

MGM

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Cistercian contemplative identity

**THE CONTEMPLATIVE DIMENSION
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CONFERENCE OF M. EMMANUEL OF LA CLARTE-DIEU

The Contemplative dimension of the Order of Cistercians, S.O.

To speak of the contemplative dimension is in a certain sense to define the monk and the monastic life.

It seems to me that in the OCSO, this dimension gives direction to the other activities of our life which are ordered to it. Our life has been conceived and organized with this goal in mind: "that in all things God may be glorified."

In our way of life, the contemplative dimension means living the Gospel in the absolute, with all else being ordered to this goal. It is a never-ending search to become one with Jesus Christ who said, "I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me."

Christ Jesus, then, came to do the will of his Father, who sent him to save mankind by the total gift of himself, the only gift capable of revealing the depth of God's love for us.

We, too, monks and nuns, are called by God to renounce our self-will, to fight "with one common will" under the banner of Christ the King, for the salvation of the world.

Preferring nothing to Christ, we must share by patience in his sufferings if we are to share also in his glory.

When we enter the monastery, we are led to conform ourselves to the Word of God by following the Rule of St. Benedict, the Constitutions, and the guidelines of a particular community of brothers or sisters.

To live thus does not only involve the essential monastic activities: Divine Office, *lectio*, study, and work, but includes also all our human activities in their least details: everything that goes to make up an intensely regular community life.

Everything depends on how we receive and assimilate our initial formation and continue with it: putting our will into the hands of God, under the care of an experienced guide, whether novice master or abbot. To let oneself be as clay in the hands of the potter: the Holy Spirit, who finds expression in the Rule, the Constitutions, the abbot's teaching, and in cenobitic life. The last has power to lead us either to fervor or laxity.

If the monk lets himself be totally directed toward God, he will little by little let go of that part of his life which is a slave to the senses and the passions; his heart will expand and be filled with an unspeakable sweetness of love. He will be able to delight sometimes, perhaps often, in supernatural graces---a deep relationship with God---which will always be discreet and modest, like everything else that is Cistercian. These are the "high seasons" in our life of contemplation.

In each of these stages of his conversion---and it takes a lot of them to make a monk---the monk immerses himself more and more in solitude of heart, moved and led by a divine touch, by a certitude he has been called to an ever greater discovery of Him who has loved and saved him.

By our vow of conversion we are always persons in formation.

May our communities and our shepherds protect us from the spirit of the world which is tending to penetrate our cloisters. If, when they are well managed, mass media, magazines, comfort, and exits from the enclosure can sometimes be instruments of compassion and communion, even of contemplation, they carry also the great danger of assimilating us to the world.

CONFERENCE OF MOTHER CHRISTIANA OF NISHINOMIYA

To Seek God in Truth

A Cistercian Vocation

Those who feel called to a Cistercian life ordered wholly to contemplation often have somewhat varied motivations: to love God alone, to give one's whole life to God, to live with Christ, etc. However, once they find themselves in the monastery and their ideals are put to the test of everyday life, they understand little by little that one thing only is asked of them: to seek God in truth. That is the absolute demand made by the Rule, a demand which must from now on take over their lives. Most ask themselves, not without apprehension and misgivings: "Where will this lead me?" Walking like blind men on the adventurous roads of faith, after a period that may vary in length, they leave the darkness and see at last a glimmer of hope. Guided by the example of the seniors, comforted by the community atmosphere, they come to find the pearl that is hidden in the Cistercian way. They know enough now to count no longer on their own strength, and are driven to abandon themselves to God in faith.

The Rule, Concrete Interpretation of the Gospel

When the time comes to be consecrated for life in the covenant with God, the meaning and the very form of their giving is put on their lips by the Rule itself: "I promise to obey my abbot according to the Rule, until death." At that moment, how can anyone avoid having in his heart the image of Christ in the gospels who, at the moment he reveals to them his Father's love, and in order to allow them to share in it, reveals to them the boundless mystery: He is the Son, become for us Word incarnate, who whispers in our hearts, "I always do what pleases Him." Of course, entering into this mystery does not lessen the difficulties of everyday life, but these hardships then become the occasion of entrusting everything to the one who deigns to make their hearts his dwelling-place. Hearing the Word demands of them a total conversion, a continual turning, and allows them truly to understand the teaching of the Rule on humility, the condition *sine qua non* of their relationship with the Lord. "Obedience comes naturally to those who cherish nothing more than Christ."

If the Rule is the fruit of monastic tradition, if it was a wellspring of renewal, if, thanks to the Rule, our Fathers were able to bequeath us a Cistercian spirituality of an astounding richness and diversity, why could not this same Rule still be for us, living in this post-modern age in such different cultures, the source of true renewal and of a future rich with promise?

The Cenobitic Life: The Word Comes to Life

I have no intention of treating community life at length. I would like simply to say a few words on certain elements of our life which, at this time, could endanger the contemplative aspect of our life and which should, perhaps, attract our attention.

Manual Work

Our Fathers of Citeaux believed in the formative value of manual work done in common. It is a balancing factor for body and spirit, and also one of the things that unites the community. What is its state nowadays? Many monasteries see that they are forced to give up agriculture and move into craft work or even industrial work. But is it necessary to get the greatest return, the greatest profit possible, while multiplying machines and man-hours? What are we to think when the monastery's economy rests almost entirely on commercial activity? What long-term influence will this have on the contemplative aspect of our monastic life?

Mutual Fraternal Aid

Cenobitic life gathers into fraternal communion those who truly seek God. By his vow of stability, the monk gives himself totally to his community. He knows he will find therein a powerful help to free himself from self-will and draw him, with ever more truth, into the search for God. Without the presence of truly spiritual seniors, it is difficult to discern whether our search for God is incarnated in our daily life. There is no more precious help in the life of a monk than the presence of those who have learned how to rid themselves of all encumbrances, who have become, without their even knowing it, completely transparent before God and their brothers. Meetings and fraternal help within the community deepen our mutual understanding and, with all our differences, permit us to see the face of Christ, until now unknown, among us. We become loving when we see we are loved, and so are able to share mutual forgiveness in the joy of the children of God.

Lectio Divina

We all know how important it is to read the Bible, the sign and sacrament where we find hidden the reality of salvation. In order to incarnate the Scriptures in the heart of the monk, in order to free them of a deadening moralism, it seems to me that a serious formation is necessary from the very beginning of monastic life, not only in *lectio divina* but in the act of reading, in the broad sense of the word. Many of our young people are often content simply to "decipher" the text in a superficial way. When I speak of Scripture, I am obviously not excluding the Fathers of the Church or our Cistercian Fathers, depending on what is available in each language and on how each one is attracted. It goes without saying that our horarium should give an important place to reading so that it can be truly fruitful.

Opus Dei

The monastic life is one great *Opus Dei*. If the Eucharist is the heart and summit of our life, by the Divine Office, echo of the great Eucharistic hymn of praise, the monk enters into the inspired words of the psalms, makes them his own and, borne up by the Spirit who animates them, is transformed little by little into the image of the One he praises. Our liturgy must be kept to the simplicity of the Fathers of Citeaux, if we are to leave the Spirit as much space as possible. In this simplicity, heart and lips join together most easily. It is hardly necessary to add how important it is to say the hours at the proper times of day, certainly more important than the place where we celebrate them. Study of the psalms as soon as one enters the monastery also seems indispensable to me.

It is surely possible to live the elements of our life in different ways. I simply wanted to state here an experience of Cistercian life, both personal and communal, which we live thanks to the example and help of those who, I dare to say, have been or still are, our Fathers in monastic life. In them, both men and women, we see already among us the harvest gathered in the each day's struggle; their peace and joy are for us a gauge of what the Rule promises us in the Prologue: "As we progress in the monastic life and in faith, our hearts expand, and we run in the way of God's commands with unspeakable sweetness of love." Doesn't that describe a true contemplative life?

CONFERENCE OF DOM CHRISTIAN OF ATLAS

"CISTERCIAN CONTEMPLATIVE IDENTITY"

I received the invitation to speak to you here rather as a snare or trap! First of all, I would have preferred to leave the talk to our Abbot General. Then, I am supposed to discuss "Cistercian contemplative identity," and, to put it bluntly, I don't like that expression much. According to the papers which were presented to us from the four cardinal points of the Order, with such wisdom and openness, I believe I'm not alone in questioning this formulation. Shall I tell you why it seems ambiguous to me? First, because it can be taken to mean that contemplation is given and possessed as an identity, as a fixed state. Now, to my mind, contemplation is either a seeking, or it is nothing. Here on earth, it is a journey, a tension, a permanent exodus. It is the invitation made to Abraham: "Walk in my presence."ⁱⁱ So I try to walk, and I must admit, this walk increases my hunger to "see" the Presence more than it satisfies it. This is where (in Spain!) I am consoled by St. John of the Cross: "Not everyone who toils earnestly in the way of the Spirit is raised by God to contemplation, not even a half of them. He alone knows the reason for this."ⁱⁱⁱ

Then, there is this bit of wisdom from Moslem mysticism: "He is not truly a Sufi who calls himself a Sufi." In the same way, is he truly a contemplative who says he is? One would have to be able to say, yes, I recognized him in the text, I saw him when he was naked, sick, hungry, ...those from whom one turns away one's eyes to keep from seeing them.ⁱⁱⁱ

And then, while I'm on the road, I'm subject to an identity crisis: Is it I who live? Is it Christ in me?^{iv} I am aspiring to this new identity: "the name of the Lamb is on me, and the Father's."^v If my identity still bothers me, it is because I don't have a clear vision of him who will give me my identity when he gives me himself to see: "When you are here, I no longer know whether I exist.," says the Lover to the Beloved.

Fr. Josaphat proposes "Cistercian horizon," or "Cistercian contemplative dimension."^{vi} This is better yet. This echoes *Perfectae Caritatis*^{vii} and the Code^{viii} which speak of institutes more or less "integrally ordered to contemplation." To be ordered to means to accept beforehand that one is not there yet. "I have been grasped," says Paul, "but not of myself; I continue to run the course..."^{ix} Of course, this has meaning for me, as for all of us, as it lets me know that our Order is "well ordered," and so is able to keep awake my desire to see God, which is always threatened by a temptation to nod off. Augustine puts it well: "You have made us unto yourself (ad Te), Lord,...*et inquietum cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te.*"^x This *inquietum* is as much a part of my identity as *quies*, the "resting in God" so dear to our Fathers and our Constitutions.^{xi}

In case you would wish to identify me more closely in spite of all this, ask my neighbor at home. In his eyes, who am I? Cistercian? Never heard of it! Trappist? Less still. Monk? Even the Arab word for it isn't part of his vocabulary. He doesn't even ask himself who I am. He knows. I am a rumi, a Christian. That's all. And in this generic identification there is something healthy and exacting. One more way to connect monastic profession to baptism. You will see too, that in his description, he will only be able to translate this reality according to his own religious points of reference: "He prays, he believes in God, he keeps "Lent" and gives to the poor...that's almost like us!" Thus, after being welcomed at several of our French monasteries, our young friend Mohammed said to me, "You know, over there in France, I met some true Moslems!"

When I was a novice at Atlas, I saw one of our brothers, a convinced laybrother, standing at the window after a most difficult day. He was watching the sunset. He seemed worn out to me, even exhausted. The sight of the setting sun was magnificent, truly. And I was standing behind him, wondering that after 25 years here in the monastery, he could still stand in the same old place and enjoy a sunset. Finally, he turned around and said quite simply, "I'm waiting for this time tomorrow evening to blow this dump." In a flash, I understood what stability was, and many other aspects of monastic life. I will add that this brother is still there, thanks be to God, and that he still shows up at that window, with or without me. Really, I have nothing more to say to you on "Cistercian contemplative identity...."

I return to my first idea, to leave this topic to our Fr. Bernardo. This shows that my "yes" to his request was not without second thoughts. There's no reason not to tell you here what our Abbot General told us, at Fez and at Tibhirine, when he made his visits in June 1991. He stepped onto African soil with, as he told us, "intense curiosity." To welcome him to the continent, we had sent a real local vocation to Fez, our Fr. Pierre (Faye), who would finish his course on earth the following February 2. No one could fail to be beguiled by the wonderful face of this seeker after God, this living witness of Africa's soul, a soul forged for contemplation long before the 20th century, when our Order discovered North Africa, and even before the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in his native Senegal.

I will just tell you that Dom Bernardo saw a lot, heard a lot, and shared everything with us, including our neighbors' visits, a trek of 100 km from one country to another in a 4L Renault, crossing the border on the very day a state of emergency was declared in Algeria....And then, one morning, he told us, "I had a dream last night!" (It seems they dream more in Latin America than in Europe. We also dream a lot at Magreb, rather like in the Bible.) In his dream, our Abbot General saw a monk of Atlas in the grip of another brother of our Order who had him by the neck as he informed him roughly:

Primo, you're wasting your life here in this Moslem world which has no use for you and even laughs at you, when there are so many other places and peoples who only need the example of your witness to embrace the contemplative life and increase your community.

Secundo, you poor thing, our Order ends up taking care of a foundation like yours. What a dead weight!

Oddly enough, in this dream it was Dom Bernardo who replied; the poor monk of Atlas was surely begin held too tightly to be able to express himself. Then the dream ended, the Abbot General woke up and took a piece of paper to write down his answers. Thus he was able to tell us everything in the morning, still charged with the emotions of his nocturnal struggle.

Now as to what is the use of a house such as ours, it is clear we ourselves would never ask that question. We are such a little place! More deeply, we are well aware that no house could ever justify its existence before the Order. What comes first is God's call, bringing a community to birth, here and now. And Citeaux, like Jerusalem of old, is astounded and amazed: "Where did these children of mine come from? Before going into labor, I have given birth!" The elders here will remember the time after Algeria became independent when our survival seemed to be a toss-up, indeed an absurdity, to recall the term used by an abbot of our region not so long ago. Dom Gabriel Sortais, whose clear-sightedness was well known, was responding to one of our brethren: "The Order cannot afford the luxury of a monastery in the Moslem world." Indeed, he had a point there. And we feel we will remain an exception as long as the Order has no other house that is truly called to live in a strictly non-Christian area. All our recent foundations, including the one in India, depend upon a local Christian population able to furnish native vocations. At the time of its foundation in 1934, our monastery could count on a Christian minority population made up of a million colonists, just as could our elder brother, Staoueli, the very first Cistercian foundation on the African continent in 1843 (just 150 years ago). Our community knows we cannot recruit locally. That is an "absurdity" too. We must believe that the Holy Spirit can raise up vocations coming from elsewhere, corresponding to his plans for this singular presence. This trust in him is easier when we state that most of us have responded to a personal call of just this sort, even if there has been an intermediate stop in some other monastery of the Order. I gladly take this opportunity once again to thank those communities who have so generously sent one of their own to us because of their own overabundance.

On the one hand, this lack of native vocations almost puts us in the situation of immigrants, and in Magreb, where emigration to Europe is so strong! Imagine the astonishment of the young people who come to us when they realize we have taken the road opposite to theirs. One way to suggest a possibility for a "new economic world order", which won't be viable if it's not shared in by everyone! More directly, we may ask if this isn't how monasticism can enter into the "North-South" dialogue. I see here a real challenge addressed to us by today's world, and also a way to involve ourselves more concretely in the issues of the what is called the "young churches." It seems to me they receive this name according to whether they belong to what can still only be called the "third world." For example: We earn our living by our work, but

the local currency in which we are paid is useless in buying any books or tools we need which are not available locally, not to speak of insurance.

On the other hand, this special life of ours leads us inevitably to change somewhat certain constants of the Cistercian charism because of our environment: we run a cooperative rather than just pay wages; we never cease to seek a balance between openness and enclosure in our relations with our neighbors; there is a challenge in the life of prayer and of faith to join in, when this can be done, with the practice of the Moslem faith. Thus at the time of Ramadan or of feasts, there is always something to share together. We have little Arabic in our liturgy, but our intercessions at the Hours and at the Eucharist, especially on Friday, are marked by a more spiritual form of sharing. Bell and muezzin, whose calls to prayer rise, as you know, from the same enclosure, join together to bid us come to prayer, further than words can say. The ritual prayer of a Moslem is short, it engages the body, turns all one's attention towards the One Source of all life, is said by heart, and greatly resembles the Office of our former laybrothers. Some of us would certainly like our Office to recover some of this stripped-down simplicity, without ever losing its character of being the prayer of the Church.

Father Bernardo told us, "You are sent to inculturate the Cistercian charism so that this form of monasticism can be enriched by what you have gleaned in the local culture." And he added, "This inculturation can bring on fear, a fear of losing your monastic identity. In order to avoid this or be freed from it, the first thing to do is deepen your monastic culture." With the limited means at our disposal, this is what we're trying to do. We are learning that the exacting fidelity demanded by others is God's gift to us, and therefore an object of contemplation that may inspire new forms of communion.

In this sense, it would be up to us to present the urgent call to the world religions as another real challenge of the present day. This is a call to learn to dialogue on the very level of the spiritual experiences which these religions awaken while, at the same time, to be summoned to a humility dependent on God's forgiveness for the unfeeling and sometimes shameful response given by the believer (monks included) to the Lord's inmost promptings. In practice, we have hardly begun the interreligious monastic dialogue with Islam. Few believe it is possible. We have already gone much further with Far Eastern religions. In Dom Frans's document, so rich in its viewpoints, he presents this dialogue as the central axis for reflection in the churches of Asia. If we were to follow his proposal for a "continental congress" of the Order, our heart would be tempted to go with Asia (where Islam was born), but our feet are deep-rooted in Africa, and our head was pre-fabricated in Europe. How could we test the imagination of the Order in its proposal to have better-adapted structures? Could we form a sub-continent with Latroun?

Is this another challenge for us? In 1990 we received an unusual request from a community of older folks (recovering from drug or alcohol abuse) who asked one of us if we could share a prayerful presence that could help to sustain their fragile determination to recover, with God's help. Communal prayer, both morning and evening, and self-supporting work are the two key concepts for *Berdine* (France). *Ora et labora!* It seemed to us that we had no lessons to teach them, so we should allow ourselves to be taught. It was thus that we felt we could be part of a "twin community;" and there has grown up between us communion and social contacts.

There remains the basic question: "You're wasting your time," as our nocturnal opponent said. "So many people await your witness elsewhere." And Fr. Bernardo answered, "Their mission is to be a silent, living, and vital presence, that of Jesus and of the Gospel. It is also to offer a heartfelt welcome to the Moslem brother, so that they themselves can be better Christians. It is by this openness to Islam that they will learn how to be Christians, here and now. No use waiting for them to come halfway. Don't wait to open yourselves up; this would be contrary to the generosity of love. If this generosity is present, they will give thanks to Him who has allowed and given it....Of course, they need to learn something of the Muslim world, for it has cultural and religious values intended for them. They can then help to awaken and stimulate the contemplative dimension in the heart of each Muslim...."

In fact, we can easily see how the Spirit can arouse in the hearts of many Muslims we know a charity like that of the Samaritan in the parable, and of which Jesus would say

elsewhere, "Do this and you will live." We see too that the Muslim tradition knows how to pass on to others a desire to see God: "All will pass away but for God's face," as the Koran says.

We could even say that all normal perspectives are set aside when I, a Christian, am granted an authentic spiritual experience through what a Moslem has been given to experience in himself in order to sustain his search for God: the call to prayer, ejaculations, gestures of sharing, joyous response, the peace-filled countenance of a man of faith, a verse from the Koran (since I believe it is possible to do true *lectio divina* using the Koran, especially in Arabic, which is so close to the original milieu of our own Scriptures). It is always rather painful to see a man of prayer, a man with an interior life, being held up by faith-statements in a dialogue with another tradition and be kept by their disagreements from seeking in the other the heights and depths of openness to the Spirit in himself and in Islam. The first time a neighboring Sufi community asked to meet with us---it was Christmas 1979---the spokesman took care to say that they had come to us to share about prayer. "We would rather not," he said, "begin a theological dialogue with you, for man-made barriers often arise. We feel we are called by God to unity. We must therefore allow God to start something new between us. This can only happen through prayer."

He added, "There are few Muslims who would understand. Then too, only a few Christians would believe it. But this is what we feel called to do with you." This is an exceptional case, you might say. Perhaps, but the exception does exist, and it is not the only one. It helps me avoid constructing or receiving a fixed or settled idea of Muslims, even what most of them may say of themselves. Could the monk be said to be a "true" Christian because he is rather rare in the Christian world?

"Does Algeria help you to live out your religious consecration, and if so, how?" This was the question recently asked by our bishops as they prepared their response to the *lineamenta* proposed for the 1994 synod on religious life. If *consideratio*, so dear to St. Bernard, means (as Fr. Charles Dumont says in his document) "a reflection on the experience of concrete existence," then this is just what it brought on in our community, and also what I am about to speak on.

Well then, YES, this is what helps us to feel part of the mass of humanity and yet separate from it, in the world yet not of it, neither important nor well-known. We are preserved from any worldliness here!

This necessarily helps us to stay small and dependent, without any great importance as to what is happening in the country. It also forces us to be true to the official "social reason" given for our existence: prayer and self-supporting farm work. We also have before us the lives of our neighbors, largely modest, religious folk. It would be scandalous, in such a context, were we not to live our vocation well. They know what sharing is. Relationships and hospitality are very important to them. We practice them too, and often receive lessons in how to do so. We are with them in the situation of insecurity and confusion which is the present condition of the country. "How can you live in a monastery that exists among such uncertainties?" asked a Sister. More pointedly, how could we remain contemplative in a house with too much certainty, that was too *bene fundata*? At the beginning of our Order the founders left a house that was stable and wealthy at Molesme, for Citeaux, a "desert inhabited by wild beasts."

As I have said before, it helps us in every way to be confronted everywhere by the Muslim presence. How can we respect it without excluding it *a priori*, and without overdoing it?

It speaks everywhere of God. It is a sort of "microclimate" which frees our faith from all human respect and false reserve. Moreover, there are those values that animate Islam and which we also ordinarily expect to find among monks: ritual prayer, prayer of the heart (*dhikr*), fasting, vigils, almsgiving, a sense of praise and of God's forgiveness, a naked faith in the glory of the Wholly-Other, and in the communion of saints. This last mystery, so essential to us, reveals a place of encounter, but no idea on how we can get there. It belongs to the Spirit of Jesus to do his work among us, and I feel that in this process, he also uses our differences, including those that offend us the most. In our prayer side by side with our Sufi friends, which we have now been at for quite a while, we remind ourselves that we are following a "way" (a *tariqa*) together, "ordered" to an active and passive search in a mysticism of desire leading to union with God. The spiritual competition then becomes mutual charity, common evidence that we are being drawn in the same direction. There is also a humble avowal to stand together in mutual support.

This enables us to feel integrated into a local church made up of people with faces, people who have made choices similar to ours. In conditions often more difficult than our own, the majority of the local Christians have had to go deeper and deeper in faith and prayer in order to maintain their peace and generosity. Our hospitality at the guesthouse bears clear witness to the vital need for regular spiritual refreshment. We feel a duty to be more available. Paul VI called us Cistercians to the "apostolate of the hidden life." This vocation secretly draws us very close to the few hundred Algerian Christians who must blend the Gospel and the hidden life while remaining in the fray.

Some years ago, in a very beautiful pastoral letter, our Bishops of Maghreb invited the faithful to "receive and welcome what is coming to birth in the Church in this region." It is possible, indeed, for us to forget that our Christian identity is always in the process of being born. It is a Paschal identity. Is it not the same for our Cistercian identity? Would it still be contemplative if it was afraid to meet new horizons? By this is meant, of course, the horizons of modern times; but it also means the search for God beyond the well-worn paths of Christianity. And if Christianity is dying off, could it not be to bring to birth a new humanity which will need our care to help bring about its own birthing?

Our bishops said in another important document, "Turned towards the future, we foresee a broadening of our vision of man and of Jesus, a broadening which will give birth to an intense interaction between the Christian cultures of today and the questions posed by men of other traditions." With this perspective, it could become evident that it is no longer possible to found a monastery all built and formed in advance because the contemplative life, more than any other, shows itself to be dependent upon the human life-conditions of the land, its culture, its history, its customs, and its religious traditions. This is a viewpoint developed especially by Fr. Raguin, with his experience in the Far East. We verify his insight and its demands, in the concrete, day after day, in one way or another.

Faced with a world overcome by a theoretical and, even more so, by a practical atheism, the monk is astounded that he can remain faithful to himself, and finds that he is an "expert in atheism" according to an expression of Andre Louf that is well grounded in tradition. All the same, in the face of new incursions by Islam, it is good for the monk to show himself "expert in Islam" since he has vowed his own "submission to God" after the example of the loving obedience of the Son to the Father. In this sense, Jesus is really the only "Muslim." It is thus that I see him henceforth, transfiguring what is sought in him, in a give-and-take between us and our neighbors, there where we have been called to be witnesses of the Kingdom that is being born..."but it is by night."

ENDNOTES

Gen 17:1; cf. Dom Frans, Preparatory Documents, p. 4.

St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, ch. 9.

Mt 25:35ff. and Is 53:3.

cf. Gal 2:20.

Rev 3:12.

Fr. Josaphat (Victoria), Preparatory Document, p. 37.

PC 7.

CIC can 674; cf. CST 2.

Phil 3:12ff.

Augustine, *Confessions*, I,1.

cf. especially CST 20.

Is 49:21 and 66:7.

Dom Frans (Rawaseneng), Preparatory Document, p. 2.

cf. Luke 10:37.

Koran 28:88.

Fr. Charles Dumont (Scourmont), Preparatory Document, p. 25.

Exordium Parvum 3:2.

Paul VI, cf. Chapter Documents OCSO 1969-1977 or D.C: 1969, #1540, p. 542 f.

Letter of the North African Bishops on *New Situations in their Churches*, D.C. #1724 of 17 July 1977.

Christians in Maghreb, Letter of the North African Bishops, D.C. #1775 of 2 December 1979.

Fr. Yves Raguin, cf. esp. "La profondeur de l'homme, chemin vers Dieu" in *Spiritus* 47 (1971), p. 385.

N.B.: Certain elements of this text were presented at the Regional Meeting FSO (France Southwest) at Timadeuc in September 1991, and published in the report of this meeting, in *Annexe 3*, pp. 17-20.

CONFERENCE OF MOTHER JEAN-MARIE OF ASSOMPTION

Cistercian Contemplative Identity

I think it is fortuitous that we are reflecting on our Cistercian contemplative identity because the word "identity" implies the personal dimension which is at the heart of our way of life. It is the **person** who incarnates the identity, the person who gives reality to the ideal. We can speak about a Cistercian contemplative life-style with its observances and values, we can speak of a Cistercian contemplative spirituality with its doctrines and dynamics; but all such considerations remain sterile constructs or theories unless given force and expression in the being of a Cistercian monk or nun.

I think most would agree that our deliberations here do not reflect an institutional identity crisis. Quite the contrary, with the renewal that the Order has undertaken over the past years, we seem to have attained a certain clairvoyance regarding our life-style and spirituality. Our Constitutions witness to this through the juridical formulation of a solid Cistercian self-identity, but it is nonetheless a verbal formulation, not necessarily the fruit of an existential realization.

Being is the fruit of experience, not of theory. When I think of Cistercian contemplative identity, I think in terms of spiritual being. And when I think of spiritual being, I think in terms of depth. I believe that depth is the key to a Cistercian contemplative identity, to be a Cistercian contemplative being.

Yet, what is depth? What is spiritual being? Mysteries to be contemplated, not problematics to be solved. It could be said though, that depth is haunting; we are drawn toward it, into it, because instinctively, intuitively, we sense that the meaning of our life lies therein. When depths are awakened, spiritual consciousness grows, spiritual being is born. The door to depth will vary according to the different persons seeking to enter within. The important thing is to be on a journey to depth, the depth of our own being and the depths of the milieu. **Cistercian life** must become **Cistercian experience** in order for **Cistercian identity** to emerge. This happens through a journey into depth which transforms the very being of the traveller.

Spiritual depth is a mystery, that is true, but maybe it is not as mysterious and far-distant as one might think. In fact, depth is very close to us. It may be attained by immersion in the Mystery of Christ through the simple and humble means which are ours in Cistercian monastic life. The steps are small, the means are poor, but they are always there for us, waiting to lead us along the slow, progressive, imperceptible descent to depth.

Dom Bernardo spoke to our communities about some instruments for renewal: the Gospel, the Rule, the Cistercian Fathers, the Constitutions. It is through these traditional vehicles that we hear the call to depth and taken together they set the tone for that depth. They orient us toward and introduce us into the contemplative depths of our own spiritual being. In one way, it is all so simple, yet monastic life has rather absolute demands when it comes to acquiring the fineness of spiritual being that emanates from depth and leads to depth. We know these exigencies well: kenosis, continuity, duration, openness, porosity.

The journey into spiritual being is above all a processus of kenosis leading to new life - the paschal journey. Michelangelo, ardently engaged in sculpting one of his statues, is reputed to have said: "Another few days and life will break through". This phrase echoes the hope of the spiritual journey: another "few days" of hollowing out and opening up and spiritual being will break through. And this is transformation.

The journey to depth implies transformation, and a journey to spiritual being implies an ontological transformation. Such a processus can only take place in the ground of our being, in our heart. It is a long journey, the journey of a lifetime, for spiritual life is basically a state of being in process of continual, albeit imperceptible, transformation.

For the Cistercian, transformation of being takes place through an immersion in the **totality** of the ordinary, elemental aspects of monastic life. There is a very powerful spiritual force inherent within all the facets of a life unified as it is by, what P.Charles calls, the primacy of the spiritual. Cistercian monastic life harbors great depths. Simply by being immersed in that life, given certain preconditions, we are immersed in a spiritual reality that can transform us at the very core of our being. The profound conviction that the Mystery of Christ is present and active in our monastic life-style makes it possible for us to yield ourselves to its exigencies, and by doing so, to become ever more deeply immersed in this Mystery in order to be transformed by it. Without this conviction, we might be tempted to fill the apparent void of such a life-style with activities and orientations which, even though positive in themselves, risk being quite external to the spiritual dynamic that should be going on within the context of monastic life. In such a scenario, the quality or level of one's immersion is compromised because it lacks depth and thus produces little or no spiritual being or contemplative identity.

I think it important to emphasize these points:

- 1.The Cistercian contemplative experience is lived out within the context of the whole Cistercian monastic *conversatio*, not just a particular aspect of it. And that *conversatio* is characterized by the elemental.
- 2.Our monastic life is deeply rooted in and filled with the Mystery of Christ. The Mystery is its very soul and *raison d'être*.
- 3.The contemplative identity we are seeking emanates from an in-depth immersion in this way of life which is at once elemental and sublime.

Our way of life fosters an immersion of the substance of the person in the substance of the Mystery. But it is the life in its totality, in its unity, that draws us ever more deeply into this Mystery. All the aspects of Cistercian life are interconnected, linked together, orienting us forcefully and harmoniously toward this one goal - union with Christ. Immersion allows for, interpenetration, transformation, divinization. It is through immersion in all the facets of the life that we are immersed in Christ, and it is by virtue of this immersion in Christ that what we are calling our Cistercian contemplative identity is born. For what is it but to be able to say with St.Paul: "It is no longer I, but Christ that lives ..." in the Cistercian monk, in the Cistercian nun.

I have been talking about experience and transformation, but I do not mean to give the impression that our journey to depths through the Cistercian life is a highly conscious one, no less a self-conscious one. Paradoxically, it is, on the contrary, a more or less unconscious process. The ordinariness of our life-style, the subtleness of the workings of grace within us, the sobriety and simplicity of our spirituality, do not lend themselves to any purely human assessment of progress in the spiritual realm.

In Cistercian life we remain in the same place, occupied with the same concerns: doing the same work, chanting the same psalms, reading the same texts, walking the same cloister, interacting with the same people, struggling against the same temptations - and all this year after year. Progress is so intangible that to talk in terms of experience seems ridiculous, if not absurd. Yet, imperceptibly, unconsciously, through immersion in the Mystery, our being is changing.

This subtle, progressive transformation, which takes place at a level beyond the reaches of our ordinary self-consciousness, is the very soul and substance of our vocation. But it can also be the source of temptation. One can grow impatient with the slowness of change, with the monotony of the journey, with the sobriety of the experience ... One can try to speed things up, to liven things up, and this through means foreign to the integrity of our elemental life-style. In so doing, one risks aborting the seeds of spiritual being that are gestating in the depths of our heart, waiting to blossom in God's own time.

The Cistercian experience takes place in a life which is elemental. This way of life is like a pure resonant note, heard as simplicity. The word "elemental" means "reduced to the essential". This is certainly characteristic of Cistercian life in its very nature - a way of life intentionally reduced to the essential, nourished by an elemental spirituality. The whole Cistercian life is elemental, and

this quality should be present and pass through all that touches it. The elemental is like a space which leaves room for the essential and orients all else toward that. The elemental is close to the earth - literally and figuratively. Van Gogh, in speaking of Millet's *Angelus*, said it was the closest man had ever come to creating something divine. And it seems to me that there is indeed a connaturality, a mutual attraction, between the elemental and the divine. Simone Weil remarked that there exists between the most distant parts, for whoever can see deeply, an affinity. I think all of this is verified in our monastic reality.

The Cistercian experience is characterized by a processus of transformation-through-immersion which is unconscious but which can liberate within us a new level of consciousness, a consciousness of the heart. As our being is imperceptibly transformed, our consciousness is imperceptibly transformed. We see things differently, we feel things differently, we know things differently - and this because the eyes of the heart, the ears of the heart, the mind of the heart, if you will, have opened. A new identity has been born, emerging ever so subtly, from the depths of our journeying. This emerging spiritual being, this emerging spiritual consciousness is our Cistercian contemplative identity - a sober contemplative identity so intertwined with the very fiber of our being that it flows almost anonymously from our heart, pervading our entire existence. One could almost call it a *contemplatio sine nomine*.

Just as a footnote, let me conclude by returning to my original point where I talked about the importance of the person within the context of Cistercian experience.

As I said, there are different doors to depth. One is immersed in the Cistercian milieu as a unique person. The life-style does not vary much, but the person within it should have a "face". It is not a faceless journey. The personal face of the journey can be called the soulscape. The soulscape is born in the heart of the person within the context of the spiritual journey. It is a journey within a journey. It is not something invented or artificially fabricated; it is a subjective, interior echo of the journey which unifies it, vivifies it, clarifies it.

The soulscape is bound to this landscape which is our Cistercian life, giving a soul to it. There is an affinity between the soulscape and the landscape - a secret connivance. The soulscape is the secret connivance between our own depth and the depth of the milieu.

Perhaps our challenge is double. We must do everything we can to respect and nurture our Cistercian life-style:

- ▶ to protect, as it were, the Cistercian landscape, to make sure it remains inviolate in all its integrity,
- ▶ while at the same time, allowing the unique person to emerge within and in virtue of this landscape as an integral part of the Cistercian reality.

Life-style becomes identity through this mysterious connivance of the soulscape and the landscape which enhances Cistercian experience.

CONFERENCE OF MOTHER ANNE-MARIE OF ALTBRONN

Cistercian contemplative identity A pastoral approach

In the following reflections I have tried to follow a pastoral approach to the proposed theme of the Cistercian contemplative identity: how to support and encourage the contemplative orientation of our communities in our service as Abbots and Abbesses.

Please allow me to speak in the feminine only, since this is a fraternal sharing from a personal point of view.

It seems to me that the Abbess can only serve the contemplative identity of her community in the measure that she has clear and strong convictions within her. These heartfelt convictions, and her continuous personal conversion, can then be expressed in her teaching and pastoral care and inspire her vigilance and discernment regarding the day to day living - practical as well as spiritual - of the community and each of its members.

I. SOME CONVICTIONS

1. To Believe in the Grace of Our Vocation.

Like the baptismal grace in which it originates, the contemplative identity is engraved in us, as a seed, with promise of what it can become by the grace of our particular vocation in the Church.

This free gift can only unfold in someone who is free of self, detached and given over to the action of the Spirit. Thus, we are called to enter into the dynamic of conversion for the integration of our being, in love.

Marked with the seal of serious commitment in the way outlined by the Rule of St. Benedict and our Constitutions, it will take an entire lifetime for us to "become what we are": called to live "through love in His Presence" (Eph 1:4), to "be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29), by participating in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus "under the guidance of the Gospel".

It will take an entire lifetime for us to "be responsive to the Holy Spirit and so attain purity of heart and a continual mindfulness of God's Presence". (Cst 3:2)

2. To Return to the Heart.

To dispose our heart to receive the image of Jesus, to allow the Holy Spirit to make of us a devoted and loving being who resembles the well-beloved Son, it seems to me that the fundamental interior disposition is presence to oneself, an attentive, recollected being.

"Where to look for the Well-Beloved?" asks Bernard..."It is He who is present and I who am not". (S.Div.4:2) To be there, to find the road to our heart, to leave the surface in order to enter into our depths, to pass from forgetfulness to remembrance.

"To live with oneself, in one's own heart and stay there in the presence of the Master of the earth" (Div 3:l).

Presence to the other, the neighbor, God; this is only possible in the measure one is present to oneself, in profound attention of the heart, since self-knowledge is the way to the knowledge of God.

"Advance as far as yourself to meet your God.", Bernard so rightly says. (Adv.1:10) Throughout the whole of Biblical Revelation, God does not cease to manifest Himself as an "I", does not cease to say to us: "I am with you". "Here I am." He is only able to be met by our "Here I am", which brings us into our depths, into the One who is.

3. A Self Awakened in Faith, Listening.

In the concrete reality of our life, we need to pass from "God was

there and I didn't know it" to a living faith in His loving and active Presence, to an awakened consciousness of His loving look upon us "at every moment...everywhere" (RB 7), constantly listening to His voice, His Word, which is Jesus, to the Spirit who prays in us: Abba, Father.

When presence to oneself opens out into a faithful adherence to the Divine Presence, listening is possible: You are there...I am there... "Happy the soul who perceives in silence the pulsing murmur of God, and who often repeats: Speak, Lord, Your child is listening." (Div.23:7)

Listening to the Word proclaimed in the liturgy, meditated, savored in *Lectio*, welcomed in prayerful silence, in fraternal love as well as in daily events...all life becomes a place of listening to the Word which transfigures.

Whoever wants to be a disciple of the Word, let him/her offer Him attention and interior silence, fruit of vigilance of the heart, which allows the Word to speak Itself within the disciple, to bear fruit in the measure of his/her consent to accomplishing this.

A Self Tending to Unity in Love.

Listening causes knowledge and commits one to filial obedience, awakens and nourishes "the love poured into our hearts", and leads us to mark all our actions with the seal of love, to walk toward our unity and freedom, receiving ourselves from our Source, remaining bound to Him in everything and detaching ourselves from what is secondary in order to center ourselves on the One, through the example and prayer of the Virgin Mary.

A Self Committed to Conversion...

...in the dynamism of hope: "the hope of pardon, of grace, of Glory". (Div.22:5)

If love unifies the self, it cannot be conceived without conversion; this conversion which at each instant tends to "restore the likeness through asceticism of the heart body, of the monastic observances.

4. Today as Yesterday, the Rule of St. Benedict...

...made concrete by the Abbess, in the light of our new Constitutions, is word and "lamp to our feet, to lead us along this way of a Godly life, centered on a Presence - recognized and loved in everything and everyone in faith, and by listening to the Word.

Today as yesterday, "the practice of our Rule can introduce us to the lived truth of the evangelical Beatitudes". (Paul VI)

II ACCENTS ON TEACHING

I will now point out several themes which seem to me to represent, and at the same time sustain a life seized by the Divine Presence and oriented toward it.

1. To Awaken to the Essential, to Tend toward Consistency

In the name of the authority which is confided to her - and I mean authority in the etymological sense of the term, which speaks of service for the development of the other, assistance in growth -the Abbess is missioned to be a presence calling forth, to remain awake and to constantly awaken others to the Essential, to recall our monastic identity and its contemplative dimension. This is what we are called to be, through grace, and from this flows the imperative of consistency, of ceaseless adaptation of our heart and our behavior.

Thus, the teaching of the Abbess will consist more in returning to the person, her new identity in Christ and her monastic vocation, than in an external law.

2. To Have a Keen Sense of Grace and the Movement of Grace.

Can one "lose one's life" in adoration, praise, humble service of the community, received in obedience, without keeping the gaze of one's heart fixed on this prodigal God and, in faith and the awareness of being a sinner, have a keen sense of grace and its movement in us?

What is more contrary to prayer and its contemplative regard than a soul that has become used to wonder, insensitive to the gratuity of the gift given to it?

The inexhaustible grace with which we are filled calls for the gift of self in return and a measureless gratitude, for ingratitude sterilizes the gifts of God and "keeps us from making progress in our Christian commitment". (Div.27:8) Thanksgiving is the prayer of the Son. It unites us to the Eucharist of Jesus and "prepares in us a space for grace...Therefore, happy the one who, for the least benefits, gives heartfelt thanks". (idem)

3. To Open Oneself to the Gift of Filial Confidence

Is not filial confidence the fruit of welcoming in faith and love the revelation of the Mystery of the Trinity? A trait characteristic of the son who knows himself to be loved, taken over by something greater than himself?

One of the obstacles to loving attention to the Presence of God, to availability to His Will and putting oneself in His Hands, is concern for self, for the realities of this world, for the morrow. This keeps us from remaining in the present moment, clutters the heart and stifles the seed of the Word. How can the one who is preoccupied by egotistic and disordered concerns be free for listening, for the prayer of praise, or intercessory prayer?

Is it not also filial confidence that teaches us to consent to reality, to who we are, to our Community as it is? To also welcome the fact of ageing and the lack of vocations, as a grace, as a challenge to our faith and hope?

Will our heart believe and love enough to be confident and commit itself without compromise or anxiety for the morrow, in the fidelity of this day where only what is born of love has value for eternity?

Will we consent to enter more deeply into the dynamism of the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of the grain that dies "so that all may have Life" and believe in the mysterious fecundity of a life given over for the Church and the world?

It is for us to be witness of hope, "to be signs that it is possible to live with hope in insecurity" (Jean Vanier).

4. To See Everything in the Word's Cone of Light

Listening teaches us to see! It is in the cone of light of the Word of God that we are given to see the profound dimension of all reality, the dense Presence, hidden in the heart of human realities, of all events: "there is more here than...".

Yes, the fruit of listening, this new vision capable of discerning in every reality of this world, the reality of the Kingdom which is inscribed there and is to be integrated into the present moment. The gaze of the Son is given to a faith that listens.

5. To Commit Oneself in an Authentic *Lectio*...

...a fundamental contemplative activity where Scripture becomes a personal Word that God addresses to my freedom this day. The Word, scrutinized day after day, meditated, prayed, memorized, welcomed in a heart disposed to accomplish it, brings:

The fruit of knowledge, and this in the Biblical sense of the term: an approach to the Mystery of God, of His Plan of Salvation, openness to the mystery of the new self in Christ that I am called to become.

The fruit of conversion: the Word whose mission is to fructify the soil of our heart, to evangelize and restore in us the likeness by reconciling us to the ways of God. "It is living and active...discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" and brings us a criterion for the discernment of spirits, setting straight our interior reference points.

The fruit of prayer: it awakens us to the marvels of grace and to the response of thanksgiving. It reveals to us our sinful nature in the light of the Face of Christ, and moves us to the admission of our sin and to His Mercy.

Assiduous association with the Bible in lectio, sows into our heart the "*memoria Dei*" and offers us a space for recollection, a place of privileged listening where interiority deepens.

6. To Commit Oneself just as Seriously to Work in Service of the Community

For whoever gives herself to the action of the Spirit, there is no strict separation between spiritual and profane activities. Fraternal service does not compete with the service of God. Everything can become a pathway to love, everything can leave a trace of the Beloved's Presence.

In giving it its rightful place, the commitment to work is thus at the same time a verification and a means to our progressive integration in love.

III THE AXES OF VIGILANCE

In order to develop favorable conditions for the orientation of the heart toward God, it seems important to me that we pay particular attention to:

I. Persons and the Building up of the Body.

To encourage each sister to move toward her deepest truth, in the knowledge and acceptance of her limitations and failures, and by fidelity to her personal grace, her own gift which is her "manifestation of the Spirit for the common good". (ICor 12:7)

By this self-knowledge, the development of her human and spiritual potentials and the ability to give of herself, a true self emerges in each member and allows for the building up of the Body, the Community.

2. The Primacy of the Self.

How to follow Jesus, to be like Him turned toward the Father, simple in every day life, simple in doing or having, and by careful vigilance watching to avoid pretensions, appearances, the false security of possessions, in personal behavior as well as in community options.

The exigency of authenticity and purity of heart is fundamental. External accomplishments should flow from these and not become the objective in themselves.

3. Detachment.

A fundamental asceticism which frees the heart in the gift of self to God in obedience and opens the hands to share and to serve one's sisters in imitation of the Son, who wanted no other wealth than the love of the Father, no other food than to do His Will.

4. The Quality of Community Life.

Community life is a test of our openness to God and of our relationship to ourselves, a proof of our listening to the Word, our welcoming of the Good News in our life.

Filled with the mercy of God, we are called in return to show kindness, goodness and trust to our neighbor.

The more the Son is at the heart of the Community, the more it becomes a sign of the Kingdom, capable of mercy, of forgiveness given and received, of this look of hope which has some chance of bringing out the best in the other.

Other realities of our life call for the vigilance of the Abbess and of the Community because of their strong influence on "the work of the heart" (Isaac the Syrian): the atmosphere of silence, solitude, simplicity of life, the daily horarium, the organization of the work, for example. But I cannot speak about everything and in closing will only mention a very important principle expressed in our Constitutions:

"The monastery is an expression of the mystery of the Church, where nothing is preferred to the praise of the Father's glory. Every effort is made to ensure that the common life in its entirety conforms to the Gospel...(Cst 3:4)

And that, "The entire organization of the monastery is directed to bringing the nuns into close union with Christ, since it is only through the experience of personal love for the Lord Jesus that the specific gifts of the Cistercian vocation can flower." (Cst 3:5)

CISTERCIAN CONTEMPLATIVE IDENTITY

Dom Paul, Latroun

Reverend Mothers,
Reverend Fathers,

How do we concretely live the deepest value of monastic life, of all Benedictine and Cistercian life, that is to say, contemplation? This is what I must talk about, since I was asked to do so.

I do this not without a certain feeling of uneasiness which some of you probably would also feel in my situation:

---first, because in our Cistercian tradition we do not theorize or preach about contemplation;

---next, because it is far more important and (dare I say it?) far easier to live contemplation than to hold forth about it;

---finally, because, in this area, it is always difficult to speak without mixing in our personal experience; we are also somewhat reluctant to reveal ourselves.

We all recall how often we had to remember to avoid, in our Constitutions, the use of the expression "wholly given to contemplation." We had to give in to pressure from Rome. But now we can see that Rome's insistence and our reticence were equally justified. For it is evident that, setting aside the understandings and misunderstandings, we cannot conceive of monks who would not be contemplatives or at least tending in that direction: otherwise there would be a contradiction in terms. And yet we rightly refuse a certain modern meaning that has been given to contemplation. The monk is a contemplative or he is not a monk. If we doubt this, we show that we have understood nothing of monastic life.

But what is contemplation?

Simplex intuitus veritatis, St. Thomas tells us. That is all, and it's that simple. Like everything that is true.

Like everything that is authentic. Like life. A simple, pure, naked looking upon truth. And if God is Truth, as St. Thomas reminds us, we can say equally well that contemplation is a simple, pure, naked, habitual looking upon God.

This definition corresponds perfectly, it seems to me, to Benedictine and Cistercian contemplation. By means of its simplicity and purity we find exactly what St. Benedict urges us to live out and what the Benedictine tradition has always tried to live out.

When we speak of our way of living out contemplation, let us underline its simplicity: a simplicity that means also purity, authenticity. Most often, this involves a contemplation which itself lives, which is life, with no turning back on itself. A contemplation which does not analyze, describe, or seek itself; which pays no attention to itself, since it is turned toward God, attentive to him. In other words, a contemplation which is not sought for itself.

We look in vain in the Rule of St. Benedict for a theory, a definition, the very word "contemplation." Our Constitutions themselves only make very discreet mention of it....

In this area, the simpler it is, the truer it is. Do not methods and systems run the risk of hiding what is essential and leading to emptiness? Contemplation is life and life cannot be put into a system. Life is not ruled by theories.

Contemplation is an activity of love, and love, like life, makes demands which St. Benedict, following all the Fathers of monasticism, has written of with perfect wisdom and balance. We find its echo in our Fathers at Citeaux, throughout the life of the Order, right down to the very beautiful and recent example of the simplicity of Blessed Rafael.

More than in any other area, we must return to our sources, to our roots: Citeaux, St. Benedict, the Desert Fathers. I lament, without wishing to condemn, those who cannot be satisfied with the soberness of this tradition and who must turn to modern methods (however valuable they may be) which do not have the vital strength of the tradition handed on by St. Benedict.

Although the word "contemplation" is not found in his Rule, who would dare to suggest that the reality is absent? Who would dare to say that the Rule is not a most reliable school of contemplation? That it has not formed, and is not still forming, after 15 centuries, an uncounted number of authentic contemplatives? In this, as in so many other things, St. Benedict is not an innovator; he faithfully transmits the enduring monastic tradition.

When I speak of our Fathers, I think of course of Cîteaux and St. Benedict, but also of the Desert Fathers, who were the teachers of St. Benedict and the Cistercian Fathers. Permit me now to bring up the particular situation of Latroun, to point out what the geographical context and local tradition have revealed to us in the search for our contemplative identity. Since it is life, contemplation is necessarily conditioned by its milieu. Moreover, it is in this sense that we have drawn up our report for the General Chapter.

We try to live our contemplative monastic life in this land which I call the Holy Land, first because it is holy by reason of the birth, life, Passion and Resurrection of the Lord, but also to avoid calling it by other names which are contested.

In this Holy Land, then, there was born and developed an important type of monachism, with its own distinct look, as original as it is unknown. The more prestigious monachism of its powerful neighbors---Egypt, Syria, Cappadocia---overshadow it, just like the country itself which, as far back as we go in history, has always been under the domination or influence of its powerful neighbors: Egypt and Assyria.

This monachism grew greatly in numbers, making it proportionately more important, perhaps, than that of Egypt or Syria. The proof of this, among other well known proofs, is the great number of monastic traces, both in the heart of the country and in the deserts roundabout: the Judean Desert, Gaza and the Negev. In the interior, many localities bear the name *Deir* = "Monastery" and this is proof that they developed around a monastery, as in Europe we have *Muenster* or *Moutier*. Recently, I was able to find about 30 place names with *Deir* in them on a tourist map, not counting those places totally ruined or without sightseeing value. What really delighted me was to find in the area of Mt. Hebron, where we sometimes take our men to work in our vineyards, a little village called *Deir Samet*, or Silent Monastery, exactly what our monastery in Israel is now called.

More than its numerical importance, great as it was, the principal interest of this Palestinian monasticism is in its legacy of a message of simplicity and balance, for us, the sons of St. Benedict. Set against Egyptian or Syrian monasticism, with their tendency to ascetical excess (just think of the stylites of Syria), Palestinian monachism shines by its moderation, though this is not to say it was less demanding! This is especially noticeable in the Fathers of Gaza: John, Barsanuphius, Dorotheus, Dositheus....Do we not find in them a certain childlikeness, like the "little way" of Therese of Lisieux? Dositheus, the disciple of Dorotheus, died at the age of 24 and is like her spiritual twin brother.

Would it be too daring to think that the Palestinians were the direct inspiration for the moderation and balance of St. Benedict and the Cistercian Fathers? In any case, they can be the inspiration for our seeking after monastic and contemplative authenticity by a simple return to our roots.

And for us monks of Latroun, what an encouragement to do this in the very places they lived! We are only 30 km from the Judean Desert, 70 from the Negev and Gaza.

There is also a certain cosmopolitan element in this Palestinian monachism which helps to inspire us in our insertion and integration into this Holy Land where so many peoples, races, and cultures strive to live together; where in the Church herself---or rather in Churches of every rite---it is most difficult to sort out and find the purely local element. It has always been so here and monks are not exempt from this rule. Most of the renowned monks of Palestine were foreigners: St. Jerome, St. Saba, St. John Damascene, Dorotheus....

Could not this be the true and proper vocation for this Holy Land whose past is so rich for us all, and whose present is so tortured, so laden with violence and suffering, a land which is all mankind's most precious patrimony? We read in the tradition of the Jewish people, who claim this land as their exclusive inheritance, this verse of Psalm 86: "Zion shall be called 'Mother,' for all shall be her children." Is this not her vocation, and the solution of her insoluble political problems?

She belongs neither to Jews alone, nor to Arabs alone, but to all men, Jews, Arabs, and others, united in love of Him who has hallowed this Land and put its love in the hearts of all.

This may also be the meaning of our silent presence in this torn and divided land, at the very juncture of the territories of two peoples who fight and kill each other for love of the Land, for love of the same God whom each side wishes to honor by wiping out the other.

From its location in the heart of the country, could not our monastery be the place where they peaceably meet, after being so long the place which was their battlefield? We have the firm hope and desire to bring it about.

Our frequent meetings with both sides prove to us that the most effective means to do this is to show them, in silence and all-embracing love, the face of the God who is love, the friend of all mankind who is able to fulfill the true longings of man; this God to whom young and gifted people consecrate their lives in contemplation and intimate dialog with him.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE CONTEMPORARY MENTALITY

Fr. Sylvain, Oka

Reviewing the minutes of the regional conferences and the preparatory documents for the Chapter on the above theme, on the whole, two primary concerns emerge. First of all, there is the concern that the challenges differ from one culture to another. Which brings up the question - that I submit to your reflection - are there specific cross-cultural elements characteristic of a *single* contemporary mentality (modern or post-modern). Then there is the concern that we have a positive attitude towards the surrounding culture, an attitude which integrates a healthy critique without reducing ourselves only to confrontation or being "counter-."^{xii}

It would be interesting to pursue a reflection on our attitude towards culture along with a look at our deepest motivations. Here I will simply refer to a recent article of F. Mannion which appeared in *The American Benedictine Review*^{xii} where the author identifies four major paradigms or global orientations in which to situate ourselves with relationship to the world, presently found in the Catholic Church, religious and monastic communities. These include: conservatism, liberalism, radicalism and neo-conservatism. These various attitudes can co-exist simultaneously within a given institution (Order, region, community) - according to the tendencies which influence it - and with greater difficulty, within the same person. They can be expressly found with respect to tradition, ecclesiology (in particular with its relationship to authority) and to liturgy.^{xii} These keys to the literature can be useful to situate and understand the profile of persons who present themselves at the doors of our monastery as possible candidates to the monastic life.

The challenges of the contemporary mentality are numerous and varied. In a rather schematic way, we can regroup these challenges under three large titles/categories, which indicate three distinct but inter-related levels: (1) the relationship with nature and modern technology (cosmological level), (2) post-modern man and woman (anthropological level) and (3) secularization and the return of religious sentiment (theological level).

1. The relationship to nature and contemporary technology.

Monastic life was born and developed primarily in the context of agricultural societies. This was a particularly favorable context for its way of life and the development of the contemplative dimension, especially through its direct contact with nature. The particular care in the choice of locations for monasteries and the type of work given priority (often agriculture) have allowed our kind of life to avoid the pitfalls of industrial and post-industrial societies while still benefitting from their advanced technologies. This direction may very well continue in the context of the present technological (informational) bias, and perhaps also for economic reasons. Even more as ecological awareness has sensitized us to the importance of preserving the environment and maintaining a healthy balance among its various components. However, this new ecological sensitivity remains for us an interpolation. It questions our monasteries' actual relationship to the environment as well as the intervention of those who promote the "rights of nature", at the political, ethical and spiritual levels.^{xii}

The growth of urbanization in the environment - and, in certain regions, the rapid "Westernization" of traditional ways of life^{xii}, the economic constraints,^{xii} and perhaps also, a concern for solidarity with the poor, can modify the "ideal" conditions of the workplace which have prevailed in our communities up to the present. Here we can question the communities which have opted for a factory type of industry using state of the art technologies (computers) to evaluate the real impact of these new conditions on the contemplative dimension of our life. In comparison, we can ask about the impact that the printing press had on the *scriptorium* of our monasteries and the questions that this new situation may have raised, particularly on the practice of *lectio divina*. This practice was not lost, even if the conditions under which it was exercised did change. Along this line, one of the documents spoke of the term and the practice of video divina^{xii}; it would be good to reflect and have a communal sharing of our experiences with this practice.

Beyond these more immediate preoccupations, we can ask ourselves if we are ready to evaluate precisely the long term effects of these new technologies on our way of life. In this area, it seems that we

have not yet gone beyond the level of acculturation, that is, of an intelligent and appropriate adaptation to these new procedures of work and communication, without arriving at the level of inculturation, properly speaking. For this we will need to await new generations of monks and nuns, formed in this new culture, that of *homo informaticus*. One of these major modifications left to conjecture is that of our relationship to temporality. Using the simple example of mailing a letter we see how this was formerly done by boat, then by plane and now by FAX,^{xii} so the time of waiting used to characterize the mail delivery is considerably reduced. A *culture of immediacy* is taking shape^{xii}, especially through the use of the computer which allow a considerable mass of information to be transferred in a minimal amount of time. A certain atrophy of the human memory could be the result. This could constitute a potential menace to formation and the preservation of a proper identity (personal and institutional), in the measure where the feeling of identity is rooted in the individual or collective memory.^{xii} On the other hand, we can also see the computer as an aide which, by its efficiency and rapidity, liberates the memory and the human spirit, allowing them to exercise their activity in the areas where they are at their best. As for using the computer, there has also been mentioned the risk of closing oneself off in a world of information - or of super-information^{xii}, neutral, divested of all affective content, with its more or less long term effects on human relationships or on the relationship to God which is prayer^{xii}. If such a possibility remains real and calls us to vigilance, it also has a positive counterpart, that of surpassing spatial limits which allow us to live in the rhythm of world events - conflicts, wars, famines, etc. - and can really contribute to the development of human solidarity.

2. Post-Modern Man and Woman

Post-modernity is characterized by a certain disillusionment following the collapse of the myth of progress (1960-1970), that is, the human person's ability to conquer/master nature and the Marxist utopia (1980-90), therefore the mastery of history by the human person. The two typical figures that represent this era, the man or woman of progress and the militant, have lost their place to the "problematic" man or woman. "Problematic" in this sense refers to being deprived of significant identity roles and / or of global coherence, of a life project. This seems to describe the profile of a good number of present candidates to the monastic life. The absence or quest for references is verified in various levels constitutive of a culture, whether it be the level of expression (language, symbols, etc), the level of institutions (family, educational milieu, economic and political structures, etc) or the level of values (aesthetic, ethical, etc.)^{xii}

At the level of **expression**, the healthy pluralism of our contemporary cosmopolitan societies is particularly manifested in the multiplicity of languages it uses, languages which most often reflect various anthropologies.^{xii} The particular challenge encountered by those responsible for formation is increased by the fact that they are trying to transmit a spiritual patrimony and an experience that is very characterized and best expressed by twelfth century thought. However, the frequent absence of previous facts regarding the language of faith, and even more, the monastic tradition, allows them to be received in a fresh way. This is on the condition that an appropriate hermeneutic accompanies their transmission.

Perhaps it is at the level of **institutions** that the challenges encountered vary the most from one culture to another. Let us mention a few of these. In the minutes of certain regions, there was mention of the crisis of the family institution (families broken up and reformed, single-parent families etc.) which seems to reduce the possibilities in young people even to make a vocational choice: psychological problems, emotional immaturity, etc.^{xii} The challenge which this situation presents to our communities is that of identifying/understanding their capacity for welcoming, integrating and accompanying such persons, without risking an internal disorganization.^{xii} In other regions, it is the more elevated standard of living in our communities, both materially and educationally, in relationship to the surrounding culture, which calls into question the real motivations involved in the choice of a monastic vocation. The challenge here is the discernment to be exercised in the short, medium and long term. Here the experience of our communities and recent foundations in the young Churches is very valuable. The promotion of women, in various sectors of society, and a few sectors of ecclesial life, is perhaps linked to the present crisis in feminine religious communities, especially those in the active life. In this area, our Order with its nine centuries of existence, and its recent Constitutions, can perhaps offer a unique contribution on the way of living the masculine/feminine alliance within an institution. Doubtless we still have distance to cover. Our reflection on the revitalization of the pastoral organs of the Order could make a contribution here. Some regions also mentioned the mistrust of institutions and social structures,

whatever they be, entertained by the young and in particular, the corruption of the surrounding political-economic system. Others question the influence of the democratic spirit on our communities and on various practices of our Order, particularly on the service of abbatial authority.^{xii} These situations and questions particularly challenge superiors in the exercise of their ministry, as well as all the department heads in our communities. In the instance of the General Chapter, we must bring up the question of the delegates' right to vote, which has not yet been resolved in a definite way.

On the level of **values** our communities perhaps prophetically question society more than they are questioned by society. At least this is the over all impression that comes from the reading of a good number of the minutes of regional meetings, where a rather long list of counter-values are listed, which are opposed by evangelical values transmitted by the Rule of St. Benedict and the Cistercian tradition: materialism/spiritual life and liturgy; consumerism/poverty and detachment; individualism/cenobitic life; hedonism/asceticism and simplicity of life, etc. Each of these themes could be greatly expanded. In all cases, this rather unilateral vision should not conceal the questions and challenges posed to our communities from the authentic values which inspire the present generation, as expressed, for example, in the *Directives for Formation in Religious Institutes*.^{xiii} Values mentioned were: sensitivity to the values of peace, justice, and non-violence; openness to fraternity and solidarity; movements in the interests of life and nature; hopes for a better world. Our spirit of initiative and our creativity are stimulated to find new ways of showing solidarity while at the same time, respecting our contemplative identity. I will but mention here, by way of example, the greater or lesser participation of some communities or of monks/nuns in the movement of the ACAT (Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture) and refer to a situation that is known but pin-points even more the role of "peaceful mediation/negotiation" as was practiced by the community of Lac in the autochthonous crisis of their local area (Oka, Quebec, Canada) during the summer of 1990.

Beyond these particular challenges, the great challenge asked of us by a waiting world, and especially by the young of this post-modern society, is perhaps that of a clear identity, of a coherent anthropological (and theological) project, where the three levels of values, institutions and expression do not contradict one another. Of this identity and this aim, our recent Constitutions present the fundamental features; it remains to be seen if our communities are in basic agreement.^{xiii}

3. Secularization and the Return of Religious Sentiment.

In the religious dimension, the transition from modernity to post-modernity is characterized by the transition from a strongly secularized mentality to a return of religious sentiment with its most diverse and ambiguous manifestations (fraternities, sects, New Age, etc). In some regions and certain sectors of social life, secularization is still predominant, while in others, it co-exists with the most unexpected and irrational forms. Therefore, a twofold challenge faces our contemplative identity and our specific mission in the Church.^{xiii}

Secularization, with its characteristic attitudes - pragmatism, rationalism, relativism, anthropological reductionism, etc.- incites us to continually become greater "witnesses to the transcendent," in a spirit of openness and dialogue, welcome and respect, sharing and gratefulness, especially in the service of hospitality, in the unconditional welcome of guests. Witnessing to the Absolute, as well as to our faith in the human person and his/her capacity for contemplation, as the constitutive dimension of his/her being often waiting only to be awakened. This is what inspired R. Pannikar to say that the monastic life is a universal religious and human archetype that continually summons us.^{xiii} On the other hand, if in the beginning, the human sciences (anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc) developed in major part outside of a religious framework, it seems that we have not yet fully appreciated their contribution to a better comprehension of the dynamic of the spiritual life (personal, communal and social).

Besides a similar attitude of openness, hospitality and dialogue, the adherents and representatives of the new religious movements find - or expect to find - at our monasteries places favorable to a "spiritual experience." In this context, our patrimony is of particular interest when we consider the importance given by our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers to experience, as well as to the current theme of desire. The heritage of a multi-secular tradition is also important in the exercise of discernment required for an authentic spiritual quest that is often expressed in multiple languages and

and rites, borrowed from the most diverse traditions. Faced with such syncretism, it seems important to make our ecclesial roots prominent - both in the local Church and the universal Church - as well as the specific Christian charism of our spiritual tradition, a specificity that does not harden into opposition, but becomes enriched by the contact with other traditions. This is what we are invited to do in the present ecumenical, inter-confessional and inter-religious movements.^{xii}

In concluding this brief presentation, a short text from Jean-Yves Baziou, taken from an article in the review, *Christus*, entitled: "Getting Beyond Disillusionment. Another Way of Living in the World," describes well, it seems to me, what should be the attitude of a Christian, and even more of the monk/nun facing the challenges presented by the contemporary mentality:

Instead of reading the collapse of absolutes in a negative way, we can adopt a fresh vision in the biblical manner of reading crisis situations. In the Bible, cultural mutations and times of transition, as well as conflicts appear as privileged moments of God's revelation...a God who breaks the idols that we make of him, of man/woman, and of the Church. We discover them to be larger, newer than we had imagined. Cultural change becomes the occasion of spiritual progress.^{xii}

xii. The ASPAC Region even voted on this: "While recognizing the dangers inherent in certain aspects of the contemporary mentality, ASPAC notes that it is equally important to see in the contemporary mentality so many expressions of fundamental human aspirations. It believes that attention to the positive aspects of contemporary culture will help to guarantee the authenticity of our monastic program." (vote 22, p. 37, a unanimous vote of the participants). See as well the text of Dom Columcille (Region of the Isles, Mount Melleray, 1992, p 5-6.). The Central Commissions retained this aspect as the third point to take into consideration in the presentation of the theme regarding the challenges of the contemporary mentality at the General Chapter (the two others being the impact of the contemporary mentality on our contemplative life, and the challenges caused by the problems of our society on our communities; Gethsemani, 1992, p. 28.)

xii. "Monasticism and Modern Culture: I. Hostility and Hospitality - Religious Community and 'The World' ", M. Francis Mannion, *The American Benedictine Review*, (44:1) March 1993, 3-21.

xii. We can give a brief resume of each of F. Mannion's paradigms. **Conservatism** is characterized by a minimum openness to the surrounding culture. It is concerned with restoration of past institutional models, centralized and hierarchical ecclesiology, pre-conciliar liturgy. In monastic terms, there is a predominance of the *fuga mundi* (in its pejorative aspect). The **liberal attitude** is a "dynamic dialogue between the Gospel and human culture" (p.10). It primarily concerns the adaptation of Christian and ecclesial tradition to the aspirations of the modern world. It wants to democratize, de-romanize, and de-Europeanize the Church. It aims to inculturate the liturgy with creativity without any fear of innovation. De-ritualizing what presently exists and re-ritualizing according to a liberal model characterizes its effect on religious and monastic life. *Aggiornamento* stresses a "return to the sources." The **radical approach** is not content in harmonizing the Christian tradition with modern society, but it wishes to create a new religious and cultural order, using selective literature and a deep critique of past and present institutions (as for example, in liberation or feminist theology.) This direction calls for a complete reconfiguration of the Church, its structures and symbolic expressions. Religious and monastic life are presented as an alternative sphere, at the frontier of Christian tradition and of the surrounding socio-cultural environment. There is talk of "refoundation" (in the strong sense of the word) and of "ecclesiogenesis." Finally, **Neo-conservatism** is characterized by an approach that is both open to and critical of the contemporary world, with regards to Christian origins, but at the same time, pointed towards the development of tradition, in so far as it concerns theology, ecclesiology and liturgy. "New cultural elements can always enter into the Christian synthesis, but the Church's continuity with its origins must always be preserved." (p. 16) A deep confidence in the heritage of religious and monastic traditions is manifested, as well as in their vitality and their capacity to interpolate the surrounding culture. The research and conclusions of F. Mannion on this subject

parallel to a large degree those of Avery Dulles, S.J., who also identifies four paradigms (substantially the same): traditionalism, liberalism, prophetic radicalism and neo-conservatism. See Avery Dulles, *Catholicism and American Culture: The Uneasy Dialogue* (New York: Fordham UP 1990).

xii. Attention to the environment and to ecological problems, in the larger global framework of attending to social problems, became the subject of a vote in the USA Region: "We recommend that social problems (linked to war, torture, refugees, the homeless, the oppression of indigenous peoples and the destruction of the earth's resources and the ecosystem) be taken into consideration in the secondary theme of the General Chapters: "The Challenges of the Contemporary Mentality" (Conyers 1992, vote 23a, p. 8; accepted unanimously by the participants).

xii. See in particular Father Josaphat Kato Kalema's treatment on this subject: "The Cistercian Contemplative Identity," Part II, Point 1: The Challenges, p.42.

xii. The economic question, linked to the growing complexity of administrative concerns, is emphasized by the FSO region (Timadeuc, 1991, p. 6; see also the grid prepared for the region on the theme of the challenges of the contemporary mentality., p.13).

xii. Text of Dom Frans Harjawiyata on " The Cistercian Contemplative Identity," point 2.4 The Christian Contemplative Life in Our Cistercian Monasteries," p. 7.

xii. In our Order, 54 communities of monks (out of 92), and 19 communities of nuns (out of 62) now own and use the FAX (*Elenchus* 1993).

9. As also in the case of the instantaneous and provisional, with its inevitable repercussions on the values of stability, permanence and duration which characterize our life, as noted by M. Marie St-Pierre (CRC, Prairies, 1991, p. 13).

xii. On this subject see the minutes of RIM (*Tre Fontane*, 1992), "The Contemplative Identity and Formation of Christian Conscience: Listening - Memory - Desire," p.3-36.

xii. A theme mentioned in the minutes of several regional meetings, including that of RIM (*Vitorchiano* 1991), where the Abbot General used the term "information culture" whose injurious effects on the life of our communities is to arouse curiosity and to entertain a certain superficiality (p.18). In the minutes of the American region (*Santa Sabina Center*, 1991), Dom Bernard McVeigh used the term "Information pollution." (*Appendix a, Challenges of the Contemporary Mentality*, p. 12).

xii. This aspect is developed in particular by Dom Bernard McVeigh (USA, Santa Sabina Center, 1991, p.12), as well as several other aspects relative to the use of computers.

xii. I am borrowing these categories from Dom Armand Veilleux, in his article "Monasticism and Culture" (Monasticism and Contemporary Culture)" , Appendix 6 from the minutes of the meeting of the CRC, Mistassini 1992, p.7.

xii. The Spanish region treated this point in its minutes (**San Pedro de Cardena**,) 1992), p. 3-5, and in a more developed way in two texts presented in the appendix: "*Desafios de la mentalidad contemporanea*", p.30-36, especially point 4: *La muerte del hombre*, and *Incidencia de la mentalidad actual en nuestra vida contemplativa*" (p.37-44, notably in point 2: *Problema del lenguaje*, p. 38-39, and point 4:*Temas relativos a la persona*,p. 40-44). We are also aware of Dom Bernardo's concern regarding the question of anthropology: how to work out a personalistic and cenobitic anthropology for our communities, which also takes in account the multi-cultural dimension of our Order.

xii. This aspect is stressed in the minutes of REMILA (*Humocaró* 1992), p.12 and in Oriens (*Nishinomiya*,1992), p. 10 (point 2.4 Discussion). Regarding the difficulty experienced by some young

people to make or hold commitments, the Netherlands Region suggests the possibility of other forms of commitment to the Cistercian life (e.g., oblate status), or besides this, an adapted form of initiation, which implies for the community that there would be a less stable element requiring more flexibility. (Zundert, 1991, p.11).

xii. Or without our communities adopting what G. Arbuckle names "the (relational) therapeutic model" (USA, Santa Sabina Center, Appendix A. p.14). Another communal model which is not without repercussions on our contemplative life is the "associate" model (see the minutes of the CNE Region, Oelenberg, 1991, p.13).

xii. These three points: promotion of women, mistrust of institutions, the influence of democracy on the abbatial service, are mentioned or treated particularly in the minutes of REMILA (*Humocar* 1992, p.11-13).

xii. Roman (Vatican??) Document *Potissimum institutioni*, February 2, 1990. See in particular Chapter 5, paragraph A: "Young Candidates to the Religious Life and a Pastoral on Vocations" (p.57 in the French edition published by the Canadian Religious Conference.)

xii. It is to such a reflection that F. Placido Alvarez particularly invites us in his text on "The Cistercian Contemplative Identity", p. 20-24, especially on p.21: "In the second stage of reflection, we can ask ourselves how we live the various elements on which we base our reflection. What inconsistencies exist between that which we recognize as a contemplative dimension and what we actually live? Why are there these inconsistencies? On the other hand, what impetus towards life do we find and what encourages this impetus?"

xii. These two aspects are well identified by F. Charles Dumont in this text on "The Contemplative Cistercian Identity", section VI: The Challenges of the contemporary mentality, p. 31-33. We can also refer to the document being prepared for the next Synod of Bishops on consecrated life: "Consecrated life and the Mission of the Church in the World. *Lineamenta*" (1992), to see that on the whole, very little place is reserved for institutes wholly directed to contemplation.

xii. Pannikar, R. *Blessed Simplicity. The Monk as Universal Archetype*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1982, Cf. also Dom Jean Leclerc, *Monastic Studies* 18 (1988) 64-78.

xii. We mention here the magnificent synthesis made by Dom Frans Harjawiyata who identified, on the theological level, particular challenges for each of the six continents: secularization vs. *Mysterium Salutis* in Europe; inculturation vs. *Mysterium Incarnationis* in Africa; liberation vs. *Mysterium Liberationis* in Latin America; and inter-religious dialogue vs. *Mysterium Revelationis* in Asia. (Text of the document on "The Contemplative Cistercian Identity," point 1.2 The Evolution of the Church p.1-2).

xii. Jean-Yves Bazio, "Moving Beyond Disillusionment. Another Way of Living in the World," *Christus* 157 (Janvier 1993) 8-17, the citation on P. 14 echoes this word of hope from the African region: "A new world, perhaps a more interior one, struggles to be born, but it still lacks the assurance which comes from maturity and incorporation into the whole of the human culture." (*Awhum*, 1991, P. 7)

CONFERENCE OF SISTER MARIE-PASCALE OF CHAMBARAND

Aspects of the contemporary mentality.

These remarks are rather more a sharing of reflections, fruit of 12 years of daily living with the novices of our Community. It so happens that the group in formation comprises 3 sisters aged between 20 and 30 years, 4 sisters between 30 and 40, and 5 between 40 and 50 years. The stages of monastic life do not necessarily coincide with the age group : novices of 23 years can be the seniors of the novitiate, and postulants can be more than 30 or 40 years old. The example given may not be representative perhaps, but in any case, the remarks are grounded, that is to say rooted in a monastery of nuns in France. No claims are made for being a study in sociology or psychology, nor even spirituality. The remarks concern the young sisters in formation, and not the community. I have specially noted traits which arise from the present day mentality, trying to concentrate them in preference to the events in their own personal life story (father or mother deceased, widowed, parents divorced, remarried, a member of the family handicapped, and so on...).

In the first part, we shall underline some of the established facts either of each decennary, or of the whole group of the young sisters. The temporary professed sisters have, at the most, 8 or 9 years experience of monastic life, thus they are a good test of today's mentality for each of the age-groups.

The second part will treat more directly with the community, the hazards for the formators, and possible community break through, thanks to the impetus of the young sisters and to their seeking likewise.

First aspect : the most fundamental : what has led them to the monastery.

Of course, to seek God. But this takes many different forms, linked to the type of religious formation previously received and practiced. On this point, there is room for much diversity. For those born between the years 1940 and 1950, faith, like many other basic values is understood. Prayer, a christian life, the religious life make up the concrete elements of life, perhaps not always to be found in the family, but at least in their associations. Certain sisters had already opted in the depth of their heart, for the religious life from the time of their first communion, very early, at 7 or 8 years of age. That has been the guide-line of their life, even if circumstances had obliged them to follow other occupations before putting this project into practice. They could not quench it, moreover, they had no desire to do so. In this course of life, the choices are clear, well defined, the difficulties encountered are not at this level. The same applies to the difficulties of cenobitic life : they exist, and we must make the best of it. A long task has to be undertaken of reconciliation, of healing, of redressing all that has been closed in or deformed into a defensive reflex. The challenge addressed here to our life seems to be to keep the Cistercian ideal in all its freshness. The monastery is going to be a place where all the fervor of first love can be born again. It will be necessary, nevertheless, to oust the temptations and the occasions of withdrawing into oneself, of overcoming the limitations caused by unfortunate experiences of self-giving. To thwart wear and tear and to believe once again that everything is possible is the most frequent target at stake at this point. This is a very eloquent reply confronting the so often repeated ruptures in the young peoples circles, that they have now become common place : divorce, bankruptcy, unemployment... without forgetting the threat of illness... One is challenged to have hope, to clear the way through the power of the resurrection. Former guilt, related to the way of life led prior to replying to the first call, can become a celebration of Divine Mercy by a new commitment made without restriction or limit, an opening out to the future. Thus are made entirely interdependent so many persons who have been confronted sometimes brutally by barred routes, to make deliberate and obligatory changes of orientation. Far from being disastrous, the successions of places and states of life can contribute to discovering the Life which is always new, the new Name and the new and eternal Alliance.

For the young sisters born between 1950 and 1960, the same call can be found, early or not, but with more hazy outlines and a catechetical formation somewhat vague, strongly marked by the events of "May 1968" (we have to talk of it !) All forms exist : from the classical family where the older children have a very difficult adolescence, revolted against social "rites" and obligations, to the family which moving in an open group creates and manages its own form of catechism and of parallel education which is found to be more satisfactory being less conformist. What follows is twofold. The generations are effaced, the authority and role of parents are put into brackets. They seem to enter into adolescence and remain there for a good while! Concerning the quest of one's vocation, this is better expressed in terms of thirst, of vital question, of having exhausted the experiences of life in groups of one's own choice, chosen in order to share ones doubts and questioning. Little by little, especially in large towns, schools and churches, which formerly were places of instruction are becoming places of experimentation, where the most essential truths are related to the dimensions of the individual, and generate as much uncertainty and anxiety as incapacity to make acts of commitment for the future.

The dynamic impulse due to this thirst, to this want felt by the young people of today, is a trump card for formation. Lack of meaning, lack of perspectives for the future, lack of solidarity, lack of true relationships... all this whets the appetite and is a promising opening, permitting everything to be undertaken. There is the risk, however, of giving way to haste, and above all, in view of emotional predominance, of only making choices which orientate towards a warm and coalescing mode of relationships.

In the course of proceedings, the specific challenge to Cistercian life will be to clearly mark out the route, to put in position firm but supple guide-marks, so that one will not be constantly coming up against questions concerning the basis of observances, but rather where one will be invited to exercise with patience the practices which "build and direct love in us", beginning with the actual experience of community life, of consensus, and good fellowship. The customs of the house as some will discover, are a guide which have the power to "create order". One learns how to live, and how to live with courtesy.

For the youngest sisters, those born after 1965, the call has reached them from even farther afield, in a world almost foreign to the Faith. Instinct has set them off : God exists, and they want to go towards Him. We find, naturally, all the various degrees of human, cultural and religious formation, and also all the degrees of social levels. What appears to be a constant factor is the "restlessness" which resides in them and surrounds them : a disjointed schooling, sometimes without any obvious results, a marginal existence in family life ; the multiplying of experiences according to passing whims and fancies; escape into a precocious sexuality, or again escape by the television watched without interest and with boredom; dreams and fantasies nourished by the pornographic trade : all these things result in emptiness. And in this emptiness God allows the encounter. Often it is through an experience which has been "felt" : feeling, even sensation are privileged means of acquaintance. At this point, a long time of catechetics remains to be accomplished in order to bring to hand the possibility of stating precisely who is the God of Jesus-Christ, the God of the Gospels confessed by and in the Church. The challenge, with these young people, its seems to me, lies in the apprenticeship to interiority, to endurance, to perseverance in interiority. Time, punctuated by the Liturgy, by the organization of the monastic day according to Saint Benedict, by the slow, step by step entry into a life of prayer, becomes an ally permitting the person to mature on all the levels of this being, body, affections, senses and even the reconstruction of his capacity to judge, apprenticeship of objectivity.

Second aspect: integration into monastic life

In all the domains of monastic life as it presents itself, there are questions which are going to find their answer if the Community is alive and full of good zeal (RB 72), that is to say if each of its members in spite of his limitations, lives fully and simply each moment of the day, taking part to the maximum in community consensus in a joyful and responsible manner. All the questions concerning the meaning of existence, of the consecrated life, of a fruitful renunciation of one's own will, of joyful poverty and fraternal agape, all this questioning is a power house of renewal for us, concerning the way in which we live the contemplative dimension of our life. It is a time of

verification for each one of us as to the meaning of fraternal relationships, the meaning of continence, the meaning of manual work, the meaning of the liturgy, of a life freely given, free of all servitude to material income, to the meaning of a life wholly consecrated to God, bearer of life for the world, and fulfillment of the person in all his potentialities.

The chief anxiety which confronts each one, in a unique, but at the same time uniform manner is: "who am I really ? Can you help me to know myself better ?" This question is asked by each one with more or less agitation of mind, according to the rules of identification which have been positioned. The accession to adult life requires for everyone a very long quest. The elders go through the crisis of rejecting their parents, whom they perceive as the cause of all the failures of their earlier life. The contribution of human sciences has helped in finding explications to the behavior of parents, but has not automatically pronounced on the way to accept them such as they are or have been. Integration in the community proceeds by this work of reconciliation, by accepting all that made us such as we are. By our faith, we firmly believe that God will not tear out a single page of our life story, neither the "high lights", nor the most painful. This is quite the contrary to our mentality today which wants to flee from suffering in any form, and above all, to flee from death. What a challenge to raise when a commitment, precisely until death is envisaged. What set backs, at times, to avoid by all possible means that "it is beginning again", above all when a form of common life (marriage, another community) has previously deceived many hopes and caused many wounds.

The search of identity, for the following generation, takes a slightly different form. Universal truths having suffered by "Contestation", the young have begun another stage of the "death of the Father". The creation of new forms of community life, based on fraternity, has opened the way to a valuation of the affective, of the emotional, of a choice made in function with sentiment and, hence, no longer the true and strong values. The stress is put on the team, the group, and thus the fear of all hierarchy, of all authority renders the entry into real obedience more laborious. All the valuation of the person, his spontaneity, his creativity is very positive. There remains, however, the major challenge : namely to inscribe in a collection of criteria, guide lines for morals and relationships. The whole classification of what was formerly called the "US", here takes on all its importance. To enter cistercian life infers something very new for more than half of our young sisters. A manner of relationships built on respect of persons in their own identity, in their differences, in their respective role. Saint Benedict describes that in Chapter 63 : of the rank to be kept in the community, or ch. 26 and 27 : how to deal with those excommunicated, and in order to channel initiatives which will only be motivated by good sentiments, St Benedict clearly defines the persons who should do this.

When the Rule speaks of the Abbot, it says very precisely that he will be called Dom and Abbot because he holds the place of Christ in the monastery (RB 63. 13). And again : he ought always to remember what he is called, and correspond to his name of superior by his deeds (RB 2,2). This brings to light the importance attached to places and to persons when they are really what they are. "Let the oratory be what it is called, a place of prayer : and let nothing else be done or kept there" (RB 52). At times, I wonder if this is not the greatest challenge with which we are confronted during the last 20-30 years.

This downward trend is expressed by the seniors of this age group, either in taking part in militant groups of Women's Liberation (MLF), in adopting the unisex mode, or else at times in sexual living outside of marriage, with a succession of casual partners, then abandoned, in valorizing "love without risk", where feeling no longer has room to develop and grow, to give birth and to make grow. Amongst the younger ones, one has come to even more vague experiences, more narcissic, where the relational life is levelled, at times denied. One finds individuals who have many points in common with the girovagi and the sarabites as described by St Benedict, always on road, never resting, seeking ceaselessly immediate pleasures. And they are well capable of describing themselves as such, recognizing themselves under the traits of these two types of monks !

How to know who one is, when man and woman are no longer situated by relationship one to the other in a healthy distinction favorable to dialogue, and where the child can find its place ?

When the marriage partner, the parents, the educators, the adults are rejected or no longer accepted to be what they are, that is to say those on whom the children can model themselves. The anxiety expressed most frequently by the younger sisters is : "Am I normal ?" A question which covers all domains, from the deepest to the most superficial. The information diffused by the media aims at making uniform, aseptic and standard experiences, behavior, feelings, clothing, not forgetting the repertoire of songs and films, (much more rare, that of books !) Is this not a form of security when one is able to refer to symbolical persons known by the members of a group ?

The trump card for the formation of the young people is their lack of acquired knowledge, more particularly that of the Bible, everything is new, not worn out by distracted reading. As they will quickly discover how very nourishing such a reading can be, they will feel a real appetite for it, and this is an excellent thing ! It remains however to overcome the habit of changing trivially from one thing to another, or of skipping through their reading, which St Benedict combats in a far-seeing manner : "read this book all through and in order." (RB 48, 15). This is chosen ground for *lectio divina*, which aims at giving its axle to our whole person, beginning with the Word of God and Tradition ; apprenticeship of the tenets of the Faith, but also a long re-education of the intellect, of the will, of the imagination too. Even the role of the body in the Liturgy, for example, is heavy with discoveries and reconciliations.

The anthropology which one can trace from the writings of the Cistercian Fathers surprises and seduces greatly, by its spiritual and scriptural depth, and by its concreteness, its closeness to life. It is in this sense that the young sisters orientate their quest, but without being aware of such a correspondence with their own experience. The desire to learn the truths which give life is unanimously shared by all the young, and one sees them entering with joy into the biblical, patristic, philosophical and spiritual tradition.

An almost general feeling for ecology, for the value of the body for proximity to nature, and consequently for fraternity, are also important motives ready to contribute to the adventure of the maturation of these young people. To develop charity within the community, the members of which are chosen by God and not by each another will also be an important step towards a more authentic liberty : the very generous ideal of fraternity, universal love and abolishing of frontiers which all this generation share, will quickly find there a concrete and direct field of applications.

Another active and daily challenge will be to maintain the course of christian faith with the asceticism, sometimes with privations that it calls for. To come back from the mirages of occultism, sometimes practiced or even only approached, is not easy. It leaves not only spiritual traces, but also an attitude somewhat of the magic type, one wants to avoid the "risk", the unknown, hence one seeks to lay hands on the private life of the others, to keep him within a framework without surprises.

The last generations have not lived any of the great historical or social events, they have not even, for some of them, had to encounter Death in their family. Their innocence a little egocentric, even narcissic, is going to require of us a lot of patience to begin with ! It is a question of granting them much listening time without giving way to the temptation of minimizing their tried experiences, so much longer to recount because they have not well defined lines.

A new element in the contemporary mentality is due to technological progress. It has so many positive sides to it, that one cannot discern the consequences which, little by little have installed themselves in the ways of thinking and of reacting. The greatest challenge arising from technology is to find again the sense of risk, of opening to the future, of Abandon to Providence... Imperceptibly, all pain, all suffering receives a remedy and one can no longer do without it, support it, endure it. All that does not procure a complete and immediate satisfaction, is used, then thrown away. There is no place for the unexpected, for the non-programmed, for what is uncomfortable.

Henceforth, we should look for a way of getting out of this imprisonment in a universe where contraception has been raised to a system, because it is considered acceptable and reasonable. The guarantee formulated : "A child if and when I want it", and which several young sisters have heard on the lips of their own mother, or have said themselves in their own life as a

couple, is going to produce a sort of sterilization, perhaps more pernicious than abortion. In the one case, the "embarrassing child" is suppressed, in the other it is avoided just as one seeks to avoid any danger. When, in such a way, one loses sight of the nature of human relationships, when the sterilization is used not as a remedy in objectively difficult situations, but as an ideal in seeking one's comfort, one closes the road to the future, right down to the most ordinary of choices in daily and especially fraternal living.

Of course, God does not escape from this peculiar quest of security, it has always been the field of spiritual combat throughout the centuries ! In fact, the important challenge for formators is well and truly one of doing all that is possible to allow an authentic experience of God to be made by the young people in the heart of their fragility, of their limits, of their anxieties, but also of their eagerness, their experiences, of their confidence day by day.

At times, the account of their erring or of their wanderings can be very heavy to receive, almost intolerable. A blessing and an advantage for the young, and a stimulant for the communities and formators is this confident opening out towards their elders. Now, more than ever we have to be ready to acknowledge the hope which is in us and which does not deceive, because love is poured out in our hearts by the Spirit.

CONFERENCE OF DOM PLACIDO OF OSERA

Reflections on the "Contemplative dimension" in our monasteries

1. Introduction

As I embark upon these reflections it is incumbent upon me to point out that the use of the word "dimension" is intentional. Under the actual circumstances I consider it more apt, since "identity" is something which I do not place in doubt, and which is sufficiently defined in our Rule, our Constitutions, in the tradition of the Order and in the Definitions of our General Chapters.

All of this is an obligatory point of reference, which must be set up over against - community and individual-wise - the response of daily living, whose very nature must show forth in a transparent manner that we are referring to, in effect, a life **integrally** ordered to contemplation. That is, these Documents, in harmoniously structuring our contemplative life, will do nothing more than reflect back to us a species of "likenesses". They are a mirror in which we contemplate our "identity". And this, I repeat, I do not place in doubt.

2. The expression of our identity: Christ

Therefore, when we, in our monasteries, face the contingencies of each day with simplicity, we make the joyful discovery of which St. Bernard wrote: " There were also the disciples, the intimates and inseparables: these are the ones who have chosen the better part and live consecrated to God in the cloister, identified with Him and ready to do his will" (Ram 2,5)

Identified with Him! Here we find described what all of monastic tradition wishes to attain : **continual prayer**. Here is laid out, in a spirit of blessedness, the fullness of the law of Christ: the love of God and of the brethren. Here, consequently, will there be accomplished in us those words St. Paul said of himself: " I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2,19-20). Words which he spoke, also, in exhortation: "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2,5).

3. Dimension, witness of life

This Pauline exhortation situates us at the level of the concrete, of the practical, of the day-to-day. That is, on the same plain as **dimension**: our identity with Christ must be extended and diffused along all the elements of life, which for us, as cistercian monks, is summed up " in fraternal union, in solitude and silence, in prayer and in work, and a disciplined life" (C.7).

That is why assimilation into Christ is incomprehensible if not manifested in some way in the life of the monk, for it is the love of Christ that impels us (Cf 2 Cor 5,14). Thus, for example, when we direct our attention towards our Founders, we hear how it was said of St. Alberic that he was **a lover of the Rule and of the brethren**; and of St. Stephen, that **he loved the Rule and the place**.

What does all this say to us? That the cistercian contemplative life is incomprehensible without a true love of the brothers, or unless one finds one's peace and happiness within the walls of the monastery, without having to seek diversions or compensations in order to distance oneself from cenobitic life. That is, contemplative life, given that it is to spring from the same **love of Christ**, will seek this love in the fullest way possible via an intense and joyous ascesis of self-gift, of a search for the well-being of the other, of detachment, etc.....It is in this way that the "dimension" expresses and manifests that which constitutes contemplative life.

4. Our actualization

Nevertheless we realize that the love of God does not always reach its fullness in us. Rather, we see that in a great part of our monasteries, there is a certain paucity of spiritual life. Some judge - and of this much is said nowadays - that it is due to the insufficient practice of lectio divina. Personally, however, although I admit that this could be one of the principle causes, I do not believe it is the only factor.

From my own experience of more than fifty years of monastic life, and of being close to the different phases gone through by the Order in these recent times, I can say that the best exemplars of life I have found have been among the former laybrothers, who, nevertheless, did not dedicate an inordinate amount of time to lectio. Their life, rather, came down to work, silence, and **prayer**. But, what charity! what simplicity! what joyful expressions on their faces! It is in them that I have been really able to contemplate the true **claustral paradise**.

Undoubtedly there have also been some really contemplative monks and abbots. I could cite Dom Vital Lehodey, Dom Godofredo Belorgey, abbot of Citeaux, Dom Gabriel Sortais, Thomas Merton, and certainly others whom I do not know, and others whom I do not mention because they are still living. But, considering our unique monastic mode, we should expect to have a greater number of really exemplary lives.

5. The Spirit, gift of life

When we review the elements of cistercian contemplative life: stability, conversion of life, obedience, fraternity, liturgical celebration, lectio divina, vigils, silence, ascesis, work, simplicity, elements all of which are of an eminent vitality and of a profound dimension, one can ask oneself what is the key that would lead to the avoidance of a life of superficiality, stemming from a lukewarm spirituality and, consequently, resulting in a general impoverishment.

We know, of course, that this life hidden with Christ in God (Cf Col 3,3) is not simply a question of effort, because we are well aware that the mere fact of raising water to the lips does not produce thirst; nor does the act of remaining in bed lead to sleep. In the same way it is not enough to draw up a permanent formulation, increasingly wide ranging and proportionate, because neither can a book impart wisdom. Useless, as well, to intensify the regular observances of themselves, because it is only " the Spirit who gives life" (Jn 6,63).

In no way do I intend to demean or under-evaluate personal effort, careful preparations or sincere regular observance. I simply wish to stress that we are concerned with means which, only if there first exists docility to the Spirit who orientates us to " attain **purity of heart and the continual mindfulness of God's presence** " (C.3,2), will then be efficacious.

6. Humility, manifestation of docility

This "limitless dimension" is what makes comprehensible for us, as well as our own experience, that God's action is always distinctly original in each case, for God is not limited by prefabricated molds nor fixed standards of conduct.

This does not imply, however, that our journey to God is accomplished by leaps, nor can we sit back with our arms crossed.

In a communitarian life, where all are called to mutual care (cf C.16,2), it is important to remember something we are advised to do: " We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works.

This is exactly what St.Bernard exhorts us to in one of his sermons: always be attentive to the better thing, eager and desirous of spiritual grace, considering how much and how better are others and what we lack, because in all this - he concludes - consists authentic humility (cf

Pent.3,3). And here we cannot fail to note that the example he gives to his hearers is that of a laybrother!

If I have said that it is in the more humble that I have seen the grace of the Lord shining in a palpable manner, it is because I think that **humility, simplicity**, which make us depend wholly on Him, are the only means given us to be docile before the Spirit and attract his grace.

7. The desire for God

However, to generate in us this character of simplicity, as one of the great theological virtues necessary for the development of our spiritual life, it is necessary to awaken and nurture a true taste for the Lord and maintain the **desire for God**. How? Truly, if we could find the way in which to firmly implant in ourselves the hunger for God, we will have found the philosopher's stone, and contemplative graces would flood our communities. But here we move in the mysterious realm of faith, in which we are warned that it depends not upon a person's will or exertion, but upon God who shows mercy (cf Rom 9,16). And this we can only implore with the strength given by the Consoler.

8. In conclusion

This same Spirit will teach us that there is always a room for improvement; that there is always a Gospel to discover and to live; and that the search for the mystery of God in Christ is unending.

The strength of the Spirit that comes from on high thus penetrates us through the rich mystery that is **continual prayer**: in which one's converse with God is unending, because he who wishes to know Christ, and him crucified (cf 1 Co 2,2), is not content with just being a hearer of the word, but seizes upon it, in the firm hope that since his life consists in living the Gospel, he will inevitably become an evangelist who "by a life that is ordinary, obscure and laborious" (C.3,5), continues writing today and proclaiming the joy of the Good News: having found the treasure hidden in the field, he puts nothing and no one before God, nor His word, nor to the response thereof.

A response that manifests itself in availability and service towards all his brothers, for we discover and know ourselves to be DEPENDENTS OF GOD, who is HE WHO GIVES, WHO DOES AND WHO SAYS ALL THINGS WELL.