

THE CISTERCIAN ORDER
OF THE STRICT OBSERVANCE
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Volume Two

From the Second Vatican Council
to the End of the Century

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The Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance in the Twentieth Century

VOLUME ONE

From 1892 to the Close of the Second Vatican Council

VOLUME TWO

From the Second Vatican Council to the End of the Century

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PART TWO: THE CHANGES AFTER VATICAN II

INTRODUCTION

An Overview of the First Part of the Twentieth Century: Taking Stock

(by Dom Mariano Ballano)¹

Looking back from these early days of the twenty-first century at the previous one hundred years, they seem to be divided by a vague line into two nearly equal parts. The first part is characterized by security, stability, and progress; in the second part, incertitude, dissatisfaction, worry, the critical mind, and the search for one's identity predominate. The line between these two periods was drawn by the deep cultural shift that followed the Second World War and the Second Vatican Council.

With regard to the Cistercian Order, there is need to review the transition that took place in the first half of the century, turning the former Trappists into true Cistercians, imitators and restorers of the Order's best times. Among the main causes of this renewal are the pride of place given to *lectio divina*, the return to the *Rule of Benedict* as a source of spiritual life, constant and thoughtful contact with the teaching of Saint Bernard and the other writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the fostering of monastic studies.

Another noteworthy aspect of Cistercian spirituality in the twentieth century is *inculturation*, adaptation to the mentalities and customs of countries where the Order has established itself. By the end of the century more than forty per-cent of monasteries of both monks and nuns were situated outside of Europe. This development has no doubt enriched the Order and given it great hope for the future.

The Recovery of Cistercian Spiritual Identity

The year 1892 is the key and decisive date for the evolution of Cistercian spirituality in this latest stage of its history. With the unification of the Congregations that

¹ Dom Mariano was abbot of his community of Viaceli (Spain) from February 1975 to October 1977, and superior of the foundation established in the Dominican Republic from 1991 to 1992.

continued to follow the La Trappe observance, this new branch of the Cistercian family was to experience wide territorial expansion and vigorous—though sometimes uneven—evolution in its spirit.

The first task was to try to restore a general organization based on the Charter of Charity, and an authentically Cistercian observance in conformity with the early Cistercian fathers. Monastic *conversatio* was intended first of all to transform hearts with a pedagogy of spiritual freedom and love.

In the first half of the century we find a group of persons who influenced this spiritual renewal in a particular way. We presented them in the preceding chapters and will summarize here what they contributed to the Order. We are thinking especially of Dom Symphorien Bernigaud, Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, Dom Vital Lehodey, and Dom Anselme Le Bail.

Dom Symphorien was a monk of Sept-Fons. He dedicated his life to studying and commenting on the *Rule of Benedict*. He was convinced that the Rule was the best possible manual for monks, because the essential thing is less the practice of the observances than the acquisition of Saint Benedict's spirit. For those who have that spirit, which consists of passionate love for Christ, the problems of monastic life disappear. Saint Benedict is no mere legislator but above all a father, whom we must love and to whom we must listen.

The driving force of Dom Symphorien's existence was an extraordinary love for Jesus Christ, and intense life of prayer, and a boundless devotion to *lectio divina* and the study of the *Rule of Benedict*. He loved the Rule, which he both studied and practiced. In the important commentary he left us, *Meditations on the Rule of Saint Benedict* (1909), he shows himself to be a simple, practical, and selfless man, an admirable spiritual guide with an exceptionally enthusiastic character. This book was the basic manual of formation in most communities, and it revitalized monastic observance with solid spiritual doctrine.

Jean-Baptiste Chautard entered at Aiguebelle, and later became abbot of Chambarand and then Sept-Fons (see § 2.4.2.). He was a monk of great fervor and piety. Mary led him to Jesus, and Saint Joseph provided him with a spirit of silence and prayer. He fought with all his might to prevent the Clemenceau government of the Republic from forcing monks to leave their monasteries. But above all, he devoted himself to spreading and revitalizing contemplation as the being at the heart of Christian life.

His book *The Soul of the Apostolate* (first edition, 1913), in spite of its shortcomings, was received with great enthusiasm. The book conveys the fire ablaze in the soul of the author. He was filled with passion for God and for souls. What predominates is an absolute need for an interior life, for without it nothing fruitful can come about.

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There is no doubt that Dom Chautard was a great master of the spiritual life and that he exercised this ministry with his monks. For him Cistercian life is not a collection of observances or a life of penance but, rather, Christ at work in his mystical body. Saint Paul's saying, "For me to live is Christ," is the warp and woof of life in the cloister. To know, love, and imitate Jesus is the deepest desire of the monk. A hard and austere life is thus transformed by love.

The celebration of the eighth centenary of Saint Bernard's entrance at Cîteaux and the 1913 General Chapter were favorable occasions for "vivifying the observances with authentic Cistercian spirituality." The abbots returned to their monasteries ready to propagate these new aspirations among their monks. In 1925, the General Chapter assigned Dom Chautard to do a historical and practical study on the spirit of Cîteaux. He completed the assignment, the result of which was the publication of a booklet entitled "The Spirit of Simplicity." The spirit of Cîteaux, says the author, is a search for simplicity, and thus for sincerity and truth. The founders focused everything on this objective: the identification of love for the Rule with love for Jesus Christ. Joyful fidelity to the observances is what proves the reality of love. The monk is a person of simplicity and unity. The simplicity and unity of each member in God is what makes for unity in the community.

Dom Chautard perfectly assimilated the spirit of Saint Bernard and of the early Cistercian school of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and for him Cîteaux meant life, forward momentum, and song in the footsteps of Christ and Our Lady. He found joy in song, poetry, nature, flowers, birds, and art. Through his life he revealed to the world of his day the true nature of monastic life.

While this great monk and teacher was still in the limelight, two other great figures were effectively collaborating to restore to the Cistercian way of life its genuine spirituality: Vital Lehodey and Anselme Le Bail. The first represented the contemplative dimension and the second the intellectual.²

Dom Lehodey (see §2.4.1.) left us *The Ways of Mental Prayer* (1908), *The Spiritual Directory* (1910), and *Holy Abandonment* (1919). These books established him as a great teacher of his day. He taught through his life and through his writing. He received graces of prayer and purification that make him a key figure with regard to Spiritual Childhood. As a writer, he drew little on the Bible or the Fathers. In addition to Saint Bernard, his preference was for Saint Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Francis de Sales. For him, liturgical and private prayer are privileged places in the spiritual life. Prayer manifests itself in adoration, thanksgiving, sup-

² As was noted in the paragraph on Dom Le Bail (3.2.1.), if Dom Lehodey and Dom Chautard had some knowledge of Saint Bernard, their contact with the specifically Cistercian tradition of the Middle Ages was quite limited. It was the work of Dom Le Bail to make it better known.

plication, and loving affection, and continually simplifies itself until it becomes contemplation.

Dom Vital Lehodey was able to unite penance and contemplation, seeing them as two eyes or two hands, both of which are indispensable, or as two sisters living in perfect knowledge of each other and who do not want to be separated. Penance is noble and fruitful, but contemplation is incomparably more beautiful, richer, and blessed. The one tears us away from the earth, and the other unites us to God.

A bit later Dom Anselme Le Bail (see §3.2.1.) completed the transition from La Trappe to Cîteaux. He was no doubt the most daring and most intellectual among his contemporaries. A great enthusiast of the *Rule of Benedict* and of the twelfth-century Cistercian Fathers, he dedicated his life to this study, and gave shape to his ideas especially in two works: *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Manual of the Spiritual Life* (1914), and *The Cistercian Order* (1924). This latter work is a historical and doctrinal synthesis, remarkable for its balance, its sense of Cistercian monastic tradition, and its human openness. It retains its freshness and is well worth reading even today, in spite of advances in monastic studies.

His main concern was that the monk know what a monk is, in order to live monastic life in an intelligent way. Formation for Cistercian life must be clearly Cistercian. The handbook for this teaching is the *Rule of Benedict*, which is not only a disciplinary code but also and above all a teacher of the spiritual life. It dictates exterior norms of living, but it is intended to form the soul and to show the foundation on which it must rest, the method it must follow, and the high goal it aspires to reach.

The author asks: “What are the Cistercians doing today?” He answers: “the three traditional monastic works”—to praise God, to read, and to work. Liturgical prayer, which sets the rhythm of the monk’s day, should be celebrated tastefully and with enthusiasm. *Lectio divina* is meant to provide regular contact with the Word of God and with sacred studies as nourishment for the inner life. *Lectio divina* during the intervals is not a mere pastime or moment of rest between the choir and manual work; it is, rather, a way of living out the eremitic ideal of every monk, and of making the monk’s whole life a liturgy of the heart in the solitude of continual prayer. And manual work is not a kind of agricultural apostolate or large industrial undertaking, but a way of earning one’s living, of keeping physical and mental balance, and of practicing charity and penance.

Not all abbots and monks of his day accepted the new orientation taken by Dom Le Bail. They accused him of being an intellectualist in favor of relaxing norms. For his part, he always acted with resolute freedom, and his uprightness and spirit of submission were never in doubt for anyone. He lavished on his com-

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munity abundant and solid teaching, developed an excellent library, and encouraged higher studies and the publication of books and journals. But he never forgot that the monk is above all a “workman of God,” a “soldier of Christ.”

With Dom Le Bail this first period of the Cistercian twentieth century came to a close. It was a fundamental period of renewal and return to the twelfth-century spirit and style of life. The Order attained great structural unity in government, observance, and spirituality, centered in the liturgy, the life of prayer, and *lectio divina*. Of no small influence were the wise abbots we have mentioned and the many monks and nuns who welcomed with enthusiasm this direction in the Order.

The main themes of renewed Cistercian spirituality were Jesus Christ, the life of prayer, the liturgy, studies, and austerity of life. The fruit of this renewal came quickly and abundantly: the life of nearly a hundred communities of monks and nuns, recalling the brightest days of medieval Cistercian life.

From Expansion to Uncertainty

The first half of the twentieth century was a tranquil, prosperous, and renewing period in the monastic order in general and particularly in the Cistercian Order. The monks had great faith in the monastic life they lived. Teachers like Dom Delatte (Abbot of Solesmes), Dom Marmion (Abbot of Maredsous), Dom Bernigaud, or Dom Le Bail were listened to attentively, and they nourished the life and fervor of many communities. The monasteries were booming; there was an abundance of vocations. Foundations were made in Europe, America, Africa, and Asia. Along with its reputation for austerity and sanctity, its level of intellectual life and prestige also rose.

But not all that glittered was gold. Along with progress in the liturgical and biblical movements, there came non-conformist voices, asking for changes of the doctrinal principles on which the monasteries' lifestyle and spirituality were based. There was a desire for a theology of monastic life closer to Revelation, a liturgy that was more toned-down and less showy, more contact and familiarity with the fathers and early monastic authors, i.e., a more determined return to the sources and a leaving aside of overly-rigid forms and models that were considered untouchable.

One of these prophetic voices was Dom Alexis Presse, monk of Timadeuc, abbot of Tamié, and founder of Boquen. He has been described as “an uncompromising man, a strong personality, and an expert on Cistercian history.” He was a kind of forerunner, even though his projects suffered from an overly archeological approach. He struggled and suffered during his whole life, amid conflicts and

trials, in order to obtain a clearer return to the sources, as Vatican II proclaimed years later.

As abbot of Tamié, he experienced a serious interior drama: he had come to the conclusion that neither he nor the Order was living authentic monastic life. He made his thoughts known in two historical articles: “Les observances adventives dans l’Ordre de Cîteaux” (1930) and “Une école de sainteté chez les Cisterciens” (1932). In short, he wanted to affirm that the Cistercians maintained their early simplicity for more than a century, after which time they adapted so many extra practices that they broke with the beautiful balance of Benedictine discretion. He was impressed that the early formula—the Rule and nothing but the Rule—produced such a great number of saints. According to him, this fact can only be explained by the fervor of the early days and by the sanctifying value of the Rule followed in its integrity and simplicity. His conclusion was that the formula for Cistercian sanctification was nothing other than the integral Benedictine formula, and that Cistercian spirituality is eminently Benedictine.

Boquen, the place where he settled in October 1936, was an anti-establishment move, an outcry against the conformists. But it was also a return to the early sources of Christian life, a foretaste of what Vatican II would request from the whole Church, except that, for the Council, this return was not a fixation on the past, as if the Holy Spirit had inspired nothing more in the centuries that followed, but a returning to one’s roots in order to move forward and be renewed (*accommodata renovatio*).

We come now to that great ecclesial event, Vatican II (1962–1965). Monks, along with all religious, received both praise and precise directives from the Council, especially in the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*.

The Council praised foundations that attempt to restore monasticism’s early simplicity, and it stated that contemplative life belongs to the ministry of the Church as a necessary element. And it made an urgent call to undertake appropriate renewal, especially by returning to the Gospel and the sources, in order to know as precisely as possible what should be renewed and adapted.

It fell to Paul VI to apply the Council’s program. He was monastic at heart, and had a good knowledge of the *Rule of Benedict*, monastic tradition, and monasticism’s current situation. Reading his many statements on monastic life, one cannot help but to be impressed by his precision and consistency. He constantly repeated what the Church and society expected of monasteries: that they continue being true to themselves, to what they had been up until that point, and that the *Rule of Benedict* be a help in the recovery of personal life.

The monk of our Order is a contemplative, a person of tradition, a member of a community that exercises a kind of sacred and hidden fascination, radiating light

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and warmth. By its very existence it becomes a sign pointing to God's presence. And the monk was to continue being a person of prayer. Paul VI said these things with much enthusiasm in his 1968 address to the community of Frattocchie:

Your task is prayer, communion with God, praise of God. Be the professionals, the specialists of prayer. At this moment the Church is speaking to you through me. She recognizes the extremely important role you undertake. I and the Church are grateful. Continue and persevere in this your duty. Be what you are!

In this post-conciliar stage, the Cistercian Order, as was the case with all Orders, experienced an identity crisis. There was a desire to connect with the Cîteaux of the founders, and at the same time to give new luster to the Cistercian charism. Some wanted more. "The day will come," wrote Armand Veilleux at that time, "when most young Cistercians will have to choose either to spend their whole life in an attitude of identification with a model called Cistercian or to discover their own personal and collective identity in the modern historical and cultural context."

During Dom Gabriel Sortais' time, there was resistance to raising controversial questions in the Order, and he took on the role of defender of the observances, while at the same time initiating a movement of renewal. He realized that some things had to be modified, but, according to him, the Order was to continue following the model of austerity. "Do not trust overly-human reasoning, because the monk, by vocation and profession, has been placed on a supernatural plane. Let us not confuse what annoys us with what is no longer truly appropriate for our times, and let us be careful not to remove from our life whatever involves effort and requires sacrifice" (Christmas letter to the Abbots, 1961).

The main characteristic of the adaptations made at that time was that they were centered on the person. Their purpose was to foster a better life of prayer, greater human and spiritual development, and more participation in community life. There was also a desire to take on some of the positive aspects of contemporary life. Today's world provides examples of seriousness, taste, and a sense of effort. Dilettantism is held in disregard, and so are softness and laziness. If there is a modern value, it is the adult, free, responsible, and secure human person. It is just such a person that we have to encourage to live the common life and obedience of love within the monastic context.

But cultural change, the reaction against formalism, and the expansion of the Order into countries of different cultures and traditions led superiors and thinkers to look for a principle of identity, a powerful and authentic unifying force that

would guarantee unity and allow communities to develop according to their own character, geographical situation, and the needs and aspirations of each and every one.

This is what happened at the Chapters of 1967 and 1969. Over and above the various currents of thought, there was a deep unity in the shared experience of the same vocation, and a common faith in the fundamental values of the life of monastic profession. The ripe fruit of this search for identity are the two significant documents *The Declaration on Cistercian Life* and the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*.

The first of these documents is a kind of foundational charter on the basic points of Cistercian life. In spite of discrepancies of criteria, there is an acknowledgement of the communion experienced in living out the fundamental principles that are common to all the members of the Order. There was therefore a sense of encouragement about reinterpreting for our times the traditions that have come down to us from our fathers.

The *Statute on Unity and Pluralism* presents in a concrete way those observances that require special attention today, in order to maintain monastic life without imposing uniformity in details. Held to be essential were living under a Rule and an abbot, the balance between *Opus Dei*, *lectio divina*, work, vigils as a nocturnal prayer of waiting for the Lord's return, effective love for solitude and silence, and the spirit of poverty and simplicity.

In the meantime, a few monks were at work writing up new Constitutions. The story of the new Constitutions proved to be long and eventful. Finally, in 1984, the text presented by the commission and reworked by the Capitulants, was approved almost unanimously. And the Order took satisfaction in it, for, in Edmund Mikker's words, it is "an admirable synthesis of the Cistercian spiritual heritage and of modern human experience."

This is the great work of spiritual renewal of the Order that was entrusted to no few monks and nuns during the last forty years of the century. Without making an exhaustive list, the following deserve special mention: Edmund Mikkers, Thomas Merton, Charles Dumont, Marie-Gérard Dubois, André Louf, John Eudes Bamberger, Augustine Roberts, Armand Veilleux, and Michael Casey, without forgetting the indirect influence of the wise and colorful Jean Leclercq, and the steady yet courageous hand of the recent Abbots General Ignace Gillet, Ambrose Southey, and Bernardo Olivera.

Conclusion

We are all aware of the situation the twentieth century has led to, i.e., an atmosphere of insecurity and confusion in spite of many efforts to dissipate it and revive it. Monasticism suffers from this situation in its own flesh. Vocations are scarce and communities are not renewing themselves. They suffer from a great imbalance of ages in their membership. What is asked of us is to have the lucidity and the courage to reinterpret our own tradition and identity and root ourselves in the essentials in a new way.

If monasticism has a future, wrote Michael Casey in 1998, it will be as a witness of the power of God that renews and restores fallen humanity. . . The most authentic Cistercians are those in whom the mercy of God is most clearly seen. . . . Our Cistercian forbears were champions of the mercy of God for the simple reason that they had experienced it personally.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The First Years of Aggiornamento

7.1 DOM IGNACE GILLET AS ABBOT GENERAL (1964–1974)

7.1.1. *Curriculum vitae* (See *Collectanea*, 1964, pp.3–4)

- Jacques Gillet was born on May 8, 1901 in Saint-Quentin, in the north of France, in a family of six children, three of whom would be religious: one Trappist and two Jesuits.
- His studies began at Saint-Quentin and continued at the Jesuit high school in Amiens, but were interrupted by the war of 1914–1918, during which he was taken north and into Belgium as a civil prisoner. He took up his studies again in Dôle (Jura). In high school, he was oriented especially toward mathematics.
- He entered Dombes in October 1920, and received the habit from the hands of Dom Chautard. His novitiate was interrupted by his military service; he made his first profession in 1926 and solemn profession in 1929. He was ordained a priest in Lyon this same year, then acquired a doctorate in theology at the Gregorian, in three years of study from 1929 to 1932. His fellow students were Frs. Déodat De Wilde, Albert Derzelle, Corneille Haflants, Jacques Félicien, and Stanislas Theelen, all of whom played such roles in the Order as superior, definitior, procurator, editor of *Collectanea*, etc.
- Returning to the monastery, he was asked to be novice master, prior, and director of the candle factory.
- Mobilized in 1939, he was taken prisoner in June 1940, and spent five years in prison camps in Germany. Liberated in 1945, he returned to his tasks at Dombes, to which was added teaching theology for eight years, until he was elected abbot.

- On January 8, 1953, he was elected abbot of his community of Dombes. He took as his motto three words from the Tierce hymn: *Flammescat igne caritas*, placing at the center a flaming bush, burning before the Divine Tetragram. Teaching nourished by Holy Scripture and methodical reorganization of the abbey's economy were hallmarks of his abbacy.
- On August 17, 1956, he was elected abbot of his motherhouse, Aiguebelle, and found himself Father Immediate of seven communities of monks and two of nuns. That year he was elected Vicar of the Abbot General, and on January 16, 1964, he succeeded Dom Gabriel Sortais as the seventh Abbot General of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance.

7.1.2. Some Memories Regarding the Person of Dom Ignace

(*Testimony of Dom Bernard Lefebvre, monk of Aiguebelle*)¹

My first contact with him took place in June 1956 at the Regular Visitation of Bonnecombe, which he made as the delegate of Dom Eugène Court, abbot of Aiguebelle and our Father Immediate. It was an encouraging visit since the health of Dom Jean Bousquet, our Father Abbot, was giving us some concern (I was prior at the time). This Visitation happened shortly before the resignation of Dom Eugène Court, a resignation we learned of on August 3. And on August 17, 1956, Dom Ignace became our Father Immediate. Thanks to the experience that we had had at the preceding Regular Visitation, we received this news with joy. We had to wait until the month of March 1957 before receiving the first visit of our new Father Immediate; I noted that he spoke to the choir monks about the Decree *Sedes Sapientiae* on studies. Commentary on the documents from Rome was always a priority for Dom Ignace in his teaching, whether in chapters or conversations, and later on was characteristic of his circular letters or conferences as Abbot General. The same can be said for the *Summa* of Saint Thomas, which he read assiduously. To a lesser degree, but noticeably, he often cited Saint Bernard or certain Fathers of our Order.

It was in the month of May 1957 that Dom Ignace made his first Regular Visitation with us, a Visitation that he would make again each year until his election as Abbot General. As Visitor, he knew how to be exacting regarding poverty. I remember that, at his first Visitation, he decided that the priests would change their chalices each year, so as not to become attached to a family keepsake.

¹ Entered Bonnecombe and abbot of this community from February 1961 to September 1965; secretary of Dom Ignace from 1966, then of Dom Ambrose Southey until 1975. Abbot of Aiguebelle from January 1983 to July 1989.

Since 1961, after my election as abbot of Bonnetcombe, I had more contact with him, and always found him very understanding and available. I was always aware of the confidence he constantly showed me. As Abbot General he continued to be interested in Bonnetcombe. The suppression of the community in 1965 was painful for him and, it was after the closing that he chose me as his secretary from July 1966 until his resignation in May 1974.

Dom Ignace had been marked by his formation with the Jesuits, as can be seen in the choice of his religious name. It must be remembered that he had two Jesuit brothers with whom he remained in close relationship. On our first trip to Israel, he wanted to stop in Beirut to see his brother Michael, who was teaching at the Jesuit high school in that city, and several times in the course of our travels we also met with his other Jesuit brother, Marcel, in particular at Montpellier, where he too was a professor. For that matter he remained a center of unity and counsel for all his brothers (there were five boys). Was it his Jesuit formation that pushed him toward a certain meticulousness, setting rules for himself, which he kept with a great deal of fidelity?

He was very sensitive to the spirit of poverty, and had a horror of anything that could be wasteful. This was probably one of the consequences of his years as a prisoner of war. That time of imprisonment affected him greatly. He often pointed out how important little things in ordinary life become when we do not have them, and that it is therefore important to make those things we use habitually last as long as possible (an amusing detail: he noted the number of times he used a razor blade before changing it!).

I accompanied him on his visits to various monasteries of the Order (Engelszell was the only one that I did not visit with him in those years). He certainly loved all the monasteries, but he also had his preferences. I can cite the Japanese monasteries. He had made his first visit to these monasteries in 1966, before I became his secretary, and he often spoke to me about the strong impression that remained with him, especially regarding the Japanese nuns. He even tried to write Japanese characters, and also to learn some words of this language; he could recite the *Ave Maria* in Japanese. When I visited Japan with him, in 1970, I could understand how real this affinity was, and I shared it also.

Dom Ignace was also struck by the monasteries of the Federation of Las Huelgas, in Spain, by their poverty and their joy; a certain rigidity in the observances was not displeasing to him either. It must be confessed that, in fact, it was hard for him to get used to letting go of the former observances and accepting the changes that marked the years when he was Abbot General (see § 7.1.3., below).

Among the monasteries closest to his heart, I think one might mention the houses of nuns of which he had been Father Immediate as abbot of Dombes and

Aiguebelle. Each year, it was at Grâce-Dieu that he made his retreat, but I believe that it was above all at Bonneval that he enjoyed himself the most and felt at ease. He made at least one visit there each year. Since he knew that I also was very attached to this monastery, he pretended that he wanted to make me happy by going there, which was true, but the pleasure was above all his. Contacts with Maubec were less conspicuous, it seems to me.

He was quite reserved, and could appear a little cold, but also knew how to put spirit and humor into conversations. He was always very respectful of persons and was not resentful when he suffered from someone.

I remember Dom Ignace as a man of great faith, a soul of prayer—how many rosaries we recited during trips by car!—having a profound sense of the Mass. It was also his faith that supported his spirit of obedience, which he also expected from the religious: obedience to the Pope and his representatives, especially the Prefect and the Secretary of the Congregation of Religious, whom he considered his immediate superiors and from whom he often sought counsel,² in spite of certain difficulties in relations.

I have a deep gratitude for Dom Ignace for all that I received from him.

COMPLEMENTARY TESTIMONY FROM FR. AIMABLE FLIPO³

When Dom Ignace was in Rome, we all knew that he did not leave his office. In the morning he celebrated his private Mass (like all the other priests at that time) in the crypt of the church, and I was his usual server. After the Mass, without ever having spoken about it, the two of us found ourselves making the Stations of the Cross, which were in the corridor of the basement next to the crypt... In my conversations with him we spoke sometimes about monastic poverty, and I felt he was very sensitive on this point... In living with him, I understood also that he was a sensitive person and that he had suffered from certain relations or the lack of regard that some had for him. After his return to Dombes, he wrote to me at least once a year for my feast or for an anniversary, and what surprised me about these letters was his constant gratitude for those years that we were together at *Monte Cistello*...

² Above all the Cardinal Antoniutti and Bishop Paul Philippe, with whom he could speak French.

³ Lay brother from Mont-des-Cats, who was cellarer at the Generalate during the first four years that Dom Ignace was Abbot General.

7.1.3. The Difficult Beginnings of the Post-Counciliar Renewal of the Order: 1965–1970

THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1965 AND THE DISPENSATION FROM PRIME

The 1965 Chapter (April 29–May 12), held at Cîteaux, marked the beginning of the post-counciliar phase of renewal in the Order, even though the norms of application had not yet been promulgated. This Chapter initiated a reflection on certain important points (duration of the abbacy, eremiticism, new foundations, etc.), admitted the principle of a great pluralism in the horarium, keeping some basic orientations: the hour to rise would remain at 2:15, the importance and the relative duration of the main observances was recalled, etc. It made several decisions having to do with liturgical reform, especially with regard to the use of the vernacular for the Office, deciding that it was necessary to persist in asking the *Consilium* to permit its use in the monastic Office. The Chapter, thinking it was the competent authority for the nuns, authorized them to begin using the vernacular in the Office right away. The Chapter also renewed the membership of the Liturgy Commission in view of reform in this area. At the same time, it granted more importance to the Regional Conferences of Abbots, and set up a Commission of abbots in order to prepare for the Chapter of aggiornamento, also called Special Chapter.

The decisions of this 1965 Chapter elicited various reactions from members of the Order, addressed to the Congregation of Religious, especially about the suppression of Prime, which had been accepted in principle. On February 10, 1966, Cardinal Antoniutti agreed, and suspended the authorization of this suppression for the monasteries that had not yet put it into practice, until the entire question could be treated in the framework of a reform of the Office.

The foundations in mission countries had obtained at this Chapter of 1965 the authorization to experiment in matters of liturgy and the observances.⁴ On March 10, 1966, they obtained permission to sing the Divine Office in the vernacular.⁵ The abbots of founding monasteries had agreed to meet in order to determine which experiments were permitted. They met in Rome in September 1966 to deal with this question and also with the question of other monastic observances. These steps were completed on January 31, 1967, with the concession, for the houses of Africa and Madagascar, of a *Loi-cadre*, permitting the adaptation of the elements of the Office while respecting certain principles. The Psalter was to be recited at

⁴ By a vote of 58 to 7.

⁵ The indult was valid for Africa, Madagascar, Indonesia, Asia and Japan.

least twice each month. In the month of June the Japanese monasteries obtained the permission to use this *loi-cadre*.

In our Order, after the appearance of the Norms of application of the Council Decree, the Preparatory Commission of the Chapter, in its meeting of October, 1966, put out a first questionnaire to invite the members of the Order, monks and nuns, to express their thoughts and desires. This questionnaire, which took up the main points of the decree *Perfectae caritatis* and the Norms of application, was intentionally “open,” so that the responses would not even be conditioned by the manner of asking the questions. The analysis of the inquiry was done in the regions at the beginning of 1967, so that the major orientations found there were only known shortly before the opening of the first session of the special Chapter, May 20 of the same year.

FIRST SESSION OF THE SPECIAL CHAPTER: MAY–JUNE 1967

The Chapter, which was the first session of the special Chapter of *aggiornamento*, and lasted from May 20 to June 5, 1967, had for its first objective to authorize the experiments going in the direction of the requests expressed by the preliminary inquiry. Without preliminary experimentation, the renewal of the Constitutions could not happen with the desired seriousness and prudence. The Chapter defined the juridical conditions necessary so that a given community could undertake these experiments, and it limited the areas in which these experiments could be done: silence, solitude, formation, nourishment and other points of the observance; liturgy would need the approval of the *Consilium*. For the liturgy, experiments would need to be prepared by the Liturgy Commission or with its approval, in the case of requests from particular communities. But the Chapter did accept with a large majority that certain Little Hours might not be said in choir but in private; and that another psalm schema—extended over two weeks, with the repetition of certain psalms each week—might be adopted.⁶

Moreover, a request was addressed to the Pope himself, approved by 63 Capitulars out of 74, in favor of introducing the vernacular in the liturgy, in spite of his letter *Sacrificium laudis* of August 15, 1966, in which he explicitly asked monks to preserve Latin in their Liturgy, because of its advantages. In fact, though, on this point we merely joined in with the requests of several Benedictine Congregations

⁶ This was accepted by a vote of 50 to 24 for the Little Hours and 55 to 19 for the two week psalm schema. By a vote of 62 to 12 they accepted the general principle of a reform of the Office. In fact, though, the vote on the Little Hours was not clear, for the “experiments” allowed could signify different things: either the possibility of celebrating one or two Little Hours in groups at the place of work, or even in private; or of keeping only one Hour, eventually expanded, in the middle of the day, like that provided for the secular clergy. In this case would the other two Hours be suppressed or left to private recitation? This was not clarified.

and with the *Congresso* of the Benedictine Confederation. In 1967, certainly not without regret, but understanding the reasons given, Paul VI accepted that the Congregation for Religious might grant authorization to celebrate the Office in the vernacular, if the celebration is also attended by persons not in clerical orders. The decree of December 14, 1967, gave our Abbot General the possibility of authorizing this use, but at the same time encouraged monasteries to preserve the use of Latin, at least in part.

The Chapter of 1967 left it to the local superior to determine certain details in community customs formerly regulated by the Chapter itself in the framework of the *Usages*, thus opening the way to pluralism. Finally, this Chapter established bodies for carrying out the work of aggiornamento: a *Consilium Generale* (composed of the Council of the Abbot General and abbots representing the Regions), and a Commission for the revision of the Constitutions, which needed to begin by studying the scriptural and theological bases of the monastic life. A new statute was given to the Liturgy Commission, whereas liturgical sub-commissions (to be appointed by the Regional Conferences) were accepted in principle, to regulate the application of liturgical adaptations in each linguistic area.

INTERVENTIONS OF THE CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS

Incomprehension and criticism were not lacking regarding these decisions, which some judged to be too open. The Congregation for Religious took these criticisms to heart, and addressed a letter to the Order on August 21, 1967, denying the General Chapter the right to allow unauthorized experimentation regarding the grills of the nuns and the structure of the Divine Office. This letter caused a sensation among the abbots: some rejoiced in it and thanked the Cardinal, others resented this mistrust on the part of the Cardinal. Reactions were all the stronger, because the Chapter had made it very clear that liturgical experiments needed to have the authorization of the *Concilium* for the application of the Constitution on the Liturgy. The members of the Central Commission, meeting at the beginning of November 1967, wanted to point this out to the Cardinal by letter, despite the fact that Dom Ignace had already done so in an audience on October 30, and that the Cardinal had acknowledged his mistake.⁷ The American abbots had already written to the Cardinal: the authority of the General Chapter was being held in doubt, and they requested that the Cardinal make some gesture that would restore the monks' esteem for the Chapter.

⁷ This is doubtless why he had Dom Jean de la Croix Przyluski sign the letter, not himself. For the experiments regarding the nuns' grills, a request was addressed to the Holy See on August 9, but on December 11, 1967, the Secretary of the Congregation answered that they had to wait for a more precise consultation of the nuns.

The Cardinal answered Dom Ignace on November 25, 1967, questioning the very principle of the reform, which should never go against the discipline established by the Rule of Saint Benedict. Apart from the Office of Prime, the other Offices mentioned in the Rule should be preserved, according to the Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, nn. 89 and 95. This meant to be celebrated *in choir*. This is how Dom Ignace understood it, and he was totally in agreement with this measure (and the Cardinal knew it). Besides, once the Cardinal heard about them, he did not allow mixed meetings of abbots and abbesses or of novice masters and mistresses (because of enclosure, he later clarified). He asked Dom Ignace that the *contents* of his letter be communicated to the entire Order. What Dom Ignace did was to send the *text* of the letter itself, for which the Cardinal reproached him, saying that a letter to the whole Order from the Abbot General would have been more formal. In fact, the letter provoked overreactions that caused some upset; one letter was published in the American press, as if to make appeal to public opinion and pressure the Holy See. Visibly—and he said so to the Procurator on January 20, 1968—the Cardinal did not appreciate it when people conspired against his decisions by inopportune declarations and collective petitions, which he judged illegitimate since each abbot ought not impose his ideas on others.

These events created an awkward situation for certain councilors of the Abbot General, especially the Procurator, Dom Vincent Hermans, placing them, so to speak, between a rock and a hard place. It seemed to them that Dom Ignace did not sufficiently defend the decisions of the General Chapter, which made certain abbots react in its place, inevitably creating disorder, all the more so since the Cardinal was saying he would only correspond with the Abbot General. What could the Procurator, in principle responsible for relations between the Order and the Holy See, do? What was Dom Ignace thinking and how should he be counseled? The latter had always protested his loyalty to the General Chapter, and would not allow anyone to think that he had instigated the Cardinal's letter. All the same, his sense of authority and his personal convictions made him prone to agree with the ideas of the Cardinal, who knew this, and hindered the actions of the Procurator. In actual fact, half of the Definitory supported the Abbot General.

Dom Ignace requested and obtained an audience with Paul VI on February 23, 1968. He quickly saw that the Pope also wanted the three Little Hours to be preserved. He told him of his difficulties of conscience in adhering to the decisions of the General Chapter, and offered him his resignation, which the Pope refused, promising him that he would do something to appease the tensions in the Order, as Dom Ignace had requested. The Abbot General announced this promise in a *post scriptum* to a letter to the abbots and abbesses dated February 11, but sent after the audience of February 23. In this letter, Dom Ignace tried to restore calm. He

recognized that there were two opposing tendencies in the Order, as seen in the various reactions to the Cardinal's interventions. He asked them to make efforts to understand those who thought differently, and to have the necessary spiritual dispositions toward one another.

FIRST INITIATIVES IN THE LITURGY: THE AMERICAN-CANADIAN *LOI-CADRE*

By allowing (in his letters of February 10, 1966 and November 25, 1967) that Prime could be omitted, the Cardinal implicitly allowed modification of the distribution of the psalms provided for in the Rule (Saint Benedict himself accepted that it could be modified). It made it possible to pursue a reform of the Office, through the authorizations of the *Consilium*. It took several months for any concrete projects to be established; they came from both the Commission itself and also from monasteries or Regional Conferences. It was not easy to coordinate all these plans. In November 1967, when the Cardinal's letter was not yet known, three schemas of restructuring were presented to the *Consilium* for approval, the first two with a two-week schema for the psalmody, but with repetition of some psalms,⁸ the third held to the 150 psalms in one week, without repetition.

The *Consilium*, on December 15, 1967, accepted that these schemas could be experimented with in some monasteries of the Order. The Abbot General determined the number of monasteries in which these experiments could be carried out. It must be said that the Liturgy Commission peacefully continued its work, without getting involved in the polemics over the Cardinal's letter.

But the American and Canadian Regions wanted to go further. In August of 1968, they requested a *loi-cadre* for themselves, the same sort of *loi-cadre* that was granted for mission countries on March 10, 1966. One of its points was to cause difficulties that had already been encountered, for it requested the possibility of reducing to four the number of Offices in choir: Vigils, Lauds, Midday Prayer and Vespers. The other hours would remain obligatory, but they could be recited outside of choir. Did this last point go against Cardinal Antoniutti's famous letter? In any case, since the request was in conformity with what had been approved by the General Chapter (and had also been examined by the *Consilium generale* of the Order in November 1967), the Abbot General and the Definitory passed the request on to the *Concilium* for the carrying out of the Council's Constitution on the Liturgy. This request was made during the Roman vacation, and the indult was signed on August 10 by an under-secretary, but only after Bishop Bugnini had given the green light. Bugnini, apparently, did not think that the Congrega-

⁸ This kept almost 150 psalms a week but not necessarily the 150 psalms. The first schema followed an order close to the Rule, the second was more thematic.

tion of Religious would have a say in the question. When he heard about it, Dom Ignace wrote to the Holy Father on October 3, complaining about the irregularity of this indult, which did not have the *nihil obstat* of the Congregation of Religious, and risked creating a dangerous precedent,⁹ Paul VI decided to annul the measure accorded by the *Consilium*. Dom Gillet was informed of the Pope's decision by Bishop Benelli on November 15, and a letter dated November 26, 1968, from Bishop Mauro, Secretary of the Congregation for Religious, made it official. At first it was understood that the entire indult was revoked; later, at the beginning of March 1969, it was known officially that it only concerned the number of Hours celebrated in choir, the only point that was presented to the Pope and the only point mentioned in the letter of November 26. The rest of the *loi-cadre* was allowed and considered legitimate.

To appease the tensions, Paul VI had promised to intervene at an opportune time. His intervention took the form of a letter addressed to the Order, which was signed December 8, 1968, and delivered at *Monte Cistello* on December 23, but did not reach the Abbot General in Madagascar until January 23, 1969. Thus the entire Order knew of it only at the beginning of February 1969. In the meantime, about thirty abbots from France, Belgium, and Holland had decided, at the end of 1968, to write to Paul VI, telling him of the benefits their monks had experienced from the decisions of 1967, as their questionnaires had testified. Dom Ignace was not opposed to this letter, but was it opportune, since they now had the letter of Paul VI?

The Pope's letter begins by defining the spiritual life of the monk and the spiritual fecundity of that life for the Church. Then it speaks of renewal, which is not a search for novelties but, rather, growth in love, which in turn inspires the observances. This renewal is to take place under the maternal vigilance of the hierarchy, which is to guarantee that the inspiration and the spirit of the Order not be changed but adapted to the demands of the times. If the hierarchy intervenes, it will be shown the obedience due to it. Decisions must be made prayerfully and with meditation, after serious theological, historical, and pastoral study, and with care not to trouble souls. "Take the greatest care to safeguard the essential values of your life: practical and theoretical primacy given to liturgical prayer, to which

⁹ It has been proven, by his personal archives, that Dom Ignace, as every monk has the right, had denounced to the Congregation the decision of the General Chapter of 1967 and asked it, after the *Consilium generale* of November 1967, to oppose every request to omit the Little Hours in choir made to it. Bishop Bugnini recognized for his part, the mistake in procedure that the *Consilium* had made, but found it curious that the Abbot General allowed a request to come to the *Consilium* when he was opposed to it. He could have at least informed and warned it. As for Dom Ignace, he should have respected the decision of the Chapter and preferred to let the Congregation act. Since the latter was short-circuited, he had to intervene. Afterward, he regretted that indiscretions took place on the part of the employees of the Secretary of State. Nonetheless, he assumed his responsibility regarding the General Chapter of 1967.

nothing is to be preferred as Saint Benedict warned you; may *lectio divina* and work be faithfully observed also.” Paul VI warned against the multiplication of “experiments,” which were certainly necessary, but were by nature disturbing, above all if undertaken without permission. The letter ended with an encouragement not to be discouraged by the difficulty of finding the balance between our traditional observances and the demands of the times. The work of adaptation could, therefore, proceed.

THE 1969 GENERAL CHAPTER

The crisis that appeared in the first years of renewal was reduced at the beginning of the Chapter of 1969. The Abbot General and the Presidents of the Regions met two days before the opening of the Chapter, on March 9 and 10, to discuss it and the first days of the Chapter were consecrated to clearing the air. Certain abbots, particularly some American abbots, wanted Dom Ignace to offer his resignation, since he did not seem to agree with the direction taken by the Chapter of 1967, and that the present Chapter would doubtless confirm. How could he direct the Order in its renewal under such conditions?

However, Dom Ignace could not offer his resignation, because he knew that it was against the will of Paul VI and that, if the General Chapter forced him to it, the Pope would take measures that would be painful for the Order.¹⁰ But he said nothing about it, and limited himself to answering the questions of the participants. Besides, he did not see why he should ask pardon of the General Chapter, since the Holy See had agreed with him, he thought, in declaring the Chapter’s decisions to be illegitimate. Finally, the majority of abbots wanted to turn over a new leaf and not exaggerate the machinations of the past. The abbots who protested the most asked to see the letter that Dom Ignace had written to the Pope on October 3, 1968, but the others took offence at this lack of discretion: every religious is free to correspond with his superiors! However, to appease everyone, Dom Ignace had his letter read by Dom Ambrose, who succeeded in reassuring and calming the American abbots, who were the most adamant. Thus the matter was considered closed. But the Chapter named a permanent Secretary to the General Council, charged with directing the renewal in the Order (see the section on this office in § 8.4., below).

¹⁰ Paul VI had told Dom Ignace that if the Chapter forced him to resign, he, himself, would name a Superior General, unknown to the Order. Dom Francis Decroix would have to go seek the decisions of the Pope to announce them to the Capitulants. This fact was related in writing to Dom Bernardo Olivera, by Dom Ignace on October 23, 1997, “so that there remain a trace of this grave danger to which the Order was exposed if it had taken advantage of the patience of Rome”. This piece is found classified in the archives of the Abbot General at the Generalate.

On the more concrete point of the Little Hours, which was the disturbing element of the years 1967–1968, the Chapter accepted to present to the Holy See the proposal of a *loi-cadre* for the Office in which it was requested that the Little Hours and Compline, while being obligatory, could be said outside of choir, but *in common*.¹¹ After all, the Rule provides for certain offices being said at the place of work. This project received the approval of the Congregation for Religious on May 10, 1969, and the *Concilium* granted it the following May 24. It was renewed in 1971 and became the general law in 1974. Rome had spoken; Dom Ignace could no longer oppose it.

The second session of the special Chapter opened in Rome on March 11, 1969, and lasted until March 30. According to the instructions of the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, it should have ended with the approval *ad experimentum* of a new edition of the Constitutions, but it seemed premature to adopt a precise text. This is the reason that the session was not closed but suspended. However, a new impulse was given to the work of revising the Constitutions. They would be perfected progressively in the years ahead, theme by theme, and would remain very supple. As was said above, a Secretary General was added to the *Consilium Generale*, charged with organizing and stimulating the work of aggiornamento throughout the entire Order, assisting the nuns particularly.

For other reasons this Chapter marked an important date in the history of the Order. Up until then, in an ideal of strict uniformity, each detail of observance was practically regulated by the supreme authority of the General Chapter. The Chapter was well aware, through experience, that a certain liberty of adaptation was necessary, but it remained the competent authority to make judgments in this area. From then on, only the major orientation of the Order, its fundamental spiritual values, the principle observances that concretize them and guarantee the Order's profound unity and proper character, would come under the Chapter's competence. But each community, under the responsibility of its abbot and with the mutual help and ongoing oversight of the other abbots and of the General Chapter, would see to the details of the observances, according to the conditions of the place and its own spiritual "face." Indeed, the fundamental reason for this decision was to allow each community to deepen and express its living experience of the Cistercian life. A statute "On Unity and Pluralism," which was almost unanimously approved, determined the guiding principles to be respected in the traditional observances (see § 7.2.).

One of the major features of this Chapter, which was quite extraordinary for many reasons, was an awareness of the profound unity of all, an awareness that

¹¹ The principle of the *loi-cadre* was accepted by 69 votes to 7. The different points of this law were adopted with the same type of majorities, except that of the Little Hours which received 54 yes and 22 no.

developed progressively, in spite of the many differences that appeared in the beginning. But there was a climate of careful listening to one another, with great honesty and constant charity; like a sort of collective examination of conscience, which revealed in everyone a common experience of the same Cistercian vocation and a common faith in its fundamental values. "In the light of this profound unity of ideal, the differences already mentioned, once placed again in their true context, seemed less important to us than we had first believed. Should they divide us? This became inconceivable" (introduction to the minutes of the sessions). The very unity of the Order was reinforced when a more supple legislation was allowed, and when uniformity to details was done away with, both in the liturgy (*loi-cadre* for the office) as well as in the daily observances (statute on unity and pluralism). This unity was concretized in a common declaration affirming what had always been the Order's contemplative orientation: "...our life is totally oriented towards an experience of the Living God. God calls and we respond by truly seeking Him as we follow Christ in humility and obedience. With hearts cleansed by the Word of God, by vigils, by fasting and by an unceasing conversion of life, we aim to become ever more disposed to receive from the Holy Spirit the gift of pure and continual prayer."

SEPARATE CHAPTERS OF ABBOTS AND ABBESSES: THE LETTER OF JULY 15, 1970

From the moment that the special Chapter of *aggiornamento* opened, there arose the question of the nuns' participation in the decisions that had to be made. Officially the Chapter of abbots decided for the entire Order, but it acknowledged that the nuns should have a say in questions regarding them. The Chapter of 1967 recognized by a vote of 65 to 7 that the nuns ought to be free to make their own decisions. In fact, Dom Ignace convoked them to a meeting at Cîteaux in June 1968. A large majority of them wanted more effective participation in the government of the Order (40 yes, 2 no, 1 abstention). It was their wish that any decisions by the Chapter of Abbots entailing changes to the Constitutions be voted on by the abbesses before becoming official (37 yes, 5 no). But, not wanting to impose themselves on the abbots, they only voted 20 to 19 to request their participation in the exchanges of the General Chapter. Such participation, however, would allow them to intervene in the discussions before decisions were made, and help avoid finding themselves faced with a *fait accompli*. As for the abbots, they were dragging their feet. At the 1969 Chapter, they suggested that the nuns' participation in the Regional Meetings would be more appropriate, because it was there that the first discussions took place. They agreed to make this request to the Holy See by a vote of 64 to 12. (The abbesses also voted in favor of this idea; 32 yes and 9 no). But

with a vote of 52 to 23, the abbots decided to wait until they could consult the nuns regarding the admission of the abbesses to the General Chapter. Behind this question of the presence of the abbesses at meetings of the abbots, the more general question of the rapport between the two branches of the Order was emerging.

This important point was discussed at the *Consilium Generale* that met in Rome from January 28 to February 2, 1970. But they had to know from the Congregation of Religious what was possible or not, all the more so since they knew that the Congregation was reflecting on this question, because other Orders, like the Premonstratensians, were also asking. Before the January meeting, the secretary of the *Consilium Generale* spoke with the secretary of the Congregation, who was then Fr. Heston. The latter let it be understood that mixed legislative chapters were not possible, but they could have simultaneous meetings in separate rooms to facilitate exchanges between the two groups. On the other hand, mixed Regional Meetings, with no legislative character, would be possible once a year. The Holy Father, said Fr. Heston, was very attentive to the situation of women in the modern world. He wanted to give the nuns the possibility of making decisions on matters that concerned them. Heston's response was only an indication given by word of mouth, not a written decision, which would come in its time later on.

The *Consilium Generale* then sent a letter to the undersecretary, Fr. Huot, with whom two abbots then met to clarify that the autonomy of nuns should not lead to two Orders. It should be autonomy within the interdependence of the two branches of the Order. But how would the system of filiations and Regular Visitations function? The Congregation promised to work out its response with us. But the decision of the Holy Father, made on January 22, to recognize the abbesses' right to make their own decisions was irrevocable. In fact, the Order was consulted in May. The Definitory wrote up a draft that it submitted to the Regional Presidents and transmitted to the Congregation in meetings on June 26 and 27.

The response came to us in the form of a letter from Cardinal Antoniutti, dated July 15, 1970. It declared that it would not be opportune for the abbesses to attend the assemblies of the monks. They could meet among themselves "to study, discuss, and, in matters not reserved to the Holy See, they could decide their own legislation." From this time on, the General Chapter of Abbots no longer had any authority over the nuns. Nonetheless, the Abbot General and the Fathers Immediate kept their traditional role and powers vis-à-vis the monasteries of nuns.

One might think—as some members of the Congregation for Religious maintained—that many of the nuns approved of this solution because it protected them from the daring decisions that the abbots could make, as was seen in 1967.

From then on, there were two General Chapters. At the Chapter of Abbots in 1971, the first to follow the letter of July 15, 1970, the Capitulants declared they were

happy with the evolution in process. The Chapter “believes that the nuns, becoming more aware of their own spiritual riches, will be able to contribute more than ever before to the well being of the entire Order. It declares that, for its part, it will do everything it can in order to *maintain the unity that is so necessary* between the two branches of the Order, *leaving to the nuns the autonomy due to them* and the responsibility to *decide their own legislation*.”

The real question, in fact, was how to be sure that decisions made by the two groups would not differ from the fundamental nature of the Order to such a degree that unity would no longer be possible. Later, in 1987, the solution was found: the Chapters are interdependent, in the sense that, on essential points (defined by the Constitutions), the decisions of both groups are only valid if they are in agreement. They can only differ on the details of observance.

Dom Ignace presided over the Chapter of abbots in 1971 and the first Chapter of abbesses the same year. Approaching his seventy-fourth birthday, he offered his resignation at the Chapter of 1974. It was accepted and became effective on May 6, two days before his birthday. He died twenty-three years later on December 4, 1997, in the infirmary of the abbey of Acey, since his community of Dombes could not provide the care he needed.

CONCLUSION

If one is looking for an authoritative conclusion concerning this whole first period of *aggiornamento*, it can be found in the April 28, 1972 letter that the Secretary of the Congregation for Religious, Bishop Mayer, himself a Benedictine, wrote to our Abbot General, Dom Ignace, in acknowledging the reception of the Acts of the three Chapters of 1967, 1969 and 1971:

The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes has examined the Acts of your General Chapters of 1967, 1969 and 1971 and saw with satisfaction the climate of mutual respect and charity that was present at your discussions, even when points of view differed.

The study of the communicated documents does not call for *any particular remark*, the declarations have insisted on the necessity of a profound spiritual renewal more than on the opportunity for changes in structure.

The “aggiornamento” is certainly not something easy in an Order as ancient as yours and whose physiognomy is so well defined. In effect, it would be good to find a harmonious balance between the former observances and the real exigencies of these times and to allow in the various monasteries a healthy pluralism that will not endanger your proper charism.

THE CHANGES AFTER VATICAN II

Whatever the difficulties encountered and the options that may result from them, the reformed Cistercians must carefully keep what is specific to them. Silence, prayer, the liturgical life, the practice of penance often expressed in work, are fundamental gifts and an inheritance which they can never renounce. It is by these means that they exercise their apostolate, even if this is not understood by all.

You will have easily recognized in the preceding remarks a summary of the counsels addressed to your Order by the Holy Father in 1968 and 1969. The Sacred Congregation sincerely wishes that these directives be heard by all your religious and reflected in their life. With this, the union among you will be maintained and for the Cistercians it will be the most effective way to assist the Church and the world in the present circumstances.

7.2. THREE EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE 1969 GENERAL CHAPTER

7.2.1. Dom Armand Veilleux | A Turning Point in the Order's History¹²

The 1969 General Chapter was certainly the most important Chapter for the history of our Order since the 1892 Chapter of Union. It created within our Order a unity that has continued to hold firm, and it produced a few important texts that continue to influence the life of the Order and in which the Order set out in earnest on the path of post-conciliar reform. To call it a “charismatic” Chapter is not to use a trite label. The Holy Spirit's action was in fact clearly felt.

It is clearly still too soon to write the history of that period. Nonetheless, I would like to give my impressions of that Chapter, which I experienced with great intensity. I took part, not as an abbot (I was elected abbot a few months after the Chapter), but as an expert from the Canadian Region.

The General Chapter opened in a climate of unease and tension. The official minutes briefly allude to this climate with a great deal of tact and discretion: “During several sessions of the first days of the Chapter, the discussions had to do with relations between the Order and the Holy See, and with the role in these relations of the Very Rev. Fr. Abbot General, supreme moderator” (Minutes, p. 5).

In reality, what stood out in the first days of the Chapter were discussions about the possible resignation of the Abbot General, Dom Ignace Gillet. This latter, unable to accept in good conscience some of the orientations and decisions taken by the 1967 Chapter, which had authorized experiments, had taken measures through the Holy See to prevent certain initiatives from being put into practice, for example, the *loi-cadre* for the Divine Office obtained by the *Concilium* for the application of conciliar liturgical reform in the US and Canadian Regions. Some capitulants, while respecting Dom Ignace's personal convictions, thought that, if his conscience did not allow him to show solidarity with decisions legitimately taken by the General Chapter, he ought to resign. Following a few days of public discussion, a compromise solution was negotiated outside of the sessions by the Vicar and Moderator of the Chapter, Dom Ambrose, who acted with great tact and charity. Dom Ignace was to present his resignation at the following Chapter. In fact, however, he presented it at the 1974 Chapter. I am convinced that the great

¹² Dom Armand Veilleux has been the abbot of Scourmont since 1999, after having been abbot of Mistassini (Canada) from 1969 to 1976, of Conyers (USA) from 1984 to 1990, Procurator of the Order from 1990 to 1998.

charity and honesty with which these discussions were carried out and the great humility with which Dom Ignace gave his consent were major factors in creating the climate of trust and mutual respect that characterized the rest of the Chapter.

Since it was difficult to see how Dom Ignace, in spite of his great qualities, could guide the Order in searching for new paths and renewal, the Chapter devised the creation of a new function, namely, a “Secretary General” of the Order, somewhat along the lines of the Secretary General of the United Nations, to carry out this role alongside the Abbot General. In fact, however, he was given the more modest title of “Secretary of the *Consilium Generale*.” Of itself, it was a shaky solution or even a recipe for disaster. But in fact it worked rather well, no doubt, thanks to both the great tact of the person elected to this post, Dom John Eudes Bamberger, and the great humility of Dom Ignace. When Dom John Eudes became abbot of Genesee a few years later, he was not replaced, and the post ceased to exist.

Another potential source of great tensions at the opening of the Chapter was the desire of the North American regions to obtain greater autonomy for their houses and greater pluralism in the application of monastic values. This desire for pluralism seemed dangerous to other regions that tended to see uniformity of observance as a guarantee of unity in the Order. This point was obviously linked to the burning question of the revision of the Constitutions, especially since the draft of a “New Charter of Charity,” drawn up by a Commission established in 1967, had not been well received. A new ordering of topics proposed by Dom Augustine Roberts and accepted by the Chapter, with a few modifications, made it possible to work around this difficulty. According to the new order of topics, there would first be a discussion on the definition of Cistercian life. This was a providential initiative.

We first spoke about drawing up a “Descriptive Definition of the Order.” But we quickly realized that Cistercian life cannot be “defined” as if it were an abstract reality. Nor could it be “described.” Cistercian life is an empirical reality that has taken on many aspects and forms in the course of history, so it cannot be “described” without choosing arbitrarily and *a priori* the elements to be brought into the “description.” We therefore decided to draw up instead a “Declaration” that would be both an act of faith in the vocation we perceive to be ours at this precise moment of the Order’s history and with the necessarily limited lights we possess at present, and a commitment to live in accordance with this vocation. Three different commissions of different languages drew up three rather like-minded drafts, which were then revised in each of these commissions to make them more concordant. Finally, the text was finalized by a small commission of five persons and approved by a nearly unanimous vote (68 to 8). The unity built around the drawing up of this beautiful little text affected all the work of the following weeks.

The Statute on Unity and Pluralism that caused so much fear at the beginning of the Chapter was voted on a little later, again, almost unanimously (70 to 4). Also, the General Chapter decided to ask the Holy See for a *loi-cadre* for the Divine Office that would apply to the whole Order (69 to 7).

One of the important questions on the General Chapter's agenda was the length of the abbatial term. This was a difficult question, and the capitulants did not feel ready to make a decision on the matter. On the one hand, it was felt that the *ad vitam* abbatial term could not be maintained, but, on the other hand, there was not a readiness to institute an abbacy for a fixed term. In some monasteries of the Order, feelings were so strong that several abbots thought the Order could not simply put the question off until later without causing a great deal of unease. It was the intervention of an outside "expert," Dom Brasó, that made it possible to unfreeze the question. Dom Brasó, former abbot of Montserrat and president of the Subiaco Benedictine Congregation, explained the solution that his congregation had adopted shortly before, namely, the *ad tempus non definitum* abbatial term. According to this solution, the abbot is not elected for life, nor is he elected for a fixed period of six or eight years. He must simply offer his resignation as soon as he realizes or is helped to see that resigning would be preferable for the good of his community. What matters most, then, is not a "right" to stay in office, but the good of the community the abbot is meant to serve.

A first vote of 58 to 17 decided that abbots would no longer be elected *ad vitam*. Since then, all abbots have been elected *ad tempus*. It remained to decide if the duration of this term was to be determined beforehand by an election for a fixed period, or if it was to be left "indefinite." Without precluding future evolution, the Chapter decided that the mechanisms in place, especially the Regular Visitation, were sufficient. So the choice was for an abbacy *ad tempus non definitum*, adopting the model of the Subiaco Congregation. It was five years later, in 1974, that communities were given the possibility of choosing between this solution and an abbatial election *ad tempus definitum*.

The other major point on the General Chapter's agenda was the revision of the Constitutions. A commission created by the 1967 Chapter had been given the mandate of drafting an introduction to the Constitutions, showing the scriptural and spiritual foundations. This commission drafted a "New Charter of Charity," which had a fairly cool reception in the Order. The commission therefore set to work again a few months before the 1969 Chapter and sent all the superiors of the Order a series of seven documents. Meanwhile, Dom Vincent, Procurator General, offered a new suggestion: Our basic law is the Rule of Saint Benedict, complemented by the Charter of Charity. We therefore do not need Constitutions; it would be enough to draw up "declarations" on the Rule and on the Charter of Charity.

In this matter also, the intervention of an expert from outside the Order was of major importance. It came from Fr. Beyer, SJ, a well-known canonist, professor of law at the Gregorian University, and consultant to the Roman Commission for the revision of canon law. His approach was along the same lines as Dom Vincent's. He explained that the directives for revising constitutions foresaw a distinction between the "fundamental law" that expressed the spirituality and overall structure of an Order or Institute, and "secondary law," made up of statutes. Only the fundamental law needed the approval of the Holy See. We could consider the Rule of Saint Benedict as our fundamental law, and, obviously, there is no need for a new approval of the Holy for that! He advised us slowly to review, Chapter after Chapter, the various aspects of our life, drawing up appropriate statutes. If someday the Holy See demanded a text for its approval, a compilation of these decisions could be made. He also advised us not to hurry and to take at least ten or fifteen years for this work. The General Chapter opted for this orientation, and, of all the decisions of the 1969 General Chapter, this was the most important one and the one that entailed the most consequences for the Order's evolution over the following 25 years.

Instead of having a small commission make a quick revision of the text of the Constitutions, the Order undertook a gigantic task that, from 1969 to 1987, involved all the communities and all the Regions in a vast effort to reflect on the fundamental values of the Cistercian life and to revise the Order's structures. After three successive drafts studied by the whole Order, an initial version of the Constitutions was voted on at Holyoke in 1984 for the monks, and the following year at El Escorial for the nuns. These texts were reviewed by the Mixed General Meeting at Rome in 1987 before being presented to the Holy See and approved on Pentecost of 1990.

One of good initiatives of the 1969 General Chapter was to appoint at the beginning of the Chapter a small team to write up a synthesis of the Chapter's work, in order to give readers a good grasp of the main points that stood out. Not only was this summary report approved by the Chapter, but the Abbot General agreed to provide a short preface for it and encourage people to read it. No doubt, this text contributed to the General Chapter's work being well received in the Order. Attempts to do something similar at subsequent Chapters did not turn out as well.

It was not until the General Chapter at Holyoke, when the text of the new Constitutions took its final form, that we again experienced a truly charismatic meeting in which the action of the Spirit was palpable. Nonetheless, the experience of the 1969 General Chapter remains unmatched.

7.2.2. **Dom Augustine Roberts** | Behind the Scenes at the General Chapter of 1969¹³

In the following reminiscences I will first describe my personal experiences leading up to and during the Chapter, then mention more superficially some other elements as I saw them.

I assisted at the General Chapter of 1969 as a young, first-time superior, thirty-six years old and the newly elected Titular Prior of Azul. I had, however, already been at two meetings of the USA Regional Conference: at New Melleray in October 1967 and at Spencer in February 1969, just before the General Chapter. These meetings had briefed me about the major dynamics of the General Chapter and about the major themes. For the USA abbots, there were two major themes for the 1969 General Chapter:

- Who should be elected as the next Abbot General to succeed Dom Ignace Gillet?
- How could the traditional uniformity of observances in the Order be modified, to permit the local communities more freedom in adapting the observances to their own needs and mentality? In those days, one did not use so much the word, “culture.”

The American abbots tended to favor the election of Dom Ambrose Southey over Dom André Louf, although they would have accepted either one. For the second question, the main voice in the region was the new abbot of Gethsemani, Dom Flavian Burns, who had developed a vision of possible Cistercian pluralism based on greater independence of each local house to decide the details of its observance.

For me, the Spencer Regional Meeting was sandwiched in between two other events, which were to have their importance in relation to the General Chapter. First came a Symposium at Spencer organized by Fr. Basil Pennington on “The Spirit and Aims of the First Cistercians,” with conferences by speakers like Dom Jean Leclerq and Fr. Louis Lekai. Sr. Elizabeth O’Connor of Bon Conseil was also present. The final day of the Symposium was dedicated to writing a short paragraph in which the spirit and aims of the founders of Cîteaux and of Saint Bernard were expressed. These conferences and the final synthetic statement are contained

¹³ Dom Augustine, monk of Spencer (USA), was part of the foundation in Argentina, where he became superior and prior of Azul from December 1967 to January 1984. Administrator, then abbot of Spencer from June 1983 to June 1996. Procurator of the Order from 1998 to 2002. Abbot of Azul from 2002 to 2008.

in the first volume of the “Cistercian Studies Series” published at Kalamazoo. The second event took place during my trip to the General Chapter. It was a series of visits to most of the Spanish monasteries of monks and to some of the houses of nuns in Spain. Actually, these visits were perhaps more important for the Spanish abbots than for me personally, since it gave them an opportunity to speak in Spanish with an American monk and to exchange ideas with the New World about the state of the Order, renewal and the forthcoming General Chapter. I tried to explain to them in gentle terms the need of greater flexibility in the observances, especially in Latin America. They were welcoming, seemed open, but were non-committal. The only person who really seemed opposed to such ideas was the excellent abbess of Alloz, Mother Marie du Puy. She prescribed continual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for her community during the entire General Chapter.

I arrived in Rome a few days before the General Chapter and stayed at Monte Cistello. It was my first contact with the place since being a student there in 1961. The eight years had made a big difference, and instead of 70 students there were now seven or eight. It seemed something like a silent, empty tomb. Dom Ambrose Southey, then Abbot of Mt. Saint Bernard, also arrived early. I had not met him before and my first impression was of a pleasant, young, busy abbot, full of energy, who knew what he was doing and did everything with determination and enthusiasm.

A few days later we were driven to the site of the General Chapter: the new formation center of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate on the Via Pineta Sacchetti. The Presidents of the Regional Conferences had arrived early to discuss the problems of the Order, especially the two points discussed by the USA Region, namely, the tension between Dom Ignace and most of the General Chapter, and the direction which the General Chapter of 1967 had taken by permitting certain major experiments in the traditional observances. Like most superiors at their first General Chapter, I was fascinated, awed, and confused by the dynamics of the first days. Since it was my first General Chapter, I did not have a good basis for comparisons. The Spanish Commission, of which I was a member, did not seem to understand much, either.

After three or four days of this, the Abbot of Berryville, Dom Edward McCorkell, and the Abbot of Guadalupe, Dom Columban Hawkins, decided to have a prayer meeting one evening after supper, to ask God to help solve the serious difficulties that had surfaced within the Order and within the present General Chapter. They invited me to accompany them, which I did. The three of us were from daughter houses of Spencer. It was a very intense prayer meeting and I was deeply recollected during it, free of distractions and totally centered on an inner darkness. Immediately after finishing the meeting, I left for my room, went to bed

and slept well. I woke up on schedule the next morning, got up and started saying Lauds from a small Spanish breviary I had. The spirit of the prayer meeting was still in me and I instinctively knelt next to my bed while reading Psalm 50, the *Miserere*.

Half way through the psalm I felt the desire to go to the desk and write something for the Plenary Session that morning, without knowing exactly what it could be. I rejected this desire, since it seemed to be a temptation to seek a more comfortable position than kneeling on the floor, plus the fact that I would not have been able to finish Lauds before Mass time. But the desire became irresistible: I had to go to my desk. So I got up, sat down, opened to a blank page of my notebook and at that very moment an intellectual inspiration came concerning what I should write and then say. The inspiration had not at all been in my mind during the prayer meeting, at least consciously. It was a recollection of Pope Paul VI's intervention at the end of the first session of the Second Vatican Council, in 1962, when he was still Archbishop of Milan. He had outlined the entire work of the Council in the form of three concentric circles: at the center is the Church itself (= *Lumen Gentium*), then the Church in dialogue with other Christian Churches (= *Ecumenism*) and the exterior circle would be Church in dialogue with the modern world (= *Gaudium et Spes*). My inspiration was to suggest something similar at this General Chapter, so that its work could be more adequately organized:

- 1 First, there should be a clarification of what Cistercian life is in itself (= *Declaration on Cistercian Life*).
- 2 Then the General Chapter should treat Cistercian life, as now clarified, according to its varying expressions in the different communities throughout the world (*Statute on Unity and Pluralism*).
- 3 And finally Cistercian life in its diversity should be considered in its relation to other Church bodies, especially in relation to the Holy See (= the new *Constitutions*).

I wrote this suggestion down in the course of three to four minutes, rapidly and without hardly any corrections. It occupied a full page of my notebook. I even wrote my introductory words, because this was going to be my first intervention at any General Chapter, "Father Augustine of Azul." When I had finished writing, I asked myself, "When will I read this?" The reply came immediately from inside myself, but I do not think that it was *from* me: "It will be clear to you when you should read it." I closed my notebook, and went at once to Mass in the big Chapel, then to breakfast and to the Plenary Session.

I occupied my usual seat in the back row, feeling a mixture of wonderment at what had just happened to me and curiosity as to how I would know the moment

to intervene and what the reaction would be to my suggestion of reorganizing the work of the General Chapter.

Dom Ambrose was the only Moderator of the General Chapter. After Tierce, he gave some announcements and directives for the work of the Commissions, then asked the usual question, "Before going into Commissions, does anyone have something else to say?" I understood with some trepidation that this was the sign for me. I raised my hand and read my text, only adding the words, "because the program of the General Chapter, as it stands, is not well ordered." The intervention appears in the Minutes. Dom Ambrose thanked me and suggested that the Commissions think about what I had just said. Immediately after the session ended, Father Clement of Bellefontaine, the French secretary, came running to my desk to ask for my written text, which I gave to him and never saw again. That afternoon and the next day, somewhat to my surprise, the different Commissions began expressing themselves in favor of my proposed reorganization, with two different declarations: one on Cistercian Life and another on Cistercian pluralism. Within a few days, affirmative votes were taken on preparing these two documents.

People say that the tone of the General Chapter changed noticeably with my intervention, with a greater sense of communion and even enthusiasm. If so, it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Since it was my first General Chapter, I am not in a position to judge it well. Moreover during most of the General Chapter I was living a strange mixture of pastoral clarity and spiritual haze. It was an intense mixture of activity and passivity. During the second of the three weeks of the General Chapter, the Commissions—especially their secretaries and presidents—were busy preparing the two documents. I had the impression that Dom André Louf was leading the effort. Armand Veilleux, who was present as an expert in Liturgy, was also contributing, although I am not sure exactly how. My attitude was more passive, since I trusted that the Lord would do his work and I did not wish to get in his way.

The *Declaration on Cistercian Life* was presented, modified and approved without much difficulty, but the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism* was more delicate and controversial. The Presidents and Secretaries produced a list of eight or nine points of observance which expressed in each case the minimum of the observance required by the General Chapter, without any real explanation of what is involved. Not knowing the protocol of the General Chapter nor how to express myself in such a case, I wrote a short paper to explain the need, as I saw it, of having a short explanatory introduction to the concrete points of observance, justifying what the General Chapter was doing and explaining that it was not a question of lowering the standard of Cistercian life so that all communities could feel comfortable, but of adapting the life to an increasingly wide variety of situations and cultural needs,

for the spiritual good of the monks throughout the world. I offered a text as an example of what I meant and distributed the paper to the presidents and secretaries of the commissions. I am not sure what they thought of me, but they accepted my recommendation and added the two introductory paragraphs almost exactly as I had written them. I was both relieved and pleased.

I made two other interventions in Plenary Session. One was on the project for the Constitutions, which was called at that time, “*New Charter of Charity*.” I suggested accepting the proposition of making declarations on the Rule, but doing it synthetically, combining the two chapters on the abbot (2 and 64), the two on humility (7 and 72), the several on temporal administration, etc. I had the impression that no one had not thought of such a possibility. It was clear that the work on the Constitutions—the outside circle in my vision of three concentric circles—would have to wait until a future General Chapter. At that time, I did not realize that the Law Commission, which would be elected at that Chapter, would be skeptical of so many changes in Cistercian life. We had to wait fifteen years for the Law Commission to change again and for the outside concentric circle to be drawn.

My fourth and last intervention of the General Chapter concerned the “Introduction to the Report of the General Chapter.” I think Armand Veilleux was its main author. When it was presented to the Plenary Session during the final hours of the General Chapter, I made some suggestion—which I cannot remember at this time—that caused Dom Ambrose to delegate me and Father Raphael Simon of Spencer to review the whole text of this Introduction in order to bring it more into agreement with the *Declaration on Cistercian Life* and the *SUP*. Father Raphael was present at the General Chapter as an invited expert on psychology and group dynamics. He and I met twice during the last day of the General Chapter, to re-read the Introduction and change some expressions that could have been misunderstood, especially by some of our nuns and by the Holy See. For example, I think that we added the phrase, “unity made concrete by a certain uniformity in our way of life,” and when the text speaks of the *Declaration*, we added the word, “only,” to the sentence, “we do not conceive of it *only* as a description of a concrete way of life”.

What I have said so far describes my personal activity during the Chapter of 1969. Some more general impressions can be summarized as follows:

- Everything at the Chapter seemed to depend on, and pass through the hands of, Dom Ambrose, the only moderator. He had no “Coordinating Commission,” although perhaps he had an unofficial one. Yet he was always calm, dialogical, and open to new suggestions. It was clear that he had won the respect of all.
- The figure of Dom Ignace Gillet was enigmatic, withdrawn, and more passive

than active. If I had not attended the previous meeting of the USA abbots, I would not have thought that he was under fire from many abbots. Providentially, and probably due to the action of Dom Ambrose and of other moderate voices, it was decided not to move towards his resignation, perhaps in view of the new unity around the *Declaration* and the *SUP*.

- The drama of the *Declaration* and the *SUP* lay in the increasing polarization within the Order. There was a strong movement, centered in North America, toward decentralization and the consequent pluralism of observances, but without an explicit basis for it in the tradition of the Order. At the same time there was an intense resistance to toying with uniformity of observances, as being a betrayal of the Order's spirituality. This resistance was centered in Dom Ignace, but was also strong among many nuns and several European abbots. It was not at all clear how to find a middle ground between these opposite tendencies, which helps to explain how both sides were relieved and pleased with the vision of three concentric circles, or stages.
- The greater unity around the *Declaration* and the *SUP* led to a consensus about the need for integrating the nuns into the renewal process. It was clear that Dom Ignace could not do this, so someone (André Louf?, Dom Ambrose?, Dom Thomas Keating?) thought of an official assistant to the Abbot General in charge of renewal, especially among the nuns. Dom John Eudes Bamberger, then Father John Eudes of Gethsemani, who was providentially at the General Chapter as an expert in psychology, was elected for this. Dom Ignace's humility in accepting such a situation was remarkable.
- Despite the major issues being discussed at the General Chapter, there was still time to listen to some Visitation Reports according to the traditional system (I think) of one-third of the houses of monks and one-third of the nuns' houses at each Chapter. My impression of this at the time was that it seemed artificial, inadequate and out of place in light of the intense life of the General Chapter. But not everything could be changed at the same time. It was like reading a newspaper while a major earthquake was shaking the house.
- I have almost no recollection of other details of the Chapter, the Spanish Commission, etc. Despite my interventions in a few plenary sessions, I was not a member of any *ad hoc* commission, nor was my opinion asked about things. It was only after the General Chapter, from Azul, that I saw my name mentioned as an important person at the Chapter. Actually, I think that the major grace of the Chapter was not my vision for organizing its work, but the fact that many members of the General Chapter and of the entire Order rallied around that vision and gave their energy to carrying it out.
- As a sequel to my whole experience at the General Chapter, especially to the need

I saw to explain Cistercian pluralism to many who felt threatened by it, which included the Abbot General, I almost immediately began to write a commentary on the *SUP*. The commentary appeared in several periodicals of the Order. It was only while writing it, as I reread Pope Paul VI's Letter to the Order of 1968 and the reports of some of the previous regional meetings, that I realized how well the Holy Spirit had prepared us—often without our being aware of it—for something new, more flexible and more unifying within the Order. That seems to have been the essential grace of 1969.

7.2.3. Dom Bernard Johnson | Personal Reflections on the 1969 General Chapter¹⁴

Dom Alexandre Decabooter,¹⁵ one of the stars at many General Chapters, once remarked that we cannot expect to have a spectacular Chapter every time, that there will be some uneventful gatherings of the venerable assembly from time to time. He was present at the 1969 Chapter held in Rome at the formation center of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate on Via Pineta Sachetti from March 11–29, during a lovely Roman spring, and he would be the first to say that it was a great Chapter. It was my very first Chapter as a capitulant. Since 1946, when I entered the Order, the General Chapter was something “out there,” far removed in a sense from daily life in the monastery. It was at that gathering—mainly at Cîteaux in those days—that our Abbot took what seemed an inordinate time to go and to come back. Every year during that time, always in early- or mid-September, there would be the piecemeal communiqués about what the Chapter was deciding. Then these decisions would be read to us in chapter four times a year at the Quarter Tenses. It all aroused a reverent but minimal interest. What a completely different thing it was to be actually present with other abbots and especially during those easy days following the Vatican Council with its call for renewal and up dating. It is hard so many years later to re-live the thrill and excitement of that particular Chapter. Many of the members at that time have fallen asleep in the Scriptural sense, but there are still enough around to admit that the 1969 chapter was a wonderful experience.

A few Capitulants may have fallen asleep in the literal sense, since the translation system was not the best especially for those not in what was referred to as the “principal language groups,” but the activity in commission and in the corridors

¹⁴ Abbot of New Clairvaux (USA) from 1968 to 1970; member of the Council of the Abbot General from 1971 to 1990 (Procurator from 1977 to 1990), Abbot of Conyers (USA) from July 1990 to July 2000.

¹⁵ Monk of Mont-des-Cats, superior of Maromby from August 1962 to June 1963, abbot of Désert from August 1966 to March 1986.

was vigorous enough to keep interest at a fever pitch. The program had been prepared by a commission and the Definitory, and was heavily overloaded; its main defect being a lack of order as many capitulants pointed out early in the Chapter. I feel honored to have been a member of the Second Commission, which came up with an alternative program that, after some discussion, was accepted, and the chapter then set out on very serious work on important questions (which at a later time would be refereed to as “hot points”—government, liturgy, and pluralism. It is hard to imagine the energy and the interest that went into producing what could be called the crowning work of the 1969 Chapter, namely the SUP, or Statute on Unity and Pluralism. This was the product of brilliant collaboration and sharing of superiors from all over the world, even from the “end of the World” as the abbot from New Zealand more than once remarked during the Chapter.

The Chapter was made up of abbots from far distant places—a phrase used often at the Chapter when speaking of the foundations that were represented and were under discussion, and many stars shining brightly in the Cistercian heavens, whose names would shine for many a future chapter: Southey, Roberts, Keating, Louf, to say nothing of the experts whose quiet but powerful presence added the necessary lubrication to the functioning of the Chapter.

The Chapter awaited with a certain amount of anxiety the audience with Pope Paul VI, since the letter he had sent to the Order, to his beloved sons and daughters, had raised more than one concern and expectation at what he would say concerning the principle values of the Cistercian way of life and the need for renewal, questions like silence, solitude and separation from the world. We had no reason to fear, since his allocution left no one in doubt that he expected us to remain what we were. Little did he know perhaps that we would spend hours and hours at the Chapter trying to describe, not define, but identify ourselves in the light of our tradition and the documents coming from the Vatican Council. Many of the points that would occupy the General Chapter for years to come were openly and squarely delineated, and seeds were sown for future harvesting.

This was also the last Chapter where the nuns would be discussed and decisions made without their cooperation or even knowledge. On this particular point I keep as a very personal remembrance the discussion about the monastery of Redwoods. Being from California myself, this discussion would and did have a special interest. Deep in memory but as vivid as though it happened yesterday, was the sound of determined feet marching from the translator box to the microphone of the French-English translator at the Chapter, someone destined to be a brilliant light in many subsequent Chapters, Armand Veilleux, who wanted to make at that time an unprecedented intervention (non-abbots did not do that sort of thing!) in defense of the then abbess of the Redwoods, who in turn would

become in the nuns' Chapters a special person famous for sowing seeds of thought for profound reflection.

So much more could be said about the 1969 Chapter, but let this suffice to indicate that it was a spectacular pivotal chapter that will stand out in OCSO history. There would be many Chapters after that, but only a few, very few, like 1984, 1987, and 1990, that would be remarkable for insights, orientations, and decisions. The 1969 Chapter will always remain a thrilling and historical one, thanks to the people who made it up, the subjects, the atmosphere of unity and wholesome desires for the future of the Order.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Evolution of the Order's Structures

8.1. THE EVOLUTION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

(by Dom Ambrose Southey)¹

The evolution of the General Chapter during the second half of the twentieth century has been truly remarkable, not just in one or other aspect but in every aspect imaginable. To see this more clearly we can examine the Chapter under the following headings: preparation, frequency, duration, language, timetable, content, functioning, participants, place and follow-up.

8.1.1. Preparation

In the 1950s the Abbot General and the Definitors always prepared the programme for the Chapter. With the election of Dom Gabriel Sortais in 1951 these programmes became ever more dense, since he raised such questions as the recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Office of the Dead; the situation of the Lay Brothers and many other topics. This way of doing things continued until the Chapter of 1964, when a special commission was set up to prepare the Chapter of 1965 (This is not mentioned in the *Compte-rendu* [C-R] of the 1964 Chapter, but is referred to in the 1965 *Compte-rendu*, p. 54.) No explicit reason is given for this change but it seems that the Chapter felt that there were a number of important questions raised by Vatican II, and that the new Abbot General, Dom Ignace Gillet, did not have the same qualities as his predecessor to tackle these questions. Eventually, in 1971, the *Consilium Generale* was established,

¹ Abbot of Mt. St. Bernard (England) from July 1959 to May 7, 1974, date on which he was elected Abbot General. He resigned from this charge in September 1990. He was promotor at both General Chapters from 1967 to 1974.

and one of its functions was to prepare the General Chapter (cf. C-R 1971, p.12 sqq.) This body was composed of the Abbot General and his permanent Council together with a number of other Abbots. While in session it functioned as the Abbot General's principal Council. Finally, this task of preparing the Chapter was given to the Central Commissions (cf. C-R 1984, p.463) Later there will be something on the history of the Central Commissions (see § 8.2.).

8.1.2. Frequency

In principle the General Chapter met annually on September 12. However, there were two types of Chapters. One was ordinary and the other plenary. Superiors from distant lands, which included the USA and Canada, were only bound to come to plenary Chapters, which took place every five years. At the General Chapter of 1960, by 48 votes to 18, it was decided *ad experimentum* for eight years that in future the Chapter would be every two years and the plenary Chapter every four years. Dom Gabriel had suggested this in the programme since often there were quite a large number of Superiors absent for one reason or another.

In 1965 Dom Ignace suggested returning to the yearly Chapters, but this was not accepted. At the 1967 Chapter it was decided to have another Chapter in September 1968 (C-R 1967, p.154). However, in fact this Chapter did not take place until March 1969, since the *Consilium Generale* asked for a referendum about the exact date of the Chapter. At that Chapter it was decided that the *Consilium Generale* should determine the date of the following Chapter, provided that it was not later than March 1971 (C-R 1969, p.136). The 1971 Chapter voted that each Chapter should decide the date of the following one (vote 98) and it also voted that the *Consilium Generale* should decide whether to have another Chapter in two or three years time (votes 124–125). The next three Chapters were three years apart (1974, 1977, 1980) and the fourth was in 1984. Finally, at the 1984 Chapter it was decided that in future the Chapters would be every three years. This was put into the new Constitutions and approved by the Holy See.

8.1.3. Duration

It is not necessary to spend much time on this point. Most of the Chapters in the 1950s lasted five or six days (September 12–16 or 17). In 1962 the Chapter took fifteen days. There was no Chapter in 1963, and the 1964 Chapter, which elected Dom Ignace Gillet, only took three days. But after that the Chapters gradually became much longer, ranging from two to four weeks. Since the approval of the Constitutions, the Chapters have settled down to a duration of about three weeks.

8.1.4. Language

In the 1950s all the documents of the Order were in French, and that was the only language used at the General Chapter. If a particular Abbot did not speak or read French, he could not understand anything at the Chapter, unless he happened to be sitting next to someone who did know French, and who was able to explain things to him in his own language. The Chapter of 1951 raised this question, and decided that in future every effort should be made to lessen linguistic difficulties during the sessions. In addition it asked that all official documents of the Order should be translated (cf. C-R 1951, p. 15). However, neither of these decisions seems to have been put into practice immediately. When I first went to the Chapter in 1959, everything was still in French. The translation of documents had certainly begun by 1956. At the Chapter of 1960, the Definitors were given permission to choose translators of the official documents of the Order, provided that they themselves remained responsible for the accuracy of the translations (C-R 1960, p.18). The program for the 1960 General Chapter (p. 3) mentions that in future the Chapter hall will have, at least for the English language, a translation system of the sort used in international gatherings. This was done, at least in a limited way. Moreover, at that Chapter, the English speakers were grouped in the second commission (p. 6). But for the 1965 Chapter, the six commissions were again of mixed languages. From 1967 onwards the commissions of the General Chapter were chosen according to language (C-R 1967, pp.5-8). At the 1969 Chapter there is mention in the *Compte-rendu* of the translation system and the fact that for the first time there would be a Spanish translation. Nowadays every person present has the possibility of a translation, including the Japanese.

8.1.5. Timetable

Under this title I want to discuss a normal day at the General Chapters from 1950 until 1965. One could say that the main idea was to reproduce a day in the monastery without the manual work!

The Capitulants rose at 2:15 as usual, and recited the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin and canonical Vigils and Lauds. Concelebration did not exist in those days, so after the half an hour of mental prayer in common each Abbot had to say his mass. The Lay Brothers of Cîteaux served these masses. Sometimes a Brother had six masses to serve! Except for the High Mass of the Holy Spirit on the opening day there was no High Mass each day. After Prime the Abbot General held Chapter, and gave a conference. After mixt the sessions began. The Abbots sat in

order of the precedence of their monastery. Meals were taken in silence, although there was reading at the midday meal. The food was more or less the same as in any monastery of the Order. There was reading before Compline. At each Chapter various officers were named: promotor, secretary, invitor, hebdomadary, cantors, and timekeeper. It seems that at the 1962 Chapter, held in Rome at Monte Cistello, permission had been given to speak at the midday meal. In 1965 Dom Ignace suggested a number of changes: Vigils and personal prayer were to be in private. At 5:00 a.m. there would be Lauds in common, followed by masses. At 8.00 there would be Prime, Chapter with conference, and then the sessions. Sext was at 12:15 followed by the meal with conversation (since the 1962 experience had been so beneficial!), 14:30 None, then sessions. At 17:45, Vespers, mental prayer, and meal in silence. Compline was in private or in the Church with the community of Cîteaux but out of choir. These suggestions were voted almost unanimously (cf. C-R 1965, p.8). Nowadays only breakfast is taken in silence, and, because of concelebration, there is a High Mass at a convenient time.

8.1.6. Content

It would take far too long to try to give a list of all the topics treated by the General Chapter during the second half of the twentieth century. At one time the Chapter was mainly concerned with listening to reports of the Visitations made in the houses of the nuns as well as those of the monks. But, as already mentioned, as soon as Dom Gabriel was elected in 1951 he began raising important questions. In fact, at the 1953 Chapter, he put a number of points on the programme: length of sleep, reduction of the frequency of the Office of the Dead, suppression of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, changes in Lenten fare and the life of the Lay Brothers, etc. Some of these points were not settled immediately and came up again at following Chapters. The question of the Lay Brothers was still not settled when Dom Gabriel died in 1963. His successor, Dom Ignace, was faced not only with this matter but a host of questions raised by Vatican II. There is little doubt that the most important Chapters were those of 1967 and 1969, but they will be treated separately. Since those Chapters, a great deal of time and effort was put into the formulation of our new Constitutions. This effort had become necessary because of Vatican II and the new edition of the Code of Canon Law. The new text was accepted by the 1987 Chapter and, after some modifications, approved by the Holy See in 1990. Since then, many other topics have been discussed and decided at the Chapters or Mixed General Meetings.

One can mention in particular: a Statute on the Regular Visitation, the restructuring of the Abbot General's Council, a Statute on Temporal Administration, the

pastoral role given to the mixed commissions of the MGM, the nature of a Superior *ad nutum*.

8.1.7. Functioning

Perhaps it is in this area that the evolution of the General Chapter can be seen most clearly. There has always been a *Règlement* (or 'Rules of Procedure') for the General Chapter, but it has changed considerably over the years. Besides the President of the Chapter—the Abbot General—there has always been a Promotor, whose duty it was to moderate the sessions. When Dom Dominique Nogues was Abbot General, the Promotor was Dom Gabriel Sortais, who did the moderating. But when he became Abbot General he continued to act as Promotor, although another person had the title! Dom Ignace Gillet tried to do the same at the 1965 Chapter, but he had not the necessary qualities, and the commission that prepared the 1967 Chapter asked for a Promotor to be chosen. That Chapter voted that it should be the Abbot Vicar (cf. C-R 1967, p. 111). At that time the Promotor had to prepare all the votes. But eventually a co-ordinating commission was introduced (cf. Minutes of the *Consilium Generale*, Rome 1970, pp.18 and 21). It should be mentioned that, until the Chapter of 1969, voting was done either by distributing white and black beans or by raised hands. In 1969, electronic voting was introduced and has continued ever since. As the years went by further refinements were made to the procedure and now it is a thirty-page document.

At one time there were only three commissions at the Chapter besides the Vigilance Commission. This was extended to four, and now it depends on how many Superiors are present and whether it is a MGM or a Chapter. There can also be *ad hoc* commissions to deal with some particular question. The name of the Vigilance Commission has been changed to Pastoral Commission. At the 1999 Chapter it was decided to make the Pastoral Commission one of the fifteen mixed commissions. Although all these commissions now have a pastoral role, the fifteenth will be asked to study the House Reports that need a special pastoral treatment (cf. Minutes 1999, pp.22–23).

Another area where there have been changes is the way of studying questions on the programme. Some are given to all commissions, some to two or four commissions, and some are treated by the simplified procedure. This last means that the question is communicated before the MGM or Chapter with a working paper and votes. The votes are taken without discussion unless the required number of persons (25 or 5)² demand that the matter should be treated by the ordinary pro-

² In 2005, these numbers would be modified: 25 at the RGM, 14 at the monks' GC, 11 at the nuns' GC.

cedure. The Simplified Procedure was introduced at the 1977 Chapter, I think, and was put into the “Rules of Procedure” at the following Chapter.

Finally, the question of Secretary has undergone a major development. In the 1950s there was one Secretary who had to transcribe the decisions of the Chapter in longhand, and they were read and signed just before the closure of the Chapter. In 1960, two abbots were named as secretaries. In 1965 it was proposed that the secretary would not be a member of the Chapter, although an abbot would be appointed to fulfill this function in delicate matters when it would be desirable that only members of the Chapter should be present. The *Compte-rendu* has two sections, an official section approved in plenary session, containing decisions taken and explanations necessary to understand them properly, and a detailed account of discussions checked by the Abbot secretary. Copies of this section are left in the room for possible remarks from the capitulants. However, up to 1969 the names of speakers were not given. In 1967 the Chapter voted to discontinue the practice of copying the Acts of the Chapter longhand into a special ledger and they were no longer read at the beginning of the session. In 1969 there were three secretaries at the Chapter in charge of the *Compte-rendu*.

At the Chapter of 1974 it was laid down that there should be three secretaries, one for each of the official languages (English, French, Spanish), besides the Secretary who had to draw up and sign the official documents (see Appendix 5, nn.5 and 6) At the following Chapter the duties of the Secretary were increased (see Appendix 1, n. 6) He has to supervise all the work of the secretariat, and may attend the meetings of the Coordinating Commission.

8.1.8. Participants

All the Abbots of the Order as well as Titular Priors and Superiors *ad nutum* were always supposed to participate in the General Chapter, unless they were excused on grounds of distance or health. (cf. 1924 Constitutions, n.4) The Procurator General and the Definitors were also present but without the right to vote (ibid. n.6). However the 1971 Chapter gave the right to vote. In 1969, the Superiors of non-autonomous houses were allowed to be present and to vote, but not the Superiors of “simplified” foundations. It was also permitted to have a delegate from each Region present but without the right to vote. The American and Canadian Regions already had a delegate present at this Chapter. Some experts also participated at this Chapter (the secretary of the Liturgy Commission had been present already since the 1967 Chapter). The Secretary of the *Consilium Generale* was allowed to be present at the 1971 Chapter. Finally 5 Abbesses were present as Observers in the 1974 Chapter. The climax came in 1987 when the Abbots and

Abbesses met together in the first mixed meeting, although the two Chapters remained separate.

8.1.9. Place

For centuries, with a few exceptions, the General Chapter was held at Cîteaux. In 1962, Dom Gabriel wanted the Abbots to see Monte Cistello (the new Generalate and Student House), so the Chapter that year was held there on the grounds of Tre Fontane. In 1964, the Chapter returned to Cîteaux, but the increased number of people present at the Chapter (secretaries, interpreters, etc.) was becoming too much for the community of Cîteaux to handle, and so in 1969 the Chapter was held at the Scholasticate of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Rome. Thereafter nearly all the General Chapters have been either in Rome or very near it (Arricia, Rocca di Papa), except for Holyoke, USA in 1984, Poyo, Spain in 1993, and Lourdes, France, in 1999.

8.1.10. Follow-up

In the 1950s the only official follow-up of the General Chapters was a one-page sheet headed "Decisions and Declarations of the General Chapter." The Superiors received something else in French called the *Compte-rendu*, but it was regarded as confidential and was not shown to the community. As time went on, this report became longer and longer, and some Superiors started showing it to their monks. Now the Minutes of the Chapters are in the three official languages and are put at the disposal of the community. These Minutes at the last Chapter, 2002, were 345 pages!

Conclusion

We can ask ourselves in conclusion what exactly was the evolution of the General Chapter. It could be summed up in three points:

- 1 The Chapter has become more international in every sense.
- 2 The functioning of the Chapter has been gradually improved, and now it has been judged by experts to have reached a high standard.
- 3 Although, according to our Constitutions, the Abbots and Abbesses have separate General Chapters, the Mixed General Meeting has improved the unity of the two branches and eventually it will lead to one mixed General Chapter.

8.2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERMEDIARY STRUCTURES

(by Dom Bernard Johnson)³

This brief study deals with the evolution of the “intermediary structures” of the Order, namely the Definitory and the Central Commission. The “intermediary” element refers to those entities between the “supreme authority of the Order, the General Chapter” (c. 77.2) and the “fundamental unit of the Order, the local community” (c. 5).

The time frame is from the first General Chapter, more accurately the Chapter of Union of 1892, and the present day with the 2002 General Chapter. During this time, and more specifically the time after the Vatican Council II, these two structures were intertwined and interlocked, sometimes with conflict and misunderstandings, but—thanks to the good will that has always characterized the Order, exemplified by magnanimous and very intelligent men and women, abbots and abbesses, and the monks and nuns of the Order—we have happily arrived at this healthy stage in our long history. Not that anything is written on stone tablets and cannot change, but the experience of the past forty or so years gives encouragement and hope for future development. It seems best to treat these two intermediary structures separately and so we begin with the so-called Definitory.

8.2.1. The Definitory

There seems to be no need to give a detailed history of what is sometimes referred to as the “ancient Definitory,” since this can be gleaned from a number of excellent histories of the Cistercian Order. These historians go back to the fundamental constitution of the Order, the Charter of Charity, to show how the idea of a “council” around the Abbot of Cîteaux for settling disputes, for the sake of peace and unity and not out of necessity (an interesting phrase from some capitular legislation), was used for further development in the history of the General Chapter.

Several Papal interventions in the course of this history attempted to regulate the formation of such a body of councilors as regards number and mode of election and functioning, and so The Definitory—the name dates as far back as 1176—became a household word, not always spoken with fraternal affection and

³ Abbot of New Clairvaux (USA) from 1968 to 1970, member of the Abbot General’s Council from 1971 to 1990 (Procurator from 1977 to 1990), and Abbot of Conyers (USA) from July 1990 to July 2000.

respect. It is interesting to note in the history of the Order that, after the French revolution and the development of the various Congregations of the Trappist variety during the 1800s, there was no attempt to reintroduce the idea of a Definitory, although, strange to say, the place where the General Chapters of these congregations was held was always referred to as the Definitory, and decisions were “defined” and called definitions.

But our story begins with the day the affable and energetic Cardinal Mazella—Camillo to his friends, and he had many of them—arrived at the French seminary in Rome early in October 1892. In his briefcase was the decree from the Holy See, dated June 23, 1892, a decree that all the abbots assembled there for the General Chapter of Union of the three Trappist congregations (we make abstraction of the fourth, the Casamari congregation who effectively withdrew from the workings of the Chapter) had received and had presumably discussed with their communities. The decree stated that the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII, *vehementer exoptat* (‘greatly desired’), that there would be only one Congregation, and outlined the ways and means of obtaining that union.

It is numbers 13, 14, and 15, all dealing with the setting up of “Definitors,” that interest us in this study. In the course of the discussion of these numbers, the Cardinal gave the cogent reason for establishing this juridical structure once again in the Order. It should be noted here that this structure would have nothing to do with the “ancient Definitory.” No historian, past or present, ever said that the Abbot of Cîteaux—read Abbot General—ever had a “private council.” Add to this the fact that the old Definitory functioned exclusively during a General Chapter in session (a cause of tremendous upheaval at various chapters), whereas the modern Definitory, as foreseen in the papal decree under discussion here, would function, almost if not entirely, outside the sessions of the General Chapter.

The Cardinal’s reasoning, simply stated, was that the Church, the Holy See, did not want one man to govern alone, but he needed to be helped in his governing by others. These others have the “name of Definitors, or assistants, or something else,” and this was the practice of all other religious institutes. This latter argument did not hold much water, since these other religious institutes held their chapters at long intervals, every six, eight, or even ten years, and it is obvious that the General would need assistance during the intervening space of time. With annual chapters this need was not so apparent. But the other argument, that it was the wish and will of the Holy See, must have duly impressed the capitulary fathers, since there was no objection to the idea, apparently not even on the level of community discussion. It was a question of respect and reverence for authority.

And so, before the close of the General Chapter, six Definitors were elected, three acting superiors, two abbots, and one titular prior. In passing, it can be not-

ed that, between 1892 and 1913, a number of abbots *de regimine* were elected as Definitors, but it was then decided in the 1913 chapter that the two offices were incompatible. In any case the decree of 1892 had stated clearly enough that the Definitors need not be abbots. Incidentally, as a little historical footnote, it might be added that one of the Definitors elected, Father Augustine Collins, a monk of Mount Saint Bernard and chaplain to the nuns at Stapehill, refused the election, and never showed up for work, and was replaced by another monk, Basil Sheil, who died on May 11, 1893 at the age of thirty-seven. The notion of a Definitor refusing the job would come up later for discussion at another General Chapter. Before the 1892 chapter ended, the new—or what Dom Vincent Hermans, one of the greatest of Definitors of the twentieth century, would call the “modern Definitory”—would be given the work to draw up the new Constitutions, a piece of work that they did very effectively, resulting in the 1894 Constitutions.

The 1894 Constitutions, having been definitively approved by the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII, on August 25 (feast of Saint Louis of France) 1893, were formally promulgated by the Abbot General Dom Sébastien (last names were not in vogue at the time) on September 12, 1894, in the Order now “happily knit together;” an expression Pope Leo borrowed from the *Charter of Charity*. Consequently, in accordance with Number 29 of these Constitutions, a new set of Definitors was elected for a period of five years and according to a linguistic division, five in all, two for the French language, one for the English language, one for the German, and one for the Dutch languages. One difficulty arose as regards a Definitor for the German language, and it was left to the Abbot General to designate one, which he did in the person of the Abbot of Mont-des-Olives, or Oelenberg. There seems to have been no qualms or discussion about this derogation from the Constitutions.

One interesting fact is that a fair number of those elected *ad quinquennium* (‘for five years’) did not complete their terms for one reason or another, but this eventuality was well covered by one of the faculties given to the Definitory of accepting resignations and electing a replacement

This arrangement continued with only slight modification in 1946, when the Holy See was requested to grant a change in the Constitutions, namely to increase the number of Definitors to six. In the petitions, mention was made of “*expansio Ordinis*” which was just a little over a dozen new foundations. This expansion was centered for the most part in Spain, and although no mention was made of the Spanish language either in the request or the response, which came with the proviso *ad septennium* (‘for seven years’), it was in fact a Definitor for the Spanish language who was elected in the person of Dom Jesús Álvarez of Viaceli. This change became definitive at the General Chapter of 1953, at the end of the seven-year experience. The number of six would remain constant until the General Chapter of

1971, when the number was reduced to four, with the additions of two secretaries to be chosen by the Definitory.

This might be the place to say a word about the use of the term "Definitory." In the same General Chapter of 1953, it was decided that "The assembly unanimously adopts the following definition proposed for the Definitory: the term *Definitory* will serve to designate the Corps of Definitors acting as Council of the Abbot General. When the General Chapter confides some work to the Definitory, it is to be well understood that this means the Definitors, acting under the effective presidency or delegation of the Abbot General." The story behind this unanimous decision was perhaps the fact that, when the Abbot General, Dom Herman Smets, died in the midst of the war in 1943, there was a long vacancy in the effective office of the Abbot General, since the Vicar General at that time, Dom Dominique Nogues, stayed in his monastery of Timadeuc in France, separated or isolated from his Council in Rome. The acts of the Definitory from 1943 to 1946 were then the acts of the Council, acting doubtless by delegation of the Vicar General. It was probably also Dom Gabriel Sortais' plan to clear up the situation for any future eventuality.

Without creating here a canonical commentary, which would be beyond the scope of this brief study, it might be well to say that, at a glance, what are called the *attributions* or the *right of deliberative vote* in the 1894 Constitutions and those of 1990, as well as in the intervening legislation of 1925, are substantially the same: approving foundations, accepting resignations (Abbots, Titular priors, Definitors) as well as their deposition, alienation questions, etc. There have been some additions, owing to new legislation deriving from the two codifications of Canon Law (1918 and 1983). The 1990 Constitutions also make a clear distinction between needing the consent of the Council and the need to consult, a juridical figure that both the 1894 and 1925 Constitutions somehow insinuated when stressing the point that the Definitors are placed by the Abbot General to be his councilors and should offer their advice freely.

The Constitutions of 1990 use a completely different terminology, all of which comes from the introduction of the *Consilium Generale*, now the Central Commission, into the governmental legislation of the Order; so now the Constitutions speak of The Council of the Abbot General and Councilors, instead of Definitory or Definitors.

Two great movements in the world, the Church and, the Order would also have a profound effect on the Definitory as we have thus far described it. These movements are globalization or interculturalization, with its great push for better representation on the level of government bodies, and the promotion of women in society. These movements vis-à-vis the Definitory began with the General Chap-

ters of Poyo (1993) and Roca di Papa (1996), where the idea of having nuns on the Permanent Council, as it was referred to at the time, was first seriously—tentatively, but still seriously—considered. At first there were two nun Councilors without the right to vote, then two nun Councilors resident at the Generalate with the right to vote. One of the finest hours of the Order's General Chapters, or more accurately, Mixed General Meetings, took place at Lourdes in 1999 and at Rome in 2002, when, after a veritable tour de force of presentations, explanations, discussions, amendments and finally votes, the full entire Order decided on a Council of the Abbot General composed of five elected members, two monks and two nuns, with a fifth member, either a monk or a nun, being chosen by the Abbot General and the other Councilors. What makes this new legislation so remarkable is not so much the presence of two nuns and possibly a third one on the council but the manner in which the nominations and election took place, no longer using language as a prerequisite but rather competency in all its meanings, technical, social, practical and so forth. The Regions were not obliged to nominate their own members, but could cross borders and frontiers and select persons they felt would be good councilors, and so it happened to the great honor of the General Chapter. In choosing a fifth member for this new Council, the idea of better or more complete representation was verified.

One element in the legislation that has stayed constant is the office of the Procurator General. The Procurator with his duties outlined in the various Constitutions has always been one of the Definitors. Probably the best study on this juridical person is that by Dom Vincent Hermans, who held the office for many years, (see *Analecta*, 1968, pp. 143–52). And this is the place also to acknowledge the present writer's debt to this remarkable man—and colleague for seven years—for his masterly work on the Definitory in *Collectanea* 1970, 191–201.

When the General Chapter of 1971 added two secretaries to the Definitors, reducing the number of Definitors to four, one idea was to relieve them of purely secretarial work and give them a more pastoral activity, something which took place when the Definitors began to attend regional meetings and also to visit the monasteries which were still in their linguistic areas. Dom Vincent however always maintained that juridical and canonical activity was a very high pastoral nature and he backed this up by asserting that the vast majority of "cases" that came to the Abbot General and his council were of a strictly personal and pastoral nature, not all of them of the happiest kind. What could be sadder and yet more pastoral than dealing with a brother or sister struggling with a vocational problem? And what could be happier or more juridical than approving a new foundation!

Having briefly looked at the historical and juridical side (this element will come out more in the study on the *Consilium Generale*/Central Commission) of

the Definitory, we might conclude by looking at “the human face” of this “corps of Definitors.” Since 1892 there have been more or less 83 Definitors or councilors. More or less, since one of them, the famous polyglot, Dom Fabien Dütter, was elected twice with an interval of several years in between. Many of these men—all priests since that was one of the qualifications until 1971—served for short periods, either dying in office, being elected abbot, or being appointed superior. Others served for over twenty years, since re-election was never prohibited. And some of these members were giants of literary or artistic activity: Dom Symphorien Bernigaud, who wrote the fine commentary or meditations on the Rule of Saint Benedict and did the etches that were so much a beautiful part of the former Latin breviaries, or Dom Vincent Hermans and Dom Deodat de Wilde with their canonical and theological writings—to name a few. Only one, Dom Herman Smets of Westmalle, was later elected Abbot General.

In the course of modern Cistercian (Trappist) history, the Definitory will be described in many human ways. Dom Augustine Marre, the second Abbot General, in his discourse to the General Chapter of 1907, stressed the point that it would be a severe misunderstanding of the Definitory to consider it as “an honorable retreat for certain religious who had become embarrassing to their communities, or as a place of repose for venerable invalids, or, finally, an insignificant charge which can be filled by the very first comer on the scene.” In more recent times they have been referred to as typists, crank-turners, and lickens of stamps! But perhaps the most thorough and classic description of the Cistercian Definitor is that given by Dom Herman Smets to the General Chapter of 1935, which was a chapter that elected a set of Definitors. Dom Smets was a great orator, somewhat florid and long-winded, but he left no corner unswept when he described what a Cistercian Definitor should be, actually basing himself on Dom Marre’s speech, which was rather windy itself. After giving a lengthy discourse on the subject, Dom Smets concludes by saying: “In the light of these considerations on the attributes and duties of the members of the Definitory, we can see without difficulty the sum of the beautiful, intimate qualities that those whom the General Chapter will call to fill this most elevated function must not only possess but cultivate. The perfect Definitor must be all at the same time a man of solid virtue, of great activity, of sure judgment, and a man of pure and unshakable Cistercian convictions. He must be a model religious ... the exercise of prayer, the practice of obedience, the spirit of sociability ought to make him comfortable with persons of the most imperial titles as well as the simplest monk living in community.” And he winds up with a long peroration saying: “the Definitor faithful to his mandate, by means of the pure crystal of the Cistercian prism, will always and everywhere examine and guard his words and gestures.” And then the Abbot General, the only one

who had been a Definitor, concludes with the fervent wish that the “divine Pastor of souls will always maintain around the head of our dear Family collaborators of this caliber, that the house of God may be wisely administered by wise men, for all the ages to come.” Amen; so be it!

8.2.2. *Consilium Generale* and Central Commission

After the brief synthetic history of the Definitory, the same will be done for the second intermediary structure, namely, the *Consilium Generale* and the Central Commission. Just as the Definitory and this latter juridical entity have been interlocked, so too have the *Consilium Generale* and the Central Commission had a history of being entwined together as regards name, composition, and functioning. It must be said that the time-period, 1965 to 1990—the first date connected with the closing of the Second Vatican Council and the latter with the promulgation of the new Constitutions of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance—was an exciting, even exhilarating time with moments of joy and moments of pain.

One of the main functions of the Definitory and the Central Commission, as well as the *Consilium Generale*, was the preparation of the General Chapter, especially those chapters called Special General Chapters, which dealt with the adequate renovation of religious life to use the Conciliar term.

The history might begin with a decision of the General Chapter of 1920, which set up a process for preparing the program of the General Chapter. It might be stated right here at the beginning that one delicate issue in this area was the distinction between preparing the General Chapter and preparing the program of the General Chapter, a nuance that was not always respected but was always detected and corrected. The 1920 process called for sending questions that the capitular fathers—abbots and titular priors—felt needed to be discussed and perhaps legislated for at the General Chapter. These had to be sent to the Definitory at a set time. The points were given a sort of order of priority, and were sent back to the superiors together with notes and further information. The Presidents of the commissions of the General Chapter were then to distribute these points among the members of the commissions for further study, the idea being that the capitulars would come to the Chapter well aware of the subjects to be discussed. The President of each commission was to choose a “co-adjutor” (that was the term used at the time), and these two would be convoked to Cîteaux (where the General Chapters were held after the reacquisition of the abbey of Cîteaux in 1898). There, together with the Abbot General and the Definitors, the final touch would be put on the program and the immediate preparation of the Chapter.

This system seemed to have worked well, but when the question of languages

began to assert itself, it had to be modified to allow time for translation and expedition of texts, and this was done by clarifications made at the 1951 Chapter. It probably belongs to a study of the Chapter itself, but it might be mentioned here that the Abbot General at the time, Dom Gabriel Sortais, was a sort of General Chapter himself, presiding and moderating and in general directing the program.

Things began to change drastically with his death in 1963, about midway in the working of the Second Vatican Council. At the Extraordinary General Chapter of 1964, which was held at Cîteaux in January, it was suggested that a commission be put into action for the preparation of the 1965 Chapter. Dom Ignace Gillet, the newly elected Abbot General, said that there was already a process in the Order as noted above and that it would suffice. This opinion was modified later on at a meeting of Abbots at Westmalle—convoked to discern the question of a simplified foundation—to admit of just such a larger, more representative group than the Definitory.

There were tremendous questions in the air at the time: collegiality, unification of the community, what was referred to as the “Region factor,” the renewal of the liturgy, the situation of the nuns, and many more topics. Dom Ignace sent out a circular to the regional presidents, calling for an election of representatives from the regions on a “pro-rate” basis, that is, based on the number of *monks* (not nuns); these representatives were convoked for a meeting at Monte Cistello in December, precisely to prepare the General Chapter of 1965. This initiative resulted in a group of fifteen abbots divided thus: five French-language, five English-language, two Flemish and Dutch, one Canadian, and two representing Italy and Spain. After a discussion in the absence of the Abbot General (at his own request), it was decided unanimously that he should preside and also take part in the voting that would eventually take place. The Definitors were conspicuous by their absence, but this omission more or less reflected the malaise that existed in the Order vis-à-vis what was thought of as the “Roman curia.” This was corrected, however, in the 1966 meeting of the Commission of Abbots, also held at Monte Cistello, when they were invited to attend the meetings, and were used also as interpreters and secretaries.

It would be far beyond the scope of this brief history to summarize the long and detailed but very interesting and provocative discussions on all the major issues then surfacing in the Order. The best way to see the evolution of the Commission of Abbots to the Consilium Generale and then to the term of “Central Commission” would be to see the decisions of the General Chapters from 1967 to 1987 concerning these juridical bodies in the Order. The decisions however must be seen in the optic of great movements going on in the Church, the Order, and society in general. For the OCSO it involved the putting into execution of the

decree of unification in the Order, the establishment of a general Chapter for the abbesses, and the emergence of a strong desire for the unity of the two branches, along with decentralization or a better and more effective representation in government on the local, regional, and national levels.

The fact that the Holy See had promulgated a decree, *motu proprio*, called *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, with directives for renewal of religious life in the Church, would also play a great part in the history under discussion here. There was question of setting up in all religious orders a juridical body referred to as the *Consilium Generale*. It should be obvious that this was not written with just the Cistercians of the Strict Observance in mind, with their particular system of annual chapters. The Roman decree called for a special body that would direct the practicalities of renewal at special chapters, such matters as up-dating Constitutions and other bodies of regulations and usages, and the allowing of experiments on all levels of communal life, including government and liturgical practices.

In the Order, this directive gave rise to different interpretations, especially among canonists. One opinion held that, precisely because the Order had annual Chapters (and at the moment there was no great movement to change that age old practice), the Abbot General and the Definitors would fill that office, always being aware that they were free to add others to the Council in order to have fuller participation and representation in decision-making. The other opinion would replace the Abbot General and his council with a completely new organization, fully equipped with legislative powers, to do all that would be necessary for adequate renewal of religious life in the Order. Another idea was to space Chapters over two years, and then keep the Abbot General and the Definitory for minor questions of house-keeping, whereas this other body would have the vicarious power of the General Chapter for the major questions "in between times."

At the 1967 General Chapter, after listening to the reports of Commissions with a variety of suggestions, it was decided that, following n. 7 of *Ecclesiae sanctae*, the General Chapter would give a mandate to the *Consilium Generale* (and the chapter had by a show of hands accepted the proposal that the Central Commission of abbots would be put into abeyance as long a time as the *Consilium Generale* was in function). This mandate outlines the functions of the *Consilium Generale*, namely, to prepare the next General Chapter, to supervise preparations for the questionnaire that was decided upon by the same General Chapter for the entire Order, to examine requests for experimentation, using the criteria that matters which are important but not urgent should be put off until the next General Chapter, and that permission for experimentation granted by the *Consilium Generale* would be valid until the next General Chapter. As incredible as it might seem, this mandate was voted in by a show of hands! At the same time, another

vote was taken, one needing a two-thirds vote, since it modified a number in the Constitutions, namely: "When in session the *Consilium Generale* would form the extraordinary council of the Abbot General." This vote did not receive the necessary two-thirds majority, and it might reflect a certain confusion in the minds of some of the Capitulants, as there is a small touch of incoherence in this matter: willing to give rather broad powers to the *Consilium Generale* by a show of hands, according to *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, but not wishing it to be the Council of the Abbot General, which it is nonetheless in *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (the vote was 43 against 31, and the two-thirds was not obtained).

There were two sessions of the newly baptized *Consilium Generale* between 1967 and 1969, which simply continued the work of the Central Commission, with almost the same members but also with the Definitors, as noted above. The 1969 General Chapter severely criticized the working of the *Consilium Generale* in preparing the chapter, and, to quote a Commission report, "the efficacy or rather the inefficacy of the new organisms of recent years"—namely the Central Commission and the *Consilium Generale*—was put into question. The criticisms on a number of levels—mainly not taking into account the necessary participation of the local communities—resulted in the appointment of a Secretary General for the *Consilium*, whose main job would be to coordinate the work of the regions with special attention given to the nuns' communities, and this, *ad experimentum*. The Secretary General chosen at the chapter—he was an expert at the chapter—was Dom John Eudes, who would do a tremendous job by means of travel and correspondence and attendance at regional meetings. It has to be admitted in all honesty and respect that this office was created because of a general feeling of unhappiness not only with the working of the *Consilium* but also with the character of the Abbot General at the time (see § 7.1.3.).

The 1971 General Chapter would be prepared by a meeting of the *Consilium Generale* held at Monte Cistello in January 1970, and another, also in Rome, but at the Scholasticate of the Oblates of Mary, in December 1970. At both these meetings the Secretary General, Father John Eudes, was present, as were two secretaries to facilitate the taking of minutes and their publication. The Promoter elected by a show of hands was Dom Ambrose Southey, Abbot-Vicar. Great care was taken in preparing the program, which would include many important points: relations with the feminine branch, formation, abbots for a definite term, etc. The 1971 General Chapter took another hard look at the existence and functioning of the *Consilium Generale*, and formulated a number of votes, the most important perhaps being "We want to keep the status quo with regard to the *Consilium Generale*," which vote was rejected because it did not receive the necessary two-thirds majority. And there was another vote: "The *Consilium Generale* is the principal Council

of the Abbot General,” which was accepted 60 yes, 11 no. Then, in consequence of not wishing to keep the status quo, the Chapter passed a series of votes concerning the membership, the sessions, and the functions that it would be useful to give here, since they remained rather constant until they were more clearly delineated in the new Constitutions of 1990.

These functions are (1971): the *Consilium Generale* should treat of important matters, especially those which involve relations between the Order and the Holy See (a reason for some of the unhappiness with Dom Ignace Gillet), and the *Consilium Generale* has a deliberative vote in such matters; the *Consilium* coordinates the work of the regions and of the commissions of the Order; the *Consilium* prepares the General Chapter and this with a deliberative vote; the *Consilium* will decide which experts and which observers will be invited to the Chapter, and the *Consilium* sees to the implementation of the decisions of the General Chapter; the *Consilium* can give a provisional interpretation of the decisions of the General Chapter, with a deliberative vote; the *Consilium* can approve foundations but only in those cases where it would be impossible or difficult to wait for the General Chapter. In fulfilling that function the *Consilium* simply replaces the Abbot General and the Definitory, and thus a deliberative vote is required. The *Consilium* should not treat of matters reserved to the General Chapter and that can wait until the next General Chapter. All of these decisions received heavily affirmative votes, even the last one, which had been formulated in a negative way. The Secretary is not only confirmed in his position but is also made a member of the Chapter with right to vote.

In 1971 the abbesses of the Order held their first General Chapter, and from that time on the collaboration with the feminine branch increased on all levels, but especially in the drawing up of the Constitutions, and was beneficial to all concerned.

At the Chapter of 1974, prepared by a meeting of the *Consilium Generale*—the first to be held outside of Rome, at Viaceli in Spain, and also with three observers from the feminine branch—the Abbot General Dom Ignace offered his resignation for reasons of age, and, as he very humbly said, “in order to allow younger blood to guide the Order. Dom Ambrose Southey, the Abbot-Vicar and the Promoter of the *Consilium*, was elected Abbot General and there began a more vigorous leadership and clearer direction.

The office of Secretary General was assumed into the functions of the Abbot General as set forth in the Statute of the Abbot General. Another very important element in the structure of the *Consilium* was the addition of new members who were no longer major superiors of the Order, but had been major superiors (a clarification from the General Chapter of 1974), and also the decision to hold the

meetings of the *Consilium* in various countries in Europe as well as outside Europe, which would include the United States in 1976 and Japan in 1983. The desire of the African region to have a meeting of the *Consilium* in Africa could never be realized because of travel difficulties, but the presence of a member of the African region in the deliberations of the *Consilium* was always a precious addition.

All the Chapters either of the abbots or the abbesses were prepared by the *Consilium* or by the Preparatory Commission of abbesses elected by the General Chapter of abbesses. At the various Chapters there would be some kind of representation from the opposite branch of the Order. It became evident at the Holyoke Chapter of abbots and that of the abbesses at Escorial that a summit meeting, a mixed meeting would eventually be not only highly desirable but also necessary, when it came to drawing up Constitutions, which were to be as identical as possible. Such a summit meeting would require joint preparation, and so the Mixed Preparatory Meetings came into existence, and did the work very well for the 1987 Chapter, the Constitution Chapter, which was something of a triumph for collaboration as well as participation, not to say patience! With experience and expertise from both branches, the preparation for subsequent Chapters became more efficient and beneficial for the entire Order.

What was taking place quietly but very efficiently was the coexistence of two councils in the Order. The Permanent, or residential, Council of the Abbot General, also developed from the time of the 1971 chapter, when its number was reduced to four, and the Definitors were given a more pastoral role, which would bring them more closely into contact with the actual life of the monasteries through their visits to these monasteries and their active participation in regional meetings. The Chapter of 1996 added nun resident councilors to the Council of the Abbot General without the right to vote. The 1999 and 2002 Chapters changed this by granting the nuns the right to vote, and the structure would be altered in such a way that there would be two monks and two nuns, elected by the Chapter with a fifth member, either monk or nun, selected by the Abbot General and the Council.

The 1990 Constitutions were thus changed in favor of better representation and diversity. It is in these Constitutions that one will find the qualifications and the duties of the members of both these structures that have an important role to play in the life of the Order. Put very simply, the Abbot General has a councilor at hand to aid him, which has always been the idea since the time of the union in 1892, and the Order has a council of abbots and abbesses, called the Central Commission, to insure the good working of the Chapter, before, during and after.

One of the issues that was prominent at the time of the Council and that had repercussions on the Order was decentralization. So it is rather curious if not

amusing to see this important council called Central! There is reason to think that, given the wonderful experience of the last forty years or so, these two Councils will continue to render their invaluable service to the entire Order.

At an extraordinary session of the first General Chapter of the Congregation of N.-D. de la Trappe in France, in May 1835, the abbots decided to have a seal for the definitions that they established, and they designed a *sigillum* that shows Our Lady holding her cloak over the six abbots, who at that time represented the two observances. Since three of these wore the famous *chaperon* and three did not, it was decided not to put three on one side and three on the other, but to mix them up to show that, while there was diversity exteriorly, there was perfect unity and affection among them. One might think of Our Lady, Queen of Cîteaux, holding in the folds of her cloak all the members of these two Councils, united in their very diversity and in their charity.

8.2.3. Reflection on the Relations between the Central Commission and the Regional Conferences

(This is the conclusion of a long article by Dom Armand Veilleux, on the history of the Central Commission, which completes the preceding presentation, stressing the consequences that the development of this structure could have on that of the Regional Conferences.)⁴

POSSIBLE LINES OF EVOLUTION FOR THE FUTURE

The Central Commission was born at the moment when the Regional Conferences were just beginning. Not only did the two structures evolve at the same time, but also there was continual interaction between the two.

As we saw, as soon as an idea came from a commission for the preparation of the General Chapter, Dom Ignace thought it important that all “parts” of the Order be aware of it. The meeting at Monte Cistello in 1964 had already proposed an interaction between the Central Commission and the Regions, thus indirectly recognizing the Regions, whereas the Order continued to be reticent about recognizing them directly and explicitly.

It must be said that for many years several abbots saw the Central Commission

⁴ Cf. *Histoire de la Commission centrale*, in *Un bonheur partagé. Mélanges offerts à Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois*, Cahiers Scourmontois 5, pp. 213-236. Our quote goes from p. 232 to the end. Dom Armand Veilleux has been abbot of Scourmont since 1999, after having been abbot of Mistassini (Canada) from 1969 to 1976, of Conyers (USA) from 1984 to 1990, Procurator of the Order from 1990 to 1998.

as a sort of mini-Chapter between less frequent General Chapters. As said above, this idea had already been launched by Dom Gueric of Scourmont in 1964, but was upheld especially by the USA Region and one or another abbot from the Canadian Region during the 1970s.

In reaction to this trend, which was considered a decentralizing movement, many insisted—even in the formulation of the Constitutions in 1984 and 1987—that the representatives of the regions be simply designated by the Regions, but really elected by the General Chapter.

The parallel and interdependent evolution of these two new structures of the Order that are the Regions and the Central Commission has certainly been fruitful. It has also had its drawbacks. If it allowed the Regions to contribute actively, each in its own way, to the transformation of other structures of the Order and to the elaboration of the new legislation (Constitutions and various Statutes), it has perhaps often led to giving second place to the aspect of mutual pastoral help, which was the first goal of these meetings of abbots and abbesses.

Throughout the evolution of the Central Commission and the *Consilium Generale* (a complex and interesting evolution), the representation of the Regions remained a fundamental element since 1967. Each time that it was a question of revising certain Regions or creating new ones, it was this question of representation at the Central Commission (and also of the delegate to the General Chapter) that caused difficulty. This was an understandable concern, because the number of members on the Central Commission could not increase indefinitely, and it would not be right for one region of three or four monasteries to be represented on an equal footing with a region of twenty.

In order to give new momentum to the Regions and to allow their geographical distribution to evolve freely, the time has perhaps come to imagine a composition of the Central Commission that would be decided on a basis other than representation by Regions.

The Regions were born in the perspective of mutual pastoral aid between the monasteries of the same geographic area. Their increasing involvement in the other structures of the Order has, in several cases, caused them to lose much of this pastoral dimension and to spend most of their time on juridical questions or problems of organization. Moreover, the increasing role taken by the Regions in the preparation of the General Chapters has caused several larger and better-organized Regions, with facility of communication and numerous competent persons, to acquire a preponderant influence on the movement of the Order. At the same time, the Regions farthest from Europe, with more limited means of communication, have often had to be content to “watch the train go by.”

In our day, a more important element than that of the Regions is culture. We

have become more and more sensitive to the multiculturalism at the heart of the Order. The distribution of the Order into Regions has immoderately promoted some cultures very close to one another, like the great European cultures (and their replicas in the Americas), represented by many powerful and influential Regional Conferences, while the numerous cultures of Africa on one hand, and those just as numerous and rich in Asia and Oceania, on the other, find themselves grouped into two Regions that, for practical reasons, can only meet rarely, and thus have a very limited influence on the course of the Order.

To Constitution 81 on the Central Commission was added a Statute, which says that it prepares the General Chapter, “coordinating the initiatives of the Regional Conferences.” At the time this Statute was written, I do not think people realized that it greatly limited the role of the Central Commission. In effect, since this time, it has been the Regional Conferences that prepare the General Chapter. The role of the Central Commission is very subordinate compared to that of the Regions. Concretely, each time that a Region requests that a question be submitted to the General Chapter, especially if it is the object of a vote within the Regional Conference, the Central Commission feels obliged to put the question on the program of the General Chapter. The Central Commission has only to determine by what procedure the question will be treated and, if need be, ask that someone prepare a working paper. Apart from that, each of the last five or six meetings of the Central Commission reviewed the procedure for the study of the House Reports, lightly putting the finishing touches on this procedure at each of its meetings.

One can legitimately wonder if this type of activity of the Central Commission really justifies the expenditure of time, energy, and money implied in a meeting of forty persons coming from all parts of the world. It is true that this meeting can also serve as a Plenary Council for the Abbot General, but so far experience has shown that this activity takes up a very small part of each meeting, and that there is no special reason to deal with questions ordinarily dealt with by the Abbot General and his permanent Council, other than the fact that the Plenary Council has gathered. A much smaller commission could do the same work in a much more effective and rapid manner.

Moreover, the fact that most of the members of the Central Commission are considered, on the one hand, as delegates of their respective Regions and, on the other hand, as elected by the General Chapter, does create some problems. Obviously their presence allows them at times to better explain the positions and points of view of their Region, already known by all through the Minutes of the Regional Conference, but what should they do if their personal opinion differs from that of their Region when it is time to vote or make a decision? Should they express their Region’s point of view or their own in this vote?

If we would dissociate the composition of the Central Commission from the system of Regions, we would have much greater freedom in finding a creative way to work with the multiculturalism of the Order at a Central Commission of more “human” dimensions, and each Region could develop its own identity and respond to the needs of the monasteries concerned without worrying about whether it is too small or too large. Nothing would impede the existence of small Regions of three or four monasteries belonging to the same culture or even the same geographic territory; and nothing would impede the creation of a whole range of interaction among several Regions. This would have a much greater chance of success than the numerous projects of sub-regions, which, with few exceptions, have not been successful.

Besides, given the fact that the style of General Chapters has changed considerably since the completion of the Order's great legislative effort, no doubt there is also reason for modifying the style of the Central Commissions. Much of the work could be done by a “Secretariat of the General Chapter,” composed of a small number of persons, who would meet for the first time one year before the General Chapter and a few times after that. The few superiors that it would be necessary to add to the Council of the Abbot General to form an “enlarged council” could be chosen at each General Chapter on the basis of the same criteria that have been laid down for the election of the members of the Council of the Abbot General.

One can only hope that this new structure of the Order, born in the aftermath of Vatican II and continually evolving in response to the changing situations and needs of the Order, will continue to transform and evolve, and not succumb to the danger of sclerosis that sooner or later threatens all structures.

8.3. THE OFFICE OF SECRETARY GENERAL

(by Dom John Eudes Bamberger)⁵

The office of secretary of the *Consilium Generale* was created by the General Chapter of abbots at its 1969 meeting. This was the second Chapter of Renewal, whose agenda was set, in its general lines, by Vatican II in its decree, *Perfectae Charitatis*. This document called for the updating and renewal of Religious life in light of the spirit and decisions of the Council. A major task of such a Chapter of Renewal, from the legal point of view, was the writing of new Constitutions. In order to implement the general directives of this decree, the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* was issued by Rome with more detailed norms. It called for a “Special General Chapter” to be convoked, provided that first the members of the Order were consulted. This consultation was undertaken by the Order somewhat hastily, due to the short time remaining before the 1967 General Chapter. It took the form of a questionnaire, the results of which were processed by professionals and presented to the members of the Chapter just as its members convened.

Although this 1967 Chapter—the last, by the way, to be held at Cîteaux—declared itself, the “special Chapter” and made provisions for beginning the task of updating the Constitutions, there were criticisms that adequate provision was not made for study of the topics treated, and that consultation of the communities on major issues was not undertaken (see especially the Report of the Meeting of the Superiors of the US, October 1967, p. 33). Changes in the Divine Office in the past had been minor adjustments; now extensive and fundamental adaptations were allowed for by the Council, and the Chapter had provided for experiments. A questionnaire proved inadequate as a means of consultation when a large majority of those consulted were not sufficiently aware of the consequences and implications of some of the prominent issues at stake. As a way of improving the situation in the future, freer and fuller exchange of information and views between the various regional conferences was felt to be desirable.

Another criticism was that the decisions of the Chapter were not sufficiently implemented by those responsible for their application. As a result there was no adequate plan worked out for this 1969 General Chapter, whose work was so important for the future of the Order. Yet, as the Procurator General remarked, the Definitors carried out their functions in keeping with the powers they had been

⁵ Monk of Gethsemani (USA), Secretary of the *Consilium Generale* from 1969 to 1974, Abbot of Genesee (USA) from November 1971 to September 2001.

given. The situation was further complicated because a number of members of the Order had sent complaints to the Holy See about certain decisions of the 1967 Chapter, based in good part on misunderstanding of the Chapter's work and decisions. Thus, the 1969 Chapter opened at a time of dissatisfaction with the current functioning of the structures of the Order. This was but one cause of the considerable frustration and confusion that became evident early in the meeting and that Dom Ignace, the Abbot General, noted in his Introduction to the Minutes of the 1969 Chapter. He added, at the same time, that, although there were decided differences among the Chapter fathers, there was nonetheless a palpable unity of purpose and a good spirit that "led all of us to a more serious examination of our respective positions." As a result, the exchanges took place in a climate of frank but charitable confrontation of divergent views. These differing views were the reflection of a fairly broad variety of observances and spirit in various regions and houses of the Order. In short, the Order was experiencing in its efforts toward "accommodated renewal," called for by *Perfectae Charitatis*, the same kinds of tensions that emerged in the earlier sessions of the Vatican Council. In part, these differing views were all the more deeply rooted and not easy to accommodate in that they resulted from differing mentalities associated with the cultural and social variety in which our Order had become increasingly embodied since the last revision of Constitutions in 1920–1925.

Thus there emerged a general awareness that, in a period of change and experimentation, further provision for communication and explanation was called for, to assure maintenance of the unity of purpose and of spirit that all wished to preserve. One of the concerns expressed in regard to setting up Regions in the Order was that in time these groups would come to function with increasing independence, and strain the coherence of the member communities of the Order. At this time there were some houses and Regions marked by rather widely divergent observances and mentalities. This concern, in fact, was expressed recurrently during the twenty some years that the Constitutions were under revision (1967–1990), and a decided reluctance to extend legislative power to the Regions was determinative. At the same time, need for much more active participation in the preparation of legislation became evident in the course of the Chapter. The challenge was to accommodate these individual tendencies, while preserving unity of spirit and of structure in the Order as a whole.

As discussion proceeded, the fact that observances differed came to be viewed as a sign of the times in an Order that was increasingly spread throughout the world. Instead of viewing these differences as a source of tension and potential disunity, it was proposed by the American Region to adapt to the fact of Pluralism by altering the approach of our legislation. From the very first Chapters of

the early twelfth century until 1969, the principle of unity of observances was accepted as normative for the Order. This principle influenced the way the Chapter was conducted and the way visitations were carried out. All houses, all members of the Order, in principle, were to adhere to the approved Usages. The Visitor was to correct deviations and his report to the Chapter consisted in good part of an evaluation of the practical fidelity to these established norms. Local needs, such as putting aside the night cowl in hot climates, were treated as exemptions rather than as precedents.

So long as this principle was operative, there was relatively little need for any broad communication among the houses. Since there were no officially recognized regional differences, no movement for the formation of Regions had arisen until more recent times when, in fact, considerable variations had been introduced as adaptations and exceptions due to dietary customs, climate, formation needs, and economy among other causes. At this Chapter of Renewal, this variety of needs and of observance was felt sharply. As a result of the frank discussions and the serious study of the situation there emerged two new decisions. The more significant was the Statute on Unity and Pluralism. In this piece of legislation, for the first time, the principle of diverse usages, within specified limits, to be sure, was provided for by the General Chapter. The second was the creation of the office of Secretary General, whose main task was to assist the General and Definitors in the renewal of the Order. Prior to the vote, the recommendation was made that this office be *ad experimentum* for a period of three years, until the next Chapter when the subject would come under consideration again.

I participated actively at the General Chapter as a *peritus* of the American Region, and was elected to this office. When I asked for more detailed clarification of the duties and manner of functioning in this office, the salient points specified were the following. The Secretary General should attend all Regional Meetings as far as possible. He would remain resident habitually in his own monastery (for me that was Gethsemani where I was novice master at the time of the Chapter). His office does not confer legal powers, but involves rather teaching, explaining, and communicating the decisions of the Chapter and the work of the various Regions and commissions as they treated of the issues concerning the Order as a whole (cf. Minutes of the General Chapter for 1969, 107–111; 123, 129 and 191). In addition, two special votes were taken. The first stated that the Secretary of the *Consilium* should organize a group of nuns with the task of bringing their Constitutions up to date. The second vote entrusted him “with the work of organizing his relations with the nuns, as may be dictated by the circumstances in which he finds himself”(192). This rather vague, broadly worded directive was to result in some misunderstanding, readily resolved by appropriate explanations, between me and

the General later on when I assisted the President of one of the French Regions, who called for a meeting to organize a seminar for novice mistresses from various European monasteries. At the period it was far from clear that the nuns should leave the cloister for such a purpose without higher permission. Other duties were listed in detail by the first commission and accepted by the Chapter. They were listed as follows:

- 1 Coordinate and encourage the work of the commissions appointed by the General Chapter (Liturgy, Constitution etc).
- 2 Assume the ultimate responsibility for the preparation of the program of the next General Chapter.
- 3 Set up the program of the meetings of the *Consilium Generale* and advise the Abbot General on a suitable time for convoking them.
- 4 Stimulate studies and discussion on the Regional level in view of preparing schemas for the program of the next General Chapter. (Minutes, 284)

An additional function that evolved after the Chapter was that of visiting the monasteries of the Order. These visits entailed many personal contacts with abbots, monks, and nuns, especially those involved in formation. I made it a practice to visit only those monasteries to which I was invited, so as to avoid any seeming imposition of my presence and views. In fact, most superiors did invite a visit, and this wide contact with local communities proved most helpful in implementing the duties of the office. In retrospect, I believe that one of the most helpful and influential events in relation to the nuns' evolution during this period of change was holding some seminars for formation personnel, especially those for novice mistresses, first in Europe then later in Japan. These were well attended and disseminated some fresh approaches to formation and human development in its bearing on monastic life.

The work of the Secretary General was generally well accepted, and seems to have proved useful at that period when dialogue was just beginning and changes were many and increasing. Certainly the fact that I was at the service of the Regions and those houses that asked for some assistance, rather than in the position of imposing ideas or decisions, was appreciated. One of the chief advantages was that, having actively participated in meetings in all the Regions, the Secretary was often able to contribute to the discussions by sharing the views and decisions of other Regions. This personal communication supplemented the printed minutes in a more vivid and lively manner, and provided explanations based on exchanges and views not expressed in the written reports. Having participated in a large number of such meetings, and having visited many monasteries, the Secretary

was closer to the actual experiences of the houses at a time when experiments and new initiatives were under way. This allowed for drawing up an agenda for the *Consilium* and then for the General Chapter that was closer to the life of the Order than would otherwise have been possible.

By the end of the three years there was a rather firm and general agreement that the office should be continued, so I was re-elected for another three year term (Minutes, of the 1971 Chapter, 206). The nuns too expressed their approval in a vote giving the Secretary General the right of participating in their next Chapter with the right to vote (Minutes of Nuns' Chapter, 105). The African monasteries seemed particularly open to this form of aid, so the Region voted for the Secretary General to serve as their representative to the *Consilium Generale*. Not long after the Chapter, however, I was elected abbot of Genesee Abbey (November 1971). As had been remarked at the 1969 Chapter, the functions of the Secretary General would seem to be incompatible with those of a local abbot. Especially the numerous and prolonged absences from his community made it undesirable for the same person to hold both offices simultaneously. For some period of time, it proved possible to continue both functions by a more judicious selection of meetings to attend, and by a policy of more selective visits to individual monasteries. But as time progressed the need to curtail still further such trips raised the question of resigning.

However, in the meantime, the Regions had become increasingly adept at sharing, and with the experience of some years the new structures functioned more smoothly. Also, a new Abbot General would be coming into office, a man with large experience in dialogue and with the workings of the Order. There was a new expectation that the General would make friendly visits to communities of the Order, and could be invited to Regional Meetings. Moreover, there had always been some feeling that the office of Secretary General was created for a time of rapid change in a climate where adequate structures for exchange were not as yet in place, and dialogue as yet largely undeveloped. Moreover, the 1971 Chapter had voted that the Definitors would have a more pastoral role (Minutes, 168, vote 12). In brief, I came to the view that it would serve better were I to continue in office until the following Chapter, when my mandate would expire, and then recommend that the position be discontinued, having fulfilled its function. As I saw it, the office would have become in good part redundant by the time of the 1974 Chapter, for the new General himself, aided by the Definitors and experienced abbots, would be able to integrate the tasks of the Secretary into his own functioning.

I was able to continue preparing the agenda for the *Consilium*, and so assist in preparation of the General Chapter, and attempted to maintain such contact with the Regions and communities as was compatible with the duties of a local abbot.

Certainly this entailed that I was forced to curtail activities such as education, visiting communities, and taking fresh initiatives for seminars, etc. At the 1974 Chapter, among others, I made the recommendation that the office be discontinued, and it was accepted by the Chapter. Since that time the General himself, a Definitor, or the Order's Secretary for Formation often takes part in Regional Meetings, circulates information, and visits individual communities, so that these structures adequately provide for the needs of the Order.

For me personally the opportunity to become familiar with the various regions of the Order was a highly rewarding one. Contacts with dedicated monks and nuns proved to be a strong stimulus to fidelity to the Cistercian charism and a valuable support in a variety of manners, in addition to facilitating the work of the Secretary General. The early Chapters of our Order in the twelfth century consisted of abbots, all of whom had been formed in the same monastery of Cîteaux, and all of whom knew one another personally. This fact colored the style and spirit of the legislating process, and had a good deal to do with avoiding a legalistic approach to the Cistercian life. The experience of Secretary General served in some measure to contribute to a more personal approach to the major issues of the time, including the relations of the two branches of the Order. The subsequent pastoral visits of the General and Definitors and the work of the Secretary for Formation have continued that tradition effectively to the present.

8.4. THE FATHER IMMEDIATE AND THE REGULAR VISITATION

(by Dom Salvador Toro) ⁶

The contribution I have been asked to give will be a kind of testimony, or, perhaps better, a description of my experience. After many years attending the General Chapters and receiving and making Regular Visitations, the experience to draw on is extensive, at least in time. I will try to take a fresh look at the topic, with simplicity. I have used various sources from the Order: Dom Bernardo Olivera, from whom I quote two long texts, Dom Armand, abbot of Scourmont, on how the processes of renewal are made, in a course given to the Superiors of the Spanish Region about on "The Spirituality of Law," and Sister Colette Friedlander, in her exhaustive thesis "Decentralization and Cistercian Identity 1946-1985," a work that merits our recognition, because its contents

⁶ Superior, then Titular Prior of Sobrado (Spain) from 1971 to November 2003.

correspond admirably to its title; it is well worth studying in order to learn about the evolution of the Order in the last fifty years. I have also benefited from the work of Louis Lekai.

There are three aspects: the *institution*, the *legislation*, and, finally, *experiences and questions*. Using this basic framework, I will not treat these elements separately, but rather as an interconnected whole, because in fact each of these realities influences and modifies the others.

An institution with nine centuries of existence can only come down to us influenced by the thousands of transformations of history, cultures, reforms, and endless interpretations, which are not easy to follow, as if they formed a straight and continuous line. Rather, we should speak of the periods in which, the figure of the Fr. Immediate or the Institution of the Regular Visitation, were minimized, supplanted, and even forgotten. The “Exordium” and “Observantiae” study programs give a good account of the vicissitudes of the Order, especially from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century.

Already before Vatican II, a process of renewal and decentralization was under way in the Order; it also had a noticeable effect on the two institutions we are discussing. After Vatican II, this process was taken further in the search for the authentic tradition, in order to bring the intuitions of the early Cistercians up to date.

The juridical structure of the Order has, as it were three roots, stemming from one trunk, making it possible to live out a specific vocation for men and women who freely desire to make gospel values a life project in this particular way of following Christ. In a way, everything is organized in function of the local community, composed of concrete persons seeking the face of God. The aim—*terminus ad quem*—of the entire project that originated at Molesmes is the person. Monastics are in a constant process of *returning*; this *return* takes shape and defines itself over time, thanks to brothers and sisters, who contribute to the configuration and growth of the Order through their humble and laborious life in community.

Return to the Rule, to Paradise, to the lost likeness, to the Gospel, etc., is the Order’s characteristic process of renewal. We came to birth marked with this sign of renewal, and it continues to be the guarantee of our belonging to the Order and being faithful to it.

Much has been written about the origins of our Order, but we continue to discover new things. We take as certain the affirmation of L. Lekai:

The Cistercian reform was, above all, a movement of spiritual renewal, and a factual recital of its origins must therefore be followed by an analysis of the

ideals which inspired the small band of monks who founded Cîteaux. The movement's expansion through new foundations induced Stephen Harding to commit to writing the basic elements of observances at Cîteaux and to insure the cohesion of the expanding monastic congregation by devising the nucleus of a constitutional framework. (p. 21)

The annual visitation of each monastery by the father-abbot became impaired by the hardships of travel as well as by the excessive number of visits some abbots of numerous "daughters" were obliged to make. Cîteaux had 24 directly affiliated houses, Pontigny 16, Morimond 27 and Clairvaux over 80. (p. 50)

Very soon the Cistercian constitution had to undergo important modifications, above all because of its expansion and its position in relation to the hierarchy of the Church and to the great abbey of Cluny. The Charter of Charity could not foresee all the problems that stemmed from this expansion. In the middle of the twelfth century, it became obvious that the annual Chapter was far from being the general assembly of all the abbots of the Order. It is hard to imagine that the number present at the annual General Chapter ever reached one-third of the abbots. The knowledge that the capitulants had of the monasteries of certain regions was poor, and in fact, they could not make decisions about concrete matters of the life of the communities. This authority gap was filled easily and in a fairly natural way by the Fathers Immediate, but they were ultimately accountable to the five proto-abbots, who used a firm hand in maintaining the cohesion of their respective filiations, and the abbots of the filiations took their lead.

Gradual decentralization in co-responsibility was a sort of meeting-point in the Order's self-recognition, but this meeting-point was blurred or ignored because of other interests that had little to do with the foundational ideals. The era of the "Congregations" was the highpoint of this whole process of light and darkness. The Congregations had much to contribute, but some of their interpretations took the Order far from its origins; they were, nonetheless, a link in the Order's history.

The Father Immediate and the Regular Visitation are nearly inseparable, even for the nuns. The Father Immediate and the Visitor are not always the same person, but even when they do not coincide, the Father Immediate needs to be fully informed about the Visitation process.

The First Root. "Taking the Gospel for guide" and the Rule—the good soil in which the entire project of the Founders of Cîteaux took root—the Cistercian community both enjoys *great autonomy* and is framed within a *certain dependency* on its

community of origin. We are “motherhouses” and “daughter houses”; “filiation” is one of the pillars of the Cistercian institution.

The Second Root. The second root, following the institution’s inherent logic, is the abbot of the founding house, who becomes the Father Immediate of the foundation. He is the bond in this *charismatic dependency*, as I would call this type of dependency between motherhouse and the daughter house. We are well aware of how important this “figure” is in our particular law. In order to fulfill his mission, the Father Immediate cares for the *spiritual progress of his daughter house*, which he does normally, but not exclusively, by means of the *Regular Visitation*.

The Third Root. The third root is the *General Chapter*, at which all the superiors of the Order come together from time to time, *in equality*, to attend to the *good of souls*.

When the mission of each of the institutions fulfils its responsibilities and keeps within the limits of its competence, the communities in question live in a climate of liberty, without tensions, and in peaceful fellowship. Relations between the various organs of the Order are fraternal. This was the ideal of the Charter of Charity, and it is the ideal we want to rediscover for today, both in its original inspiration and in renewed creativity.

This is our context, as everyone knows. All institutions go through various stages in their history, and this history leaves its mark on the institution, showing that it is alive and susceptible to the vicissitudes of the times, culture, and trends in the context in which it lives and develops. Thus a quick glance at the two institutions we are concerned with here, the Father Immediate and Regular Visitation shows that they are no exception to this law of life. At times local autonomy is stressed; at other times the authority of the Father Immediate. Sometimes the General Chapter takes on competencies that are proper to the Father Immediate; at other times it takes a “hands off” approach and stays out of concrete, complicated situations. It is all a part of history, and in this history we discover the action of the Spirit, guiding us toward the knowledge of the truth, the only truth that will make us free.

Frankly, the Order’s history is complex. The path towards the *simplicity* it has desired and sought throughout the centuries, as a response to the foundational charisma, remains rather blurred. The Order today, in its desire to return to the founding charisma, looks for simplicity and plainness as two basic values. It is true that this search has always been there, more or less explicitly. When the life of the persons is simple, this simplicity and plainness are lived out naturally in daily life,

with its joys and sorrows, with its successes and failures, and with its ideals and discouragements. Fidelity is reborn in fraternal living. When the life is not simple and plain, we theorize and legislate about simplicity and plainness, entering into an ever more intricate complexity, thinking that we will thus obtain *simplicity*, which is the foundation of charity and of freedom. The notion of both Father Immediate and Regular Visitation need to be resituated in this context of fraternal simplicity in mutual help. The possible complexity of legislation should be cleared up by means of trust, engendered by fraternity.

8.4.1. The Father Immediate

The text of Constitution 74 is as follows:

The Father Immediate is to watch over the progress of his daughter houses. While respecting the autonomy of the daughter house he is to help and support the abbot in the exercise of his pastoral charge and to foster concord in the community.

The verbs used already indicate the positive and pastoral meaning of the Father Immediate's "power" in his daughter house—to be vigilant or watch over, to help, to sustain, to encourage, to consult, to make efforts, to remedy. I believe that a simple reading of these verbs clearly shows what the Father Immediate's attitude of "vigilance" should be over his daughter houses. The new dynamic is found in the *affectus caritatis*, which is neither weakness nor permissiveness, but is above all a support for loving fidelity.

Dom Bernardo, our Abbot General, in a conference at the 1996 General Chapter, spoke with clarity and precision about his view of what the Father Immediate is meant to be. I quote the text in full, because I believe that it is enlightening in the Order's present circumstances:

The first word that needs explanation is the verb, "to watch over." What does this word mean and how far does it reach? To watch over means to look after carefully and be personally concerned with something. Applied to the Father Immediate it means that, without being a "vigilante," in the pejorative sense or in the sense of a "keeper of public order," he must exercise his function of "watching over" his daughter house.

It should be emphasized that this service of vigilance is not meant to be fulfilled only during the Regular Visitations, but rather has to be practiced whenever the circumstances require it and whenever the Father Immediate

discerns that it is opportune. We should remember that the text is in the Constitution on the Father Immediate, not in the one on the Regular Visitation. Consequently, the service of vigilance is a permanent one.

The text goes on to say:

If he notices there a violation of a precept of the Rule or of the Order, he is to try with humility and charity and having consulted the local abbot, to remedy the situation. (C. 74.1)

That is, the Father Immediate has authority to remedy the situations that require it. Obviously he has to do this with humility and charity, and consulting the local Abbot or Abbess, but he would sin by neglect, which is a form of lack of prudence, if he did not apply the necessary remedies.

In some serious cases, which are generally rare, such as the removal of a brother in charge of an office, he can act without the consent of the local Abbot or Abbess. The *Constitutions* only speak of a consultation. Once again we need to remember that the powers of the Father Immediate are “ordinary and flow from his office,” that is, he has these powers because he is the Father Immediate.

In grave cases which are also urgent, it would be a similar imprudence to postpone their solution until the next Regular Visitation, above all if the latter is in the distant future.

All of this perhaps was not clear in former times, or even in more recent times. It was clear, however, for the members of the General Chapter of 1920 when they treated the theme of the attributions and responsibilities of the Fathers Immediate. The *Acts* of the Chapter read as follows:

In order to clarify the powers and responsibilities of the Fathers Immediate, reference is made to the decisions of the General Chapter of 1905. We read there, in the Minutes of the Third Session: “A Father Immediate has sufficient authority to know the important things that are happening in his daughter house between two Regular Visitations and to prevent any violation of the Constitutions. During this interval between Visitations he has the duty to denounce the violation to the Most Reverend Abbot General.” This venerable assembly thinks that the following words can be added: “and, if the case is more or less urgent, to take those measures which he judges opportune and necessary.” (Acts, 1920, p.28)

The Chapter Fathers of 1920 had a clear sense of the principle of subsidiarity: there is no reason for the Abbot General to do what could be done by the Father Immediate. They also understood well what local autonomy is. In other words, there are visits of the Father Immediate which are not Regular Visitations but which are not thereby simply friendly visits or “Visits of

ordinary vigilance.” The Visits I am referring to can be the reply to an appeal of recourse, in order to respond to a concrete, precise situation. They are, therefore, “canonical” Visits, since they express the rights conferred on the Father Immediate by the *Constitutions*. Perhaps we can call them, “Visits of Extraordinary Vigilance.”

It is obvious that any commentary on the functions of the Father Immediate in relation to his daughter houses involves the principles of “autonomy and communion.” Some clarifications about autonomy might be useful.

8.4.2. Autonomy

It is possible to speak of autonomy at different levels and in two directions: outward, in relation to the Holy See; and inward, within the Order. The most concrete way to approach the matter is to situate ourselves at the level of the local community.

The monasteries of the Order are autonomous, that is to say, *sui juris*, and their Superior, the abbot, is a Major Superior (cc. 813, 620); he enjoys due internal autonomy and due interdependence in regards to:

- the other houses of the Order
- the few possible intermediate structures
- the supreme government, or the Generalate.

The monastery, as a legitimate institution, governs itself and must be able to act with liberty of spirit. Obviously this autonomy is not absolute. If it were, the Order would not exist. The autonomy is enriched and limited by the principle of solidarity or communion: the good of the whole Order may require the existence of common norms that limit local autonomy in view of the higher good to be enjoyed by all.

It is also obvious, but useful to mention, that local autonomy is at the service of concord and progress in everything that is correct according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Constitutions of the Order. Wherever rectitude of life is lacking there is room for correction and external intervention. The principle of solidarity, as we will soon see, is another enrichment and limitation to local autonomy.

Local autonomy might be considered as “filial and organic autonomy.” In fact, there exists a relation of subsidiary dependence between each monastery and the authorities of the Order responsible for vigilance over observance and for the

preservation of its patrimony, i.e., the General Chapter, the Abbot General, the Father Immediate, the Visitor.

In normal situations there is no need for the higher authorities to intervene, except to promote, encourage, and stimulate the communities. But when there occur abuses, serious failure in observance, detrimental economic management, situations of conflict, passivity, or ineffectiveness, the Order has all the necessary powers to remedy such situations.

For this reason it can be said that the higher authorities do not have “direct” power over the monasteries and over the monks and nuns, but, rather, “indirect” power in accordance with its object, in order to watch over, promote and stimulate the Cistercian life, correct defects, and preserve the patrimony. This we are trying to do at present in the Order. Nevertheless, there are things that perhaps need rethinking. Our current Constitutions, in principle, still presuppose things that are now rare or non-existent. I am referring to life-term abbots, superiors for indefinite terms, and superiors “*ad nutum*.” It is normal that a change in the legislation in the spheres proper to authority has repercussions more or less directly on the subordinates and, in my opinion, this is the case of temporary superiors and superiors “*ad nutum*.”

The Father Immediate’s role is set in the framework of the former life-term superior or in those of the present-day indefinite-term superior, but it does not, in fact, take into consideration the reality of a change of Father Immediate every six years.

At present a Father Immediate, elected for six years and not re-elected, by obligation, visits his daughter houses three times while in office, if he does not delegate. (This is not a hypothetical case, but a real fact.) In this situation of constant changes, the Father Immediate does not know the members of the daughter houses, and they are not disposed to create a climate of trust when there is no continuity or consistency.

If we add the difficulties of the distances of the daughter houses, the problem is more serious. And it does get more serious, not only for the filiation, but also for his own community, which, in the case of numerous daughter houses, suffers from the absence of its abbot for long periods of time. We ought to return to the words of Jesus: “it was not thus from the beginning.” I am aware that there was and is opposition in the Order to the redistribution of the filiations. It is a matter that has been dealt with several times in the General Chapters, and we always come back to the same point.

I ask questions for which I do not have the answer and moreover I know they are questions that many do not question. Nevertheless, the experience of a good number of our communities with numerous and distant filiations, in cultures not

their own, should make us more sensitive about exercising mutual responsibility in a real way, and not only in theory, or at most, during the meetings of the General Chapter.

What kind of pastoral function can a Father Immediate exercise if he lives on another continent, visits the community every two years (when he does not delegate), and, moreover does not know the language, culture, or customs of the country that he visits? I am not unaware that visiting a community of a culture distinct from one's own can be enriching both for the visitor and the community visited, but it remains something exceptional, novel. The case of a superior *ad nutum* makes what I am trying to explain even more obvious.

And if, as we hope, the abbesses become Mothers Immediate, then we will see the Order's capacity for creativity. We will also see that, in addition to the criterion of foundation, we can have recourse to the criterion of adoption, which is applied only in rare cases in the masculine branch, and, possibly find other modes of mutual help between communities as foreseen in the Constitutions.

The Regional Conferences could take on some pastoral responsibilities to make up for the absence and distance of the Father Immediate. There can even be absences and distances within one's own region.

Are we so sure that the figure of the Father Immediate, such as we have it defined today, is definitive? Is it the best way to watch over, help, support, foster, consult, remedy, etc.? How to bring it about that the vigilance or watching over, the help, the supporting, the fostering, consulting, and remedying, be realities close at hand and effective, or, better, *desiderata*, something to be desired?

Are there, in our present legislation, figures similar to the wife of Lot, remaining unchangeable, for better or worse? It is not good for an institution to put its best efforts into looking at and studying the past, lingering on past glories, dusting off our valuable tomes... Our present and urgent task is to direct ourselves toward the future that God places in our hands, in order to be able to offer it in a significant way to the women and men of our times.

8.4.3. The Regular Visitation

Regarding Regular Visitations, we read in c. 75.2:

The purpose of the regular visitation is to strengthen and supplement the pastoral action of the local abbot, to correct it where necessary, and to motivate the brothers to lead the Cistercian life with a renewed spiritual fervour. This requires the active co-operation of the community. The visitor is faith-

fully to observe the precepts of law, the spirit of the Charter of Charity and the norms of the General Chapter.

Because of his clarity and precision, I again quote Dom Bernardo, from the same conference cited above:

The service and right of Visitation is complementary to the service and right of vigilance. The right of making the Visitation is added to the obligation of being vigilant in order to be able to act more broadly, in a specially favorable context and in a periodical way that favors continuity.

The Regular Visitation is the normal and most favorable moment for the Father Immediate to exercise his service of correction and encouragement, but it is not the only one, as has been said above.

It should be pointed out that the situation of the Fathers Immediate in monasteries of monks is different from that of the Fathers Immediate in nuns' monasteries. This is due to the fact that the Fathers Immediate in the houses of nuns have the same obligation of vigilance but without the corresponding right of Regular Visitation.⁷ This situation brings with it several consequences which are not always positive, from unresolved problems to a lessening of the Father Immediate's authority, passing though an excessive multiplication of visits.

It is important to take note of the difference between the Father Immediate and the Visitor. Perhaps the most obvious consequence is that the Visitor, when he is not the Father Immediate, provides a transitory service, in communion with the Father Immediate, whom he must inform about the results and effects of the Visitation.

For monasteries of nuns, it is obligatory to delegate the Visitation every six years; it is the Father Immediate who delegates, in agreement with the abbess. Thus the difference between the monks and the nuns resides in the fact that, for monasteries of monks, the Father Immediate *may* delegate the Visitation, whereas, for monasteries of nuns, he *must* delegate the Visitation at least every six years.

For practical reasons, I am providing an outline of the Statute on the Regular Visitation. The purpose is to see at a glance the contents of each number of the Statute, and to perceive the possibilities and richness that this Statute on the Regular Visitation has to offer for the real renewal of our communities. This will stand

⁷ When Dom Bernardo gave his conference, it was still the Abbot General who was Visitor for the nuns. At present, the right of Visitation has been given to the Father Immediate, who must delegate another person at least once every six years.

CHAPTER 8: THE EVOLUTION OF THE ORDER'S STRUCTURES

out even more clearly if we compare it with the former Statute, entitled *De Forma Visitationis*, which is included at the end of this contribution.

(See outline, next page)

OUTLINE OF THE STATUTE ON THE REGULAR VISITATION

I. THE NATURE AND FREQUENCY OF THE RV

1.1. Autonomy and communion of the monasteries

- Bonds
 - Charity
 - Common tradition
 - Doctrine and Law

1.2. Superiors united by the

- Bonds
 - Solitude for the good of each community
 - This is exercised by the Filiations and the RV

1.3 Frequency

- All the communities
- At least every two years.

2. The RV and its purpose

2.1. A time of communion in the same Cistercian grace.

2.2. Expression of corresponsibility between all the communities.

2.3. Purpose of the RV (its finality)

2.4. In relation to the brother/sisters:

- To encourage- watch over- renew- strengthen

2.5. In relation to the Superior:

- To perfect
- To correct, if it is necessary, the pastoral action of the Abbot

3. The brothers/sisters

3.1. Reception of the Visitor with

- Faith
- Joy

3.2. RV = call to conversion

- Personal
- Communitarian

3.3. Suggestions–Guidelines–Corrections accepted with

- Respect
- Humility

4. The Superior

4.1. Reception with confidence

4.2. Assistance to his pastoral office

4.3. Success of the RV

- Cooperation
- Receptive attitude
- Search of the good
 - Of the community
 - Of each brothe/sisterr

5. Visitor- (visitors)

5.1. Respect

- Community
- Superior

5.2. Confidence in the Spirit acting in each one

5.3. He will help the community to:

- To examine the quality of the monastic life
- To perceive the invitations of God

5.4. He will observe the prescriptions of :

- Law
- The Spirit of the Charter of Charity
- The norms of the present Statute

6. Mutual understanding and collaboration

6.1. Visitor-community- superior, condition for success and permanent fruits

6.2. To accompany the RV

- Prayer
- Attention in fidelity to
 - The Gospel
 - Rule of St. Benedict
 - Constitutions
 - Norms of the GC
 - Particular grace of the community

II. THE PERSON OF THE VISITOR (Visitors)

7. The Visitor

7.1. Fr. Immediate- Abbot General

7.2. Can Delegate to:

- Superior of an autonomous monastery of monks
- Abbess in office (Only for nuns)
- Former Abbot (titular Prior)
- Councilor of Abbot General
- Former Abbess (Titular Prioress) (Only nuns)
- Nun Councilor of Abbot General (Only nuns)

7.3. Conditions for Delegation:

- Consultation of Local Superior-Delegation for monks
- Consultation of local Superioress (she consults the community)

8. Obligatory Delegation in the monasteries of nuns, every six years.

9. Possible companions of the Visitor

9.1. An Abbot or Abbess

9.2. A former abbot or abbess

9.3. An expert in some particular matter (only monks.)

9.4. Conditions of accompaniment:

- Consultation of the Superior(ess) and the Superior(ess) to the community

9.5. In all these cases there is only one official Visitor.

9.6. All in the community must meet with him.

9.7. The companion assists the Visitor with

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- His councils
 - Carry out the tasks the Visitor entrusts to him
- 9.8. He will inform the community how both will proceed,

10. Advice for a new abbot

- 10.1. It can be useful to have a more experienced abbot/abbess as companion
- 10.2. To respect, as far as possible, the request of
- A superior
 - A community
 - A delegated Visitor
 - A companion

11. Inculturation (only monks)

- 11.1. Fr. Immediate of a different culture
- Delegate a Visitor of the same culture as the community
- 11.2. Fr. Immediate of the same culture
- Delegate a Visitor of a different culture
- 11.3. Fr. Immediate of a different language
- Delegate a Visitor of the same language as the community
- 11.4. If there is need of a translator
- Must be approved by the conventual chapter of the community visited
- 11.5. The translator must maintain the same confidentiality as the Visitor

III. BEFORE THE VISITATION - PREPARATION

12. Prayerful attitude of all those involved:

- Community—Visitor
- Grace of discernment and good zeal
- Celebration of the Mass of the Holy Spirit

13. The superior

- 13.1. Will encourage the community in the efforts of preparation
- 13.2. Will encourage the brothers that they be honest and sincere
- 13.3. Will give conferences about the importance of the RV
- 13.4. Will allow the community full liberty

14. The community

- 14.1. Its necessities and the moment of its history
- 14.2. Examine
- Community dialogues
 - Meetings of the Council
 - Other means suitable for the collaboration of all
- 14.3. To identify some important points to be treated during the RV.

- 14.4. The possibility of redacting a community document

- 14.5. The liberty of the Visitor to treat other points

- 14.6. The Visitor can propose a particular method
- The community must conform to it.

15. The Visitor (esp. if he is not the Fr Immediate)

- 15.1. Information about the community he will visit
- 15.2. He will speak with the superior
- 15.3. The superior will inform him of the preparation of the RV
- 15.4. The Visitor will ask of God the grace of discernment
- the courage necessary to take the necessary measures

IV. THE VISITATION

16. During the Visitation

- 16.1. The following points constitute the more evident aspects of the community life.
- 16.2. According to circumstances, the Visitor will be particularly attentive to some of them.
- a) the climate of charity, obedience and unity in the community (C. 13–16)
 - b) the spirit and the celebration of the liturgy (C. 17–19)
 - c) the balance between prayer, lectio and work (C. 20–23; 26)
 - d) silence and separation from the world as well as the observance of the enclosure (C. 24; 29)
 - e) fidelity in living the monastic ascesis in poverty and simplicity of life (C 25; 27–28)
 - f) the reception of guests and apostolate (C. 30–31)
 - g) the service of the different officials (C. 35)
 - h) the functioning of the councils (C. 36)
 - i) the financial situation and temporal administration (C. 43.3; 74.3);
 - j) the quality of initial and ongoing formation (C. 45 ff y n.66 of the *Ratio Institutinis*)
 - k) the relation with the absent brother/sisters and the foundations;
 - l) the state of the physical health of the community;
 - m) the ministry of the chaplain in the monasteries of nuns. (C. 76)
 - n) the relation with the Order and the local Church (C. 31–32; 77 ff)

17. The interview with the Visitor

- 17.1. All the professed members of the community

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have the right and duty to meet with the Visitor.

17.2. In order to share:

- their vision of the community: strong points, challenges, and problems

17.3. To answer questions in truth and love

17.4. It is not necessary nor is it permitted to speak of the hidden faults of the brothers/sisters

17.5. Matters should not be kept till the moment of the RV

17.6. If there are community dialogues, all should participate actively

18. Authority of the local superior

18.1. He maintains his ordinary powers

18.2. He will put at the disposition of the Visitor all the necessary information about the community and about his own administration

18.3. He will not preoccupy himself about what the brothers/sisters may say to the Visitor

18.4. A kind attitude in case of possible imprudence

19. Interventions of the Visitor—with the community

19.1. He will act with tact and charity. The action of the Holy Spirit in all.

19.2. He will suggest opportune means—encourage growth and fidelity—he will help to resolve difficulties.

19.3. To keep in mind a healthy pluralism—To not impose what is done in his house

19.4. Objectivity and discernment in relation to the monastic values

19.5. Objective idea of the community derived from the information received

19.6. If there is something to correct, he will do it with prudence and love.

20. Interventions of the Visitor—with the Superior

- Encouragement—Correction

20.1. To help the local Superior in the exercise of his or her pastoral function

- Giving council to the Superior himself
- Observations directed to the community

20.2. If the procedure of the Superior is erroneous or deficient

- he has the right and the duty to correct it.

20.3. To take care not to prejudice the authority of the Superior

21. Interventions of the Visitor—with the Superior

- Possible change of Superior

21.1. Examination of the situation of the community

- Advise
- Demand

21.2. Change of Superior

21.3. He will previously consult the Fr. Immediate (if he is not it)

21.4. He will inform the Superior with courage and goodness

22. Special interventions of the Visitor

22.1. He will not act precipitously

22.2. He will dialogue with the superior

- With the community (in the measure that it is possible)
- With the Council (at least)
- Before taking an important measure

22.3. Take sufficient time for the RV

22.4. In exceptional cases:

- After consulting the Superior
- He may remove an official from his or her function
- (Prior—Cellarer—Novice Director)
- Or the responsible person in some department

22.5. He cannot name the successor, neither in an office nor in a department

22.6. He will inform the Fr Immediate

V. CLOSURE OF THE VISITATION

23. The writing of the Visitation Card

23.1. He will write it with care, showing:

- That he has heard what was said to him during the RV
- That he has made efforts to understand well the situation of the community

23.2. He will make a summary in the Letter of the vision that the community has transmitted to him.

23.3. He will add his own perception of the community

23.4. He will give council, encourage, invite to conversion

23.5. He will point out matters of possible and desirable growth

23.6. He will concentrate on some essential aspects

23.7. He could leave a list of minor points.

24. Participation of the community in the redaction of the Visitation Card

24.1. It could be useful to present

- to the community
- to the council
- to the Superior
- the points of the Visitation Card for a possible dialogue

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- 24.2. He will indicate to the Superior the observations about which he is thinking to make before or after reading the Letter
- 24.3. The Visitation is closed normally with the reading of the Card
- 24.4. Open Visitation
- Only in exceptional situations
 - for a determined and precise time
 - having consulted the community
 - the local Superior
 - the Fr. Immediate

VI. AFTER THE VISITATION

25. The Superior has a specific responsibility

- 25.1. He or she must promote in the community reflection and evaluation
- 25.2. Put into practice the recommendations of the Visitor
- with a spirit of faith
 - In communion with all the Order
- 25.3. The Visitation Card will be read a few times each year
- According to the instructions of the Visitor
- 25.4. The community reflects on the grace received in the Visitation and their response
- 25.5. And evaluate the putting into practice of the Visitation Card and the recommendations of the Visitor

26. The Visitor

- 26.1. He will send a report to the Abbot General within two months
- 26.2. He will send a report to the Fr. Immediate
- An invitation to pay attention to the practice of some particular recommendation
- 26.3. These reports must be substantially the same as the Visitation Card
- 26.4. If he has not been able to say everything in the Visitation Card
- He will notify the Abbot General
 - With the possibility of taking them up in the next Visitation

27. The Abbot General

- 27.1. He can respond to the report of the Visitation
- By himself
 - By means of his Council
- 27.2. He can suggest means to help the community

28. The Superior

- 28.1. He or she could send a report to the Abbot General and to the Fr. Immediate

- After consulting his Council
 - Or the whole community
- 28.2. Sending a report to the Regional Conference, depends on the Superior

29. Possibility of recourse

- 29.1. A Superior and the community can always have recourse against the Visitation
- 29.2. The recourse is presented
- To the General Chapter
 - To the Abbot General, who acts as Vicar
 - To the Holy See

30. Confidentiality

- 30.1. The Visitor and the Community visited have
- the right
 - the duty
 - to keep confidentiality and respect
 - for the persons involved in the Visitation
- 30.2. The Visitor will not reveal the names of those who have made observations
- 30.3. He is obliged to use discretion about all that concerns the community visited.

VII. CONCLUSION

31. The expression of the bond of charity between the houses of the Order, the Regular Visitation thus prepared and lived, constitutes a privileged spiritual event offered to each community in order to assure its growth in fidelity to the Cistercian grace.

DE FORMA VISITATIONIS

*We include the former Statute De Forma Visitationis (from the twelfth century).
If we compare them, we will see the action of the Holy Spirit in the Order.*

[The finality of the Visitation]

- 1 When he has to make a visitation, the visitor will proceed with extreme precaution and diligence: With fidelity and prudence (1), he will propose to correct excesses and conserve peace (2).
- 2 Maintaining intact the discipline of the Order, he will attempt everything he can to move the brothers to a greater respect towards their own abbot and to the grace of mutual love in Christ.

[Duties of the Abbot visited]

- 3 On his part, the Abbot visited will be attentive to show himself obedient and docile to the visitor according to the rules of the Order and he will do all he can to better his house as someone who has to render account to the Lord (3).
- 4 For this, at the arrival of the visitor, the Abbot of this house or, if he is absent, the prior or the one who replaces him, will hurry to advert and supplicate, as well as prescribe to the brothers that they suggest and propose with fidelity and confidence, in public or in private according as they judge preferable, that which they think must be corrected.
- 5 On the other hand, he will avoid putting obstacles to the realization of the correction or, once carried out, he will take care to adjust himself to it.
- 6 In the presence of the visitor or after he has departed, he will abstain from any measure of retaliation, of reproach or movement of indignation toward any brother.
- 7 On the contrary, if anyone does not keep the proper reserve or discretion, he will refer it in good spirit, without complaining, to the judgment of the visitor.

[Duties of the Abbot Visitor]

- 8 In relation to the visitor, it is true that he should not trust every spirit (4). In any matter of which he has no knowledge, he will inform himself with diligence and, when he has clarified it, he will put things in good order with a lively zeal at the service of the Order and with sentiments of paternal charity.
- 9 He also will impede that the brothers return to points already conveniently corrected, that they give themselves over to uncontrollable hypothesis and perturb the spirit of the fathers and brothers with vain suppositions.
- 10 If anyone does this, the visitor will scold and reprimand (5) according to merits.
- 11 He will also impede that a brother put off or keep in reserve until the arrival of the visitor that which seems to need correction, as to aggravate the scandal, something, which is completely detestable. To the contrary, the matters which arise are published and will be emended in due time.

[Sanctions]

- 12 If the visitor does not respect this ruling, he will be sanctioned as is just by a superior abbot or by other abbots of his rank, or inclusively the General Chapter will chastise him.
- 13 In a similar way, if the abbot visited does not expedite the observance of this same ruling, he will be seriously culpable before God and worthy to receive a sanction from his father-abbot or the General Chapter.

[Appendix: Confessions]

- 14 No guest-abbot, not even the visitor, will hear confessions unless he is the father of the house visited.
- 15 Moreover, if the case is serious, the very father of the house visited will try to send the one who has confessed to him, to the abbot of this house and with the suitable loyalty, will do what is necessary, with all diligence, in order that the brother, as is due, open his conscience to his own abbot (6).

8.4.4. Complementary Note on the Father Immediate of the Nuns

(Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois)⁸

In the case of the *nuns*, the Father Immediate is an abbot designated by the General Chapters (the Chapter of abbots until 1970; since then, the Chapters of both abbots and abbesses), with the consent of the conventual chapters of the communities involved. The Father Immediate is generally the abbot of a house of monks relatively close geographically. His function evolved a great deal during the last years of the twentieth century.

Until 1997, the Visitor by law was the Abbot General, who nonetheless had to delegate the Father Immediate at least once every six years. Thus the Father Immediate, who did not go regularly to his daughter house as Visitor, sought other occasions to visit his daughter house to exercise his responsibility of vigilance. From this comes the habitual multiplication of informal visits, especially with the geographical proximity that often exists between the motherhouse and the daughter houses of women. Distances are greater vis-à-vis daughter houses of men.

This can be a good arrangement, but it can also restrict the autonomy of the community and inhibit the abbess, if the frequency of the Father Immediate's visits is too great, every three months for example, or even more often.

Moreover, up until 1983, the juridical situation of the Father Immediate was not the same vis-à-vis the monks and vis-à-vis the nuns, because the nuns of our Order were not exempt from the bishops' jurisdiction.

THE EXEMPTION OF THE NUNS

Officially, since 1834, the Order had only the "spiritual care" (*cura spiritualis*) of the nuns; otherwise they depended on the jurisdiction of the bishops.

Still the bishops had at their side, so to speak, the Fathers Immediate, who assured the bond with the Order, but were simply the bishops' assistants. The 1836 Constitutions (taken over in 1883 for the observance of La Trappe), which were the only Constitutions for the nuns approved by the Holy See until those of 1926, say that "in the exercise of his charge, the Father Immediate will always be mindful to act in dependence on the bishop whose place he holds; also, he will always take care to acquaint himself with the bishop's intentions and to conform to them

⁸ Superior then abbot of La Trappe (France) from February 1976 to October 2003.

exactly, rendering an account to him of the spiritual and temporal administration of the House.”

The Holy See has often been reticent (even after the Second Vatican Council, particularly in 1970) about the monks looking after the nuns too much. However, it should be noted that, at that time, equality did not exist between the abbots and abbesses; it was not possible for the nuns to take in hand matters that concerned them, for the abbots alone made up the General Chapter. The Holy See was so reticent on this point that, after the formation of the OCSO in 1892, the Order did not want to present new Constitutions for the nuns, for fear that the occasion might be seized upon to accentuate the nuns’ dependence on the bishops. It was only in 1926, as we have said, that the OCSO presented to the Holy See new Constitutions for the nuns.

In these Constitutions, which continued to be in use until the Vatican II *aggiornamento* and the 1990 Constitutions, a suitable balance was sought between the powers of the bishops and the powers of the Order, i.e., in this case, the powers of the Father Immediate. In order to lessen the interventions of the bishop as much as possible, occasions for the Father Immediate to intervene were added, at the risk of unduly limiting the autonomy of the community.

The draft text studied in 1921 stipulated that the Fathers Immediate would possess by delegation the same powers as the bishops, except those that the bishop reserved to himself. The Father Immediate would be the only delegate of the bishop. It was a way of escaping, in practice, the interventions of the bishops; but the Holy See did not accept this solution. Consequently the Constitutions simply state that the Abbot General and the Father Immediate should come to an understanding with the bishop concerning measures to be taken or authorizations to be granted.

Nevertheless, occasions for a Father Immediate to intervene in his daughter houses were still quite numerous after all. For example, these Constitutions of 1926 make the Father Immediate a real “superior.” They state: “The nuns have a Superior (named Father Immediate) . . . from the Order.” No doubt, this satisfied their concern to have another authority as a counterweight to the bishops, who sometimes were called “ecclesiastical Superior” of the nuns, even if they were only delegates of the Holy See. As for the monks, the Father Immediate is not called a “superior” of his daughter-houses, even if he does exercise a real authority.

It was likewise said in the 1926 Constitutions: “The Father Immediate ought to be consulted by the Superior on all matters of importance within his authority” (n.15.4°). In his 1969 article,⁹ Dom Vincent pointed out that the Order has always required the abbess to secure the assent of the Father Immediate for certain

⁹ *Le Père Immédiat de nos moniales*, *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, 31 (1969) 64-73.

important acts of temporal administration. Furthermore, it was not rare for the Father Immediate to help his daughter-house of nuns with its economy. It was logical therefore, that he would have the right to control its administration. "But this 1926 text is too vague," remarked Dom Vincent, "it could easily lead to abuses, since some Fathers Immediate might consider everything to be important. . . A community of nuns is not a monastery with two heads: the Abbess and the Father Immediate."

The opinion of the Father Immediate was required in order to prolong the novitiate and his consent was necessary even to prolong temporary vows (until the 1965 Usages) . . . as well as for other dispensations (fasts of the Order, for example, or to decide whether there was a serious enough reason for omitting to sing the Mass or Offices—Vigils, for example). Before taking the habit or making temporary profession, the postulant or novice had to be presented to the bishop or his delegate. It was, in fact, the bishop or the Father Immediate who presided not only at solemn professions, but also at clothing ceremonies and temporary professions.

In 1954 the nuns received authorization from the Holy See to receive persons for a retreat in their guesthouse: it was to be "under the control and responsibility of the Father Immediate, in agreement with the Abbess" (General Chapter 1954, p. 12–13). This stipulation had to do with the question of enclosure, an area in which, even today, the nuns are not as autonomous as the monks. In the 1926 Constitutions, enclosure was subject to the watchfulness of the bishop as well as that of the Father Immediate. The present-day Constitution 29.6 still says: "The Father Immediate, according to c. 74–75, or the Ordinary of the place is to watch over the observance of enclosure, which is to be reviewed during the regular visitation."

It is canon 615 of the 1983 Code that, on the practical level, granted exemption of the nuns with regard to the bishops, because this canon submits to the vigilance of the bishops only monasteries that have no other real superior than their local superior. This is not the case in our Order, either for women or for men, since we have the General Chapter and the Father Immediate.

Actually, since 1979, the Order had the benefit of a decree (rescript) *ad experimentum* for ten years (one that was not easily obtained), which, if the bishop accepted,¹⁰ transferred to the Father Immediate the faculty of presiding at solemn professions and at the election of the abbess, confirming the election, accepting the resignation of an abbess, and verifying the accounts. Until that time, in fact, it was the bishop who had these functions (as concerns presiding at elections, this

¹⁰ This has not been the case everywhere. A good year after the publication of the rescript, 25 bishops had accepted it, 11 had rejected it (with regard to 12 monasteries), and in 15 cases it seems that no steps were taken (that is to say, beginning in 1979, the rescript was used in less than half the cases).

was also the universal law according to the 1917 code, canons 506 and 535). The 1983 Code clarified the question, as has been said, by restoring exemption to nuns who are attached to an exempt Order.

The 1990 Constitutions, however, reserved the right of confirming the election of abbesses and accepting their resignation to the Abbot General and not to the Father Immediate. On this last point the General Chapter of 2002 made the Chapter the normal authority for accepting the resignation of an abbess, as well as of an abbot. The Abbot General uses his power as vicar of the Chapter to accept a resignation when the Chapter is not in session.

So it is only recently that the Father Immediate has almost the same powers with regard to the monks and to the nuns. At present, the only powers particular to the Father Immediate of a monastery of nuns are:

- He *must* delegate the care of making the Regular Visitation once every six years;
- He presides at solemn professions, which the abbess receives (we must distinguish between the profession received by the Mother Abbess and the monastic blessing given by the celebrant, which is the response of the Church to the monastic gesture of the professed monk or nun between the hands of his abbot or her abbess. Until now the Holy See reserves to a priest the care of giving this “blessing” which is, however, not a sacrament).
- After having consulted the abbess and nuns, in conformity with canons 567 and 630 of the CIC, he should propose to the Ordinary of the place a monk of the Order having the required liturgical and pastoral competence to be chaplain and ordinary confessor.

8.5. THE FORMATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE OSCO (1967–1990)

(Dom Armand Veilleux)¹¹

The Constitutions of a religious Order are not simply a juridical text regulating its internal functions and its relations with the institutional Church. They are a text in which an Order expresses its perception of its spiritual identity and mission. In approving them, the Holy See acknowledges in an ecclesial way the form of Chris-

¹¹ Dom Armand Veilleux is abbot of Scourmont since 1999, after having been abbot of Mistassini (Canada) from 1969 to 1976, of Conyers (USA) from 1984 to 1990, Procurator of the Order from 1990 to 1998.

tian life being lived within this Order or Institute. The process of the formation of such a text is perhaps as important as the text itself.

The way that our Order developed its Constitutions from 1965 to 1990 is an exceptional case of the participation of the entire membership of an Order in the development of a text expressing its own charism. It will be worth the trouble to recount this history. And, to highlight the particular characteristics of this undertaking, it will be useful to say a few words about its prehistory.

8.5.1. The Constitutions between 1893 and 1925

At the time of the “Chapter of Union” of 1892, the three principal congregations issuing from La Trappe decided not only to unite in one body, but also to constitute themselves into an autonomous monastic Order. It was decided at the same time immediately to draw up Constitutions. These were finalized the next year, at the Chapter of 1893, held at Sept-Fons, and approved by the Holy See on August 25, 1894. The outline of these Constitutions is very revealing of the ecclesiology of the time. A first section deals with the government of the Order—the General Chapter, Abbot General, Definitors, Procurator General, Fathers Immediate, Abbots or Titular Priors, etc. The second section deals with observances, and finally the third section with entry into the Order. Our Constitutions of 1990 reversed this pyramid, much as Vatican II had done in the constitution *Lumen Gentium* for the Church.

This decision by the capitulants of 1892 to finalize the Constitutions immediately was of utmost importance for the subsequent evolution of the Order. These Constitutions gave a clear and strong sense of identity to the Order, an identity which helped it pass without too much difficulty through the challenge of two world wars, and allowed it to launch, with tremendous energy, into a vast program of foundations to the four corners of the earth. This clear identity also allowed the Order to transform itself, from an essentially European, and predominantly French, Order to an international and multicultural Order without losing its spiritual identity.

After the publication of the Code of Canon Law in 1917, our Order immediately began the task of revising its Constitutions. This new version, prepared at the General Chapters meeting at Cîteaux in 1920 and 1921—the first General Chapters after World War I—was approved by the Holy See in 1924. As for the Constitutions of the nuns, which had not been affected by the union of the Congregations in 1892, they were also reviewed after the publication of the Code of Canon Law and received the approval of Rome in 1926.

8.5.2. Vatican II and the Search for a Working Method

During the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council, in October 1965, the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* was published, in which all the religious institutes were invited to review their legislation. Paul VI's Apostolic Letter, *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, of August 6, 1966, offered a number of indicators of the way in which it would be necessary to make this revision and, in a very general way, to set about the renewal of the religious orders.

When the Central Commission met at Rome some months later, in October 1966, to prepare the chapter of 1967, how to proceed with the revision of the Constitutions was discussed at length. Finally, a provisional commission was named, whose mandate only extended until the General Chapter, charged with consulting a large number of experts on various subjects. The members of this commission were Fr. Charles Dumont of Scourmont for the section on spirituality, Fr. Edmond Mikkers of Achel for the historical section, and Fr. Basil Pennington for the juridical section. Fr. Basil was the coordinator of this task. Among the directives which the Central Commission gave to this provisional commission, were "to prepare a draft of the outline of the Constitutions," and "to prepare a plan for the organization of the work and to define the method of the approach."¹²

At the Chapter of 1967, the capitulants, after having heard the advice of Frs. Edmond and Basil, both present at the Chapter, decided to create a new commission, giving it the mission "to begin immediately the revision of our Constitutions according to the norms given in nn. 12–15 of *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, and first of all with regard to with the scriptural and theological bases of the Cistercian life." It seems that they envisaged a single text for monks and for nuns.

After some trial and error and a few changes in its membership, the commission delivered a document called *A New Charter of Charity*, which was communicated to the whole Order over the year 1968. It was given a cool reception. The commission courageously set to work again, and offered a series of seven documents to the Chapter of 1969. These documents comprised, among other things, a chronological report of work accomplished, a draft of modifications to the current constitutions of the monks and nuns to conform them to new legislation while waiting for the new Constitutions, and a general draft of the new Constitutions themselves.

¹² Minutes, pp. 43–44.

8.5.3. From 1969 to 1990: The Painful Genesis of a Text

The 1969 General Chapter, which ended in great unanimity, opened in an atmosphere of tension. This tension was due, at least in part, to dissatisfaction with the draft of the commission charged with preparing the revision of the Constitutions, including the last documents sent to the capitulants just before the General Chapter. With the object of overcoming what seemed an impasse, Dom Vincent Hermans had developed another plan just before the Chapter—a counter-plan so to speak. For him, there was no real need to draw up Constitutions. *Ecclesiae Sanctae* distinguished between the “fundamental law” of institutions, the revision of which required the approval of the Holy See, and “statutes” proper to an Order, which could be approved by the Order itself. Could we not consider, then, that our fundamental law was the *Rule of St. Benedict* and the *Charter of Charity*? It would be enough to draw up some declarations on the *Rule* and on the *Charter of Charity*.

A canon lawyer, Fr. Beyer, SJ, who had been invited to the Chapter as an expert, agreed completely with this understanding. He invited us in particular not to hurry. We could take all the time we needed to review important aspects of our monastic life, and make a compilation of legislation later. It is true that the General Chapter of 1967 had already been declared the “Chapter of renewal” to which special powers had been granted, but nothing prevented considering the Chapter of 1969 as simply the first part of the second session of this special General Chapter.¹³ Fr. Beyer spoke in terms of a period of 10 to 15 years. No one thought then that twenty years or more would be spent in this task.

Pleased with this line of reasoning, the Chapter decided: a) to consider the *Rule of St. Benedict* and the *Charter of Charity* as our first and fundamental legislation; b) to prepare secondary legislation which would be a compromise between the simple declaration on the *Rule* and the *Charter of Charity* and the outline proposed by the commission for the revision of the constitutions.; and c) progressively to develop this legislation over the course of the following years.

This decision of the General Chapter of 1969 was certainly the most felicitous one and also one that had the most consequence for the future of the Order. It renounced a hasty drafting of new legislation. Opting instead for legislation that above all followed the life, the Order threw itself into a vast effort of renewal, which could be translated into new legislation later if necessary. In the meantime, the Law Commission made a revision of the current Constitutions to bring them into conformity with the current legislation of the Church.

¹³ Dom Ignace, in his closing remarks, spoke of the General Chapter “ad tempus indefinitum” (Minutes, p 246).

In reality, at the same time as the preparation of the texts of the future Constitutions had been painfully set in motion, the Order had already thrown itself into a vast effort of spiritual renewal, as much from a new awareness of its identity as from the new structures which had been put in place. Therefore, the Regional Conferences, which had existed since the last years of the 1950s, took on more and more importance in the working of the Order and of the Central Commission. The Central Commission, which had its first meeting in 1964 and which became the *Consilium Generale* in 1967, had already become an important organ in the government of the Order.

Already, at this Chapter of 1969, some important decisions had been made. To begin with, completing a task begun long before at the regional level and by the *Consilium Generale*,¹⁴ a *Declaration on the Cistercian Life* was drawn up, which served as inspiration for the life of the Order from that time on, and for all subsequent legislation as well. Along with this *Declaration*, the Chapter passed a *Decree on Unity and Pluralism*, which was already in itself an important piece of legislation. In the course of the same Chapter, the *ad vitam* abbatial term was replaced by the *ad tempus* abbatial term (*ad tempus non definitum*, to which was added in the Chapter of 1974 the possibility of *ad tempus definitum*).

Over the course of the years and even the decades which followed, the Order at the regional level as well as at the level of the General Chapter, while continuing its spiritual renewal, made an important effort to reflect on the fundamental structures of the Order and on its mode of functioning. The General Chapter of 1971 published two documents on "Spiritual Renewal," and each of the following Chapters dealt with one or several important spiritual themes. Gradually, the General Chapter was transformed from an organ of control into an organ of communion, and provided itself with new working procedures. The Vigilance Commission was transformed into the Pastoral Commission. A new statute for "simplified foundations" appeared, which was eventually merged into a new *Statute of Foundations*. The question of the relation between the two branches of the Order occupied many Regional Conferences and more than one General Chapter before the concept of one Order with two General Chapters was arrived at, with the possibility that Abbots and Abbesses together could elect the Abbot General. There were frequent and heated discussions about "collegiality." The reality of collegiality was inscribed more and more into the life of the Order, even if the word itself continued to inspire fear until the final redaction of our Constitutions.

It is important to remember that, parallel with this vast enterprise of spiritual

14 And more precisely from the reflection of the abbesses during their meeting at Citeaux in June, 1968.

renewal and the transformation of the structures of the Order to which it led, a tentative search was going on for a literary form to give to our future Constitutions.

In fact, the mission given to the Law Commission by the General Chapter of 1969 (and the Chapters which followed) was to determine what “form” to give to our Constitutions. In 1971, despite a variety of opinions, the Chapter felt that it was still premature to think of drafting a new text. Too many experiments were underway the results of which could not yet be evaluated. The president of the Law Commission, Dom Guerric Baudet of Scourmont, repeated over and over that this work was premature and, like a good scholastic, that there could be no form without matter. Nonetheless, the Chapter of Abbots in 1974 voted to “begin without delay editing a new set of Constitutions,” and entrusted the work to the Law Commission, which led its president to resign in 1976.

Under a new president, the Law Commission drew up a preliminary draft for the new Constitutions which was distributed to the capitulants before the 1980 Chapter. It was decided that the new text would be sent to all the communities (of monks) of the Order so that a regional synthesis could be made of remarks and suggestions. This would be sent to the Law Commission, which in turn would submit it to the *Consilium Generale*.¹⁵ An identical decision was made by the Abbesses the following year.

This text, called *Project I*, kept for the most part the outline and style of the *Constitutions* of 1924 and 1926 and did not take into account the decisions taken by the General Chapters of 1967 and 1969. A post-conciliar vision of the renewal of the Cistercian monastic vocation was lacking. It was no surprise, then, that this preliminary project received an overwhelmingly negative response from the Order. In any case, it caused a great stir of interest. It was calculated that the responses to the survey totalled over 20 pounds of paper! It is very possible that the main fruit of this preliminary project, as it was for the second, was to cause all the communities and regions of the Order to undertake a vast communal reflection.

When the *Consilium Generale* met at Neiges in November 1982, it had some difficult decisions to make on this subject. It was clear that a new draft, very different from the first, was necessary. But should it be entrusted again to the Law Commission or, as certain regions wanted, to a totally different group? The *Consilium* opted for a Solomonic solution. The Law Commission would do the work, but the project would be submitted to an evaluation group composed of three monks and a nun, and the report of this group would be sent to the communities at the same time as the project itself. It should be mentioned that, since 1981, the Law Commission was mixed (until then it used “correspondent” nuns). Overall,

¹⁵ Minutes, p 27–28; 196–199 and 211–12.

it might be said that the nuns were probably more active in the work on the new Constitutions than the monks.

Project II certainly showed a clear improvement over *Project I*, but it still seemed unsatisfactory, both to the evaluation group and to the communities of the Order. It was found to lack a spiritual character and a fundamental doctrine able to guide the Order in the pursuit of its effort of renewal.

At the *Consilium Generale* at Phare in September 1983,¹⁶ it was decided that *Project III*, which would serve as the basis for the work of the next General Chapter, should be drafted by one individual. The time had come to draw up and have approved by the Holy See an overall legislation that would integrate everything that had been decided on in previous years and would clarify that which still needed clarification. This work was entrusted to a member of the evaluation group, Michael Casey,¹⁷ whose talents, already well-known and well-utilized in all the Australian monasteries of the extended Benedictine family became familiar to the whole Order.

Fr. Michael's text had the advantage of being very well structured and of having an important spiritual and theological character. This spiritual dimension was found not in pious texts on the fringes of texts that were coldly juridical (as is the case for many Constitutions of Institutes and Congregations), but in the structure of the whole. The fundamental idea is that the heart of the Order is found in the local community, that the monk or the nun is found at the heart of the local community, and that Christ is found in the heart of the monk or the nun. The text began, therefore, by speaking of the call to the monastic life and the response to that call in monastic consecration. It then spoke of the spiritual life of the local community, then of its government, and then of entrance-formation. Because certain communities give rise to others, the text then turned to discuss the relations between communities, and finally to speak of that community of communities which is the Order. It is immediately clear that the order of contents is the inverse of the 1893 and 1927 *Constitutions*.

The General Chapter of monks at Holyoke in 1984 and of nuns at El Escorial in 1985 were dedicated almost entirely to the study, article by article, paragraph by paragraph, and nearly line by line, of the draft. It was greatly modified, but its spirit remained. A special commission, called COCO (Commission on the Constitution) ensured a link between work in the commissions and work of the plenary sessions, compiling hundreds if not thousands of amendments suggested by the commissions and individuals and sending them to the assembly for voting. The Holy Spirit was certainly a help in this: the entire assembly (a hundred at

¹⁶ The new Code of Canon Law had been published at the beginning of the year.

¹⁷ Monk of Tarrawarra (Australia).

Holyoke, including delegates, and around eighty at El Escorial) drafted the text and passed it unanimously at the end of each of the two chapters (there was only one abstention at Holyoke).

The very first “Mixed General Meeting” was held at Rome in 1987, during which the texts of 1984 and 1985 were reviewed and voted on in parallel, resulting in two texts practically identical except for questions that concerned only monks or nuns respectively.

This text was transmitted on 26 January 1988 to the Congregation of Religious, which, having assigned various experts to study it according to normal procedure, gave its response on 30 March 1989, suggesting a little over 100 modifications. These were studied by the Regional Conferences and analysed by the Law Commission before being submitted to the Central Commissions¹⁸ at Ariccia in November 1989. A good number of these modifications were small improvements, and others could be accepted without problems. On points where it seemed necessary to assert our own point of view, we made our case and Rome accepted our explanations in nearly every situation.

When the approval of our Constitutions was given by Rome, bearing the official date of Pentecost 1990 (a date suggested by Dom Ambrose), a wonderful adventure of nearly 25 years was completed, during which time the entire Order lived in great unity, despite differences of opinion, sometimes major, on this or that question, and with a true enthusiasm.

In fact, the work of legislation has not ended. Several aspects of our Cistercian monastic life on which the Constitutions do not touch except in broad outline, must be developed in a more detailed manner in many Statutes. In this light, the *Ratio Institutionis*, or *Document on Formation*, was approved by the General Chapter in 1990, the *Statute on the Regular Visitation* (using a precedent from the twelfth century) was approved in 1996, and the *Statute on Temporal Administration* in 1999. Over the course of the same years, the *Statute on Foundations*, which had been approved in a new formulation at the 1987 Chapter, received constant modification to respond to the changing needs of new foundations.

All these documents, despite their great diversity, are marked by a great unanimity, and it would be easy to trace several major themes that may be found in each one, from the *Declaration on Cistercian Life* in 1969 to the *Statute on Temporal Administration*. One of these major themes is the central importance of the community in the spirituality of our Order.

If I may, I would like to close on a personal note. I entered the Order seven years prior to Vatican II, which responded to hopes that never ceased to grow in

¹⁸ The *Consilium Generale* of monks once again became the “Central Commission” in 1987. The Commission for the Preparation of the Chapter for Abbesses had also, on the same date, taken the name “Central Commission.”

me during the first years of my monastic life. Having been given the grace to be a student in Rome through the entire duration of the Council has left an impression on me in a very special way. From my novice master (still living, with 65 years of monastic profession), I received a great love of the Order. I consider it a grace to have been able to carry my small part in all the steps described in this brief historical essay.¹⁹ And, thanks be to God, the life goes on!

8.6. THE FUNCTION OF THE ABBOT GENERAL

It is difficult to evaluate objectively the way in which, after the Council, the function of the Abbot General evolved. The new Constitutions are not innovative in matters of law. One can only notice that the multiplication of foundations and the development of Regional Conferences doubtless infer new ways for the Abbot General to exercise his role as the “bond of unity within the Order” and to “foster good relations among the communities,” by the visits to monasteries that he is asked to make “sufficiently often, as he judges best, to be aware of the state of the whole Order.” The number of monasteries is constantly increasing, in regions more and more distant from one another. The journeys risk becoming excessive and, yet, how can one know the Order without knowing each community, or by going only to houses that are having problems? The General Chapter of 1987 reflected on the “burden” of the Abbot General and the ways to lighten it. Recommendations were made, and it was recalled that the Father Immediate was the first authority one needed to consult in cases where an external intervention seemed necessary. Too often, perhaps, appeal was made directly to the Abbot General, without respecting the intermediate levels. Certain administrative steps at the Roman Congregations could be made by the councilors, and superiors are asked to remind their communities that it might be wise to reduce correspondence with the Abbot General to real necessities.

The Abbot General, like the others living at the Generalate, live outside of their communities. Therefore some think that it is not desirable that their mandates be too long. In 1971, a small majority of abbots was ready to accept that the mandate of the Abbot General be *ad tempus definitum*: 38 to 36, but that was far from the

¹⁹ I might add that it was as far back as 1964 (it's been forty years!), during the first meeting of the Central Commission, that I began to make my small contribution to the renewal of the Order. This meeting was held at Monte Cistello, where I was then a student, and I was invited by the American Abbots who were members of the Commission to draw up for them a certain number of memos, in particular concerning the project “Definition of the Cistercian Life,” which resulted in the Declaration of Cistercian Life at the Chapter of 1969.

two thirds necessary for the measure to be adopted. The present legislation was thus confirmed by a vote of 68 to 5. At the following Chapter in 1974, at which a new Abbot General would be elected, the question of his status was restudied. The abbots were in favor of changing the existing law, 49 to 30. This was not yet the two thirds necessary, and therefore the practice in use was finally extended by a vote of 74 to 6. This is what was put into the 1984 draft of the Constitutions. But, in 1987, at the moment of confirming or rejecting it, amendments were again proposed in the sense of a limited duration. Some suggested a mandate of nine years, renewable every six years. But once again the necessary two-thirds majority was not attained: 51 yes and 34 no, for the abbots; 31 yes and 30 no for the abbesses in favor of a definite term!

Each Abbot General has his temperament and his particular charism. But he is asked above all “to be a pastor who promotes spiritual renewal in the communities.” This is what the two Abbot Generals have done in the course of the last quarter of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.

8.6.1. Dom Ambrose Southey (1974–1990)

(by Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois)

A British national, Dom Ambrose Southey was elected Abbot General on May 7, 1974. At the time he was fifty-one years old, and had been abbot of Mount St. Bernard since July 9, 1959. He entered this community during the Second World War on September 25, 1940 (later he would attribute to Mary a large part in his vocation). He made solemn profession on January 17, 1945, was ordained priest on December 12, 1948, and passed his license in canon law in Rome in 1953, after two years of study in the Eternal City. Named prior at age thirty-one at the end of June 1954, he was part of the team that had to finalize our *Ratio Institutionis et praesertim Studiorum*, beginning in 1957, following the appearance of the document from the Holy See *Sedes Sapientiae*.

As Abbot of Mount St. Bernard, he was remembered as a prudent and open man. His sons gave this testimony, published in *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, 1974, which could apply equally to the way he carried out his work as Abbot General:

His ability to disregard his tastes and personal opinions is surprising; he can also consider a question with calm and perfect detachment. In community dialogues, by virtue of his temperament and formation, it seemed natural for him to allow a total freedom of expression, refusing not only to impose his ideas, but even more, what some might have wanted, to direct

the discussions. [... He] showed a great competence [in administration], which provided the opportunity for two of his qualities to be applied: a clear mind and an exceptional memory. Very often, when examining a matter, he remembers useful details that others have forgotten. Very rarely does his memory betray him. When confusion reigns in a discussion, he is capable of disengaging the essential points, of organizing and structuring a mass of divergent details. But he will only do this in order to clarify an existent situation, not to give an initial orientation to the discussion. His role of Promotor at the General Chapters these last years is a quite remarkable example of this.”

In fact, when elected Vicar General, at the time Dom Ignace Gillet became Abbot General in January 1964, then designated as Promotor of the General Chapter, he played an important role in postconciliar *aggiornamento* in the Order. His tact and his sense of measure, as well as his exactness of thought and objectivity, did much to appease the tensions that were not lacking at this time, especially at the 1969 General Chapter between Dom Ignace and certain Capitulants (see § 7.1.3., above), or again when, in 1974, the quarrel began with the other Cistercian Order regarding the Spanish monasteries of the Federation of Las Huelgas (see below).

Called to succeed Dom Ignace Gillet, during the Chapter of 1974, Dom Ambrose had to direct the work of updating our monastic legislation after Vatican II and the reform of Canon Law that came in 1983. It was during his term as Abbot General that the current Constitutions of monks and of nuns were written and promulgated by the Holy See on Pentecost 1990. His juridical formation and the accuracy of his discernment were valuable in the exchanges that had to be undertaken with the Congregation for Religious. But the approval of the Constitutions was not an ending, “it is only a beginning.” He had his heart set on the communities “receiving” these Constitutions and putting them to good use, as much as possible. For this he did not hesitate to make practical suggestions, so that they would truly be a new call from the Lord, to which one responds in faith and prayer (cf. letter to the communities of December 28, 1984). In his second to last letter to the communities, he sketched a portrait of the monk according to these Constitutions.

Dom Ignace Gillet presided over the first General Chapter of abbesses in 1971, but all those that followed were presided over by Dom Ambrose, until the abbots and abbesses held their meetings at the same place, at the same time, which were called “Mixed General Meetings” (MGM). The first took place in Rome in December 1987, to revise together the draft of the Constitutions before presenting them for pontifical approbation, with the goal of harmonizing them as much as

possible. It was not clear that it would be good to have the abbots and abbesses discuss together; it seemed so likely that group phenomena would be operative, crushing some or inhibiting others. The decision to have a “common meeting” was made by the abbots at Holyoke in 1984 with only 44 votes to 35, and 4 abstentions. Without being opposed to this comparison of views in common, in order to finalize the text of the Constitutions, Dom Ambrose did not hide the fact, in addressing the abbesses at their Chapter of 1985, that he was not for Common (single) General Chapters of the two branches of the Order, especially because of legitimate differences in the way they experienced and understood the exercise of authority. His conference, which has remained famous, caused some reactions at the time. He based his remarks on what he had noticed in his visits to the communities, without wanting to make a value judgment on these differences.²⁰ He concluded by clearly affirming that he did not want to constrain the freedom of the abbesses in their choice, and that he would think it normal that they express their disagreement, if there was any. But in his last letter to the communities, he said again that he was “often struck by the difference in attitude between monks and nuns,” when it came to harmonizing community responsibility and abbatial authority (Epiphany 1990).

In practice it was clearly seen at the Mixed General Meetings that these differences were not at all a hindrance or an obstacle, but were, rather, enriching. Since 1987, the Chapters have not met separately again. Twenty years after the conference of Dom Ambrose to the abbesses, the two Chapters, in their seventh joint meeting, decided by voting 61 to 6, with 5 abstentions (abbesses), and 83 to 14 with 1 abstention (abbots), to establish a single Chapter according to certain conditions.²¹ However, the Holy See did not approve this decision, and therefore it could not be applied, and we continue with two interdependent Chapters, according to the Constitutions of 1990, but both electing a single Abbot General.

Like his predecessors, Dom Ambrose not only gave conferences at General Chapters (he presided over six of abbots and as many for the abbesses, and the last two were joint Mixed General Meetings in 1987 and 1990; at this last one he quickly handed over the presidency to his successor), but also wrote letters to the communities. This teaching was rich and always practical; he never went into lengthy and learned spiritual considerations, but invited communities to reflect on their way of living, flowing from what he had learned in the course of his visits to the communities. It is by its fruit that one recognizes the tree, and it is by the fruit we

20 In the six months that followed his election as Abbot General, he had already visited 38 houses. A year later it was over 120.

21 That is, that all the votes would be taken in common unless 30 capitulants requested that they be separate, and with the possibility of having certain meetings separately.

bear that Dom Ambrose invites us to judge the quality of our life. This teaching remains current, and has lasting value beyond the circumstances in which it was first given. The French version of his writings has been published in book form, the preface of which was written by a monk who was his personal secretary for a time.²² In his preface to the book, he describes the way the Abbot General went about preparing these texts.

Usually, these texts were written between two trips, in the midst of many other distracting topics, during the few short weeks that we were “stable” at the Generalate. For Dom Ambrose it was a question of finding a topic and writing a text. For me it was a question, above all for the circular letters from 1982 to 1989, of translating the text, respecting the meaning, and offering a French text that would be easy to read.... And we were not always in agreement about the translation.... And this was not always an easy task.... The letter on the integration of monastic values is particularly memorable; I certainly agreed with the importance of the theme, but I felt absolutely imprisoned by my own cultural universe and incapable of transposing what was written.

In spite of their brevity and simplicity of presentation, many of the documents published here are pure masterpieces. As a true Briton, Dom Ambrose does not display his knowledge, but it is extensive and, above all, sound. And again, as a good Briton, he was always concise in language and style; he knew how to go straight to the important point, and then deduce all the consequences at the practical level. As a citizen of the country where the juridical notion of “habeas corpus” was born, Dom Ambrose respected the freedom of persons and communities. He showed this respect by always trusting the dynamic that is born from the confrontation of our lives with the Gospel and monastic tradition. Passionate for sports—rugby, tennis, a fascination with cars, not to mention those games practiced across the Channel, the subtleties of which so easily escaped a “continental” European—Dom Ambrose proposed challenges for us, and made us run with optimism on the way of monastic life. However, this optimism was always marked by realism, because he was convinced that everything works for good for those whom God loves, and therefore there is no room in this life for definitive failure or giving up.

While knowing perfectly the monastic tradition and respecting it, this same realism led Dom Ambrose to avoid imposing a particular model of

²² *Pour que le Christ soit formé en nous. Lettres et Conférences*, coll. “Voix monastiques” n. 9, Oka 1995. Preface by Dom Jacques Brière (his secretary from 1982 to 1990, and present Abbot of Tre Fontane in Rome).

monastic life or of monastic community; he was more attentive to consistency in the behavior of persons or communities. Whether in a small or large community, a community rich in talent or poor in means, an “open” community or a more traditional one, it is when charity is active that the Gospel lives in the heart of brothers or sisters, and that is the essential.

The emphasis that Dom Ambrose placed on interior renewal in the practice of monastic *values* is very indicative of his pastoral care as Abbot General. From his first letter to the communities in Advent of 1974 on, he asked each community to examine itself: “What are our monastic values and how are they being expressed in the new situation created by twenty years of adaptation? If all of us look into this matter with sincerity and openness it may well result in a new Golden Age for the Order.” A year later he consecrated his letter to prayer and charity in community, raising many questions, he said, at the end, without trying to furnish answers; his intention was only to stimulate the reflection of the communities. This is what he sought above everything else. In a report on the state of the Order, drawn up at Easter 1980, from his visits to the communities, he spoke of three points that required vigilance: the necessity of affirming the contemplative aspect of our life, the importance of a true understanding of poverty in our modern economic structures, and the difficulty of fostering the true assimilation of the monastic *values*. These three points would be, one after the other, taken up and developed in the following years, especially in the opening conference of the 1980 General Chapter, in the 1983 Christmas letter, and in the one for Advent 1982. In this last letter, on the internalization of values, he tried to analyze what is meant by “value” and also by “integration” or “assimilation” of the monastic values.²³ One can no longer (if this was ever the case) be content to be molded; conformism is not enough, nor is identification with an ideal. It is a question of integrating the monastic values into our own interior system of references, which is at the basis of our freedom of action, beyond what is permitted/forbidden...beyond our blind spots, and beyond our selfishness. What really causes us to act? This is the question that must be asked. To be quite honest, he concluded, let us recognize that we need continual conversion and growth in purity of heart²⁴. Ten years later, coming back to the report drawn up in 1980, he did not see much change in the situation of the Order, and he wondered if there did not exist “a fairly large number of monks or nuns

23 At the 1984 General Chapter, Dom Ambrose said that he was inspired in the letter of 1982 by the theories of Fr. Rulla, SJ, professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, on “values” and “needs” and he developed the theme of purity of heart.

24 Then we would risk, he said in the preceding year to the Abbesses, playing with words—silence, word, etc.—and ignore the profound reality of them.

who are not living their vow of *conversatio morum* deeply enough. That means that they are living it sufficiently enough to give the impression of life, but not so deeply as to cause a notable change in the state of the Order” (Epiphany 1990). The values contained in the Rule of St. Benedict are at the heart of our charism and it is the way of living these values that is basic to the unity of the Order, fashioning its nature. But the Spirit begins by working on the heart of individuals, then on communities and finally on the Order as a whole (cf. Conference at the 1977Chapter).

Community and fraternal charity are also important themes for Dom Ambrose:

We would be indulging in empty idealism if we expected our community to be a group of saints. But at least we have a right to expect it to be a group of people who, taken as a whole, are seriously seeking God according to the Cistercian ideal. If they are doing this then already they are offering support because they are providing living examples and they are passing on to us a living tradition. But notice that I say they are ‘offering’ support. In order that we can accept the offer, it has to be given in a climate of patience and tolerance and love, otherwise it will only tend to put us off. Support can take other forms also, such as sympathy, encouragement, forgiveness, a sense of humor and above all loving concern and interest. In this connection, too, dialogue can be useful since it gives us the chance to express our ideas and to learn from others.

He went on to give seven points—with great precision, wanting to avoid any confusion—on how community life can heal our wounds and make us grow. This 1978 Epiphany letter is a veritable charter of community life that would be good to read again. He came back to the topic of unity in the community in his conferences to the abbesses in 1975, 1978, and 1981. The nuns live the monastic values in a more profound way than the monks, it seemed to him, but they are perhaps prone, by their feminine psychology, to more pettiness in the common life, and he was sometimes horrified to see persons consecrated to God wasting their time and talents over such trivial details. It is evident that Dom Ambrose was not afraid to say exactly what he was thinking.

In fact, was there any important aspect of our vocation that escaped his attention? The table of contents of the collection of his letters and conferences suffices to show that he touched on all the principle questions raised in the Order during the period of *aggiornamento*, and that he knew how to clarify them and give precise directives that are, in reality, invitations to respond to our deep vocation. “If you find yourself wondering whether all the changes of the last thirty years have

been for the best, ask yourself whether fraternal charity seems to have improved in the community, whether people regard the Divine Office as a real prayer and not just as an obligation to be fulfilled, whether private prayer and *lectio divina* are esteemed and respected, whether work is carried out in an unselfish and responsible way. If you can answer “yes” to these and similar questions, then you may rest assured that things are going well even though there may be some room for improvement due to human frailty.” (Letter of January 26, 1987). These are, without doubt, the criteria of vitality. But God alone is judge of the way in which a community lives profoundly. We cannot have an absolute certainty of this: “And perhaps this is a good thing for our humility,” he said to the abbesses in 1985. “We must walk on in faith, putting all our trust in God” (Fifth Conference at El Escorial).

It was during the time Dom Ambrose was Abbot General, in 1980, that the Benedictine world celebrated the fifteenth centenary of the birth of St. Benedict. The highlight of this celebration was a Symposium in Rome at which the members of the Benedictine *Congresso* and the General Chapters of the two Cistercian observances participated, and which ended with the pilgrimage to Monte Cassino, where John Paul II himself met with the abbots. According to its organizers, this anniversary was not meant to be a triumphalistic celebration of the past glories of Benedictine monasticism, but the occasion to revivify our fidelity to the permanent values of the Rule. Dom Ambrose did this, for his part, in his instructions to the Order.

DOM AMBROSE'S RESIGNATION

We have seen that before the election of Dom Ambrose at the 1974 General Chapter, a majority of abbots, but not two thirds, would have preferred that the mandate of the Abbot General be for a determined time. This proposal was not accepted, but immediately after his election, Dom Ambrose announced that he would ask for a vote of confidence at the second General Chapter that would follow. He did this at the Chapter of 1980. The abbesses, who did not participate in the Chapter, had been invited to express themselves by correspondence. More than two thirds of the responses, abbots as well as abbesses, were in favor of Dom Ambrose continuing in this charge, which he did, and afterward confessed, once the results were proclaimed, that a mandate of six years is too short to be truly useful to the Order, given that it takes at least five years for an Abbot General to get to know it. All the same he felt that his mandate ought not to be very long “because in this function, one is cut off from the immediate monastic environment.” Six years later, in a letter to the abbots and abbesses, he announced his decision to present his resignation to the following Chapter of 1987 (which was the first Mixed

General Meeting, that is, the two General Chapters, men and women, held at the same time). But the reactions to this letter made him give up this idea, at least until 1990. The subject of his letter to the communities in January 1988 was on the “disappointments and surprises in our life.” He had not expected to still be Abbot General at that time, “but Providence has intervened and here I am once again!” he wrote. This is what inspired the theme of his letter.

Finally on September 3, 1990, he obtained permission from the General Chapters to resign; not that he was tired, in ill health, too old or discouraged, or weary of the job, but, he said, “after sixteen years away from the regular monastic life, one loses contact with the basics, one becomes anemic spiritually, monastically... going in circles.” To tell the truth, few thought that Dom Ambrose was spiritually anemic or going in circles, but everyone understood the legitimacy of his desire to return to a more regular life.²⁵ His successor was the first to be elected by the two General Chapters (in two different rooms...) on September 8, 1990: it was a forty-seven-year-old Argentinean, the Abbot of Azul, Dom Bernardo Olivera. He introduced himself in the closing conference of the Chapter. He was studying to be a veterinary when he suddenly felt the Lord’s call and entered Azul on October 28, 1962 as a lay brother. He made temporary profession as a monk on May 1, 1966 and then received his formation in theology at Spencer (USA), motherhouse of Azul. Three years later, on March 19, 1969, he made his solemn profession and was ordained priest on July 25, 1971. He spent a year in the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Argentina in 1973, and another year, in 1978, in the Institute of Spirituality at the Gregorian in Rome. He was novice master and professor before being named Vicar Superior in 1983, and elected Abbot in 1984. Unlike his predecessor, canon law is not his strong point, he clarified!

8.6.2. Dom Bernardo Olivera: Recollections of a Secretary

(by *Fr. Elias Dietz*)²⁶

When I began my service as secretary in the autumn of 1998, Dom Bernardo Olivera had been Abbot General for eight years. It was a time of transition both in terms of his approach as Abbot General and in terms of the functioning of the Abbot General’s Council.

²⁵ He continued to serve the Order after his resignation. Not only is he invited to each General Chapter, with the right to vote, but he presided over the law commission of the Order from 1993 to 1999, was interim superior twice, at Bamenda (from 1993 to 1996) and Scourmont (from 1996 to 1998), returned to Scourmont as master of novices, then served as chaplain to the nuns (most recently, at Vitorchiano).

²⁶ Monk of Gethsemani (USA), secretary of Dom Bernardo from 1998 to 2002 and again in 2007–2008, elected abbot of Gethsemani in April 2008.

By that time Dom Bernardo knew the Order well and no longer felt compelled to visit as many houses as possible. He was consciously changing the pattern of his visits and travels: he gave priority to houses that most needed attention and accepted invitations to Regional meetings, congresses, and study weeks if he felt his presence would be of benefit. Instead of undertaking voyages that extended over months, he began taking shorter and more frequent trips. In my four years as his secretary we visited only half of the monasteries. Now that the Order is made up of one hundred seventy houses spread all over the globe (100 houses of men and 70 of women), Dom Bernardo thinks it is time to consider a more collaborative approach to the role of Abbot General, perhaps by enhancing the role of the Abbot General's Council.

The Council itself was changing: at that time it included two nun councilors *ad experimentum*. The experiment became official policy at the 1999 Chapter, so my years at the Generalate coincided with this important transition. Dom Bernardo, who has always been a strong advocate of collaboration on all levels, welcomed the mixed council and sought ways to promote similar developments, such as the possibility of having abbesses or former abbesses as assistant visitors, a practice he used himself for several visitations at Cîteaux.

Dom Bernardo's promotion of women is not limited to matters of administration; a change has taken place in his reading and study as well. Formerly an avid student of Saint Bernard and other early Cistercian figures, in recent years his focus has shifted to women mystics both medieval and modern. For instance, he did an extensive study of the works of Concepción Cabrera de Armida († 1937). Two significant gatherings of contemplative women—at York (June 1999) and Nantes (June 2002)—provided him with a chance to develop his thought and receive feedback from the sisters themselves.

The demands of his office never keep Dom Bernardo from reading and study. He does a great deal of background reading before writing his annual circular letters to the Order or when preparing conferences for the General Chapter or other gatherings. A favorite area of personal study is the Gospel of Mark and he is quick to obtain a copy of any new commentary. He has learned to make the best of his time under any circumstances. Long drives (he is able to drive but prefers not to) or intercontinental flights are a chance to read, reflect, and catch up on rest. At Rome he seldom leaves the house. His idea of recovering from a long trip is to close his door and spend a day alone. In this regard he resembles the Bernard from whom he took his name. Geoffrey of Auxerre's description of his abbot fits Dom Bernardo quite well: "As often as he could get away from business, he would be either praying, reading or writing. . . . His perseverance in these spiritual exercises had won him such exceptional grace that he experienced no tedium or

difficulty of any sort. He was at freedom with himself, at large in his spirit's wide domain, where he had prepared for Christ (as he used himself to counsel others) a spacious room." (*Vita Prima* 3.1.2)

Unlike his patron saint, and contrary to his own physical appearance, he is always in good health and quite fit. Whenever we had to hurry to catch a plane, I was always amazed at how fast this slight, sedentary man can walk and run. He is the despair of well-intentioned brothers and sisters around the world who try to get him to enrich his diet and gain some weight. I learned early on that such efforts are in vain. He has learned to live simply and with the necessary minimum.

As parsimonious as he is with material things, he is not possessive of his time. Whether on visitations, at meetings, or with occasional visitors at the Generalate, he has remarkable stamina both as a speaker and a listener. As a speaker he adapts his approach and his material to local circumstances. In communities used to brief chapters he is brief. In communities that want to make the most of his presence he is capable of talking for hours. As a listener he is never hurried. For serious personal or community matters, rather than set time limits, he prefers to be late or to change the schedule.

He consistently gives priority to persons over structures. Whoever meets him has his full attention. During visits he shows equal warmth and concern to superiors, venerable elders, postulants and novices, retreatants, and employees. In this sense he is more a pastor than an administrator. He seldom shows much interest in financial and practical matters, so it is easy to get the impression he is rather otherworldly. But in fact he has a keen eye for the value of things and, when necessary, makes prudent decisions about such matters as the distribution of funds and the upkeep of the Generalate house.

In some ways his character and Christian experience fit into the archetype of Saint Paul. One has only to read his self-introduction at the 1990 General Chapter to see that his vocation was based on an intensely personal experience of the Risen Christ, a conversion experience not unlike Paul's. Many of his personality traits—zeal, a passion for ideas, and boundless energy—also fit this model. On the other hand, in Dom Bernardo these qualities are tempered by his sense of humor. He is in earnest when he recalls to his brothers and sisters the radical demands of the Gospel and a high ideal of monastic living, and yet he is quick to laugh at anything smacking of over-seriousness and stiffness of manner. Few have taken as seriously as he the task of articulating what monastic renewal entails in the present-day context. He is challenging and demanding about both the spirit and the practice of Cistercian *conversatio*. But, again in the Pauline mode, he would never want law to dampen the spirit.

Dom Bernardo's personality thus runs the gamut from an intense seriousness

to an unstoppable love for laughter. I often thought I got the best measure of the man when I would spend an afternoon struggling to translate the thornier passages of one his circular letters and then spend the evening listening to him entertain a group at table or a whole community in chapter with his vast repertoire of hilarious stories. He has a mischievous streak and enjoys playing jokes on superiors who take his visits too seriously; he usually succeeds in putting them at ease, but occasionally leaves them bewildered!

Although a man of strong convictions, he is open to hearing a wide range of stances and opinions. He manages to be equally at ease in a bishops' synod, an inter-religious dialogue, or a youth group. At heart he seems to have a preference for innovative and future-oriented thinkers and yet can advise prudence and caution when necessary. A good example of this is his relationship with Christian de Chergé, whom he appreciated and encouraged. With characteristic piquancy, he once told Christian that the Order needed monks more than it needed martyrs. While studying Christian's notes of the year preceding the disappearance of the monks, Dom Bernardo was a little surprised to see how much Christian struggled with those words as the situation at Atlas became increasingly dangerous.

Dom Bernardo keeps an ear to the ground on present-day questions such as globalization and the impact of major cultural shifts on monastic life. He makes a point of reading any books or articles published by members of the Order. He encourages and supports scholarly work in Cistercian history and spirituality and often laments the passing of the generation of scholars the Order has so depended on for decades. He has a weakness for publishing and pursues his own projects with enthusiasm. He is forever compiling notes and reformulating his thoughts. Something of a teacher and scholastic at heart, he enjoys reducing complex subjects into easily grasped, synthetic expressions. His writing style is generally direct and unadorned, although he often indulges in bits of word play à la Saint Bernard.

An element of disappointment has been the cool reception his ideas and writings receive in some quarters. This is just one expression of the inevitable tensions he faces as a Latin American at the head of a predominantly European Order and as its youngest Abbot General to date (elected at the age of 47).

Another difficult area has been the relationship between the o.cso and the o.cist, at least at the official level. Dom Bernardo has always had a great desire to see a rapprochement between the two Orders, and is open-minded about possible approaches to the question. His invitations to dialogue, however, have usually been misunderstood or refused. The complexity of the situation was most apparent at the 2000 o.cist General Chapter to which Dom Bernardo had been invited for a day. On the one hand, part of the assembly wanted to profit from his

presence to discuss the topic of the Cistercian Family, on the other hand, the organizers consistently blocked such proposals and insisted on following the agenda. The day ended in failure and embarrassment. At that occasion, more than at any other, I admired Dom Bernardo's ability to remain tranquil in the midst of tensions. Before leaving the Chapter he simply stated that he would be glad to return another day if they wanted to discuss the Cistercian Family. He was the only one at Viale Africa who continued to hope that a return invitation would come. At the last possible moment there was in fact a return invitation, but only for a brief visit at the noon meal. Dom Bernardo proceeded with typical patience and tenacity: he accepted the invitation and made sure he had a chance to make a little speech and propose something constructive before the dinner was over!

Perhaps the best overview of his service as Abbot General comes from Dom Bernardo himself. Shortly before I took leave of him in 2002 he listed for me the priorities he had set for himself. The list is longer and more specific than the program he articulated at the time of his election (see his self-presentation in the minutes of the 1990 Chapter), but the core insights and aspirations remain the same:

- To seek greater integration and a more active role for the nuns.
- To be open to and to promote the life of the Order in Africa and the Orient.
- To open the Cistercian charism to the laity.
- To rearticulate the place of the OCSO within the Cistercian Family.
- To be aware of the pluri-cultural reality of the Order and move beyond European centrality.
- To have special care for elderly communities of the Old World and for foundations in the young Churches.
- To seek greater transparency and truthfulness in interpersonal, regional, and capitular relations.
- To return to Gospel simplicity with a stress on cenobitic mysticism.
- To be Christologically centered, living with hope and trust in the Risen Lord.

It was a great privilege to live with, travel with, and work for a man like Dom Bernardo. In small matters and in great he always keeps his feet on the ground as a simple and humble monk. He is easy to work for and a pleasure to be with. No doubt I learned a great deal from him, but what I most consciously retain from those years is the quality of his presence: he is a fine human being and a man of God.

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8.7. THE EVOLUTION OF THE NUNS' BRANCH OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER OF THE STRICT OBSERVANCE DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

(by Sr Elizabeth Connor)²⁷

Since the middle of the twentieth century much has been written about the two branches of the Order. This paper will attempt to show the development of the nuns' branch of the OCSO throughout this period of change, especially since Vatican II. Three phases of change can be distinguished:

- 1 1959–1971. From the first meeting of abbesses at Cîteaux until the first General Chapter of abbesses;
- 2 1971–1987. From the first General Chapter of abbesses until the 1987 Mixed General Meeting / General Chapters;
- 3 1987–. From the 1987 Mixed General Meeting / General Chapters until the present.

8.7.1. 1959–1971: From the First Meeting of Abbesses at Cîteaux until the First General Chapter of Abbesses

For the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, the second half of the twentieth century was the most significant time of change in its long history. A young woman entering a Trappistine monastery in the 1950s found herself in a milieu which in many ways resembled that of nineteenth century monasteries: a very structured community, numerous rules or 'usages' for all the aspects of daily life, sign language (because Trappists did not talk), strict enclosure, and formation centered on the Rule, the Usages and rubrics. The Divine Office was rightfully of greatest importance in the monastic day—just as it is today and as Saint Benedict said it should be—but it occupied many hours each day. After the Office came work. The third dimension of the Benedictine life, *lectio divina*, was relegated to the background. In the novitiate, "repetitions" by the Novice Mistress were just that: repetition of rules, to which were added readings taken from spiritual writers of that epoch. It is difficult for older members of the Order to realize that they lived that way in the past.

27 Nun at the Abbey of O.L. of Bon Conseil (Canada). Sr. Elizabeth was correspondent and then member of the Law Commission of the Order; she was superior of the community at Chimay (Belgium) from July 1982 to September 1984. This paragraph takes up many of the events already presented above, but as the nuns experienced them.

THE CHANGES AFTER VATICAN II

This rapid look at where we have come from leads us to reflect on the winds of change that blew through the cloisters of our monasteries: the profound movement of return to the sources, which put before us the challenge of trying to grasp the charism of our Founders and live it more truly, as Vatican II urged religious Institutes to do. How many questions were raised, not only about the way of living in the monasteries, but also about structures and, for what concerns us in these pages, the nuns' place in the Order!

Dom Gabriel Sortais (Abbot General, 1951–1963) had begun leading the Order toward renewal even before Vatican II. As for the nuns' way of life, it was becoming quite evident that certain changes were not only desirable but also urgent. It was also imperative that any and all changes which would be introduced should have reference to what is essential in the monastic life: seeking God.

THE MEETINGS FOR ABBESSES AT CÎTEAUX

As early as 1957, Dom Gabriel told the General Chapter of abbots that he hoped to organize a meeting for abbesses, so that they might study their situation in the Order. Since at that time enclosure rules concerning egress made no provisions for meetings, each abbess had to obtain permission from her bishop in order to attend. The abbesses could visit four monasteries of the Order during their journey. At this historic meeting, which took place at Cîteaux in 1959, for the first time the abbesses were able to discuss their common interests among themselves. Dom Gabriel gave a number of talks on subjects such as faithfulness to the spirit of the founders, unity of the Order, spiritual and intellectual formation, obedience and freedom, co-responsibility, consultation of the community and subsidiarity. Several of these subjects later became key themes in Vatican II's *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life: Perfectae Caritatis*.

A second meeting for abbesses was planned for 1964. Because of Dom Gabriel's unexpected death in November, 1963, it was the new Abbot General, Dom Ignace Gillet, who organized this meeting and presided. One of the principal topics studied was unification, that is to say, that there would be one single category of religious in the communities rather than the two (choir and lay) that had existed in the past. This was also in keeping with *Perfectae Caritatis* (n. 15), which had stated that there should be one category of religious. At the request of the Order and after discussion with the Congregation for Religious, a *Decree of Unification* was communicated to the Order by the Holy See in December, 1965, for the lay brothers and sisters who wished to avail themselves of it.

The abbesses met for the third time at Cîteaux in 1968. In the meantime the 1967 General Chapter of abbots had declared itself to be the special General Chap-

ter foreseen by the Holy See in its document *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, for 'adapting and renewing the Constitutions of religious institutes in the Church according to the spirit and letter of the Council' (n.6). Such adaptation and renewal implied experimentation. Accordingly, the abbots took votes on certain changes concerning the Liturgy, on the use of individual cells instead of a common dormitory and, as for silence and speech, brief communications. They stated that the nuns also could make use of these permissions if they wished to do so. The question of suppression of grilles in the nuns' monasteries was likewise brought up. When the abbesses met at Cîteaux in 1968, therefore, they accepted the possibilities of experimentation offered to them by the Chapter of abbots. At a time when uniformity was the norm it took daring to introduce these changes. As time went on, however, their positive influence on the evolution of the communities became apparent. Following their discussions at Cîteaux on the structures of the Order, the abbesses asked for more direct and effective participation in the government of the Order.

At this same 1968 meeting, in reply to the Abbot General's question about what they considered to be the fundamental points of the Rule, the first commission replied as follows:

The Cistercian life is founded on:

- the sense of divine Transcendence, which is the soul of the whole Rule;
- the central place Saint Benedict gives to Christ.

The response of a human being called to this life is:

- seeking God;
- following Christ, by obedience.

As the heart is cleansed by humility, it develops an aptitude for pure and continual prayer, which gives life to one's whole day of *Opus Dei, lectio divina*, and manual work. All this is lived in an atmosphere of silence and separation from the world which is favorable to contemplative leisure and in a lifestyle that is simple, poor and penitent.

The monk (nun) also pursues this seeking for God in community life in a monastery under an abbot (abbess), in deep harmony with his brothers (her sisters), seeking God's will unceasingly (Cîteaux, 1968, Minutes, pp. 8-9).

At the next General Chapter, in 1969, the abbots drew up two documents which became points of reference for both monks and nuns during the aggiornamento years: a *Declaration on the Cistercian Life* and the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*, concerning observances. In the *Declaration* we find quite a few echoes of the text of the abbesses on the fundamental points of the Rule. The two branches were advancing in the same direction, even though they were working separately. The

unity of the Order, in fact, was of prime importance to everyone. During the years of change, this would be borne out over and over again.

REGIONAL CONFERENCES / *CONSILIUM GENERALE* / PREPARATORY COMMISSION

Since the 1960s, superiors in the various geographical regions of the Order had begun to meet together. Originally informal gatherings, these meetings gradually took on a distinctive character. Associations of monasteries drawn together by a shared language or other affinities, they permitted the superiors to exchange ideas and viewpoints. During the first years the abbots and abbesses of some regions met separately (with or without observers from the other branch), while other regions held 'mixed' meetings. In some regions, abbesses attended meetings with the abbots as well as regional meetings of abbesses. As the years went by, all the regions became mixed. So that each sector of the Order might be heard and might share in the preparation of the General Chapters, each region of monks was represented in the *Consilium Generale*, which had originated as an informal consultation group for the Abbot General and soon after became responsible for the preparation of the Chapters of abbots. From the early 1970s on, each region of nuns was represented in the abbesses' Preparatory Commission that prepared their Chapters.

CARDINAL ANTONIUTTI'S LETTER

For centuries Cistercian nuns received their legislation from the General Chapter of abbots. The monks themselves recognized that it was not normal or fitting that the decisions made by the abbesses at their Cîteaux meetings could not be implemented without approval of the Chapter of abbots. Though they did not know it, a change was coming. In July, 1970, the Abbot General received a letter from the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, Cardinal Antoniutti, saying that '*it was not opportune for the nuns to attend monks' assemblies, (but if the nuns so desired) they could celebrate their own assemblies to study, discuss and, to the extent that it was not reserved to the Holy See, decide upon their own legislation*'. The letter stated further that the intention of these rulings was not to split the Cistercian Order into two distinct Orders, but '*simply to accord just and necessary autonomy to the nuns*'. The abbesses could make changes in Book II of the Usages without further authority. For other changes they would need permission from the Holy See. This was understandable. The monks also had to obtain permission from the Holy See to make changes in matters specified by Common Law. At their first Chapter

in 1971, the abbesses availed themselves of the possibilities accorded in Cardinal Antoniutti's letter.

8.7.2. 1971–1987: From the First General Chapter of Abbesses until the 1987 Mixed General Meeting / General Chapters.

This second period of evolution of the feminine branch was one of intense work in the entire Order. The Council had indeed, as Pope John XXIII had predicted, opened windows. Several major aspects of the nuns' life were in transition. We will focus on the most important ones. Sometimes it was like crossing a swift torrent, cautiously stepping from one stone to another:

THE FIRST GENERAL CHAPTER OF ABBESSES, 1971

In October, 1970, Dom Ignace met with the abbess presidents of regions at Maubec to plan the fourth meeting for abbesses, to be held in autumn, 1971. This was the first time that a group of abbesses had planned one of their meetings. In the past this work had been entrusted to the Definitors (as the members of the Abbot General's Council were called at that time). The abbess presidents were also invited to the 1971 General Chapter of abbots as observers, and from that time on at every Chapter of each branch observers from the other branch were present.

This meeting of abbesses opened in Rome on September 7, 1971, with a Mass of the Holy Spirit. Actually, it just missed being a simple dialogue Mass because a number of the participants—including the abbess who had the liturgy booklets in her luggage—had been delayed for hours in Paris waiting for their flight. It was about three o'clock in the morning when they finally arrived at the Rome airport, where Fr. Aimable, the cellarer at Monte Cistello, had been waiting for them during most of the night.

With Dom Ignace Gillet presiding and Mother Ignazia Gatti, abbess of Valsenera, leading the discussions as Promotrix, the abbesses got down to work. Among the councilors of the Abbot General, also present, was the Procurator General Dom Vincent Hermans. The abbesses frequently called upon him to give his opinion on canonical questions. The points on the agenda included:

- adoption by the nuns' branch of the two key documents of the 1969 General Chapter of abbots: the *Declaration on the Cistercian Life* and the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*;
- possible changes in the observances included in Book 2 of the Constitutions;
- setting up structures for the assembly.

The subject of enclosure was discussed, but the abbesses wanted to avoid making premature decisions concerning *Venite Seorsum*, the Roman document on enclosure that had come out in 1969.

This meeting did not begin as a 'Chapter'. In fact, one of the decisions the abbesses had to make was whether they wanted to call their assembly a 'Chapter' or not. After discussion of the juridical pro's and con's, two days before the end of the meeting they chose the name '*General Chapter of the feminine branch of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance*'. How did they feel about their 1971 experience in Rome? The following paragraphs from the Introduction to the *Acts* give us a glimpse:

From the very first days of the meeting, one thing was clear: the concern of all the participants to preserve, above all, the unity of the Order . . . The General Chapter of 1967 had appeared to some of us as a break with the tradition of the Order. We were not prepared for this evolution in the same way that the abbots had been prepared by reason of their General Chapters. But this 1967 Chapter made us reflect. . . . Thus it was that the Chapter of 1969, enlivened by the breath of the Spirit, found us more open and in a positive way resolved to enter upon the way of renewal.

In particular, the two major documents of 1969—the *Declaration on the Cistercian Life* and the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*—gradually appeared to us as engendering new life: not new as to its essence, but as to its form and expression, and a life that has real continuity with the Charter of Charity of the first years of the Order. (Gcf 1971, Acts iii)

THE FATHER IMMEDIATE

Since their meetings at Cîteaux the abbesses had repeated their desire that certain powers attributed to the bishops be restored to the Fathers Immediate, in keeping with the tradition of the Order. The 1971 Chapter of abbesses made an explicit request to the Holy See for the transfer of the following four powers: the right to preside at the election of the abbess and confirm the election, to accept the resignation of an abbess, to preside at ceremonies of profession and to verify the accounts of the community (Acts, Gcf 1971, vote 34). Their request remained without an answer, so that for several years it was not clear how the Holy See looked upon the feminine branch of the Order. Then Abbot General Dom Ambrose Southey invited Mgr. Mayer, Secretary of the Congregation for Religious, to speak to the abbesses at their 1978 General Chapter. This personal contact resulted in greater understanding and mutual confidence. Following Mgr. Mayer's suggestion, the

CHAPTER 8: THE EVOLUTION OF THE ORDER'S STRUCTURES

Chapter drew up a *Declaration on the Unity of the Two Branches of the OCSO*. This text did not contain anything really new, but reaffirmed that the monks and nuns belong to one same Order and that according to their tradition ‘*the unity which makes up the Cistercian Order (is) a unity expressed in two distinct branches, the masculine branch and the feminine branch. . . The bond between the two branches is assured by the person of the Abbot General and by the Fathers Immediate*’. (CGf, Appendix II, p. 54) Several months after Mgr. Mayer’s visit to the Chapter, the long-awaited indult concerning the transfer of the four powers to the Father Immediate was granted. For it to be implemented by the communities, their diocesan bishops had to accept it.

WORKING TOGETHER...

A pattern had already been set for dealing with questions that needed to be studied in the Order. For the monks, there was continual interaction between the regions, the *Consilium Generale* and the Chapter. The regions presented their desiderata and views to the *Consilium Generale*, and from this input the *Consilium* drew up the agenda for the next Chapter. An analogous way of proceeding was followed by the nuns: interaction between the regions, the Preparatory Commission and the General Chapter of abbesses. The Chapters, in turn, proposed questions for the regions to study in preparation for the following Chapter. So from Chapter to Chapter, in each branch during this period of change, all that was done in the Order was the fruit of collaboration on the three different levels.

NEW CONSTITUTIONS

During the following years a major preoccupation of both branches was the drawing up of their new Constitutions, as required by Vatican II. When one looks back over the Minutes of the Chapters, or those of the *Consilium Generale*, the Commission of Preparation or Regional Conferences during those years, it is astonishing how much work was done. The basic juridical principles for the monks were already established, but this was not the case for the nuns. Several aspects of their legislation needed to be clarified or changed. Perhaps the most puzzling question was that of the structure of the OCSO: one Order with two branches and two Chapters. The Order was, and is, juridically unique in the Church; it has no precedent in Canon Law. Another thorny question was how to spell out the authority of the Chapter of abbesses. The nuns’ Chapter does not have the ecclesiastical power of governance. In the OCSO this power resides in the Chapter of abbots. Finding the right answers to these questions took a long time.

The monks' Law Commission had already been blazing the trail for their new Constitutions for several years by the time the first Chapter of the nuns' branch took place. At the 1971 Chapter the abbesses expressed their desire for the participation of some nuns in the work of the Commission. Concretely, that meant regional "correspondents" and a secretary elected by the Chapter. From 1972 on, therefore, one or two nun correspondents attended every Law Commission meeting. In 1977, the Chapter of abbots approved a new *Statute for the Law Commission*, and elected Dom Bernard Johnson as president of the Commission. The statute specified that "*in all questions concerning the feminine branch, the Commission is assisted by the nuns appointed by the abbesses (nun correspondents of the C.I.)*" (Statute, 1977, IV.1). Their presence became all the more useful when the 1978 Chapter of abbesses voted that the nuns' Constitutions should correspond as closely as possible to those of the monks. By votes of the Chapters of 1980 and 1981 (abbots and abbesses respectively), the Law Commission became mixed. Two nun members were elected by the Chapter of abbesses: Mother Danièle Levrard and Sr. Elizabeth Connor. A third nun member, Sr. José Gandara, was chosen by the members of the Commission. All three had already been correspondents of the Law Commission since the early 1970s.

A number of juridical questions necessarily remained pending until the promulgation of the New Code of Canon Law. In the meantime, two projects (we might say "martyr texts") of new Constitutions were drawn up by the Law Commission. The question of the two branches was still difficult. Quite aside from the juridical aspect, there was also the fact that there were divergent points of view among members of both Chapters on the question of the Chapter itself. If the Order wished to have a mixed Chapter, how could that be worked out juridically? With two Chapters, how could there be one single Order? The search for right solutions went on.

In February, 1983, the New Code finally appeared, so that the monks felt they could take steps forward on their Constitutions. At their following Chapter at Holyoke in 1984, using a Constitutions project ("Project III") as a working paper, the abbots studied intently each article, with the result that by the end of the Chapter the vast majority of voters accepted the amended text. As for the nuns, at their Chapter at El Escorial in 1985 the abbesses studied the Holyoke text and other points which applied to the feminine branch. A global vote taken on their Constitutions text at the end of the Chapter was unanimously in favor, save for one abstention. Still, this was not the end of the road. There were points that had to be revised, and the whole project had to be confirmed by the next Chapter.

NOT ONLY JURIDICAL CONCERNS . . .

Although the abbesses were obliged to spend much time, effort and energy on juridical questions during the period of *aggiornamento*, they did not lose sight of other essential aspects of the monastic life. One subject which occupied their attention, as well as that of the monks, was formation. Since other papers in this program deal with this topic, it will be mentioned only briefly here.

At the first Chapter of abbesses emphasis was put on transformation in Christ as being the underlying purpose of all formation, and formation in general was the subject of lengthy discussions. Several years later, at their third Chapter, the abbesses asked a question on the practical level: "How can we integrate our knowledge of the monastic life with our day to day living of it?" (Acts Gcf 1978, p. 52). The Acts of that Chapter summarize their point of view:

Courses, workshops which take place within our monasteries, seminars for novice mistresses, etc., will not be something merely historical or even simply an intelligent reading of the Fathers, but rather will engender the quest for a communal grace found in our contact with these ancients as we live their message today, realizing that they still dwell with us, all of which will prevent us from seeking substitutes elsewhere. Within this Cistercian charism, developing a spirit of faith will consist in recovering the sense of the mystery of Christ which our early Fathers perceived in Chapter 15 of the *Exordium Parvum* (CGf 1978, Acts, p.52).

A number of courses or workshops of various types were, in fact, already being organized in most of the regions. Here only two of these projects are described, but they show the quality of the formation which was being made available to the nuns:

- 1 The Laval seminars for novice mistresses, which were held biennially from 1970 until the early 1980s. Each of these seminars, organized by the secretaries for formation for the South-West France and North/Central Europe regions, was centered on a Cistercian theme such as the Rule, lectio, formation, etc. The participants came not only from French monasteries, but also from other regions and countries.
- 2 The first Patristic-Cistercian trimester for nuns was held at Chimay in 1972. The idea of a trimester had been proposed informally during the 1971 Chapter and had appealed to a number of abbesses. Dom Guerric, President of the Law Com-

mission and an abbot observer at the Chapter, also took an interest in such a project and asked his prior, Fr. Maur Standaert (Secretary for Formation of the North/Central Europe region) to plan a three-month course of studies. The nuns of Notre-Dame de la Paix, at Chimay, offered hospitality to the students in their monastery. The theme chosen for the trimester was “The human being created in the image and likeness of God,” as developed principally by the Fathers of the Church and Cistercian authors. Among the resource persons—monks, nuns and university professors—were Fr. Edmund Mikkers, Fr. Maur, Fr. Charles Dumont, Fr. Jean Chatillon, Br. Gabriel Ghislain, Fr. Gaëtano Raciti and Sr Gabriel Peters. Besides lectures on the theme there were classes on Cistercian methodology, as well as a general introduction to the literary history of the Order of Cîteaux.

In this milieu which permitted maximum integration of study and monastic life, the seventeen nun students (including three of La Paix) from eight different countries attended lectures in the morning, helped with manual work in the afternoon, and lived their monastic days with the nuns of Chimay. Each sister chose a personal study project which she began during the trimester and continued after going back to her monastery. The three Scourmont monks: Fr. Maur, Fr. Charles and Br. Gabriel were available as advisers for these projects and for the nuns’ research. All the participants felt keenly the deep unity born of sharing the same monastic vocation; all caught a glimpse of the Order as a milieu of communion where the grace of Cîteaux is transmitted to each one experiencing it personally. When the students returned to their communities shortly before Christmas, it was with a keen sense of their shared Cistercian vocation. A number of them were asked by their abbesses to give classes on Cistercian spirituality to their sisters in formation, so that the fruit of the trimester was multiplied.

8.7.3. From the 1987 Mixed General Meeting until the Present.

MIXED GENERAL MEETING / GENERAL CHAPTERS OF 1987

If some monks had considered the Holyoke Chapter to be ‘historic’, the 1987 Mixed General Meeting in Rome, concurrent with Chapters of abbots and abbesses, was much more so. It was the first time that the two Chapters had met together. With Dom Ambrose presiding, Dom André Louf, Promoter for the abbots, and Mother Benedicta Geebelen, Promotrix for the abbesses, both Chapters studied all the articles of the Constitutions common to both branches and voted on each one in separate Chapters. The articles that pertained only to one or the other branch were dealt with by their respective Chapters. The abbots took a total of 317 votes, the

abbesses, 295. The Holy Spirit was clearly at work in the assembly. When the final global vote on the Constitutions text was taken, once again the result for the nuns was a unanimous *placet* and, for the monks, acceptance by a vast majority.

A solution was at last found to the long-standing puzzle: one Order with two Chapters. Actually, it was a very simple solution: interdependence. This means that: “*The supreme authority of the Order is exercised by all the superiors meeting in their own General Chapter, according to their Constitution*” (C.77.2). Two distinct General Chapters . . . Interdependence also signifies that “*to make a change in any of the Constitutions which pertain to the integrity of the Order’s patrimony and structures, or concern liturgy and observances, an affirmative decision of both General Chapters is required before the matter can be submitted to the approbation of the Apostolic See.*” (Cf. C.72.1 and 2). Two interdependent General Chapters.

The Decree of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life approving the new *Constitutions of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance* went into effect on Pentecost, June 3, 1990. It was the culmination of over twenty years of study and work on the part of the entire Order.

The 1987 experience had been such a success that everyone seemed to take for granted that in the future General Chapters would always be held concurrently with a Mixed General Meeting. The second Meeting took place in autumn, 1990, a few months after the approval of the new Constitutions. At this Chapter Dom Ambrose gave his resignation as Abbot General. For the first time in the history of the Order, the abbesses had the right to vote in the election of the Abbot General. Beforehand, they had presented a request to the Holy See about doing so and the reply had been affirmative, on condition that each Chapter should vote separately. So the new Abbot General, Dom Bernardo Olivera, was the first Abbot General elected by the two Chapters.

The fact that the Order had adopted Mixed General Meetings concurrent with General Chapters had an important impact on the continuing evolution of the Order. The way of looking at things changed. Though the terms “feminine branch” or “masculine branch” were—and are—used in discussions or documents, the connotations changed. Members of the Order no longer *think* “monks’ branch” or “nuns’ branch” as separate categories, because there is cooperation on all levels. One is more apt to think “region” or “commission” or simply “the Order.”

The approval of the new Constitutions did not mean that there would be no changes in the future. On the contrary, new possibilities opened up for the nuns. Three of these are mentioned here:

- 1 *The Abbot General’s Council*. At the 1993 Mixed General Meeting at Poyo the question of nuns being members of the Abbot General’s Council was brought up. After

studying the question during the next three years, in 1996 abbots and abbesses voted that in addition to the four monk Councilors there would be two resident nun Councilors who would “assist at the meetings of the Permanent Council without the right of vote”(GC 1996 m and f, vote 109). Consequently, two nuns were appointed by the Abbot General. Since this was a provisional arrangement, so to speak, the restructuring of the Permanent Council was studied again by both Chapters at Lourdes in 1999. Both voted together that the Abbot General’s Permanent Council (which in the future would be called simply “the Council of the Abbot General”), would be composed of two members from each branch of the Order elected by the Mixed General Meeting, and a fifth member chosen by the Abbot General and the elected members. The two nuns elected were Mother Danièle Levrard, Promotrix of the nuns’ General Chapter, and Sr. Cecilia Aoki (Acts MGM, Lourdes, p. [2]).

- 2 *The Central Commission* of abbots, just as its predecessor the *Consilium Generale*, when in session acts as the plenary council of the Abbot General, who consults it in the cases stated in the Constitutions. The 1990 Constitutions attribute this same function to the Central Commission of abbesses (St 8o j f).
- 3 *Regular Visitations*. According to the 1990 *Constitutions* the Abbot General continued to be the official Visitor for the nuns. He was to delegate the Father Immediate at least every six years and could delegate another abbot. A statute was added stating that with the permission of the Abbot General, and of the abess and community to be visited, the Visitor could be accompanied by an abess.

Because of the evolution in the Order concerning the regular visitation, however, a new statute had become necessary. A text was drawn up at the Mixed General Meeting at Poyo, but no votes were taken on it. Then, at the next Chapter, in 1996, both Chapters came to agreement on a new text. According to this new Statute, the Father Immediate became the Visitor for houses of nuns (n.7), but he is obliged to delegate another Visitor at least once every six years (n.8). As before, the Abbot General continues to have the right to visit the monasteries, and an abess can be delegated as Visitor in a monastery of nuns. It is also possible for an Abbot Visitor, after consulting the superior and the community to be visited, to be accompanied by an abbot or abess during a visitation in a house of nuns.

At the 2002 Chapter in Rome the question of the obligation of the Father Immediate of nuns to delegate another Visitor every six years was brought up again. In one of the very rare instances of divergent views, the abbots voted for suppression of this obligation whereas the abbesses wished to retain it. Since agreement was lacking between the interdependent Chapters, the obligation remains.

CHAPTER 8: THE EVOLUTION OF THE ORDER'S STRUCTURES

ONE SINGLE CHAPTER

During the whole period since Vatican II, the Order had been traveling a long road with regard to the question of a single General Chapter. Since 1987 the interdependent Chapters have helped create greater unity in the Order. At the 2005 General Chapter the two Chapters took a step further with acceptance of the following vote: "We wish to have one single Chapter which respects 'the healthy differences and the complementarity of gifts' of the monks and nuns according to C72.1." But the Holy See, as already mentioned above (8.6.1.) did not grant the authorization necessary for this change in our Constitutions.

WITH A LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE . . .

Earlier in this paper a formation project was described: the first Patristic-Cistercian trimester of Chimay, which came almost at the beginning of the nuns' journey into renewal. Since the future evolution of the monasteries depends largely on formation, in closing we should also mention a more recent formation program: the workshops on the *Cistercian Patrimony* for both monks and nuns. Three such workshops took place: the first at Jacona in 1994; the second at Cîteaux in 1997 and the third at Viaceli in 2000. Directed by Fr. Michael Casey, and sponsored by the Secretariat for Formation OCSO, each workshop lasted approximately a month. Their goal: to help form a common vision and love for the Cistercian charism. That one phrase sums up what the Order has been striving for during the last half century.

AFTERWORD

As a conclusion to this paper, the principal differences between the situation of the nuns in the 1950s and at present are mentioned here (*see next page*):

THE CHANGES AFTER VATICAN II

GENERAL CHAPTER.

- *Then:* The nuns had no General Chapter.
- *Now:* abbots and abbesses voted in 2005 to have one single General Chapter.

FATHER IMMEDIATE.

- *Then:* The bishop presided at the election of the abbess, confirmed the election and could accept her resignation. He presided at ceremonies of solemn profession.
- *Now:* These powers have been restored to the Father Immediate [*except for the confirmation and acceptance of the resignation of an abbess which belongs to the Abbot General, for the first, and to the General Chapter or the Abbot General for the second*].

TERM OF THE ABBESS.

- *Then:* The abbess was elected for a term of six-years. She could be re-elected.
- *Now:* The abbess is elected for an unrestricted term. If the conventual chapter so chooses, however, she can be elected for a fixed term of six years.

REGULAR VISITATIONS.

- *Then:* The Abbot General was the Visitor by right; he could delegate another abbot.
- *Now:* The Father Immediate is the Visitor by right. He is obliged to delegate another Visitor (abbot or abbess) every six years. (See also *Statute on the Regular Visitation*)

ELECTION OF THE ABBOT GENERAL.

- *Then:* The Abbot General was elected by the Chapter of abbots.
- *Now:* The Abbot General is elected by both abbots and abbesses.

COUNCIL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL.

- *Then:* The Abbot General's Council was composed of monks.
- *Now:* The Abbot General's Council is composed of monks and nuns.

PREPARATION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

- *Then:* There were no Commissions for preparing the General Chapters.
- *Now:* A Central Commission composed of abbots and abbesses representing the regions prepares the Chapter

CHAPTER 8: THE EVOLUTION OF THE ORDER'S STRUCTURES

REGIONS

- *Then:* Regional Conferences did not exist.
- *Now:* All the communities of the Order belong to a Regional Conference.

OBSERVANCES

- *Then:* Based on the *Usages*.
- *Now:* The nuns have drawn up their own Constitutions.

FORMATION:

- *Then:* Nuns could not participate in formation programs outside their own monastery.
- *Now:* Both monks and nuns attend formation programs in monasteries or elsewhere.

CHAPTER NINE

The Regions and the Regional Conferences

9.1. THE BACKGROUND HISTORY OF THE REGIONS

(by Dom Armand Veilleux)¹

When Dom Sortais was Abbot General, several abbots from various places were in the habit of meeting, as a way of helping each other. These meetings were in no way official, but the Abbot General, a great promoter of Cistercian centralization, was afraid of anything that would lead to subdividing the Order into Regions. He dreaded it even more because he had had to deal with an attempt of some Spanish abbots to reconstitute the Congregation of Castille, which would have entailed their passing over to the Common Observance. In 1960 we were questioning the possibility of only convoking the General Chapter every two years and certain abbots were wishing they could meet by nation or by language those years when there was no Chapter. Dom Sortais alluded to this idea in his opening conference for the General Chapter of that year, and invited us to prudence, for such meetings could be “a ferment of separatism harmful to the unity that constitutes the strength and beauty of our Order in the eyes of the Holy See and, let us not doubt it, in the eyes of the Lord.” He had the Chapter vote on the following declaration:

It would be unfortunate if the time between our General Chapters caused meetings that could take the form of Regional Chapters. Nothing prevents the abbots from meeting to discuss their problems together, but these meetings should remain on the level of friendship. The General Chapter declares that it will not recognize these meetings as official in any way and that they should not make decisions or even formulate common desires. (GC 1960, p. 11)

¹ Dom Armand Veilleux is abbot of Scourmont since 1999, after having been abbot of Mistassini (Canada) from 1969 to 1976, of Conyers (USA) from 1984 to 1990, Procurator of the Order from 1990 to 1998.

However, hardly had Dom Ignace Gillet been elected Abbot General in January 1964, than he was confronted with a request from some monks of Achel, who wanted to make a particular type of foundation that was unusual in the Order. At the request of the abbot of Achel, Dom Ignace called together several abbots among those who were most involved in this question, to get their advice. But these abbots took advantage of the situation to discuss the problem of renewal in the Order, and discussed points that could be put on the program of the next General Chapter. They drew up a report that, as they saw it, was worth communicating to the other abbots. The reactions of the abbots would make it possible to prepare the agenda for the Chapter at another meeting of the commission.

But instead, Dom Ignace consulted the abbots on the necessity of setting up this preparatory commission for the Chapter. He did not want to form such a commission without the endorsement of the Capitulants. In a November 25, 1964, circular letter, he synthesized the answers to his questionnaire. The majority really did want this commission, which would be formed according to the number of monks and nuns in each country or group of countries. Thus the abbots of a given Region had to reach an agreement to designate their representatives to this commission.

At this first meeting of what later became the Central Commission, in Rome, in December 1964, the "Region factor" was discussed at length, especially since the agenda of the General Chapter of 1965 included the question of the "Constitutional recognition of these Regional Meetings." Dom Jean-de-la-Croix of Aiguebelle gave a first report on the matter, and he tended to transfer a part of the authority of the Father Immediate to these meetings. Dom Guerric of Scourmont proposed a different orientation, which the assembly approved: there was no need to consider an immediate recognition of these Regional Meetings, which were "all the more appreciated, the more they were spontaneous." "Their principle role," said Dom Guerric, "is not to establish a new institution, but rather to respond to a spiritual need: to establish dialogue and promote contacts. The great interest of these meetings is to know one another better in order to love one another more." Dom Guerric saw in them a second goal that "consists in the preparation of questions to present at the General Chapter." Thus studies could be given to qualified and available religious "since, too often, the abbots are neither qualified nor available to study these questions in depth" (pp. 58-59). He also proposed another interesting idea: since it is a question of allowing the superiors to meet, one "could hope for connections between monasteries more distant from each other, even between monasteries belonging to different continents. Such Regional Meetings should then be supra-national and supra-linguistic, overcoming natural limits as much as possible, so as to become more spiritual. One could invite members who

belonged to other Regions to such meetings” (pp.59–60). In the end, the Central Commission of 1964—paying no attention to the warning at the 1960 General Chapter—asked that Regional reports be sent to all the monasteries.

The 1965 General Chapter spoke explicitly about these Regional Meetings, but did not go as far as the Central Commission would have wanted. The Chapter seemed to want to avoid the danger of “regionalism.” Contrary to the decision of 1960, these meetings were now authorized to formulate common votes, and it was accepted that their minutes be sent to all the abbots. The question of giving them a juridical status was put off until later. However, the Regional Meetings were already given the task of clarifying usages, and they were useful for designating members for the Central Commission.

When the 1966 Central Commission met, the question about the juridical status of these meetings was explicitly brought up, but everyone agreed that the situation was still evolving, and that it was too soon to legislate about it. Besides, an interesting debate was under way on whether or not to have non-superior delegates at these meetings. Finally someone proposed that the Regional Presidents form a Synod-Council of the Abbot General; but others did not see the advisability of such a body. Dom Gueric of Scourmont said: “The essential thing is that each Region be represented at the Central Commission and that each Region be consulted in important matters.”

The following year, at the 1967 Central Commission, the abbot of Aiguebelle presented the desires of the French South and West Region for a new distribution of houses, because the abbesses would be participating in the meetings, and the Region was becoming too large (pp. 13–14). The question of non-superior delegates participating at these meetings was also brought up, but the situation was allowed to evolve freely (p. 14).

The General Chapter of 1967 recognized that the Regions had “an important role in identifying problems and studying them.” Without anyone realizing it, this role would be the source of a problem that would accompany the reform of our institutions. Several Regions could meet more easily because of the smaller distances, and were comprised of more outstanding personalities, who would have a great deal of influence on the movement of the Order. This left the “peripheral” Regions with little possibility of expressing themselves on the way questions were handled and on the formulation of various solutions that would be studied at the time of the General Chapters. In addition, there was the fact that certain influential persons participated in more than one Regional Conference. The same 1967 Chapter decided that, thereafter, its authorization was necessary to form a new Region, and it approved the formation of the African Region.

At the 1969 Chapter new responsibilities were given to the Regions. They had

the care of organizing a court of appeal for a religious sent to another monastery as a disciplinary measure. They established Regional Secretaries of formation, and each Region was authorized to send a non-superior representative to the General Chapter. Concretely, from 1969 up to the definitive edition of the Constitutions, and even since then, the General Chapter has always given tasks to the Regions and involved them in the life of the Order in various ways.

The General Chapter of 1971 was the first to pay fairly close attention to the Regions. It considered them as a “permanent structure,” and required the approbation of the Chapter for the creation of new Regions. At the following Chapter the participants wanted to return to this notion of “permanent structure,” and the 1977 Chapter wrote a “Document on the Regional Conferences,” to avoid having to speak of them in the future Constitutions (Appendix X). This document assigned two functions to the Regions: a) the preparation of the General Chapter and b) the care of extending and developing the pastoral action of the General Chapter in the communities.”

This 1977 Chapter (votes 100 and 102) and the Chapter of Abbesses in 1978 (vote 59) suppressed the requirement for the approval of new Regions by the General Chapter, judging that a simple recognition of their existence was sufficient. These decisions created a lot of confusion in the years that followed (see the description of this process in the minutes of the 1981 *Consilium Generale*, p. 10). In fact, since each Region had a representative on the *Consilium Generale*, the number of members of this group could grow uncontrollably.

Number 81 of our present Constitutions marks an evolution on several points. It no longer speaks simply of free meetings of *superiors*, but of “communities of the Order grouped into “Regions” and these Regions—which can be composed of both monks and nuns—are linked to *geographical areas*. It was no longer possible not belong to a Region, even though no one is actually obliged to belong to one Region rather than another (the definitive text in 1987 suppressed the expression “free associations” that the texts voted at Holyoke and El Escorial included in 1984 and 1985). Also, every new Region has to be approved by the General Chapter. Finally, this c. 81, contrary to the “document” of 1977, stated again that its end is to foster “communion and fraternal cooperation in each geographical area and in the Order as a whole.” This is the only goal mentioned in this Constitution. It is only in a Statute that the “usefulness” of the Regional Meetings is mentioned: for the preparation of the Central Commission and the General Chapter. In another Statute their role of “establishing a dialogue among the various nations and peoples by which the common patrimony of the Order can be more deeply appreciated” is mentioned.

The creation of Regions in the feminine branch closely followed that of Re-

gions for the monks. In practice, almost all the meetings were in common from the beginning. Gradually “Mixed Regions” came into play, even if no one ever succeeded in defining what this “mixedness” consisted of. Concretely, at the end of the Twentieth Century, all the Regions were considered mixed, except the Dutch Region which was officially composed of only men’s monasteries, even though the Dutch-speaking abbesses attended all its meetings (while at the same time belonging to the Central-North-Europe Region).

The nuns of the Region of the Isles, of the United States and of Canada had formed for quite some time a Region called the NAI (North America and the Isles). When the nuns of the United States decided to form a mixed Region with the monks of their country, they were numerous enough (five) to have a delegate at the Central Commission (or Preparation Commission) of the nuns. But this was not the case for the Canadian abbesses or for those of the United Kingdom and Ireland, who numbered only two each on either side of the Atlantic. After many negotiations, it was decided that the mixed Region of the Isles as well as the Canadian Region would each have one representative at the two Central Commissions. As for the Italian Region, formed when the Italian monasteries separated from the Spanish monasteries, the Italian superiors of themselves gave up the right to have a delegate on the Central Commissions, but were content to be represented by someone who would already be attending in another capacity.

As has been seen, each time that the question arose as to whether the Regions could be established freely or whether they needed to be approved by the General Chapter, it was always connected with the question of the composition of the Central Commissions. No one wanted to multiply the number of members on these Commissions endlessly, because they were already numerous, and also because there was always an uncomfortable feeling in these Commissions when giving the same voting rights to a Region with three or four monasteries as to one with twenty-five or thirty monasteries. To allow the Regions to develop along the lines of their original intent (i.e., the free meeting of superiors and communities for pastoral reasons), it would be good to create a composition of Central Commissions that would not be linked to the Regions but would respect a just representation of cultures. (This question has been treated above, § 8.2.3.)

It would then be easier to reconsider how the Regions are constituted, a desire that has been expressed several times. The 2005 Chapter ratified (on an experimental basis) a new division of the houses of four European Regions, forming five more balanced Regions, as will be shown at the end of this Chapter. In what follows, we present the **eleven Regions as they were defined at the end of the Twentieth Century.**

9.2. PRESENTATION OF EACH REGION

9.2.1. The American Region: us Region

(by Dom Bernard Johnson)²

The origin of the United States Region must be seen in the context of the evolution of the Regional Conferences during the time the Constitutions were being developed. Since 1990, several minor amendments to the Statutes of Constitution 81 have been made, but they do not in any way affect the rationale or structure of this extremely useful entity in the life of the Order.

As far back as the Generalate of Dom Herman Joseph Smets (1929–1943), it was taken for granted that, at different kinds of gatherings of abbots, such as at an abbatial blessing or the dedication of a monastery or church or some similar celebration, the abbots present would certainly make use of the time spent together to discuss common difficulties and exchange points of view on questions. These questions ultimately would find their way to the agenda of a General Chapter. Such meetings were very informal and had no juridical force whatever but they were in an embryonic form the beginning of Regional Meetings. Regional Meetings for several subsequent Abbots General, namely Dom Dominique Nogues (1945–1951) and Dom Gabriel Sortais (1951–1963), were just a little less than an anathema. Abbots meeting outside the General Chapter gave the impression of provincialism, something radically contrary to the Cistercian spirit of affiliations. The structure of filiations was a practice highly commended by Pope Pius XI in his personal approval of the Constitutions of 1926. This fear of provinces has turned out to be a groundless fear, as will certainly be proven by any study of the whole idea of Regions in the Order.

The great impetus for Regions was the Second Vatican Council with its documents on religious life and its “adequate renovation,” usually and more properly called renewal. The Order took this seriously, very seriously indeed, and did not hesitate to take full advantage of the possibilities presented to the religious orders in their work of renewal. The 1965 General Chapter was considered the “Special General Chapter” mandated by the practical application of *Perfectae Caritatis*. It was seen quite early that in preparing for such a Chapter and others that would

² Abbot of New Clairvaux (USA) from 1968 to 1970; member of the Council of the Abbot General from 1971 to 1990 (Procurator from 1977 to 1990), Abbot of Conyers (USA) from July 1990 to July 2000.

follow there must be honest consultation of the whole Order. For all practical purposes, the easiest and most efficient way to have such a consultation would be to “listen” to what the various geographical and cultural “regions” of the Order had to say. The Order, since 1955, had spread in a marvelous way to many parts of the world by means of “far distant foundations”—and those not so far away, relatively speaking, as in the United States. The *Consilium Generale*, as it was called later, brought together in Rome under the presidency of Dom Ignace Gillet in December 1964, representatives of various “regions.” These had been named according to a proportional arrangement (there were three American abbots: Spencer, Holy Trinity, and New Clairvaux), for the purpose of preparing the General Chapter of 1965. They did their preparation work well, covering an enormous range of questions and problems.

In the United States there had been a gathering of abbots as such, that is, not on the occasion of some celebration, but a meeting just to get the abbots together in one place. This took place at Holy Spirit Abbey, Conyers Georgia, and it might be said that it was the “brain child” of two very colorful, even charismatic abbots of the epoch, Dom Columban Hawkins³ and Dom Augustine Moore,⁴ the first by sheer force of his personality and the second by the fact that he had been the first American Definitor (Councilor of the Abbot General) and as such was always considered at that time as being “in the know.” No minutes of that meeting are available, but a group photo of the abbots present (all attended, but in various degrees of interest, perhaps even a certain amount of resistance) show a united assembly of “happy abbatial campers.” The reluctance or resistance is understandable as there was always in the background in some abbots’ minds the question, “what will the higher authority think?”

Most, if not all, such resistance disappeared at the Holy Trinity Regional Meeting of 1967, which brought together all the superiors, including the abbesses. At this moment it is important to give a rather “homey” account of how the abbesses came to be present. This present account is from Sister Mary Ann Sullivan of Our Lady of Mississippi Abbey, whose help in putting this short story of the US Region together is invaluable and highly appreciated. Sister Mary Ann was present when this scene took place.

Mother Angela, the Abbess of Wrentham, was visiting Our Lady of Mississippi (Mother Angela was a remarkable abbess, who took boundless interest

3 Abbot of Guadalupe from December 1947 to July 1969.

4 Abbot of Holy Spirit from October 1957 to August 1983. He was a Definitor from September 1955 until his election as abbot.

in the Order).⁵ The Community had gathered in Mother Columba's office (Mother Columba was abbess of OLM for 18 years).⁶ They were discussing the monks' Regional Meeting. During the discussion the question came up spontaneously; "But they are discussing OUR Constitutions; aren't we one Order? We should be there." After a few moments, with the conversation continuing in the same direction, Mother Angela picked up the phone and said "I am calling Dom Gerard." (At the time Gerard Kennedy was superior *ad nutum* of New Melleray Abbey, motherhouse of Mississippi.) Dom Gerard thought it would be fine if the Regional President, Dom Emmanuel Spillane of Holy Trinity agreed. This proved to be no problem as long as all the women superiors were invited.

And so it happened. And thus began the useful, and happy, custom of inviting the abbesses to these meetings, despite an unfortunate disapproval coming from Cardinal Antoniutti, the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, with whom subsequently the US Region would have some pertinent but always respectful relations.

It was about this time also that the idea of creating a Region just for the nuns came up for discussion, resulting in the formation of the NAI (North America and Isles Region, that is the United States, Canada, Ireland, and England), which was discussed above. This particular group held almost yearly meetings in the various monasteries of the region, until the US Regional Meeting held at Picture Rock Retreat House (Santa Rita being the sponsor). At that meeting, the Region declared itself "mixed," thus rather unceremoniously dismantling NAI. Some bad feelings were created by this one sided decision, but in actual fact it was something of a *felix culpa*. From this action the nuns' monasteries involved joined their own monks' Regional Conferences governed by their own particular statutes.

It should be added that almost simultaneously with the nuns joining in the Regional Meetings, representatives of South America (Azul and La Dehesa) and from the Far East (Lantao, Phare and Rawaseneng) were also admitted as members of the US Region. This membership was dissolved amicably when conferences were created in the different geographical areas of the Order (eventually ORIENS, ASPAC and REMILA).

After the Utah meeting of 1967 the US Region began to exercise a certain amount of importance at the General Chapter, without, however, as far as can be judged, ever forming what might be called the "American bloc." The US Region did represent a certain special opinion, perhaps based on a cultural aspect. Top-

⁵ M. Angela Norton, abbess of Wrentham from September 1952 to January 1986.

⁶ M. Columba Guare, superior, then abbess from October 1964 to May 1982.

ics such as temporary abbots, the use of a *loi-cadre*, vernacular in the liturgy, and what would often be referred to as the “lay brother question”—a question that had very particular points of view in the Region itself—were areas of interest in which the American Superiors offered much effort and creative thought.

At the General Chapter of 1969, an important figure entered Cistercian governmental life, the creation of the Office of Secretary of the *Consilium Generale* (sometimes called Secretary General). The main task of the Office, if one can so speak, was to coordinate the work of the Regions. He also had the subordinate task of supplementing in a subtle way the work of the Abbot General, who was very much a monk of his particular time and formation. Dom Ignace found the work of *aggiornamento* very heavy and personally difficult. The first (and it might be said, in a sense, the only) Secretary General with the wide responsibilities that he was asked to carry, was Dom John Eudes of Gethsemani (he became abbot of Genesee in November 1971). He was able to bear the responsibility with sensitivity, great ability and “know how,” given his vast professional experience. Being a member of the us Region, his presence at almost all the other Regional Conferences brought to the us Region a much broader horizon and view of what was happening in the Order. This consequently was able to balance in a very positive way positions and view points that arose at the us Regional Meetings.

The us Region has brought to the Order, and especially at the meetings of the General Chapter, its own brand of humor, intelligence, fire (and there have been some fiery characters among the us abbots and abbesses!). But it has always been respectful of what makes the Order the great organization that it is, namely unity among all the members. The “character” of the us Region can be seen in the Regional Statute approved at the Regional Meeting of 1998, which is cited here as a conclusion to this short history of the Region itself.

THE FUNCTIONING OF THE REGION

The us Region is the official name. The Region is composed of both monks and nuns. There will be at least one meeting held during the General Chapter. Two Regional Meetings are held between the General Chapters, usually one with delegates from the communities (the question of delegates to the Regional Meetings at the beginning met with some opposition, but in the spirit of the times it soon dissipated), one without delegates. The first meeting after a General Chapter prepares for the Central Commission. Delegates elected to attend the General Chapter, attend the Regional Meeting that prepares for the coming General Chapter. There may be separate meetings for pastoral sharing (actually one of the most important and highly appreciated elements of the us Regional Meetings). Parliamentary law

is followed during the full Regional Meeting (this is characteristic of the American mentality). Superiors, delegates and delegates to the General Chapters have a right to vote if the nature of the vote does not restrict this right to the superiors (suffrage has always been a delicate point at Regional Meetings). The president of the Region is elected by the superiors present at the first Regional Meeting after a General Chapter and the president, who may of course be either abbot or abbess, has a number of clearly stated responsibilities, mainly of coordinating and moderating Regional Meetings using the help of two assistant moderators if the Regional Meetings opt for their assistance (as it almost always does) and a very practical, if not complicated, responsibility of dividing the expenses of a Regional Meeting according to a percentage basis.

Statute 81.A on the Regional Conference speaks of “questions of common interest and relevance that may not concern the whole Order.” Our Statute considers such matters as: the regional newsletter; the editor of CSQ, Cistercian Publications; probably most important of all “both members for the Central Commission are designated at a Regional Meeting during a General Chapter.”

The history of all organizations, be it a zoological society or a Regional Conference, is made up of people, of events, of ups and downs, both negative and positive. This is true of the US Region. It has been made up of wonderfully gifted characters, of sad events like the necessity of forming a “Commission for the Future” destined to help one or another monastery of the Region. Perhaps that act best shows the pastoral character, the unity and honesty of the US Region. It has always been a well-united group of abbots and abbesses, monks and nuns whose main thrust is to maintain, encourage, and strengthen the Cistercian way of life for the present and hopefully lead it into a promising future.

9.2.2. The Canadian Region

(by Dom Marcel Carbotte)⁷

The Canadian Region is small compared to other Regions of the Order, since it has only six monasteries, two of nuns (Assomption and Bon Conseil) and four of monks (Oka, Prairies, Mistassini, and Calvaire), but has been able to welcome in its midst, from the beginning of its meetings, the abbots of Rougemont (O.Cist) and Saint Benoit du Lac (OSB, Congregation of Solesmes). The first official meeting of the Canadian abbots took place in 1966, in the presence of the two abbesses of the Region who, from this moment on, have always attended the meetings of the Regional Conference. The official participation of the abbesses in the Regional Conferences of monks and General Chapters, both plenary and special, was even proposed in 1968. Let us also note that at the time of the General Chapters at Poyo in 1993, our Regional Conference was the first to receive approbation as a mixed Regional Conference, able to have a monk or nun delegate who represented it with the right to vote at the Central Commissions. The Canadian Region meets almost every year apart from rare exceptions. These meetings have always been held by turns, in one or other monastery of the Region, except for the 1998 meeting. To emphasize the ninth centenary of the foundation of our Order, we decided to have it at Cîteaux that year.

Since the liturgy expresses in a particular manner the bonds of fraternal communion, the Regional Conference is always organized so that it can take part in the liturgy of the welcoming community as much as possible, and in the evenings to meet the brothers or sisters of this community at chapter.

In 1967 we began a liturgy commission with the participation of the nuns and our brothers of Rougemont, a commission that was active for several years, with the members meeting annually. Also, rather soon, in order to allow for a more universal openness to the Order, we began the practice of inviting the President of the US Region to our meetings, then a representative of another Region or the Generalate, as well as one or other expert according to the needs of the moment.

As for the participation of community delegates at our meetings, this has varied quite a bit over the years. At the 1970 meeting, each superior of our Canadian houses was accompanied by a delegate from his/her community. It had been agreed that this would happen regularly thereafter, but little by little, for one rea-

⁷ Abbot of O.L. of the Prairies in Manitoba (Canada) since December 1969.

son or another (lack of space here or there to receive such a large group, or the difficulty of having two members absent from a small community), this decision was not always respected, except for the delegate to the MGM and his/her substitute, who were regularly invited to all our meetings. The manner of choosing these delegates has varied over time.

FORMATION

One of the great worries during these last forty years has been and remains to be that of formation, initial formation and ongoing formation of the community. From the first meeting of the Canadian abbots we named a secretary of formation for the Region who has been regularly invited to our meetings. We decided at that time to put on the program of each of our meetings a subject having to do with formation. For example in the minutes of our 1985 meeting, formation takes up 36 of the 94 pages. From time to time we have had joint meetings with those responsible for formation, i.e., novice directors, who also meet regularly every two years and who organize different sessions open to all the members of the Region, Trappists, Cistercians, and Benedictines.

There have been various initiatives in this area: in 1969 we began the little fraternity of Ottawa to allow some of our students to take courses at the University of Saint Paul. There was also a round of conferences in our monasteries by Fr. Robert Thomas, ocsO, on the theme of *The Monastic Day according to our Cistercian Fathers*, conferences that stirred up a lively interest almost everywhere. There were also study programs on the Primitive Documents of the Order (lead by Fr. Chrysogonus of Gethsemani), on Saint Bernard (by Fr. Michael Casey), and on the liturgy (by Dom Adrien Nocent, OSB). To celebrate the fifteenth centenary of the birth of Saint Benedict, we organized a symposium on the Rule, with a series of conferences by the monks and nuns of our monasteries. It would also be good to mention here the spiritual animation team made up of three members of the Order, with the mission of helping our communities during the years of renewal.

In 1975 the community of Oka organized a monasticate open to all young monks in formation, with four professors sharing the task, and a program of studies strictly monastic, which had to precede or replace, according to the case, the strictly clerical studies. The program, among other things, proposed to make our Cistercian Fathers better known, to have them studied in such a way as to help the young people savor them and gain nourishment for their spiritual life. Finally in 1980 was born, thanks to the initiative of the monasteries of Mistassini and Oka, the *Cistercian Studium*. It became affiliated to Laval University in 1982, and an agreement between the *Studium* and the University is renewed every five

years. More than forty professors/lecturers have been invited to the *Studium* since its foundation. About thirty students have attended the *Studium*, nine have obtained their baccalaureate, seven have continued as far as the master's degree or the doctorate.

PUBLICATIONS

During the first years of renewal the Region published a newsletter as a means of communion and information at the service of the Canadian Region, which allowed the monks and nuns to know each other better and to share their opinions on the monastic life. The first part of this newsletter was oriented above all, but not exclusively, to the study of the spirituality of our Cistercian Fathers, while the second part was a sort of chronicle of our monasteries, formerly published in *Collectanea*, and that several of our Canadian communities continue by sending circular letters. We should also mention that for several years, Oka has published periodically, but not regularly, various works in a collection entitled "Voix monastiques" ['Monastic Voices'] (The collection of the *Studium*).

It is also Oka that is in charge of distributing in North America and Asia the collection "Pain de Cîteaux," which is presently edited in Canada by Editions Anne Sigier.

PRECARIOUSNESS

As was noticed in our regional report at the Chapter of 2002, for about forty years, all of our Canadian communities, monks as well as nuns, in the image of North American society marked by consumerism, secularization and entertainment, suffer from aging, diminishment of members and a scarcity of vocations at the same time. In the context of our fragility, we remain sensitive to the challenges that recruitment involves for each of our communities, challenges that we share with all the religious communities and with the Canadian Church. In Canada we have seen a marked diminishment in religious practice, with a drop of 50% in Quebec, which had always been the most Catholic province in the country. Added to that is the tendency to reduce the influence of the Catholic faith in public teaching more and more, thus a drop in the birth rate and the rise in divorces, which effects both the young and their parents, the fear of commitment, the negative reaction of families, friends and media and the insufficient awareness of existing communities. To respond to these challenges, we have taken various initiatives. All our communities have opened their doors very wide to welcome numerous groups of young people and help them to know the monastic life better, and some

communities offer the possibility of spending a more or less long time inside the cloister, in view of a spiritual experience. For some time the Oka community has organized, once a year, “week-ends” to help persons discover the monastic life in the Church and also with the hope of awakening vocations. We can add to this a greater use today of modern means of communication to make ourselves known; several of our communities have their own site on the internet. Most of our communities have had a lot of coverage on radio and television, and others have appeared in Canadian magazines and journals.

A practice that is becoming popular is to ask future candidates to spend some time in the community, before receiving them into the novitiate as postulants. This allows those responsible to make a first discernment and it allows the candidate to better prepare for their definitive entrance into the community. We continue to reflect on the needs of young people today and on the responsibility of our communities toward them.

In 1981 we approached for the first time the question of a Third Order to respond to a desire of many people to have some kind of spiritual bond with our Order and especially with a particular monastery. Up to now this question and that of associates has evoked little enthusiasm in our Region, at least at an official level.

In recent years especially, we have become more aware of the fragility of our Canadian communities. We have also sought a way to help one another to exercise our pastoral vigilance in mutual help and support. Thus, since December 2002, we have initiated a new type of meeting with superiors only. It involves rather informal sharing, touching on concrete aspects of our present life. Their goal is to bring encouragement and support to each superior, so that each one can, in turn, guide and accompany his/her brothers and sisters in necessary discernments. This has allowed more serenity, but not without suffering, in the making of certain more important decisions, as for example, for one community in particular, the sale of its milking herd, the closing of its cheese factory and the renting of land.

All of our Canadian communities are aiming at a simplification of life-style, while wanting to maintain the quality of the monastic life. This movement of simplification of structures had already begun around 1975, when two of our communities, Prairies and Mistassini, decided to transfer to smaller buildings better adapted to a small number and to a more simple economic structure. Several years later our sisters of Bon Conseil followed suit, and in their turn have made a transfer. Our brothers at Oka are also preparing to do the same.

All our monasteries have a guesthouse, some larger than others. They are well frequented, but in general do not bring in a large income.

Concerning the care of the very sick or the brothers and sisters who are very

old and require special and continual attention, most of our monasteries have chosen to have recourse either to outside help or to place these brothers and sisters in specialized institutions in order to prevent those responsible for the infirmary from burning out or the entire community from being overburdened.

WORK

Most of our Canadian monasteries have, little by little, abandoned the farm and have moved from an agricultural economy to one based on small industries: chocolates, candies, fruitcakes, jams, altar breads, etc. A part of this production is sold in the gift shops of most of our monasteries and the rest is sold wholesale. This has allowed us to replace the heavy work of the farm by a work better adapted to present possibilities and to reduce, in many cases, a good share of the lay help, while giving to *lectio divina* once more the time that should be consecrated to it in the monastic life. This way of doing things has its advantages, but also has risks, as for example, the danger of individualism, because there is scarcely any common work now, at least much less than before.

In 1981, the Canadian Regional Conference started a committee for the defense of the trademarks of the abbeys. This committee was composed of one representative of each of our monastic families (Trappist, Cistercian and Benedictine) with the firm, Robin, Robic and Associates, as juridical counselor for trademarks. The task of this committee is to take care that the words Trappe and Trappiste or the name of our monasteries not be used for illicit commercial ends. In 1999 the Canadian Region reaffirmed its desire to continue to protect the marks “Trappiste” and “La Trappe.”

CONCLUSION

Even if the Region is aware of its precariousness, it looks to the future with confidence, desirous of pursuing its quest for the Lord according to the Cistercian way, ready to make the decisions that present themselves due to circumstances, in view of its survival, if such is the Lord's will. Neither does this precariousness keep us from being generous, since the Region has given, in recent years, three of its members as superiors of monasteries in continental Europe.

9.2.3. Region of the Isles

(by Dom Laurence Walsh)⁸

NAME: Our Regional Meetings (RM) began in 1967, being held more or less annually. Originally we were known as the *Anglo-Irish Region*, but in the early 1970's we changed to our present title *Region of the Isles*—Britain an island, Ireland an island, Caldey an island, New Zealand—two islands. Australia an island continent! The latter two subsequently joined ASPAC, and Tautra—another island—joined us. Incidentally *Inis* the Irish word for *island*, also means a monastery!

NUNS: Glencairn's Abbess and Delegate were present at the 1967 RM, but following the meeting of Abbesses at Cîteaux in 1968, apart from Glencairn's presence in 1976 and both Stapehill and Glencairn as *observers* in 1979, the nuns did not attend subsequent meetings until 1981, when they became regular attenders. The 1995 RM voted unanimously to ask the General Chapters that we be recognized as a mixed Region, with one representative, abbot or abbess, at Central Commissions, and one Delegate, monk or nun, at the General Chapters. The Abbess of Glencairn is our current Regional President.

DELEGATES: From the beginning a Delegate, elected by each of our Communities was present at the RM, and the Superiors at the 1967 meeting voted 6 to 1 in favour of giving them the right to vote. Our practice is that the Delegates at the RM elect from among themselves the person who will be Regional Delegate to the General Chapter.

FORMATION

- a) *General*: Formation and recruitment have been constant themes down the years. Regional courses of a week or so have been held for novice directors on a number of occasions. Meetings of student directors and meetings of liturgists have also been held, as well as a few symposia on monastic themes, including the Cistercian—Orthodox one hosted by the Anglicans at Oxford in 1973, having obviously a strong ecumenical base (See Cistercian Studies Series 29, *One Yet Two*). Use has also been made of correspondence courses.

⁸ Abbot of Roscrea (Ireland) from September 2000 to October 2003.

- b) *Imago*: For a few years, in the 1980's, twice yearly meetings under this title were held to encourage the study of the Cistercian Fathers/Mothers. After a time it was felt that it tended to become too academic. Still it made a contribution.
- c) *Vocations*: In view of the vocation crises the Irish Abbots and Delegates at the 1978 RM appointed a group of four monks "to study the long term prospects of our Cistercian life in Ireland, giving particular attention to the following areas (1) Recruitment/Formation (2) Economical/Sociological factors." The Report helped the Communities, and twenty-five years later has still much to say to us. (RM, Bethlehem, 1979, Appendix 5).

The vocation crisis of 1979 is pale compared with that of 2004.

Society, especially in Ireland, has changed drastically with heavy drinking and drug culture, even among teenagers, broken marriages, and sharp decline in religious practice. Applicants who contact us now tend to be older, with more experience of life. These type of people are being accepted almost everywhere. (RM, Mount Saint Bernard, 1998, p.6).

- d) *Solitary Novice* : While nobody seems to favour a central novitiate for the Region, all are aware of the problem of forming the solitary novice without a peer group. In 1981 a two-month get-together for second-year novices and junior professed was held at Roscrea, with reasonable success (RM, Caldey, 1981, Appendix 2). This experiment was not repeated, though suggestions were made of meetings for a few weeks each year (RM, Mt.SaintBernard, 1998) or of some form of sharing for novices to give them more of a sense of belonging to the Order (RM, Roscrea, 2001). The highly praised joint venture of Cistercians and Benedictines in the Low Countries have been admired (RM, 2001), but no solution has been decided upon.
- e) *Study Course for Juniors*: In 1986 there were juniors in the Region, but not sufficient teachers. A five year programme was devised that aimed at implementing the directives of the *Ratio Studiorum*. The students came together for a two-week period twice each year. The Bernardine Sisters took part almost from the beginning, and the Pluscarden Benedictines joined occasionally. There were courses in the principal subjects. Teachers gave notes and a useful reading list. Students were expected to study when they went home. It was found that a home-based tutor was the best way to ensure that they continued to study. It was at the time generally possible to find competent and qualified teachers in our own communities, though outsiders were occasionally called in. At present it is a problem to find teachers within our communities. The course provided a good introduction to the Scripture, to the Mystery of Christ and this lived out in the Church, celebrated in the Liturgy, experienced in our own monastic and Cistercian tradition.

LITURGY: The Liturgy in the Region is mostly in English, while some Latin plain chant is retained, and in the Irish houses there is some use of the Irish language and melodies. Tautra has Mass and most of the Office in Norwegian. Glencairn has been the most active community in the field. There has been much regional sharing, but each house has worked out its own course. There have been a few much appreciated meetings of monastic musicians, which were open to other contemplative communities. Roscrea has produced a CD of its chants, called *Salve*, which has been well received by the public.

HOSPITALITY: All our communities have guest houses, large or small, geared in the main for those who desire to go apart for some days and live in the quiet and rhythm of the monastery. It is mostly older people who come. One monastery holds monthly contemplative week-ends for younger people 20–35 years old, attracting 8–12 people each of the week-ends. It is motivated by a nun from outside. A small number of younger men and women have “graduated” from these meetings and now form an established Lay-Cistercian group. Some other monasteries in the Region are moving in the same direction.

ECUMENISM: Most of our houses have ecumenical outreach which seem to be grace-filled. Tautra sees itself as a healing presence in ecumenical dialogue with a totally Lutheran people. The visit of the Queen of Norway to lay the foundation stone of the new monastery and her overnight stay in their one guest room is a heartening sign of how effective is that healing presence.

Another monastery had a letter from the local Church of Ireland (Anglican) Bishop, quote: “When I first joined you at evensong not long after coming here, you insisted on putting me in your stall, giving me your crozier and inviting me to give the blessing at the end. You have no idea how much that meant. I was deeply moved and shall never forget it.” He called it “Christian hospitality,” showing how little gestures can mean so much.

WORK: All the monasteries of monks and Glencairn have comparatively large farms. A few still have a lot of monastic involvement in the farm, but most depend on outside help in the main, or have leased their farm lands, but generally not very satisfactorily.

Shops are proving to be good sources of income in a number of houses, selling religious goods or monastic produce. Small industries—baking altar breads, soap and candle manufacture, making greeting cards etc. are favoured by our nuns. Roscrea has a 100 year old boarding school for 300 boys, but with little monastic involvement.

PUBLICATIONS

- *Newsletter*: A bi-monthly sharing of news among our monasteries—an organ of unity and information in the Region. The format is a folded A3 sheet, produced by Glencairn.
- *Hallel*: The name comes from the Hebrew word for “praise.” It started at Mount Melleray in the late 1960’s as a means of sharing vernacular monastic liturgy. It was so successful that it in 1968 it was upgraded into a “Review of monastic spirituality and liturgy.” In the early 1990’s the number of issues was reduced to two a year, and it was produced commercially. To help cover costs an effort was made to increase the readership, and a section on book reviews was added. At present 750 copies per issue are printed and distributed worldwide. It is centred in Roscrea. Hallel is a forum for those who wish to promote the monastic ideal and is a means of communication between them.

PRECARIOUSNESS: Lack of vocations, aging, and in some cases the economy, are bringing this question to the fore. Five pages of the minutes of our 2003 RM (Nunraw) are devoted to the topic, which is being realistically faced by the Communities in faith and humility. Challenging suggestions have surfaced, that we see precariousness as a chance to do something new, as a choice to be precarious with the precarious Christ. As of now awareness is more in evidence than committed action.

HOLINESS: We are ‘humbly proud’ of the fact that a member of our Region, Cyprian Tansi, monk of Mount St Bernard, was beatified by Pope John Paul II, 22 March 1998.

9.2.4. Region of ASPAC-ORIENS

(by Dom Frans Harjawiyata)⁹

1. BIRTH OF THE JAPANESE REGION FOR NUNS

After the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II, when the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance began to have Regional Conferences, there were in Japan four monasteries of nuns: Tenshien (founded in 1898), Nishinomiya (1935), Imari (1953) and Nasu (1954), which formed the *Japanese Region*. The four abbesses held their first meeting in 1967 to study the Constitutions. No one else was invited to take part in this meeting, and no report was made. The first report sent to the houses of the Order was made at the meeting of 1969, in which the abbot of Tobetsu (then the only Japanese monastery of monks) was invited as an observer. Later, in order to respond to the need for exchange within the Order at the level of the whole world, invitations to the Regional Meetings were also offered to a number of monks and nuns from Europe and Africa as well as to the Secretary of the *Consilium Generale*. The abbess of Miyako, which was founded in 1981 and transferred to Ajimu in 2001, became the fifth member of the Region.

After the introduction of the vernacular in the liturgy, the Region's attention was focused on the liturgy, which was adapted to the Japanese houses, and on formation which was proper to the Japanese Region. There was collaboration on the translations of documents regarding the liturgy and of texts related to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Order. As regards monastic formation, the Regional Secretary for Formation organized study-weeks for formators on *lectio divina*, the Holy Rule, Scripture, psychology, Fathers of the Church, history of the Order and similar topics. The texts used were writings on Scripture published by Fr. Paul Takahashi of Tobetsu and texts on monastic life translated by the nuns of Tenshien, by Dom Placide Furukawa (former Titular Prior of Oita), and by Fr Xavier Yamashita of Tobetsu.

2. BIRTH OF THE REGION OF "ASPAC" FOR MONKS

In 1967 there were in Asia and Oceania six monasteries of monks: Consolation, founded in 1883 in China, Tobetsu or Phare founded in 1896 in Japan, Tchengting-

⁹ Superior, then abbot of Rawaseneng in Indonesia from 1963 to 1966, then from 1976 on.

fu founded in 1928 in China and in 1956 officially transferred to Lantao, Hong Kong, Rawaseneng, founded in 1953 in Indonesia, Kopua founded in 1954 in New Zealand, and Tarrawarra in 1954 in Australia. Tobetsu and Lantao joined the US Region, and Kopua and Tarrawarra joined the Region of the Isles. Consolation and Rawaseneng did not belong to any Region, nor did the monastery of N.D. des Iles, which was founded in 1968 in New Caledonia. Later Guimaras, founded in 1972 in the Philippines, became the third Asian member of the US Region, followed by Rawaseneng as the fourth one in 1979. Since that time the four Asian houses were given the possibility of forming a Sub-Region that could present their suggestions directly to the *Consilium Generale*. Actually at the General Chapter of 1980 the monasteries of Asia and Oceania were given the privilege of having a representative on the *Consilium Generale*. It was in 1982 that the Superiors of the four houses of Asia held a Sub-Regional Meeting at Lantao, where the Superiors of Kopua and Tarrawarra as well as the Procurator General were invited. It was agreed upon to form a Regional Conference, named *the Region of Asia and Pacific* (=ASPAC), which was subsequently approved by the General Chapter of 1984.

The "ASPAC" Region held its meetings in one of the houses of the Region, inviting one or several abbesses of the Japanese Region. After the meetings there would be additional days for a special program on various monastic topics. The 1985 meeting was held at Tarrawarra, with additional input on formation by Br Eugene Dwyer, FMS. In 1986, Tobetsu hosted the meeting with additional conferences on the Primitive Cistercian Documents by Fr Michael Casey, OCSO. In 1989 the gathering was in Kopua with the additional topic on Psychological Aspects of Formation by Dom Jean Doutré OCSO. Rawaseneng hosted the 1992 meeting with conferences on enculturation by Fr. I. Kuntara SJ. The 1995 meeting was a gathering of Regions, ORIENS and ASPAC at Tobetsu. The additional material was on Japanese Culture by Mrs. Ayako Sono.

3. EVOLUTION OF THE JAPANESE REGION, WHICH BECAME THE REGION OF ORIENS, AND THE MERGING OF THE TWO REGIONS INTO ONE MIXED REGION, ASPAC-ORIENS

In 1987 two monasteries of nuns were founded in two different Asian countries outside Japan: Gedono in Indonesia and Sujong in South Korea. In 1988 the two superiors of these foundations took part in the meeting of the Japanese Region, which, on this occasion, was transformed into the *Region of ORIENS*. The frequency of the meetings was reduced to one every three years. In the 1992 meeting, which coincided with the visit of the Abbot General, a suggestion was made concerning the possibility of merging with the ASPAC Region. After this meeting

several new foundations were established in the general geographic area. Rosary was established in China in 1993 by Nishinomiya, and in 2002 it was given totally to Gedono to be the founding-house. Matutum was founded in the Philippines in 1993, and Makkiyad in India 1995.

In 1995, a joint meeting of the Region of ASPAC and the Region of ORIENS was held at Tobetsu. In the presence of the Abbot General the two Regions arrived at an agreement to form one mixed Region under the name of the Region of ASPAC-ORIENS. This fusion was approved by the General Chapter of 1996. The same General Chapter approved the foundation of Lamanabi in Indonesia, and gave the green light for the process of incorporation into the Order of Kurisumala Ashram in India. Kurisumala Ashram was founded in 1958 by Fr Francis Mahieu, a former monk of Scourmont. This monastery was meant as an attempt at acculturated Christian monastic life in the context of the religious culture of India. The actual incorporation took place in 1998, with the explicit permission to keep the Syro-Malankara Rite. It is to be noted that the foundation of N.D. des Isles in New Caledonia was suppressed in 2002. Having no free communication with other houses of the Order, Consolation, in China, is not in a position to take part in the activities of the Region.

The Current Composition of the Region

At present (in 2004) the Region of ASPAC-ORIENS consists of 20 monasteries (10 of nuns and 10 of monks) dispersed in 9 different countries. Two houses are over 100 years old: Tobetsu and *Tenshien*. Seven houses have celebrated their golden jubilee: Lantao, *Nishinomiya*, Rawaseneng, *Imari*, Kopua, *Nasu*, and Tarrawarra. One has celebrated its silver jubilee: Guimaras and ten are recent houses each less than 25 years old: Oita, *Ajimu*, *Gedono*, *Sujong*, Shuili, *Rosary*, *Matutum*, *Makkiyad*, Lamanabi and Kurisumala

Frequency of Regional Meetings

At least once between General Chapters a plenary meeting of the Region is held in one of the monasteries of the Region. In 1998 it was at Guimaras; in 2001 at *Sujong*, and in 2004 at *Matutum*. Each Community is invited to send a delegate, who takes part in all the sessions and enjoys the right to vote, except for any vote restricted to the Superiors and announced as such by the Presidents. The languages of the Region are English and Japanese. Interpreters are provided when they are needed. A Regional Delegate for the General Chapter is chosen by each of the branches

of the Region. Each community, in order of seniority, selects this delegate in the manner decided by the local superior.

Members of the Region present at the General Chapters gather together with the Regional Delegates to elect the two Regional Presidents who are the Regional Nominees to the Central Commissions. The feminine and masculine branches vote separately. The Regional Representatives have a term of three years on the Central Commissions.

The English-speaking members of the Region have felt the need to have Sub-Regional Meetings for superiors and for formators. While the Japanese meet every year, the far-flung English-speaking Sub-Region needs to take a different approach, so that everything does not happen in one year, since the time and expense involved is considerable

Formation

The Region has two Regional Secretaries for Formation, one for the English language, one for the Japanese language, one monk and one nun.

Because of the great differences in language and culture, collaboration at the regional level in the area of formation is rather limited. About a half of the houses being recent foundations with a number of young members in initial formation, monastic formation is of utmost importance in the Region. Several houses occasionally collaborate with other religious institutes in their respective countries or invite monks and nuns from other houses of the Order to give series of lectures or to preach community retreats. Also it has happened that some particular houses have invited the juniors (Lantao 1995) or the formators (Gedono 2004) from the other houses to meet for several days. From time to time the Regional Secretary for Formation has organized regional meetings for formators, using the two official languages of the Region. Meetings of this type were held in 1997 (Tobetsu), 2000 (Guimaras), and 2003 (Sujong). Sub-Regional Meetings for formators are also on the program. As regards theological formation for the priesthood, each house makes its own arrangement considering the possibility for collaboration with local Theological Faculties.

Liturgy

Each house is responsible for its own liturgy. For the Eucharistic celebration most houses adapt the liturgical books and the language in use in the respective local Church, namely in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and English. As regards the Liturgy of the Hours, some houses compose their own offices, while

others adopt the office in use in the local Church, with some additions or adaptations. There is no collaboration at the regional level. English speaking houses have greater possibility of using liturgical books and liturgical songs published in Europe or in the United States. Asian houses using English in the liturgy also make use of vernacular songs on particular occasions. In this context it is worth noting that Kurisumala celebrates its liturgy in the Syro-Malankara Rite.

Work

The houses of the Region are located in different countries with very different standards of living. Also there are great differences in the evolution and the scale of each community's enterprises. In addition to the large-scale industries in the few senior houses, there are also small-scale cottage industries in the recent foundations, which are still looking for satisfactory forms of making a living. Most of the communities of monks and nuns in Japan make cookies on varying scales. Some of the Japanese communities also have an alternative or an additional enterprise, such as making butter, madeleines, chocolate, confectionary, agricultural works and dairy farming. In other countries several houses of monks have dairy and/or beef farming, a plantation of coffee, tea, or cocoa. In addition some houses have a vegetable garden, altar bread distribution, cards, icons, rosaries, and other religious articles. Others have some form of food processing: jam, dried fruits, syrups, or bakery goods. Still others have a mango orchard, a forestry program, or a small soap industry. Most houses have gift-shops; Tenshien is unique in this regard, because its gift-shop is frequented by about two million visitors a year, without in any way disturbing the solitude of the community. Mutual collaboration in work can only take place among relatively close houses. On particular occasions houses more blessed with economic wealth have given helping hands to particular projects in less fortunate houses.

Hospitality

Almost all houses have guesthouses of various sizes; fairly big ones with facilities for 35 to 50 persons (Guimaras, *Sujong*, Kurisumala); medium size with facilities for 20 to 35 persons (Tobetsu, *Tenshien*, Lantao, *Nishinomiya*, Rawaseneng, *Nasu*, *Gedono*, *Matutum*, *Makkiyad*) and small ones (*Imari*, Kopua, Tarrawarra, Oita, Shuili, Lamanabi. At this time (in 2002) Ajimu is not in a position to offer lodging facilities.

Publications

Several houses of the Region publish books or articles in their respective languages. English publications are accessible to a few members of non-English speaking communities. In this connection it is to be noted that Fr Michael Casey of Tarrawarra is a very productive author on monastic spirituality. At present the Region has no regional newsletter for their members. Some English-speaking houses circulate their own newsletters once or several times a year.

Among English books published on particular houses for special occasions can be mentioned: “*The Golden Jubilee of Our Lady of Joy 1928–1978*” (Liesse) by Fr. Stanislaus Jen of Lantao; “*Te Martyrum Candidatus Laudet Exercitus*,” written by the same Fr Stanislaus Jen on the occasion of the centenary of Our Lady of Consolation’s foundation (1983). “*Kurisumala Ashram: A Cistercian Abbey in India*” published in 1999 by Fr Francis Mahieu. In addition there are Jubilee Books on several monasteries published in Japanese and Indonesian.

Some Characteristics

- a) The Region of ASPAC-ORIENS consists of 20 houses dispersed in such a *vast area*, that if the other Regions were of the same size, there would be *only three Regions* in the Order: namely ASPAC-ORIENS, Europe-Africa and Madagascar, and North-South America. The countries in which the houses of the ASPAC-ORIENS Region are located are *very different in many ways*; in their geographical latitude, their population size and density, their languages, histories and cultures, their religious traditions and the percentage of their Catholic population, the structures of their governments and the level of their economical development.
- b) *The age* of the houses is also very different. Two houses are over 100 years of age, while ten houses have less than 25 years of existence. Some monasteries have to struggle with the problem of aging; on the other hand many monasteries have a large number of young members. Regarding *the size of the communities*, one monastery has more than 60 members, while another one has no more than 2 members. According to the statistics in 2002, there were in the Region (including Consolation) 11 houses of monks, having 244 members, of whom 64 (or 26.23%) were in initial formation, compared to 17.47% in initial formation for the Order as a whole. There were 10 houses of nuns, having 330 members. 87 of these (or 26.36%) were in initial formation. For the Order the figure is 14.65%. Thus, for both the monks and for the nuns, *the percentage of those in initial formation was higher* in the Region than in the Order. But the comparison would be very differ-

ent if the nuns of Japan were considered separately. The figure would be as follows: In the five Japanese houses of nuns there are 208 members, 27 (or 12.98%) are in initial formation. In 5 houses of nuns outside Japan there are, 122 members, 60 (or 49.18%) are in initial formation. It is not too difficult to draw a conclusion that in the following decades the number of nuns in Japan will gradually decrease, while their number in the other Asian countries will significantly increase.

- c) It can be foreseen that in the near future the monks and nuns *in Japan* will have to face *the challenge of recruitment*. The Catholic population of Japan is less than one million people. This limited number is expected to provide recruitment for two monasteries of monks and five monasteries of nuns. On the other hand in the eight other countries of the ASPAC-ORIENS Region about 90 million Catholics provide recruitment for six monasteries of monks and five monasteries of nuns. In addition many other factors are to be taken into account, such as the influence of secularism, materialism and hedonism.
- d) Young communities still have *strong affective relationships with their founding houses*, so that the relationship with the founding house is far more intense than with other houses of the Region. It is important to note that the founding houses in question have different traditions, languages and cultures: American and Belgian Dutch, French, Irish and Italian. There are also Asian founding houses: Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesian. Two houses, Rosary and Kurisumala, were founded in a very special and non-conventional way. In other words the Region of ASPAC-ORIENS is providentially challenged by enormous diversities in almost all areas.
- e) At present and in the future, relationships of our monasteries *with the local Churches* are becoming more and more important. This applies even more to the houses of the ASPAC-ORIENS Region. Communications and interactions with other religious institutes at the national level play an ever greater role. At times these relationships with local co-religious and ecclesiastical personalities are of no less relevance than relationships within the Order. In this context it might not be out of place to mention some organizations of collaboration at regional and continental levels in Asia. For example there is the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences); there is AMOR (Asia-Pacific Meeting of Religious); the Secretariat of SEAMS (South East Asian Major Superiors). Even at this time the Region of ASPAC-ORIENS of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance does not have any contact with these organizations. In fact, the topics of the Regional Meetings of ASPAC-ORIENS houses are for the most part internal issues relative to the Order or to particular communities. Great Asian concerns such as dialogue with local religious traditions are practically never touched upon, except in additional programs given by local speakers without any follow-up.

IN CONCLUSION it can be stated that the Region of ASPAC-ORIENS is composed of communities of the Order which are characterized by great diversities in practically all areas. Both the Region and its monasteries are still *in a process of looking for self-identity* in the context of both the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance and the Church in Asia and the Pacific.

9.2.5. REMILA: A Brief History of the Mixed Latin American Region

(by M. Cecilia Chemello and Dom Eduardo Gowland)¹⁰

Different from many other Regions of the Order in which there are active communities of a long Cistercian tradition, REMILA is essentially a Region in constant growth, within expansive geography and among peoples many of whom do not know the monastic life. This determines its spirit:

- strong enthusiasm for the Cistercian life,
- eagerness to see it come to birth and flourish in a rich plurality of these nations and cultures,
- and an active participation in the life of the Order as a service which seeks to offer its proper gift, born of its particular living of our charism in the New World.

1. ORIGINS: 1976–1984

As a Region, the origins of REMILA go back to the US Region, to which the two older houses of monks belonged: Azul (1958) and La Dehesa (=Miraflores) (1960). Taking into account the evolution that was going on in the structures of the Order and the “post-Conciliar problematic,” often very different from Latin America and its young foundations, in its meeting of 1976 the US Region recommended the formation of a “Latin American Sub-Region” composed of the two mentioned communities, to which the two houses of nuns would be added: El Encuentro (1971) and Hinojo (1973). It is interesting to note how, previous to this, already in the General Chapter of 1974 and then in that of 1977, the Abbot General invited two Latin American monks to participate as “observers”: Fr. Leandro Pérez (Azul) and Bro. Hernán Guerrero (La Dehesa).

As is seen, and contrary to the majority of the Regional Conferences, REMILA, from its beginning, was mixed, a situation that required a certain effort to become recognized by the Order and to be incorporated as such into its structures. In October of 1978, there took place in Hinojo a meeting that could be called “foundational,” because in it for the first time superiors and delegates participated from

¹⁰ M. Cecilia Chemello is foundress in January 1973 and first abbess of Hinojo (Argentina) until January of 1995. Dom Eduardo Gowland is an Argentinean monk of Azul: he was prior in Brazil from August 1988 to October 1990, then abbot of Azul from October 1990 to June 2002.

the then existing five houses—Novo Mundo, Brasil, had been incorporated—with Dom Ambrose Southey, as Abbot General. There it was decided to constitute a “Mixed Latin American Pre-Region,” whose goal would be “to foster mutual knowledge and support, to obtain a better adaptation to local culture, and an adequate integration of Latin American cultural values with the traditional values of monastic life.”

In May of 1980, at La Dehesa, the “Pre-Region” met again, but this time with Fr. Thomas Gallego, at that time Councilor of the Abbot General, and it was decided to ask formally its recognition at the monks’ General Chapter of that year. It was not possible to obtain this recognition at that time, because the question of “Regions” and all its consequences in the life and government of the Order was not sufficiently mature for the capitulants. Fr. Ricardo Gans, prior of La Dehesa, had to limit himself to a proclamation of the existence of REMILA in plenary session. For the official recognition, we would have to wait for the General Chapters of Holyoke (1984) for the monks, and of Escorial (1985) for the nuns, in order to be formally recognized by both chapters and to become a part of the structures of the Order with full rights.

2. CONTRIBUTIONS AND NEW FOUNDATIONS

From the beginning, the activity of REMILA was orientated to three large areas of activity:

- participation in the life and post-conciliar renewal of the Order,
- the integration of new foundations,
- the development of its own proper structures.

Because of its situation and mentality, and because of the youth of its superiors, REMILA always accompanied the Order in seeking for an working out better adaptation to the new times and challenges, proposing or supporting balanced initiatives that renewed its mentality and its structures.

The topics dealt with at the time in view of the new Constitutions merited ongoing attention and reflection on the part of the communities of the Region and provided a unifying objective. Among the themes we remember especially:

- that of the unity of the Order,
- the integration of the nuns in the structures of government,
- the patrimony,
- collegiality,

- the pastoral relevance and representativity of the Regions,
- inculturation,
- formation
- and the foundations.

The present text of Constitution 2, about the nature of the Order, was extensively elaborated by REMILA and accepted in the last instance by the Central Commissions meeting in Ariccia in 1989, in order to give an adequate answer to the Holy See regarding the linking together of the monastic and the contemplative aspects. In dealing with these topics, REMILA invested its utmost dedication and commitment, thus contributing its inspiration and the fruits of its recent experience. This effort attained its most significant moment in 1990, with the election of Dom Bernardo Olivera, Abbot of Azul, as Abbot General of the Order.

At the same time, especially in the promotion of new foundations, by providing personnel for certain functions, and by carrying out its own projects and meetings, the Region was developing itself through the new possibilities offered to it, creating a new ambient of encounter, collaboration—especially among monks and nuns—and mutual help.

Often this type of collaboration constituted a new experience for the founders, whose former experiences were in larger or older communities and/or Regions. It was and is for them a necessary invitation to change and the assimilation of a new situation in which the Cistercian life is incarnated, organized and developed here and now. One should take into account that between 1980 and 2000, eight communities were incorporated into the Region: Jacona (1981), Quilvo (1981), Humocaró (1985), La Azulita (=Los Andes, 1987), Jarabacoa (1989), Esmeraldas (1992), Paraíso (1998)—all these with Mother houses outside the Region—, and Juigalpa (2000), the first foundation from within REMILA itself, which constitutes a new event and opens a new page in the development of the Region.

On all levels each community was independent and sought by itself its proper features and development, as, for example, in work and liturgy. Common projects were concentrated mainly in the areas of formation, helping out with personnel, and economy. During the first six years there was frequent communication between them by means of letters, reciprocal chronicles, etc., but after the approval of the Constitutions interests were concentrated rather on the internal life of the communities and on local and regional formation. Furthermore the great distances and scarce economic recourses meant that meetings had to be less frequent. In general the assemblies took place once or twice between General Chapters, and courses of formation every three years—today more regular and stable, every

two years—plus particular invitations of specific communities to participate in courses or conferences organized by themselves.

From 1980 to 1984, a *Boletín de Enlace* ('liaison newsletter') was published to share news and create more communion between the monasteries. From 1986 to 1991, Azul published a *Bulletin of Formation* with gathered projects, experiences and material of interest for those in charge of formation. Since 2004 a *Carta Enlace* ('liaison letter') has reappeared in digital form.

Among the major projects in the field of formation, we must point out: collaboration with monastic reviews, especially with *Cuadernos Monásticos*; the book *Hacia Cristo*, on the monastic vows, by Augustine Roberts, later translated into various languages; and the series *Padres Cistercienses* with 16 volumes, translations of the works of the Cistercian Fathers of the twelfth century. A course on the Cistercian Patrimony presented by Fr Michael Casey in the course of a year, first by correspondence and then in Jacona during an intense month in 1994, merits special mention. In this course a generation of young monks and nuns in charge of formation in our monasteries were formed. The subsequent publication of the manual *Introducción al patrimonio cisterciense*, in two volumes, gathered together most of this teaching. More recently there is a written agreement with the Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez of Chile for a *Programa de Formación Teológica a Distancia*, destined for our communities with the possibility of obtaining diplomas in theology.

3. SITUATION OF REMILA AT THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1984, unexpectedly, the Region began a long and important process of shifting from superiors who came from the founding houses to superiors formed in the country of the foundation. This step was taken by Azul (1984), Los Andes (1992), Jacona (1995), Hinojo (1995), El Encuentro (2001), Humocaró (2002), and Miraflores (2004). More than a merely juridical change, this shift represents a psychological and cultural evolution. There remains much to be done in this sense and each house has its own pace and history.

In general terms, it can be said that at the beginning of the new millennium, REMILA is characterized by the following traits:

- 1 **Common elements.** All the monasteries are rooted in the Latin American culture existing in their own countries, even though some foundations still find themselves working out their own inculturation. Common language facilitates communication; the modest size of the communities; the fact of being communities founded after the Second Vatican Council, and, above all, the shared eagerness

to establish an authentic and profoundly Cistercian spirituality in this Catholic continent gives them a clear sense of identity.

- 2 **Diversity.** The variety of local cultures and of filiations constitutes a great richness that, nevertheless, implies continuous readjustments in regional dynamics because of the multiple contributions of its traditions, customs, and mentalities. In addition, there is the varied social and geographical context of each country—a context that conditions the monasteries' development—relations with the vicinity, and the manner of receiving guests.
- 3 **A history with three phases:** foundation, significant contributions to the Order, and formation or passing on of responsibilities. These three phases appeared at first at the level of the Region as a whole, but at the local level their pace and chronology differed according to the houses. This has taken place more quickly in the Southern Cone and slower in the Northern Andean areas, where there are three houses that are still foundations. Among the contributions to the Order should be noted the appointment in 1986 of Fr. Gaspar Moioli of Azul as permanent councilor from 1988 to 1990 and the election in 1990 of Azul's abbot as Abbot General. Between 1998 and 2002, the Procurator General was also from REMILA.
- 4 **Integration of new communities.** Of the 13 monasteries that compose REMILA at the beginning of the new millennium, 9 were founded in the last 25 years: 4 of nuns and 5 of monks. The large number of new houses, sometimes very isolated among themselves, means that the pastoral priority of the Region is, and will be, monastic formation and inculturation. At the same time, efforts are made to fortify and improve channels of communication between the monasteries, in order that the Cistercian grace continue to take root in the "Great Homeland" that is Latin America.

9.2.6. THE AFRICAN REGION: RAFMA

(by M. Monique Masson)¹¹

1. THE BIRTH OF THE AFRICAN REGION

- 1.1. On November 14, 1966, Dom Ignace Gillet sent to the nuns' monasteries a circular letter that grouped the monasteries by Regions, and he added: "We have three monasteries of nuns in Africa: La Clarté-Dieu, l'Étoile Notre Dame, and Butende. But the enormous distances separating them and the difficulties of travel in Africa probably make a meeting impossible. If the abbesses of these monasteries cannot meet, they should at least consult one another by letter and then send their suggestions directly to me." The monasteries of men probably received similar instructions.
- 1.2. The minutes of the 1967 General Chapter held at Cîteaux tell of an intervention made on June 3 (Minutes, p. 131) by Dom Pierre Faye, superior of Grandselve. In October 1966, he had been chosen as president of the Conference of Superiors of the Benedictine and Cistercian Monasteries of Africa, at a meeting organized by AIM.¹² A similar meeting had been held at Bouaké (Ivory Coast) in 1964. Dom Pierre Faye asked what value the General Chapter gave to these meetings between Benedictines and Cistercians and to the wishes expressed by them. He especially asked: "Could not the Cistercians have their own Conference instead of meeting with the Benedictines, who do not have exactly the same notion of monastic life? We might consider establishing a new Region for Africa." On June 4, the following vote was proposed to the Chapter (Minutes, p. 136): "Are you opposed to the establishment of a new African Regional Conference?" The Chapter gave its agreement by a vote of 59 to 15, with the clarification: "It is understood that no African house is obliged to join this Region." The birth of the African Region can then be dated to June 4, 1967. It would be more accurate to speak of its *conception*, because the first African Regional Meeting was held only ten years later, in 1977.
- 1.3. The special General Chapter of 1969 (Minutes, p. 244) speaks of the particular difficulties the superiors of the African Region face in order to meet: "The expanse of the continent, problems of communication, and the expenses involved,

11 Foundress in January 1961 and first abbess of L'Étoile-Notre-Dame, in Bénin until June 1999.

12 At the time: *Aide à l'Implantation Monastique*.

make it difficult to have Regional Meetings and to send a delegate to the *Consilium Generale*. That is why the superiors of this Region are asking to have here, i.e. in Europe, a permanent delegate who has experience of African monastic life. They find it preferable that he be named by the president of the Region after consulting the superiors involved. The president would still have the right of attending the *Consilium Generale*.” During the thirty-fourth session (Minutes, p. 331), by a raised-hand vote, the Chapter approved the African Region’s request that—on account of distance—a permanent delegate be appointed to the *Consilium Generale*. It should be noted that, at that Chapter, the superiors of the African monasteries were all Europeans.

1.4. The first African Regional Meeting was held at Our Lady of Victory, in Kenya, on January 5–11, 1977. A long period of gestation was needed before the African Region could begin to make itself known. The minutes of the meeting report “This is the first time that the African Region was able to meet as a Conference on African soil and in one of our monasteries. This meeting was made possible by the encouragement and financial help of AIM, for which help the African Region remains sincerely grateful. The presence of the Abbot General for most of the meeting was also a special encouragement for its members.” The membership of this first meeting was as follows:

- the superiors of six communities of monks: Koutaba, Mokoto, Lumbwa, Kasanza, Bamenda, Awhum (which was not yet incorporated into the Order); the superiors of Bela Vista, Maromby, and Kokoubou were absent.
- the superiors of four communities of nuns: La Clarté-Dieu, l’Étoile Notre Dame, Butende, and Grandselve.
- Dom Ambrose, Abbot General, Dom Bernard Johnson, member of the Permanent Council, and Dom Mayeul de Dreuille, OSB, representative of AIM, were there as observers and participants in our discussions.
- Six delegates were added to the group: 4 monks and 2 nuns, all Africans, which gave a more African face to our assembly.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION

The Region’s development can be considered on two levels:

- The African Region is expanding on account of the birth of new monasteries of both monks and nuns. In 1977, there were 8 monasteries of monks and 4 of nuns; in 2004, there are 10 monasteries of monks and 9 of nuns.

- The African Region is also gaining in depth, one might say, by becoming authentically what its name signifies. In 1977, at the meeting at Victoria, only one monastery of monks out of 8 had an African superior, Dom Mununu, prior of Kasanza.¹³ We might add Fr. Abraham of Awhum, whose monastery was in the process of being incorporated at that time. One monastery of nuns out of 4 had an African Superior, M. Thérèse of La Clarté-Dieu.¹⁴ All the other superiors were European. In 2004, at the RAFMA meeting in Huambo, for the monks, there were 9 African superiors and 1 European superior; for the nuns, there were 7 African superiors and 2 European superiors—a sign that the African Region had experienced a major development.

3. THE MAKE-UP OF THE REGION

The Region is formed entirely of Sub-Saharan and Malagasy monasteries of both monks and nuns. As we have already seen, the monks and nuns have always worked together since 1977. At Bamenda in 1980, two votes were taken in response to a desire that was expressed:

- 1 “The African Region (which, practically speaking, is a mixed Region) would like officially to be declared a mixed Region.” Result of the vote: for the monks, 6 yes, 1 no; for the nuns, 4 yes.
- 2 “For the time being, the superiors agree that the delegate to the General Chapter should be a monk.” Nuns’ vote: 4 yes.

At La Clarté-Dieu in September 1982, the Region declared itself the Mixed African Region. The acronym RAFMA (Region of Africa and Madagascar) was adopted to designate our Region at the time of our meeting at Latroun (Israel) in May 1995. We frequently have the intention of forming Sub-Regions to reduce traveling expenses: one Sub-Region for the East and for Madagascar, and another Sub-Region for the West. But so far this has not been followed up on.

4. THE FREQUENCY AND PLACES OF THE MEETINGS

Despite numerous difficulties, of which we will speak later, meetings have been held regularly once between Chapters. In addition, we recently held a “mini-meeting” at Vitorchiano just before the MGM of 2002.

¹³ Since December 1972. He was named auxiliary Bishop of Kikwit (Zaire) in April 1984.

¹⁴ M. Thérèse Kantengwa, abbess from 1974 to 1992.

THE CHANGES AFTER VATICAN II

In 1977, at Victoria (Kenya); in 1980, at Bamenda (Cameroon); in 1982, at La Clarté-Dieu (Zaire); in 1986, at l'Étoile Notre Dame (Benin); in 1989, at the house of the Bernardines of Buhimba (Zaire), not far from Mokoto; in 1992, at Awhum (Nigeria); in 1995, at Latroun (Israel); in 1998, at l'Étoile Notre Dame (Benin); in 2001, at Koutaba (Cameroon); in 2004, at Huambo (Angola).

5. THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN OUR REGION'S HISTORY

First of all, there are the enormous distances—both physical and cultural—that separate us. Africa is an entire continent with peoples of different languages. At the General Chapters, *RAFMA* is asked to provide an African liturgy, but it is a real challenge, especially if we want to use any of our native languages. We are also separated by the languages that our colonizers left us: English, Portuguese, and French. These languages are a valuable instrument for formation and communication, but, in order to understand each other, we need interpreters. Physical distance is another difficulty. Traveling is both expensive and risky. From the monasteries in Madagascar, they have to go through Paris in order to join us. Trips to the Regional Meeting always involve a lot of unexpected adventures. Visas are also a major problem. In spite of these difficulties, we have always had our meetings.

6. THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

Our monasteries are young. The oldest, Koutaba, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary at the 2001 Regional Meeting, which it hosted. On that occasion, Dom Bernardo Olivera, our Abbot General, spoke of a “second birth” for the Cistercians of Africa and Madagascar, and rightly so. For the most part, the generation of founders put its whole heart and all its efforts into passing on the values of the Cistercian tradition to young monks and nuns. We have sown in the hope that the Holy Spirit would make the seed bear fruit in spite of our limitations and weaknesses. All of our Regional Meetings have been characterized by great pastoral concern. By speaking of our common experiences, we mutually support and comfort one another. It seems that, over time, our meetings have made progress with regard to sincerity and transparency, even if there have been some mistakes in this area.

As Dom Bernardo commented, the founding generation is now passing away, and the new generation of African sons and daughters that is on the rise will have to face new challenges. Now is the time for the African Region to find its true face

and bring new vitality to the Order. Dom Bernardo proposed a whole program of progress for us, in order to be Cistercian monks and nuns, new men and women in the risen Christ:

- Renewal in order once again to live out the original Cistercian charism on African soil.
- Deep spiritual renewal, led by the Holy Spirit.
- Inculturated renewal, i.e., to remain radically faithful to our Cistercian charism but to do so through our cultural means. (See Dom Bernardo's homily for the fiftieth anniversary of Koutaba's foundation, February 18, 2001)

It is a good thing and no small thing to live out the challenge to which each of the monasteries of our Region is called. A true Pasch!

9.2.7 The Spanish Region (RE)

(by *M. Blanca Lopez LLorena*)¹⁵

To relate the history of the twentieth century of the Spanish Region (RE) is to tell all its history. Because, with the exception of Santa Susana (La Oliva), founded in 1776, almost all the masculine monasteries were born in this century and the feminine ones, of very ancient origin (Tulebras 1147, Carrizo 1176, Arévalo 1220, Benaguacil 1266, Avila 1330) were incorporated into the Order in the second half of the twentieth century.

Recalling this history globally, we could say that, indeed, the twentieth century for the Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance (ocso), in Spain, has been, overall, a prosperous century, even though in its early days it was still burdened by certain aspects left over from the previous century, and suffered the disastrous consequences of a civil war.

In order to understand this history, it is necessary to go back to the year 1835, the year Mendizabal's government sold church lands and expelled men's religious orders from Spain. With this event, the Cistercian monks disappeared, and the nuns passed over to the direct jurisdiction of their respective Bishops.

In 1897 Dom Cándido Albalat, abbot of Sainte Marie du Desert, was sent to take cognizance of the situation of the Spanish nuns and to try to incorporate them into the Order. But, having presented the petition to the Holy See, only a spiritual filiation was permitted. It was not until 1923 that Alloz, founded in 1887 by the Bishop of Avila, D. Ciriaco Sancha y Hervás, was incorporated into the Order.

Santa Susana, (today La Oliva), founded from Val-Sainte in 1776, having wandered for many years, returned to Spain in 1880. In 1891, Sainte Marie du Desert founded San Isidro, and then Viaceli in 1908. The twentieth century begins with these three centers, which extended their radius both within the peninsula and outside of it. Today, San Isidro numbers 5 daughter houses of monks, Viaceli three, and La Oliva two.

The previously mentioned monasteries experienced increasing prosperity in the first decades of the century. Vocations were numerous, the liturgical and biblical movements enriched their spiritual life, the economy was reasonably good,

¹⁵ Abbess of Carrizo (Spain) from 1979 to 1997 and again since 2003.

and foundations began. Nieges founded Osera in 1927, Viaceli founded Huerta in 1930, and San Isidro founded Cardeña in 1942.

In the summer of 1936 all suffered the hard blow of a bloody civil war, which especially affected the Spanish religious. Some monasteries were saved from the situation, even though all suffered losses, their younger members being drafted into the army. Viaceli, in the red zone, was evicted and pillaged, and 18 of its members were destined to die in the holocaust. After the war, life returned to its normal course after some hard years of scarcity and economic poverty. Having maintained their religious values, the communities reestablished their monastic life, not without coming up against a series of difficulties that they overcame little by little.

In November 1948, the first abbot of La Oliva, Dom José Olmedo Arrieta, was elected. In Viaceli Dom Luis Yagüe was elected on May 29, 1949. The superiors met together in San Isidro in order to propose as definitor Fr. Carlos Azcárate. They noticed the need for increased relations among themselves.

In the meantime, the feminine branch began returning to its roots through more frequent contact with the monks of the Order who assisted them in various ways: giving retreats, acting as extraordinary confessors, giving talks on Cistercian spirituality, liturgy, etc.

In 1950, the Apostolic Constitution *Sponsa Christi* was promulgated, promoting the formation of a federation to provide mutual help among the nuns. The nuns sought to form groups to the degree possible within the limits of these orientations. In Spain, at that time, there were one monastery of the Common Observance and six of the ocsó, (La Oliva, San Isidro, Viaceli, Huerta, Osera, and Cardeña). Monks of one or another of these houses visited the nuns' monasteries, inviting them to enter their respective Observances. The nuns were enthusiastic about the idea, but there were doubts and perplexities about which Observance to adopt. Some were inclined to the Common Observance, closer to their past, and others to the ocsó. The monastery of Holy Spirit of Olmedo, today Vico, was the first to decide for the ocsó, in 1951. Santa María la Real of Arévalo followed in 1951; Santa Ana of Avila and Santa Maria De Gratia Dei of Beneguacil (Valencia) in 1954; Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, of Carrizo, León, in 1955, and Nuestra Señora de la Caridad of Tulebras, Navarra, in 1957. Added to Alloz, previously cited, there were then seven nuns' monasteries united to the ocsó. Various others remained excluded, because the General Chapter felt it necessary to limit the incorporations, since chaplains could not be provided for all. The Monastery of San Isidro assumed the paternity of Alloz, Arévalo, and Beneguacil; Viaceli took on Santa Ana of Avila and Carrizo; La Oliva assumed the paternity of Vico and Tulebras.

As I see it, this was the highpoint of the twentieth century in the history of the Spanish feminine branch. It was a period in which they came out of their isolation, in order to join the process of renewal being experienced in the whole Order, progressively attaining complementarity involvement in government with the masculine branch, and multiple benefits of the relations within the Order. It would take too long to enumerate these benefits, but I dare to point out as the most notable one the “mixity” in the functioning of such bodies as the Regional Conferences, Central Commissions, and Mixed General Meeting. Both branches have amply benefited from these mixed organisms, but I think that the feminine branch, above all in Spain, has benefited to a much greater degree.

The rest of the monasteries of Spanish Cistercian nuns, following the guidelines of *Sponsa Christi*, were united in two federations of nuns: “The Spanish Federation,” united to the Cistercians of the Common Observance (Poblet), and the “Federation of the Regular Observance of Saint Bernard in Spain,” headed by Las Huelgas in Burgos and united spiritually to the OCSO.

Since the decade of the fifties, the Spanish feminine branch was incorporated into all the events of the Order, participating already in the meetings that Dom Gabriel Sortais called together at Cîteaux.

The decade of the sixties was profoundly marked by the Second Vatican Council. Through its documents, monastic and contemplative life was transformed. *Perfectae caritatis*, *Ad Gentes*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et spes*, etc., became points of reference for the “adequate renewal” being asked of the monks and nuns. This gave new dynamics to our communities, all of whose members were called to collaborate in this renewal.

In response to the call of the Council, the Order issued a series of important documents:

- “The Decree of Unification,” 1965, highly controversial at the time, which contributed most to the transformation of the communities.
- “The Definition of the Cistercian Life,”
- “The Statute on Unity and Pluralism,” fruit of the special Chapter of 1969, which opened unsuspected horizons, in spite of the fears that arose in our Region.
- The “Letter of Cardinal Antoniutti,” which promoted a new dynamism in the Feminine Branch, and
- “The New Constitutions” which were a matter of reflection and motive for dialogue in the communities for a long time.

In 1966, a new monastery was born in the Region: Viaceli founded the community of Sobrado, the first post-conciliar community, with a renewed orientation.

Our Regional Conferences thus began to bring together nine Spanish and Italian monasteries of nuns, and another nine monasteries of monks, giving rise to the two Italian-Spanish Conferences, feminine and masculine.

We can find the first manifestations of the thought of the Region in the Acts of the Meeting of the years 1966 and 1967.

They are timid steps toward a renewal of the Constitutions, the observances, and the liturgy: The Regional Conferences, accepted with caution, had to remain without legislative power, and, after the time of renewal, were destined to be suppressed. This was the thought of the Region at that moment.

The decade of the seventies was progressively more open in both branches, with the monks' branch taking the initiative.

In 1971, interpreting the Letter of Cardinal Antoniutti (1970), the first feminine General Chapter was held, which made it clear how much the feminine branch was both interested in and capable of being on the level of the masculine branch.

The Spanish Regional Conference, which had difficult beginnings, acquired greater importance with the inclusion of delegates (1974), and became an instrument for post conciliar renewal.

- A Liturgical Commission was created for the move from Latin to the vernacular, organizing the new schemes of the *Opus Dei*, the Lectionaries, and the monastic Choral Office.
- "A Chant Commission" for the melodies of the new texts.
- A Secretariate for formation, which planned for the whole Region, organizing courses for Novices Masters, and for initial formation, separately at first and then mixed since 1986.
- *Cistercium* was an effective and competent means of making information available.

In general, **the economy** provided for the formation of the young monks, the restauration of buildings (Sobrado, Cardeña, Tulebras, Carrizo, Osera, and Huerta) or the building of new structures (La Oliva, Arévalo, Avila, and La Palma), but its sources of income also underwent a profound transformation. Traditional agricultural work and farming did not bring in enough income and had to be substituted by subcontracted work or more profitable modern enterprises.

Vocations reached their maximum influx between 1960 and 1970, and new foundations arose: in 1976 the community of Alloz founded La Palma in Cartagena (Southeast of Spain); in 1981 San Isidro (which had already founded Bela Vista in Angola) founded Jacona, in Mexico; in 1989 Viaceli founded Jarabacoa, in the Dominican Republic; in that same year Alloz founded Armenteira (Northeast

of Spain); in 1992, Tulebras founded Esmeraldas in the Republic of Ecuador; La Oliva founded Las Escalonias in 1994, and Zenarruza in 1996; and in 1998, San Isidro founded Nuestra Señora del Paraíso, in Ecuador. Recently the community of Huerta has established a pre-foundation in Toledo: Monte Sión.

The present **organization**, after having overcome many obstacles, allows for close collaboration between the monasteries in facing various problems: formation has become a regional priority in the form of PREM (Regional Plan of Monastic Studies); there is also a refresher course for Superiors, annual meetings of young professed (monks and nuns), the Cistercian Library, (Publication of translations of the Cistercian Patrimony and present-day Cistercian authors), a common regional fund based on dues from the monasteries and other income from publications, principally destined to meet these formation needs.

At the present moment of profound political, social and religious change, it is more necessary to maintain a close collaboration and fraternal help, in order to face the most acute problem: the lack of vocations. Also it is considered of capital importance to know how to situate ourselves in the face of the new challenges of our contemporary world, assuring, at the same time, a profound living-out of the essentials of the monastic life.

9.2.8. The Mixed Italian Region and its Evolution: (RIM)

(by M. Rosaria Spreafico and Dom Gervais Fauvarque)¹⁶

1. A BIT OF HISTORY

When the Regional Conferences began to meet officially in 1966, the superiors of the Italian monasteries, too few to form a Region of their own, after some consultation (their names, in fact, figure as invited guests in the 1966 meetings of the France South and West Region), joined the Spanish monasteries to form the *Italian-Spanish Regional Conference*. The abbots and abbesses met separately in two distinct Conferences, an arrangement that continued until 1979.

However, for reasons of geographical distance and differences of language and traditions, the Italian monasteries did not find sufficient identity and scope of expression in this joint conference, because discussions about the affairs affecting the Spanish monasteries and superiors did not sufficiently involve them. Thus, beginning in 1980, while still participating in the Spanish Regional Conferences (RE) for discussions of juridical questions, the Italian superiors began to meet as a Mixed Italian Sub-Region, to deal with their own particular problems at a pastoral level. In 1982, RE recognized and accepted the formation of an Italian Sub-Region at a time when the tendency was to form mixed Regional Conferences.

The evolution of the subsequent years is well synthesized in the prologue of RIM's Statutes: "The long-term experience of meeting as a Sub-Region with the participation also of the novice directors (monks and nuns), brought us to an awareness of the specific identity of our Italian monastic identity. Thus in 1988 we came to form the Mixed Italian Region (RIM)—which included four monasteries and one annex house—that was definitively approved by the General Chapters of 1990" (See the minutes of the 20 September session [CGf 58 yes, 0 no, 2 abs; CGm 81 yes, 3 no, 3 abst.]). Being a small group fostered a particularly meaningful expression of our Italian communities, which gave the meetings a strong pastoral character appreciated by all. The fact that our houses are relatively close geographically also made it easy to have numerous delegates present (two for each monastery), thus making our communities more directly involved, and giving them a better knowledge of each other. For language reasons, beginning in 1992, the superior of Engelzell, with the authorization of the president of the CNE Region,

¹⁶ M. Rosaria Spreafico is abbess of Vitorchiano (Italy) since 1988 and Dom Gervais Fauvarque was abbot of Frattocchie (Italy) from 1972 to 1997.

began taking part in our meetings, first as an invited guest and then, beginning in 1993, as a full member.

The Region thus consists of the four superiors of the men's monasteries (Tre Fontane, Frattocchie, Boschi, and Engelszell) and the superiors of the two women's monasteries (Vitorchiano and Valserena). The superior or a counselor from the Generalate also attends.

As defined by the General Chapter of 1990, RIM, on account of its small membership, foregoes sending its own representation to the Central Commissions, and is to be represented by a superior of its choice who is already a member of the Central Commissions. Moreover, it can manifest its place in the Order by sending the minutes of its meetings to all the communities (translated in the Order's main languages).

The prologue of RIM's Statutes goes on to say: "From the beginning, RIM has had its own characteristic features and organization. Its main goal is to encourage the communities, to foster fraternal relations among the houses of the Region, and their commitment to the life of the Order. [...] The communities are involved in the preparation of each meeting by dialoguing on the basic subjects dealing with monastic life, so that the truly vital problems can emerge, be listened to, and be treated in-depth, in order to foster growth and progress in inculturated spiritual renewal."

For several years RIM's experience was very enriching from all points of view: the diversity of the monasteries that belong to it, the different histories and traditions, the presence of persons notable for their capacity for in-depth existential reflection and their long experience of monastic life enlivened the dialogue and led to good debate and exchange among all the participants. The subjects chosen were close to lived experience and were further developed by conferences by experts in the matter, conferences that were then shared with the various houses. The themes, which became points of dialogue in the communities, helped form a common line of thought.

With time, even though the experience continued to be basically positive, there arose difficulties and tensions that put the dynamic of the small group at risk. At first we thought about including superiors from other Italian monastic communities, both Benedictine and Cistercian. But that plan of action, on account of the smallness of our group, would have changed the specific identity of our meetings. We thus welcomed with great interest the proposal that arose at the MGM of 2002 and that was later confirmed by our 2003–2004 Regional Meetings, to expand RIM into a Mediterranean Region.

2. THE FEATURES OF RIM

The first goal we always envisaged was pastoral, for the sake of growth in our communities. This pastoral interest was understood less as discussion of hard cases or discernment of problematic situations than as a focus on the fundamental questions that are at the origin of daily problems great and small. This stress on the pastoral dimension of our Regional Meetings was experienced as a reflection on our identity and its implications. We met to help each other and our respective communities to reflect on the monastic life of today and always, to reflect on ourselves as monks and nuns, to learn how to see and express our identity in such a way that it becomes a word of good news, and to encourage the communities to be involved in this work. Once again, it is a duty for us, as monastics, to engage in deep evangelization in order to restore the fabric of Christian life, a new awareness of the faith. This point of view is precious to us and we would not like to lose it if a new Region is established.

By way of example, here are some of the subjects treated since 1988:

- The person and the community (from a Christian point of view and in terms of the contemporary mentality,
- Present-day depersonalization and reconstruction of the person.
- The community's formative role.
- Cistercian contemplative identity.
- Desire.
- Common vision and pluralism in community life.
- The formative role of the *schola caritatis* in today's socio-cultural context.
- The Cistercian Church, the living body of its Lord.
- The Cistercian grace today: conformity with Christ.

It has always been necessary to be careful to keep the presentation of the subjects simple and clear for all the monks and nuns who make up the Region, and not to make them too broad, so as to avoid a sense of dispersion in the communities' exchanges. The usually annual frequency of meetings, a common language, and the relatively limited number of participants generally led to good results in our meetings, which contributed valuable elements for revision of life and formation on the community level.

3. OTHER INITIATIVES OF THE REGION

RIM met annually, and, besides the Regional Meeting, the formators of the various monasteries met for a more focused session, at times enriched by the presence of an expert. We often sought to coordinate the topics of the Regional Meeting with the further development of the Novice Directors' courses to our mutual enrichment. Through the years we have developed a program that has gradually improved. Here are the themes we have dealt with since 1982:

- Young people and formation.
- Psychological, socio-cultural and pedagogical aspects of formation.
- Anthropology in the RB.
- Man in Cistercian hagiography.
- Person and communion.
- Atheism and Secularization.
- The steps of spiritual experience in Saint Bernard.
- Christology and anthropology in the liturgical sermons of Saint Bernard.
- Formation to contemplative identity.
- The Pedagogy of Desire.
- *Lectio divina* as an instrument of communion.
- Humility and obedience as a pedagogical means to the *schola caritatis*.
- The presence of Christ in the monastery, from the perspective of sacramental pedagogy.
- The vows in Saint Bernard and Saint Thomas.
- Education of the *affectus*.
- Grace.
- Education of the *intellectus fidei*.

Off and on we have also had sessions for those in formation, novices and junior professed or young solemn professed, in one monastery or another; sessions animated by fathers and mothers of the Order or by other qualified persons. This initiative remains somewhat sporadic and has not developed much.

It has been more difficult to come to collaboration at the levels of the liturgy, finances, and work, because of the great diversity of the communities in RIM. On these topics a great respect for the various local situations has always safeguarded the initiative and autonomy of each monastery. Concerning work, the economies of Frattocchie and Boschi has always been based on agriculture, whereas the econ-

omies of Tre Fontane, Vitorchiano, and Vals Serena include, in addition to agriculture, hand-made crafts and products.

9.2.9. The Dutch Region : NED

(by Dom Manu Van Hecke)¹⁷

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

The Dutch abbots had already begun informal meetings in 1956. The changes in the Church and in society made themselves felt in our abbeys. Above all, with Vatican II, many things in the monastic life that were formerly considered as evident no longer seemed so certain.

The first *official* meeting of the ocsso abbots of the Dutch Region took place from March 14–17, 1964. The introduction found in the minutes of this meeting shows the climate of the period: “If a reflection on one’s own vocation, necessarily accompanied by an open exchange of experiences, is always useful and desirable, it is even more so now in a time of tension, malaise, doubt; in a time also where there is a need of return to the sources and renewal, in short, in a time of crisis.” Also, there was in the Region a concrete reason for this meeting. A group of 6 young monks from Achel was seeking a more simple form of monastic life in a small community (which would later become the community of Bornholm). We wondered also if the General Chapter had sufficient contact with what was happening in the communities and if it would not be good to pay more attention to this question in the Regional Meetings. Even then, a “Constitutional” recognition of these Regional Meetings of abbots was spoken of. A second meeting followed, still in 1964.

In 1965, there were again two Regional Meetings of abbots, mostly in relation to the General Chapter of 1965. At the same time, in this same year, a meeting of the Dutch abbesses took place at Nazareth. The goal of this conference was a reflection on monastic formation.

In 1966 there was the first common Regional Meeting of abbots and abbesses, thus a mixed meeting, where we were conscious of anticipating the General Chapter. The discussions concerned mostly the changes in the liturgy, the usages, the observances. Next there was a second Regional Meeting (the term appeared for the first time in the minutes), with elected delegates from each community this

¹⁷ Abbot of Saint-Sixte (Belgium) since November 1996.

time. They received the right to vote. A third meeting of abbots and abbesses took place in December of 1966.

In the following years there were almost always two Regional Meetings a year, with and without delegates. During these meetings the problems each monastery was facing was the order of the day: renewal and adaptation after Vatican II, the situation of crisis, due, among other things, to the lack of recruitment and aging, the different conceptions of the monastic life, experimentation. Added to this, a reflection on the structures of the Order.

From 1972 on there was usually a single Regional Meeting per year, uniting the abbots (Achel, Diepenveen, Echt, Saint-Sixte, Tegelen up to 2002, Tilburg, Westmalle, Zundert) and the abbesses (Berkel, Nazareth and, since 1970, Klaarland), the delegates, the Definitior for the Dutch language, a representative from the CNE Region, a brother from the community of Bornholm (member of the NED Region since 2002). In 1970—after a reaction of the Congregation for Religious—it was decided that the nuns should participate as observers with the right to vote. The votes of the monks and nuns were taken separately and noted as such. Since 1968, the Dutch abbesses also took part in the North Europe Regional Meeting. In 1999 the mixed CNE Region was constituted and the Dutch abbesses were a part of it. Because of this, the NED Region became the only non-mixed Region in the Order, even though the nuns continued to participate actively in our Regional Meeting.

The Regional Meetings continued, with a varying duration of 2, 3 or 4 days. The topics for discussion were in part linked to our own regional situation (aging, lack of recruitment, formation, situation of the houses, problems of the moment...) and also themes related to the preparation or prolongation of the General Chapters. In 1967 several surveys were made in the Region: an extensive opinion poll concerning the manner of applying the Cistercian life (summarized in two thick volumes), a questionnaire on the duration of the abbatial office and a survey on the subject of delegation of a community member to the Regional Meeting.

The link with the General Chapters became more important with time (e.g., the work regarding the new Constitutions). But we also try consistently to stay very close to the concrete life of the houses (e.g., since 1988 going around the table which takes place most of the time during the Regional Meeting, during which each house expresses what is happening in the community).

Several times there were reflections on the nature, goal and composition of the Regional Meeting. Thus in 1971, we drew up a Statute for the Regional Meetings, among other statutes.

Three important events should still be mentioned:

In 1972, a commission for aging religious was begun, because of the increased aging in most of the houses of the Region. It conceived the project of constructing

or installing in a single abbey, a regional rest home for aged religious, where the aging monks and nuns could both live. The Dutch Scientific and Social Institute of ReseMarch, Study and Counsel (KASKI) did an analysis of the question, examining the concrete situation and the expectations in the different abbeys. In the end, this project did not obtain enough support. We agreed that each community would care for its own members and the commission in question was suppressed. The communities of Koningshoeven and Koningsoord finally found their own creative solution regarding this need.

In 1993, after a visit of the Abbot General to the houses of our Region, we made another appeal to the KASKI Institute to make a survey on the concrete situation of the eight abbeys of monks. The goal was to progress together on the level of responsibility concerning the monastic life in the Netherlands and Flanders. The KASKI report (which was presented to the General Chapter in 1993) recommended a policy of rearrangement (the fusion of certain communities). This report caused tensions in our Region. But, in the end, it helped us to speak with honesty and freedom about the concrete situation of our houses, while respecting the autonomy and the particularities of each one of them.

In the course of the year of Cîteaux, 1998, different celebrations were organized on the regional level, in collaboration with the three o.cist abbeys, the Bernardines of Oudenaarde and the o.cist Sisters of Bijloke. Since then we have formed a true Cistercian family in our Region and the contacts are increasing.

OSB–O.CIST.–OCSO COLLABORATION

A very intense collaboration with the Benedictine monks and nuns has also grown in our Region. The first common meeting of Dutch and Flemish osb and ocsso superiors took place in June of 1967. The occasion for this was the Dutch Pastoral Council meeting at Noordwijkerhout, where we discussed the changes in the place of monks and nuns in the Dutch Church, among other things. During this meeting there appeared a great need for exchanges with one another on many unanswered questions, above all those concerning liturgical renewal and formation. It was decided to begin a review whose target group would be the monasteries themselves, with the goal of promoting exchanges of experiences and points of view, and to make proposals contributing to reflection and to the renewal of the monastic life. This review *Monastieke Informatie* (Monastic Information), first published in 1967, is still an important organ of information, communication and dialogue among the different monastic communities and has a large audience. The o.cist monasteries began collaborating in 1968.

Several agreements of cooperation and consultation were also made in the area of liturgy and formation.

Liturgy: In our Order (GC 1967), it was foreseen that each Region would have its liturgy commission. Besides, a translation commission already existed for the Dutch linguistic Region. We also began, in collaboration with the Benedictines, the IWVL (Intermonasteriele Werkgroep Voor Liturgie / Intermonastic Work Group for the Liturgy) with the goal of composing a Dutch office of quality. This work group had several components: the *Commission for Chant* (putting the office to music: psalms, biblical canticles, hymns, antiphons, entrance and communion chants...), the *Commission for Readings* (translation of patristic readings, other non-biblical readings...), *Commission of Services* (liturgical calendar, compendium for feasts, composition of the offices...). Several CD's were also made.

Formation: Already since 1961 meetings of Benedictine and Trappist novice directors were being held. After the meeting of superiors in 1967, different initiatives were taken, because several abbeys were no longer able to supply a proper formation for novices, temporary professed, theology students and solemn professed. This collaboration led to a great solidarity among the different houses OSB-OC-OC SO in our Region. This includes 11 monasteries of Benedictine monks, 19 monasteries of Benedictine nuns, 2 monasteries of o.cist Cistercian monks, 1 monastery of o.cist Cistercian nuns, 8 monasteries of Trappists and 3 monasteries of Trappistines.

- 1 OIMV (*Opleidingscombinatie Initiele Monastieke Vorming / Association for Initial Monastic Formation*): this concerns an agreement to collaborate in the formation of novices. In the beginning we organized 6 weeks of formation each year, on a cycle of two years (the first session was in January of 1968), then, after several years, 3 weeks were proposed offering an introduction to the basics of the monastic life: acquaintance with Scripture, liturgy, ancient monastic texts and the Rule of Saint Benedict. We also tried to stimulate the individual activity of the novices in giving them preparation to do. For them these weeks are an opportunity to know one another and to support one another, given that they sometimes do not have brothers or sisters of the same age in their own community.
- 2 Very quickly we also organized annual formation days for the superiors and formators. These were progressively subdivided into *days for superiors* aiming at supporting these latter in their task of direction and giving them the possibility to share on this topic, and *days of formators* on which they met to work on accompaniment and other spiritual themes.

- 3 MOST (*Monastieke Studieweken* / Weeks of Monastic Study): Sessions (first session in March 1969; three times a year; later, less frequently) of ongoing formation for the solemn professed, especially to become familiar with the new ideas in theology, anthropology, spirituality. Since what was offered no longer met the demands of the monasteries, these sessions ended in 1996.
- 4 Since 1980, a cycle of formation was also begun for the temporary professed: MVJ (*Monastieke Vorming Jonggeprofesten* / Monastic Formation for Young Professed). This involves a cycle of three years for three weeks each year, focusing mostly on *lectio divina*, community and personal prayer, the vows, community life, etc.
- 5 Several initiatives were also undertaken as a common effort in theological formation (i.e. a *Studium Monasticum*). A comprehensive five-year cycle of theological studies was begun in 1984, in the monastic framework of MTV (*Monastieke Theologische Vorming* / Monastic Theological Formation): fifteen weeks of courses each year during which theological and philosophical disciplines were taught. Because of the lack of students and the lessening of means due to aging in the abbeys, this formation was no longer possible and it ended in 1997.
- 6 A lacuna appeared when MOST and MTV ceased to exist. The SMV (*Secretariaat Monastieke Vorming* / Secretariat for Monastic Formation) was then created in 1998 in the hope of helping the superiors and formators to promote and keep alive in the communities the care for ongoing formation. Since its creation, different initiatives have already been taken: study weeks, publications, reading groups, etc.

Other agreements have existed or still exist besides those regarding liturgy and formation:

- 1 Working groups around certain themes:
 - *Aziatica*: techniques of Eastern meditation
 - *Oude monastica*: group reading of ancient monastic texts
 - Monastic spirituality in the light of philosophy and recent theology
- 2 WAB (*Werkgroep Abdijbibliotheken* / Work group concerning abbey Libraries, since 1973): the goal was to stimulate collaboration among the abbey libraries and to provide mutual help (loaning books and periodicals). In the 1990s, this collaboration focused on the BIDOC program (a program of computerization for the

libraries). The libraries of other religious communities and seminaries are also associated with this group.

- 3 IIW (*Intermonasteriele Internet Werkgroep* / Intermonastic Work group for Internet): This work group began in 2000 in order to create our own internet site for the Region, www.monasteria.org.
- 4 Days for Priors/Prioresses : Days of sharing for second superiors (since 2003).
- 5 GBZ (*Ontmoetingen gastenbroeders en -zusters* / Meetings of brothers and sisters in charge of guest houses): one has already taken place in 2004. This theme of hospitality had already been discussed at Regional Meetings and days for the superiors.

All of these collaboration agreements are evaluated each year during the general assembly of superiors. In this time of continually increased ageing, this collaboration represents a challenge, but is also a real support for the communities of our Region.

9.2.10. The South and West France Region : FSO

(by Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois)¹⁸

1. COMPOSITION OF THE REGION; FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITIES

1.1. At present the Region consists of 15 monasteries of monks (of which one, Saint-Sauveur, is a foundation) and 10 of nuns.

- The Region does not coincide exactly with France, since, on the one hand, it includes only 12 of the 15 monasteries of monks and 9 of the 14 monasteries of nuns, and, on the other hand, it goes beyond the borders of France, counting La Fille-Dieu in Switzerland, Latroun and Saint Sauveur in the Near East, and Atlas in Morocco. It has developed special ties with the community of La Merci-Dieu, spiritually affiliated with the Order, the Bernardines in Switzerland (Géronde and Collombey), and several monasteries of the Order of Cîteaux (Boulaur, Castagniers, Lérins): their superiors are invited regularly to the meetings of the Region.

18 Superior then abbot of La Trappe (France) from February 1976 to October 2003.

The present name of “France sud et ouest” (FSO) is thus quite inadequate, all the more so because it does not contain all the monasteries of these two Regions of France (Les Gardes and Laval, for example, belong to CNE) and on the other hand, it includes monasteries from the other French Regions (La Grace-Dieu, Ubexy...). But we have not yet found a satisfactory acronym that can signify the entire Region.

- Given the size of the Region, and of other Regions like CNE, and the strangeness of their composition, the question has been raised of reconsidering the whole of the European Regions (except for Spain and the Isles) and perhaps of envisaging a redistribution of the houses.
- One of the consequences of this situation is the necessity for the Region to go beyond its limits in most of its activities, which spread out not only over all of France but also to French-speaking Europe, and even to the Cistercian “family,” and also to that of Benedictine monasticism which, in France, is of a contemplative nature, like our Order. A certain homogeneity exists at the heart of French monasticism, beyond distinctions of Orders and Congregations. But the monasteries of the Region outside of Europe, namely Latroun, Saint-Sauveur and Atlas, to their regret, cannot profit from all the services at the disposition of the monasteries of France, and they feel isolated.

The Region thus functions in a very “open” mode. It is its specific character and is also what constitutes its richness.

1.2. Most of the communities of the Region are among the most ancient of the Order: only Atlas, la Joie-Notre-Dame, Cabanoule and, of course, Saint-Sauveur were born in the twentieth Century. Eleven monasteries of monks began before 1852, and eight of nuns before 1875, if we count La Grace-Dieu, heiress of Port-Royal, and La Fille-Dieu, which has an uninterrupted history since 1268. No need to mention La Trappe, which weathered the French Revolution, thanks to Dom Augustin de Lestrange.

- They have sometimes inherited old buildings constructed for larger communities, which now, in some places, have a rich tradition and will not be easily abandoned, even if this would not be a catastrophe in the eyes of history. On the other hand, other places, even more important, such as Clairvaux, have disappeared.
- Moreover, the twelve French monasteries of monks of the Region are the origin of numerous foundations in the last two centuries, and thus find themselves at the head of important filiations (27 daughter houses of monks (10 within the Region, the majority—16—being outside of France), although all have a motherhouse of

French culture. Sept-Fons has recently made a foundation in the Czech Republic, where Vitorchiano has also just made a foundation.

- Twenty-one monasteries of nuns—namely, all of the FSO houses except La Fille-Dieu—have their motherhouse in the Region. Two monasteries of nuns of the Region made foundations after 1970 (Ubexy and La Joie-Notre-Dame).

1.3. The majority of the communities have a rather high average age. In certain places recruitment is low or difficult. It is useful to remember the civil and ecclesial contexts of these communities. The vocation “crisis” is affecting the Church of our French-speaking Regions whose population is becoming older, with fewer large families, even fewer stable families. On the other hand the number of monastic or contemplative communities is still very large. Can they all continue to develop as in former times? France has 128 monasteries living under the Rule of Saint Benedict, and Belgium has 44 (to say nothing of the Carmelite monasteries, more than 100 in France, nor of the Poor Clares, more than 50, nor of the other contemplatives.)

2. MUTUAL HELP AMONG THE COMMUNITIES

As has been indicated, this is not limited to the FSO Region, but the monasteries of the Region participate in it quite a bit and can profit from it just as much, if they like. If the structures established do not shape the face of the Region, because they go beyond it, they affect the communities of the Region. If they are not all “of” the Region, they are considered to be “in” the Region and for the most part, those in charge are members of monasteries of the Region.

2.1. *Formation*

2.1.1. The regional secretaries for formation of the two Regions FSO and CNE always work together and thus form a single “staff” of two monks and two nuns. This staff sends out information of interest to the communities (lists of preachers and lecturers, etc.) and organizes several courses destined for different groups.

- The most regular courses (each year, during 10 days in August or September) are aimed at young people in formation (after the novitiate). The themes touched on are monastic history and spirituality or theology..
- Every two or three years a course is organized for formators, and since 2000, this course has broadened its horizon to include the French- and German-speaking “Cistercian family.”

2.1.2. The novices and young professed still in the novitiate meet regularly, with their formators, by geographic regions. These inter-novitiate meetings are open to Benedictines in certain places.

2.1.3. A structure has been established on the level of the Cistercian “family” in French-speaking countries of Europe, in which Abbot Generals have their representatives, for the spreading of Cistercian culture (ARCCIS). This association contributes to making Cistercian authors better known through various publications and to answering requests of researchers, lay or religious, on Cistercian spirituality. The publishing work of the abbey of Bellefontaine, with its various collections, is of great benefit for all the monasteries of the Region and far beyond it.¹⁹

2.2. *Monastic Liturgy*

- A liturgy commission for French-speaking Europe has been in existence since 1968, called the “Cistercian Francophone Commission” (CFC), even though it has members other than Cistercians, for here also collaboration has been established not only between the two Cistercian Francophone Regions, but with the Benedictine world, especially that of the French Province of Subiaco. To make its service more efficient the commission has been declared an association and an author recognized by civil law.
- The CFC has effectively helped monasteries to celebrate their liturgy in conformity to the reforms approved for the Order, being careful for their expression in the French language in particular. It publishes a bulletin called *Liturgie*. One year out of two the General Assembly (of about 30 members) is open to other monks and nuns.
- Made up of three sections (texts, chant, and formation), it can take credit for many liturgical texts (including more than two hundred hymns, a good part of which has been adopted into the official *Liturgy of the Hours* of the Church in France) and it collaborates in the liturgical translations of the Bible. It has the role of screening, editing, and distributing music materials, and works at formation in chant through courses or meetings of cantors in various geographical regions, which allows them to be better formed and informed.

19 At present a group of monasteries under the direction of Mont-des-Cats is responsible for it.

2.3. *Concerning Aging Communities*

- The monk infirmarians, Cistercian and Benedictine, meet every other year to share their difficulties and to help one another. In some communities the infirmary is burdensome to maintain. Sometimes outside help is necessary. One wonders about the best way to meet the needs of persons who have become very dependent after an illness or because of age. It is not possible to plan a monastic nursing structure that could receive these persons in order to relieve monastic infirmaries. Other solutions are being researched, taking civil law into account.
- The social protection system in France gives monks and nuns assistance from an “Insurance Fund for Sickness and Aging” for the clergy. This fund is supplemented by a private insurance company (*Mutuelle-Saint-Martin*). The administrative council of the “Cistercian” section, composed of monks and nuns of the Order, furnishes information that can be helpful for our communities.

2.4. *Mutual Financial Help*

2.4.1. The cellarers and bookkeepers meet annually by geographic regions, with their Benedictine counterparts. Those who work with cheese do the same. The cheese industry is shared by a number of monasteries and the problems are common to all.

2.4.2. A structure that unites not only those who follow the Rule of Saint Benedict, but all the monastic Orders (more than two hundred communities are members) has been set up and a trademark “Monastic” has been legally registered. Created at first to take charge of the legal defense of Trappist or monastic trademarks, it was extended to the study of all economic problems of the monastic communities. It has several commissions: for ethics, administration, and business. All three give excellent advice to the communities. The General Assembly is a place of sharing where everyone can get to know one another. The association collaborates with two other organizations, supported by laypersons who offer their services to the monasteries. One gives financial assistance for certain operations (the “Foundation of Monasteries”) and another, “Assistance to Works from the Cloisters,” is more aimed at the commercialization of monastic products, especially those from the nuns’ monasteries, thanks to the stores set up in seven large cities in France.

2.4.3. Most of the monasteries have farm or forest lands but have given up raising animals. The principal agri-food industries are cheese, cookies, candy (chocolates,

bonbons, fruit pies, jams, syrups) and wine. Among the activities of the monasteries there are also the fabrication of dietary and cleaning products as well as the production of electricity or subcontracting for secular enterprises. But there is also the fabrication of altar breads and vestments, including monastic vestments for communities of the Order. Melleray has a photocomposition workshop.

Questions about the commercialization of our products are becoming more and more crucial. The wholesale dealers of former times cannot compete with the present day large shopping centers and our small scale processes, though they assure a recognized quality to our products, do not allow for very low costs in production. Our monasteries are still the best place to sell them and several have developed stores that sell not only their own products but also those of other communities. This is an effective mutual assistance, for it offers a more extensive sale possibility than just the monastery where the product is made. It also allows each store to obtain a larger turnover, assuring proportionate income. These stores thus contribute to the support of the monks or nuns at the same time that they offer a place of welcome to tourists who pass through. Nearly everywhere, they include a religious bookstore and offer a film or a video on the life of the monastery.

2.5. *The Chaplains of nuns*

It is becoming more and more difficult to find chaplains in communities decreasing in number. In four or five monasteries of nuns, the Father Immediate had to appoint a priest who is not a member of the Order, at least for a certain time. The situation will undoubtedly not get better in the near future. Let us recall that 21 monasteries of nuns have their motherhouse in the Region and expect it to provide a chaplain...

2.6. *Associations of "Lay Cistercians"*

A request from laypersons has been made to several communities of the Region. Some monasteries question whether they should respond to this request for it would engage the community in a service that it doesn't feel capable of. Five communities in the Region (in 2002) have set up an association, or a "fraternity" with these laypersons. Aiguebelle and Atlas have written norms or a charter for these lay associates. They can be found on the Internet site of the Order. One community would like their employees to be associated with the monastic project, something excluded in the norms of Aiguebelle. Thus practices are diverse and still being looked into. We find these associations promising, provided that a serious discernment is made on the involvement of these laypersons in our life.

9.2.11. Central and North Europe (CNE)

(by M. Michaël Fornoville)²⁰

1. COMPOSITION, NAME, EVOLUTION, AND THE UNITY OF THE TWO BRANCHES

It was at the 1960 General Chapter that the question of informal meetings of abbots came up. Their existence was acknowledged but caution was urged. These meetings were not mentioned at the 1962 or 1964 Chapters (See Dom Armand of Scourmont, CNE Minutes, 2003, p. 31). “After the election of Dom Ignace Gillet as Abbot General at Cîteaux, Dom Jean Chanut and I dared to ask him timidly if it would not be good for abbots to be able to meet to speak of things of the Order and thereby prepare for the General Chapters. To our surprise, he agreed right away, . . . under certain conditions. Dom Jean was the one who contacted the abbots of what was to become the Central Europe Meeting” (Memoirs of Dom Gueric, Scourmont).²¹

At Nazareth, the abbesses and the novice mistresses of Berkel, Brecht, and Maria Frieden met in early February 1965, to study problems of renewal.

A circular letter from the Abbot General, Dom Ignace, dated November 14, 1966, invited the abbesses to organize a Regional Meeting in view of revising the Constitutions. In France, two Regions were formed. The abbess of Maubec²² organized a meeting for the South (Midi–Southern France), and M. Marie of the Trinity²³ organized one at Les Gardes (11–16 December, 1966) for the North of France and French-speaking Belgium, that is, ten houses: Altbronn, Belval, Campénéac, Chimay, Clairefontaine, Igny, Laval, Les Gardes, Soleilmont, and Ubexy. With the approval of the Procurator General, three other superiors joined them: Berkel (Dutch), Nazareth (Flemish), and Maria Frieden (German). There was a vote, and 8 out of 9 voted to admit these latter participants as full-fledged members. Thus was born the *North-Europe Regional Conference of Nuns*.

But there seem still to have been some hesitations, because seven abbesses from France met later (October 21–26, 1967) without the Belgian abbesses, and the abbots of the North-France group met (November 21–23, 1967) with the abbesses of their filiations (eight in all). These abbots were joined by those of Mariawald,

20 Foundress and superior (Prioress) of Klaarland, in Belgium, from 1970 to March 1993.

21 Dom Gueric Baudet, administrator then abbot of Scourmont from May 1949 to September 1988.

22 M. Geneviève du Chaffaut, abbess from 1956 to 1984.

23 M. Marie of the Trinity Kervingant, abbess of Gardes from 1957 to 1979.

Engelszell, Caldey, and Scourmont (ten in all). On the other hand, the Belgian abbesses (along with those of Berkel and Maria Frieden) met at Clairefontaine (January 10–13, 1968), without the French abbesses, to prepare for the next General Chapter of abbesses and to prepare the responses to be sent to the Definitory.

The “France-North” Conference (October 1968), which brought together the abbots of Acey, Caldey, Citeaux, Engelszell, Mariastern, Mariawald, Mont-des-Cats, Oelenberg, Orval, Rochefort, and Scourmont, decided to change its name to “*Central-Europe*” (October 22, 1968). Thus the Regional Conference was baptized and given official recognition. At the same meeting, the abbots accepted (by a raised hand vote) to put into effect the abbesses’ wish to take part in their meetings.

The affiliation of daughter houses (of nuns) with their Fathers Immediate in the same Region did not make for a logical division of France. Nonetheless, apart from slight changes, these two large Conferences have met regularly once a year since the 1970s and have been mixed, except for one or another preparatory meeting for the General Chapter of abbesses. The nuns of the North, therefore, given their small number, did not form an autonomous Dutch-speaking Region, even though they attended the meetings of the Dutch-speaking abbots in a non-official way from the beginning.

Taking into account the German, Austrian, and Yugoslavian houses, there was always a diversified involvement, not only of languages, but of mentalities as well, which has been an enriching factor for Central and North Europe. It must be acknowledged that the non-French-speaking elements have sometimes found it difficult to follow the discussions, even with good interpreters. Recently (2002), a major improvement was made in the form of simultaneous translation for the five German-speaking members. Instead of interpreting in a low voice, the interpreter had a computer on hand and wrote the translation on a large screen for all to read, which allowed for a greater integration of all in the exchanges without being slowed down or hindered by translations. This experience was felt by all to be conclusive, which confirms the fact that a multilingual Regional Conference is more enriching than Sub-Regions created along language lines (Minutes, p. 15).

Given the large number of houses in our Regional Conferences, a number that was inevitably added to by invitations to neighboring Regions and several other superiors of the Cistercian Order, the Benedictines, the Bernardines, etc., the abbesses were often hesitant to bring a community delegate to the Regional Meeting. Even though, in 1975, it was decided that each Region would send a delegate to the General Chapter, few nun delegates took part in the Regional Meetings, often just one delegate from the house whose turn it was. As for the abbots, without overdoing it, they generally had a few at each meeting. They also continued to

choose the delegate for the General Chapter from among those who came to the Regional Meetings.

It was therefore early on that the two branches met simultaneously, but it was not until the General Chapter of Lourdes in 1999 that our Regions became a single Mixed Region: *Central and North Europe* (CNE).

In 2000, provisional statutes for the new mixed Region were drawn up. The main orientations of the statutes are as follows:

- We opted for two co-presidents, an abbess and an abbot.
- As part of their mandate, they are also delegates to the Central Commissions.
- They can be re-elected by simple majority.
- As for the community delegates (both monks and nuns), for each Region, two communities of monks and two communities of nuns, chosen following the order in the *Elenchus*, have to send a delegate. These delegates vote at the meetings.
- Concerning delegates to the General Chapter, for the nuns, at the second last meeting before a Chapter, a house is chosen by lots from among those houses that have not yet sent a delegate to the General Chapter. That house then delegates a sister who also attends the last Regional Meeting before the Chapter. The monks are adopting the same method as the nuns.

Regional Presidents:

Centre-Europe

D. Jean (Cîteaux)	1964
D. André (Mont des Cats)	1969
D. Loys (Cîteaux)	1978
D. Hervé (Acey)	1988
D. Armand (Scourmont)	1999

Nord-Europe

M. Lutgarde (Clairefontaine)	1968
M. Véronique (Laval)	1972
M. Danièle (Les Gardes)	1985
M. Anne-Marie (Altbronn)	1994
M. Benedict (Berkel)	1999

The Female Branch

Our Order is unique in the world with this enormous challenge of having two branches in one whole. This unity was difficult to obtain—even though it is part of the human make-up, “Male and female he created them”—and difficult to retain with all it entailed. It had to counter a certain amount of resistance in our Region, but, as the crowning achievement of forty years of peregrinations, the result is more than satisfying. The rights of abbots and abbesses are now the same in their monasteries. The abbesses are co-responsible in the functioning of Order and the General Chapters and as members of the Abbot General’s Council and as electors of the Abbot General. They preside along with abbots at assemblies of the General

Chapter of the two branches, at the Central Commission, and at Regional Meetings. They make Regular Visitations alone or with an abbot of the Order. Nuns take part in the Law Commission and other services. To make it complete, only one thing is lacking . . . priesthood!

2. QUESTIONS TREATED

From the beginning, the dynamic of the Regional Conference's meetings was different from the earlier annual meetings, where few resolutions were taken.

- First, there was *aggiornamento* and all the important adaptations it involved.
- There was the adaptation of *unification of communities* (along with the whole problem of lay brothers and sisters), which, no doubt, was rushed in certain cases and was not sufficiently discussed in the Region to allow us to close ranks and stay in step (1964). It was a point that came up often.
- Then there was the enormous adaptation of the *liturgy* in the vernacular following the Council, which, however, was granted with difficulty by certain Roman authorities. Once authorization had been obtained, language groups and Regions worked at it with ardor.
- Groups of specialists did good work, but they were also supported by the abbots, who made some important choices.
- The great turning point of the 1969 Chapter—moving from uniformity in the Order to *unity* or union of communities within *pluriformity*—was decisive, even if it did not gain unanimous adherence from the start. A tendency to call the Rule of Benedict into question in the search for needed adaptations received a conclusive answer.
- The immense project of *revising the Constitutions* required years of intense work at the General Chapters, and had repercussions on the regional level, determining the work of the Regional Conferences for a good fifteen years.
- We must not forget the hot points regarding *collegiality* (1984–1986) and later Las Huelgas (1986–1990).
- Then came the work on the major statutes: the *Ratio Institutionis* (1987) and the *Statute on Foundations* in several editions; much later there was the *Statute on Temporal Administration* (1999). All of these subjects were dealt with in the Regional Meetings.
- There were also the *major themes* of the General Chapters, which involved community preparation and discussion at Regional Meetings: Cistercian Contemplative Identity (1993), The School of Charity (1996), etc. All of that time was given

to preparing for the General Chapters and doing a serious *auto-critique* of each Chapter at the first Regional Meeting afterwards.

- *Portraits of the communities*, prepared for the General Chapter following various models—by the Father Immediate or Visitor, by the communities themselves, etc.—were usually presented and discussed beforehand in the Regional Meetings, which greatly fostered pastoral dialogue on the regional level. This ever deeper sharing, with greater and greater “listening with fraternal care and understanding, mutual help when needed, and sometimes compassion” (Timadeuc, 1999), brought certain themes to the fore, which were retained for broader discussion in the plenary sessions or in fraternal meetings during the Regional Meetings themselves.

3. STRUCTURES FOR MUTUAL AID

Obviously, *formation* was often studied, both *initial and ongoing formation*. Since our Regional Conference includes different languages, the solution to the formation problem was found in various ways according to the possibilities of each linguistic group. On the whole, we are fortunate on account of the number of initiatives available and the relative proximity of the abbeys in our areas. More specifically, but without being exhaustive, we can list the following:

- For the *Dutch-speaking* Region: From January 1969 until today—they are now at their 120th week!—the OIMV,²⁴ three weeks of monastic studies each year for monk and nun OSB and OCSO novices from Holland and Flanders. This is followed up by the MVJ for young professed, and in a less regular way by the MTV and MOST for additional formation. The OCSO and OSB superiors also have their annual days of meeting and formation. The same applies to the novice masters of the two Orders.
- For the *German* Region: The Benedictine and Cistercian novice directors have a formation week every two years (monks and nuns). Recently, Mariawald, Maria Frieden and Engelszell together organized a semi-annual week of formation for their novices.
- For the *French-speaking* Region: There have been six courses for the novices at Laval (between 1970 and 1982), a semester of Patristic and Cistercian studies at Chimay in 1972 and another on the Eastern origins of Christian monasticism at Les Gardes in 1978, and annual courses for young monks and nuns. There are also, of course, the STIM and STIM-BAC²⁵ programs, not to mention the studium

²⁴ For this acronym and the following ones, see above 9.2.9 in the presentation of NED.

²⁵ Institute and Studium of Intermonastic Theology organized in Belgium and France in collaboration with the

programs in the monasteries, certain of which are open to monks (and sometimes nuns) of other houses (Mont-des-Cats, Pierre qui Vire, etc.). There is no need to speak of the courses for cantors, cellarers, infirmarians, guestmasters, librarians, bookkeepers, etc. in liaison with FSO.

4. PRESENT SITUATION

Along with formation, the question of *community reform and renewal* has often been treated, especially recently with stress on the fact that “the problem is less one of adaptation than one of authenticity, the point of reference being, not the individual and that person’s era, but the vocation of the person” (Dom Guillaume, 2003).

Recruitment has diminished considerably and seems to invite each house to change tack and submit to the inevitable shrinking of active personnel, and to strive for creative solutions. Certain abbeys of the Region have in fact taken measures that allow them to live monastic life in a reduced framework of “small communities,” but in an equally authentic way. It seems even to be a trait that has developed in the Region in recent years: we have left behind an “ideal” stance in favor of greater simplicity and of a more modest and real embodiment of our life.

The theme of *precariousness*, which arose from the reading of the house reports at the September 2002 General Chapter, has proven to be a widespread reality today, and it takes on various forms. This situation has set in motion a major movement of solidarity on the regional level, which is a concrete way of putting the *Charter of Charity* into practice. The problems are difficult, and often the communities in question cannot face them alone. In addition, abbots and abbesses meet in commissions of mutual help and commit themselves to find solutions to these precarious situations.

There also exist new spontaneous meetings for superiors who wish to share among themselves their pastoral concerns like the urgent problem befalling Fathers Immediate who have to find superiors or other officers for their daughter houses (January 2002 meeting at Cîteaux, March 2002 meeting in Paris).

Benedictines for theological formation. The program consists of ten-day sessions that alternate with study in the monastery, with the help of a tutor. The first cycle lasts three years. It can be followed in France by the STIM-Bac, which forms a partnership with the faculty of the Jesuits in Paris and allows one to obtain a baccalaureate in theology.

≈ *Note on the New Distribution of Regions* ≈

As we hinted above, the 2005 General Chapter approved an experiment of a restructuring of four European Regional Conferences. This will probably be ratified soon.²⁶ This measure was taken, on the one hand, to reduce the size of France-South-and-West (FSO) and of Central-and-North-Europe (CNE), and on the other hand, to enlarge the composition of the Italian Region (RIM) and allow the Region of Holland and Flemish Belgium (NED) to integrate the abbesses of the same language. Each superior is free to connect his/her community to the Region of his/her choice. This explains what could look like infringements of a strictly geographic distribution. Thus at the present time we have functioning:

- REM (Mediterranean Region): contains the Italian monasteries, three French monasteries of the south Mediterranean, Morocco and, for linguistic reasons, two other communities: from the Czech Republic (foundation of Vitorchiano) and Austria.
- CNE (Central and North Europe): essentially takes in Walloon Belgium and the monasteries in the north and northeast of France.
- REI (Europe-Israel): unites the communities of the east and southeast of France with those of Switzerland, Germany and the Czech Republic; this is the Region that connects with Latroun in the Holy Land.
- RÉCIF (Cistercian Region in France): contains all the communities (except one) in the west and southwest of France.
- NED (Holland and Flemish Belgium): receives two of the three communities of nuns in the Region.
- The seven other Regions continue on their way without changing composition.

How the Central Commissions will be composed, in connection with the Regions, is on the program for the next General Chapters.

²⁶ The REM has already been approved by the General Chapter of 2005.

PART THREE
CISTERCIAN LIFE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

INTRODUCTION:

An Overview of the Present Situation

(by Dom André Louf)¹

Without doubt it was the *aggiornamento* of the liturgy that had the greatest impact on Cistercian life after Vatican II. The simplification of its structure, the reworking of texts, as well as the access to modern languages allowed the liturgy to play more fully the role that it had during the centuries, namely, through careful rumination of the words offered, to be the privileged place of lectio and the source of interior prayer. Each linguistic area had to resolve the particular problems—texts and melodies—that it encountered, but that was done most often in a satisfactory manner, and enriched the contemplative ambiance of the monastic day.

Parallel to the liturgy, it was Lectio Divina of the Scriptures that greatly profited from the *aggiornamento*. Already begun by the renewal in Biblical studies, before the Council, lectio ended up occupying more time in the day of each monk and nun, and this under its traditional form, that of a slow and meditative reading, done in the presence of God, with confidence in the power that its Word held for each one of those who approached it with faith.

Lectio is extended to spiritual authors, particularly those who represent the *Doctrina Sanctorum Patrum*, already recommended by Saint Benedict in the last chapter of his Rule. Here again, the Patristic renewal of the last decades constituted a precious stimulus, placing at the disposition of many the texts of the first fathers of monasticism, and, concerning more particularly our Order, the Cistercian authors of the twelfth century. This “return to the sources” had an impact on the whole of the *aggiornamento* and left numerous traces in the new Constitutions, drawn up by several consecutive General Chapters, following Vatican II and according to its directions.

If the rigor of certain ascetical observances were mitigated, for the most part

¹ Abbot of Mont-des-Cats (France) from January 1963 to November 1997. He was “Vicar of the Abbot General” from 1974 to 1984 and Promotor of the General Chapter from 1974 to 1993. Since his resignation he has been living in a hermitage near a monastery of Benedictine women, which doubtless explains his skepticism regarding Lay Cistercians.

they still remained under one form or another, particularly those like vigils and fasting that had always been part of the great Tradition. A certain effort was made to rediscover their deep significance in our present anthropology, which has evolved considerably in relation to that of the Middle Ages. This effort has not been effective due to the discredit our modern culture has placed on bodily asceticism, and this even in the Church. Thus there is still much to be done in order better to understand the link between asceticism and contemplative interiority that were so important in the beginnings of the monastic life.

Particular attention was given to the balance of the monastic day, between the time allotted to work and the time available for lectio and prayer. The *aggiornamento* of the life of the lay brothers, in the framework of the unification of the communities (Decree of December 1965, [cf. 5.3]), made it necessary to redefine, for each individual case, the amount of time for work and contemplative *quies*, and even attendance at the Divine Office in choir. When carried out with the necessary discernment, such an effort allowed a better understanding of the spiritual gifts of each brother and sister in particular, at the service of their personal vocation and that of the community. It also forced a break in the strict uniformity that reigned up to that time not only within each community, but also between different houses and regions of the Order. The rapid expansion of the Order, which began in the 1950s in geographic and cultural areas very different from those foundations formerly made, greatly favored this flexibility in the life and the observances.

Within the communities, because of this, fraternal life was notably stimulated. Fraternal exchanges of various kinds were authorized and then encouraged. The functioning of councils and community meetings was often improved, which led to a more effective participation of the brothers and sisters when decisions were made that affected the entire community.

This emphasis on fraternal relations brought with it considerable flexibility, sometimes excessive no doubt, in the rules of silence, formerly very strict. As in the case of other observances, important for the contemplative quality of the life, a deepened reflection on the link between silence and interiority now seems imperative.

At the level of the structures of the Order, the full autonomy given to the General Chapter of nuns was, without doubt, the most important event. From it we could hope for a reciprocal enrichment of the two branches. The legitimate and understandable concern for total equality between the two finally prevailed. We were thus deprived of a typically "feminine" text of the Constitutions of the Order which could have reflected the complementary and more precisely the feminine

nuances of the Cistercian charism, which would have constituted a positive gain for the two branches.

The birth and development of the Regional Conferences was another positive element in the organization of the Order, not only for the preparation of the General Chapters, which was their primary objective, but also for the awareness of the originality of all the cultures represented and their impact on the adaptation of the Cistercian charism in the observances.

Finally, under the impetus of the present Abbot General, certain monasteries encouraged the establishment of groups of “lay Cistercians,” associated with the Order through them. Some communities have willingly engaged in this open breach with the traditional separation from the world that had always put aside similar initiatives. Other communities seemed rather reticent, wondering if the latter were not reproducing at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the divergence that the Order quickly experienced in the twelfth century, after the death of Saint Bernard, between monasteries tempted by activity in relation with the outside world (preaching, missions) and those who wanted to remain faithful to the *quies cisterciensis* that the first Fathers of Citeaux favored, and more particularly the School that can be called “claravallian.” It is too soon to predict how this trend will develop.

Guiding Principles of Development Throughout the Twentieth Century

10.1. CISTERCIAN IDENTITY: TWO POINTS OF VIEW

10.1.1. The Viewpoint of Dom Armand Veilleux²

This volume describes the Order's development over a period of a little more than a century. What has emerged from this evolution is a strong sense of identity. It is the history of a group of women and men who knew how to traverse many trials and more than one crisis without losing their Cistercian identity, for it had been well forged in the preceding centuries by uprooting and odyssey.

A person can enter into a true relationship with another only in the measure that he or she has a strong identity. A Catholic can enter a fruitful ecumenical dialogue if he is well anchored in his Catholic tradition, much like only a Christian who is solid in his faith can truly dialogue with a representative of another religious tradition. Finally, only someone who is well rooted in his or her own culture is capable of entering deeply into another culture so that a creative newness can result from a true inculturation. It is the same for institutions and communities.

During this period of a little over a century that interests us, and that can easily be divided into two sections—before Vatican II and after Vatican II—our Order manifested a very clear identity. During the first part of these historical sections, it was a question of fidelity to the fundamental monastic values well established in the uniform observances in all the monasteries, as well as in the juridical tradition clearly established in 1893 and lived faithfully.

In the years preceding Vatican II, the Order, strong in its traditions and at the same time having a spirit of adventure inherited from the decades of odyssey from the time of Dom Augustin de Lestrange, did not hesitate to initiate a surge

² Dom Armand Veilleux has been abbot of Scourmont since 1999, after having been abbot of Mistassini (Canada) from 1969 to 1976, and of Conyers (USA) from 1984 to 1990; he was Procurator of the Order from 1990 to 1998.

of new foundations in the four corners of the world. It quickly became evident that the unity of the Order as well as fidelity to its monastic vocation could not be guaranteed simply by fidelity to uniform observances. The shocks created by the irruption of the Spirit of Vatican II, and the presence, at the time, of students at Monte Cistello coming from most of the monasteries of men in the Order, as well as several crises happening in local Churches, could have smashed everything to bits within the Order. But this did not happen. Much to the contrary.

One of the reasons that our Order remained spiritually and monastically healthy throughout this entire period, in spite of decreasing numbers (accompanied by the large increase of foundations) was that from the beginning of the Council it made a collective and collegial effort to express its identity in the writing of important texts that were never the result of a few isolated scribes but always from dialogue at the level of the entire Order. These texts are the objective expression of a clearly perceived vocation.

The writing of a "Declaration on the Cistercian Life," finalized during the 1969 Chapter, after a process of maturation in the communities and Regional Meetings, was a key charismatic moment. All the great intuitions of this brief text form the basic outline for the Constitutions and all the important Statutes written later: on Formation, the Regular Visitation and Temporal Administration, not forgetting the one on Foundations, continually reworked to respond to constantly changing situations.

The fundamental intuition of this Declaration is that the Cistercian life is a life "totally oriented toward the experience of the living God," which is a very beautiful way to describe what is called today the "contemplative life," an expression that is now too common unfortunately. This is reaffirmed from the beginning of our Constitutions (c. 2), where our Order is defined as "wholly ordered to contemplation" consecrating its members to "the worship of God" following the Rule of Saint Benedict. Also, our Document on Formation, in its prologue, which is a resumé of all the spirituality of our Constitutions, describes formation as a long process leading us, from our entrance to the monastery until our death, to be gradually transformed to the image of Christ, and thus a contemplative union with God. According to the conclusion (n. 31) of the Statute on the Regular Visitation, it is conceived as a spiritual event offered to each community to guarantee its growth in fidelity to the Cistercian grace. The Statute on Temporal Administration opens with the affirmation that "the entire organization of the monastery is directed to bringing the monks into close union with Christ." And finally, the goal of a foundation is to foster this Cistercian *life*.

The second important intuition, united with the fundamental intuition of our Founders of the Twelfth Century, is that our life is clearly and profoundly *ceno-*

bitic. We are true cenobites living together in solitude and not hermits living in community. “We carry out this search for God under a Rule and an Abbot, in a community of love where all are responsible. It is through stability that we commit ourselves to this community,” says the Declaration of 1969. We could enumerate endless texts from our Constitutions and each of the Statutes mentioned in which the important orientations of the life and important decisions rest with the community as such. Evidently this means, in each case, community understood as properly Cistercian, that is, the brothers together “with their abbot” (to use this fine expression of the Little Exordium describing the monks of Molesmes leaving for Cîteaux “with their abbot”).

A third aspect of our Cistercian identity is poverty, incarnated in simplicity of life. According to the Declaration, “Our Cistercian life is basically simple and austere. It is truly poor and penitential ‘in the joy of the Holy Spirit.’” And according to our Constitutions (c. 3.3) the monks “seek the blessedness promised to the poor” “in simplicity and labor.” As for the Document on Formation, in its Prologue (n. 4) it speaks of the poverty of heart which allows it to “run with an open heart on the paths of God’s service,” after gradually becoming detached from false sources of security. The Statute on Temporal Administration also recalls from the beginning (n. 7) the importance of evangelical simplicity in the use of goods that we have at our disposal but which are all “ecclesiastical goods,” that is, goods belonging to the People of God. This practice of evangelical poverty and simplicity will evidently be an important point to look out for during the Regular Visitation, and every foundation should be ready to live a serious poverty for quite some time.

Our Order was conceived by our Founders of the Twelfth Century as a community of communities. In modern terms, the collegial dimension of pastoral solicitude is an essential aspect of our Cistercian identity. Our Constitutions say it clearly in its beautiful c. 71 which opens the third section. This collegial dimension affects the life not only of superiors but of all the members of the Order. Also, when monks or nuns elect an abbot or abbess, they ought to be conscious that they are electing someone who should exercise this collegial responsibility. The Regular Visitation is one of the first exercises of this collegiality, which is expressed also in the approval of foundations by the General Chapter, an approval which includes the acceptance of a collective responsibility for a new foundation. Finally the same co-responsibility is exercised in the material help that communities are called to offer one another.

Another aspect of the Cistercian identity that people will want to emphasize—among many others that could be mentioned—is its cultural incarnation. The Declaration of 1969 happened because of the necessity of reaffirming the ba-

sic identity of the Order and at the same time of recognizing the necessity of a diversity because of the implantation of the Order in numerous cultures, all in a situation of rapid evolution. In the same spirit, the Document on Formation was limited to affirming the important fundamental principles of all formation in the Cistercian spirit, leaving ample room for adaptation to all cultures and even calling each Region (n. 69) to make this adaptation carefully. It is the same for the Statute on Temporal Administration. The Statute on Foundations has never ceased being revised, Chapter after Chapter, precisely in order to respect this need of incarnation in the evolution of cultural situations.

Thus, one sees that the Order has maintained, in the course of the last half century, during a profound and rapid evolution, a very clear and solid identity, that has known how to constantly repeat and reaffirm itself in its legislative and spiritual texts. We can be confident that this clearly Cistercian identity, with the principle characteristics that we have just described, will allow it to face serenely all the challenges that it will not fail to meet in the years ahead, not only in the countries of ancient Christianity but also in the young Churches.

10.1.2. The Viewpoint of Mother Martha Driscoll³

THE SEARCH

In China, the underground community asks me, “What exactly is the Cistercian identity? What specific things do we have to do to be Cistercians?” The Novice Directors of the USA ask me “What is the Cistercian identity?” The question comes up again and again in different forms and in different contexts. We try to face it in new ways and deepen our answer in an unending spiral that repeats what we know and yet always seems to be a new discovery. Despite enormous differences in culture, all our monasteries are sincerely asking the same question. That is creating a new unity: we are all together in the same search.

We have been asking ourselves “What is our Cistercian Identity?” for about forty years, the space of a generation, the length of time the people of Israel wandered about in the desert looking for their identity—or rather being formed in their identity as the People of God. Perhaps that search in the desert of uncertainty has been renewing our Cistercian identity of seeking God in a communal desert spirituality and will give birth to a new generation, born of that search. Perhaps the search itself is our identity, our process of becoming who we are as we seek how to search for God with our whole lives and hearts.

It brings us to a new discovery of our identity in the Church and as Church, to our identity as followers of Jesus, to our most profound identity as members of Christ, children of the Father. As I tell our Chinese sisters, our identity is not found by seeking what makes us different from others in the Church, but by seeking to live more fully the Mystery of the One, Universal Church and understanding our place in it. We have one charism among many—all of them good and beautiful, all of them with the same salvation history, all responding to the same Revelation, all of them centered on Jesus, all of them playing their specific role in the Divine plan of redemption, all of them seeking to spread the Kingdom of Love to the ends of the earth and to the vast expanses of time until all is united in Christ’s offering to the Father.

We are not alone in our search. Each religious family has been on a journey returning to the roots, going back to the founders, back to the original charism. This has brought about a new unity among all the religious Orders and Congregations. Perhaps we feel that more in a “new Church” such as Indonesia where contacts with other religious families are an almost daily experience. In our poverty, we

³ An American, Mother Martha entered the Italian monastery of Vitorchiano in 1975, at the age of 31. She was part of the foundation of Gedono (Indonesia) as superior and became its first abbess in 2000.

experience the beauty of the Church as an 'exchange of gifts.' In Europe and North America there is a different kind of poverty, in which the Church and religious in particular have unexpectedly found themselves in a minority position and under heavy criticism as well. There has been an 'exchange of problems' that has brought different congregations together, without the defenses, suspicions and rivalry of former times.

According to Louis Bouyer, the differences between religious families grew up as barriers in the nineteenth century, at a time when distinctiveness was sought as identity.⁴ The re-establishment of the religious orders that had been banished by the French Revolution led to a thoroughgoing reconstruction in which there was inevitably a certain degree of artificiality. Institutions were reproduced as they were thought to have been in a certain idealized period, with little discernment made between what was essential and what was relative. Historical distinctions were made between different schools of spirituality and these distinctions were cultivated in and for the sake of affirming their identity over and against other spiritualities. Benedictine, Jesuit, Carmelite spiritualities began to be viewed as so different as to be in competition if not outright opposition. Each religious family sought to create a complete vision of the spiritual world hermetically sealed off from any other vision.

Those efforts were clearly not based on reality. For example, how can Theresian spirituality and Ignatian spirituality be set up as separate edifices when Theresa had Jesuits as her directors? Saint Ignatius was close to monastic spirituality. Jesuits often had contact with, and inspired renewal in Cistercian monasteries. Well-intentioned disciples can be very unintelligent descendants of the masters they seek to serve. Saint Benedict, Saint Bernard, Saint Ignatius never wished to do anything else than propose perennial Christian spirituality to their contemporaries. That is what happens when any new congregation is born. What happened in France in the nineteenth century was that many religious families were re-established at the same time in the same places and they needed to affirm their identities by having something different.

Vatican II's call to return to the spirit of the founders could have made the situation worse. However, the document *Starting Afresh from Christ*⁵ invites us not only to go back to our founders/foundresses for renewal but to go back to Jesus in the Gospel for new life. When we start afresh from Christ, we find that what we have in common as religious men and women is more than what differentiates the various congregations and charisms. We need to seek that common ground in

4 See Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*, chapter one.

5 Instruction of the CIVCSVA, May 19, 2002.

which we are all rooted in our contemplative relationship with Jesus—which is the only reason for consecrated virginity in community life.

We go back to Jesus through the charism of the founders—the special and enormous grace given to them in their personal encounter with Jesus in view of their call to be fathers and mothers of a religious family. But what defines a Christian spirituality is not any distinction between one group and another. Over-specialization, like its opposite, syncretism—which is so open to everything that it has no identity at all—can both lead to sterility, because our attention is then more centered on ourselves than on the God we meet in Jesus.

SO, . . . WHAT IS OUR CISTERCIAN IDENTITY?

Our identity is us, you and me, all of us, the men and women who are part of the Cistercian Order. It doesn't exist apart from us. What is the identity of a family? It is not the name or the nose or the family business but rather the fact of being part of the family, of being part of a line of descent, of having been generated by those who were generated by others in the family tree. It is a common blood that runs in our veins that ties the members together, like it or not. **Identity is relationship.** It is a breath of the Spirit in which we recognize ourselves as belonging to the same family. We are part of the immense family tree of the Church, one small branch on the limb of monastic, religious life. Our Cistercian identity is a physical, spiritual, emotional, psychological and theological reality more than it is a clear idea. It is being part of a living incarnated charism which we receive from those who received it before us. We are part of the family of God in and through our Cistercian family.

We are a strange breed of seekers, a motley group: perhaps loners, often rebels, perhaps young idealists, or older 'failures' in the game of life, disappointed, deceived and wounded by the emptiness, meaninglessness and violence of life in this world. There is a common thirst, a hunger, an unquenchable desire that cannot be satisfied with something less than everything. That dissatisfaction can easily be misdirected and become the cause of a lot of grumbling. It is a half-conscious need to be with Jesus all the time, day and night that is often frustrated and frustrating because the presence of Jesus eludes us.

Those characteristics are often found in people who are proud and selfish, who demand too much of themselves and others, who judge and maybe despise the life of ordinary mortals, who want something 'better', something 'higher', something 'special': people who have a more than average need of true conversion of heart.

In each of us there has been some kind of an encounter with the love of God revealed and made flesh in Jesus. We have been attracted and have asked: "Rabbi,

where do you live?” and we have responded to his invitation, “Come and see.” Andrew and the other apostle went and stayed for a symbolic day. We, like them, decided to stay for the rest of our lives. The staying is not as romantic and satisfying as it seemed to be at first. Perhaps that *staying* is our identity: that determined, dogged, relentless will to stick it out. The conviction that if there’s anything, anywhere, that has meaning, it is Jesus. To whom else can we go? If things don’t seem to make sense where we are, they will make even less sense if we leave. Maybe it is our stubbornness that brings us to an ever deepening abandonment to Him—“he understands so it doesn’t matter if I don’t.” At solemn profession we put our trust in his promise and beg him not to disappoint us. We put our trust in the community’s willingness to pull us out of every hole we fall into. Our *staying* is a *staying together*.

Our identity is perseverance in faith in a life that is ordinary, obscure and laborious. It is a specific way of knowing and following Jesus. Our identity is Christ and our goal is to grow in his love and bring his compassion to the suffering world. Our aim is eternal life for ourselves and many others. We enter the monastery in order to become fully Christian, to enter into the life of the Trinity, to build up the Church, the Body of Christ in unity and communion, and to incarnate Christ’s worship of the Father. It is a gift and a mission in the Church. We learn to live it in and through the universal Church. We can lose sight of it, we can forget it, we can betray it but the objective identity remains.

Cistercian Identity and Vatican II

Since Vatican II we have been in a period of renewal and yet somehow the hoped-for springtime of new life has not always arrived. Life has been too strict, too harsh, too demanding, too inhuman. The letter of the law has often stifled life. Sacrifice has frequently displaced contemplation. Otherworldly spirituality has left little place for human growth and development. Conformity has left no place for freedom. Practices of public humiliations have wounded personal dignity. Absolute silence has squelched communication. Everything was done together and yet individualism seemed to reign supreme. Friendship was suspect. Affection was frowned upon. Control was more important than charity. Authority tended to be absolute and obedience blind.

We found our pre-Vatican *conversatio* was not working and was in need of drastic changes. The *Statute on Unity and Pluralism* opened the doors and windows. The reason for many practices had long since been forgotten. They were simply observances that had to be performed in order to seek perfection and avoid being proclaimed in the chapter of faults. Once the winds of change began

blowing, many were dropped with relief, but also without any real evaluation of why those practices had been created in the first place. Renewal meant throwing off the burdens of unhealthy oppression, lightening the ascetic practices, changing the daily schedule, cutting down on community programs to have more time for personal prayer. There was thirst for contemplation, freedom, leisure time, and eremitical life. It meant becoming responsible for one's own monastic life, realizing the psychological damage that had been done and seeking ways of healing and personal growth. Self-service in the dining room sometimes entailed eating at different times, following personal rhythms. The availability of private cells and more free time led to abandoning the common exercise of prayer and *lectio* together in one place. In some communities this process went very quickly and in others very slowly. In some there was the energy of anger at the past, in others hesitations or resistances about leaving the old and accepting the new. Attachment to tradition seemed to be in direct opposition to renewal.

Each community developed a *conversatio* with more freedom in all areas: food, sleep, clothing, personal space, use of time, personal belongings, reading, communication with those outside the monastery, travel, and visits. Work became more varied as agricultural work slowly decreased. Common work almost completely disappeared and the common life was disparaged as too confining and constricting. Participation at the Eucharist, the Office and common meals often suffered as well. Silence became an impossible ideal but communication remained difficult. Latent individualism blossomed. The tendency was to look for solutions outside of our tradition, even outside of our faith: depth psychology, Eastern meditation, Zen. A gaping lack of confidence and trust in the worth of our own identity became evident.

In the history of Benedictine monasticism, movements of renewal usually begin with going back to the Rule. After Vatican II, however, we were more likely to go back to our Cistercian Fathers or even more so to the desert fathers who seemed to be appropriate heroes for our individualistic times. The emphasis was on becoming more Cistercian and less Trappist, less strict, less rigid. We were sometimes embarrassed at our Order's name which vaunts a 'Stricter Observance', giving a bad public image. Often the Rule of Saint Benedict was put on the back burner, neglected, even mistrusted, felt to be a leftover from a patriarchal era that had little to do with our modern experience and was perhaps to blame for the excessive harshness of the past. People were allergic to hearing the "must's," "do not's," "never's" and "will be punished's." In some communities, the practice of reading a section of the Rule together in chapter each day disappeared. It then followed that there was no more reason to go to the chapter room every day either. Personal reading seemed to obviate the need for chapter talks from the abbot

or abbess. Maturity meant thinking for oneself and not needing the teaching of another. Mature obedience meant discerning God's will through dialogue and no longer simply accepting the decisions of others.

What happened to our *conversatio*? Does it still have any meaning to identify our charism with a *conversatio*? The world to which we opened the doors was a world seeking comfort and freedom. Have we gone too far in that direction and thus lost an alternative lifestyle that flies in the face of consumerism? Did we adjust ourselves too much to secular humanism without realizing what the differences were with Cistercian humanism? What clear, radical, evangelical proposal of monastic life do we offer to those who have found comfort a meaningless pursuit and humanism a dead end when it is not based on transcendental reality? What challenge do we offer to those who want to give their lives for a better world, for the eternal salvation of those who suffer and die in unjust and violent times?

SCHOOL OF LOVE

When I read *Fraternal Life in Community*,⁶ I felt certain that it must have been written by a Cistercian. Our charism—the community as a *Schola Caritatis*—was being proposed to all Congregations and Orders. I felt a profound wonder that the special charism of Cistercian life is truly at the heart of the Mystery of the entire Church.

Whereas western society applauds the independent person, the one who can attain self-actualisation alone, the self-assured individualist, the Gospel requires persons who, like the grain of wheat, know how to die to themselves so that fraternal life may be born. Thus community becomes *Schola Amoris*, a School of Love, a school in which all learn to love God, to love the brothers and sisters with whom they live, and to love humanity, which is in great need of God's mercy and of fraternal solidarity.⁷

The Magisterium of the Church (*At the Beginning of the New Millennium*, 43 and *Starting Afresh from Christ*), has repeated again and again the call to the spirituality of communion. The ecclesiology of Vatican II is the spirituality of our Cistercian Fathers. That was the exciting discovery made at Vitorchiano in the 1960's and 1970's. We have a rich heritage to plumb, to receive and to share with all religious and with the entire Church. Being Cistercian is simply the way we become Christian and participate in the Church.

⁶ CIVCSVA, *Congregavit nos*, "Fraternal Life in Community," February 2, 1994.

⁷ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 25.

Religious community is a visible manifestation of the communion which is the foundation of the Church and, at the same time, a prophecy of that unity towards which she tends as her final goal. As ‘experts in communion,’ religious are, therefore, called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and in the world, witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design.⁸

If all religious are called to be “experts in communion,” we Cistercians, with a spirituality of communion dating from the 12th century, should be experts who can enable others to be experts. We ourselves are vowed to the hidden life but our communities are very visible and we are called to be microcosms of the Church, manifestations of that communion of life to which all are called to find fulfillment in eternal life. We are cities placed on the mountain top—or in a spacious valley. Our mission is to give witness to the reality of the Church as the sacrament of unity, freedom, happiness, peace and personal fulfillment. People who come to visit our monasteries in the vague search for that peace want to discover not only prayer and spiritual direction but a visible reality of human community in God. If we are living as a school of love, we give witness to the Christian miracle that it really is possible for people to live together in stable, faithful relationships.

The witness we give, the image we present, is an expression of our identity. The Cistercian life used to be known popularly as the most austere Order of the Church: not a very attractive witness. If people go away thinking ‘those people are really holy and living a heroic life that I could never live,’ they will go away alienated rather than feeling invited to enter more fully into the communion of God’s love. But on the other hand, if we give the impression of being leisurely country clubs where one can live undisturbed in silence, there is perhaps even less witness and only the wrong kind of attractiveness, perhaps only for those seeking a quiet place to retire.

Many people have been hurt by the Church, influenced by the bad press she receives, confused by ideologies of relativism, deceived by the empty promises of success and consumerism, wounded by their inability to love and be loved, to be faithful. There are people hungry for love, hungry for friendship, hungry for the hope that there is still a meaning in life, hungry for the eternal values of truth, goodness and beauty. People who know in their heart of hearts that Jesus is the only “answer” to their lives and yet have difficulty reconciling themselves to the Church because they haven’t yet experienced the Church as communion. We can offer them a hand and a smile in an authentic way if we are genuinely offering a

⁸ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 10.

hand and a smile to our brothers and sisters every day. If the guests are aware of enduring and unresolved conflicts among us, we will only add to their long list of deceptive experiences. But if we are living a life of committed conversion aimed at building up mutual love in the community, with all the difficulties and pain that entails, in union with the long-suffering loving kindness of the heart of our God, then they will feel peace, compassion and joy. They will sense the unity that alone can give credible witness that the Church is the sacrament of salvation, the School of Love where all can learn to live together in the Mercy of God.

IDEALS AND REALITY

The title of Lekai's book on the history of Cistercians, *Ideals and Reality*,⁹ is full of insight. We are people of high ideals who live a way of life that puts our noses to the grindstone of the reality of ordinary human life in this world in a way that very few people wish to confront it. Our enthusiastic love for Jesus, our idealistic determination to search for and experience the Absolute, has been tempered by the growing awareness and admission of our sinful state that humiliates and confuses us before it liberates and changes us. We live on the thin line between hope and despair, faith and denial, love and rebellion. We face and experience the roots of the human-divine drama of creation, life, sin, redemption, death and resurrection while we go about what seems to others to be a boring, monotonous routine.

Our Cistercian ideal is truly a high one: union with God which is experienced together in community life lived as '*communio*'—the life of the Trinity in the life of the community. We seek a communal experience of God, not just a private, individualistic experience of prayer while we continue to live autonomous lives side by side. It is the basic Christian ideal of living as the early Church: one in heart and mind with all property in common¹⁰—of being the Body of Christ, of being the Church, the Bride. Our Fathers wanted to create a patch of heaven here on earth—'*Paradisus claustralis*'. One reads, another prays—all in unity as one body. We move as one Body: we eat, sleep, pray, sing, work together, we move from one place to another as a living organism, the Body of Christ.

The ideal itself immediately brings us face to face with the realities of human life in a stark and naked way. The basic human impulse is to run away from anything unpleasant, but we choose to live human life without veils or cushions. We want to see reality the way it really is because Jesus is the Truth, the Way and the Life. We want to see things the way God sees them, to live in the reality of the present moment where God is present. The desire to live together in unity confronts

⁹ *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality*, Kent University Press, 1977.

¹⁰ Acts 2:41–47.

us with all the difficulties of human relationships: our often contradictory needs which put us in conflict with each other, the dimension of sin that separates us from each other and prevents us from experiencing what we seek. Our identity is to cling to the ideal in the midst of the reality of our human poverty is. Maybe that's why there is the danger of abandoning that ideal, each one pulling back into their snail shell of egoism, pride and fear.

Our Cistercian Fathers transformed the Benedictine “school of the Lord’s service” into a “School of Love” by using all the observances and tried-and-true means of the Benedictine monastic tradition in order to bring us out of our shells, to bring us together in the Word, the Sacrament, the Presence, into that communion of love, forgiveness and mercy which is the Church. They recognized in the Rule the way to learn to live in communion. They saw all the monastic observances as means to help us to live together in the love and forgiveness of the Father in Christ, in interpersonal relationships in which we find our true selves.

What happened in the years—or centuries—before Vatican II was that the Trappists forgot the reason for the observances, lost sight of the goal of communion, so the observances were lived as a path of personal perfection in accordance with exterior rules. They were used as a means of making you feel strong instead of revealing your weakness. Reality got lost in a false ideal of perfection—which is not our ideal. We have an ideal of love. Then after Vatican II, as we have seen, in many monasteries the observances were cast off as though they were chains and the goal sometimes became contemplation through leisure time, or self-fulfillment by means of psychological methods, freedom from constraints in a friendly atmosphere where the role of authority became even more confused than the concepts of obedience. Somehow or other the ideal got lost in the reality.

Without the ideal, the reality has no meaning. The true Christian identity—mutual love in Christ as the Way to the Father—has to be clung to at all costs in the reality of our human fragility. The Trappists wanted to go to heaven, one by one, in a refusal of the human reality, dualism, disdain for the body, for the world, for and material reality. After Vatican II there was a tendency to embrace the human reality and lose sight of the ideal of the faith. If we substitute the ideal of communion with an ideal of coexistence of tolerance we also lose everything. In individualistic relativism, we seek to live together in peace with no conflicts with lots of space for privacy, which is not the original Cistercian ideal. That kind of tolerance makes forgiveness, reconciliation, truthful correction unnecessary and avoidable. If there is no real ideal of communion, we do not experience the difficulties of living it. It is only when our ideal is strongly affirmed as the real goal of human life, that we experience ourselves in truth and realize our need for the salvation that Christ bestows on us, day by day. If we seek to build up com-

munion, in interpersonal relationships of love in truth, we experience every day our inability to love and forgive and accept and be open, to be meek and merciful, to concretely seek what is good for the other rather than our own self will. Only then can we realize the depth and height of the gift we have been given in being called to Cistercian cenobitic life. Otherwise things can stay very shallow. Perhaps everyone is looking for depth in their own personal life but we keep communication at a very shallow level in order to 'keep the peace.'

OBSERVANCES-VALUES-COMMUNION

Our search has brought us to a renewed effort to find the connection between observances, values and communion. Communion is a theological gift of God's indwelling in us and it is our goal—to live what we have been given. The values are dimensions of life that we are attracted to by our personal experience and aesthetics. We see the good in them, we read about them, we get enthused about them. We love solitude. We treasure silence. We value the stability through which we put down roots. The discipline of regular life puts our lives in a basic rhythm that allows for growth. We desire the soul-refreshing experience of *lectio*. We receive life and energy through the liturgy and sacraments. We give priority in faith to the good of obedience. But their attractiveness does not guarantee that we will live them faithfully. Our love for the values and our ability to live them are two different things. Our consciences are not always that well-tuned and pure to be able to choose what we want most deeply. Beyond the responsibility of choosing the values, we need to be sustained and supported by the choice of concrete observances. We need to have specific ways of living that nail us to those values.

The first Cistercians seem to have been pretty down to earth people. They wanted to live the *Spirit* of Saint Benedict fully so they wanted to live the *Rule* of Saint Benedict fully. They found the ideal of gospel living they were looking for in the Rule. They were not looking for arbitrary means for attaining exterior perfection but rather had a very realistic awareness that everything in the Rule was aimed at conversion, union with God, freedom from self-will through the happiness gained from humility and the conformity with Christ gained through digesting his Word and following him in radical obedience. It would seem they knew what they were doing when they lived the observances. They realized they needed the discipline of the Rule in order to attain their high ideals. They knew there is no real communion without self-renunciation. It was clear that their union with God was their union with the crucified Christ and they wanted to embrace him in the harsh realities of a life without comforts and compromises. Perhaps it is not too idealistic to think that when they experienced difficulties they remembered

the fourth step of humility was of utmost importance in their path of union with Jesus. Obedience was not mystified away and correction was a necessary grace in order to receive the truth about oneself –something which has been lost in the spirituality of tolerance.

The observances are the means of conversion from *proprium* to *commune* by which we hold on to our ideal of communion in the Trinitarian life. The observances express our ideal in concrete ways and become our path of continual conversion not because we learn to live them perfectly but rather precisely because they show us every day our incapacity to live our ideal, to live for the sake of the other. Yet we persevere: without running from the truth, without discouragement, without throwing in the towel, without demeaning the observances as unrealistic. The point is not to insist harshly that they be lived strictly and judge each other accordingly but rather to encourage each other to keep going in the right direction in the mutual awareness of our weakness.

This brings us to what is perhaps the heart of our Cistercian charism: the path of conversion pointed out by Saint Bernard in *The Steps of Humility and Pride*. It is the conscious use of all the means of monastic *conversatio* in order to accept the humiliation of ordinary life together as the road to truth about ourselves, the only way of learning compassion for others, the narrow gate that leads towards intuitions and brief glimpses of eternal happiness, moments of true joy in communion.

Saint Bernard says that no one can stand to see oneself the way he/she really is. Humility is that virtue by which a person can learn to love that misery.¹¹ We need to see the reality of the disfigurement of sin so we can reach a clearer idea of the glory to which we are called, which we are, which is hidden underneath the mud of our misery and our masks. Bernard gives us a path that is clear and concrete. It is a path of vulnerability, through the *affectus*, through the piercing of our heart, through the revelation of ourselves to ourselves which then widens out to a capacity of being sensitive and merciful and loving. We can have empathy with others because we know how bad our own experience is, so we can understand any one else. It is important to realize that the disfigurement is an effect of sin, something much deeper than psychological woundedness.

The *affectus* has to learn to be vulnerable. If we are hard of heart with others we are being hard of heart with ourselves—we refuse to see what we can't bear to see. The only way we can bear to see it is if the monastic Church continually gives us the mercy we need and helps us to open ourselves to ourselves. The only way to live in communion is through humility, which means saying the truth to each

11 See Sermon on the Song of Songs 82.3.

other and helping each other to discover the unbearable truth of ourselves. How can we learn to see ourselves as we really are, to see what we can't stand to see, unless we dare to tell each other? We can't see ourselves but daily life reveals us. We need openness, not just in conversation and dialogue, but openness to that truth about ourselves, wanting to learn through life, through what happens, through what people say to us. We want to accept our misery together so that we can live in the bliss of God's mercy together. We need a lot of prayer that unites us with Christ's suffering heart to be able to do that, to enter in by the narrow way to the fullness of Christian contemplation. I think that is pretty close to the heart of our Cistercian identity. The values and observances are all trying to get us there.

DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION

The role of dialogue has been an important factor in the Order's search for renewal. Many communities have experimented with it, found it a positive means of growth or rejected it as disrupting, threatening or divisive. Even where it has never been tried, dialogue is a challenge that was given to us by the Church and the Order. The themes of successive MGM's (Cistercian contemplative Identity, the community as a school of love, conformation to Christ as the Cistercian grace today) invited us to discuss and seek together.

Building up a common vision of our Christian vocation of mutual love, of our monastic identity and mission through dialogue is a long and arduous journey. It is a paschal experience lived together in which we each have to die to self to listen to the Word and affirm the Truth together, get over personal gripes and own our wounds and sinfulness rather than throwing the blame for our difficulties on others. It is a path of growing responsibility for one's own conversion, a process of maturing as human beings. As we find the truth of the values we want to live, it is not impossible to be of one heart and mind on the basic foundations of our life and vocation.

It is a much longer journey to try to live the nitty-gritty of all that in our daily lives, to incarnate it in our relationships and in the observances that we have freely chosen together. We have daily run-ins with our endemic egoism, our instinctive and habitual way of seeing things from our own point of view and acting on our own judgment when it comes down to concrete particular choices. We then defend our points of view and our judgments with practically no awareness at all that our ideal and values go exactly in the opposite direction. "They no longer live by their own judgment, giving in to their whims and appetites; rather they walk according to another's decisions and directions, choosing to live in monasteries and to have an abbot/abbess over them." (RB 5:12)

Working together on improving communication in daily life, understanding the psychological impediments we all have in listening, judging and speaking clearly, sharing concrete experiences of miscommunication are all very useful and revealing ways of getting to know ourselves. All the concrete examples of difficulties boil down to one: we each follow our own instinctive reaction, thought, judgment and so we misinterpret, put aside, 'forget', 'do not hear' the words of others... even the words we ourselves have agreed upon through dialogue.

Communication means 'making communion'. Usually, we don't take the difficulties seriously enough. We take it for granted that communication is or should be simple and if there is misunderstanding we spontaneously assume it is the fault of the other in our omnipresent feeling that we are always right. But communication is love, going out of ourselves in order to be one with the other, finding ourselves in the other and the other in us. Therefore, communication is conversion. It is difficult and demanding. It is not optional.

DRAWING THINGS TOGETHER

The conclusion becomes more and more clear. We seek communion in Christ through a path of deepening understanding of and assimilation of his Word. We embrace the precious values of the monastic tradition as ideals we love and appreciate. We decide on and try to live observances as exercises of conversion that incarnate that love and those ideals. We constantly experience our inability to do so on the concrete level. The observances show us that in daily life we are not yet able to live the spiritual values and the communion in Christ that we understand and desire. Our spiritual intelligence has not yet become our reality. If we only read and talk about the spiritual life, perhaps we feel uplifted and feel we are already living what we can talk about. Then we would be deceiving ourselves.

The Cistercian School of Love needs concrete observances which every day make us face the fact that we are still stiff-necked and hard-hearted. They are not a path of perfection but rather a path of reality, a path of self-knowledge that keeps us from falling into gnosis or spiritual pride. They are the path where we know and acknowledge our need of Mercy every day, not just theoretically but as concrete a need as our need of the air we breathe. They are our path of daily encounter with the gentle love of Jesus that gradually bows us down into meeker and happier monks and nuns as described in the twelfth degree of humility. In our common misery, we learn to receive the gift of mercy which unites us. It is not our common vision that unites us—although that is necessary as the common base of our life together. It is not our ability to live to perfection the values we have embraced that unites us. Communion is the fruit of our admission of our common '*miseria*' so

that we grow in the freedom of living together in God's mercy. Our communion is not the fruit of ideas or ideology but of daily learning to forgive and be forgiven in the sacrament of the Church. The observances that show us our lack of love are the path of humility that humiliates and leads to the deepening awareness of God's gratuitous love. That is how we find out who we are.

What often happens in the Church as in society is that if we see our incapacity to live what we profess, we give up on what we profess, we lower the standards to adjust them to our weakness, we criticize high ideals as unrealistic. "If impossible to be lived, then the ideals are not true, they are hypocritical." "It's useless to demand too much—that's repressive and makes people feel guilty." "We have to fill our needs, we all have wounds that need special care. Better to be lenient and kind and tolerant with ourselves." That soon leads to giving up on the values as well: "Why talk about something we can't live? All that beautiful literature is a little too mystical and flowery. Let's be practical and pragmatic." Then we 'demythimize' the Gospel by saying "Jesus didn't really mean to be as radical as all that," "Jesus was against everything legalistic" or "After all, we're not Jesus." From there we go on down the road of relativism and our beliefs, commitment and motivation are watered down more and more by all kinds of 'rational' reasons. "Christianity doesn't have the corner on the truth, we have to respect and appreciate everyone. If we are too Christian we become exclusive and might offend others." We become very philosophical but not in the philosophy of Christ. Relativism is rather the philosophy of non-truth. It waters down commitment because everything is thought to be basically the same. "If I stay or if I go, it is all the same."

However, maintaining the truth of the ideals and their lived expression is not hypocritical. The opposite is true: if we don't hold up the ideal of concrete observances, we could easily feel quite spiritually advanced with all our liturgy and *lectio*, value and ideas—while we continue to live according to our own self will. Our identity would be hollow—as hollow as those who live the observances without the motivation of living the values and communion.

THE FUTURE—THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM

"We must rediscover and embody the complementarity of observances, values and communion so that it can be communicated to new members."¹² Providentially the study program "*Observantiae: Continuity and Reforms in the Cistercian Family*" was inaugurated at the MGM of 2002. The prologue to this program gives an illuminating reminder of how the word "observance" is used in the Rule of

12 Global Vision of the Order in 2002 (see Minutes of the MGM 2002, Appendix VI).

Saint Benedict. It also alludes to Saint Bernard's delightful teaching on the necessity of observances in order to reach the wine of contemplation. We cannot have the former without the latter.

We can understand our search for identity better in the general context of the philosophical turmoil experienced by everyone in the change of epoch that took place in the 20th century. Previously—if discussed at all—values were unquestioned principles of charity, kindness, humility, absolute obedience, total silence, spirit of sacrifice. Observances were objective ways of behavior that were deduced from the universal principles of Christian faith and monastic spirituality.

Formation was in the praxis of those values and observances. There was little personal direction. Subjective experience was not regarded as important and to think or talk of one's own personal experience was dangerously close to pride. What counted was how you acted—in conformity with objective norms of spiritual perfection in accordance with metaphysical certainty about what was right and good and holy.

All of a sudden that metaphysical certainty was lost so that the observances didn't make sense any more. We passed very abruptly from an objective way of understanding and acting to a subjective and personal way of experiential knowledge. An explosion of humanism and personalism occurred within the Church and the Order. Along with all of our contemporaries, we fell into the morass of anti-metaphysical relativism without really knowing what was happening. Objective and absolute principles were all questionable and questioned. It seemed good—freedom, tolerance, room for your own thing, openness to all that is without any moralizing judgments or dogmatic statements.

We need to rediscover our charism as a method, a way of life that enables us to find the Truth and incarnate our life in Christ but **we need to do that in a subjective way**. The observances, understood as the opportunity to see/experience oneself in concrete life, become a path towards monastic wisdom in a very personal search for God. We start off with a desire, perhaps inchoate but worth pursuing. We are faced with an experience—we are invited to enter into the life of the community already in act before we arrive, a group of people following a determined *conversatio*. We choose that *conversatio*—the observances and the values underlying it as a means toward communion. The *conversatio* places us in front of concrete choices day after day. Those choices bring new experiences—values—that either attract us more deeply into the life or which we find difficult or distasteful. There is an evaluation that brings us to a subsequent choice.

So far, we are describing what might popularly be called a subjective, phenomenological approach. We learn from experience, we find positive or negative values that determine our subsequent choices. But whereas the tenets of relativ-

ism would propose that each person is the source of the criteria of his/her evaluation, we have the living monastic tradition that brings us the Word of God as the criteria for right living. It comes to us through the Scriptures, the sacraments, the liturgy, the community, the abbot/abbess, the Rule and the Constitutions in a very concrete way. We enter into a method that teaches us discernment—wisdom—from people who have been living under the guidance of the Word and the Spirit for hundreds of years. Starting from subjective experience, we can reach the Truth. We can learn to use our freedom for the highest good: to live in the love of God. We can learn to trust reality. We can rediscover our charism and taste our identity of being a School of Charity open to the Church and the world.

10.2. EVOLUTION OF CISTERCIAN SPIRITUALITY

(by Fr. Michael Casey)¹³

The following impressionistic notes are based on my own experience of Cistercian life from 1960 until today in my own monastery and in other monasteries I have been privileged to visit. I have asked more senior monks for clarification on certain points, and I have read a little around the topic. The result is unavoidably quite subjective.

If by spirituality we understand the complex of symbols, beliefs, values and practices that express and embody the search for God, then it is not easy to generalise about an order that has developed over nine centuries and has spread to all six continents. The foundation of ocsO spirituality in the twentieth century was the gradual evolution in history of the Benedictine and Cistercian tradition, plus the particular form given to it by the movements of Strict Observance. Beyond that there are many specific events and influences that operated differently in different monasteries. The fact of globalisation has meant that more recent events and influences have had a more homogenous effect on the Order than those of the last century.

10.2.1. Factors in the Development of ocsO Spirituality Today

The Spirituality of the Order has been shaped by specific external events in recent decades. Here are some of the formative influences that were operative in this period; some were positive, others not so.

- a) The promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1918, the formation of new constitutions for the monks by the General Chapter of 1924 and the approval of the nuns' constitutions and an updated book of the *Regulations* by the General Chapter of 1926.
- b) The writings of Blessed Columba Marmion (d. 1923) which interpreted monastic

¹³ Monk of Tarrawarra (Australia).

- life in an affective, Christocentric, liturgical and theological context and which continued to be widely read in monasteries until the 1960s.
- c) The Apostolic Letter *Umbratilem* of Pope Pius XI in 1924 which provided legitimacy to the purely contemplative life.
 - d) The Second World War, during which monks from France, Belgium and the Netherlands lived in a war zone; some of them were conscripted and made prisoners of war, some monasteries were occupied by troops and all suffered deprivation. After the war some suffered from what is now called “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.”
 - e) The influx of vocations after the Second World War, particularly in the United States and the establishment of new foundations. Between 1945 and 1955, fourteen monasteries of monks and eleven monasteries of nuns were founded, at the rate of 2.5 a year. This geographical expansion will continue for the next half-century and raise the issue of *inculturation*.
 - f) The writings of Jean-Baptiste Chautard (d. 1935), Vital Lehodey (d. 1948), Eugene Boylan (d. 1964) and Thomas Merton (d. 1968).
 - g) The renewal of Bernardine studies initiated by Etienne Gilson’s 1934 book *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*. This renewal was further advanced by the celebrations marking the eighth centenary of Bernard’s death in 1953 and in the subsequent work of Jean Leclercq, OSB in editing Bernard’s writings and in his extensive studies of monastic culture.
 - h) The liturgical movement. The reform of the liturgy was advanced by Pope Pius XII in the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*. Changes such as the Dialogue Mass and the restoration of the Easter Vigil prepared the way for the work of Vatican II. Monasteries were particularly affected by the adoption of the vernacular and the possibility of creative local adaptation, particularly in the Liturgy of the Hours.
 - i) In 1955 the daily recitation of the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin* was discontinued, and the frequency of the *Office of the Dead* was reduced from near-daily when no feasts occurred, to twice monthly. The *Matutinal* Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, obligatory for choir religious, was dropped.
 - j) In 1956, the promulgation of *Sedes Sapientiae* which resulted in a new *Ratio Studiorum* (1959), the building of Monte Cistello, and the opportunity of higher education for hundreds of monks.
 - k) In 1962, under the fervent sponsorship of Dom Gabriel Sortais, a new edition of the Regulations was produced, combining the description of observances with notes elucidating their historical and spiritual meaning.
 - l) The Second Vatican Council 1962–1965 and the movement of *aggiornamento* and return to the sources which it promoted.
 - m) Despite the prohibition of regional meetings by the General Chapter of 1960, by

1964–1965 such gatherings were accepted *de facto*, and eventually became part of the structure of the Order.

- n) The *Decree of Unification* of the General Chapter of 1965, integrating lay-brothers and choir monks. In some monasteries there was a certain resentment at the unilateral manner in which this change was perceived to have been introduced.
- o) The change in the interpretation of the rule of silence permitting “brief oral communications” approved by the General Chapter of 1967.
- p) Substantial changes in observances as the principle of pluralism was adopted. Many monasteries began to experience a degree of instability or *anomie*, with numerous departures, sometimes in the region of 50%.
- q) Changes in economic situations, mechanisation and new technologies involve substantial adjustments in the nature of monastic work; often requiring a shift from predominant agricultural labour to a species of manufacturing.
- r) In the 1960s, in many western societies the movement of secularisation. As a result a certain diminution in the sense of the sacred and in a sense of sin. Within the Church, “secularization theology.” Later, the influence of postmodernism.
- s) The *Declaration on Cistercian Life* and the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism* of the General Chapter of 1969.
- t) Nuns began to hold their own General Chapters, beginning in 1971. Mixed Regional Meetings in some places followed by Mixed General Meetings from 1987 and male-female complementarity in many functions within the Order.
- u) In 1972 an inquiry was made of the Order regarding the duration of the abbatial office, the so-called “Kaski Report.” Following this the introduction of a retiring age for abbots and the possibility of limited terms of tenure. As a result, there was an increasing turnover of members of the General Chapter.
- v) The increased emphasis on the Cistercian patrimony, beginning with the work of Anselm Le Bail of Scourmont and continued with such endeavours as the series *Pain de Cîteaux* initiated by Robert Thomas and the *Cistercian Fathers* and *Cistercian Studies* series commenced particularly by Basil Pennington.
- w) The process of Post-Vatican II Constitutions began in 1980, continued through the monks’ chapter of Holyoke in 1984 and the Nuns’ chapter of El Escorial in 1985 and was finally approved by the Holy See in 1990. Coinciding with this, the new Code of Canon Law in 1983.
- x) Programs of Order-wide formation: *Exordium* (1998) and *Observantiae* (2002). Various meeting of formators and special programs for novices and juniors.
- y) The influence of *intégrisme* in France and various levels of right-wing or fundamentalist movements throughout the Church.
- z) The beatification of Bl. Gabriella, Bl. Raphael and Bl. Michael Tansi and the death of the monks of Atlas.

10.2.2. The Shifts in Beliefs, Values and Practices

A) LIFESTYLE

An emphasis on observances has always been an important element in the Cistercian identity, distinguishing the reformed monks in the twelfth century and the Strict Observance in later times. Uniformity of observance was enjoined by the Constitutions and enforced by General Chapters, Abbots General and Fathers Immediate. At the local level compliance with the *Regulations* was maintained by means of the Chapter of Faults. A general recommendation was: *Keep the Rule and the Rule will keep you*. An attempt was made to give meaning to the various observances through the *Spiritual Directory*.¹⁴ As the century moved on, the theology, piety and style of these volumes began to seem heavy and outdated and they fell into neglect. Dom Gabriel Sortais had hoped to produce an updated version, but achieved only a new edition of the *Regulations* with spiritual notes.¹⁵ By mid-century, especially for the growing numbers of mature-age candidates (particularly those with military experience) the *Regulations* were simply rules to be kept, without great spiritual significance. With the effects of incipient pluralism and inculturation, and the less-than-standard conditions prevailing in numerous newer foundations, many details were allowed to lapse. Especially with the “mitigations” introduced after the Council, there was a danger of monks (and to a lesser degree nuns) breaking loose from the body of traditional observances and having nothing else to replace them. Abbot General Ambrose Southey addressed this issue in his encyclical of Advent 1982, stressing the importance of internalising the values inherent in the observances.¹⁶ The new Constitutions, approved by the Holy See in 1990, followed the directives of *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. They attempted to combine spiritual elements with the juridical, in order to lay bare the beliefs and values undergirding the legal requirements, and giving some intimations of the

14 English Translation: *A Spiritual Directory for Religious* (Peosta: New Melleray Abbey, 1930). These two volumes were composed by Dom Vital Lehodey, Abbot of Bricquebec. The work was a revision of the 1869 edition; it was commissioned by the General Chapter of 1900 and approved by the General Chapter of 1909. See also Nivard Kinsella, *Flight and Pursuit: The Mission of Dom Vital Lehodey* (Dublin: Gill, 1962), pp. 88–106; this book is a translation and adaptation of Irénée Valléry Radot, *La Mission de Dom Vital Lehodey* (Paris: Cerf, 1956); see also § 2.4.1., above.

15 In 1954 the Definitor, Dom Vincent Hermans, produced a typescript of 375 foolscap pages entitled *Spiritualité Monastique*, which Dom Gabriel hoped would be the harbinger of a more definitive volume.

16 Dom Ambrose discussed this question further in the fourth conference given at the General Chapter of 1984, Minutes, pp. (14)–(16).

monastic roots of particular provisions.¹⁷ At the end of the century, after a post-conciliar period of experimentation, there is a renewed appreciation of the role of Cistercian *conversatio* in the process of spiritual growth of monks and nuns. There is less uniformity and coercion. Extrinsic motivations such as penance, reparation and sacrifice, fear of the superior, the prospect of the Chapter of Faults and conformism were largely replaced by a greater understanding of the intrinsic purpose and finality of particular monastic observances. This, in turn, has led to freer and better-informed choices in daily living.

B) AUSTERITY

If an average monk or nun were to have fallen into a 50-year coma in 1950, on awakening they would have thought themselves in paradise. They were no longer expected to scourge themselves on Friday; the food was better and more plentiful, they were (probably) given a personal cell in which to sleep, read and meditate, they were permitted to speak in community, to receive visitors more freely and, perhaps, to go out more often. The monastery was better-heated and generally more comfortable. Standards of hygiene were higher and the risk of premature death by tuberculosis was lower. Pious kitsch has been, in most cases, successfully banished to attics and barns. The liturgy is no longer incomprehensible and interminable. There is some access to the mass media. The Chapter of Faults had fallen into desuetude. Surprisingly many of those of us with experience both of the old monasticism and the new find the new much more demanding. The standard of living is still noticeably lower than “outside,” abstinence from meat is still generally observed and celibacy is probably even more demanding. Increased communication requires of us greater sensitivity in community relationships and perhaps exposes us to new hardships. We are expected to exercise a great deal of responsibility for ourselves and for the welfare of the community. There are the challenges that technology brings and the greater mental demands of a more complex style of work. Although many monasteries are more financially secure now than they were half a century ago, there are still communities that live in relative poverty, without grand buildings or an expansive economy. Communities that experience a dearth of vocations and are ageing, and those that present the various symptoms of precariousness experience a level of hardship in day-to-day living that goes far beyond what was the lot of previous generations. In more secularised countries monks and nuns are less buoyed up by public adulation than previously. And

¹⁷ See M. Casey, “El Patrimonio Cisterciense y el Nuevo Monasticismo: Reflexiones sobre la prima parte de las Constituciones,” *Cistercium* 186 (1991), pp. 521–38.

then there are meetings. The same virtues are demanded of us now as in the past, though the forms are different: patience, perseverance, daily fidelity, low-impact living, charity, forgiveness and the proactive will to reconciliation. The difference is not in the quality of the austerity only in its degree of visible drama.

C) BOUNDARIES

In the typical early twentieth century monastery, *clausura* and, in particular, the enclosure wall was an important symbol of monastic life. Within that area, the quadrangular building embraced the *claustrum* where many important monastic activities occurred, cut off from the eyes and influence of the world. Monks and nuns rarely emerged from their seclusion and an aura of mystery pervaded their life. Hospitality was offered, but no close contact with the community was encouraged. After the Council boundaries became more porous, as is indicated by the provisions made in c. 31–32. In many monasteries guesthouses have assumed an increased importance with many guests eager to learn more of prayer and to join the monks in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. Our nuns became more emphatic in declaring that they were Cistercians and not Carmelites; total enclosure was not regarded as a central part of our charism, and was even somewhat contrary to our tradition of self-support through marketing the products of our work. In addition, the increased frequency of international and regional meetings and the opportunity for higher education also opened the gates for more exits. In some cultures this has led to serious difficulties resulting from insufficient separation from family influence and demands. Monks have more freedom than nuns, whose legislation is still more narrow. At this time (2004) discussion continues both regarding the canonical question of enclosure and the more spiritual question concerning the meaning of “separation from the world” as a monastic value.¹⁸

D) CHASTITY

Contrary, perhaps, to popular opinion, sex pre-existed the 1960s—even in monasteries. Sexual difficulties and failures were generally treated under the seal of confession, with emphasis on their moral aspects and in a context of mercy and forgiveness. Relatively rarely was there the competence to diagnose the source of

¹⁸ These exchanges ended at the 2005 Chapters with the elaboration of a text, common to monks and nuns, on “monastic solitude” which would have replaced c. 31. But this approach was not accepted by the Holy See.

the difficulty or to map out a pathway to greater wholeness. Many good monks and nuns laboured long under this burden. In the case of more public eruptions of sexuality, these were administratively hushed up or a pretext formed whereby those involved could disappear. There is much more openness about sexuality today and potential candidates are routinely quizzed about their orientation and experience before entry. Most formators encourage ongoing openness in this area. In some important issues there is a dearth of data, and public statements do not always tell the whole story. In many cases of departure among recently solemnly professed, I have the impression that the person involved has felt that sexual needs (genital needs, intimacy needs, generative needs) were not being met by monastic life. Some were unable to cope with the experience of falling in love. And in some cases of trouble with authority or community relations, part of the difficulty may perhaps be ultimately traceable to an unacknowledged or unintegrated homosexuality. Apart from dealing with perennial practical issues associated with chastity, there is a need for the Order to develop a more potent network of beliefs and values to sustain the practice, perhaps drawing courage and taking inspiration from the example of John Cassian of discussing such matters with great freedom and frankness.

E) COMMUNITY

The typical Cistercian monastery during the first part of the last century embraced the concept of total community in the sense that very little allowance was made for personal space or style. Any sign of singularity was banned. The common dormitory, common scriptorium, common refectory, common work and being together day and night were tolerable only on the supposition of a much-reduced level of communication enforced by the rule of almost complete silence. Although many visitation reports noted “abuses” of the sign language, members of the community often did not get to know one another at any depth, unless they worked together with permission to speak. After the Council many communities, especially in the English-speaking world, undertook programs of “building community,” conflict-resolution and communication skills, making use of experts in psychology and the social sciences. In most communities there is a concern for cultivating affective maturity and for the quality of relationships among the members. The 1990 Constitutions are avowedly cenobitic. The theme of *Schola caritatis* adopted for the 1996 General Chapter indicates the widespread concern in the Order to make our houses affectively viable. The greatest obstacle to this, in many monasteries, is individualism.

F) LITURGY

Since the liturgy continues to occupy a substantial part of each monastic day, the adaptations wrought in this area, particularly in the wake of Vatican II, are among the most visible indications of change in monastic life. First of all the liturgy was trimmed of its repetitive elements (the *Little Office*, the *Office of the Dead*, multiple daily Masses, multiple commemorations and extra collects). There was no longer any scope for processions designed to keep the monks occupied on non-working Feasts of Sermon. Prime was abolished (and, in most communities, the daily Chapter). The vernacular began to be used almost exclusively. Under the aegis of a *loi-cadre*, the content of the Office was reduced and re-arranged mostly in accordance with one of four schemas of psalm-distribution. The passing of Gregorian Chant is routinely mourned, but in few of our monasteries was there more than a passive competence coming from years of repetition. The change provided scope for local creativity in the composition of new texts and music. Understandably, the result has not always been a brilliant aesthetic success, but it has produced a liturgy that is more readily comprehensible, is less of a burden and, in most cases is more conducive to prayer. The former obsession with rubrics seems to have gone into remission. The use of the vernacular has meant that the liturgy is more inclusive and this has served as an invitation to many former lay-brothers and lay-sisters to participate, and it means that most newcomers can begin to be formed by the liturgy soon after their arrival, instead of spending much energy coming to grips with an unfamiliar language. Guests and visitors, likewise, can more easily join the liturgy as participants rather than as silent spectators. The increased intelligibility of the readings must, over the years, have a profoundly formative effect on communities and individuals alike.

G) WORK

Many brochures from the first part of the twentieth century have photographs of monks (and somewhat less frequently nuns) going to work; like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, they march in line with their hoods up, their habits hitched and bearing rustic implements of one kind or another. It is true that the lay-brothers did real work, but the choir monks spent so much time in choir that much of their work was unskilled, serving mainly disciplinary and symbolic purposes. In few monasteries is there scope any longer for such mindless agricultural puddling. The

simple repetitive tasks that facilitated meditation and prayer for those so minded are now done by machinery. Nowadays most are aware of the need to earn money to keep the monastery running, and monastic work has been reorganised to be more profitable, using the reduced work force to the best advantage, without jeopardising the priorities of the contemplative life. Many monastic dairies have been closed or the operation handed over to employed workers. In the absence of lay-brothers and lay-sisters, most monks and nuns now invest more in work than ever before. More mental application is needed in the jobs they do, since often they are working with machinery or computers. Even farming has become very professional. For many choir religious work is less relaxing and prayerful than previously: it no longer gives them an opportunity for fresh air and exercise. As a result many monasteries have established exercise rooms. The boundaries between work and other monastic observances are much more clearly defined now, so that work and prayer can be viewed as separate entities to be balanced. In terms of time, the four to six hours prescribed by c. 26 is almost equivalent to the amount of time many monks and nuns would spend in liturgy, *lectio* and personal prayer.

H) PRAYER

Between 1907 and 1914 Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, Abbot of Sept-Fons, wrote his celebrated book on prayer entitled, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, still in print nearly a century afterwards.¹⁹ As the title indicates, it was a book intended for those in the active apostolate and its sources were general rather than monastic. Likewise, the book of Dom Vital Lehodey, Abbot of Bricquebec, *The Ways of Mental Prayer*,²⁰ commonly used in the novitiates of the Order was not based on monastic sources. "Among the older writers, I prefer Saint Teresa, then Saint John of the Cross and Saint Francis de Sales. Among the moderns I studied Père Poulain and Mgr Saudreau especially, who were both masters of their subject."²¹ Largely dependent on Lehodey, but with a chapter on "The Mysticism of Saint Bernard" was the work of Dom Godefroid Belorgey, Pro-Abbot of Cîteaux, formerly a monk of Scourmont.²² In the English-speaking world Fr Eugene Boylan's work, *Difficulties in Mental Prayer* complements John of the Cross, Teresa and Francis de Sales with Augustine Baker and Blossius, but makes no reference to clas-

19 [Bernard Martelet ed.], Dom Chautard, *Lâme de tout apostolat* (Paris: Éditions Saint Paul, 2d. edition 1981).

20 An English translation by a monk of Mount Melleray was published in Dublin by Gill & Son in 1938.

21 Quoted in Kinsella, *Flight and Pursuit*, p. 107.

22 English translation (somewhat abbreviated) published in Cork by the Mercier Press in 1951 under the title *The Practice of Mental Prayer*.

sical Cistercian sources. These four works may indicate the syncretistic approach to “mental prayer” current in the Order in the first half of the twentieth century. Liturgical prayer was something else and in this the writings of Dom Marmion were probably most influential. Since “mental prayer” involved kneeling in the choir stalls for thirty minutes after Vigils and fifteen after Vespers, these periods were not necessarily prime time for concentration and after Vigils staying awake was an issue for many. During my novitiate we were taught a simple method of meditation, encouraged to do the best we could, and given the expectation that over time our prayer would simplify itself. “Mental prayer” was a self-standing exercise and no particular emphasis was placed on it. More attention was devoted to the practice of *lectio divina*, especially after the letter of Abbot General Sortais in which he insisted that the “intervals” between community exercises were not free time for doing odd jobs like darning socks, but were to be designated as periods for *lectio divina*. In this most of the work was left to the Holy Spirit. After Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* encouraged a more critical approach to the Scriptures, many felt a certain tension between scientific exegesis and pious reading,²³ but this opposition eased as the years went by. After the Council throughout the Church, there was a general interest in contemplative prayer, of which the reception accorded to the writings of Thomas Merton is a witness. Many drew inspiration from the non-Christian religions of East Asia. Because requests were being made of monks and nuns for help in this area, many were motivated to rediscover the contemplative and mystical roots of our tradition. Today those coming to our guesthouses and entering our novitiates take for granted that they will be given instruction in contemplative prayer. And *lectio divina* continues to be the foundation of the prayer life of many monks and nuns.

1) STUDY

The Strict Observance chose a more rustic path than the Common Observance, and, in the first half of the twentieth century, the number of those who had the advantage of post-graduate studies in theology and related disciplines was few. Following *Sedes Sapientiae* and its *Statuta Generalia* (1959), our own *Ratio institutionis praesertim studiorum* (1960), the building of Monte Cistello and the advocacy of Abbot General Sortais, hundreds of monks were sent to study in Rome. As far as I know, no provision was made for the nuns at the same level. The result was mixed. Many left the Order, some became abbots, others were involved in

²³ See André Louf, “Exégèse scientifique ou lectio monastique? Autour d’un livre récent,” *Collectanea OCR* 22.3 (1960): pp. 225–47. This article was occasioned by H. de Lubac’s *Exégèse Médiévale*.

educational programs in their own monasteries. Comparatively few of those who graduated continued to study unless they were teaching or needed to prepare conferences. After Monte Cistello and Rome ceased to be a desirable option, monks and nuns have studied and taken degrees at a variety of universities and have attended other non-academic programs. The level of teaching in the Order is higher in most places: during their years of formation, most monks and nuns would have been exposed to monastic tradition, newer and more critical thinking on the Rule of Benedict and to selected parts of the Cistercian patrimony. In additions, most communities offer programs (both live and recorded) on relevant topics. The various reviews of the Order, *Collectanea*, *Cistercium*, *Cîteaux* and *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, give some indication of the number of monks and nuns actively involved in writing at a reasonably scholarly level, and to the extent that the reviews are read in the communities, they also demonstrate a higher level of monastic cultural awareness than, for example, was evidenced in the 1930s. The role of serious reading and study in the ascetical formation of monks and nuns probably deserves more attention in the Order than it is currently receiving. Somehow the insistent demands of work and play are accorded a higher priority.

J) PATRIMONY

The frontiers of Cistercian spirituality have always been porous;²⁴ late twelfth-century Cistercians drew more extensively on the dominant Church Fathers than on the writers of their own Order. It was from this interaction with contemporary currents of theological and devotional thought that the Order continued to re-invent its spirituality in a way that related to the piety of the Church.²⁵ Thus, it seems, the spirituality found in many monasteries at the time of the birth of the Strict Observance owed much to the French School of spirituality.²⁶ It can come as no surprise that in the first half of the twentieth century much of the spiritual teaching in Cistercian monasteries revolved around the devotion to the Sacred Heart and to Christ's Passion, Marian devotions including the rosary and Louis de Montfort's "true devotion," *The Imitation of Christ*, Saint Thérèse's *Story of a Soul*, the writings of de Causade on holy abandonment and the other staples

24 See David N. Bell, "Is There Such a Thing as 'Cistercian Spirituality'?" CSQ 33.4 (1998), pp. 455-71.

25 See M. Casey, "Marketing Monastic Tradition within Monasteries," *Tjurunga* 60 (2001), pp. 27-52. Among other topics I reflected on "hybrid vigour" as an element in the ongoing evolution of the monastic institution.

26 Louis Châtellier, "La spiritualité moderne et L'Étroite Observance cistercienne," in *Réformes et continuité dans l'Ordre de Cîteaux: De L'Étroite Observance à La Stricte Observance* (Brecht: Cîteaux, commentarii cistercienses, 1995), pp. 3-22.

of the Catholic spiritual diet.²⁷ Hagiography was popular for refectory and personal reading. These non-monastic supplements often provided the warm, affective component that the austere life and the sober Latin liturgy did not generate. When they fell away many monks and nuns experienced a certain level of piety void.²⁸ Work was done on the Cistercian Fathers early in the century. The General Chapter of 1925 commissioned a study on the Cistercian spirit of simplicity.²⁹ Ailbe Luddy of Mount Melleray wrote *The Life and Teaching of Saint Bernard*³⁰ and published many volumes of Bernardine translation, Dom Anselm Le Bail was building up a scholarly tradition at Scourmont and Thomas Merton was introducing the novices and Scholastics of Gethsemani to a range of hitherto unavailable Cistercian texts. Some interest in the primitive Cistercian documents was fired by academic controversy in the 1950s, but it was only from 1983 through the zeal of Fr Chrysogonus Waddell of Gethsemani that many monks and nuns were exposed to the spiritual potential of these neglected texts. The ninth centenary of the foundation of the New Monastery (1998) and the program *Exordium*, may have built on this foundation. The appearance in the last 40 years of numerous good translations and studies on the Cistercian Fathers and Mothers is an indication that the Council's call to "return to the sources" was heeded. The next stage is for this very rich tradition to become a real source of spiritual theory and practice not only among scholars and students, but also for the rank and file of monastic communities.

27 For a good evocation of the spiritual climate in the Order during the first part of the twentieth century see Pearse Cusack ocsb, *Blessed Gabriella of Unity: A Patron for the Ecumenical Movement*, (Roscrea: Cistercian Press, 1995). "The Cistercian author of this book belongs to a diminishing number of exact contemporaries of Bl. Gabriella. It was thus easy to identify with her, but it was also possible to write from the inside of Trappist life as it was lived in the thirties" (p. 13).

28 "There is also the common unrest that is characteristic of persons abandoning old habits when this does not come from a personal, existential need that is experienced at depth, but which is imposed on them by the community in which they live. This is what happened in the sphere of the liturgy after the Council. To be sure, it is not the vocation of the Church to act as the conservator of ancient and outdated treasures but to try, first of all, to satisfy the Christian needs of the faithful. Meeting these needs has priority over saving from destruction the treasures of Gregorian culture. On the other hand, for older people who have lived the Catholic faith, these ancient treasures are not simply *cultural* treasures. They are part of the fabric of their Christian life: they are, as it were, the living skin of their religious experience, and not simply a garment that we can at any time take or leave, even sometimes regretfully. These are not simply religious forms of expression, but they are the particular forms in and through which their religious life has become what it is. Here there is no room for a *dualism* between what is inner and what is outer. A good number of such people inevitably feel as though they have been skinned alive, as though they have been stripped of their own flesh." Translated from E. Schillebeeckx, "Zijn er crisis-elementen in katholiek-kerkelijk Nederland?" in *Katholiek Archief* 21 (1966), p. 347.

29 English translation and commentary by Thomas Merton published under the title: *The Spirit of Simplicity: Characteristic of the Cistercian Order* (Trappist KY, Gethsemani Abbey, 1948).

30 Dublin: Gill & Son Ltd, 1927.

K) FORMATION

Previously formation principally followed the apprenticeship model during the novitiate and then, for the monks, switched to an education model during the period of temporary profession (the scholasticate) and beyond if the monks were destined for priesthood.³¹ Formators were chosen from among the “solid” members of the community who were not occupied in something more useful. Nowadays formation is approached rather more professionally. Many programs are offered to assist formators in their manifold tasks. Formators are expected to know the tradition, to be able to communicate it by competent teaching and to be somewhat skilled in the arts of formative discourse, and spiritual direction. With fewer candidates and a wider range of pre-entry experiences, it is considered important to offer newcomers some accompaniment as a means of helping them process what they are experiencing in the monastery; sometimes a mild form of non-professional counselling is needed as well. Psychological screening of candidates is common; occasionally those in formation are sent to psychologists for further help at a later stage. The emphasis is less on the external conformity of the newcomers with the *conversatio* than on their developing the interior aptitudes and attitudes that will enable them to profit from the *conversatio*. With regard to monastic and theological education during the monasticate, this was a relatively new concept in many monasteries of nuns. Among the monks it was a result of sending the majority of choir monks on to priesthood. The courses offered now are not usually designed with a view to ordination: they are more geared to helping the young monks and nuns understand the beliefs and values by which they live and to see them in a wider theological and cultural context. Ongoing formation is a priority in some communities, in others it meets resistance. It is not unusual for monks and nuns to attend shorter or longer courses that will either enrich their own lives or help them in their work. Some communities are able to offer the opportunity for therapy for monks and nuns in times of crisis or in situations of depression or emotional upheaval.

L) INCULTURATION

Up to the 1960s General Chapters were conducted entirely in French; those who

³¹ For an explanation of these terms see M. Casey, “Models of Monastic Formation,” *Tjurunga* 45 (1993), pp. 3–31.

could not express themselves in that language were considered to have nothing to contribute to the proceedings. Except maybe money. Even on the eve of the Second World War only about half the monasteries were French-speaking, although many foreign abbots were competent enough to manage in French. Of the 26 foundations made between 1940 and 1965 only three (all in Africa) were French-speaking. This means that by the mid-1960s nearly two thirds of the capitulants were at a disadvantage when it came to actively participating in the affairs of the Chapter.³² The decisions of the Chapter reflected the same lack of sensitivity to the conditions obtaining in other parts of the world. A certain amount of what was transmitted to new foundations as “monastic” was merely French or European. In Japan, it took half a century before the use of chopsticks was permitted. There was little expectation that the established tradition would have something to learn from the New World. In truth, it was only after the Council, in the 1970s that the neologism “inculturation” began to be used in the Church.³³ Although the principle that what is rightly valued in local culture should be welcomed as a potential means of enriching the Cistercian patrimony, as it is stated in c. 70, the process of osmosis proceeds very slowly. Many non-European cultures have not been influenced by Cartesian dualism, or by Jansenism. There is a healthy attitude to the body, and in Africa, drumming and dancing during the liturgy seems perfectly natural. There are traditions of high spirituality in East Asia. Many cultures that were not subjected to the dehumanising effects of the Industrial Revolution have maintained a much healthier view of the relationship between the individual and the group than currently obtains in the individualistic West. There are many monastic virtues of which the Order could be reminded by paying attention to other cultures.

M) GOVERNANCE

In the opening decades of the twentieth century the Order had its fair share of Prince Abbots and Queen Bees. The spirit operative in many Western societies that led to dictatorships had its parallels in autocratic attitudes in the Church and in monasteries. This tendency was legitimated by a not-disinterested interpretation of the Rule of Benedict, reiterated in daily conferences and implemented in policy. So long as the regimen was relatively benign it was not challenged by

32 [Beginning in 1960, there was a translation system for English, which was extended to include Spanish beginning in 1969; see § 8.1.4., above.—Note added to Michael Casey’s text.]

33 See M. Casey, “The Rule of Benedict and Inculturation: A Formation Perspective,” *Tjurunga* 62 (2002), pp. 15–46.

Abbot Visitors or the abbots of the General Chapter, who often saw their task as the strengthening of abbatial authority. Mostly monks and nuns passively accepted this preponderance as part of the package although some developed tactics to create a little space for themselves without overt rebellion. In the middle years of the century such compliance could no longer be taken for granted. Particularly in the late 1960s with the advent of the Beatles, the student riots in Paris, the anti-war demonstrations in the us, increased dissent in the Church especially after *Humanae vitae*, and the tide of secularisation strengthening,³⁴ the notion of “sacred authority” was weakened considerably. Both the substance and style of autocratic rule began to seem inappropriate to a contemporary monastic community. Even Abbots General were not immune from criticism on this score. Lifelong tenure of the abbatial office was questioned and the pace of resignation quickened. Generally, after the Council, there was an emphatic demand for more participative forms of government and the opening of monastic life to dialogue, a theme often mentioned in the writings of Paul VI. With the 1969 *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*, decision-making become considerably more decentralised.³⁵ Regional Conferences gained momentum and much was left to the choice of the local community. This meant meetings, committees and discussions. To some extent those who were middle-aged and beyond were disempowered by this devolution of authority; the normal machinery of seniority which would have raised them to a position of eminence in the community ceased operating and they were left in a sort of limbo. Much of the initiative was seized by enthusiastic and better-educated young mavericks who seemed to be able to cope more effectively with the massive changes then taking place, who were filled with a zeal for Vatican II and who were ardent for *aggiornamento*.³⁶ There was a lot of experimentation, some of it pretty wild. Gradually things settled down and abbots and communities found a *mo-*

34 “The most significant fact about the time in which we are living is that it is a time in which a single movement of secularization is bringing peoples of all continents into its sweep.” Thus Leslie Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966), p. 11. Some of the books from this period seem frightfully outdated today, yet once they caused a great stir. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1963). John A. T. Robinson and David L. Edwards, *The Honest to God Debate* (London: SCM, 1963). Paul van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (London: SCM, 1963). Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). Daniel Callahan [ed.] *The Secular City Debate* (New York: Macmillan, 1966). Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969). E. L. Mascall, *The Secularisation of Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965). Robert L. Richard, *Secularisation Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967). Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966). Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Toward a New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967). John Macquarrie, *God and Secularity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967). John A. T. Robinson’s book *Honest to God* was finished in November 1962. He traces the origins of what came to be called “secularisation theology” back to Rudolf Bultmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Paul Tillich.

35 See Colette Friedlander, *Décentralisation et identité cistercienne 1946–1985: Quelle autonomie pour les communautés?* (Paris: Cerf, 1988).

36 I include myself in this description.

dus operandi for arriving at consensus not only concerning major decisions, but also in making arrangements for the practicalities of daily living. Most superiors today consult their communities regularly and communicate to them whatever concerns them. The ideal of adult mutuality presented by c. 16, however, is not universally accepted. There remain pockets of preference for hierarchical rule, on the one hand, or institutionalised co-dependency, on the other. In general, however, change in the theory and the practice of authority seems irreversible. But a spirituality of “mutual obedience” is yet to be developed. A postmodern distrust of authority is not uncommon among those fatigued by the constant scandals within the Church and within the governments of so many nations.

10.2.3. The Development of ocsO Spirituality in the Twentieth Century

Cistercian spirituality is based on the distinctive Cistercian *conversatio*. Most of the changes in the beliefs, values and practices of the Order in the past half-century have not been simple emanations from the Cistercian tradition, but the living responses of that tradition to a changing world and a vastly different ecclesial environment. The Order and its regions, together with each community, have had to find points of fusion between the old ways of doing things and the newer beliefs and values that come from the Church and from the ambient culture. The result has been pluriform. There have been different degrees of success in returning to and re-appropriating the sources of Cistercian spirituality; and then there has been the challenge of embodying that spirituality in a lifestyle that does not represent a radical break with the recent past. The pastoral organs of the Order offer some supervision in this situation.

In general the Cistercian *conversatio* of today exhibits a remarkable continuity with its nine centuries of tradition—granted the complexities of modern society and the tangled consciousness of those formed by it. The major observances are carried out not merely with mute fidelity but also with an intelligent awareness of their meaning and finality, and in a spirit of responsible freedom. There is a discerning awareness of the relative importance of different exercises. Most monasteries encourage mature monks and nuns to act with responsible freedom in situations where a conflict of values occurs.

The transition from less emphasis on belief and values to more emphasis is neither homogenous nor without difficulties. In many of the areas discussed in the previous section, there are substantial challenges to be faced in ensuring that our way of life remains consonant with our essential values, and also somehow

contemporary. Sometimes this involves retaining the antique manners of the past; sometimes it will mean abandoning them. It is a matter for discernment.

A particular example is the concept of the monastery as a *schola caritatis*. Many who enter today come from dysfunctional affective backgrounds. It may be that they are attracted to Cistercian life because of the wholeness it offers. But such a situation implies that the superior, the formators and the community are willing and able to assume their roles as teachers and examples in the school of love. Mostly this means that communities will need to improve their game. The commonest complaint I have heard in meetings of formators is that there are too many members of the community who do not live the *conversatio*. The journey to affective community is long and not without obstacles and challenges; difficulties are unearthed that were unnoticed when monks and nuns lived in affective isolation. But this is the journey we must make if we are to remain faithful both to the New Testament and to our own Cistercian charism.

The major change in the spirituality of the Order in the last fifty years is best understood as a desire to embrace the meaning of the observances so that monks and nuns may live their vocation at a good level of critical self-awareness. Not only to love and to live the cenobitic Cistercian *conversatio*, but to do so mindfully.

10.3. TRAPPIST-CISTERCIAN FORMATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

10.3.1. The Drafting of the 1990 Ratio Institutionis

(by Dom Armand Veilleux)³⁷

The Constitutions of our Order, drawn up between 1967 and 1987, and then approved by the Holy See in 1990, were further filled out by an important document called the *Ratio Institutionis* or “Document on Formation.” This document, written in the same spirit as the Constitutions, was also the fruit of years of work, involving all the communities and all the Regions of the Order; it was then studied, discussed, amended, and voted on at the Mixed General Meeting of 1990. To understand its guiding principles and the meaning that the Order wanted to give it, it could be useful to look not only at its own history but also what came before it.

1. PREHISTORY: THE “RATIO” OF 1958

Up until 1955 in men’s monasteries, with rare exceptions, almost all the choir monks became priests. The formation of the novices was given in two parallel novitiates, one for the choir monks and one for the lay brothers. For the lay brothers, once the novitiate ended, there was, in general, no more systematic formation. They went to the Sunday chapters of the abbot, to the sermons on feasts of sermon, and to the “repetitions” that their father master gave them. In some monasteries these repetitions were merely pious reflections of a nature to stir up fervor (*fervorino!*); elsewhere it was a more solid teaching, like the catechism. As for the choir monks, at the end of the novitiate, they began studying for the priesthood. The formation of the novitiate involved courses on the Rule and the vows, as well as learning the observances, i.e., everything needed to make profession with full knowledge!

On the whole, theological studies in our Order were rather weak, even if certain monasteries had an excellent tradition of spiritual and doctrinal formation. In general the same manuals were used as in the major seminaries, but in most

³⁷ Dom Armand Veilleux has been abbot of Scourmont since 1999, after having been abbot of Mistassini (Canada) from 1969 to 1976, and of Conyers (USA) from 1984 to 1990; he was Procurator of the Order from 1990 to 1998.

cases formation in the monasteries was far from having the same academic value, even though the spiritual formation could be excellent. After the novitiate and theological studies there was little organized formation. There were simply “theological conferences” for the priests.

Then, in 1956, the Holy See issued the document *Sedes Sapientiae* on formation or, more specifically, studies in religious communities. New demands were made of all the communities. In particular it was asked that in monasteries where studies were done (which was the tradition of our Order), it was necessary to have qualified professors with recognized degrees.

Sedes Sapientiae also asked that each religious Institute draw up a *Ratio Studiorum*. Ours was published in 1958. It bore the title *Ratio Institutionis, praesertim studiorum*. The accent was clearly on studies, which was a good thing, because studies had been neglected in the Order up to that time.

It must not be forgotten that this was the time when, under the influence of Fathers de Lubac, Rahner, Congar, Chenu, and many others, theology became oriented toward the rediscovery of its scriptural and patristic foundations. This then led to a rediscovery and new understanding of our monastic tradition, including the tradition of *lectio divina*.

Dom Gabriel Sortais took these demands very seriously, leading to the construction of Monte Cistello, which had about 90 students the year that the Council opened.

1965: *Consequences of the Decree of Unification*

The Decree of Unification—which did not suppress the lay brothers but rather the distinction between two classes in our communities, establishing a single category of monks—put the question of formation in a new way. At the same time, in several monasteries of men, a current of what was called “lay monasticism” began to emerge. More and more the need was felt to form “monks” before forming “future priests.”

It was at this time also that collaborative efforts between monks and nuns began. All profited from this collaboration: the nuns’ formation had not always been very solid doctrinally, but it had always been oriented toward the monastic life and not toward the priesthood!

1968: *Document on Formation*

In 1968 the need was felt to revise our *Ratio*, precisely because of all this evolution. A commission of representatives from most of the Regions of the Order (the

Regions had just begun to appear a few years before) was set up to reflect on this theme. This commission did not propose a new *Ratio* but a series of documents containing many extremely useful elements, but which were not put together as a coherent whole. The following General Chapter recommended that the communities take inspiration from these documents but they were never voted in as official texts for the Order.

It was not by accident that a new interest in formation became apparent at the time when pluralism appeared in the Order, pluralism that was a consequence not only of a global cultural evolution, but also of the fact that the Order had suddenly spread to diverse cultures where it had not penetrated before or where it was present but not well represented.

Then came a long period of the renewal of our Constitutions, begun in 1967, which culminated in the Chapters of Holyoke and Escorial in 1984 and 1985, and finally in the 1987 Mixed General Meeting in Rome. During these years the Order did a tremendous amount in the area of formation, at the local, regional, and Order levels. Secretaries for formation existed in almost all the Regions, and several initiatives were very successful.

In the excellent section on formation, the new Constitutions made reference to the preparation of a *Ratio Institutionis* that would be prepared by the General Chapter. This *Ratio* also seemed to be required by the new Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1983.

2. DRAWING UP A NEW RATIO

The 1986 Mixed Preparatory Meeting (MPM I) asked each Region to write a new draft of this *Ratio*—or if that could not be done, a document that would summarize its contents—and send it to the Central Secretary for Formation before March 1, 1987. Fr. Cornelius Justice of Mount Melleray was then elected to this task. His job was to present a synthesis of these texts at the following meeting.

The second Mixed Preparatory Meeting (MPM II) decided that Fr. Cornelius, working with the Regional Secretaries of Formation, would prepare a draft text of the *Ratio* to submit to the next MGM scheduled for 1987 in Rome.

1987: The Chambarand Text / and the MGM of 1987

Fr. Cornelius established an impressive network of communication, and called forth an important reflection in the Order. During a meeting of three weeks with almost all the Regional Secretaries of the Order, he prepared a draft text that

would be known by the name of **Chambarand I** and which was communicated to the Capitulants during the General Chapter, the program of which was already extremely overloaded, since the last revision of the Constitutions had to be finished before presenting them to the Holy See. The only decision the assembly made was to recommend study of the formation document by all the Regional Conferences and those who were responsible for formation.

It was no longer a question of a *Ratio studiorum* (which still had to be done) but of a document that treated all monastic formation.

In the year that followed the Chapters of 1987, nearly all the Regions met and studied this *Ratio* project. On the whole the reactions were positive, but there was also a general desire for a more succinct text with less “psychologizing” while at the same time conserving the recognized importance of the psychological dimension of formation.

The Central Commission Meeting at Cardeña in 1989 ratified these orientations and appointed a commission of three persons to revise the text in time to arrive at the MGM of 1990 with a text already quite acceptable to the majority.

1989 (June): Synthesis and New Texts

This text, ready in June of 1989, known by the name of **Chambarand II**, was sent to all the Regions who had to study it and send their reactions and comments before March 1990. All, without exception, accomplished this task, and, based on their suggestions and comments, a new version, called **Chambarand III**, was presented as a working paper for the MGM of September 1990.

1990—MGM: Definitive Text

A detailed study of this text, paragraph by paragraph and almost sentence by sentence, was made by all the mixed Commissions of the MGM (certain sections were distributed among various commissions). In fact, this study of the *Ratio* took up a large part of the meeting. After several votes on various amendments, the entire text of our *Ratio* was approved by the two General Chapters with a strong majority (Chapter of Abbesses: 51 yes, 7 no, 1 abstention; Chapter of Abbots: 80 yes, 9 no, 1 abstention).

Apart from the Constitutions themselves, no other texts produced by the Order in our time caused so much reflection and work by all the Regions and thus all the cultures in the Regions, both between General Chapters and at the 1990 MGM. Anyone considering a complete or partial revision of the document ought to take into account this enormous work of the entire Order. It would be difficult to think

that a revision could be made without involving the entire Order once again in such an enterprise. Also it would be necessary to be sure that such a project would be opportune before beginning it.

3. SEVERAL IMPORTANT THEMES (OR BASIC INTUITIONS) OF THE DOCUMENT

- a) Personally, I believe that the most fundamental intuition of this document is that formation is a process that lasts all of one's life.

It concerns a process by which a person (man or woman) is progressively transformed into the image of Christ, which is the goal of our monastic life. From now on, by "formation," is meant the whole of this "transformation" and not the beginning period of initiation to the monastic life.

This approach will evidently influence the way we understand the agents of this formation and the means that are used.

- b) The second fundamental intuition is that the two principle agents of this formation or transformation are the Holy Spirit, on one hand, and the subject of formation on the other. All the other people called "formators," with different titles, mediate the action of the Holy Spirit and serve as guides to the subject in formation.
- c) The third fundamental intuition is the essential role that the community itself plays in the formation of a cenobite. This community life is what our Constitutions constantly call the Cistercian *conversatio*.

Several Important Points Resulting from these Basic Orientations:

- a) The document is centered on the "person" in formation, and not on the things that must be transmitted.
- Great respect is shown for this person, and for the particular grace that he or she has and brings to the community.
 - Each person is considered in the whole of his or her history: everything that preceded his or her arrival at the monastery is important.
 - Each person is also considered in all the dimensions of his or her being. It is not a question of simply making someone adopt a so-called "monastic" behavior, to make him or her acquire monastic virtues, etc. It is a question of helping someone to become a man or a woman who is radiant, balanced, and mature—a Christian who has taken on the entire Gospel message—and has decided to live according to the monastic "way," in virtue of a call received from the Lord. Thus one in-

sists on the importance of balance: human, emotional, affective, intellectual, and spiritual.

- Consequently, great importance is given to all the stages of human growth.
- b) Even if persons have a special task in the area of formation (especially initial formation), it will be difficult for their work to bear fruit if there is not a sufficient quality of community life in the community. Therefore one must be attentive to guarantee that the elements of the Cistercian *conversatio* dominate in the community's role as formator. To this end, each community must be attentive to take on the "monastic culture" and develop its own culture.
 - c) This also implies a clear conception of "ongoing formation." In the past, when the word "formation" designated almost exclusively initial formation, ongoing formation was conceived of as some sort of continuation, at a slower pace and more limited frequency than initial formation (a periodic refresher course). Now that formation is understood as the entire process of transformation that extends throughout one's life, initial formation is seen only as an intense time of ongoing formation.
 - d) There is no need to emphasize the importance here of each national and local **culture**. Formerly formation was often a process of acculturation and not inculturation. It was necessary to assimilate a monastic culture cast in very precise forms. From now on each Region is called to adapt the *Ratio* to its cultural context and its needs. This capacity of our *Ratio* to adapt is confirmed by the fact that all the non-European Regions (Remila, USA, Africa, ASPAC) indicated their global agreement with **Chambarand II**, (as Fr. Cornelius pointed out in his presentation of the text at the beginning of the MGM of 1990), while offering suggestions that were integrated into **Chambarand III**. (Curiously, the only Region that had difficulty with **Chambarand II** was Central-North-Europe, which did not appreciate the importance given to the community in the process of formation). At the time of the presentation of the commission reports during the fourth session of the MGM of 1990, the secretary of the seventeenth Commission (the "Young Churches") explained that this text "is a good basic text, for it can be adapted to the various cultural contexts, especially since it does not contain too many details. It also expresses the Cistercian ideal. It is a document that can be useful to the entire Order" (Minutes, p. 21). Moreover, the text of the *Ratio* itself (n. 69) invites the Regions "to help the houses to adapt this *Ratio* to their specific needs and to the particular culture of the Region."
 - e) There is also the importance of pluralism: we tried to write a text that expressed all the important basic principles valid for everyone, but which kept to a minimum those elements that, by their nature, were proper to an individual culture. This was

a difficult choice, because **Chambarand I** gave an extremely valuable advice and clever analyses, but they were not valid for all cultures. We must not forget this first text but return to it often to take from it what can be truly useful for us.

- f) The monasticate was a new reality in several regions at the time the *Ratio* was written, and is still evolving.

4. STUDIES IN THE MONASTIC LIFE.

Our Order has never had a great intellection tradition. (Scourmont, for example, under the influence of Dom Anselm Le Bail, was for a long time an admirable exception. This abbot knew how to harmonize studies of great scientific value with an unquestionable monastic orientation.) Since 1955 we have greatly improved the intellectual life of our communities (monks and nuns). Perhaps, at the present time, there is an attitude that is going in the opposite direction and leading some to remark that the *Ratio* insists too unilaterally on courses and studies.

This reaction is really symptomatic of something else, since we made every effort possible to emphasize in this text that studies are far from being the first element of formation, and that this element ought to be subordinate to many others. We also situated studies in the pluralistic framework mentioned above.

If *lectio divina* is really at the heart of our life, a certain initiation to Sacred Scripture is essential. Thus we put this initiation to Sacred Scripture as one of the things that should be done during the novitiate and continued during the monasticate, and even beyond. This does not mean that everyone should do the same studies of scientific exegesis. For some a simple initiation to a rich reading of the Word of God will suffice. Others will need a more thorough formation. But all need an initiation.

Our spirituality ought to be founded on what is given us in Revelation and on faith. To avoid the trap of sentimental or infantile piety, a solid initiation of Christian doctrine is essential for everyone. Here again, it can take different forms. For some it will be a sort of catechism for adults; for others a more thorough and scientific study. But all need an enlightened faith and therefore a good knowledge of the principle areas of Christian doctrine.

One could say something similar about each of the elements on the list of “subjects” to be treated, either during the novitiate or during the time of temporary vows.

CONCLUSION

The whole of the spirituality of our Constitutions is found summarized in the Prologue of this *Ratio*, which can legitimately be considered a spiritual commentary on the Constitutions. And the total understanding of the ultimate goal of formation is admirably expressed in 2 Cor 3:18, which was used as an epigraph to the text: **“Called to be transformed into the image of Christ.”**

10.3.2. Some Features of Monastic Formation

(by *Dom John Eudes Bamberger*)³⁸

INTRODUCTION

The history of monastic formation in all its aspects, important as it is, has never been presented in a comprehensive study to any adequate extent. There are, of course, very good reasons for this; it is not due to lack of interest but rather to the vastness of the project. After all, the whole extent of monastic life is intended to be a formation to sanctity, a continuous conversion, even a transformation of the whole person, in all dimensions of one's being—body, soul, spirit. Formation covers actually the whole of the monastic life. Accordingly, it includes the seniors as well as the newer members. Such a view of formation is precisely the one adopted in the Statute on Formation that is the current legislation in the Order.

For the sake of brevity I shall treat only of those features of monastic formation in our Trappist-Cistercian Order which seem to me to have been of particular significance. It seems logical to divide this presentation into two major sections: formation before Vatican II and after the Council, stressing the effect of the changes that have been implemented by the monasteries of the Order following the Council. In the brief compass of a concise report I make no claim to provide a comprehensive account of this topic; rather, it seems more useful to offer a frankly personal account of how one American monk experienced and understood monastic formation in the period beginning with the year 1950. How interesting it would be to have a personal account of that other period of rapid transition in the Order from the year 1150 to 1200! Personal though this account will be at times, yet I shall not confine myself to the two monasteries of Gethsemani and then Genesee where I lived during those fifty years. I propose to take into account the practice and experience of the other houses of the Order's as they appear to one monk who lived through the second half of the twentieth century. I might add that circumstances offered me the opportunity of gaining personal experience of every Region of the Order, having served as Secretary General for six years near the middle of those fifty years.

One final word: I presume that other monks from other Regions of the Order will provide accounts of this large field of interest that will supplement what I have

³⁸ Monk of Gethsemani (USA), Secretary of the Consilium Generale from 1969 to 1974, and abbot of Genesee (USA) from November 1971 to September 2001.

to offer and provide a complement that perhaps gives a view that qualifies some of my own observations and evaluations.

PRE-CONCILIAR FORMATION

When I entered the Order in 1950 I could not have realized that the spirit and cast of mind that has shaped much of the structure of monastic life during the past 400 years would soon undergo a radical questioning that would lead to a shift and restructuring of daily life and relationships. Although some few persons in the Church realized the desirability, even the necessity of a radical change, at that time no one who had prominent notice called for any practical program. In our Order, however, there were a few monks, including a couple of abbots, who quietly had begun to rethink basic monastic spirituality and to implement a more integrated program of formation than was generally offered in the Order as a whole.

At Gethsemani the kind of formation offered was, I believe, rather typical, though perhaps more rigidly interpreted and practiced than in many communities of men. There was no program at all for all preparing applicants to enter. If a man met the canonical requirements and evinced a seriously religious motivation as revealed in a brief correspondence and an interview with the novice-master or abbot, he was accepted. There was a more exacting screening for choir monks as regards academic qualifications. In particular, one had to have a certain attainment in Latin and a demonstrated ability to handle studies. A number who wished to enter as choir monks were refused and led to join as lay-brothers. Occasionally, one who began in the choir novitiate would transfer to the lay-brothers, finding the study-regime too demanding or simply preferring a life with more manual labor and less choir. Other standards were rather broadly framed; in particular, lay brothers might be accepted aged 16, who had not finished secondary school; choir monks at 18, just after completing secondary studies, were not rarely accepted. Relatively few at that period were as old as thirty. On the other hand, many of us had been in the military and had a broader exposure to the world than age would otherwise have allowed for. The relative youth of much of the community certainly resulted in a good deal of enthusiasm, that was not always expressed with due prudence or accompanied by insight into motivation.

In general, at that period the life was highly regulated by numerous prescribed Usages that were imparted in 'Repetitions' by the Father Master. These sessions were devoid of any intellectual stimulus; rather, they were oriented to observance and to a pious and austere life of prayer, self-denial and penance. No discussions during the class were allowed, nor were we encouraged to follow up with readings in history or fathers or early Cistercians. The whole tone was decidedly dry

and tended to be moralistic and resulted in a rather voluntaristic emphasis. At least that is how some of us received this teaching. However, it was Christ-centered so that the penances, difficulties and trials were understood to be a way of union with our Lord in his passion. The abbot's chapter talks supplemented these repetitions and conveyed in a less somber mode a doctrine of love of Christ and his cross. Prayer and recollection were forms of communion with the Lord but no coherent doctrine of contemplation in its relation to ascesis and its manner of effecting spiritual transformation was supplied. Very little was said in detail about contemplation, transformation and the resurrection in general. Silence was well observed and insisted on. Again there was no stimulus to serious study or intellectual pursuits. On the contrary, when Fr. Louis (Thomas Merton) began a series of classes with the novices a short time after I entered, and began speaking of prayer and the fathers with a striking enthusiasm that we found appealing, it caused tension with the Father Master. His influence was felt to interfere with that of the novice master who was convinced that formation required the influence of a single person. In fact Merton's style and approach to monastic life was surely a very different conception and especially was conveyed in a much more congenial, appealing tone. The abbot himself was favorable to Fr. Louis' teaching but decided that under the circumstances his talks should be interrupted.

The library was closed to novices who had access only to the works of devotion and piety kept in the scriptorium. The one area where a certain intellectual effort was required was the study of Latin since all the choir prayer was in that language and all liturgical books.

Years later when I was asked to review a book that described the formation of a Zen Buddhist monk it became clear to me that the psychological principles of formation in the Order in the mid twentieth century had a great deal in common with those employed in the Buddhist tradition. Of course, the theological and spiritual principles diverged greatly but on the level of the psyche and the reorganization of inner structures and the effect on consciousness, there was a close affinity, in my experience at any rate. The long offices chanted in Latin, the silence which prolonged the concentration of prayer and meditation, the simple work in the fields and the limited intellectual input all served to lead to an interior life of constant prayer. After a time this prayerful interiority led to a heightened spiritual consciousness. Although the subtleties of the contemplative process and the workings of the spiritual senses were little understood, yet the practices contributing to this 'work of the heart' were zealously taught and adhered to.

Increasingly as time went on, however, the novices experienced this regime as a source of emotional stress. Many seemed unable to pass through the inevitable frustrations to gain insight into their psychic workings, resolve inner conflict and

integrate their aspirations and energies with the divine mysteries that are the realities of contemplative experience. In Zen too working through such frustrations plays an important role in achieving a fresh identity that is associated with enlightenment. The master's function is to recognize and identify the various stages of this process and by well-directed comments assist the novice to discover his own inner way. It began to appear that too many well-intentioned and eager novices did not have the resources and psychic strength profitably to live this regime. The complexity of their conflicts and tensions baffled all too often those charged with formation.

The traditional means of dealing with such crises proved inadequate sufficiently often that changes in the regime and usages were agreed upon. The first of these modifications in the liturgy and hours of sleep were introduced in the 1953 General Chapter. Incidentally, some years later I was invited by Fr. Louis to meet with him and a monk from India who was visiting. In the course of our discussions this Hindu ascetic mentioned that in recent times his community had found it necessary to make changes in their manner of life. This change began, he added, in 1953! I myself was a junior at the time and profited from the very different style of formation that Fr. Louis introduced when he was appointed to the newly created office of magister spiritus of the monks in simple vows in 1952. Much that characterized his methods was subsequently adopted by the Order some years later. Not that he was the only one who saw the need for a more personal and humanistic orientation in the formation of the young and in the life as a whole. Dom Anselme le Bail had introduced a more humanistic spirit that gave greater scope to study and a more culturally integrated formation at Scourmont already in the 1930's. Other abbots and monks of the Order similarly gave greater scope to the classical history and spirituality of the Cistercian tradition and its study: Dom Chautard of Sept Fons, Dom Alexis Presse of Tamie, Dom Luddy of Mount Melleray, Pere (later Dom) Deodat of Westmalle among others. The General Chapter of 1933 itself recognized the need for a more serious intellectual thrust to the Order's life and formation. As a practical measure it decreed that a "Review of the Order" must be published. Each of the above named abbots contributed articles in the early issues of *Collectanea ocsa*, that introduced serious studies of spirituality and history to the monks of the Order. Articles appeared in four languages in the first volume: French, the most prominent, Dutch, German and English.

Another Pre-Vatican II adaptation was the adoption of a Plan of Formation for Young Nuns, in 1953. (Cf. Minutes of General Chapter, p.49). In the Presentation of this Plan the Chapter stated that "the formation of the young was left until the present to the initiative of the Mistresses of Novices. While paying homage to their devotedness and zeal, one might deplore the lack of method in the forma-

tion that they attempt to give.” The plan is purposely “detailed, precise and practical.” The Holy See had begun already in 1950 to express awareness of the need for updating of formation, (*renovationis accomodatae*) and after some experiences were made by way of implementing such renewal, the Congregation of Religious issued norms to be followed by the Orders as they followed up with such a renewal. Shortly after, the Holy Father’s Constitution *Sedes Sapientiae* was issued (1956). This document required every Order to review carefully the whole area of formation of the young. At the Chapter of 1957 the Abbot General, responding to the Roman initiatives, gave four conferences in addition to the Opening Discourse, all five of which talks had as their theme the subject of spiritual and intellectual formation (Minutes of General Chapter of 1957, *passim*). In as much as at that period all the choir members not yet ordained were studying for the priesthood, the topic of formal studies occupied a prominent, though not exclusive, place in these considerations. The chief thrust of these conferences is that study should contribute to contemplative prayer not compete with it. At the same time, there must be sound and adequate provision for a serious intellectual training. As the General, Dom Gabriel Sortais, pointed out, the Order had already made some adaptations that conformed to the norms of the 1956 document, but also expressed concern that there not be deviations of practice in the Order that could readily lead to divisions. Thus the adaptations called for later by Vatican II, did not come as an abrupt, unforeseen measure. Rather, the Order was involved in a gradual process of adaptation and renewal for more than a decade prior to the end of the Council.

My own impressions of the formation, however, during this period from 1952–1956 when I was doing studies for the priesthood are rather mixed. Merton’s teaching integrated Biblical and Patristic theology, in a manner that made both accessible. Their direct contribution to monastic life and prayer was evident and resulted in a personal taste for such studies and the practice of contemplative prayer. On the other hand, though we had competent professors with Doctorates in Theology from European Universities, the style of teaching and the texts employed were the same as those employed in diocesan seminaries and reflected a more academic mind set. I attempted to read Saint Thomas Aquinas, who seemed to me to speak from a spiritual experience that permeated his formal style rather than the manuals as far as was compatible with preparing the exams. Saint Thomas cites Saint Augustine, Saint John Damascene and many other Fathers including Cassian, with considerable frequency, and so, in the end, this approach seemed to provide a more integrated formation than that offered by the formal program of studies. For those who did not have an exceptionally gifted teacher at that pre-Council period, priestly studies were less readily able to contribute to a

contemplative orientation and were more oriented to academic and pastoral work ministry. At the same time, the intense liturgical life, the atmosphere of silence and recollection and solitude remained dominant influences for a life of constant prayer and considerable simplicity.

A *Ratio Studiorum* was voted in by the 1958 Chapter, and was later approved by the Vatican. By the time that a Statute for the Students was put into effect in 1960 ad experimentum and approved in 1962, there was already a rather widespread concern to train teachers and prepare others for responsible positions in communities. In 1959 when I was at Monte Cistello as a student there were 75 students from 15 different countries living there and attending various Roman Universities. All, with but a few exceptions, were already ordained priests.

The next need for change on the level of the Order was given attention in 1962 when at the Chapter the necessity for better screening and selection of candidates was underlined. The Chapter also determined that the subject of formation was to be studied and treated in detail as a priority of the following General Chapter. 1962 was the second year of Vatican II Council. By this time a keener awareness of the opportunities and desirability for further adaptations resulted from the deliberations of the Council which were being followed with great interest throughout the world. Soon the Order would be involved in more fundamental changes in the formation given to all monks, not only the young.

VATICAN II AND MONASTIC FORMATION

The Council ended in 1965 and it was two years later that the first Chapter of Renewal that was called for by the decree *Perfectae Charitatis* took place with results that I shall note subsequently. Following that first special General Chapter, and in the wake of a certain dissatisfaction it gave rise to, in 1968, incidentally the year of Merton's death, the *Consilium Generale* decided that a Formation Commission consisting of a representative from each Region of the Order, and three monks specially designated, should meet at Monte Cistello to treat of issues pertaining to formation in the Order. None of the members of this commission was an abbot; all were experienced in formation as it had been practiced in the Order until that period. The mandate for this commission was vaguely general in its wording, perhaps wisely so.

The commission decided to draw up some rather comprehensive recommendations to be proposed to the houses of the Order for discussion and eventual treatment at the Chapter of 1969. No nuns participated in the meeting and so the formation of nuns was but little treated since we felt lack of sufficient informa-

tion prevented any serious recommendations for the feminine branch, though, of course, much that was proposed would prove to be of considerable interest to the nuns as well as to monks. The meeting revealed that, in spite of certain differences of opinion frankly expressed, there was a unity of spirit and agreement on fundamental principles and aims. The resulting documents treated of the various stages and aspects of monastic formation in extended detail. The same more humanistic, more sophisticated spirit that had already animated formation in a number of the houses of the Order was evident in the deliberations of this group as well as a willingness to confront the current challenges that those engaged in formation were encountering. The Commission turned out to be the first stage of a lengthy process of revision of the prescribed formation that came to be codified in the *Ratio Institutionis* (Statute on Formation) which was approved by the General Chapter of 1990 and which remains the legislation of the Order relative to formation currently.

Some six weeks after the Report of this ad hoc Commission was given out, the Sacred Congregation of Religious published the 'Instructio De Accomodata Renovazione Institutionis Ad Vitam Religiosam Ducendam' (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 61 (1969) 103–20). This document set forth principles and norms that were to be followed in implementing the Renewal called for by *Perfectae Charitatis*. The Report of the Formation Commission had largely anticipated many of the provisions of this document, as Dom Gueric of Scourmont pointed out in the 1969 General Chapter, so that the Order had begun the process of revising monastic formation along the same lines that guided those who were overseeing the implementation of Vatican II. Once again, the Order proved to be in tune with developments in the broader Church, thus assuring a good measure of continuity in the process of adaptation. Inevitably, to be sure, as it began to be applied, the practice in individual houses increasingly differed due chiefly to the capabilities of the communities in terms of adequately trained and endowed personnel.

These differences gradually established themselves and persist at present. While some communities have a well-established cycle of courses with a staff of monks participating, others have made little provision for formal study once the novice leaves the novitiate. In the majority of houses priestly formation now begins only after solemn profession in any formal way, though certain basic studies such as Latin and other languages, and philosophy may be offered in the form of tutorials, to those who are interested and capable at earlier stages. Most study of theology is done at some seminary or University so that the individual must call forth greater initiative to assure the integration of his study with the life of contemplative prayer.

As I see it, the single most influential decision affecting formation in the Order

was the adoption of the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*. The provisions that had the most profound influence on formation and daily life in the monastery were those concerning silence and greater openness to the world. In addition, the fact that broad norms for various practices required consultation within the community in order to arrive at agreement as to their specific application. Once such consultation was set in motion in an atmosphere where permission to speak was general, a very different interpersonal dynamic became operative. Communication increasingly became a conscious issue, and in consequence so did the quality of relationships among the members. Obviously, this development made various helpful contributions to the life of prayer and contemplation as well as favoring a more satisfactory community experience for many. At the same time, new challenges had to be dealt with in order to assure that the interior life did not suffer diminishment. Formation came to include a good deal more concern for wholesome human and community relations. The nature of obedience, its mode and exercise were influenced appreciably in this context, so that superiors as well as novices and juniors, found themselves learning new ways of exercising this essential monastic practice. In particular, more effort was expended in consideration of developing the particular gifts of the individual. The increased complexity of modern economy, the need for teachers and competent administrators, for spiritual directors with greater sophistication—all these offered wider scope for the cultivation of talents and interests that contributed to the mature and active participation of more members in community living. Obedience was viewed in a more mutual way, it became less passive on the part of the subject, more consultative on the part of the superior.

Another development that took place due to the increased complexification of modern society with its increasing specialization in all fields of endeavor from theology to agriculture, was the provision for meetings of various kinds. First of all, Regional Meetings of Superiors from being occasional grew into regular events. They contributed a good deal to the formation of Superiors but also to that of the monk delegates who participated at certain of these sessions. These meetings were followed by sessions for novice-masters, and others involved in teaching and counseling. After a time, in a number of Regions regular sessions of formation for novices and/or juniors became the usual structure of formation for many communities. This approach has the advantage of pooling resource persons, as well as providing a situation where monks of different communities could become acquainted with members of different monasteries and profit from their ideas and support. Cellarers, cantors, infirmarians too found it helpful to have sessions that are a form of ongoing formation. A number of specific programs were organized on various occasions offering to senior monks and nuns opportunities for specific learning experiences, mostly concerned with a fuller understanding of the

Cistercian tradition. More recently this has included a session of several months in Rome that offers teaching by selected experts.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AND LIFESTYLE

In such a climate of rather rapid change in so important an area one of the major tasks of formation was to establish and preserve the orientation to contemplative prayer and those practices that favor its development. The need for more privacy emerged as communication became more significant an element in daily life. A majority of communities came to provide private cells for the monks and, somewhat later, the nuns also adopted the use of individual cells. Norms for their use varied to a degree, the chief difference among communities is whether the cell is the place for lectio and study as well as for meditation and prayer. Some communities preferred to maintain the scriptorium for this practice. In the interest of poverty some communities chose to have no washing or plumbing facilities in the cells; others, however, considered that modern habits called for privacy in this area as well. Formation required attention to what could be called the discipline of the cell, that included maintaining it in order and maintaining simplicity as well as the issue of preserving silence in the cell, not admitting visitors, and using time in the cell well. The Order's legislation has left such matters to the discernment and preference of each community. Seniors who had a formation based on a common life that made a minimal allowance for privacy as well as novices required to be formed to the considerable modification of daily life that resulted from the installation of the private cell.

Other opportunities for more specialized formation, such as participation in East-West dialogue are offered to those who are involved in this area. The yearly meeting on Cistercian matters at Kalamazoo brings monks and nuns as well as scholars from various countries to this academic center. The availability of English translations of Cistercian Fathers and the numerous volumes of Cistercian Studies published by Cistercian Publications, subsidized by the US Region, contribute importantly to formation in the English speaking houses of the Order by making significant texts available for study and lectio.³⁹ This availability has had a reciprocal influence on the kind of courses given in communities, the novice master and other teachers choosing to treat of subjects in which the class can more actively participate by further reading and study.

At the time of the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*, the use of television was

39 Translations in other languages render the same service in other Regions.

an issue given attention, as well as other modern media of communication. The norm given was sufficiently general to admit of a very wide interpretation. This too soon became a field that required special treatment in formation. However, at that time the Internet did not exist. It was made public by the US military in 1992 and its use for e-mail rapidly grew. The first program for the World Wide Web was written at CERN, Geneva in 1989. Soon after in many communities these services were made available. Before long much business and a good deal of communication was carried out through these facilities by the superiors and book-keepers and other department heads. Others in the community promptly felt the utility of having access to these services as well as the use of a computer for a variety of private matters: preparing homilies, classes, sending and receiving messages, and even for study and writing music. In our community, postulants would fairly regularly ask if they should bring their computer with them when they entered. As this development took place it became also a subject to be dealt with in formation for the whole community. Some monasteries drew up a Statute for the Use of the Internet and Web; computers have been made available for common use and rules for their use have been established and required to be taught.

In recent years some communities established a Web Page in which the nature, purpose and life of the monastic community is described in some detail, the e-mail and street addresses provided and interested readers invited to contact a designated monk for any further information. Access to monastic conferences and homilies is linked to this page thus allowing for a certain deeper contact with monastic spirituality. At The Abbey of the Genesee the majority of applicants in the last few years have contacted the Abbey for the first time after reading this Web Page which serves as an instrument of initial formation for some.

A further observation I would make is the fact that for a majority of those coming to the monastery in the last decade, it has seemed helpful to provide rather early in formation a situation in which certain skills can be acquired. Even in 1950 when the novitiate training stressed silence, solitude and simple, austere life-style it was the usual practice for choir novices to make a serious study of Latin. The brothers were assigned to work with someone who taught them some skill by working with them. It is not always easy to provide such opportunities while leaving the new-comer sufficiently free to concentrate on the interior life and all that simplicity requires. However, rather early on such opportunity for learning in some area or other appears to be a distinct help to the process of integrating work and prayer, community and contemplation. In many moderns the sense of identity is relatively fragile and is considerably assisted in its formation in this manner among others. Those with the capacity for study do better in their development often, when given a limited amount of time and help for the study of a language,

history or literature that will prove helpful in the near future. This seems all the more desirable as most modern curricula are deficient in these areas from the point of view of what is helpful for monastic formation.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

By way of conclusion I will simply underline a few of the more salient features of the subject of Monastic Formation as it has evolved and is practiced today and note what seems to be particularly deserving of attention for the future. The *Ratio Institutionis* recognizes the importance of the community as a whole for the process of monastic formation. The way the monks actually live out their vocation together is a daily, continuous source of formation to the Cistercian life. This is true for all members of the community, not only for the postulants, novices and juniors. The Rule of Saint Benedict, the legislation of the Order and the norms worked out in the individual communities as such are important guides for life. However, they must be put into practice to prove effective and the manner in which that takes place, day by day, by the members of the community is normally the most pervasive and effective influence on the monk. This means that all members of the community have a responsibility for formation of the monks who live in it. Formation itself to prove effective must take this fundamental reality into account, and seek to inculcate a sense of responsibility for the quality of community life. The building up of community has rightly become a major feature of formation and is best taught by those practices and teachings that favor wholesome and respectful interpersonal relations. Many passages in the Cistercian Fathers provide numerous points of contact with this field that touches as much on the psychological and social levels as on the spiritual.

Perhaps the chief challenge of formation at all stages of monastic living is that of creating and maintaining a contemplative orientation in all of the areas of Cistercian life. The difficulties confronted by communities today in attempting to inculcate a sound contemplative lifestyle vary widely at present. In a number of countries ageing is a chief concern that has impact on all the members of the community; in others, it is the training of rather numerous novices and juniors most of whom have had relatively weak intellectual formation. Formation is affected by all the areas of life so that economic problems, cultural limitations or threats, ranging from the plethora of media that penetrates everywhere, to its relative paucity and the lack of adequate literature for monastic teaching. Not least of all, the need to establish an atmosphere of prayer that becomes the environment that pervades all fields of monastic life in a situation where dialogue and atten-

tion to the requirements of human development are essential for modern persons would seem to be a particularly formidable challenge to our communities as they advance in this twenty-first century.

10.3.3. Formation: An Abbot's Point of View

(by Dom Patrick Olive)⁴⁰

INTRODUCTION

The title itself of the request that was made to me gives the framework of what will follow. It speaks of its interest and its limits at the same time. Interest because it concerns reflections drawn from a concrete experience, located in time (about a quarter of a century) and in an expanse (several hundred persons): limits, because this experience must be put into an ensemble of which it is only one element among others. Thus you will not find here a *treatise on Cistercian formation today*, but rather some remarks on several points that seem to me to call for a particular attention and care.

1. CONTEXT OF FORMATION

It seems to me that we find ourselves today, at least in my experience, in a situation where the context of monastic formation is not favorable to it. It is not certain that, historically, this is the first time or that it is an insurmountable handicap; it might even be an advantage that we need to know how to make use of.

We must first note the general weakness in instruction in the faith. In most cases at least it is not faith itself that is in question (yet we can ask many questions regarding what the people who present themselves to us mean by "faith") but the objective content of faith. The external conditions of the transmission of faith in our regions for about thirty years (that is, almost two generations) have caused a sort of break-off. With rare exceptions and in the best of cases, the young brothers come with little experience in which good feelings, bits of prayer and some superficial beliefs are mixed. One can say that it is almost a miracle that a vocation is

⁴⁰ Abbot of Sept-Fons (France) since December 1980.

born in such a context, which does not really prepare them for the inevitable trials that they will have to face.

We can almost say as much for intellectual formation, for the crisis of the transmission of knowledge does not only affect the religious domain. But even more than the sum of knowledge, it is the capacity for a true intellectual effort that is wounded, resulting from various scholarly methods that have been tried out on students for quite some time, plus the invasion of the visual culture and means of access to it. Only a privileged minority (of which we meet a few) have access to solid methods and a favorable environment. Thus, for example, we have the question of reading (to be attentive to a written text, even to read fluently!).

Finally, there is a deficiency in the education of feelings, in the broadest sense of the term. In general, we notice a lack of distance vis-a-vis immediate emotions, which are taken for reality, even for the truth. You can quickly see the repercussions that this can have in the area of one's relationship with God and in a balanced fraternal life. The questions that touch upon the family environment are added to these difficulties, especially confusion around the father figure.

The immediate consequences of all this are evident: crisis of morality (public and private), more persons with psychological problems, conversions that raise questions, etc.

From this tableau, which I consider as more realistic than pessimistic, flow certain conditions for monastic formation today.

2. CONDITIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY FORMATION

The practice of the Rule of Saint Benedict, according to the modalities described by our Constitutions, furnishes all that is necessary to allow those who present themselves to the monastery to live and develop a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ in prayer; but it is evident that the conditions evoked above lead us to prioritize certain elements.

Let us first note that we cannot be content with a "general" formation in which each one would take up what he can or wants. If a common base given to all is necessary, obviously, adaptation to persons is essential and requires sustained attention precisely because of the difficulties mentioned above.

It is essential to help the new brother to be aware of the unity of his person and life. An artificial separation between sensitivity and intelligence, between practice and theory, fruit of several centuries of idealistic thought and formation (even in people unaware of the theoretical aspects of the question), obliges us to insist

on this point. It is striking to see how much people easily disassociate ideal and practice, intentions and doing; there is generally no bad intention here nor duplicity but a state of fact inherited from the contemporary scene that is not easy to correct. The common life in its most ordinary aspects is a powerful revelation. This discovery is often a decisive step in the adaptation and the capacity to live our life. The putting into practice of the unity between the divine office, *lectio divina*, prayer, and continual prayer, clearly shown in the Constitutions, will also be decisive in this process.

The religious deficiency mentioned above requires a corresponding education to faith capable of giving the candidate something to live by and persevere in a type of existence entirely based on faith. Religious sentiment, when it exists, becomes blurred quite quickly and can lead to confusion if a solid faith is not present. Faith put into practice, yes, but also educated faith. To learn to persevere in prayer and to give oneself the means to do so, clearly constitute one of the pillars of formation.

We must also insist upon a basic philosophical formation without which theological study will remain superficial or will be easily transformed into erudition but will lack depth. Here also, we must watch over the organic unity between study and the interior life. It is evident that the possibility of integrating studies to the rhythm of the monastic day is, through experience, a great blessing, even if this happens through a prolongation of the time for studies, as we have seen. When the community sees itself as a place of formation, including studies, all benefit.

A true human education is also indispensable: feelings, control of the emotions, attitudes regarding sexuality. We must always approach the problem with openness but keep from playing the apprentice psychologist. The discovery of, and then the experience of a true relationship of spiritual sonship/fatherhood is a decisive step.

Formation through work is also very important. Whether it is a matter of merely technical learning, the development of practical gifts, the capacity to work together, the sense of taking on a true responsibility, these are very important elements of maturation and verification. There are often pleasant surprises in this area: gifts revealed and perceptible progress.

In all this process, collaboration between the various formators is the guarantee of success. Very particularly, as the Constitutions say, between the Abbot and the Novice Director, but also between all those who play a formative role. Nothing is sure in this domain, but a lack of coherence in the means or the ends can only harm those who have the right to quality formators who work together harmoniously.

Above all, it is necessary to offer those who present themselves a clear identity.

We have not always had a realistic attitude on this point. The fear of rigidity has sometimes led to a lack of coherence; in certain cases, personal difficulties were projected onto the whole, which can lead to a sort of inhibition when it concerns expressing or even living what one is effectively. Even though we must not underestimate the risk of rigidity, we should not hesitate to say, and above all, to be what we are. There is here a wealth in differences, which is an aspect of the Church. Moreover, in the present confusion of identities (psychological and even sometimes sexual), we have everything to gain by clear words and behaviors, without vanity or rigidity.

3. THE LESSONS OF A PRACTICE

The goal of all formation, but very particularly monastic formation, is clearly long term. If we aim at or hope for immediate results, we will necessarily be disappointed. Thus we must accept to work for the following generations (and reflect on this when making certain decisions; let us think about what we have received from the generations that preceded us and about the judgments we make on this heritage).

The capacity to persevere, especially in prayer bereft of any sensible attraction, is a touchstone that does not deceive. It is always a delicate passage that requires careful accompaniment and thus a certain experience, the result of which is never guaranteed.

In formation, we must always keep from believing that achievements are definitive. The insistence on ongoing formation seems to me to support this. To invite the brother to keep or to find again a true formative relationship with a capable elder is a vital necessity. Many examples (positive or negative) show this; the indispensable formative role of the community cannot substitute for it.

In this area, perhaps more than any other, we must accept disappointments and failures. The human person is a mystery and we should not imagine too quickly that we have seen everything. This acceptance supposes the clear desire to analyze the causes of a failure but also to refuse morbid culpability. No case is the same, no one is infallible, personal freedom is an inalienable good even if it leads to a mistake!

Formators need a true capacity for adaptation. Behaviors evolve quickly, our way of life is profoundly different from that of the brothers who come and often we have only a vague, and in any case theoretical, idea of their milieu, their experiences and the impact of these on their personality. But adaptation does not mean compromise. We must know how to be flexible without giving in, understanding

without naiveté, ready to welcome without, however, ceasing to invite progress on the monastic way. This recipe is difficult, yet it is an essential key.

Our community has all age groups (from the twenties to the nineties), four continents are represented, thus we have the experience of important cultural differences. The only way to integrate them positively seems to be to invite them all to transcend their limits in order to enter into what could be called a monastic culture capable of bringing them together. The success of such an attitude evidently depends very much on the coherence and quality of this monastic culture, which is more a practical question than a theoretical one. Certainly one needs to know how to be a monk, but it is much more important to live as a monk. Here is the challenge addressed to the entire community. The Rule indicates clearly to us the self-transcendence to be accomplished; whoever we may be, we must take the necessary steps and we are all here in the same boat. The Rule's origins, its pedagogy, clearly transcend the differences and it is a true source of unity for the community.

A simple note on which to end: the fact of being a large community allows us to integrate "weaker" members that a community of a different size perhaps could not receive. In any case, we must be prudent in this area for experience shows that the numbers can quickly change.

CONCLUSION

To finish, I am aware of the lacunae in my reflection. This does not mean that the points not mentioned are not significant for me but that those that I touched upon take more care to integrate; it is the originality (at least I hope!) and the limit of this contribution.

If one more word is called for, I would say: optimism. I believe that our way of life is well adapted to the needs of contemporary men and women, from wherever they come. If God calls them to share it, it can respond to their aspirations and help them to heal their wounds; it can bring them true happiness on condition that we know how to transmit to them what we are living.

10.3.4. Cistercian Formation in the Making: A Community's Experience

(by Mother *Cristiana Piccardo*)⁴¹

This contribution has to do with the lived experience of an Italian monastery, Vitorchiano, and its foundations (seven in forty years). Thus it is a very limited experience, but one which certainly has been shared with other communities of the western world before and after Vatican II.

My generation came into contact with the Cistercian Order after the Second World War, that is to say, after the experience of the war's complete destruction of basic human values and life values. Nevertheless it was a generation that—from the ruins of world conflict—entered into a new ecclesial and social experience. The Church was at that time the strongest positive reality for young people without orientation and destiny; it was the only ambient capable of engendering confidence and hope. It was the time in which the valorization of the laity was taking hold, opening the way to youth movements, which developed rapidly, full of enthusiasm and humanism: the word friendship began to regain meaning, and people began once again to speak of ideals. At the same time, social and political life was proposing new categories of political vision and civic fellowship. In this context there arose a new type of youth, rebellious and generous, autonomous and hungry for meaning, perhaps a little skeptical and critical, nevertheless, with an almost heroic desire for fidelity to something that made sense. I remember the interminable hours of waiting in the square at Castel Gandolfo when Pius XII was dying: he might seem contradictory as a personage, but he was a great paternal figure for post-war youth in search of their faith. The square was full of young people with tears in their eyes. No one wanted to take leave of that father. And then there was the impressive silence of his funeral procession in the streets of Rome. It was a contradictory kind of youth, formed by reading Merton, Maritain's "Le Paysan de la Garonne," and the books of Voillaume and of Jacques Loew, whereas in the universities the realism of Zola, Sartre, and Flaubert still held sway.

Clearly it was the beginning of a new era and a time of profound changes.

When, in the mysterious plans of the mercy of God, this type of youth joined the Trappists, they encountered the old Cistercian observance, but they neverthe-

⁴¹ Abbess of Vitorchiano (Italy) from October 1964 to October 1988, then titular prioress and abbess of Humocaro, foundation of Vitorchiano in Venezuela, from June 1991 to July 2002.

less lived it in a new way, perhaps with another kind of freedom and another form of seeking and being in relation.

The life was certainly very hard on the ascetic level: strict fasting, radical silence, sign language, exhausting forms of work in the field, and demanding vigils. The division between choir monks and lay brothers was shocking to the new sociological and democratic mentality, and was hard to understand. Intellectual-spiritual formation alternated between limited commentaries on the Rule and long explanations of the usages and customs of the monastery. The chapter of faults with its rigorous structure of accusations, proclamations, prostrations, and penances, was intended to cultivate a very concrete kind of humility, but it also gave rise to secret resentments and nasty desires for revenge. Discernment criteria during the time of formation had mostly to do with physical and psychological stamina for vigils, manual work, silence and fasting. A common refrain at the time of formation was: “We must wear ourselves out for the Lord.” And the measure of a vocation was the capacity for generous resistance to this overall wear and tear. Relationships with authority, whether with the Novice Mistress or the Mother Abbess, were rather formal. Once a month, we—the novices—had the notorious meeting with the Novice Mistress. Each brought in a scrap of paper on which were noted the faults of the month; one knelt down in front of the desk of the Mistress, read off the faults, received a penance, and, finally, the Mistress invited the novice to sit down. The time allotted was usually brief, and the people who did not have much capacity to express themselves remained silent and listened to the councils of the Mistress without a word. Nevertheless, if the Mistress was simple and maternal, there was room for a certain amount of spontaneity as well as real affection and deep gratitude. Above all, in the case of our community, the Novice Mistress was a person who was always with us: she was the first to get up in the morning, the first in the long line of novices going out to work in the fields, and first in her dedication to the needs of all. She was a true model of monastic sanctity, and I had a sincere and deep admiration for our Novice Mistress. What a surprise it was when one found in one’s desk in the Scriptorium a piece of bread or cheese or chocolate when the fasting was particularly hard. The Mistress tries, with her motherly affection, somehow or other to make up for the lack of food. It could probably not have been called true spiritual maternity and adequate accompaniment of the person in formation, even if the passing on of values, lived with much generosity, constituted a living example that brought forth fruits.

I remember that when “spiritual maternity” began to be spoken of, a veritable scandal broke out in the community: it was feared that the relation with the Mistress or the Abbess, who were not priests, might involve something too intimate and spiritual which—as was said at that time—pertained to the “inter-

nal forum” and was matter of sacramental confession. Thanks be to God, Italian spontaneity made it possible to establish sufficiently deep and trusting relationships. There nevertheless remained a delicate division between a dependency on the authority of the house, which was rather external and formal, and the experience of confession, which touched on deeper realities of the soul. This division did not help unify people. Years went by before the abbess was recognized as the “mother” of the community in the full sense, material and spiritual, and as the determining point of reference for the life of the house and of the nuns, that is, the person with whom each evaluates her life and from whom each receives indications for her journey. It had to do with the way we lived out fidelity: there was fidelity to God, of course, but fidelity to authority and to the community was not of the same nature.

Without a doubt the divine office, the great liturgical strength of our life, is what most impacted our formation at this time, even though the difficulty of Latin hampered our understanding of the psalms and other scriptural texts. Thanks to the preferential importance and loving fidelity given to community prayer in the divine office, we had a profound sense of the absoluteness of God, and the life was totally impregnated with this Great Presence.

Another source of formation was hard, humble work in the fields. It was a simple way of being formed to sacrifice, detachment, and to a concrete experience of poverty, which freed us from many ambitions and illusions. We realized that fidelity to the “usages” had formed several generations of nuns to sanctity. Personally I do not believe that they were a sure source of formation. What is certain is that, when entering in the monastery, one came into a place regulated by customs, a precise horarium, intense silence, regularity, and the constant admission of one’s infidelity to the discipline of the house, along with the seeking of humiliating penances, which were part of the process of purification of the person. Those who entered this reality with a humble and free heart, with time, found themselves open to the grace of being rooted in God’s will at every moment and every step.

Nevertheless, times were changing rapidly, and new criteria for discernment were arising. These criteria had as much to do with the personal qualities of the candidates as with their ability to put up with rigid Trappist asceticism. The imposing figure Gabriel Sortais, Abbot General at the time, left his mark on the Order with wide-ranging paternal, missionary, and conciliar views. To him we owe the contemplative humanization of liturgical prayer, the unification of the different classes of monks, the movement toward greater valuing and consulting of the feminine branch of the Order, and the beginnings of General Chapters of Abbesses. New criteria were brought to bear on formation programs.

Mysteriously, Trappist monasteries were filling up with young people fascinat-

ed with the desire to find the meaning of life after the disasters of the war. It was a generation that had to face rapid changes of the times, and try to remain faithful to a charism that had saved it from the ungodly vacuum left by the war.

It was young people of this kind who took on community responsibilities and introduced changes, with much enthusiasm, and perhaps little experience, but with historic fidelity to the new times. It did not happen overnight.

The 1964 general meeting of Abbesses limited itself to an attentive revision of the “usages” and decided to make a new edition of the Cistercian customs. Mother Ignacia Gatti, at that time prioress of Vitorchiano, was put in charge of updating the book of Usages. In reality, this effort did not bring any particularly new or original ideas regarding the methodology Trappist formation: the essential criterion of discernment during the time of formation was still the ability to follow the “usages.” Nevertheless the simple valorization of the Feminine Branch of the Order, the possibility offered to the Abbesses to dialogue and make decisions, the fresh air that blew through the Catholic world after the Council, and the opening of new foundations outside of Europe, created a new style and an awareness of the need for change.

The fascinating contributions of psychological sciences began to be a point of reference. In the monastic world they were sometimes applied with much enthusiasm but little aptness, because there was the risk of loosing the human and spiritual depth of the process of conversion according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Cistercian charism. Nevertheless, psychology was valuable for deepening self-knowledge and accurately naming the traumas, conflicts, ambitions, and desires at work in the human heart.

It was not until the 1968 Meeting of Abbesses that a new monastic identity began to assert itself with the draft text of a declaration on Cistercian life, which the Abbots took into account at their well-known prophetic Chapter of 1969. It was the first time people began to speak of “aggiornamento,” dialogue, regional meetings, and a representative participation of Abbesses in the General Chapter of Abbots. The topic of formation took on new amplitude and new meaning, leading to the important 1971 document that categorically affirmed the need to “move from a community of observances to a community of communion.”

We now turn to what was happening in communities during this time.

Some keywords taken directly from the Council or strongly influenced by it were coming to the fore in the lived experience of community life: Church-communion, authority as a bond of unity, the abbess as spiritual mother of the community, formation in dialogue, life-giving tradition, and a sense of the Church.

In my community, it was especially respectful and loving listening to the new generations and a first experience of making a foundation that made us face fun-

damental questions: What should be handed on to a house now being born and to the new generations: customs or values? It was from these questions that our experience of dialogue began. The beginning was not easy. On the one hand there were initial attempts at a clear line of thought based on a common vision, a responsible consensus, and a new concern for truthfulness in the accusations of faults, in order to keep them from being pure formalisms. On the other hand, there was the persistent and sometimes violent insistence on customs of the past: "It's the way we always did things: we're on the way to infidelity and laxity..." The greatest fears at that time were that the spiritual maternity of the abbess would invade the subjective conscience, that freedom in making accusations would not respect the classic distinction between internal and external forum, that formation efforts were a serious threat to the traditional value of silence, that by learning dialogue we would weaken the spirit of submission and obedience, that concern for ecclesial communion would threaten the values of solitude and enclosure.

At the same time, thanks be to God, there arose in the community's memory great figures of the past like Mother Pia Gullini with her broad ecclesial and ecumenical sense, with her coherent life, austere yet free, faithful to the charism and tradition, but with a wealth of a profoundly human maternity. It was thanks to Mother Pia's ecclesial intuition and maternal role that the sanctity of Blessed Maria-Gabriela took on consistency.

Persons of this caliber became, little by little, vital reference points for our life. They gave us a forward momentum that allowed us to develop a healthy understanding of the signs of the times and of the new generations, all the while remaining faithful to the tradition at heart.

We quickly realized that a community cannot improvise when it comes to dialogue; rather, it has to be a slow process that begins during the initial formation. Thus, weekly dialogue became an essential component of formation beginning in the novitiate. Further reflection brought us to modify the structures of formation. The former novitiate structure, which began with postulancy and ended six months before solemn profession, no longer seemed adequate. The monasticate or juniorate was created for the simply professed: they had another mistress, another place of formation, another model of insertion in the adult community, and another arrangement of studies and courses. Nevertheless the same experience of dialogue as in the novitiate continued for the group of young professed. The positive results of this experience led us to think about the need for better accompaniment of the young professed, who, after Solemn Profession, left the monasticate, and, with some difficulty, began living in the solitude and anonymity of the larger community. Little by little there arose generational groups: through sincere interchange, the sisters in these groups sought to stimulate and support one another

on the road of conversion. These groups were under the direct responsibility of the abess or prioress.

When we first attempted to form these age groups of solemn professed, some cried scandal: "You are creating a community within a community"! The newness of these groups was accepted with greater calm once it became clear, little by little, that persons coming together to sustain each other on the way of conversion proved to be more serviceable and responsible in their assignments, showing a deep desire of authentic fraternal charity.

Formation in dialogue, even in the novitiate and monasticate, has not always been easy. To dialogue on topics presents few problems, but to put oneself openly in discussion, to accept the correction of the group, to break down barriers, to grow in confidence, to communicate without aggressiveness, to overcome pitfalls of affectivity and sensitivity is tremendously demanding. Nevertheless, there was noticeable growth in freedom, responsibility, communication, and above all in mutual trust and friendship. Many communities were preoccupied at that time with external modifications: change of habit, the transformation of the dormitory into personal cells, the introduction of psychological analysis, the restructuring of work, etc. Our community did not, or perhaps could not make many exterior changes, but it did try to face a deep change of mentality. It was a renewal that did not question the truth, or the charisma, or the tradition; it was a kind of fidelity that did not merely perpetuate customs, but that held fast to the fundamental values of the monastic vocation in a creative and responsible way.

The deepest changes at that time particularly affected the relationship with authority, which point, as I said earlier, had become the real test of the life of the community. The regular meetings with the abess or novice mistress became less formal, and there was freedom to verify one's own life and face it in an authentic and in-depth way. In other words, these meetings became true spiritual direction. In order to adhere to the truth, one has to expose oneself and let oneself be judged and helped. The aim was the growth of the person, so that one's chosen vocation could mature in a responsible way through self-knowledge, the acceptance of one's history and a positive integration of reality and of the community. This shift also modified the meaning of monastic obedience, which, beyond its executive dimension, came to be a personal decision for the good, for fidelity, and for a fruitful building up of the community to which one belonged. Only then can obedience introduces us into reality and make it possible for us to take it on responsibly as an expression of God's will, integrating ourselves into the community by deciding to belong to it and constantly seek the common good.

The transformation of work was another symptomatic change, not only because of the technical development of farm work, with the use of new farm machinery

and systems of irrigation and harvesting, but also because of the development of other types of work that were more productive and more adapted to our times. It was question of abandoning the old “spirituality of work,” which underlined the value of physical stamina and penitential sacrifice, in order to develop a new spirituality of work to take its place. In fact, the transformation that had the greatest impact was an openness to responsible collaboration, which gave rise to economic councils for the various work areas. Thus the contribution of each sister was valued and each became responsible for the good of the house in an attitude of creative and generous service. The work areas thus became places for a very concrete revision of life, for the sake of making a real effort toward collaboration and integration, which, if attained in the work team, also flowed over into community life.

Formation was enriched by high quality studies: the great openness to the Cistercian Fathers begun under Dom Gabriel Sortais and contact with the primitive documents of the Order through in-depth analyses and presentation by experts in the Order renewed our understanding of the Cistercian charism. Some of the words for which our Fathers had a special predilection—like *freedom, desire, memory, conversion, authenticity, concord, and unity*—became common parlance. And, as we know, it is language that creates mentality, ways of seeing and approaching reality, and new forms of living together. Above all the value of tradition was taking on consistency and weight, as something that was a vital support for the present and a fruitful perspective for the future. An interesting effort of this period, which was particularly enriching for formation, was to rediscover the origins of our house, to appreciate the role of the elder sisters, and thus to grasp the message that came down to us *from generation to generation* up to our own times. In this context, the observances became a vital expression of a fidelity to life, to the charism, and to the house.

To grow in awareness of one’s vocation and of one’s consecration necessarily meant coming to terms with the missionary expansion that belongs intrinsically to the very mystery of consecration. For Vitorchiano, this has meant two radical choices: on the one hand, to carry on, with renewed responsibility, the community’s ecumenical grace, stemming from Mother Pia’s fundamental intuition and from the sanctity of Blessed Gabriela, and, on the other hand, to found new houses.

The ecumenical road led us above all to grasp the ecclesial dimension of the monastic experience and to realize that a life in conformity to Christ entails a continual offering. Without this wide-ranging ecclesial inspiration, communities turn in on themselves and end up confining themselves in a demanding but narrow-minded form of perfectionism. It also meant a respectful contact with other religions and beliefs without abdicating one’s the faith, much less one’s particu-

lar way of leading the spiritual life. This was the period when it was fashionable to use mantras, yoga, oriental meditation, etc. The stripping away of self on the Benedictine path of humility has always proven to be the most radical way of attaining prayer of the heart and universal love.

Foundations were the community's other missionary grace. What was the community's formative journey in its first experiences of making foundations?

First of all, there was the grace to realize clearly that making a foundation involved not only the superior but also the whole community, which is called to take on the two-fold role of mother and missionary. What was coming to birth from its womb needed all its maternal attention. This involved not only the desire to transmit the best of one's own experience, but also to make room for the reality that was being born and which needed to form itself as a group: the founding group needed to learn a new language, develop an adequate liturgy, deepen mutual knowledge and fraternal integration, plan the construction of a new house and the organization of its work.

Obviously the mission brought us face to face with the problematic of enculturation, which was of particular relevance at that time. It of course involved taking on the mentality, sensibility, and culture of the new environment, but, on a deeper level, some basic formative criteria became immediately evident: there was need for attentive listening and lived humility. Enculturation requires humble attention to the local reality, the ability to make space for the contribution of the local people, a warm and generous embrace of the human reality of the place, and a capacity to stand in awe of God's infinite creative power in every place on earth. At the same time it became clear that the transmission of the Cistercian charism had to be integral and faithful, which meant putting oneself on the line with generosity of life. Pre-established forms could not be imposed, but there was also need for firmness and perseverance.

Our community's formative journey gradually found confirmation and support in the direction the Order was taking. We were encouraged and strengthened by reflecting on documents from of the General Chapters.

It is worth recalling the 1978 General Chapter of the Feminine Branch, which we can consider as one of the most prophetic Chapters, at which was a very interesting reflection on formation was elaborated. It was not an organized reflection in logical consequence, as the Ratio provided later on; rather, it was a matter of more spontaneous considerations. Nevertheless, already in the documents of this Chapter, one can find nearly everything that the Order and the General Chapters developed in the years that followed.

It is also worthwhile to recall some of the more significant ideas:

- Our dynamics of formation are based entirely on the Rule of Saint Benedict and on the “School of Charity” of the Cistercian tradition.
- Attention to the person: to learn to use the wounds of life and of one’s history as channels of grace in order to acquire human maturity (thus opening the way to a healthy use of the contribution of psychology).
- For this to happen in the community it is necessary to offer an ambient of openness and fraternal communion.
- The value of dialogue is to grow in mutual understanding and trust. For the first time the conciliar terms of co-responsibility and subsidiarity were stressed.
- Solitude and silence are valued as a dimension of listening to God and to the sisters in a climate of truth and of love.
- The absolute need for *Lectio* as an essential means to a deep spiritual experience. (*Lectio* seeks, *Meditation* finds, *prayer* asks, and *contemplation* savors.)

The same Chapter extolled “fraternal life” in highly positive terms. It was already speaking in terms of “welcoming, accepting, and understanding the brother”; we were being asked to grow in “mutual respect, trust, and simplicity”; there was already mention of the importance of “responsible freedom”; Fathers Immediate and Visitors were asked to stimulate community dialogue; and we did not forget the inevitable tensions between solitude and communion, obedience and co-responsibility, which the “Cistercian School of Charity” can integrate on the way of love toward experience of the living God.

Some years later, the Order gave us the jewel that are the new Constitutions. Since then, the way towards a community of communion in which all the members are responsible for the charism received and for the common good became an explicit and fruitful norm. The spirituality of communion that Pope John Paul II clearly laid out in number 46 of *Novo Millennio Ineunte* will be a keynote for the Order.

We experienced once again that the grace of growth is not a human achievement, but, rather, the movement of the Holy Spirit, who, while helping a community on its poor and laborious path, was at the same time inspiring the whole Order and the Church.

10.4. CISTERCIAN LITURGICAL RENEWAL

*(by Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois)⁴²***10.4.1. Before Vatican II**

The liturgy has always been an important point of Cistercian observance. Essentially it is a question of living the liturgy in a fruitful manner, according to Saint Benedict's principle: *ut mens nostra concordet voci nostrae*.

But the legislators and the commissions that had to lay the groundwork for their decisions have mostly been concerned with determining the details of the rites. At a time when the liturgy was essentially Roman, with all the details laid down by the supreme authority, the concern in the Order was to preserve or even to restore several particular usages from its ancient tradition.

The reform brought about in the Roman Liturgy after the Council of Trent had won over various monks, who tried to put it into effect in the Order, even though the reform was not obligatory in churches or monasteries that could claim a tradition of at least two hundred years, which was the case for the Cistercians.

In order to channel this current in favor of "novelties," which brought with it the risk of completely sweeping away the ancient Cistercian liturgy, Claude Vaussin, abbot of Cîteaux, in 1651, initiated an official reform. This reform took definitive shape in the publication, a few decades later, of the *Cistercian Ritual*. It was adopted at the Chapter of 1688, printed in 1689, and its tenth edition is dated 1949. Some time later Claude Vaussin was reproached with having abandoned the ancient rite. But one could say, on the contrary, that he saved what he could, faced with the urgings of those who wanted to adopt the Roman Rite completely.

In the nineteenth century, some Cistercians of Bornhem (Belgium) claimed that Claude Vaussin's reform was illegitimate. They reasoned that, when Pius V permitted the continuation of older liturgies having a tradition of at least two hundred years, it was on condition that they would in no way be modified. According to them, by carrying out this reform, Claude Vaussin made us lose that right. The

⁴² Monk of Mont-des-Cats, named superior, then elected abbot of La Trappe from February 1976 to October 2003. He was secretary then president of the Liturgy Commission of the Order from 1965 to the end of its mandate in 1977. Since then he has been Central Secretary for the Liturgy.

affair was taken to Rome, where our rite was approved Pius IX's 1871 brief *Quae a sanctissimis*.

After the reunion of the three Trappist congregations into a single Order in 1892, it was necessary to rectify and harmonize the practices of all. A special commission for the Ceremonial was instituted in 1899, which commission took on various shapes in the decades that followed. But the only acting members were superiors appointed by the General Chapter; the others were only joint members or consultants. A *Manual of Ceremonies (Manuale Caeremoniarum)* was prepared by Fr. Trilhe, a monk of Sainte-Marie-du-Désert, who had a keen sense of the Cistercian tradition. Printed in 1908, the Ceremonial was given a trial run, but almost immediately certain monks, who questioned its legitimacy and detected in it a whiff of Gallicanism, complained to Rome. The General Chapter reacted by issuing a report that ended with two questions ('doubts' was the term they used) the Congregation of Rites was invited to answer: Can the General Chapter force the monasteries to follow the Cistercian rite; and, if so, must we take this Cistercian rite from the Ritual of 1689? The response in 1913 was affirmative on both points, and it was suggested that the Missal be put in conformity with the Ritual of 1689, taking into account also, says the decree, the ancient Missal. Did not this response leave the door open for a more daring return to the ancient rite, as many people wanted? In any case the commission did not sufficiently take advantage of this possibility in the drawing up of the "Rubrics of the Missal for the Use of the OCSO," published in 1924.

The work of the commission involved more than just the rubrics of the Missal. It also undertook a more serious revision of various liturgical books, with the desire of recovering some ancient Cistercian practices. The General Chapter of 1947, in reorganizing the commission after the war, confided to it the study of the question of a possible return to the ancient "Cistercian rite." In a general way, one can say that the liturgical commission, up to 1965, accomplished a great deal in revising our liturgical books in a sense favorable to the Ritual of 1689 and, where possible, trying to recuperate some elements of the ancient rite.⁴³

But times were changing. The liturgical movement in the Church opened up new pastoral perspectives. This movement made its way over the walls of the cloisters into our communities. One sign of its effect was Pius XII's restoration of the Paschal Triduum liturgy in 1951–1955. It was not only a question of re-establishing ancient rites even if, in fact, it was a return to the ancient usage of celebrating the Paschal Vigil in the night time and no longer on Holy Saturday morning. The new spirit of these changes was symbolized in the renewal of Baptismal promises.

43 This work has been succinctly presented in vol. 1, Part One, in §§ 2.3.2.; 2.4.3.; 3.1.2.; 4.2.

The liturgical commission of the Order judged this renewal of promises contrary to the spirit and the governing principles of the Cistercien liturgy. The commission warned “against an infatuation for things that might find their way into our Cistercian liturgy in the name of enriching it or allowing more active participation.” The commission even reacted against those who wanted to be in the twentieth century and not in the twelfth: “Let us admit that our liturgy would hardly be recognizable!” Fortunately, the votes of the General Chapters went in a different direction.

10.4.2. The Vatican II Reform: A Liberating Renewal

THE LITURGICAL COMMISSION

The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* dealt mostly with the Roman Rite. Its principles could give guidance for the reform of each particular liturgy, but what authority would direct this reform? The question was clearly posed at the 1965 General Chapter, even before the Holy See clarified this point in its Instruction *In edicendis normis* of November 23, 1965. Our liturgy, the Chapter remarked, does not depend on Episcopal Conferences but on the General Chapter, which can, therefore, be the basic authority. The capitulants appointed a new liturgical commission, a part of which would form a “committee of studies” in charge of preparing for the reform in the Order, according to a suggestion made by the “Council charged with the application of the conciliar Constitution” (i.e., the *Consilium*). This committee, it was thought, would play the same role in relation to our liturgy as the *Consilium* played vis-a-vis the Roman liturgy. As it turned out, the Holy See reserved to itself the right to authorize any experiments to be undertaken. From their first meeting at Westmalle in 1965, the liturgical commission and the committee of studies joined forces. The commission was given a statute more adapted to its mission in 1967, and then again in 1971.⁴⁴ It met six times between 1965 and 1970, but ceased to exist in 1977, because the structural reform of our liturgy was nearly completed. A central secretary was appointed to take care of current business. The work was taken over by regional commissions, first authorized in 1967, since by then it was a matter of applying the renewed liturgy to the various languages. A Latin edition of the “*Rituale Cisterciense*” appeared in 1998. It was a sign of the times: in that year of the ninth centenary of Cîteaux, the book

⁴⁴ The nuns did not take part in the liturgical commission of the Order, which was originally a commission of the General Chapter itself. The abbesses gathered at Cîteaux in 1968 did not judge it useful to create their own liturgical Commission, because the monks’ Commission collaborated well with all the monasteries.

contains a foreword by the two Abbots General of the Cistercien family. The new *Rituale* made use of the norms approved for each Order in the course of the preceding thirty years, but anything having to do with the Missal, the Sacraments (Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick), monastic initiation, and funerals, was presented in common for the Holy See's approval for both Orders.

THE CONVENTUAL MASS, THE CENTER OF UNITY OF THE COMMUNITY

One of the first fruits of the reform was that, thanks to concelebration, it allowed the Mass to recover its full place and meaning, especially in monks' communities. Up to then, each priest celebrated in private, generally between Laudes and Prime; the Masses were served by non-priests who also took communion. The rest of the lay brothers attended the *De Beata* Mass, celebrated at the same time as the private Masses, but at the altar of the Virgin, situated behind the stalls of the choir religious, using the formulary of Marian Masses, except on Solemnities. At the conventual Mass, which only the choir monks attended, there was no other communicant besides the celebrant. Our Usages did not allow for the distribution of Communion at sung Masses. By making it possible for there to be a single Mass with Communion for the whole Community, concelebration restored the full importance of the conventual Mass. In November 1964, the *Consilium* granted, for those dioceses that had requested it, the possibility of concelebration in certain places: in cathedrals, seminaries, monasteries, and special occasions. Thus, in several monasteries, the first concelebration took place at Christmas in 1964. On March 7, 1965, a rite of concelebration with Communion under both species was promulgated. The use of concelebration could then be generalized for the conventual Mass, as the Council had decided (s.c. 57,1).

THE LANGUAGE OF THE LITURGY

The key question for the whole of the reform was that of language of the liturgy. From 1965, the General Chapter, believing it had the authority to do so, authorized the use of the vernacular for the nuns, and asked the Holy See that the monks, in those monasteries where the former lay brothers participated in the Divine Office, might also be granted this permission. The Benedictines did the same. But at first, Paul VI, in his letter *Sacrificium laudis* of August 15, 1966, did not feel prepared to give a positive answer to the request. In the spirit of chapter 68 of the Rule, the Cistercian abbots, following the example of the Benedictines, reflected and persisted. On May 30, 1967, judging in conscience that their request was well founded, they voted 63 against 11 to present their request again to Rome. The unity of our

Communities and the benefit of having all participate in the Divine Office were points in favor of a shift to the vernacular. One other reason can be added to the preceding: there was need to take advantage of the particular sensibility of contemplative life in the literary and musical creation that needed to be undertaken throughout the Church. Was it necessary to excluded contemplatives from the monumental work about to begin, the task of transposing a centuries-old liturgy into other languages and cultures? The convergence and the insistence of the requests caused Paul VI to clarify and nuance his initial thoughts. As early as June 6, 1967, even before he had received the letter of the General Chapter, he communicated to the Congregation of Religious his decision to authorize the use of the vernacular wherever it might prove fruitful. The necessary indult was granted to us December 14, 1967.⁴⁵

INQUIRIES IN THE ORDER

It was in view of the results of a wide inquiry in the Order, after the appearance, in 1966, of the decree on the application of *Perfectae Caritatis*, that the 1967 Chapter accepted the principle of reforms to be undertaken both in monastic observance and in the liturgy. The questionnaire was “open,” that is to say that it did not pose specific questions to which each one had to reply “yes” or “no,” precisely so as not to put pressure on anyone and not to raise *a priori* questions that perhaps no one was concerned about.⁴⁶ The consequent disadvantage was that it was difficult to deduce from it the overall opinion of the whole, since not everyone expressed themselves on all the questions that were arising and of which they were perhaps unaware. But what was significant were the requests that emerged. It is impressive that in a group of about 5000 monks and nuns almost 900 spontaneously expressed a desire for a redistribution of the psalms; 642 wanted the generalized use of the vernacular for the Divine Office, 137 wanted partial use, and expressed a desire to retain the Latin. These figures are far from representing a majority, but again, it was an open questionnaire and not a matter of answers to specific questions for all. These results led the abbots to study the different propositions and even to accept the idea of experimentation in this regard.

Later on, there were other *a posteriori* inquiries on the impact of reforms, the results of which were easier to use. Some of these inquiries were asked of us by

45 Some time later a notification of the Holy See, dated June 14, 1971, generalized the possibility of using the vernacular, privately as well as in choir; all that was needed was the authorization of an Ordinary, (i.e., the bishop), an abbot of a monastery, or a Provincial religious superior.

46 The responses to the questionnaire were analyzed according to region by small groups of monks set up for the purpose, and they published interesting syntheses. These syntheses were made available to the capitulants of 1967, but they were not put together and printed in book form for historians to refer to.

the Holy See, since there was need to give an account of experiments we had been permitted to make. This was notably the case in 1971, after two years of experimentation with the *loi-cadre*.

THE REFORM OF THE DIVINE OFFICE

A reform of the office was necessary. Vigils, for example, were sung only on Sundays and Solemnities, when the community rose a half an hour or an hour earlier than usual. They consisted of twelve psalms and rather short readings, broken up into four sections, separated by responsories. Laudes followed immediately after Vigils, like a constituent part of the "night Office." During the week Vigils were recited *recto tono*. There was reason to hope they could be given greater value and take the place of Prime, which was practically substitute office. In general way, it seemed desirable that there be a little more breathing space in the Office, with some moments of silence, especially if it was going to be in the vernacular (up to then, once the Office was started, it kept moving to the end without interruption). It was also desirable to have longer biblical or patristic readings, and to include prayers of intercession (or of praise) at Lauds and Vespers.

The General Chapter of 1967 allowed experimentation along these lines, with the authorization of the *Consilium*. These experiments were permitted at first in some monasteries, then to all that wanted to try them. This was especially the case after 1969, when the Order obtained a *loi-cadre* (guidelines) that left each community free to organize its Office, on condition that it include the various traditional elements and that the 150 psalms be distributed over one or two weeks, not more. As for the Little Hours, they could be fulfilled outside of choir. The Liturgical Commission proposed three schemas for the distribution of the psalms: one basically followed the distribution of the psalms in the Holy Rule, distributing the twelve psalms of vigils over two weeks, and placing elsewhere the psalms of the suppressed Office of Prime; another scheme distributed the 150 psalms over a week with no repetition (thus respecting to the letter one of the prescriptions of the Rule); and a third adopted a more thematic order than the mere numerical order in the Rule, while at the same time borrowing certain orientations of the scheme in the Rule, particularly the movement from the confession of sin to the confession of praise at Lauds.

After a period of several years of experimentation, during which the monasteries could freely take advantage of a wide range of possibilities, it seemed neither possible nor desirable to return to overly detailed regulations.⁴⁷ After a period of

⁴⁷ This position came through clearly in the survey carried out in the OCSO in 1971 concerning the use of the faculties accorded by the *loi-cadre* indult, the results of which were submitted to the Congregation of Rites, and which

hesitation, the Holy See accepted the principle of a *loi-cadre* with the possibility of several schemas for distributing the Psalms over one or two weeks. Our legislation was approved on June 25, 1974: it describes the general layout of the Office, but leaves the choice of the readings, the distribution of the Psalms, and the adaptation of the chanted elements to the decision of the Abbot and the community. This relative freedom granted to the monasteries came as a surprise to some liturgists in non-monastic circles. Such freedom would have been unthinkable for the secular clergy, who usually say the Office alone. But for a communal Office, there was little risk involved: the community is self-regulating, and is also monitored by the Regular Visitations, as provided for in the constitutions, and by the General Chapter.

The *Praenotanda* strikes a balance between each community's capacity to express itself in the Office and its integration in a tradition of prayer that precedes and surpasses the community. In other words, the Divine Office is both the expression of a community and a "gift" to that community. Number 3 of the *Praenotanda* expresses it thus: "The Church recognizes its own voice in the Liturgy of the Hours organized by the monastic communities. Through hierarchical authority the Church exercises careful and vigilant oversight of this activity so that this prayer always maintain its value as an expression of the Christian Mystery, even when it is adapted to the particular needs of each community." The prayer of monks and the nuns is liturgical by virtue of the fact that the community is representative of the Church as such. It is not necessary for the hierarchy to determine all the details, to the extent that it leaves a certain freedom of choice. But this does not mean that we need not submit ourselves to the vigilance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, with is the definitive guarantor of the Christian character of any liturgy.

A CISTERCIAN RITE OF THE MASS?

With regard to the Eucharist, even though we had our own particular rite, a basic question arose from the start. In fact, as far as the Missal was concerned, the Cistercian rite differed little from the Roman rite. But, we have already said, some people had been working for years on a revival of the ancient twelfth-century rite. Could we take advantage of the conciliar reform to emphasize this development? If so, to what end? Was it fitting to return to former states of the liturgy, just for the fun of it, so to speak? The goal of conciliar reform was of a preeminently pastoral nature: "to organize the texts and the rites in such a way that they express as clearly as possible the holy realities that they signify, and that the Christian people,

the capitulants accepted by a four-fifths vote. The results of this inquiry can be found in the Acts of the General Chapter of 1971 pp. 52–62.

insofar as it is possible, easily grasp them and participate in a full celebration, actively and as a community” (s.c. 21) Certain ancient practices like concelebration, communion from the chalice, or reception of the host in the hand were restored. They were restored for their pastoral value, not as an exercise in archeology.⁴⁸ The Cistercians had to consider their ancient rite in the same spirit. It could not be a question of a *return* pure and simple. The pastoral approach of the reform certainly did not forbid conserving authentically Cistercian practices, on the condition that they have a pastoral value, taking into account the principles formulated by the Council. It was within this perspective that the liturgical commission entrusted with the Cistercian Order’s reform prepared an adapted version of the *General Introduction to the Missal*. The Holy See advised us, rather, to present a list of particular points that could be conceded to us in the framework of the new Roman *Ordae Missae*. When all is said and done, for the Mass, it must be recognized that little was conceded to us in the indult of June 8, 1971, no doubt, in order not to disconcert or shock the faithful, who, unaware of our rights, might see our particular customs as disobedience to the norms that the Holy See was constantly reiterating. We have been allowed, however, to integrate certain elements of our tradition in the celebration of the Paschal *Triduum* or the blessing of Palms. The profound bow, according to our custom, takes the place of genuflection, and we conserve simplifications of certain details. For the rest, we have adopted the restored Roman Missal. Can we still speak of a Cistercian rite? No, but is that really important? The guiding spirit of the work of our Fathers regarding the celebration of the Mass was one of simplicity, authenticity, and even of austerity: we can consider these as elements of our monastic *culture*.⁴⁹ It was precisely these criteria that were followed in the reform of the Roman liturgy. To be sure, the perspective of the new *Ordo Missae* is mainly that of the parish. The current model is that of a Sunday Mass celebrated by a pastor with his parishioners. In fact, however, the stated norms are flexible enough to allow this model to function within a monastic perspective.

CALENDAR

Before the Council, we had our own calendar. We had to bring it up to date along the lines of the new orientations, which tended to reduce the sanctoral cycle, in

48 “Work on the new liturgy is not to be considered a work of archaeology,” remarked John Paul II to the members of the Armenian Synod, August 26, 1989.

49 “The brothers’ lifestyle is to be plain and frugal. Everything in the household of God should be appropriate to monastic life and avoid excess so that its very simplicity can be instructive for all. This is to be clearly apparent ... even in the celebration of the liturgy” (c. 27).

order to give the celebration of the mysteries of Christ in the framework of the temporal cycle its full importance. Beginning in 1960, the decree *Cum nostra* paved the way for a reform of the norms governing the manner of celebrating the cult of the Saints, and we drew up a new “codex rubricarum,” which was approved in June 1965. But conciliar reform required that we go even further. Our propositions, however, had to be put aside in 1971, because the whole Benedictine world was asked to present a single monastic calendar. This common project was presented to the Congregation of Rites in 1972, but that body wanted our monastic “Proper” to be in keeping with the Roman Calendar, which “must, obviously, remain the basis for all particular calendars.” It also pointed out that this calendar is now quite sober, with only 96 obligatory celebrations for the whole Church, reflecting the major spiritual traditions and underlining the catholicity of worship, even among monks. So, with some adjustments, it was into the Roman calendar that monastic celebrations were inserted. It is important to keep in mind not the number of celebrations retained in the sanctoral, but, rather, the character of these celebrations. Many of our former feasts, which interrupted the cycle of psalms in the course of a week, have been reduced to simple memorials in the framework of a weekday celebration, and these memorials involve little that is obligatory.

MONASTIC INITIATION

It is sufficient to point out that work on the rite of monastic initiation was done in collaboration with the O.Cist commission, and the shift of emphasis regarding the rite of entrance into the monastic life. Formerly this rite was centered on the blessing and the “taking” of the habit; today the stress is on the admission of the candidate into the community, the taking of the habit being only an optional addition. It was a return to a long-standing practice, which had been that of our Fathers, and which the Roman *Consilium*, with the approval of the Superiors General, recommended.

FUNERALS

The pre-conciliar commission had done good work reforming our Cistercian funeral rite. We have profited from the euchology of the new Roman rite, which diversifies and updates the prayers, but we have successfully preserved Cistercian particularities with their strongly paschal character. The last farewell takes place in the cemetery and not before leaving the church. The procession toward the cemetery, following the paschal candle, includes the singing of Psalms 113 (departure from Egypt) and 117, the great paschal psalm that Jesus referred to at the tomb

of Lazarus (Ps 117:21; Jn 11:41). As our ritual states, "This procession is a symbol of the crossing of the Red Sea and the departure from Egypt, when the Hebrew people set out toward the Promised Land, but it is also the Pasch of Christ when he passed over to the Father through death. The cemetery symbolizes the place of refreshment, peace, and light that is Paradise, in the center of which is the tree of life." The cemetery is also the symbol of the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus has entered through his resurrection ("Open to me the gates of holiness..." Ps 117:19). We accompany our brother or our sister as far as the frontier of our earthly world, entrusting him or her to the angels and saints for the journey home (see the antiphon *In paradisum*). The celebrant blesses the tomb and psalms are sung while the body is lowered into the ground and is covered with the earth. Then there is a final chant and the last prayer of farewell: "Lord, have mercy on this sinner." The Roman rite is much more sober. In some places, the procession to the cemetery and the burial take place without the participation of the clergy. This reason justifies our safeguarding a particular ritual that was traditional for us. The updated version of this rite, common to both Cistercian Orders, was approved on October 19, 1995.

HOSPITALITY AND THE LITURGY

Since the Council, the majority of our communities have opened their churches to the participation of the faithful, and it is one of the characteristics of our renewed liturgy. As was stated at an assembly of the French-speaking commission for Europe (CFC, Dombes, 1987) our hospitality should be free of any condescension or false shame: "Without condescension—because the Eucharist, and even the Office, in so far as they are prayer of the Church, belong to all who take part in them; visitors should not be made to feel like poor relations off in the corners; their attendance is a grace from the Lord, and they comfort the community with their own grace. Without false shame—because what we have to offer them is who we are, our values, and our style. It requires of them an indispensable and salutary change of environment. Moreover, it is important that both the community and its guests realize that the liturgy and the monastic life in general retain their meaning with or without the guests." There is one liturgical assembly, but it includes each in its own right, community and guests. It is first of all the community's liturgy, in which the guests fully participate. Consequently, the chants, for example, are chosen from the monastic repertory for the community, but also taking care that they be accessible to all, at least for the refrains. It is a good idea to invite everyone to enter fully into the celebration, even if it means listening more than singing. It might be meaningful to have a guest proclaim one of the readings or prepare the

universal prayer petitions, or even invite a particular group to sing something after the communion, for example.

Let us remark finally, and in conclusion, that the unification of the communities in 1965 has had repercussions on the liturgical life of each community. Formerly the liturgy was the work of the choir religious: the lay brothers attended the liturgy on Sundays, but in their own choir, reciting Paters and Aves interiorly. Now participation in the liturgy is regulated by the abbot or the abbess, according to Constitution 14 and the Statute 19.2.B, in such a way that each religious might grow at his or her own pace in the Cistercian vocation. But the liturgy should be celebrated in such a way that it expresses the spirit of the community (ST 19.1.A), and there is no doubt that it is here that the conciliar reform has had greatest impact on the life of the community and of each brother or sister.

Appendix : The Language of the Liturgy in the Communities of Japan

(by Fr. Paul Shigeyuki Takahashi)⁵⁰

In this little memoir I would like to give a personal presentation of our tragicomic experiences of using Latin in this little monastery of the Far East. I will be pleased if you come to see how Latin became a serious problem and how it could have a major impact on a monk's life. As they say, "It's just Latin, and yet it's Latin!"

It was in April 1948, three years after the end of the Second World War, that I entered the monastery of Tobetsu. I was fifteen years and five months old. I am the youngest son of a Catholic family from Tokyo. Even before beginning elementary school at age seven, I was in the habit of going to the parish church—a fifteen-minute walk from home—to be an altar server. I was always accompanied by my oldest brother, who was later ordained priest in the monastery of Tobetsu. Obviously, at that time Mass was said in Latin, and each evening we learned the text of the ritual of the Mass out loud with the parish curate, whose oldest brother was a Trappist lay brother at Tobetsu. It came down to memorizing by rote the Latin ritual transcribed in phonetic Japanese characters. For these lessons, at the beginning I generally repeated awkwardly and with difficulty what the priest pronounced, for example: "Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam...." That was how my relationship with Latin began.

In the Tobetsu community at that time there was a clear demarcation between

⁵⁰ Monk of Tobetsu (O.L. of Phare), Hokkaido, Japan.

the choir monks and the lay brothers. The two groups had separate novitiates and novice masters. Entering the monastery at the same time I did, my father was assigned to the lay brother novitiate. Although we often crossed paths in community, it was strictly forbidden for us to exchange words. However, thanks to a kind and exceptional provision on the part of Dom Morvan, the community's abbot at that time, we were allowed brief moments of private familial conversation—my father and we, his two sons—once a month after Vespers. Once one had taken the brown lay brother habit, it was no longer permitted to change classes and go with the choir monks (but it was possible to change in the other direction).

There were about sixty monks in the monastery of Tobetsu then, two-thirds of whom were lay brothers and the others choir monks. The criterion for choosing one's class was neither virtue nor personality nor depth of faith, but the ability to learn Latin. In other words, even if a person over twenty had great intelligence and virtue, the practice was automatically to orient him toward becoming a lay brother, because it was thought that a person over twenty would have been unable to learn Latin without difficulty. On the other hand, even if a twelve- or thirteen-year-old postulant had no great intellectual ability, he was automatically directed toward the group of choir monks. We began learning Latin by studying the alphabet, by doing exercises in the noun and adjective declensions, and then in the extremely complex verb conjugations. Over three years, every day (in my case it took three and half years), we had to learn enough Latin to read fluently Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*. Only on condition of having learned Latin could we begin the novitiate. At that time, the whole Office was sung in Latin, so it was necessary to know Latin before beginning the novitiate (and, obviously, after profession we had to take philosophy and theology courses in Latin). I remember well that at the 1962 special General Chapter the Tobetsu community had asked permission to sing Japanese chants during Benediction, since it was totally forbidden to sing anything other than Gregorian chant in church. At that time there were various traditional devotions, especially in May, when we sang Japanese chants before the statue of the Virgin Mary decorated with flowers and set up at the main entrance to the monastery.

On the one side, the postulants had gone through a great deal of trouble to learn Latin, and, on the other side, during the Divine Office the lay brothers sat in the back of the church behind the monks' choir, reciting in silence hundreds of *Pater Nosters* and *Ave Marias*, which they had already learned by heart. For the lay brothers it was considered a fault to sing or hum, even during the Mass or the Office. Only once a day, at the end of Compline, were they allowed to sing the *Salve Regina* at full voice, going up to the monks' choir. We therefore sang the *Salve Regina* as slowly and broadly as possible.

It was in fact perfectly normal for there to be a great difference between a monk priest, who entered the monastery at the age of 15 or 16 without having known life in society, and on whom the priesthood was conferred only because he knew his Latin, and a lay brother, who, by persevering in monastic life, overcame the severity of a hidden and laborious life. It is impossible to describe how kind the lay brothers were to promising young choir monks. This kindness evokes very good memories for us.

After the Second Vatican Council, it became possible for us to celebrate the liturgy in the vernacular. That meant that postulants could take part in the community's prayer from their first day of monastic life. After the suppression of the classes of lay brothers and choir monks within the community (by the *Decree of Unification* in 1965), we were all able to praise God and celebrate the Eucharist with one heart and one voice. Before the Council we had gotten up at two o'clock every morning (an hour earlier on feast days) to sing the extremely long Divine Office. Today, now that we are free from such a heavy burden, we attend Vigils with greater ease, beginning at three-thirty.

Thus, freed from the heavy pressure and constraint of Latin, we more easily concentrate on what is fundamental. This is not to deny the importance of Latin or to belittle it. To read and savor the works of the Fathers of the Church and the Cistercian Fathers, it is indispensable to learn Latin. Nonetheless, what I think is important is that it be for the one who has the aptitude and the gift for languages freely to choose to assimilate Latin. Latin itself is not a decisive factor in the life of a monk. Understanding or not understanding Latin should not prevent each from coming to spiritual fulfillment.

As explained above, we saw how irrational it was to impose Latin in a Far-Eastern land that was totally foreign to the Latin culture in which Europe developed over the centuries. At the same time, we have reflected on the damaging and negative aspects of what we underwent.

We must not close our eyes before the reality that the *Perichoresis* (circumcession of joy) and its true communication should be channeled essentially by the liturgy, whereas the Eucharist especially was rather hindered by Latin in the past.

10.5. THE CISTERCIAN BLESSED

(by *Sr. Augusta Tescari*)⁵¹

10.5.1. Blessed Joseph-Marie Cassant

- March 6, 1878: born in Casseneuil-sur-Lot in a family of farmers in good situation.
- 1884–1893: student at a boarding school of the Christian Brothers in Casseneuil.
- 1893–1894: lived at the parish rectory with the pastor, Fr. Filhol.
- Dec. 5, 1894: entered the monastery of Sainte-Marie-du-Désert, received by, Fr. André Malet, novice master.
- Jan. 17, 1897: simple profession.
- May, 24, 1900: solemn vows.
- Oct. 12, 1902: ordained priest by Bishop Marre, abbot of Igny and bishop of Constanza.
- May 31, 1903: celebrated Mass for the last time.
- June 17, 1903: died of tuberculosis.
- 1936–1937: informative stage of cause for beatification at Toulouse and Agen.
- 1960–1963: beatification cause in Toulouse.
- June 9, 1984: promulgation of the decree of heroic virtues.
- July 7, 2003: promulgation of the decree of a miracle.
- Oct. 10, 2004: Joseph-Marie declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II.

“When I can no longer celebrate the Holy Mass, the Sacred Heart of Jesus can take me from this life, because I will no longer have anything holding me back on earth.” The Lord accepted the desire of his faithful servant: He died of tuberculosis at the age of 25, eight months after his priestly ordination.

Enamored of the Eucharist, lover of prayer, he had desired from his childhood to be a priest. The results of his studies were poor, but his piety was extraordinary. He obediently followed the advice of his pastor to embrace the monastic life, and when he entered the Trappist monastery of Sainte-Marie-du-Désert in the diocese of Toulouse at age sixteen, he was immediately at home in the climate of silence and prayer of the monastery. His health was weak, and he was not gifted with intellectual or practical gifts, but he had good common sense, an iron will, and all the charm of innocence.

The Father Master, receiving him in the monastery and intuiting in the youth a great capacity of love and self-giving, encouraged him to “have confidence, I will help you to love Jesus.” He guided him in the way of the Sacred Heart of Christ, developing the Eucharistic vocation of the youth who, opening his heart,

⁵¹ Nun of Vitorchiano (Italy), Postulatrix General for the causes of beatification and canonization in the Order.

let himself be instructed and guided with confidence and simplicity, managing to find peace and joy in all the difficulties. Thanks to his docility, the hard way of monastic ascesis, which leads to purity of heart and total abandonment to the will of God, became for him sweeter and easier. Joseph gave himself with simplicity and loyalty to the community into which he had entered and to the superiors who guided him.

The sincere friendship that united Joseph-Marie to his spiritual director helped him to know God and himself: he learned to confide completely in the Love of Jesus, his Truth, his Way, and his Life. “All for Jesus, through Mary” was the motto of the young Trappist, who carried out each gesture of the monastic day, in order to please Jesus through Mary with a generosity without limits, considering himself always a useless servant.

After solemn profession, his desire to be a priest was persistent enough for his superiors to have him begin the course of theological studies, but his poor memory made study difficult, and cost him humiliations and discouragement. He finished the intellectual preparation with sufficient results, at the cost of constant application and enormous sacrifices, and, already very sick, he received the priestly ordination in 1902.

Joseph-Marie Cassant had none of the things the world glories in: brilliant intelligence, physical attractiveness, or manual skills. He was a poor man, and humbly accepted himself as such. The genius of his sanctity consisted in consecrating himself entirely to Love in spite of his own limitations, or, better, because of them: “The Heart of Jesus is a throne of mercy, where the poorest are those best received.”

Knowing him capable of depending, not on his weak strength, but rather on the strength that comes from the Heart of Jesus, his spiritual director permitted the young monk to make a particular vow that helped him overcome his lack of self-confidence and the ups and downs of his extreme sensitivity, and made him stable in Love. Joseph vowed never to lose courage, and he remained faithful to it: “Oh Jesus, may I remain secure in your Heart, and may trust in your Love always rule in me.”

Loved by his brothers and always content and smiling, the young monk had found stability and happiness in a profound and personal encounter with the Heart of Jesus, in a simple but decided and constant orientation of his will toward Him by whom he was loved and whom he loved with all his being.

After his ordination as a priest, in spite of several weeks of rest with his family, Joseph-Marie’s sickness made inexorable progress, causing him painful suffering, but he offered them up with peace and serenity. He prayed “to be granted to die serenely, and thus to live always more united to the Heart of Jesus, to the

point of being absorbed by his love... The closer death comes, the more my trust must increase." He frequently found the goodness of Jesus in the sacrament of Penance, and, when he could no longer celebrate the Eucharist, in Communion: "The Eucharist is the only happiness on earth... Communion is the joy of my life." His short life came to an end after nine years of monastic life, which were spent in prayer, self giving, humble service, brotherly love, and peace, which he always sought in all circumstances. This youth, who had no value in the eyes of the world, nor in his own eyes, died crucified with Christ, transformed in an act of thanksgiving. His lasting reputation of sanctity and some healings attributed to his intercession incited the General Chapter to authorize the introduction of his cause of Beatification in 1935.

10.5.2 Blessed Rafael Arnáis Barón

- Apr. 9, 1911: Born in Burgos, Spain, in a well-to-do family.
- 1920: Attended a school run by Jesuit Fathers; got sick; continued in the same school the next year.
- 1923–1930: Studied in Oviedo, where his family had moved. Beginning in 1926, he took private drawing lessons.
- 1930–1933: Studied at the School of Architecture in Madrid.
- Jan.25 –Jul.26, 1933: Compulsory military service in Oviedo; incorporated into the I Company of the "Regiment of Trench Mine Engineers"
- Jan. 15, 1934: Entered the monastery of San Isidro de Dueñas.
- May 5, 1934: Sick with diabetes, returned to his family in serious condition.
- Jan. 11, 1936: Returned to the community as an oblate.
- Dec. 12, 1936: Entered the Trappists for the third time; again leaves on February 7, 1937, his condition becoming worse.
- Dec. 12, 1937: Last entrance at San Isidro.
- Apr. 26, 1938: Died a holy death, his life cut short by a diabetic coma.
- Sep. 27, 1992: Beatified by Pope John Paul II.

Sensitive, gifted with a vivid artistic sense, educated with a sound piety, and penetrated with a sense of the divine, Rafael, was open to all the good and beautiful things that life can offer as a young man who is rich, intelligent and capable of love.

He studied architecture in Madrid and, during the summer vacation of his first year at the university, was the guest of his aunt and uncle at their property in Pedrosillo. There he read the biography of brother Gabriel Mossier, monk of the French Trappist Monastery of Chambarand. In the autumn he visited the monastery of San Isidro, which made a strong impression on him. He visited again twice over the next two years. After a brief period of military service, he resumed his architecture studies, but in his heart the call to monastic life was insistent. He wrote

the abbot, asking admission as a choir postulant. From the moment he entered the monastery, the sanctity of his life drew the attention of the brothers. But only four months later, falling seriously sick with diabetes, he was obliged to return home, where he spent over a year. He decided to return to the monastery, this time in the last place, as an oblate. He lived in the infirmary of San Isidro, separated from the brothers of the novitiate, misunderstood by the Father Master and by other members of the community, and with an inferior status, in a state of physical and spiritual suffering. After a little more than eight months, his age group was drafted for military service. Declared unfit, he returned to the monastery. A relapse of bad health forced him to return to his family for medical care. After recovering, he returned to San Isidro, where, a few months later he died of a diabetic coma, on the morning of April 26, 1938, at the young age of twenty-seven.

The significance of his entire life was condensed in his exclamation “God alone.” Penetrated with a humble consciousness of himself and of the greatness of God, for him, all was grace and a gift from the Lord. In the offering of the small daily things, he opened himself to greater and greater love, attaining total abandonment of self in the hands of God.

It was in sickness that he understood more deeply the meaning of love. He accepted his infirmity, the fact of having to renounce religious vows, the condition of oblate, and the humiliation of being in the last place. He adhered totally to the will of God, and transformed his situation of inferiority into a situation of privilege, which filled him with spiritual joy: “It was necessary for the Lord to put me in this situation, so that I open my eyes and detach myself from all my desires, including the desire to be a Trappist.”

At the time of his last entrance in the monastery he said: “I left my home, I broke my heart to pieces... I emptied my soul of worldly desires. I tied myself firmly to your cross. Lord, what are you waiting for? If what you desire is my solitude, my suffering and my desolation, take it all, Lord; I ask for nothing.” Raphael had only these desires: “To unite myself absolutely and entirely to the will of Jesus. To live only in order to love and to suffer, and to be the last one, except in obedience.”

In spite of the natural repugnance he felt with his intense sensitivity he made a conscious choice for suffering and psychological solitude, for the hunger and thirst provoked by his sickness, the insufficient medical attention, and the humiliation of his degrading lower status. Foreseeing his approaching death, he came to desire it, because it was Christ’s will. He found true peace and joy in this wisdom of the cross. Like Saint Theresa of Avila, he was convinced that “God alone suffices; whoever has God lacks nothing.”

Love of the Virgin Mary, which grew in his soul from childhood, was also one of the characteristic notes of his sanctity. The short writings and spiritual letters

he left bear witness to his rectitude and depth. Rafael has been called the greatest mystic of our times, and Pope John Paul II proposed him as a model for young people.

10.5.3. Blessed Maria-Gabriella Sagheddu

- Mar. 17, 1914: Born in Dorgali, in the province of Nuoro, Sardinia; the family raised sheep.
- 1919: Her father died: the economic conditions of the family become precarious.
- 1932: After the death of her seventeen-year-old sister, a profound change took place in Maria.
- Sept. 30, 1935: She entered as a postulant in the Trappist monastery of Grottaferrata (Rome).
- Oct. 31, 1937: Temporal vows.
- Jan. 1938: Obtained permission to offer her life for Christian Unity.
- Apr 18 to May 29, 1938: Stay in the hospital San Giovanni in Rome.
- 1938–1939: Lived in the infirmary, with the ups and downs of tuberculosis.
- Apr. 23, 1939: Died on Good Shepherd Sunday.
- Jan. 25, 1983: Declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II.

The witnesses of her infancy and adolescence tell us of her obstinate, critical, non-conformist, and rebellious character, along with a strong sense of duty, fidelity, and obedience—all in apparent contradiction. It was said of her that “She obeyed grumbling, but was docile.” “She said no, but went immediately nonetheless.”

What everyone noticed was the change that took place in her when she was eighteen: little by little she became sweeter, the outbreaks of anger disappeared, and her features became more pensive and austere. She was gentle and reserved, she had a greater spirit of prayer and charity, and there developed in her a new ecclesial and apostolic sensibility. She also joined Catholic Action.

She gave herself over to deep listening, and entrusted herself totally to the will of God. At the age of twenty-one, she decided to consecrate herself to God and, following the indications of her spiritual father, entered the monastery of Grottaferrata, a community poor in economic and cultural means, governed at that time by Mother Maria Pia Gullini.

Her life seemed to be guided by a few essential principles. The first and most noteworthy was her gratitude for the mercy of God that enveloped her, calling her to belong exclusively to him. She liked to compare herself with the prodigal son, and had great gratitude for the monastic vocation, the house, the superiors, the sisters, everything. “How good is the Lord!” was her continuous exclamation. This same gratitude pervaded the supreme moments of her sickness and agony.

The second principle was the desire to respond to grace with all her energy: that what God had begun in her might come to completion, and that the will of God be accomplished, because in his will she found her true peace.

In the novitiate she feared she would be sent away, but after profession, having overcome this fear, it was replaced by a calm and serene abandonment, which became in her an impulse toward total self-sacrifice. As she put it simply: "Now it's your turn to act." Her brief monastic life (three and a half years) was spent like a eucharistic offering, in the daily effort of conversion, for the sake of following Christ, obedient to the Father unto death. Gabriella found her self-definition in the mission of offering, in the total gift of herself to the Lord.

The reminiscences of the sisters are simple and significant: quickness in recognizing herself at fault and in asking pardon without justifying herself; simple and sincere humility; willingness to do any work gladly (taking on the most burdensome tasks without saying anything to anyone). After her profession the experience of her own littleness became stronger: "My life in of no worth... I can offer it quite simply."

Her Abbess, M. Pía Gullini, was a person with great ecumenical sensitivities and desires. After having incorporated these in her own life, she had communicated them also to the community. When Mother Pia, at the request of Fr. Couturier, presented to the sisters the request of prayer and sacrifice of the great cause of Christian unity, Gabriella immediately felt impelled and driven to offer her young life: "I feel that the Lord asks it of me," she confided to her abbess, "I even feel impelled when I do not want to think of it."

Unreservedly given over to obedience and aware of her own weakness, she moved ahead intently on a rapid and direct route, moved by only one desire: "the will of God and God's glory." Gabriella attained that liberty which brought her to be conformed to Jesus who, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." In face of the wounded Body of Christ, she was aware of the urgency of her self-offering, which she carried out with great integrity to the very end. From the day of her self-offering, tuberculosis appeared in the body of the young sister, who until then had been in perfect health, leading to her death after fifteen months of suffering.

The afternoon of the 23 of April, the long agony of Gabriella, completely abandoned to the will of God, came to an end. Meanwhile the bells were ringing the end of vespers of Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospel of the day proclaimed: "And there will be only one sheepfold and only one Shepherd."

Even before its consummation her offering was well known and well received among Anglicans, and has touched the heart of believers of other confessions. Sister Maria-Gabriella's most concrete gift to her community was the arrival of numerous vocations in the years that followed.

Her body, found intact on the occasion of the identification of her remains

in 1957, now lies in a chapel adjacent to the Monastery of Vitorchiano, where the community of Grottaferrata was transferred.

Forty-four years after her death, Sister Maria Gabriella was beatified by Pope John Paul II on January 25, 1983, in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, on the feast of the conversion of Saint Paul, the last day of the Octave of prayer for Christian unity.

10.5.4. Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi

- 1903: Born in Igboezunu. His father Tabansi and his mother Eijkwevi were animists.
- 1909: Was sent to Nduka, Christian district of Anguleri, where he attended the mission school.
- 1912: Received baptism with the name of Michael
- 1913–1919: Studies; obtained the teacher's certificate.
- 1920–1924: Taught in Aguleri and in Onitsha.
- 1925: Entered the seminary of Igbariam.
- Dec. 19, 1937: Ordination as a priest.
- 1938–1950: Exercised ministry in Nnewi, Dunudofia, Akpu-Ajalli and Aguleri.
- July 2, 1950: Pilgrimage to Rome for the Holy Year; continued on to England and entered the abbey of Mount Saint Bernard, where he was a novice for two and a half years.
- Dec. 8, 1953: Having finished the novitiate, he made simple vows.
- Dec. 8, 1956: Solemn Profession.
- 1956–1964: Lived a hidden monastic life, preparing for a foundation in Nigeria, which in the end was made in Bamenda, Cameroon.
- Jan. 20, 1964: Because of an aneurism of the aorta, he was urgently admitted to Leicester hospital, where he died.
- Mar. 22, 1998: Pope John Paul II declared him Blessed.

Born in Nigeria of pagan parents, Iwene Tansi was sent to a Christian school, where he received baptism, taking the name of Michael. The piety and austerity that characterized his life appeared early on.

At the age of sixteen he received the teachers' certificate, and five years later became director of the school. He was demanding and severe with the students. Desiring to dedicate himself more intensely to God, he began studies for the priesthood at the age of twenty-two. Even though he was only a seminarian, because of his seriousness, he was also made treasurer of Training College. He was the second person from the diocese of Onitsha to receive sacred orders. Once a priest, he served in four large parishes: his priestly life was characterized by firmness, bordering on rigidity, but was balanced by his goodness, which made his parishioners love and venerate him.

Consumed with zeal for the salvation of souls and the Kingdom of God, his charisma was ascetic charity. He led a frugal and austere life, but came to the aid of all the human misery he encountered: the poor, lepers, and the sick. With his

strong sense of justice, he gave preferential help to the sick and disabled; as for the healthy, and even for members of his family who asked for loans or help, he found them jobs.

He fought mercilessly against the Ibo fetish tradition, a veritable secret society that impacted the life of the people and was especially violent toward women. He insisted on Christian marriage for Catholic couples, and defended the dignity of women in all circumstances, and was concerned about the human and Christian education of young girls. They learned to refuse polygamy, not to tolerate conjugal infidelities and sexual abuse, and to withdraw from ancestral traditions, for example, from the obligation to marry the brother of her husband in case of widowhood.

He built parishes at Dunukofia and Abapete in the “cursed forests,” former cemeteries for the contagious, which were believed to be inhabited by spirits. His absolute lack of fear won people over. An admired preacher, a forceful pastor, a man of authority able to move people, he was loved, feared, and respected. In his parishes there was a spectacular flowering of priestly and religious vocations.

With the passing of time, Fr. Tansi became aware that his apostolic ideal could be fulfilled only through contemplation. He felt a strong attraction for a deeper life of prayer and abandonment. Dom Marmion’s book *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk* inspired him to act on this desire. He confided in his bishop, who helped him to enter the abbey of Mount Saint Bernard.

In his monastic life he showed a scrupulous fidelity to the Rule, great docility, profound self-denial, and much patience in physical infirmities—in fact, he suffered from a stomach ulcer. From the beginning he wanted to be treated like all the others, putting up with the cold, toils, and humiliations, walking with God in blind trust. Realistic, sincere, humble, and full of reverence, Fr. Tansi was an excellent monk, disappearing in the common life, in no way distinguishing himself from others. He preferred to serve rather than to be served, and his spirit of poverty and love were visible in his work. He never spoke of his past life or of the success of his apostolate.

The main characteristics of his spirituality were surrender to the will of God, complete detachment, and an uncompromising dedication to what he considered as the demands of the Catholic faith. He said: “If you want to be a true Christian, you must live totally for God.”

Although he was appointed as novice master for the foundation that was to be made in Cameroon, near the Nigerian border, he never again saw his home country or Africa. He died from an aneurism of the aorta during the night of the January 20, 1964, completely alone.

The cause for his canonization was opened in 1986, and two years later his re-

mains were transferred to Onitsha, where a striking miracle took place. Pope John Paul II beatified him, traveling to Nigeria for the ceremony, at which two million people participated. One of Fr. Tansi's spiritual daughters took the initiative to found a pious union of committed lay people associated to Cistercian monasteries, "The Father Tansi Solidarity Prayer Movement," which has a considerable membership in Nigeria, Cameroon and elsewhere.

10.6. THE EXPANSION OF THE ORDER: FOUNDATIONS

(by *Dom Armand Veilleux*)

10.6.1. In Light of the Evolution of the Statute on Foundations

THE SUCCESSIVE VERSIONS OF THE STATUTE

The Constitutions of 1894 and 1924 include few elements about the manner of making a foundation and about the process to be followed in reaching the stage of autonomy. The General Chapters, especially after 1925, took a certain number of measures in response to particular situations.⁵²

It was in 1953 that the General Chapter, in response to the new situation created by the post-war foundations in America and the new surge of foundations in Africa, drew up a first *Statute on Foundations* for the monks' communities (*Acts*, pp. 39–42). A Statute for the foundations of nuns was approved the following year (*Acts*, pp. 24–26). Curiously these two Statutes were written in Latin, whereas the 1953 Chapter approved documents of a similar kind, including the Statute on the Liturgy Commission, written in French.

The surge of foundations in the following years meant that the General Chapters had to make numerous changes to this legislation. The particular situation of several new foundations led the Order to write up a “Statute on Distant Foundations” approved *ad experimentum* in 1967 (*Acts*, pp. 170–71) and revised in 1969 (*Acts*, pp. 326–27). It was intended above all to address the problems these foundations encountered in the process of attaining the rank of an autonomous house. It also spoke about “simplified foundations” (See *Acts* of 1965, pp. 105–6 and of 1967, pp. 146–47), although no special statute was written for them. But the approval of these simplified foundations was left strictly to the General Chapter.

The need was soon felt to extend to all foundations the special norms drawn un in 1967 for “distant foundations.” Moreover, the notion of “distant foundation” was in itself problematic. Distant from what? The 1974 General Chapter of Abbots approved—*ad experimentum*, obviously—a new Statute that eliminated the juridical distinction between ordinary foundations and so-called distant foundations, and

⁵² This evolution has been studied by Colette Friedlander, in her study *Décentralisation et identité cistercienne 1946–1985*, (Paris: Cerf, 1988), esp. pp. 146–59 and 456–68.

granted all foundations the possibility of an intermediary “semi-autonomy” stage, even though this notion too was extremely problematic.

At their 1975 Chapter, the Abbesses, using the monks’ Statute, but modifying it on some points, voted in their own Statute (*Minutes*, pp.25–28), which led the Abbots to approve a new *Statute on Foundations* (*Minutes*, pp. 42–44) in 1977, rather than confirm the one they had approved *ad experimentum* in 1974. The difficult point remained the notion of “semi-autonomy.”

Because of a certain number of changes made in the legislation during the writing the Constitutions, a new Statute had to be drawn up. It was presented and voted on quickly at the end of the 1987 General Chapter, without giving the capitulants time to examine it well (*Minutes*, pp. 307–10). It was now a single Statute for the monks and the nuns. The text was presented in three languages (English, French, and Spanish), but with a number of differences—in some cases more than just a matter of nuance—between the three versions, and none of the three was indicated as the original text. This is why the Permanent Council, in 1996, was led to present a harmonized version of these three texts for the approval of the General Chapters (*Minutes*, p. 43).

Various modifications of the Statute were voted on at the 2002 and 2005 MGMS. They had to do mostly with determining the moment Father Immediate’s approval is needed for a foundation of nuns, and with the right of vote about professions when a house is not yet autonomous.

THE INSOLUBLE PROBLEM OF SEMI-AUTONOMY

At the beginning of the Order, when a foundation was being made, the abbot was chosen and blessed before leaving the founding house. He then left with a dozen companions (often more), and the foundation was, from the first day, an abbey. When, toward the middle of the twentieth century, there were more and more “distant” foundations, i.e. foundations in a country or continent far from the founding house, and thus in a different culture, it became difficult to send a large contingent of founders. It was also thought that the presence of numerous founders might make the integration of local vocations and the process of inculturation more difficult. It could therefore take a number of years to reach autonomy, which required the presence of twelve solemn professed.

The 1967 General Chapter thus invented the notion of “semi-autonomy,” a rather shaky term from a juridical point of view. In reality, the semi-autonomous priory was a *sui juris* house, whose members had stability there and elected their own superior, who was a major superior and a member by right of the General Chapter. The motherhouse’s obligations toward this autonomous priory, however,

were similar to its obligations regarding a foundation. Moreover, in the 1967 version—corrected on this point in 1969—the abbot of the founding house was designated as “founding abbot” and not as “Father Immediate.” At the same time, the 1967 and 1969 General Chapters granted to non-autonomous foundations rights that normally belonged to the founding house, especially with regard to voting for the admission of novices to profession.

The new *Statute on Foundations*, approved *ad experimentum* by the 1974 Chapter of abbots, upheld the notion of semi-autonomy, and reduced to six—and no longer twelve—the number of monks required for a house to be raised to this rank. In the Statute that they wrote during their 1975 Chapter, the abbesses kept the essential characteristics given to this new type of house, but withheld the title “semi-autonomous,” which led the 1977 Chapter of abbots to reconsider the question.

This notion of “semi-autonomy” was a juridical anomaly. Already the Law Commission of 1976 (see Report, p.16) noted that such a house was generally not conceived of as being “totally autonomous” in the Order, whereas, from the canonical point of view, it was just as autonomous as an autonomous priory or an abbey. Dom Vincent Hermans therefore drew up a new version of the Statute for the following Chapter of abbots, eliminating the convoluted notion of semi-autonomy. But the majority of Capitulants, indifferent about juridical fine points and wanting to give these young communities the right to receive help from the founding house, voted to reintroduce this notion into the Statute, and the abbesses did the same the following year (1978).

In the Constitutions voted on by the monks at Holyoke in 1984 and in those voted on by the nuns at El Escorial in 1985, the expression “semi-autonomous priory” was replaced by “simple priory” (to distinguish it from a “major priory”). But the juridical reality remained the same. When the text of our Constitutions was presented to the Holy See, one of the remarks made by the Congregation of Religious was that we needed to drop this distinction between two categories of priories, since both expressions indicate a *sui juris*, and thus fully autonomous, house. We insisted on keeping this distinction in Statute 5.A.c of our Constitutions (approved in 1990) with a footnote (the only footnote in the entire Constitutions) saying that it was “according to the proper law of the Order,” a law going back to 1967. As a result of which, still today, in the mind of many members of the Order, including some Fathers Immediate, the “simple priory” is not completely autonomous!

In the masculine branch of the Order, when a foundation attains autonomy, it becomes the daughter house of its founding house. In the feminine branch, a special problem is posed by the fact that, when a foundation attains autonomy,

it loses all juridical links with the founding house, whereas the latter has special obligations toward the foundation until it acquires the status of major priory or abbey. This problem led several Regions and the Central Commissions at Cardena (2007) to request a study of the possibility of maintaining a juridical relationship in these cases. It is difficult to conceive what this relationship might be, unless we opt to move toward a system of filiation in the feminine branch like that of the masculine branch.

At the same time, the requirements for approving a foundation are becoming less stringent, and are sometimes interpreted quite broadly, so that certain foundations remain in this status for many years. As a result, local vocations make their profession—including solemn profession—for the motherhouse, which might be a place they have never visited on another continent. At recent General Chapters solutions were sought, and sometimes the decisions of the two Chapters have converged regarding canonical votes for admission to profession. The suggestion has been made not to accept candidates for solemn profession as long as a community is not *sui juris*. Some answer that this measure would be unjust to candidates who sometimes have nine years of temporary vows and would like to make a life commitment. Others say that it is not just to allow them to commit themselves for life when the house where they live does not yet have a juridical existence or a certain future, and when they have no intention of going to live in the founding house with another language, another culture, and on another continent.

The evolution of the Statute on Foundations is an example of legislation that has constantly evolved in order to respond to the new demands of life. It also shows the danger of introducing new juridical categories that have not been well thought out, thus creating unsolvable juridical and human problems later on. The Order will doubtless need to rethink this whole question in the years to come, not only in light of the history of the past fifty years, but also in light of the entire tradition of the Order from the twelfth century until today.

10.6.2. The Order's Foundations Since the Time of the Second World War

OVERALL VIEW

A quick look at the list of monasteries of the Order, according to their foundation date, at the end of the *Elenchus Monasteriorum*, shows that the last sixty-five years of the Order have been very fertile as far as foundations go. Among the present monasteries of monks, 56 already existed before the Second World War, and 15 of those were founded after 1892. Of the 26 monasteries of nuns at the same time, 13

were founded after 1892 (see chapter 6, above in vol. 1). Since the war there have been 47 new communities of monks and 46 of nuns. Among these, 5 communities of monks and 8 of nuns are incorporations. All the others are foundations.

Before the war, only 12 monasteries of monks were situated outside of Europe (7 in America, 3 in Asia, 1 in the Middle East and 1 in Africa). In that same time period, only 4 monasteries of nuns were situated outside of Europe (2 in Japan and 2 in Canada).

Among the foundations of monks made since then, 8 were made in western Europe, 1 in eastern Europe, 10 in North America (9 in the USA and 1 in Canada, which was closed soon after); 7 in Latin America (5 in South America, 1 in Mexico, 1 in the Caribbean); 9 in Asia/Oceania; and 11 in Africa/Madagascar. Among the foundations or incorporations of monasteries of nuns in the same period, 17 (8 of which are incorporations) are in Western Europe, 1 in Eastern Europe, 5 in the USA, 6 in Latin America (4 in South America, 1 in Mexico, and 1 in Central America); 7 in Africa, and 5 in Asia/Oceania.

An interesting phenomenon is that, whereas the number of monasteries is continually on the rise, there is a continuous drop in the number of monks and nuns. Many foundations were made between 1944 and 1960, when vocations were numerous and the number of monks and nuns in the Order continued to grow. But, whereas there was a radical change in the number of vocations, beginning in 1960 for the monks and several years later for the nuns, the making of foundations has not stopped, even if it has certainly slowed somewhat. The average number of monks per monastery in 1960 was 55; now it is 23. For the nuns, these numbers are 46 and 25 respectively.

The main consequence of this phenomenon has been that a certain number of founding houses experienced a serious lack of vocations almost immediately after having made foundations, and for this reason were not able, in certain cases, to give these foundations all the help that they needed, especially in the area of formation.

ACCORDING TO GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS

Europe

Of the 8 foundations of monks made in Western Europe during this period, 2 were made in the 1940s, shortly after the Second World War: Nunraw by Roscrea in 1946 and Bethlehem by Mount Melleray in 1948. These two foundations were made in areas of the United Kingdom where Cistercian life was not yet present, namely, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This was not the case for Bolton, found-

ed in 1965 in the central part of Ireland, not very far from Mount Melleray and Roscrea, nor for Sobrado, founded in 1966 on the west coast of Spain, not very far from Oseira. Two others were made in Spain later on, both by La Oliva: Las Escalonias in 1994, and Zenarruza in 1996. We have to add the incorporation of Boschi in 1996 and that of Myrendal in 2002, as well as a recent foundation in Eastern Europe, i.e., Novy Dvur in 1999.

During the same period, several Spanish monasteries of nuns were incorporated into the Order: Vico and Arevalo in 1951, Avila and Benaguacil in 1954, Carrizo in 1955, and Tulebras in 1957. Brialmont, in Belgium, was incorporated in 1976, and Donnersberg, in Germany, in 2002.

Besides these incorporations, 9 foundations of nuns were made in Western Europe during this period: Nazareth by Soleilmont (1950), and Maria-Frieden by Berkel (1953). Valserena by Vitorchiano (1968), La Paix-Dieu by Gardes, Klaarland by Nazareth (1970), La Palma by Alloz (1976), and Armenteira, also by Alloz (1989), Tautra by Mississippi (1999), and Meymac by Laval (2007). We must add the foundation of Naši Paní in eastern Europe by Vitorchiano (2007).

Although one hesitates to separate these European Foundations into different categories, one can see evident differences between those made shortly after the Second World War, with the particular problems of that era, and those made in the 60s and 70s. Maria-Frieden, founded in Germany by Dutch nuns only eight years after the end of the war is a good example of the difficulties encountered by the first group. La Paix-Dieu and Klaarland, both founded in the same year (1970), can bear witness to attempts at a new, simplified expression of the Cistercian charism made in the 70s.

Concerning the *incorporations* of nuns' monasteries during this period, it might be useful to reflect on the way they were carried out and on the difficulties encountered, since we might have certain similar cases in the future. During the first centuries of the Order, when incorporations of monasteries were frequent, a significant group of monks or nuns were often sent to the monastery that was going to be incorporated, in order to help the community to grow in the Cistercian spirit and charism. The Order has not taken this kind of pastoral measure in recent cases: perhaps it was not seen to be necessary.

North America

In the United States of America, three houses of monks were founded in the middle of the nineteenth century, and they developed slowly up until the Second World War. Before and after this war, there was in these houses, especially at Gethsemani and Spencer, a surprising growth in the number of vocations. Several founda-

tions were made in a few years, just to take care of the abundance of novices. Gethsemani made 5 foundations in the USA between 1941 and 1955, and Spencer 3 between 1948 and 1956. In Canada there were 4 houses. In 1977 a new foundation was made by Oka in Ontario to receive English-speaking vocations coming from the west and central parts of Canada; it was closed in 1998.

The first foundation of nuns in the USA was made at Wrentham in 1949 by Glencairn, and the second at Redwoods in 1962 by Nazareth. In the following 30 years, Wrentham made 3 foundations in the USA: Mississippi (1964), Santa Rita (1972), and Crozet (1987). The two monasteries of nuns in Canada have not made any foundations. Mississippi founded Tautra, in Norway (1999).

These North American foundations owe much of their vitality to the growth and the new role of the American Catholic Church in the decades following the war. Especially in the 70s, they were a creative force in the Order, which creativity has generally been welcome, even if it has sometimes been felt as threatening.

Africa

Aiguebelle founded Atlas in Algeria in 1934. Next, in 1951, the foundation of Grandselve (now Koutaba), also by Aiguebelle, was the beginning of a long series of foundations made in Africa by several communities of the Order. The following monasteries of monks were founded: Mokoto, by Scourmont in 1954; Victoria, by Tilburg in 1956; Emmanuel, by Achel in 1958; Maromby, by Mont-des-Cats in 1958; Bela Vista, by San Isidro in 1958; Bamenda by Mt. Saint Bernard in 1963; Kokoubou by Bellefontaine in 1972; Awhum adopted by Genesee in 1978; Nsugbe in Nigeria by Bamenda in 2000 and Illah, also in Nigeria, incorporated in 2005 with Genesee as mother house.

The foundations of nuns in Africa/Madagascar during the same period were as follows: La Clarté-Dieu by Igny (1955); Étoile Notre-Dame by les Gardes (1960); Butende by Berkel (1964); Grandselve by Laval (1968); Abakaliki by Glencairn (1982); Huambo by Valserena (1982); Mvanda (Kikwit), an African foundation by another African Foundation, l'Étoile Notre-Dame (1991); and Ampibanjinana by Campénéac (1996). Kibungo, in Rwanda, was founded in 2002 by a group of sisters who had to flee Murhesa (La Clarté-Dieu) in the Congo because of the 1996 civil war.

One of the common characteristics of African foundations is the difficult economic situation they are facing at the present time. Almost all are reduced to subsistence living, scarcely producing enough to feed themselves, whereas several years ago some of them had a flourishing economy and were self-sufficient. This situation is due to the general state of affairs in Africa, which is determined by the

world economic system and local socio-political factors. Some have lived for years (as in Angola) or are still living (as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) in a war situation. The generosity with which they are faithful to their monastic life is admirable and, in some cases, truly heroic.

Another characteristic of many of these houses (not all, however) is that they have numerous vocations, even if discernment is much more difficult in a cultural context where there has not been a long monastic tradition, and especially when this discernment still needs to be made by the founders from another culture. Connected to this, for many of these foundations, there is a great need for assistance in this area of discernment and formation, but often no assistance is to be had, because the motherhouse is itself terribly short of personnel. Many monasteries need at least a few more persons to help with formation, or simply need a few solid and mature monks or nuns to model monastic values for the young people in formation.

Our African monks and nuns certainly have a special contribution to give to the local Church in the area of inculturation, as Pope John Paul II reminded them at Parakou fifteen years ago. Perhaps the quickest way for this inculturation to happen is to provide a solid basic monastic formation to all the young Africans who come to the monastery.

Latin America

Almost immediately after having made three foundations in the USA, Spencer made two more in South America: Azul in 1958 and La Dehesa (later called Miraflores) in 1960 (Miraflores was passed on to Gethsemani later). Then, we had to wait 20 years before other foundations were made in Latin America: Novo Mundo by Genesee in 1980, and Jacona by San Isidro in 1981. Several years later, Los Andes was founded by Holy Spirit in 1987, and Evangelio (Jarabacoa) by Viaceli in 1989. Almost ten years later San Isidro founded Paraiso.

As for the nuns, Ubexy founded El Encuentro in Mexico in 1971. Then there were three foundations made by Vitorchiano in South America: Hinojo (1973), Quilvo (1981), and Humocaró (1985). Recently Tulebras founded Esmeraldas in Ecuador (1992). In 2001 Hinojo founded Juigalpa in Central America.

In South America there is now a solid and well-established monastic presence. The Cistercian Regional Conference (REMILA), as well as different monastic conferences of Benedictines and Cistercians of the Common Observance in Latin America, are active in providing formation for their members. Even though distances between houses are great, the means of transportation are certainly much better than in Africa. The number of vocations has diminished a bit in the past

ten years, but there is already a solid core of South American monks and nuns in each community.

Another reason that the foundations in South America met with many fewer difficulties than those of Africa is that this Church has roots going back more than 500 years, even though monastic life as such was not present during the period of colonization, except in Brazil. The small number of vocations coming from South American ethnic groups is a question that deserves reflection. Naturally it is linked with the history of colonization and evangelization of the continent.

Asia/South Pacific

Consolation in China, Phare in Japan, and Latroun in Israel were founded in the nineteenth century. Consolation founded Lantao in 1928. In 1953, three years before founding Victoria in Africa, Tilburg founded Rawaseneng in Indonesia. Then, several years after founding Nunraw and Bethlehem, Mount Melleray founded Kopua in 1954 in New Zealand, and Roscrea founded Tarrawarra in Australia the same year. Several years later, in 1968, Sept-Fons founded Our Lady of the Isles, hoping to revive a foundation made in New Caledonia a century earlier, and in 1972, the American Region founded Our Lady of the Philippines. In 1980 Phare founded Oita in the central part of Japan, and in 1991 Vina founded Shuili in Taiwan. We could mention Saint-Sauveur here, founded in Lebanon in 1998 by Latroun and closed in 2006.

The series of foundations of nuns in this part of the world during this period began with three Japanese foundations made by other Japanese communities: Imari, by Tenshien (1953), Nasu, by Nishinomiya (1954), and Miyako (now Ajimu), also by Nishinomiya (1981). There was also a foundation in Korea, Sujong, by Tenshien (1987), and Gedono in Indonesia by Vitorchiano in 1987. Next came Rosary, a foundation made by Nishinomiya in 1993, and then adopted by Gedono; Matutum in the Philippines was founded by Vitorchiano (1993), and Makkiyad in India by Soleilmont (1995).

It is impossible to make any general remarks about this group of monasteries, for they represent a great variety of cultures and situations. Although faced with rather difficult situations, Lantao and Shuili courageously continue the Cistercian tradition established by Our Lady of Consolation, which was one of the largest monasteries of our Order shortly after its foundation. The Japanese monasteries of monks and nuns are witnesses to a solid implantation of the Cistercian charism in Japan for almost a century. Kopua is holding firm with courage, while Tarrawarra and Our Lady of the Philippines have been blessed with numerous vocations and other graces. Rawaseneng and Gedono also have a good proportion of their com-

munities in formation. Our Lady of the Isles in New Caladonia, founded in 1968, was closed in 2001.

A common trait in many of these monasteries is the great geographical distance that separates them from the motherhouse. Our Lady of the Philippines is an interesting case, since it is a foundation prepared and taken on by an entire region.

MONASTERIES HAVING MADE SEVERAL FOUNDATIONS

Monasteries of monks

- Roscrea, after having founded Nunraw in 1946, went to Australia eight years later, in 1954, and also was able to found Bolton in Ireland in 1965, but it was then that vocations began to diminish.
- Mount Melleray, after having founded Bethlehem in 1948, went to New Zealand in 1954.
- San Isidro, after having founded Bela Vista in 1958, went to Mexico in 1981, then to Ecuador in 1998.
- Tilburg, after having founded Rawaseneng in 1953, was still able to found Victoria in Kenya only three years later.
- Viaceli, after founding Sobrado in Spain in 1966, went to the Dominican Republic in 1989.

The most “fertile” houses are evidently Gethsemani and Spencer. Gethsemani made 5 foundations in the USA between 1944 and 1955; and later adopted Miraflores in Chili. Spencer made 3 foundations in the USA between 1948 and 1956, and then 2 in South America, in 1958 and 1960. The number of monks sent on these foundations is perhaps even more significant. For example Gethsemani sent 29 founders to Mepkin, 21 to Genesee, and 32 to New Clairvaux.

Monasteries of Nuns

The most evident example is Vitorchiano, which, after having founded Valserena in Italy in 1968, made 3 foundations in South America between 1973 and 1985, and one in Indonesia two years later. Later, Vitorchiano made one foundation in the Philippines and another in the Czech Republic. In these cases the number of persons sent is also impressive (22 to Valserena).

Next comes Wrentham, which, even though founded only in 1949, has already made three foundations, sending a good number of nuns. We could also mention other monasteries that have made foundations: Glencairn (Wrentham in

1949, and Abakaliki in 1982), Tenshien (Imari in 1953, and Sujong in 1987), Berkel (Maria-Frieden in 1953, and Butende in 1964), Nishinomiya (Nasu in 1954, and Miyako in 1981), les Gardes (Étoile in 1960, and La Paix-Dieu in 1970), Nazareth (Redwoods in 1962, and Klaarland in 1970), and finally Alloz (La Palma in 1976, and Armenteira in 1989). It is interesting to note that many of these founding houses were still relatively “young” when they made their first foundation.

SEVERAL COMPLEMENTARY REFLECTIONS

1) *Relationship with the Founding House*

According to the Cistercian tradition, a community is founded by another community, which hands on to the foundation its particular expression of the Cistercian spirit. For a foundation to be successful and grow, it is usually necessary for it to have been wanted and warmly supported by the motherhouse. When a foundation is the personal project of an abbot or a small group of founders, without being accepted by the entire community (or at least a large part of it), it has little chance of growth. There are some cases of foundations that began as a personal adventure and have developed well, but only because they were accepted and adopted by the community of the founding house at some point.

The relationship between the motherhouse and the foundation during the first years of the foundation—that is, until the time of autonomy—is also essential for the healthy development of the new house. A community should not make a foundation if it cannot foresee the possibility of continuing to support the foundation for several years financially, or at least in personnel. Paternity must be responsible.

2) *Collective Responsibility*

In spite of what has just been said, it happens that communities that seem to be quite capable of making a foundation, suddenly find themselves experiencing a lack of vocations or an economic crisis in their own community, and are no longer able to help their foundation adequately. According to our Constitutions, when the General Chapter approves a foundation, all the houses assume a collective responsibility in its regard. It must be said that there is great generosity in the Order, especially when a foundation needs material help. But at present there are quite a few foundations (and also older communities!) of the Order who are in extreme need of help in personnel, especially of persons capable of forming young monks or nuns, and this help is not available to them.

3) *Number of Founders*

In the Order the traditional number for a foundation is twelve monks or nuns. In former times, often a greater number was sent. In our recent Statute on Foundations, no more than six persons are required, and sometimes an exception is requested even on this point at the moment of approbation. Is there an ideal number? When a large group comes to a different culture, especially in the young Churches, there is a danger, from the beginning, of transposing large imported structures that will be difficult to adapt to later on. A smaller number of founders was adopted later on, not only because there was less personnel available in the founding houses, but also because it was felt that a smaller group could adapt more easily to a different culture. But experience has shown that if we want to establish our type of Cistercian common life somewhere, the group should not be too small. Not only do six seem to be a minimum, but also, besides the superior, these six should include a good administrator or cellarer, a novice master, and a person capable of being second superior. To create a situation where the superior of the foundation has to assume all these tasks alone does not seem fair to the superior or to the foundation.

4) *Adaptation and Inculturation*

Any reflection on foundations of the Order in the young Churches must involve the topic of inculturation. On February 9, 1992, during his trip in Africa, the Holy Father mentioned the importance of this topic to our monks and nuns of Parakou: "The monastic life is a great spiritual force for a particular Church.... I know the vitality of the communities of this diocese, one of which has already made a foundation outside of Benin. I invite monastic communities to offer their contribution, especially in the *area of inculturation*" (*Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in French, February 9, 1993).

However, when speaking about *inculturation*, people often think only about *adaptation*. There is an important difference between the two terms. Adaptation is something necessary and important but it remains superficial. When one arrives as a stranger in another culture, it is normal to adapt to the customs of the local population. And we can say that, on the whole, the founders of our Cistercian houses mentioned above have been courageous and generous in adapting to local situations with regard to food, clothing, buildings, etc. The same applies to the use of local musical instruments in the liturgy, which has been done to a large extent. Inculturation is something much deeper. It is something that happens on its own

when the representatives of a culture have integrated the experience of faith and the monastic experience. The important point is that what is inculturated is not a series of external customs but an interior experience.

When one visits monasteries of the Order in the young Churches, it is a privilege to see a number of “authentic” monks and nuns among the local vocations, and this helps us affirm that an authentic process of inculturation is well under way.

10.7. THOMAS MERTON (1915–1968) CISTERCIAN MONK AND AUTHOR

(by Dom John Eudes Bamberger)⁵³

Thomas Merton arrived at the Abbey of Gethsemani to become a Trappist monk on December 10, 1941. As he explained later, prominent in his decision to seek God in a cloistered monastery, far removed from the world he had been formed in, was a rejection of the modern world, whose violence repelled him and whose seductions had led to misery. This attitude of disappointment with a society that he had found to be unable to deliver the happiness it promised is evidenced in the way he told the story of his life and conversion. However, his entry into the cloister was felt as a deliverance and not as an evasion. The grace of Christ called him to a union with God, which, with time and experience, grew stronger and purer. As the implications of this search became explicit in daily life, he felt impelled by the same Spirit who had brought him to the monastery to share, in extended detail, in writings that were the fruit of experience. His earliest writings were concerned somewhat narrowly with the inner development of his conversion and of his early years in the monastery.

When his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, was translated into Japanese, he spoke of his development some twenty years after he entered the community, in words that reveal the turn taken by his inner life and the new emphasis on the social, political, and interpersonal that replaced the more negative features of his earlier attitude toward the world, at the time of his decision to enter the monastery.

[W]hen I wrote this book, the fact uppermost in my mind was that I had seceded from the world of my time in all clarity and with total freedom. The break and the secession were, to me, matters of the greatest importance. Hence the somewhat negative tone of so many parts of this book.

Since that time, I have learned, I believe, to look back into that world with greater compassion, seeing those in it not as alien to myself, not as strangers, but as identified with myself.... But precisely because I am iden-

⁵³ Monk of Gethsemani (USA), Secretary of the Consilium Generale from 1969 to 1974, abbot of Genesee (USA) from November 1971 to September 2001.

tified with them, I must refuse all the more definitively to make their delusions my own. (*"Honorable Reader": Reflections on My Work*, 63)

Thomas Merton was as yet a layman and was but twenty-four years of age when he began to write his autobiography. He was in the Order less than seven years, still a student preparing for the priesthood, when he published this work, which quickly caused him to become the most widely known monk in the twentieth century—the first edition sold 600,000 copies. By the time of his death he was the most popular spiritual writer in America. It was not mere egotism that led him to write about his own life in extended detail and at such an early age; rather, he had a firm and enduring conviction that the most effective way to speak of God in the twentieth century was in the spontaneous language of personal experience. His writing is representative of what Fr. Jean Leclercq has called “monastic theology.” He eschewed technical, academic speech (except in *The Ascent to Truth*, a work he later judged with much severity). He maintained this conviction after entering the cloister, and became an indefatigable diarist, even though, as he well realized, such publication was seemingly in conflict with the ideal of the hidden life that had its own strong appeal for him.

He soon discovered that, although his own abbot supported and encouraged him, writing in such a personal style for the public was also in conflict with the practice of the Order at the time. The censors and the Abbot General raised this objection to the autobiography and to the monastic journal covering his early years in the abbey, *The Sign of Jonas*. Significantly, when the General at first expressed this objection in a verbal exchange, Merton was not shaken in his opinion. He accepted the decision but replied “I wish I had a journal of Saint Bernard’s from the twelfth century.” Other influential persons agreed with Merton. Later, Dom Gabriel Sortais withdrew his refusal at the urgings of Jacques Maritain, who, among other things, noted that it contained some of the finest writing of the century. Prior to publication, Merton had recorded in his journal his conviction that his writings would have an impact on the spiritual lives of many, and summarily gives his reasons for this conviction.

Since I belong to God and my life belongs to Him and my book is His and He is managing them all for His glory, I only have to take what comes and do the small part that is allotted to me... *It seems to me there can be great possibilities in all this. God has woven my crazy existence, even my mistakes and my sins, into his plan for a new society...* Now I see what it is all leading up to: to the happiness and the peace and the salvation of many people I

have never known. (“The Intimate Merton,” eds. Brother Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo, 55–56).

Merton had many occasions to reflect on his work as a writer and its place in his life as a cloistered monk. Yet, he remained convinced that writing played a major role in his contemplative life and could be adjusted to the Cistercian way of life. Writing, he noted, came easily to him; he wrote rapidly while instinctively giving attention to the requirements of art and style. Writing, he observed in his journal, was a way of clarifying his thought. The process assisted him to discern God’s will. It also responded to his social instincts, his strong urge to share with others. He noted some of his thoughts about publishing his books, personal as they are, especially the journals:

Why would I write anything if not to be read? This journal is written for publication.... If a journal is written for publication, then you can tear out pages of it, emend it, correct it, write with art. If it is a personal document, every emendation amounts to a crisis of conscience and a confession, not an artistic correction. If writing is a matter of conscience and not of art, there results an unpardonable confusion—an equivocation worthy of a Wordsworth. (op. cit., 21)

Merton was a talented author who had a gift for communicating personal experience of life in Christ as lived in the monastery. His manner created for many a sense that he understood their own experiences and aspirations. Those who met him in person were quick to feel he was sympathetic, quick of understanding, and friendly, so that many quickly came to feel he was a personal friend. The Dalai Lama, for one, remarked when Merton died that he felt he had lost a close friend, though they had met but a few times. Merton’s intent in publishing was not to achieve literary fame, but to make known God’s mercy and grace. His story and the monastic experiences he chronicled in his journals brought to popular attention an awareness of the existence of monasticism in the United States. It also encouraged many who lived outside the cloister to aspire to a more profoundly personal, even contemplative prayer. His appeal is not limited to his own language and culture. He has been translated into at least twenty-seven different languages. The autobiography has remained in print these fifty-five years. He has been for many the most influential religious figure of the Church of his time, “one of the great theologians of the twentieth century” (Anglican Fr. Donald Allchin), “the best known monk since Luther” (New York Times). He is surely the most widely read monk of our Order since Saint Bernard. Well over three million copies of his works have

been published. The list of books written about Merton since his death includes hundreds of titles. There are a number of Merton Societies in various countries as well as an International Merton Society that regularly study his thought, applying his spirituality and perpetuating his memory. The Merton Annual has so far published fourteen volumes of articles and reviews that treat of his thought, his social involvements, and his spiritual legacy. The breadth of his influence is no less striking than the extent of his readership. Writings concerning his work include articles by Protestants, Anglicans, Tibetan Buddhists, Zen adherents, specialists in Islam and the Sufi tradition, and scholars of the Orthodox mystical teachings. This is but a partial list of areas where he made a significant contribution. Many people have been and still are influenced by their reading of Merton to enter religious life, to live a more spiritual life, even to enter the Catholic Church.

What qualities of mind, heart and character and formation did Thomas Merton possess that enabled him to achieve such an impressive ascendancy? Fr. Jean Leclercq, the dean of monastic studies in the second half of the twentieth century, has spoken of some of Merton's works as spiritual classics (*New Seeds of Contemplation* and *The Sign of Jonas*). He observed that Merton had a penetrating intelligence that carried him quickly to the heart of any issue he took up. He possessed a broad human culture in literature, the arts, theology, and classical and modern languages all of which he carried with a modest ease that avoided any show of superiority.

Those who lived with him in the monastery and wrote about their impressions of Merton agree that he was a modest, friendly, and humble brother, devoid of all airs of superiority. In private sessions he was invariably attentive, understanding, and a good listener. All of us students appreciated his teaching and spiritual direction. He brought an enthusiasm to his classes that made the material come alive whether he spoke of the early Cistercians, or the theology of Saint Paul's epistles, or of prayer. That Merton had a swift intelligence and a remarkably rapid apprehension of the relative importance of matters taken up in his class and in his reading would have been intimidating had he not taken pains to maintain a certain light and friendly tone. It seems to me he deliberately used humor as a way of eschewing all pomposity and creating a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, favorable to establishing a good group spirit and fraternal relations among his students and novices.

One reason he could live the monastic schedule and yet manage to write and publish such vast number of articles and books is that he could take in the sense of a page so rapidly. He also wrote with comparable swiftness. All of his classes were very well prepared; in fact, he inevitably had about three times as much material than he covered, and would skim over his pages quickly choosing what

points he would bring out, while skipping over a good deal. Eventually those class notes would turn up in some publication or other. He gave the impression of being rather free of spirit, ebullient, and even playful at times. But he regularly conveyed a seriousness of purpose at the same time, so that he always had the respect of the brothers. Nobody presumed to get overly free or unduly familiar with him, or to take up his time with trivialities. He was very disciplined in his use of time, and knew how to cut things short when conversation became too long or was not relevant to the purpose. To judge from his journals, Merton himself seems not to have been aware of the depth of the esteem and affection that he inspired and we willingly gave, in good part because we were reticent in expressing such personal attitudes. Nor did he encourage it.

Though he made it clear he was not an expert in any particular field, including theology, Merton read widely and with an intensity of purpose that facilitated his absorbing large amounts of information. The range of his interests remained very broad throughout his monastic years. That he also read with penetration is attested by knowledgeable persons in fields as various as Orthodox theology, Sufism, and Buddhism. The Dalai Lama remarked after his meetings with Merton in the weeks preceding his death that "I thought it quite fit, appropriate, to call him a Catholic *Geshe*. This means a 'scholar' or 'learned one'. Also I could say he was a holy man." (*Merton: By Those Who Knew Him Best*, Paul Wilkes, 147). Another feature of Merton's personality was his uncommon ability to identify with so many different kinds of persons and so to communicate a personal concern for them. He made friends of a wide variety of persons he never in fact met in person, and was very much aware of it. His writing communicated a personal encounter that caused numerous readers to feel that his experiences as described were similar to their own. Many felt they knew him personally. That he was aware of this feature of his writing is evident from his Preface to the Japanese translation of his autobiography.

Therefore, most honorable reader, it is not as an author that I would speak to you, not as a story-teller, not as a philosopher, not as a friend only: I seek to speak to you, in some way, as your own self. Who can tell what this may mean: I myself do not know. But if you listen, things will be said that are perhaps not written in this book. And this will be due not to me, but to One who lives and speaks in both." ("Honorable Reader," 67)

This reference to "the One who speaks to both" raises a final point regarding Merton's character and the reason for his large and continuing influence. At the beginning of this essay I mentioned that Thomas Merton came to the monastery to

seek God. The disillusionment he felt with the world as he had experienced it was influential only in a secondary way; freed from pursuits that had resulted in frustrations and meaningless disappointments, he was led to seek beyond this world for his fulfillment, in God. The true subject of *The Seven Storey Mountain* and of the Journals is not Thomas Merton, but God himself: “the acting agent becomes the one acted upon” by God (see Francis Kline, “In the Company of Prophets?” *The Merton Annual* 12, 126). Hovering over all the events, God’s presence is felt, in a manner to be active everywhere, preparing, guiding, supporting. Even sin and the confusion of error do not thwart his Providence. Merton becomes who he is because he has opened his heart to God; his seeking in so many different places and manners is presented as a search for the knowledge and love of God. Merton was an artist with words; but his art is so effective because he was a contemplative who learned how to allow God to shine forth in all his works.

Twenty-five years after his death Sandra Schneiders explored the question: “Why have serious thinkers speculated that Merton may be the most important spiritual voice of our times?” Sister Sandra answers her question with the opinion that Merton’s writings convey his holiness. Merton himself, I believe, would sum up his life in the words he used in his journal.

The Voice of God is heard in Paradise:

[...] What was fragile has become powerful. I loved what was most frail.
I looked upon what was nothing. I touched what was without substance,
and within what was not, I am. (*The Sign of Jonas*, 362)

Within the Cistercian Family

(by Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois)¹

Introduction

As mentioned above (see § 1.6.), during the nineteenth century, Cistercian monasteries were grouped together by region or by affinity into various Congregations, which were not linked in any juridical way. Nor was a General Chapter—bringing all the superiors together and having real authority over all the monasteries—held in the nineteenth century. Since the destruction of Cîteaux and the death of its last abbot in April 1797, the Order had no head and became dispersed. Pius VII designated a “President General” of the Order in 1814, but with no real jurisdiction beyond his Italian Congregation. Also, at least until 1868, there was a “moral” or “formal” bond, made concrete by the fact that the Holy See confided to this President General the care of confirming abbatial elections, at least those of the Trappists, and, after 1846, those of the Belgian Vicariat (Bornem and Val-Dieu), but this gesture gave him no authority over these abbots and their communities. There was an attempt, in 1863, on the part of the President General, Dom Teobaldo Cesari, to convoke a General Chapter of all Cistercian abbots, from whatever Congregation they might be, in order to re-establish the unity of the Order. But the plan was unsuccessful: there was too great a divergence of observance between those who accepted an apostolic ministry (parishes and schools) and those who wanted to remain simply contemplative (mostly the Trappists). Pius IX took up the initiative again but only with the first group. On March 27, 1868, the decree *Disciplinae Regularis* brought together under the effective authority of the President General (“by the vow of obedience”) the Belgian Vicariate and the new Austro-Hungarian Province, created in 1859, which was then united with the Italian Congregation. The three of them were able to hold real General Chapters. The Chapter first opened in April 1869, and its participants defined themselves

¹ Monk of Mont-des-Cats, named superior and then elected abbot of La Trappe (France) from February 1976 to October 2003.

as Cistercians of the Common Observance. This name was written in juridical documents until 1934. The pontifical decree of July 20, 1891, at the request of the interested parties, confirmed the composition of this Order.

It is clear that this Order did not at that time bring together all the Cistercian heirs of Cîteaux. In 1891, there still remained as juridical structures the three Trappist Congregations, which had no juridical bond among them, nor a bond with the Common Observance,² the Sênaque Congregation, which joined the Common Observance in 1892, Casamari, which remained independent until 1929, and ancient Spanish monasteries of nuns, which had fallen back on the jurisdiction of the bishops since the disappearance of the men's monasteries in 1935. In the North of France, the Bernardines of Esquermes had three houses and about 200 members in 1891. Other Bernardines existed in Flanders and Switzerland. All of these groups formed the great Cistercian family. Some canonical development and rapprochement began in 1892—with the union of Trappists into the Order of the Strict Observance—and continued throughout the twentieth century, but no canonical unity into one single Cistercian Order was attained. The Common Observance, which today is simply called the "Cistercian Order" (soc for several decades),³ at present has thirteen Congregations and several isolated monasteries, each Congregation having its own Constitutions, President, and Chapter. For several years now, lay groups have been taking shape and seeking to associate themselves with monasteries of the various Congregations or Orders, including our own.

What has been and what is the relationship between the Order of the Strict Observance and these various components of the Cistercian Family? This is the question we will examine in this chapter.

11.1. RELATIONS WITH THE CISTERCIAN ORDER (FORMERLY THE COMMON OBSERVANCE)

We have already pointed out that the reunion of the three Trappist Congregations into one single Order in 1892—at which point the confirmation of Trappist abbots by the Abbot General of the Common Observance ceased—gave rise to a strong reaction on the part of the Abbot General and his Order. We were accused

2 Already in 1869, the President General wrote to the abbot of Westmalle: "The Trappists have not submitted to his jurisdiction and are not united with the Cistercians of the Common Observance", even though he confirms their abbatial elections!

3 *Sacer Ordo Cisterciensis*. We will use the initials soc or oc according to the context.

of leaving the Order and founding a religious Institute that had nothing more to do with Cîteaux. From our point of view, this reaction is difficult to understand and explain. It was followed by a falling out between the two Observances, which was not helped by the unhappy attempt of our Abbot General, Dom Wyart, to take over the monastery of Holy Cross of Jerusalem in Rome (see § 1.4., above). In 1896, as the eighth centenary of the foundation of Cîteaux was approaching, Dom Wyart wanted to make a gesture of reconciliation by proposing that the Strict Observance be reduced to the rank of a Congregation, which, along with the other Congregations, would be under the authority of a single General Chapter. But his proposal was rejected, because the others would not have had a majority within this single Chapter.

The pontifical letter of Leo XIII *Non medioicri* of July 30, 1902 (see § 2.1., above), even though very explicit, did not put an end to the discord and disagreement—which is still present in some minds—over the interpretation of the events. It is unlikely that we will ever come to a common interpretation, as Dom Bernardo Olivera recognized in his “Centenary” letter of October 1, 1992, signed also by his council: various sensitivities are at play, and must be taken into account.

Be that as it may, these differences do not prevent us from establishing good relations between persons and monasteries on both sides. But we must remember that, during the first half of the twentieth century, the majority of the Common Observance monasteries and the most active of them were in Germany and Central Europe, where the Strict Observance had little representation. So there was not much neighborly rapport, and even less so, because politically Europe was divided into two opposing camps with little appreciation for one another, as the devastating conflicts of 1870–1871, 1914–1918, and 1939–1945 have shown. The Common Observance is also present in Vietnam and Ethiopia, but there are no Trappists there either. It was only after the Second World War that the OC was implanted in the USA (in Dallas mainly) and in Brazil. In France the Common Observance is only present through the Congregation of Lérins-Sénanque, which is very close to the Trappists.⁴ The 1950 incorporation of Boquen (founded by a former Trappist) into the Common Observance did not stir up trouble, except when Dom Quatember, Procurator and soon to be Abbot General of the OC, reproached our Order for having acted in a scandalous way in expelling Dom Alexis Presse (see § 3.2.3., above). In Spain, it was only in 1940 that the monks of the Common Observance settled again at Poblet. The nuns, who were quite numerous, lived in

⁴ On December 28, 1956, the abbot of Lérins, Dom Bernard de Terris wrote to Dom Sortais: “Your Paternity knows how close we are to one another. I have my eyes fixed on La Trappe...” (*Arch. Curie Génér.*) In 1968–1969, he officially asked the Order to consider the possibility of an incorporation. But the state of precariousness that Lérins was experiencing then—it did not last—made this measure impossible.

peace among themselves, but would be a cause for conflict between the two Orders (see § 11.2, below).

Relations between the two Orders were practically non-existent at the level of the monasteries themselves. On the other hand the “collisions” between the two Observances took place on the level of leadership, when an Abbot General, for example, would think that the other—or its General Chapter—was infringing on his prerogatives. The barometer of relations between the two Orders, at least up to 1990, reflected the rapport between the two Generalates,⁵ as our Procurator, Dom Vincent, wrote to Dom Sighard Kleiner.⁶ There were ups and downs in the temperature. The celebration of the eighth centenary of the death of Saint Bernard in 1953 brought the monks of the two Observances together. At the preceding General Chapter, in 1952, Dom Gabriel Sortais dotted the i’s and crossed the t’s, probably in response to an article he did not like, written by Fr. Colomban Bock and published in *Collectanea*; the article lamented the division in 1892 and wished for a return to deeper union. The rapport between the two families ought to be marked by charity and fraternity, Sortais said, but we must avoid discussing the merits of each observance and also avoid envisaging even a nominal union between the two Observances. At most we could study the historical questions together, even collaborate with circumspection in liturgical adaptations. Nothing more.

Two events brought on crises that obstructed a rapid reconciliation and a more fruitful collaboration in the years immediately after the war: the attempt of a Spanish Trappist abbot to reform the Congregation of Castille, and the requests for Federations of monasteries of Spanish monks. This second crisis, which began in 1954 and had repercussions in 1968–1975 and again in 1990–1991, will be spoken of again in the following section on relations with Las Huelgas.

The first crisis was provoked by the machinations of Dom Jesús Alvarez, abbot of Cardeña,⁷ in view of restoring the Congregation of Castille, which would have reunited all the Cistercian monasteries of monks and nuns in Spain. In spite of his promises to do nothing more, he continued secretly to take steps toward this union, and was drafting Constitutions for the future Congregation. However, at the Regular Visitation made by Dom Gabriel at Cardeña in May of 1954, everything was revealed by the novice who had typed up the Constitutions and by the

5 Curiously, from 1935 to 1959, they were next to each other on the Aventine, but their entrances were not on the same street!

6 “I believe that it is principally up to our two Generalates to watch over this fine concord; and if truly fraternal relations exist at this level, then the members of the Order will easily follow this example”, letter of May 8, 1973 (in the *Arch. Curie Génér.* As other documents cited in this chapter). Dom Sighard Kleiner was Procurator of his Order from 1950 to 1953 and Abbot General from 1953 to 1985. Dom Polikárp Zakar Ferenc succeeded him from 1985 to 1995, then Dom Mauro Esteva Alsina since 1995.

7 He had been abbot of Viaceli from 1940 to 1943, then Definitor from 1946 until his election as abbot of Cardeña in 1949.

Prior, who had serious qualms. We can easily imagine Dom Gabriel's reaction. Dom Jesús was asked to offer his resignation.⁸ What most troubled Dom Gabriel was the realization that the Abbot General of the Holy Order, Dom Kleiner, as well as the secretary of the Congregation for Religious, Fr. Larraona, had been aware of this attempt for several months, and that they had not warned him of the coup about to take place. Sortais, who had always been so straightforward in his obedience, did not understand this silence in his regard, which appeared to him as complicity. He announced at the 1954 General Chapter, that "while maintaining charity vis-à-vis our brothers of the Common Observance, he had decided not to set foot in monasteries of the Common Observance and that he would ask the Father General of this Observance to observe the same discretion in our regard", which he did in a letter on the following October 1, in which he said that he had asked the Trappist abbots to do as he did.⁹

These events and those concerning Las Huelgas did bring an end to attempts at better appreciating one another and becoming more reconciled. Good wishes for the New Year and other occasions were exchanged. We sought no longer to offend one another. The Council and period following it created occasions to meet. Should not the ecumenism that is so strongly recommended in the Church be operative among the Cistercians? On October 17, 1970, Dom Sighard Kleiner came to the consecration of the restored church at Cîteaux. He spoke about it in very warm terms in the Acts of the Curia of his Order and made a plea in favor of union, dated Christmas, 1970:

The incentive of nationalism, ignorance of history, and little capacity to understand one another and accept the reasons for our different ways of life, produced a mutual remoteness, closed the doors on both sides and added to preconceived ideas. Should this fact of this division of the Cistercian family into two branches be simply and passively inscribed in the annals of history? [...] What do we think of this? Have we already become inveterately accustomed to it, no longer feeling the wound of separation? Or is there a certain lassitude that does not want to disturb the peace or dares not touch it? In our time no one any longer understands why the practice of different observances should raise impregnable walls of separation and division. The inauguration of the new church of Cîteaux moves us to find new paths toward reaching the goals of the Charter of Charity and reviving the spirit of our holy Founders. To work effectively at this aim, there must be fraternal

⁸ It was also for this motive that he had to resign as abbot of Viaceli in 1943. Therefore it was a second offence!

⁹ This last point was not mentioned in the minutes of the General Chapter. Dom Kleiner hoped that this measure, to which he submitted, would only be temporary and that the Abbots of his Order would not be bound by it.

collaboration among those us who follow our Fathers by right of succession but are absent from the cradle of the Order and our brothers who, in a manner truly worthy of our Fathers, live at Cîteaux and enliven it.

In spite of the polemic barb at the end, distinguishing between the legitimate heirs (the only soc) and the others who are only “worthy” of the Founders, Kleiner’s statement, made in the midst of the dispute over Las Huelgas, was an outstretched hand that we had to grasp. Our Procurator, Dom Vincent Hermans, made efforts in this regard. He expressed his best wishes to Dom Kleiner on his twentieth anniversary as Abbot General, on May 8, 1973. In return, Kleiner privately confided to Dom Vincent his desire for a formula that would allow for a structural reconciliation and put an end to divisions that the simple man of today no longer understands (letter of May 29).

The fifteenth centenary of the birth of Saint Benedict, in 1980, provided the occasion for members of the General Chapters of the two Orders to meet in Rome, before taking part in the Symposium with the Benedictine Abbots and going on pilgrimage to Monte Cassino, where John Paul II himself joined them. At this meeting on September 16, each Order introduced itself with a speech from an abbot and an abbess of each Observance.¹⁰ Many learned things about the others that they never knew. Ten years later, the ninth centenary of the birth of Saint Bernard provided another opportunity for members of the General Chapters to meet during the International Congress that they organized together.¹¹ At the audience given them on September 14, 1990, John Paul II addressed the Orders as “juridically distinct, but one in heart and soul, being disciples of Saint Bernard together,” words that had their effect. In 1992, one hundred years after the union of the Trappist Congregations into a single Order, Dom Bernardo Olivera recalled that one of our duties is to “to seek out ways that will some day allow us, along with our brothers and sisters of the Common Observance, to arrive at what was the ultimate goal of the Capitulants in 1892: one day to bring about the full unity of the great Cistercian Family.”¹²

¹⁰ Those from our Order were published in *Collectanea Cist.* 1981, pp. 389-406.

¹¹ The Acts of which were published in *Analecta Cisterc.* 1990

¹² Circular letter of October 1, 1992; see Bernardo Olivera, *The Search for God*, CS 199 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2002) 115. Dom Bernardo refers to a letter of Dom Sebastian Wyart written on January 29, 1892, sited in *Anal. Cisterc.* 1978, p. 335.

Steps toward Reconciliation and Communion

But it can be said that the ninth centenary of the foundation of Cîteaux marked a turning point in the rapport between the two Orders. There was an ever-greater awareness of the futility of past differences of opinion, often brought on by subjective interpretations of events, and there was a desire to get past these differences, in order to affirm what unites us. Since this centenary involved the entire Cistercian Family, it will be discussed in a separate section (see § 11.5), but it must be acknowledged that in this Family, Lay Associates aside, the largest components, the only ones with both men and women, and the only ones who had experienced conflicts between them were the Order of the Strict Observance and the Common Observance. It was they who had to learn “purification of memory” in line with what the whole Catholic Church was trying to do during the great Jubilee year in 2000, spurred on by John Paul II. Already in 1996, Dom Bernardo Olivera had proposed a utopia—which he defined as “a symbolic projection pointing to a better and desirable future—of one day drafting a “Charter of Communion” or of “Fraternity in Plurality,” which would be signed by the whole Cistercian Family.¹³

In a homily given on October 27, 2000, during a colloquium held at La Trappe on the occasion of the third centenary of Abbot Rancé’s death, Dom Bernardo Olivera made the following challenge:

The communion we so ardently desire today is not based on juridical unity or uniformity of observance; rather, it is based on adherence to the Cistercian charism, with an appreciation for the plurality of authentic forms in which that charism manifests itself. If our Fathers presented their project with the expression *e pluribus unum*, we recognize our ideal as a family with the phrase *unum in pluribus*. We will thus be “experts in communion,” witnesses and workers in that project of communion that constitutes the highpoint of the history of humanity as willed by God. Only thus will we be able to present ourselves as “signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony.” (*Vita Consecrata* 46 and 51)

He was referring to a statement made by the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order that same year on “Communion in the Cistercian Family.” He had been invited, for the first time in history, to spend a day at that Chapter. When Dom

¹³ Bernardo Olivera, *The Search for God*, CS 199 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2002) 51.

Mauro introduced him, he recalled that in 1995 our Order had presented an official request for pardon for its share of responsibility in offenses against communion in the Cistercian Family. Before granting this pardon, said Dom Mauro, we need to be aware of the faults in question, and he went on to enumerate a few of them. Dom Bernardo responded by asking if we would not do better by once again becoming like children in spirit, according to the Gospel, forgetting disputes and starting over. Several abbots, especially Dom Jean Vuong-dinh-Lâm from Vietnam, were in agreement with Dom Bernardo, but Dom Policarp Zakar, former Abbot General, insisted on the importance of first purifying the past on the basis of historical studies. In spite of some capitulants' desire to continue the discussion, it was preferred to stop there and continue with the agenda for the day. Although the session seemed disappointing and ambiguous, the final Declaration made up for this regrettable impression. The last day of the Chapter, Dom Bernardo was invited for the noon meal, at which point Dom Mauro read a letter in Latin, granting the forgiveness we had requested and asking our pardon in turn.

Dom Bernardo was also presented with the Chapter's Declaration, addressed to the members of the OC. It reiterated the 1998 Synaxis's definition of the kind of communion we wish to foster among us:

The communion we seek is not a matter of juridical union or uniformity of observances. It derives from our common appreciation of the gift of a Cistercian vocation, from a profound respect for the integrity of different expressions of the Cistercian charism, and from a desire to grow in mutual affection and friendship. It is a unity constantly to be received with gratitude, and constantly to be built in humility and truth.

This communion requires respect for the identity of each. Another paragraph of the Declaration has to do with understanding our common history. It calls for a kind of purification of memory—and here the text includes the OC's request for forgiveness—and goes on to recall developments in the Order in the nineteenth century, noting that these developments must be looked at with the eyes of faith: the diversity that became established in the Cistercian Family is, in the end, a grace for the Church, a *felix culpa*. Our unity is multifarious, as is the unity of the Church: pluralism will be unity if we live out a spirituality of communion. We begin to attain this kind of spirituality by knowing one another better and by displaying true friendship. One of the means for increasing contacts and increasing mutual understanding is common study of the Cistercian patrimony.

One area in which collaboration has increased is the liturgy. Even before the Council, the respective liturgy commissions were in contact with one another, and

contact increased in the 1970s. Plans for adaptation and reform were presented to the Holy See separately in 1995. The rites of monastic initiation and monastic funerals were drawn up in common and approved at that time. The “Cistercian Ritual,” which gathers together in a single book the various reforms approved for each Observance, bears a preface by the two Abbots General, and was published in 1998, the jubilee year of Cîteaux—surely a sign.

On January 26, 2007, the same two Abbots General signed a common letter of friendship addressed to Cistercian communities. They wrote: “We wish, in this celebration of Saints Robert, Alberic and Stephen, to invite you to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in order that our common charism may always be a strong source of grace for each of us, for the Church and for the world.”

11.2. RELATIONS WITH THE SPANISH NUNS AFFILIATED TO LAS HUELGAS

11.2.1. From 1835 to 1940

Before they were suppressed in 1835–1836, the Congregations of the Iberian Peninsula included some nuns’ monasteries: the Congregation of Aragon had nine; the Congregation of Castile had only eight women’s monasteries as full members, including Las Huelgas, but had influence over the 14 houses that depended on Las Huelgas (which formed its own Congregation), and over 14 monasteries of Recollect sisters. Another thirty monasteries, it seems, depended on their bishops, including the monastery of Calatrava. There were various trends among these communities; some had elementary schools for girls.

The *Guia ecclesiastica* of 1854 lists 54 women’s monasteries with a total of 608 nuns. But they were probably more numerous. The pontifical decree of December 10, 1858, *Peculiaribus inspectis* entrusts these monasteries to the sole jurisdiction of the bishops, acting as delegates of the Holy See, their powers being renewed every three years. The few surviving monks of the dissolved Congregations no longer had any authority to care for these sisters, although bishops could name them as chaplains. In 1873, Pius IX suppressed the Congregation of Las Huelgas; the monasteries were no longer held together by juridical ties.

Beginning in 1880, the monks reappeared, but, until 1940, there were only Trappists. Some survivors from Santa Susanna, Lestrangé’s 1796 foundation, had taken refuge in France after the 1835 closures, going first to Melleray and then to Divielle. But they were once again expelled by the vexatious rulings of the French

government in 1880. They settled at Cardeña, but then transferred several times.¹⁴ In 1891 and 1909 Désert founded San Isidro and Viaceli. These monks, of course, attended to the nuns.

In 1897, the abbot of Désert, Dom Candide Albalat y Puigvert, a Spaniard, was commissioned by the Abbot General, Dom Sébatien Wyart, to contact the bishops and the various women's communities, proposing that the monasteries form a union. Since only the Recollects had Constitutions that were approved by the Holy See, Dom Candide's first concern was to draft Constitutions along the lines of the OCSO, so that houses could join the Order if they wished. Twenty-six monasteries proposed to join. The rescript of August 8, 1898 granted them permission to incorporate, but did not remove them from the bishops' jurisdiction. The document limits itself to entrusting the nuns to the spiritual direction of Trappists. Fourteen monasteries expressed their gratitude: did this mean that only fourteen were able to avail themselves of this spiritual direction? In practice, though, the Spanish monks made no distinctions, and attended to other monasteries in addition to the twenty-six that had taken this step toward incorporation.¹⁵

What did this spiritual incorporation entail? A response from the Holy See on August 26, 1899, points out that any act involving the exercise of jurisdiction is reserved solely to the bishop, but the bishop may call on the monks for anything having to do with "spiritual progress." It is worth recalling that the French Trappist nuns were linked to the monks under those same conditions in the decrees of 1834 and 1847, which were left intact at the time of the 1892 union. Were the Trappist women of Spain and France in the same situation; was there any canonical difference in the way they belonged to the Order? This was the question Dom Wyart raised in 1899. It was answered in the affirmative by Dom Benito Ramos only in 1974, assimilating the two groups (to be discussed again, below). But it must be acknowledged that the French Trappist nuns in the nineteenth century depended directly on the General Chapter of Abbots and had abbots as Fathers Immediate, which was not the case for communities in Spain. Moreover, the 1834 decree stated explicitly that the French Trappist sisters "belonged" to the Congregation of La Trappe, an expression that was never used for the other nuns.

After the publication of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, there was need to revise the Constitutions of the Bernardine sisters—as Cistercian women in France were called. The work was entrusted to a monk of San Isidro, and the so-called Constitutions of Las Huelgas were drawn up *ad experimentum* between 1927 and 1930.

¹⁴ They went to Ort (or Lord) in Catalonia, then to Bellpuig in 1884 before settling at Val San Jose, near Madrid, in 1889. In 1927, their successors took over the ancient monastery of La Oliva. See E. Fort Cogul, *L'aventura de la Trapa a Catalunya*, Barcelona, 1968.

¹⁵ For example, Huerta, founded in 1930, sent a chaplain to Buenafuente.

Even before then, a first monastery was incorporated into the Order pure and simple: Alloz, in 1923. But political instability, civil war, and persecution prevented the situation from evolving. It was not until July 1, 1944 that the Holy See approved these Constitutions. In addition to Alloz, six more monasteries were directly incorporated into the OCSO between 1951 and 1957.

11.2.2. The Establishing of Two Federations: 1948–1955

The Italian Congregation of San Bernardo revived Poblet in Catalonia in 1940. This was the first non-Trappist Cistercian presence in Spain, and trouble soon arose when, beginning in 1948, Poblet's prior, Fr. Gregorio Jordana, tried to win the nuns over to his conception of Cistercian life.¹⁶

It became an uncomfortable situation. Then there was the question of how to apply *Sponsa Christi*, published in 1950, which urged the consolidation of isolated monasteries. The two Abbots General met several times in 1952 and 1953 to deal with this matter. But to everyone's surprise, with no forewarning to our Order, Dom Kleiner, the new Abbot General of his Order, just a few days after his election, appointed the sub-prior of Poblet, Fr. Guillermo Aparicio, as his delegate for the establishment of a Federation of Spanish communities. His delegate alone was to be in contact with the communities. All member of the Order were to follow his instructions by virtue of holy obedience. A decree from the Congregation of Religious confirmed Aparicio's appointment and mission, and a questionnaire bearing Kleiner's signature was sent to the monastery. It addressed two points: does your community want to have closer ties than it now has with the soc and its superior? Do you agree to having your Constitutions and Statutes revised and approved by the Abbot General of the soc in agreement with the local Ordinary and the Sacred Congregation of Religious?

On November 2, 1953, while meeting with Dom Sortais just before his departure for Spain, Dom Kleiner, as if in passing, and "somewhat embarrassed," informed Sortais about this initiative and asked him to point out the monasteries that were likely to remain with the OCSO, so that the questionnaire would not be sent to them, although he was afraid it might already have been sent. In fact, upon receiving this questionnaire, some communities were utterly confused. Dom Sortais mentioned only six communities to Dom Kleiner, but at the Definitory they recalled the 1898 rescript, which involved twenty-six communities. This time it was Dom Kleiner who was surprised. On the basis of this rescript, recourse was made to the Holy See, which made allowance for the formation of a second Federation.

16 Oddly, once he was replaced at Poblet in 1952, he asked to transfer to the Trappists at Viaceli.

On February 2, 1954, Fr. Larrinoa, a Trappist, was appointed by the Holy See to move forward in creating this Federation of monasteries more closely linked with the Strict Observance. Larrinoa became the monastic “assistant” of these monasteries. The raising of the Federation of the *Regular Observance* of Saint Bernard in Spain, commonly referred to as Las Huelgas, was solemnly celebrated in that monastery on November 30, 1955, with Dom Sortais in attendance. Mother Maria Rosario Dias de la Guerra was elected President of the Federation; she remained in office for thirty years.¹⁷

11.2.3. After Vatican II, 1968–1975: The Question of Membership in the Cistercian Order

On March 26, 1968, Dom Ignace Gillet received a letter of complaint from Dom Kleiner about the activities of Fr. Larrinoa, who, Kleiner said, was pressuring Spanish monasteries to join the Strict Observance, to the detriment of the Cistercian Order to whom they belonged. He stated that the Holy See had been alerted about the matter. Thus began an exchange of letters between the two Generalates about which Order the Spanish monasteries belonged to. The position of the Cistercian Order was put forward in Dom Kleiner’s letter of February 25, 1970, and the arguments varied little in the future: the monasteries of Spanish nuns were not founded by the Trappists and were never incorporated into the new Order of the Strict Observance, which separated from the Cistercians in 1892. The 1898 indult, which entrusts a certain number of these monasteries to the care of the Trappists, speaks only of spiritual direction; and if an indult is needed for passing over to the OCSO, as is the custom, it is further proof that they do not belong to the OCSO. They therefore belong to the SOC, even though it has not approved their statutes and though the nuns do not have a relationship with that Order’s superiors. These arguments caused surprise both to the Trappists and to the Federation, which, in 1969, had expressed its wish—by a 639 to 50 vote—to have the same Constitutions as the Trappist nuns.¹⁸

Dom Kleiner reiterated his grievances and his denunciation to the Holy See when he heard that the 1974 OCSO General Chapter was about to examine the Federation’s “wish,” one proposal of which was that the OCSO Abbot General be considered as the Federation’s own superior.¹⁹ Kleiner deplored the “odious” man-

¹⁷ She died at the age of 103 on October 25, 2005.

¹⁸ Among the 50 votes opposing this request, 25 came from the same monastery, which, since that time, has passed over to the other Federation.

¹⁹ See the General Chapters of the Federation of 1967 and 1973. The Federation’s Council drew up this vote on March 7, 1972. According to Dom Vincent (a note in the archives of the OCSO Generalate), who was not consulted, this draft was not well worded, and caused a strong reaction on the part of Dom Kleiner.

ner in which the two Federations were totally separated, whereas they belong to the same Order, and he objected to the appointment of a Trappist assistant to succeed Fr. Larrinoa, who died in January 1974. Kleiner also sent a letter to each community of the Federation (and to the bishop of each), which evoked a reaction of surprise from the Abbess President and her Council.

In order not to strain relations even further, the Trappist General Chapter of April–May 1974 limited itself to making a general statement, confirming its spiritual ties with the Federation: it received the Federation’s “wish” favorably, but did not give it enough juridical weight to change its situation vis-à-vis the Order.

But since the matter had been submitted to the arbitration of the Holy See, each party had to refine its arguments in the course of the following year. The Spanish Trappist definitior, Dom Benito Ramos, stressed the consequences of the links to the ocsco granted in the 1898 indult, which, according to him, implied real membership in the Order.²⁰

His argumentation, however, was not acceptable, in that the soc did not see the 1898 act as a “change” of Order, which it thought necessary. Rather than try to affirm that the Spanish nuns belonged *as much if not more* to the ocsco than to the soc, it would have been better to show that they belonged *no more and even less* to the soc than to the ocsco. Dom Vincent, the Trappist Procurator, grasped well Dom Kleiner’s presupposition, namely, that any house that was not Trappist after 1892 belonged to his Order.²¹ It was this a priori notion that needed to be discussed. As we showed earlier (see § 1.6 and the introduction to this chapter), it is important not to confuse the Cistercian Family with the modern canonical Order of the Common Observance, even though it is now called—*motu proprio*—the Cistercian Order *tout court*. The monasteries of Spanish nuns were never included in the canonical definitions of this Order since 1868: they are, of course, Cistercian, but they are canonically autonomous.²² If an intervention from the Holy See

20 His work was presented to the Trappist capitulants in 1974, but Dom Vincent had expressed reservations about his arguments (note of March 28, 1974, archives of the ocsco Generalate), harking back to what he had affirmed in his 1951 *Commentarium*, p. 29. However, as an answer to the objection that the ocsco’s General Chapter does not have authority over the Spanish nuns in the same way it does over the French nuns, it can be said that the soc General Chapter has no greater oversight of them, which, as Dom Kleiner saw it, did not prevent them from belonging to his Order.

21 See his letter to Dom Kleiner on April 3, 1974 (archives of the ocsco Generalate). On April 20, Dom Gregorio Battista, the soc Procurator, wrote that his Order is “in fact and by right the heir of the entire Cistercian tradition” (archives of the ocsco Generalate). He went so far as to say that the present occupants of Cîteaux do not belong to the same Order as had their forebears before 1792—as if there were no physical continuity between the twentieth-century Trappists and those of pre-Revolution France, via La Valsainte.

22 The same applies to the Swiss monasteries of Géronde and Collombey, which affirm their Cistercian character, whereas Dom Kleiner expressed doubt about their belonging to his Order, because they had no ties with the superiors of that Order. There seems to be no reason for reasoning any differently in the case of the monasteries of Las Huelgas.

is needed for communities to be incorporated in the strict sense into one or the other Order, it is because there is need to change from the Bishop's jurisdiction to that of the Order.

Unfortunately, both sides underestimating importance of the decree *Disciplinae Regularis* of May 27, 1868, the OCSO could not develop strong arguments in the face of what had become a common opinion in the SOC. Neither side was able to convince the other, and the meeting of the two Abbots General and the two Procurators on May 22, 1974 at the Congregation for Religious produced no results.

On the one hand, the SOC wanted above all to defend its rights, and was not against the OCSO having a pastoral relationship with communities of the Federation. On the other hand, none of these communities was requesting full integration into the OCSO. So efforts were made to calm this tempest in a teapot, as Dom Vincent called it, but they led to undesirable consequences in the long run. After a vote was taken in the Federation in July 1974 (of the 558 voters, 550 were in favor of belonging to the OCSO), and after Dom Kleiner withdrew his opposition to there being a Trappist assistant for the Federation, on November 5, 1974, the Holy See appointed to that position Dom Benito Ramos, who up to that time had been Spanish-speaking Definitor. This appointment helped reduce the tension between the two Orders. A letter from Dom Kleiner on August 10, 1975, submitting to the decision of the Holy See, brought the matter to a close as far as he was concerned.²³

10.2.4. Toward the Formation of an Autonomous Congregation

The Federation wanted Constitutions similar to those of the Trappist nuns. The first thing to be done was to firm up these Constitutions, because even within the OCSO, the relationship between the monks and nuns was not yet well defined, nor was it officially approved by the Holy See. The matter was cleared up, as we know, during the joint meeting of the two OCSO General Chapters in 1987. But at its 1985 Chapter, at which M. María Jesús Frenández Estalayo was elected Abbess President, the Federation requested to become a Congregation within the OCSO. At the 1987 OCSO General Chapters, the abbots accepted (54 yes, 22, no, and 1 abstention) that this request be presented to the Holy See, but the abbesses turned it down (22 yes, 30 no, and 3 abstentions). The Permanent Council was charged with organizing further reflection on this question in the Regional Conferences.

The idea of introducing a Congregation into the Order aroused fears of leaving

²³ Dom Vincent expressed his views in an article entitled "L'appartenance des moniales cisterciennes à l'Ordre" (*Collectanea*, 1975, pp. 130-38).

the door open to dividing the Order into Congregations or Provinces, structures that the Order had never allowed since 1892. The objection was easily overcome, because this congregational structure had to do solely with the Las Huelgas monasteries, which were already federated. Las Huelgas would be, as it were, appended to the Order, and nothing would change for houses already incorporated into the Order.

The Regional Conferences proceeded to reflect on the matter, and the Central Commissions meeting at Cardeña in late January, 1989 made it possible to hold a meeting with the Council of the Las Huelgas Federation on January 30. At its meetings at Engelszell in May 1989 and at a later meeting at Orval, the Order's Law Commission proposed several solutions, ranging from "minimal" to "maximal." A question that frequently arose was that of the relationship between the Congregation and the supreme authority of the Order in the case of a union. In other words, how would the *interdependence* spoken of in the 1987 draft of the ocsso Constitutions actually be played out between the three General Chapters? For her part, in response to the request of the Americans, the Mother President of the Federation sent documentation about the communities in the Federation to all our houses, so that everyone would be better informed.

An incorporation of the Congregation into the Order would have again raised the question of the Congregation's relationship with the Cistercian Order (of the Common Observance). Since 1974, the latter had consistently claimed that the monasteries of the Federation belonged to the soc, and considered a closer canonical connection with the ocsso as a "transitus" from one Order to the other, which would require the previous approval of the soc General Chapter, an approval it was willing to give if requested. This is the position expounded on at length in an in-depth study by Polycarp Zakar, who adopted the point of view of Dom Kleiner, whom he succeeded as Abbot General in 1985. Zakar sent his study to Dom Ambrose even before the September 1990 meeting of the General Chapters.²⁴

In the end, the idea of incorporation in the strict sense was abandoned. The Federation was to become an autonomous Congregation with juridical links to the Order. Since there was no question of an actual incorporation, it was not a "transitus," and there was therefore no need for involvement on the part of the soc General Chapter, with which Las Huelgas had never anything to do. The September 1990 ocsso Chapters accepted in principle to extend the General Chapter's jurisdiction to the Las Huelgas monasteries, according to canon 614, which would involve "juridical power, the right to preside over and confirm elections of ab-

²⁴ Dom Polycarp's position is presented in his article "De statu iuridico monasteriorum monialium Foederationis Regularis Observantiae S. Bernardi in Hispania" (*Commentarium pro Religiosis*, 1991), pp. 93-120.

besses, to accept their resignations, to make visitations, and to dispense from temporary vows” (proposals voted in by a vote of 81 to 9 in the abbots’ Chapter and 52 to 7, with one abstention, in the abbesses’ Chapter). The Abbot General would provide the concrete link between the Order and the new Congregation.

The Federation presented its Constitutions to the Holy See as early as 1991. The way they were formulated raised objections in some Regional Conferences, leading to yet another discussion at the 1991 Central Commissions. Meanwhile, the soc also approached the Holy See, which, at first, postponed study of the Constitutions until the two Cistercian Orders managed to reach an agreement. Since neither side would budge, in 1994, the Holy See suggested that the Las Huelgas Constitutions contain no mention of the ocsoc. That way its ties with the Order, which would be of an essentially spiritual nature, would be mentioned only in a separate statute approved by Rome. The Holy See recognized that such an approach would help avoid creating even more serious difficulties between the two Cistercian Orders.²⁵

This solution was adopted. The autonomous Congregation was officially erected on December 8, 1994, and its Constitutions were approved along with a statute of association with the ocsoc, which allows for practically no jurisdiction over the new Congregation on the part of the Order. The Congregation is exempt from the jurisdiction both of bishops and of any monastic Order. Its association with the ocsoc is made concrete by a certain number of services and by ties of communion. It should be noted, however, that confirmation of the ocsoc Abbot General is sufficient for the appointment of a monastic Assistant. The Abbot General can also be delegated to make Regular Visitations or to preside of the General Chapter (without voting rights), and may gather information about the state of the Congregation. The arrangement thus involves more than association on a spiritual level.

Somewhat later, Dom Polycarp Zakar, who would have liked to see this “useless and ambiguous” statute done away with, obtained a letter from the Holy See, dated April 30, 1995,²⁶ acknowledging that the fact of being erected as a Congregation did not modify its earlier membership in the monastic Order—no more, let it be added, than the 1892 establishment of the ocsoc changed its previous monastic affiliation.²⁷ The real question is the nature of this membership. The Holy See adopted the position of the recipient of the letter (who was also a consultant of the Congregation) without criticizing it, which is just as well, since it both satis-

25 See the April 30, 1995 letter to Dom Zakar, mentioned in the next footnote.

26 See the text of this letter in *Anal. Cist.* 1997, pp. 339–40.

27 The Las Huelgas Congregation is as autonomous as the ocsoc is in relation to the soc. It is surprising to see that, concerning Las Huelgas, the soc persists to claim that there is no separation, whereas it continues to say that the Trappists cut themselves off from the Cistercian trunk by forming an order in 1892. One wonders how such a divergent understanding can be justified.

fied him and contributed to peace between the two Orders.²⁸ But the letter does not make an infallible judgement on this point, which is a juridical and historical matter that lends itself to the free interpretation of those who wish to consider the facts in a different way. Dom Bernardo Olivera, ocsa Abbot General, made this point discreetly when acknowledging to Cardinal Somalo that he had received a copy of this letter. The Procurator, Dom Armand Veilleux, made the point more forcefully, offering the Cardinal several arguments in favor of his interpretation. There is probably little chance that the interpretations of the two sides will ever be in agreement; the important thing is to maintain communion.

11.3. RELATIONS WITH THE BERNARDINES

The **Bernardines of Esquermes** originated with three nuns from ancient Cistercian abbeys in the north of France that were dispersed at the time of the French Revolution. After the Revolution the three sisters came together with the single concern of reestablishing their Cistercian monastic life. After several years in exile, moving from place to place, they finally settled in the little village of Esquermes, near Lille (now a suburb of the town), and were officially recognized in 1827. They were nevertheless of diocesan right, and opened a boarding school, which provided them with a shield on the social level. Still today they remain involved in education. An important factor in the community's growth was the forty-year term as superior of Dame Gérard, elected to that position in 1840 at the age of twenty-eight. A foundation was made at Cambrai in 1846. Later, faced with further political threats in the 1880s, two refuge houses were set up in Belgium and England. The sisters sought to strengthen their ties with the Trappists, but customs and structures were too dissimilar to make union possible. They had to go into exile from 1904 until the end of the First World War. In 1936, on the basis of mutual informal ties that had already been established, their spiritual links with the ocsa were made official, and in 1955 the Bernardines were officially recognized by the Church as an Order of Cistercian Nuns with solemn vows.²⁹ There are good neighborly relations between the Bernardines and the ocsa in the places they have settled, especially at Goma, not far from the monks of Mokoto.

Fore their part, some nuns from Flines (North France) managed to restore

²⁸ This position reappears in the 2000 Declaration of the oc General Chapter on communion in the Cistercian Family.

²⁹ See the article "Aperçu historique sur la Congrégation des Bernardines d'Esquermes et sur les abbayes don't elles sont issues," *Collectanea*, 1938, pp. 96–106. See also the *Observantiae* study program, pp. 111–19.

their ancient abbey in 1818. Thus began the **Bernardines of Flines**, who tried in vain to become connected with the Trappist sisters of Laval; they could not give up the small schools they had taken on during the Revolution. In 1891 they totaled sixty-nine sisters, and a decree of 1891 associates them to the Cistercians of the Strict Observance. This state of affairs continued until 1950.

At the 2002 OCSO General Chapter, the Prioress General of the **Bernardines of Oudenaarde** introduced her Congregation to the Chapter. Their rule of life goes back to the thirteenth century, and already at that time a community of Cistercian nuns joined their group. Since then, the sisters, who engage in a certain amount of apostolic activity, consider Cistercian spirituality as the source of inspiration for their vocation. From Belgian Flanders, they have also settled in Rwanda, where they were generous in helping the Trappist monks and nuns of Kivu during the time of political upheaval in the region. They are also in Chad and Burkina Faso, in close contact with Islam, in Chad with fundamentalists and in Burkina Faso with a more tolerant branch of Islam.

There are two diocesan right communities in Switzerland that belong to the seventeenth-century tradition of **Mother Louyse de Ballon** (see the *Observantiae* study program, pp. 80–84). Although they are not incorporated in the SOC or the OCSO, they are well integrated into the Cistercian Family, especially in Switzerland. Their superiors are regularly invited to meetings of Trappist superiors in the French-speaking Regional Conferences. The same applies to the prioress of **La Merci-Dieu**, in the diocese of Mans (France), an autonomous community that calls itself Cistercian, rather than Bernardine. This community was born in the 1920s under the influence of Bricquebec and Dom Vital Lehodey. The community is intended for persons who wish live Cistercian spirituality, but who are unable to keep the strict discipline of Trappist observance. The OCSO General Chapters of 1977 and 1978 accepted the community as taking part in the spiritual benefits of the Order, and as recently as November 2007 the community was recognized as an autonomous priory under the local bishop, with authorization from the Holy See. According to their Constitutions, an OCSO abbot is delegated by the bishop to accompany the community. At present the abbot of Melleray fulfils this function.

11.4. LAY ASSOCIATES

In a paper dated January 1, 1995, Dom Bernardo, Abbot General, reflected on a phenomenon that seemed to be spreading:

In various places where our Order exists today, we see persons or groups who want to share our charism in one way or another. In certain places, this is evident by the presence of rooms or houses set aside for groups (often of young people). There are also groups of benefactors who organize to help some community. Finally there is no lack of requests for a kind of association in view of some form of oblate program. These facts, which are relatively new for our Order, coincide with the upsurge of lay people in the life of the Church. In several countries, lay movements have changed the concept and vision of the Church itself. The recent Code of Canon Law has “canonized” the desire of lay people to share the life and spirituality of religious institutes. According to Canon 303, each institute can establish a type of association with lay people. How should we interpret these facts? What is the Lord trying to tell us through this sign of the times which certainly seems like a sign from God.³⁰

In fact, however, as he goes on to say later in the text, the phenomenon is not new. In the Middle Ages Cîteaux introduced Lay Brothers, who, at the time, were not monks but, rather, lay associates, distinct from hired workers (see *Exordium Parvum* 15). They were helpers who also took part in the spiritual and material benefits of the monks (*Summa Cartae Caritatis* 20). The military Orders of Calatrava in Spain, also during the twelfth century, represented another form of opening the Cistercian charism to the lay world. The Cistercian charism is an “open” charism; we have no need to protect it as if it were our private reserve. In our day, lay persons, while remaining lay, approach us with an attraction for living out this charism in a way compatible with their vocation as Christians engaged in secular life. As Dom Bernardo says further on in his paper:

No one possesses the Cistercian charism as private property. Our charism basically belongs to the Church. The Spirit can share it with whomever He wants, in whatever measure and in whatever form. We Cistercians have

³⁰ Bernardo Olivera, “Provocative Reflections on Charismatic Associations,” *The Search for God*, CS 199 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2002) 285–86.

given an historical monastic form to this particular gift of the Spirit. This monastic form is an integral part of the original charism from the beginning. However, that does not prevent the charism from being shared with the lay brothers, the family brothers and the knights of the military Orders, as we have seen. Can the fact that lay people of today feel drawn by the Cistercian charism and recognize themselves in it, be understood as a sign that the Spirit wants to share it with them, so that the Cistercian charism receive a secular form at this moment of our history?³¹

At the General Chapter at Holyoke (USA) in 1984, Msgr. Harvey R. Graveline of New York asked a superior of the Order to present to the Chapter his draft text entitled “A Secular Trappist Order.” This request was mentioned briefly in a plenary session toward the end of the Chapter, which had been entirely dedicated to finalizing the Constitutions. Although no one was interested in a sort of “Third Order,” the reaction of the capitulants was rather positive. It was merely pointed out that there was no need to legislate on this point, and that nothing prevented communities from forming spiritual ties with lay groups.

A group of this kind had already begun to form at Holy Spirit monastery (Conyers, USA) in the early 1980s. This group took on a more official status in 1987, and its first members made their “commitment” *in the presence of* the monastic community and its abbot on March 25, 1990.

In 1992, the Permanent Council drew up a document entitled “The Road to Autonomy: On the various ways to make a foundation (and related questions)” for the Central Commissions that met at the Abbey of Gethsemani. The Central Commissions put this document on the agenda for the 1993 MGM, where it was treated by ordinary procedure, i.e., by four Mixed Commissions. The part of the document that interests us here is the following:

Various monasteries of the Order have in their vicinity people who, over the years, have developed a special spiritual relationship with the monastery and would like to become “Oblates” or “Associates” of the community. They are generally men and women who have found in their contact with the Cistercian monastic community the source of their own spiritual life. [...] They are lay-people, single or married, who continue to assume their family and social responsibilities, but are eager to develop the contemplative dimension of their life. [...] This is part of a much larger phenomenon. The post-synodal document published by John Paul II after the synod on

31 Olivera, *The Search for God*, 315.

the Laity (*Christifideles Laici*) has a section (cf. especially §§ 29-31) on the importance of such lay communities. [...] The Union of Superior Generals (men) and the International Union of Superior Generals (women) in Rome studied this question in several occasions during the last few years.³²

Such groups or authentic communities of lay people finding in the Cistercian spirituality the inspiration for their life must be clearly distinguished from the several lay people who individually are frequent visitors of our communities or of guest houses, as well as from the large family of Cistercian scholars who form a wonderful family of their own and the “friends” of this or that ancient Cistercian abbey. It is probably too early and perhaps not necessary for the Order to legislate about this; but should not the Order acknowledge in some way the fact that communities of lay people have adopted the Cistercian spirituality as the source of their spiritual life and are giving a new concrete expression to the Cistercian charism? [...]

Apart from sharing in the spiritual life of the community, these persons/groups, in many cases, want to help the monks or nuns in practical ways, especially in the more and more complex relationships of the community with the outside world, for example in business, financial and legal matters. One is justified to see in that development something totally consonant with the original form of the institution of the laybrothers in the twelfth century and with the original insight of that institution. (Recent historical studies have shown that the laybrothers in the first centuries of the Order played an important role in the material administration of the Cistercian domains, often signing the important legal documents).

The question of the “laybrothers’ vocation” has never been satisfactorily solved in our Order and will be considered again at this General Chapter. Would it be realistic to think that we can simply return to the situation of thirty years ago? Perhaps this unresolved question can find a solution in two complementary directions, the first one being the use of a well understood pluralism within the communities of the Order (as provided for in our Cst. 14.2) and the other one being the development of such autonomous lay communities living a new expression of the Cistercian charism in the world, in communion with the monastic cloistered Cistercian communities.

This matter was studied carefully by the four Commissions in question, and the Chapter came to the same conclusion as in 1984. There was no need to legis-

³² A good analysis of the present evolution, done by Fr. Bruno Secondin, O. Carm, was published in *Informations* (the periodical of the Congregation of Religious) in December 1991, and reproduced in French in *Documentation Catholique*, May 3, 1992.

late; rather, the spiritual movement should be allowed to evolve. The Regions were invited to pay attention to this development.

Meanwhile, a certain number of groups had formed, not only in the United States but also in other parts of the Order. In January 1995, after having visited the Conyers group in previous years, Dom Bernardo wrote a document that we cited at the beginning of this chapter: "Provocative Reflections on Charismatic Associations." This document was written mainly for lay persons. It invited them to express their reactions, and some did. In this way, there gradually developed a sort of common vision among the rather diverse groups. Dom Bernardo took up the question again at the 1996 General Chapter. It was the third of the three utopias he presented, and he wondered whether the time had not come to draw up a Statue of Confraternity to regulate the association between the Order and the various lay groups, both those already in place and those yet to be formed.³³

Pope John Paul II mentioned this lay spiritual movement in his Message to the Cistercian Family at the time of the ninth centenary of the foundation of Cîteaux. He encouraged monks and nuns:

I encourage you according to your circumstances to discern with prudence and a prophetic sense, the participation of lay faithful in your spiritual family, under the form of "associate members" or following the present needs in certain cultural contexts, under the form of a temporary sharing in community life" (*Vita Consecrata* 56), and a commitment to contemplation, provided that the special identity of your monastic life is not impaired.

Some groups connected with various monasteries in the United States met at Genesee in October, 1999, and wrote up a document entitled "The Bond of Charity," which expressed not only the common points of their aspirations but also their struggle to be a leaven in the contemporary world by living out the Cistercian charism. That same year, Veronica Umegakwe, from Nigeria, was invited to come to Lourdes to speak to the capitulants about the great vitality of the Cistercian lay groups in her country, formed under the patronage of the Bl. Cyprian Tansi.

In the years that followed, the Lay Cistercians organized three International Encounters, held on their own initiative. They were invited to meet at the monastery of Quilvo, in Chile, in January 2000, by a group that had just recently been formed. In addition to the Chilean Lay Cistercians, there were participants from France and the United States, representing seven communities. They drew up a document that was published and sent to the Abbot General, Dom Bernardo Olivera.

33 See Bernardo Olivera, *The Search for God*, CS 199 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2002) 53–55.

A second International Encounter was held at Holy Spirit (Conyers, USA) April 24–30, 2002, with a hundred participants coming from twenty-six groups of Lay Cistercians associated with monasteries in Canada, Chile, France, Ireland, Nigeria, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United States, and Venezuela. The achievement of this Encounter was to set up international structures linking the various Lay Cistercians among themselves. A Coordinating Commission of five representatives was created to prepare the following Encounter, which was to be held at Clairvaux (France) in 2005. A Communication Commission of seven persons was also established to help maintain an ongoing dialogue, and to administer a web site (<http://cistercianfamily.org>, in three languages: English, French, and Spanish). At that meeting a letter was addressed to the General Chapter; it included the following passages:

We are lay men and women who feel deeply the call to be seekers of God within the Cistercian tradition. We accept the Rule of St. Benedict as our guide for living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From the richness and the diversity of our groups, similar values and practices bind us together. These include:

- lectio divina
- individual, communal and liturgical prayer
- simplicity of life
- conversatio morum
- interior silence and contemplation
- work as a way to holiness

[...] The growing numbers of new communities and individuals seeking our help in following the Cistercian way present us with some challenges. [...] We believe the moment has come to ask you for a word of wisdom and encouragement for our endeavors to live the Cistercian charism in the world. Thus we ask the General Chapters to discern the authenticity of this work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The fraternal help and prayer of the Order is an important element in our authentic response to the presence of Jesus in our hearts and to the renewal of the Church in this new millennium.

Acknowledging the clear call of the Holy Spirit through these flourishing groups of lay persons desiring to live the Cistercian charism, the General Chapter accepted, on September 24, 2002, to offer the word of wisdom that had been requested. Referring to the Pope's words in his 1998 Message, the General Chapter wrote:

These words of the Pope will be for you as for us a reference point in order to discern how each of us will participate in the same charism. Our differences are evident yet we have the same spirit. In respecting these differences, our unity will be able to grow on solid and lasting foundations. We don't know what the future holds for us, but our vision of the Cistercian Family recognizes you as authentic witnesses of the Cistercian vocation fully engaged in the world. We are moved and profoundly grateful to the Spirit working in you. The Spirit is the master and guide of our unity in the diversity of our states of life. Even if your oldest groups have already some years of experience, it is a question of a new situation for you as for us. Each of our communities is autonomous and will respond to you according to its cultural context, its own rhythm and the sensitivity of its members. Know that your interest in our monastic life encourages us to lead it ever more faithfully. Continue the path to which you are committed, sharing with us the tradition that gives us life.

One of the main characteristics of the movement at present is that lay *groups* or *communities*—and not just individuals, as had already been the case for a long time—establish bonds with a monastic community, with structures and norms proper to each. One particularity of the “Grange of Clairvaux” is that it forms an independent group, even though some of its members frequent one or another abbey, and even though as a group it has a special link with Cîteaux. Created in 1990, and recognized by the state as an “association,” it meets at the site of an ancient grange of the abbey founded by Saint Bernard. “It draws together lay Cistercians as well as those seeking a way of life based on the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Cistercian spirit: a simple life-style where relations with others, work and prayer are harmoniously balanced with regular reading the Word of God. It wishes to be a place of Christian brotherliness, a place of worship and a place for meeting others.” It organizes a *monthly* day of meeting, with time for praying the Psalms, reading the Rule of Saint Benedict in a way adapted to lay life, time for formation in Cistercian culture and tradition, and celebration of the Eucharist. *Yearly* it holds several community days of reflection, prayer, and formation.

Although it does not have facilities to house guests, the Grange hosted the third International Encounter of Lay Cistercians, June 1–7, 2005. Around 130 persons (including twenty monks and nuns) represented 34 groups from around the world. This Encounter, which the Abbot General attended, affirmed that what these Lay Cistercians have in common is their seeking to practice such values as *lectio*, personal, communal, and liturgical prayer, simplicity of life, *conversatio morum*, inner silence and contemplation, and, lastly, work as a path of sanctifica-

tion. Moreover, it was found that each group was rooted in and strengthened by devotion to Mary, Queen of Cîteaux, that they were developing a growing sense of community among persons, and that they were actively living their mission in the world. Far from wanting to pretend being monks or nuns, their aspiration is to incarnate in their lives as lay persons—in their family and professional life—the fundamental values of Cistercian spirituality, which monks and nuns incarnate in their cloisters.

At the Clairvaux Encounter, an International Committee was elected to create a bond among all the groups of Lay Associates throughout the world, and to establish relations with the Order as a whole. For this purpose, the 2005 General Chapter agreed to appoint Dom Armand Veilleux, abbot of Scourmont (Belgium) as the liaison person between the Order and the Committee. It is hoped that this structure will foster exchange about those elements that are common and those that are distinct, and will provide both new and old groups with spiritual resources. It is not a matter of attaining uniformity, but of identifying the basics held in common by all Lay Cistercian groups. Today there are sixty groups worldwide, on the five continents, but are most numerous in the United States and France, along with Spain and Latin America. It should be pointed out that they are not connected solely with the Cistercians of the Strict Observance; some, though fewer in number, are associated with monasteries of the Cistercian Order or with Bernardines.

All of these groups, in their various stages of growth, are experiencing more or less the same thing, as is noticed at International Encounters at which each group introduces itself. There are, of courses, differences in emphasis, but usually they are minor. Some groups in the United States believe strongly that the Cistercian charism is also open to non-Catholic Christians, a position not accepted by all.³⁴ Some would like to make commitments, even private vows, whereas others want nothing of the sort.

Moreover, the purpose of the groups—as they themselves think and say—is not to take the place of communities: they are like a new branch on a tree trunk, a branch that could not live on if the trunk were to die. There is no risk of confusion between Lay Cistercians and monks or nuns. To confuse the two would be to render sterile the rich new growth aroused by the Spirit. As a member of the in-

³⁴ This disagreement probably has to do with intercommunion, because the Cistercian charism can extend beyond the boundaries of Catholicism. There is, for instance, the Anglican Cistercian community of Ewell, spiritually associated with the *ocso* (see <http://arnesen.co.uk>). In Germany, the *Gemeinschaft Evang. Zisterzienser-Ereben*, related to the *oc* (which publishes in its *Elenchus* several of their addresses), brings together several Lutheran fraternities established in connection with ancient Cistercian abbeys (see www.evangelische-zisterzienser-erben.de). There also exists an ecumenical Cistercian community among the Old Catholics of the Union of Utrecht (www.abtei-st-severin.de).

ternational committee commented, “Cistercian” is an adjective, not a noun. Their name is that of lay persons in the world, not of monks. What they are looking for is to receive formation and guidance from monks and nuns. That is precisely the reason that some communities hesitate to accept a lay group organized around their community: they do not have sufficient personnel to provide this teaching and to attend to Lay Associates. Dom Bernardo raised the question in his 1995 paper: “How do establish formation programs without falling into a kind of apostolic activity foreign to our life?” Also, as an abbot pointed out at the 2005 General Chapter, there is the risk of setting up a lay fraternity alongside the community, in which monks or nuns would take part at the expense of their own community life.

This Lay Cistercian movement is in line with a Church-wide phenomenon in which Christians wish to benefit from the spirit and mission of religious Congregations and Societies of Apostolic Life. Such groups are called by a variety of names: collaborators, partners, associates, affiliates, or oblates. It is not always a one-way road, as *Christifideles laici* (§ 60) says well: “In turn, the lay faithful themselves can and should help priests and religious in the course of their spiritual and pastoral journey.”

The fourth International Encounter is scheduled for May 31–June 7, 2008, at the monastery of Huerta in Spain. The participants will reflect on three main points:

- What it means to live the Cistercian vocation in the world. Is it possible to live a Cistercian lifestyle in the world? Which Cistercian practices and values are they able to live out in that context?
- What it means for members of groups to live their Cistercian vocation together in community: What aspects of community contribute most to a sense of one’s Cistercian vocation, both together in the group and when apart?
- What it means to be in a spiritual relationship with a Cistercian monastery. What works well and what does not work so well?

At that meeting their intention is to reach a certain consensus on what constitutes the essential element of the Lay Cistercian vocation, and on what basis a lay person or a group of lay persons can call themselves *Cistercian*. Although some groups do not see it as important or are even annoyed by the idea, more and more of the members think the time has come to seek a certain official recognition. Theoretically, there are two possibilities: all Lay Cistercian groups as a whole could become recognized by the Holy See as an Association of Laypersons living Cistercian spirituality in the world, or the recognition could come from the two Cistercian Orders in a way yet to be defined. From the document produced by

the Lay Cistercians at Huerta and communicated to the September 2008 General Chapters at Assisi, and from the Chapters' response, we will see where the Spirit is blowing.

11.5. THE NINTH CENTENARY OF CÎTEAUX (1998)

Shortly before the ninth centenary of the foundation of Cîteaux, John Paul II sent a letter on March 6, 1998 to the "Members of the Cistercian Family," thus highlighting a title used earlier by Leo XIII in 1902. The Pope exhorted them to seek closer communion:

Returning today to its primitive inspiration after nine continuous centuries that have not always been exempt from reverses, the Cistercian Family recognizes itself in the founding grace of the first Fathers. It also discovers *the legitimate diversity of its traditions* which are a benefit for all and which express the vitality of the original charism. In this the Church sees the work of a single Spirit, beginning with the same gift. In this celebration of the foundation of Cîteaux, I heartily encourage the communities that form the great Cistercian family to enter together into the new millennium in true communion, in mutual confidence and in the respect for the traditions inherited from history. May this anniversary of the "New Monastery" which has been such a great center of light in the Church and in the world, be for all a reminder of a common origin and a common belonging, and a symbol of a unity that is constantly to be received and constantly to be built.

The high point celebration was on March 21 at what some have called a new "Pentecost": around 800 monks and nuns from the various Orders and Congregations of the Cistercian Family gathered at the place of their origins. What had not been possible in 1898 became so a century later: overcoming the obstacles of a long history, all came together as brothers and sisters to thank God, whose Spirit continues to foster Cistercian life and to inspire new ways of living the Founders' charism. A few days earlier, a "synaxis" had been held, bringing together representatives of the various Cistercian persuasions: the Abbots General and the Prioress General of the three Orders (OC, OCSO, and Esquermes), the Prioress General of the Bernardines of Oudenaarde, the Abbess President of the Congregation of Las Huelgas, other monks and nuns of the various Congregations, and two lay "Associates." The minutes of this meeting, drawn up by Dom Armand Veilleux, can

be found on the Order's website. It is there explained that a first draft of the Charter of unanimity in diversity of which Dom Bernardo had "dreamed," had been written by a small preparatory commission made up of members of the various Orders and studied by still others. However, it seemed there was insufficient time during the synaxis to finalize this document, which the various monasteries of all the branches of the Family had not yet been able to study. During the meeting a *Message* was written on the part of all the participants, not in their "institutional" capacities, but in their own name. This message was read by the Abbot General of the OC during the Mass on March 21.

One passage in this message calls on each community to "do what is possible at every level to ensure the growth of communication, dialogue and collaboration between the diverse members of the Cistercian family. In particular, we ask our Superiors General to form a commission with the mandate of continuing the work of this Synaxis, and the promotion of everything that advances our communion." This commission was in fact appointed (at least on the part of the OCSO), but has never met. Nonetheless there have been other initiatives to hold meetings, like the common study sessions for formators or in collaboration with ARCCIS (see § 13.2., below). The 1999 OCSO General Chapter at Lourdes drafted a brief Declaration that encouraged these kinds of meetings: "We urge our local communities and Regional Conferences to continue to encourage and develop bonds of charity and collaboration with all the communities of the Cistercian family, by inviting them to events such as celebrations, meetings, conferences and workshops, and by accepting the invitations which these communities extend to us." A concrete project that involved members of the entire Cistercian Family was the 2002 study program *Observantiae*, begun at the initiative of Dom Bernardo Olivera, who entrusted its organization to M. Marie-Pascale of Chambarand, central Secretary for Formation.

The community of Cîteaux plays a special role by virtue of its geographical position. As the declaration of the 1999 MGM put it: "Within the Cistercian communion, for which each local community is responsible, we recognize the community of Cîteaux, mother of us all, as holding a special place. We encourage the Cîteaux community, as a historical symbol of the unity of the Cistercian Family, to continue offering generous and fraternal hospitality to all members of the Cistercian Family who come there to find the place our common origins."

This symbolic calling is nonetheless a very real one, commented the abbot of Cîteaux: concretely it means taking on Mary's attitude, namely, "to do nothing that might appear as a show of strength, but to make sure that the wine of the

Wedding be served.”³⁵ Among the meaningful gestures that have been made, it is worth pointing out the 2001 Regular Visitation of the Cîteaux community, carried out by Dom Bernado—who, as Abbot General, acts as Father Immediate—and the abbot of Marienstatt (OC), both of whom signed the Visitation Card. In his parting words, the abbot of Marienstatt said to the brothers: “You are the heirs and guardians of this place, and you fill it with an authentic spiritual life. Without your living community, Cîteaux would be just another historical monument, with no spiritual strength or influence. Your identity must be maintained as it is.” And he invited them to take on their duty “of being *Mater nostra*, calling her sons and daughters to unity, inviting them to foster and consolidate this unity.”

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The Cistercian Family is therefore something very real, even if it has no juridical basis. We have seen that it includes several Orders and Congregations that have their own, often autonomous, juridical structures independently of each other. But we have also seen that there is an increasingly lively rapport among them, in an effort to correct past attitudes that sometimes placed them in opposition. There is no point in placing the blame on our predecessors; they were conditioned by the spirit of their times, when unity of observances was important.³⁶ In our day, we are more attentive to what is experienced at a deeper level—i.e. the Cistercian charism—than to the exterior ways of living it out, allowing for legitimate and healthy pluralism according to historical traditions and local context. We are thus able to take steps toward communion and unity more closely in keeping with the ecclesial climate of our times, all of which is a positive development.

One might wonder whether it would not be better for the spiritual unity of the Cistercian Family to take concrete shape through an exterior sign like, for example, a single “presidency” that would have no juridical authority but that would carry considerable symbolic weight. When on October 7, 1892, the Trappist abbots decided that their three Congregations would become a single autonomous Order with its own Abbot General, the abbot of Melleray, Dom Eugène Vachette proposed that this Abbot General give precedence to the Abbot General of the Common Observance in ceremonies they both attend. Cardinal Mazella, who oversaw that session, put the question off until the time of writing the Constitutions. But

³⁵ See *Les Amis des Monastères*, 153 (January, 2008), p. 20.

³⁶ At the 1952 General Chapter, Dom Sortais stated: “Union cannot take place unless the Common Observance decides to return to the purely contemplative ideal of the Founders.”

when that time came the following year, Dom Vachette's proposal was forgotten. It could be revived today in another form, for example, by having an honorary Presidency over the Cistercian Family, that is, unless people think that role falls naturally to the abbot of the community settled in the place of our foundation.

At the Heart of the Church-in-Communion

12.1. THE TESTIMONY OF THE MARTYRS

(by Sister Augusta Tescari)¹

The twentieth century was a century of martyrs also for the Trappists. This fact was foreshadowed in the bloodless sacrifice of the young Louis-Marie van Rijckevorsel van Rijsenburg of Tilburg (1873–1892) who, inflamed by Dom Wyart's proposition, had offered his life that the union of the three Congregations might be realized. In addition, the refounding of the monastery of Cîteaux was marked by another sacrificial offering on the part of Bernard Rigaud, 22 years of age, one of four founders coming from Sept-Fons. In answer to the question of Dom Sebastian Wyart as to whether he was willing to offer his life for an undertaking that seemed very difficult, the young man had given his immediate consent. After moving into the monastery of Cîteaux, Bernard died from a pulmonary illness after having repeated his offering.

1904. The century that opened saw the martyrdom of **Louis Gonzague Brey** (1865–1904), lay Brother of the monastery of Maria Stern (Marija Zvijezda), in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He was German by birth, and lived his religious life with much fervor, with a great spirit of sacrifice, and with joy and fraternal charity. In 1902 he was sent with another brother to prepare a foundation in Oceania, on an island which today is called New Britain, and which then belonged to the Apostolic Vicariate of Rabaul. He was provisionally a guest of the missionaries of the place, and was working as a carpenter to help them finish a chapel for the mission station of Saint Paul. They were suddenly attacked by a group of Canachos, natives of the place. These were led by one named To Mari, already a Christian, whom the Superior of the Mission, Father Mateo Rascher, had tried to prevent from taking another wife. Louis Gonzague was killed, along with two Fathers of the Sacred

¹ Nun of Vitorchiano (Italy), Postulatrix General for the causes of beatification and canonization in the Order.

Heart, and two brothers of that Order, and five sisters. The other Trappist brother escaped death because he was absent at the time. In 1933 the Sacred Heart Fathers introduced the cause of beatification of these ten martyrs, and the *positio* was published, but the cause was abandoned for political reasons.

This is how the death of Brother Louis is described in the *informatio* of the cause regarding his martyrdom: "Having heard the shots, Brother Louis, came running to the house to find out the reason for the assassination of Padre Rascher. When To Mari tried to shoot him, he fled to a neighboring valley. If he had wanted to, he could have fled to the coast, but he returned. When To Mari aimed his shotgun at him, Tande, the foreman of the work at Saint Paul's, put himself in front of Brother Louis to protect him. But Tande was violently thrown aside and wounded. Then, when Brother Louis was fending off a stick blow aimed at his face, he received a shot-gun blast in the face. After this, he continued walking, and, after receiving a second blast in the side, he fell to the ground. To Mari shouted to his companions to kill him with their knives.

1920. The second martyr of the twentieth century was **Philippe Dormeyer** (1845–1920), who was assassinated at Chekhlè, in Siria. The monastery of Chekhlè, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, in the neighborhood of Akbès, in which Charles de Foucauld had lived for a time, was abandoned during the First World War. In 1919 after the Armistice, it was occupied by two Brothers with the intention of reviving monastic life there. One of these was an elderly monk named Philippe, a choir monk but not a priest, who had come to Syria around the end of 1882. In March of 1920, a band of Kemalistas invaded the village and searched the monastery. All the inhabitants, along with the other Trappist brother fled to Akbès, but they were unable to persuade Philippe to leave the place. In fact, he was well known, and thought he had nothing to fear, having done much good for the inhabitants of the place, including some of the bandits. A consistent oral tradition tells us that his death came about in this manner: those who were searching the monastery asked him about the Crucifix that he wore on his breast. He answered them quietly that it was our Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. "You mean you believe in Him?" they then asked him. "Certainly, I do," he answered. "Then we are going to do the same thing to you that they did to Him," they told him; taking hold of him, they nailed him to a doorframe as a sort of crucifixion. He died after an agony of two days. Another oral tradition has it that he was slain in the courtyard of the monastery or was shot while trying to flee to the mountain.

On May 10, 1925, the entire Cistercian family was called upon once again to face the reality of martyrdom, not because of a recent killing, but rather because of an ecclesial event that affected it directly: the beatification of the thirty-two martyrs of Orange. Among them were two Cistercian nuns, guillotined in 1794.

Margherita Eleonora and Maddalena Francesca, of noble families of Justamont, were nuns of the monastery of Saint Catherine of Avignon. Their religious names were: **Sister Marie of Saint Henry and Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart of Mary**. They were beheaded respectively on August 12 and 16, 1794.

1936—The martyrs of the Spanish Civil War. In 1936 during the Spanish Civil War, nineteen Trappists lost their lives. The community of Viaceli, in the Santander province, was expelled from its monastery on September 18, 1936, by agents of the Federation of Iberian Anarchists. Imprisoned, the monks were set free after a few days through the intervention of friends of the monks. Some of the monks were received in private houses, others managed to reach Bilbao, while still others joined together in Santander, forming three small communities that tried to maintain monastic life in secret.

On December 1, probably as the result of the work of an informer, a group made up only of Lay Brothers was arrested. The Marxist police, led by a certain Manuel Neila, noted for his cruelty, wanted to know how the monks supported themselves. Having mentioned that it was the Father Prior who was in charge of such matters, the Brothers, without realizing it, furnished the Communist agents with enough information to arrest a second group among whom were Padre Pío Heredia and other priests. Pío Heredia, accused under various pretexts, had absolutely no desire to furnish names during the painful interrogation and mistreatment of the trial held on the night of December 2. The purpose of the trial was to give an appearance of legality to the charges; it was really meant to express hatred for the faith and to obtain the addresses of benefactors.

According to the testimony of a fifteen year old oblate, who was with the monks but who was later released, the religious were loaded on a truck in two separate groups, one during the night of December 2–3, and the other on the following night. A twenty-three year old novice, Marcelino Martín Rubio, arrested with the group of Father Pío Heredia and inexplicably spared and released after fifteen days, was again arrested and murdered in circumstances that are not clear. Nothing is known of the two groups that were taken away on the two nights at the beginning of December. They were thrown into the sea from the cliffs near the Santander lighthouse (according to the boasting of one of the militiamen, which is perhaps not to be taken seriously) or taken by boat to the deep waters off the bay and thrown in, or perhaps—again according to indirect testimony—shot near the cemetery of the city. The second hypothesis seems the most likely: it was their usual method of eliminating victims.

At the end of December, a lay brother in simple vows, Leandro Gómez Gil, was discovered in a private house. He was one of the group of students and lay brothers who had prudently separated after the disappearance of Father Pío and

his companions. The others of the group took refuge in Bilbao, but Leandro did not dare to do so, since his name had come up again in a category that made him eligible to be drafted and mobilized. The Red police treated him horribly, to the point where blood was pouring from his mouth, nose, and ears, enough to soak a bedsheet. The following day he was forced into car and disappeared forever. He too was drowned, perhaps, or shot. The brother of the martyr knew immediately the names of those who had murdered him in hatred of the Faith and of the Church. The murderers were pardoned.

The passion of these monks was preceded by that of two of their brothers who had remained in the monastery. In fact, on the day of the expulsion, the Marxist bandits had detained two of the priests, the secretary, Father Eugenio García Pampliega and Father Vincenzo Pastor Garrido, under the pretext of inspecting and taking over the butter and cheese factory, but probably in the hopes of getting their hands on the money of the abbey, which was considered rich. Their investigation, however, did not succeed. On September 20 the anarchists offered to take the two Fathers with them in their car to Santander, putting off their departure until late at night. But about twenty kilometers from the monastery they shot them, leaving their bodies on the side of the road. The following day, people from nearby recovered their bodies and buried them in the cemetery of Rumoroso. It was not until 1940, after investigating all the information about the affair, that the monks of Viaceli exhumed the remains of the two monks (buried without coffins, one on top of the other), and transported them to the monastery, where they buried them in the reading cloister, behind the abbot's chair.

José Camí Camí was a twenty-nine year old priest, who wanted to enter Viaceli, where he had already been accepted. At the outbreak of the war he was in his native town of Aytona, to say farewell to his family before entering the monastery. Prevented from entering because of the hostilities, he was called up before the People's Committee and released shortly after. On the night of July 27, 1936, he was taken again; they wanted "the priest." Along with the assistant pastor of Aytona, he was tied to the back of a car, which took off at full speed, dragging the two priests for a number of kilometers. When they stopped at a crossroad, the two men had just enough strength to stand up, to embrace one another, and to pardon their murderers. They were finished off by gunfire, and then were crushed under the wheels of the car, which drove over their bodies a number of times. An eyewitness related the details of their murder to José's sister.

The Cause for Beatification for all of these martyrs has been introduced. The Diocesan Process was opened in 1996, sixty years after the martyrdom. To these sixteen martyrs of Viaceli, killed in 1936, we must add three members of the Community who perished in different circumstances.

- **Santiago Raba Río** (1910–1937), a professed choir monk and subdeacon, who was sent back to his family at the beginning of the civil war when the expulsion and dispersion of the community was immanent. Mobilized into the Communist army, he was immediately singled out as a monk, and for that reason was threatened with death. He himself confessed: “I won’t last long. They will certainly kill me, now that they know that I’m a religious.” In May of 1937 he was in fact found dead in a trench on the Biscay front with a bullet hole in the back of his head. He was twenty-six years old. According to his brother’s testimony, the corporal of the section said that, since the “brother” was not with the others, he went to look for him and found him in an attitude of prayer, at which point he discharged his pistol at the brother’s head.
- His confrere, **Ildefonso Telmo Duarte** (1912–1937), a twenty-four year old professed choir monk in simple vows, met with a similar fate. When his simple vows expired, his superiors, under the circumstances, did not dare admit him to solemn vows, preferring to wait for better times. He took refuge in his maternal grandmother’s house, but was denounced and arrested. When questioned by the Popular Front of Cóbreces, it was determined that the young man was indeed a religious. He courageously admitted the fact. Assigned to a disciplinary battalion, he was treated with great cruelty. On April 30, 1937, one of the guards threw a hand grenade at the group in which Ildefonso was working, killing him instantly. He was buried in a common grave.
- The Superior of the monastery of Huerta was another victim of the persecution that fell upon Spain during the Civil War, which cost the lives of about 6500 priests and men and women religious. **Lorenzo Olmedo Arrieta** (1888–1936) was forty-eight years old. As a child he entered the monastery of San Isidro de Dueñas. At the age of twenty he was sent to Viaceli, where he was later to be Master of Novices and Cellarer. Appointed superior of the foundation at Huerta, he was asked to go to help the nuns of Brihuega in the province of Guadalajara. Caught there at the outbreak of the war, he was first taken away secretly and released, and then arrested again. It seems that he was killed July 28, 1936. After the war, the clothes that he wore, as well as the remains of a Cistercian breviary, made it possible to identify his body, found buried in a shallow grave in the cemetery of Guadalajara.

Due to a lack of positive proof of martyrdom, these last three monks are not included in the cause of beatification.

The following is a complete list of the sixteen martyrs of Viaceli:

- 1 Pío Heredia Zubia (1875-1936), prior, priest
- 2 Amadeo García Rodríguez (1905-1936), priest
- 3 Valeriano García Rodríguez (1906-1936), priest
- 4 Juan Battista FerrisLlopis (1905-1936), priest
- 5 Alvaro González López (1915-1936), choir monk in simple vows
- 6 Marcelino Martín Rubio (1913-1936), choir novice
- 7 Antonio Delgado Gonzáles (1915-1936), choir oblate
- 8 Eustaquio García Chicote (1891-1936), sub-master of lay brothers
- 9 Angel de la Vega Gonzáles (1868-1936), lay brother
- 10 Ezequiel Alvaro de la Fuente (1917-1936), lay brother in simple vows
- 11 Eulogio Alvarez López (1916-1936), lay brother in simple vows
- 12 Bienvenido Mata Ubierna (1908-1936), lay brother novice
- 13 Eugenio García Pampliega (1902-1936), priest
- 14 Vicente Pastor Garrido (1905-1936), priest
- 15 Leandro Gomez Gil (1915-1936), lay brother in simple vows
- 16 José Camí Camí (1907-1936), postulant, priest

To the cause of beatification of the martyrs of Viaceli has been added that of the martyrs of Algemesi (a community that has since been suppressed) of the Congregation of Saint Bernard in Spain. Two nuns, **Micaela Baldovi Trull** (1869–1936) and **Natividad Medes Ferris** (1880–1936) were assassinated in the same year as the monks and during the same wave of persecutions.

In July of 1936, the nuns of Fons Salutis, a monastery of Bernardine sisters situated at Algemesi, near Valencia, were driven out by the Communists. The abbess, **Micaela Baldovi Trull**, much loved by her daughters, had exercised her government of the community with a maternal spirit and a profound understanding of human weaknesses. After the expulsion, she took refuge in her sister's home, but three months later both nuns were arrested and taken to their monastery of Fons Salutis, now become a prison. During the night of November 9, they were taken out of their cells and carried to the crossroad of Benifayó on the road to Valencia, where they were assassinated.

Another nun of Fons Salutis, **María de la Natividad Medes Ferris**, after the expulsion, took refuge with her family, where she was joined by two of her brothers, both Carmelite religious. Arrested along with a fourth brother, they were imprisoned in the monastery of Fons Salutis. On the night of November 10, the four religious were taken to an unknown spot between Alcira and Carlet and shot.

1942. The Löb Brothers and the Sisters

The Löb brothers and sisters were all victims of Nazi persecution. The Dutch bishops, in a pastoral letter, had condemned the atrocities committed against the Jews. As a reprisal, in one single day—Sunday, August 2—all Jews of the Catholic Faith of the Low Countries were arrested: the police reports note that they numbered 244.

Children of a converted Jewish couple (the father was German, the mother Dutch), the three brothers **Ignatius, Nivard, and Lino** and the three sisters **Edvige, Teresa, and Veronica** were Trappists in the monasteries of Tilburg and Berkel. On the night of Sunday, August 2, 1942, while the nuns of Berkel were singing Vigils, the police arrived and arrested Sisters Edvige and Teresa. Sister Veronica could not be moved, because she was seriously ill with tuberculosis; she was arrested later on. The police also arrested another Jewish convert, the Polish doctor Lisamaria Meirowski, who had been given refuge in the monastery of Koningsoord, and was working there as Porter.

The Gestapo then arrived at the abbey of Koningshoeven at Tilburg, also while the monks were singing Matins, to search for two priests and one lay brother of Jewish origin. These also were arrested after having celebrated Mass, and were loaded into the car along with their sisters. All of them, brothers and sisters, had expressed their willingness, if God should require it of them, to suffer the Passion of Jesus in their bodies, so that, through them, the life of Jesus might manifest itself in the other victims of the persecution, their fellow Jews.

Sent to the holding camp of Amersfoort, the five Trappists formed part of a group of religious, among whom was Edith Stein, Sister Benedict Teresa of the Cross. They then went directly to the lager of Westerbork, near the German frontier. There exists a telegram of August 5 and a note sent to the abbey of Koningsoord, asking for clothing and other items.

We know that afterwards they were all loaded on freight cars and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, but we do not know whether they all died together in August or whether some of them were selected for forced labor, meeting their death somewhat later. The official registration of deaths, which we include below, was made afterwards, and the dates are purely conjectural.

The other sister, Sister Veronica, also suffered arrest and passed through Westerbork, but was later released. She was hidden in various houses in Holland, and died in her monastery of Berkel August 1, 1944. Of the Löb family, there remained two other children. The next to last, Hans, was arrested and sent to forced labor in Poland. With the advance of the Russians, the prisoners were evacuated and

sent to the west. Hans's feet were frozen, and he died in the lager of Buchenwald, February 20, 1945. The youngest sister, Paula, who was married and was mother of a child, remained hidden with a Catholic family in Nimegen, living far from her husband and son: she was the only survivor of the Löb family.

We here list the official data regarding the Löb brothers and sisters:

- ❖ Sister Edvige (Lien Löb)
 - Trappist. Born March 3, 1908 at Rijswijk.
 - Arrested August 2, 1942 at the Abbey of Koningsoord at Berkel-Enschot
 - Executed September 30, 1942 at Auschwitz.
- ❖ Sister Maria Teresa (Dorotea Löb)
 - Trappist: born August 2, 1911 at Sawah-Loento (Indonesia)
 - Arrested August 2, 1942 at the Abbey of Koningsoord at Berkel –Enschot.
 - Executed September 30, 1942 at Auschwitz
- ❖ Father Ignatius (Giorgio Löb)
 - Trappist. Born September 25, 1909 at Hoensbroek.
 - Arrested August 2, 1942 at the Abbey of Koningshoeven near Tilburg.
 - Executed August 19, 1942 at Auschwitz
- ❖ Father Nivard (Ernesto Löb)
 - Trappist: Born October 29, 1913 at Sawah-Loento (Indonesia)
 - Arrested August 2, 1943 at the Abbey of Koningshoeven near Tilburg.
 - Executed August 19, 1942 at Auschwitz.
- ❖ Brother Lino (Roberto Löb)
 - Trappist: Born October 15; 1910 at Gravenhage.
 - Arrested August 2, 1942 at the Abbey of Koningshoeven near Tilburg.
 - Executed September 30, 1942 at Auschwitz
- ❖ Sister Veronica (Wies Löb)
 - Trappist: Born October 22 1911 at Sowah-Loento (Indonesia)
 - Arrested; later released
 - Died August 1, 1944 at Berkel
- ❖ Hans Löb
 - Technician: Born November 11, 1916 at Sawah-Loento (Indonesia)
 - Arrested some time after the others and condemned to forced labor
 - Died February 20, 1945 in the lager of Buchenwald

1947–1948: The Chinese Martyrs

One of the most splendid chapters of the Cistercian martyrology is that of Chrysostom Chang and his thirty-two companions of Our Lady of Consolation in China, whose passion unfolded in the years 1947–1948.

The monastery of Yang-Kia-Ping, a foundation of Tamié, in the Apostolic Vicariate of Peking, was the oldest Trappist community in the Far East, flourishing with vocations and activity. In 1945 it found itself in the center of the civil war that broke out in the wake of the Chinese-Japanese conflict, from which it had already suffered much in the preceding year. The village near the monastery was, in fact, directly on the line of demarcation between the Red troops of Mao-Tze-Tung and the Nationalist army of Chang-Kai-Chek.

In the summer of 1947 false accusations brought the monastery to the attention of the Communists. Forgetful of the great benefits the Trappists had brought to the local people and the poor for sixty-four years, they submitted the monks to tumultuous public trials and to interrogations about their state of life and the secrets of their cult. They used public beatings and inhuman physical and moral torture to make the monks abandon their religion, which the Communists considered a superstition to be wiped out.

The eighteen monk priests, who had reenacted the sacrifice of Christ for the last time in the monastery, understood that their lives would very soon be transformed into an authentic Mass. On August 30, 1947, the martyrdom began, with the burning of what remained of the monastery. When leaving, the Communists deported all of the monks in a single group, about seventy-five in all, paying no attention to the age or state of health of the victims. Their journey into the impenetrable mountains of the North and through the wild gorges of Ta-Long-Men (the Gate of the great dragon) was what was later called a “death march.”

With their hands bound with chains and steel wire that cut to the bone, they walked in torrential rains; the old monks and the sick being carried on the shoulders of their already overburdened brothers. They were forced to eat their food like animals, were forbidden to communicate among themselves, even with signs as they were accustomed to doing, and were whipped when they were caught moving their lips to pray when falling asleep. Nearly three died each day along the road, victims of exhaustion and misery. Many priests died unexpectedly, perhaps by poisoning. The bodies of the monks were left along the way only half-buried.

In January of 1948, after a last trial by the People’s Court of Panpo, Father Chrysostom Chang and five other religious were shot. The young subprior, chosen as the leader of the group of martyrs, who, from the beginning of the persecutions

had courageously borne with beatings and mistreatment, exhorted his companions, telling them: "We are dying for God's cause. For the last time we are raising our hearts in a total offering of our being to Him." But, since the death sentence pronounced by the Communists was not carried out, the survivors were little by little set free, some of them dying shortly afterwards as a result of mistreatment in prison. The remark made by one of the young Red guards who was charged with announcing Chrysosom's death to the rest of the brothers can be applied to all these brothers who withstood such great trials, persevering until the end in the confession of their faith: "This one has died in great peace, and very much like the Man on the cross that I saw in your monastery." The guard was referring to the Crucifix in the Church at Yang-Kia-Ping.

The following is a list of the thirty-three martyrs: They were all of Chinese nationality with the exception of five priests: three French, one Dutch, and one Canadian. The cause of beatification, entrusted to the Chinese Episcopal Conference has not yet been introduced because of the political situation.

- 1 Crisostomo Chang(1920–1948). subprior
- 2 Michele Hsü (1901–1947), superior
- 3 Antonio Fan (1885–1947), prior
- 4 Elredo Drost (1912–1947), French priest
- 5 Alfonso L'Heureux (1894–1947), Canadian priest
- 6 Agostino Faure (1873–1947), French priest
- 7 Bonaventura Chao (1902–1948), priest
- 8 Emilio Ying (1886–1947), priest
- 9 Stefano Maury (1886–1947), French priest
- 10 Guglielmo Cambourien (1919–1947), French priest
- 11 Odilone Chang (1897–1947), priest
- 12 Simone Haü (1897–1947) priest
- 13 Serafino Che (1909–1948), priest
- 14 Teodoro Yuen 1915–1948, priest
- 15 Basilio Keng (1915–1948), subdeacon
- 16 Ugo Fan (1881–1947), acolyte
- 17 Alessio Liu (1897–1948),lay brother
- 18 Amedeo Liu 1899–1947), lay brother
- 19 Bartolemeo Ch'in (1893–1947), lay brother
- 20 Bruno Fu (1868– 1947), lay brother
- 21 Clemente Kao (1899–1947), lay brother
- 22 Conrado Ma (1872– 1947), lay brother
- 23 Damiano Hwang (1893– 1948), lay brother

- 24 Eligio Hsü (1918–1948), lay brother
- 25 Ireneo Wang (1884–1947), lay brother
- 26 Giovanni Gabriele Tien (1861–1947), lay brother
- 27 Gerolamo Ly (1873–1947), lay brother
- 28 Luigi Gonzaga Jen (1872–1947), lay brother
- 29 Malachia Ch'ao (1872–1947), lay brother
- 30 Marco Litchang (1885–1947), lay brother
- 31 Giovanni Maria Miao (1919–1948) lay brother
- 32 Marino Hau (1899–1947) , lay brother
- 33 Filippo Wang Liu (1877–1947), lay brother

1951. To the thirty-three martyrs of Our Lady of Consolation must be added two brothers of Liesse (Our Lady of Joy), the foundation of Yang-kia-ping: Br. **Vincent Shi** and Br. **Albert Wei**, who were also victims of the Communist persecution. The eleven novices who remained in Peking were arrested and submitted to judgment by the people. Brs. Vincent and Albert were arrested for “re-education,” in the hope of making them apostatize. Vincent died in prison at Br. Albert’s side, in August 1951, and his body was transported to the monastery. Albert was set free, but was covered with wounds and already dying. He died several days later as a result of the bad treatment he received, in November 1951.

Bibliography: Paolino Beltrame Quattrochi, *Monaci nella Tormenta*, Cîteaux, 1991.

The Blessed Martyrs of the Prison-Ships

On October 1, 1995, Jean Paul II beatified three other Cistercians at the same time as 61 other priests and religious of various Congregations. The martyrs of the prison-ships of Rochefort died in 1794, the same year as the nuns of Orange, and were declared martyrs in 1925. They were not the only Cistercians who died of starvation or illness in the slave ships or on the islands off the shore of La Rochelle. Our menology mentions several others. Yet, for the cause of beatification, which includes religious and priests, of various Orders, only 64, among the 547 who died, were retained as martyrs, namely, those who were explicitly mentioned in the lists of the deported. One of them made a statement that can be applied to all these beatified religious and to the many others condemned to die on the prison-ships: “If we are the most unhappy of men, we are also the happiest of Christians.”

Among them were two monks from Sept-Fons and one from La Trappe. Vari-

ous witnesses have passed on many stories about their piety, charity, and spirit of abandonment.

- **Brother Elias Desgardin** (1750–1794), a lay brother from Sept-Fons. He cared for his sick companions. A martyr of charity, he died of typhoid fever at the age of forty-four, on July 6, 1794. He was buried on the Island of Aix. A chronicle stated that after his death “everything went from bad to worse.”
- **Dom Paul Charles** (1743–1794) was the Prior of Sept-Fons. Detained on the ship *Les Deux Associés*, he died at the age of fifty-one, esteemed and loved by his companions in captivity, and was buried on the Island called *Madame*.
- The third beatified martyr was **Dom Gervais Brunel**, Superior of La Trappe who died at age fifty in a provisional hospital on the Madame Island. Stricken with typhoid fever, he arrived there on the point of death, dying on the very day of the disembarkment, August 20, 1794.

1996: The Martyrs of Algeria

On the night of March 26–27, 1996, seven monks of the monastery of Our Lady of the Atlas, at Tibhirine, Algeria, were abducted in circumstances that have never been clarified.

After failed negotiations between the abductors and the Algerian and French governments—which remain wrapped in unexplained silence—the seven monks were assassinated, probably on May 21, 1996. Their heads were found separated from their bodies on May 30, and were buried on June 4 in the cemetery of the monastery, following solemn funeral rites in the cathedral of Algiers. The precise circumstances of their two months in detention and their deaths remain a mystery. Their choice to remain in Algeria—in spite of the growing climate of terror and the assassination of a number of priests and religious—was made as a community, after the “brothers of the mountain” paid an intimidating visit at the monastery on Christmas Night, 1993. This freely-made decision was an expression of their wish to stay together in the place of their stability, being vulnerable along with their neighbors to the violence that threatened them, especially the most defenseless. It was also a way of remaining in solidarity with the tiny minority Church in Algeria, offering themselves, like Christ, for the salvation of the people.

Their awareness of approaching death and their unreserved willingness to give up their lives while pardoning their aggressors is clearly expressed in several texts they have left us: the remarkable Testament of the Prior (three brief pages, surely among the most profound examples of modern spirituality), the novice master’s diary, and the letters of the brothers to their families.

The names of the assassinated monks are as follows:

- Dom Christian de Chergé (1937–1996), titular prior of the monastery. He was a true Father and guide on the path of self-denial, who led the community consciously to accept the possibility of martyrdom. He was fifty-nine years old.
- Luc Dochier (1914–1996), Lay Brother, an eighty-two year old medical doctor, who had become a legend in the area for his services to the sick. He wrote: “There is no true love of God unless one consents to death without reserve.” He never complained about his long life of dedication to Algeria.
- Father Christophe Lebreton (1950–1996), the youngest, was of the generation of the 1968 student revolts. In a short time he had so grown in the faith as to offer his life, as can be seen in the profound testimony he left in his journals and poetry.
- Brother Michel Fleury (1944–1996), a former member of the Prado, was tireless worker, a simple and silent man, eager to participate fully in the Paschal Mystery of Christ.
- Father Bruno Lemarchand (1930–1996), the sixty-six year old superior of the annex house of Fez, in Morocco, was a thoughtful and profoundly humble man.
- Father Celestin Ringiard (1933–1996), sixty-two years old, was a person of deep sensitivity, with a gift for interpersonal relations.
- Father Paul Favre-Miville (1939–1996), clever in manual work, was a serviceable monk and friend of all.

The seven brothers, so different one from another, came from three different monasteries (Aiguebelle, Tamié, and Bellefontaine). What they had in common was love for the Algerian people, respect for Islam, and a desire for poverty. This second vocation of theirs, grafted onto their great Christian and Cistercian vocations, brought them together to give witness to the Pasch of Our Lord in the offering of their lives.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (Heb. 12:1–4)

12.2. ECUMENISM IN THE ORDER IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

12.2.1. In the French-speaking World

(by Sister Monique Simon)²

The monastery is an expression of the mystery of the Church...Monks and nuns strive to remain in harmony with all the people of God and share their active desire for the unity of all Christians. (C. 3.4)

Thus do our *Constitutions* of 1990 reflect for our Order the call to ecumenism and its grace, which the Catholic Church has received in the course of the twentieth century and to which it has responded resolutely, especially since the Second Vatican Council. Less than five years after the end of the Council, *Collectanea Cisterciensia* published its first issue of 1970 under the title *Monastic Ecumenism*. We will take only a moment to note the results of a “survey made of our monasteries of western Europe and of North America concerning the attention paid by them to the ecumenical movement.” Here are some extracts from the presentation, and from the synthesis made by the editors:

- The responses have been very numerous.
- In all the monasteries there is genuine interest in information about ecumenism.
- There is a profound aspiration to cooperate in some way with the cause of Unity. We can say that they are “open” to this matter. Often they are only waiting for a favorable opportunity, a providential event that would permit them to concretize their concern for ecumenism.
- The Week of Prayer for Unity has been celebrated everywhere.
- Many communities have felt the need to integrate this prayer with the Office itself. Others have preferred a Liturgy of the Word.
- Ultimately, some communities have felt, and this is a reminder to all, that if Unity has not been first lived within themselves, it is vain to seek it on the level of Christianity.³

² Nun of la Paix-Dieu, Cabanoule, monastery founded in 1970, near Nimes (France) with an ecumenical interest, in a strongly Protestant area (Les Cévennes), where, in former times, bloody wars of religion took place. Sr. Monique is the author of *La vie monastique, lieu oecuménique*, Cerf, Paris 1997, 229 pp.

³ *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 32.1 (1970), pp. 121, 128.

Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and in the diversity of our older as well as more recent foundations on all continents, who among us, in our personal and communal journeys, seems to have lived thus far in an “active desire for the unity of all Christians” (c. 3.4)? To help us in this rereading of our history, in listening to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches, the present study will provide, as its main focus, testimonies and reflections on monastic ecumenism.

First, a preliminary note on the exact sense of the word *ecumenism*, because for some time there has been an evident tendency to include in it interreligious dialogue. The two domains are certainly not devoid of resemblance, in the spirit of their work, their methods, etc. However, no matter what the eventual evolution of the vocabulary may be, it is and it remains important to respect the specificity of the search for unity among Christians. This is of particular urgency for the coherence, authenticity, and fecundity of the proclamation of the Gospel of Reconciliation (see Jn 17:21 and 2 Cor 5:18-19). This is why, following the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* of Vatican II and other documents of the Magisterium that have appeared since then, we restrict the word *ecumenism* to its meaning of search for the unity among Christians.⁴

THE FIRST CALLS AND RESPONSES IN THE WAKE OF ABBÉ COUTURIER

We have said that our Order had quickly reechoed the great turning-point of Vatican II, which had just recognized the current situation of division in contradiction to the will of Christ, and had set forth for Catholics the principles of ecumenism. Previously, some seeds had been sown that had reached us through the Benedictines. On March 21, 1924, Pope Pius XI had in fact addressed to the Benedictines, in the context of Russian emigration, the following appeal:

In this work for unity, who then could take a more important part than Western monks? [...] The Order of Saint Benedict draws its origins from the East. [...] It has kept even to today the traditions of the Fathers, zeal for the sacred liturgy and for the fundamental elements of primitive monasticism, such circumstances which render Western monks particularly apt for reconciliation with our separated brethren.⁵

4 “The ecumenical dialogue distinguishes itself qualitatively from interreligious dialogue not so much by the theological basis upon which it is founded as by its objective. Interreligious dialogue is not ecumenism enlarged, or macro-ecumenism, but rather a dialogue based upon reciprocal respect, both human and religious, and having as its goal a deepened, amicable mutual understanding that would give rise to collaboration.” Cardinal Kaspar, *Documentation Catholique*, n. 2312, April 18, 2004, p. 366.

5 Cited by Dom Olivier Rousseau in “La dimension oecuménique du monachisme,” *Unité des chrétiens*, 1973, n. 11, p. 3.

One year later, in response to this papal appeal, asking that in every country those who follow in the footsteps of Saint Benedict work for the unity of Christians, Dom Lambert Beauduin founded the Priory of Amay-sur Meuse, transferred to Chevetogne in 1939. What about our own predecessors? Did they take note of this appeal to monastics who live according to the Rule of Saint Benedict? In any case, through the intermediary of the humble priest of Lyon, Paul Couturier (1881–1953), who was received as a Benedictine oblate at Amay in 1933 and received there the fundamentals of this spiritual ecumenism, of which he became an ardent apostle, at least several of our monasteries were affected.

In 1936 in Grottaferrata (Italy) and in Phare (Japan), in 1938 in Gardes (France), and doubtless also in other communities, the tracts of Abbé Couturier promoting the universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were well received. From then on, at Gardes for example, a Mass for Unity was celebrated once a month. But especially at Grottaferrata, two nuns, one a senior, Mother Immaculata Scavini,⁶ then a young sister, Maria Gabriella Sagheddu,⁷ and at Phare a Japanese lay brother responded by offering their lives for this cause.⁸

In the same spirit of humble prayer immersed in that of Jesus (Jn 17), Abbé Couturier, who had once considered entering Dombes, chose this Trappist monastery near Lyon in 1937 as a place sufficiently discreet to host what he first called “a spiritual and intellectual retreat,” or an “interdenominational gathering” of pastors and priests desirous of “exchanges of view.” And so the Dombes Group came to birth, with its method involving recollection, prayer, and fraternity.⁹

Has this Group exercised a “theology soaked with prayer” as its founder hoped? In 1987 one member wrote, “At Dombes we try to express ourselves, not in ideological formulas, but in terms of adoring faith, welcoming the otherness as divine.”¹⁰ And there are fruits. Not only has the pioneer work of this private gathering not been without its contribution to the official dialogues, but still more by its documents has it witnessed to a commitment to work for the conversion of the Churches and for their communion. Would not our monasteries, “expressions of the mystery of the Church” (C. 3.4), have been affected by this initiative? Is not this type of theological research, referring back to the sources for the purpose of

6 Mère Marie de la Trinité Kervingant, *La Bienheureuse Maria Gabriella*, O.E.I.L. 1984, p. 24, 25.

7 Ibid in its entirety. Also *La vie monastique, lieu oecuménique*, Monique Simon, ocsso, Cerf 1997, 67–69.

8 See the 1937 tract cited in *La Bienheureuse Maria Gabriella*, p. 23, 24.

9 Since 1998 the Group has held its annual session at the Benedictine monastery of Pradines. Over the years they have developed comparative theological dossiers, then “theses” or “agreements” useful to sustain the Group’s memory. Since 1971 they have begun drafting “documents.” Seven of them appeared between 1972 and 1997. In 1988 the first five were gathered into a volume entitled *Pour la communion des Églises*, accompanied in 1991 by the sixth, *Pour la conversion des Églises?* The seventh is like a lovely fruit showing forth the results of the method, on *Marie, dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints* (1996–1997).

10 Fr. Damien Sicard, *Unité des chrétiens*, n. 67 (July 1987), 2.

purifying the faith today, kindred to the monastic theology we have rediscovered during the course of the twentieth century?¹¹

Let us add that the Abbey of Dombes has welcomed and supported in dialogue not only theologians and pastors, but others as well. The young founder of Taizé had come there to see how a monastic community functions. And in 1996 Daniel Bourguet, a Protestant member of the Group came, desirous of some months of formation in view of himself living either as a hermit or as a cenobite, according to what the Lord would indicate to him. (He is a hermit now in the Cévennes, a few kilometers from Cabanoule.)

Let us return now to the lives offered for Unity. At least since the beatification of Sister Maria Gabriella on January 25, 1983, all the members of the Order know about her very simple and ardent life. Two years after her offering had been accepted, Abbé Couturier presented her as “a marvelous worker for unity” and declared, “She is a seal on spiritual ecumenism”. The signs accompanying her death prompted her abbess to have drawn up a biography that has been republished several times. Then in 1947 the Abbot General, Dom Dominique Nogues, asked a nun of Notre-Dame des Gardes to revise a French translation of it. Sister Marie de la Trinité Kervingant (1903–1990) who, while yet an Ursuline had been profoundly moved by Fr. Congar’s book *Chrétiens désunis*, perceived that this biography needed an introduction that would present its ecumenical import. She wrote to the Abbé Couturier, who lavished her with encouragements and advice. But the work could not be published because the ecclesiastical authorities asked that everything treating of Christian unity be suppressed, and Sister Marie de la Trinité could not accept this. Abbé Couturier then wrote to her, “You have come into the invisible monastery!”¹² Until 1952 she continued to work for him, translating documents that came from the Anglicans. But what is more, through him she had interiorly received a call: to establish a contemplative monastery in which the prayer and the life would be a witness to unity. This was the earliest preparation for the foundation of La Paix-Dieu (Cabanoule), which she was able to make a reality in 1970 in the course of her abbatial service (1957–1979). Shortly after she was relieved of her charge, when the beatification of Sister Maria Gabriella was approaching, the time had come for her to write anew *Le monachisme lieu oecuménique, la Bienheureuse Maria Gabriella*, and this time its publication was authorized.

Among the pioneers of ecumenism, Mother Pia, abbess of Grottaferrata, likewise merits to be known. Born Maria Gullini in 1892, highly gifted and with a refined education, at thirty years old she declared, “To be sure of being humble,

¹¹ *La théologie mystique de saint Bernard*, Etienne Gilson, Vrin, Paris 1969.

¹² On “the invisible monastery” see *Oecuménisme spirituel, écrits de l’abbé Paul Couturier*, address by Maurice Villain, (Casterman, 1963), p. 158-160. Or *La vie monastique, lieu oecuménique*, Ibid., p. 65, 66.

I would go so far as to shut myself up in a cloister.” A student in Venice, then in Rome, having broken up with her fiancé, she desired more and more to consecrate her life to God. She had a taste of the suffering of the world, and frequented the Little Sisters of the Assumption, with whom she requested admission. But in 1917, after a retreat, she entered the Trappistine community of Laval, well known for the quality of its observance. It seems that they already had a passion for unity. From there, she was sent in 1926 to help the Abbey of Grottaferrata, then in great poverty. She became the abbess of that community in 1931. In 1933 she received a visit from Henriette Ferrary, a professor in France, and she learned from her about the desire for ecumenism that was asserting itself in that country. It would not be known until later, but beginning in 1934 Mother Pia explicitly offered her life for the unity of Christians. In short, she personally lived out a hidden self-offering before awakening spiritual ecumenism in others through her abbatial service and becoming a witness to the self-offering of Mother Immaculata and of Sister Maria Gabriella. Through the instrumentality of Abbé Couturier, whom she kept informed of these offerings, durable spiritual bonds were formed with the Anglican Benedictine monks of Nashdom (today Elmoro), with Brother Roger of Taizé, and with many others.

There was no lack of incomprehension in the Order, but here is how Mother Pia experienced it:

To see your action in all things, O my God “who work wonders”, is a pleasant duty for us and a joy for you, O Father. But to maintain secrecy about certain marvels is without doubt much better, and manifests greater purity and humility than to make them public. I have given an account of them in silence, with love, and will await “your hour”, in adoration and prayer for the great purpose of your heart, the unity of your Church....Let us know how to always accept with joy that upon the scales of our love for the cause of Sister Maria Gabriella has been placed the prudence, the distrust, the reservations of our Order, of its highest authorities. So may we obtain perfect equilibrium between the two sides of the scales, and the certitude that we place there the least possible of ourselves.¹³

In December, 1940, Mother Pia was asked to submit her resignation before the end of her third three-year term of office. After she was reelected in 1946, ecumenical contacts multiplied. In a letter dated April 28, 1948, written to a French

¹³ Undated personal note.

woman preparing a biography of Sister Maria Gabriella, she reveals her experience and her convictions:

Regarding the outline of the book... I can tell you what I think... Many years of experience with this difficult issue of Reunion, in other words, with letters, with visits, with publications after the book on Sister Maria Gabriella had appeared, have made me understand that, after the will of God (apart from which no one would consider writing it), the success of the book depends upon no one else taking a position of controversy. Those who do not know about the difficulty understand it through the example of Sister Maria Gabriella, and those who know it well find in this example a hidden resting place, a pacifying light like a new horizon predisposing them to love rather than to discussion. It is the heart that disposes the mind to submit... When one lives in harmony one is ready to move forward, without too much discussion and even avoiding it, to accept the necessary conditions for unity, the terms of doctrine and of government that "Reunion" requires. Both Catholics and Protestants know this well. This position of friendliness must be the starting point for Catholics and Protestants, in order that, together, fraternally, they might find a meeting point.

Certainly this text dates from an era when, in its earliest stages, ecumenism as a reciprocal openness had not yet given way to ecumenism as conversion of the Churches, including the Catholic Church. But following Abbé Couturier, Mother Pia sketched in outline the things she had discovered and experienced that would lead there: the "new horizon" offered by spiritual ecumenism, seeking only God's will and an amicable fraternity in this spirit of faith and hope.

In 1951 another serious crisis occurred. Mother Pia again had to submit her resignation, and was asked to go to La Fille-Dieu. She took all this, not without suffering, but with peace, and even with constant gratitude to the extent that one of the elders of the community from which she was exiled said of her, "She is a walking *Te Deum!*"¹⁴ She was summoned back to Italy in order to be hospitalized in Rome, where she died on April 29, 1959. She was the first to be buried at Vitorchiano, where the community of Grottaferrata had been transferred two years earlier. Her youthful aspirations had largely been fulfilled. Her way of humility led her to the point of being in communion with the prayer and the passion of Jesus for unity up to the very end.

All of these lives of testimony are in some way the foundations and the first

¹⁴ *Collectanea* 22 (1960:2), Chronicle p. 42.

fruits of our Cistercian participation in the Church's ecumenical engagement. They all have the following characteristics: prayer immersed in Jesus' prayer in John 17, lives offered in this spirit, monastic hospitality in the love of truth and with respectful and trusting fraternal relations among Christians of different denominations, and mutual spiritual encouragement between monks or nuns of different traditions. All of this passes through the crucible of humility and renunciation, source from which can rightly spring a great entreaty for the visible unity of Christians as God wills it and through the means that He wills.

FURTHER AWAKENINGS

The history of certain communities shows that there were other ecumenical efforts set in motion by the Spirit. Here are some examples:

In Foreign missions and in Interreligious Dialogue: Kurisumala

In becoming a part of the Church of Kerala at the time of its foundation, this monastery, conceived in a profound spirit of openness to Buddhist and Hindu monasticism, encountered the scandal of six million Christians very divided and full of rivalry to the point of violent confrontation. Mar Athanasios, Bishop of the Syro-Malankara Church (united to Rome since 1930), who since 1956 had welcomed and encouraged Father Francis in this project, was very much in favor of "inscribing the unity of the Churches as an essential objective in the foundational charter of Kurisumala, convinced that the monastic life, in the measure in which it witnesses to an era anterior to the dissensions, can constitute a center of reconciliation."¹⁵ The community designated one day of prayer per week for this intention, and its hospitality is marked by this spirit.

Return to the sources: Bellefontaine

Through its publications, and particularly the *Spiritualité orientale* series, the Abbey of Bellefontaine has had and still has a certain ecumenical impact. First, through the publication of the works or lives of great figures in monastic history, of the Fathers of the *Philokalia* and studies on hesychasm, and also through openness to Russian and Romanian monasticism. Finally, various studies have come forth to enrich and update this spiritual patrimony in an exemplary collaboration between orientals and westerners. The great craftsmen of this "return to the

¹⁵ Marthe Mahieu-de Praetere, *Kurisumala, Francis Mahieu Acharya, un pionnier du monachisme chrétien en Inde*, Cahiers Scourmontois 3 (Scourmont, 2001), p. 193.

sources” were Father Placide Deseille and Dom Emmanuel Coutant, in fraternal collaboration with Olivier Clement, Boris Bobrinsky and Jacques Touraille for the *Philokalia*. Our monasteries have greatly benefitted, and still benefit from the spiritual openness brought through these publications, which are of interest far beyond the monastic world.

Among other Christian denominations

A good number of communities founded in local churches where there lived Christians of other denominations have found that this situation has offered and still offers them occasions for hospitality, for sharing information, and for meetings. The survey noted at the beginning of this study has already demonstrated that this is taking place at Latroun (Israel), Caldey (Great Britain), La Fille-Dieu (Switzerland), and Les Nieges (France) among others, as well as in the abbeys of the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States. The foundation of La Paix-Dieu, Cabanoule (France), which took place in 1970, the same year as the survey, had been conceived deliberately with this in mind: to establish a monastery in a Protestant region, les Cévennes, so that in the very place where there had been intolerance and violence between Christians, a community of Catholic nuns would pray and live their lives for the reconciliation and unity desired by their common Savior. On account of this approach of repentance and hope, they had to arrive discretely, with delicacy, explaining first of all to the various pastors the unpretentiousness of the project. They would be a simple contemplative presence of only seven sisters, earning their living in a way similar to that of the local inhabitants, living in an old but very secluded place that would be bit by bit restored and adapted to the monastic life. So “the sisters who work”, as they became known in the neighborhood after having been much observed, were adopted, and one could hear some of the evangelical retreatants commenting that they had discovered in this monastery another face of the Catholic Church.

Visits

It was not understood until much later, but if the Protestant sisters of Reully, Grandchamp and Pomeyrol soon started coming to make retreat days at La Paix-Dieu, it was because they had immediately grasped the purpose of this priory in the Cévennes. In 1973 the sisters of Pomeyrol made their community retreat there. When they told the Trappistines the story of their long road to foundation beginning in 1929 - first an attraction to silence and to offer a place of retreat and spiritual hospitality, then the promise of vows confirming their community in a

nearly Franciscan poverty, and finally the development of liturgical prayer - it was for the two communities a great moment of communion. The Spirit was so manifestly at work in our communities and in our churches to lead us to rediscover and encounter one another in Him! Was it not, then, possible to sense that docility to the Holy Spirit in each person, community, or local church would prepare the way for total reconciliation and the unfolding of full Christian unity?

Likewise, in the issue of *Collectanea* (1970:1) on *Monastic Ecumenism*, Dom André Louf reported similar experiences with Orthodox monks. The very first of these had also been communal, absolutely unexpected, and dated back a dozen years. A Romanian Orthodox monk was staying at the guesthouse at Mont-des-Cats. The quality of his presence suggested to the Prior, the Abbot being absent, that he invite him to speak one evening at Chapter. His subject was monastic experience, and his talk was so good that he was asked to continue speaking the rest of the evenings that week.

From his very first words, something was taking place. We were one. There was no longer him and us, he the Orthodox and we the Catholics. All of us were only monks who shared a common experience, who recognized one another, “knew” each other again in a moment of grace absolutely identical for both parties...In this magnificent declaration of faith in the monastic charism, we had been given to each other as brothers, with no possible doubt remaining.”¹⁶

This happened in the very early 1960s. “On several occasions since then, something similar happened again in the course of various meetings with Oriental monks,” added Dom André.¹⁷ This type of experience and reflection witnesses to the essential elements of monastic ecumenism: a communal grace, a rediscovered profound sense of brotherhood coming from communion in the Spirit. From these spring up amazement and emulation. *Collectanea* renders a precious service in keeping us informed of these things. It is worthwhile to look more closely to see what the ecumenical dimensions of this journal have been. It is apparent that it very quickly responded to the principal promptings of the Church in this regard.

The Voice of the Teaching Church

In *Collectanea*, the first sign of ecumenical openness was the publication of a notice by Dom Olivier Rousseau of Chevetogne announcing that 1963 would be the

¹⁶ Dom André Louf, “En marge d’un pèlerinage,” *Collectanea* 32, (1970): 46–47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 48 ff.

“millenium of the monastic life on Mount Athos” (*Collectanea* 22, 1960:3, p. 292-293). Again, 1960! It was on January 25, 1959, the last day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, that Pope John XXIII had first publicly made known his proposal for a council. By means of this Benedictine voice reverberating through our journal, we could hear in the pre-conciliar context a proposal for a properly monastic commitment to ecumenism. The millenium of the Great Laura founded by Saint Athanasius the Athonite was approaching. This great monk, who lived before the schism, had inserted into his *Hypotypose* fragments of the Rule of Saint Benedict, which shows that a spiritual exchange had taken place between the two monastic traditions in that era, symbolizing their communion in the monastic vocation. Dom Olivier expressed the wish that “all western monks would participate in this tribute [with supporting studies] rendered to Athanasius the Athonite, not only the black Benedictines.”

Less than two years later, volume 24 of *Collectanea* (1962:1, p. 67), introduced an ecumenical initiative: thanks to the generosity of communities of the Order, some sixty subscriptions to the journal were gratuitously offered to important monastic centers of Eastern Churches, the Church of England, and Churches of the Reform. This gift of subscriptions continues as a sign of communion in a common vocation.

From immediately after the Council (Vol. 48, 1966:4) until after the Year of Saint Benedict (Vol. 44, 1982:3), one sees reflections on the connections between ecumenism and monasticism being expressed through the articles of three Cistercians, Robert A. Botteman of Orval, Dom André Louf, and Thomas Merton presented by Patrick Hart of Gethsemani, as also through a Romanian Orthodox, Hieromonk Antonië Plâmădeală, and an Anglican canon, A.M. Allchin, etc.¹⁸

Later on, around the Year of Saint Bernard (1990) and still more recently, the journal has presented the contributions of authors of other denominations.

In 1995 *Collectanea* published a portion of the Apostolic Letter *Orientalis lumen* of Pope John Paul II under the title, *Le monachisme: un sommet d'où regarder le christianisme oriental*. We recognized ourselves in this synthesis of monastic spirituality. This document may rightfully gladden and encourage us because our meetings and studies have already let us experience this for ourselves. For example, the series of articles between 1992 and 1998 by Jean Robert Pouchet, Benedictine monk of Maylis, on Saint Basil presents this Father as “one of the strongest links uniting the monks and the churches of the East and the West.”¹⁹

As for *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, the journal in English originating from Caldey in 1966, it had an ecumenical character from the very beginning. Today its

¹⁸ See the references given in *Collectanea* 50 (1988): 40–41.

¹⁹ *Collectanea* 54, (1992:1): 65.

very interested Orthodox readers and collaborators are hoping that it might give more attention to the Christian East.

On our different communal roads to the heart of the Church in search of renewal, our journals have accompanied us in our return to the sources as well as in our encounters with our brothers and sisters of other denominations. In providing us with testimonies and reflections, they have surely contributed to the raising of consciousness about the ecumenical dimension of the monastic life. For at the deepest level communion already exists, and this is more important than what still separates us. With Saint Bernard and Pope John Paul II we can give thanks while yet opening ourselves to continue receiving grace.²⁰

Cistercian Participation in Ecumenical Dialogue

Schools of Charity in the Desert

Our communities are expressions of the mystery of the Church, the one Bride of Christ, as schools of charity in the desert. We daily experience that holiness and unity are very relative here below,²¹ for we are essentially on the way.²² But we also experience that the living and efficacious Word works in us, purifying, reconciling, and conforming us to Christ, leading us to communion with the Father through the Son in the Spirit. We have nothing other to offer our guests on their own paths of life, no matter what their denomination, and they appreciate this. It is neither the number of interdenominational relationships nor the amiable exchanges that are ecumenical, but it is the fact that, by the grace of God, both of us are able to live with docility to the Spirit of truth and love, with mutual assistance. At La Paix-Dieu we have made two retreats in common with the Sisters of Pomeyrol, in 1992 with a Catholic priest, and in 1998 with a Lutheran pastor. They were powerful moments of communion together before the Word and in the Spirit. Since then our relations have been more simple and more trusting. It is hoped that as a result our two communities will foster a way towards the healing of memories in our region which is still very much needed. Whether interdenominational relations are lived out communally in monastic hospitality and sharing or personally in spiritual friendship, in either case they silently weave bonds repairing the torn relations inherited from the past.

20 See Saint Bernard, *Div. 27*; John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, n. 41.

21 Saint Bernard, *Sermons pour l'Année*, Fifth Sermon for All Saints, 6; Second Sermon for the Dedication of a Church, 4; Second Sermon for Septuagesima, 3.

22 *Lumen gentium* n. 41, where holiness is described as following in the footsteps of Christ.

Word and Silence

Our monasteries are places where the Word becomes incarnate in each person. It is in silence that we welcome it, keep it, and allow it to grow in prayer, conversion, and charity. Thomas Merton has well described how this ecumenical work is done in meditation:

If I can unite *in myself* the thought and the devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and the Latin Fathers, the Russians with the Spanish mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christians. From that secret and unspoken unity in myself can eventually come a visible and manifest unity of all Christians....We must contain all divided worlds in ourselves and transcend them in Christ.²³

If in silence we venerate the Word and prepare the way for communion, then human speech can become its vehicle. In the monastery there are times and places, charisms and services for this. Merton, who since the 1950s had had informal contacts with groups of Baptists, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Episcopalians, had perceived that the practices of silence and of speaking the right word go together for the same purpose:

The monastic life...is pervaded with the sense of the definitive that comes to those who, in silence, refrain from the futility of articulation. Yet also what must be grasped are the provisional needs to be articulated in honest and undogmatic speech. The two go together. The monastic dialectic of silence and language underlines the deeper dialectic of eschatology and incarnation.²⁴

Communion in the Heart of the Church

It is in the deep and hidden heart that monks and nuns of all denominations meet and recognize one another. Thus have we begun in our own way to participate in this new fraternal relationship among Christians. This can be situated in the ecclesiology of communion that has become more conscious beginning with the Synod on the Reception of Vatican II in 1985, as also with the fifth World Confer-

²³ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York, Doubleday, 1966)12.

²⁴ Cited by Patrick Hart, OCSO, "The Ecumenical Monk," *Thomas Merton, Monk* (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 210.

ence of the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England at Santiago de Compostella in 1993. The concept of communion has New Testament, mystical, and ecumenical resonances. It enables us to avoid distorting the concept of unity by interpreting it as fusion, or on the contrary, as restricted to exclusively rational and sociological models. *Koinonia*, often translated by the Latin Fathers as *communio*, is also frequently translated *participatio*. It is a communal participation in one good, or again, a community of goods. Our unity as disciples, for which Jesus prayed, comes from our being breathed forth in the communion between Father and Son. The author of the common life is clearly the Holy Spirit who [among us as among the angels and even in God is] “its love, its bond, and its communion,” wrote Baldwin of Ford.²⁵ One could read this tractate in such a way as to be ecumenical as well as monastic,²⁶ following Pope John Paul II when he said, “The Church confides to communities of consecrated life the particular duty of developing a spirituality of communion.”²⁷

Some dura et aspera of Ecumenism

To share by patience in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his Body, the Church, may take diverse forms. Let us mention only a few important points.

The spiritual combat against the passions, conversion, also has a place in the ecclesial and ecumenical life. If at Vatican II the Catholic Church officially recognized that, made holy by grace, she is still always in need of purification, the monastic way as lifelong conversion gives us a particular solidarity with the call to conversion of the church of whom we are members, as also with that of all the churches composing the one Church of Christ. For this, it is useful to keep ourselves informed about the work of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, and about doctrinal agreements such as those of the Dombes Group. This allows us to note when steps toward the ecclesial conversion we hope for are taken. For example, have we integrated the Council’s understanding of the road to full unity? We are no longer to think of it as “their return to us,” that is to say, “unity will not come about through the conversion of one to the other, but rather in the full conversion of us all to Jesus Christ.”²⁸

As another example, how do we react when someone close or a member of one of our communities decides to pass from one church to another? In either

25 Baldwin of Ford, “Tractate XV: On the Cenobitic or Common Life,” *Spiritual Tractates II*, trans. David N. Bell, CF 41 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1986) 164.

26 See *La vie monastique, lieu oecuménique*, 55-58.

27 *Vita consecrata*, n. 35.

28 Cardinal Kaspar, *Documentation catholique*, n. 2270 (2002) 488.

case it is a powerful experience of separations, felt on one side as suffering and on the other as joy. Seen from the standpoint of the one involved, moderation is indispensable. Such a crossing-over entitles that person to the respect due every person, for a well discerned and mature decision can be recognized as the work of the Spirit. The ecumenical road, also coming from the Spirit, is another thing. We remain where we are, but with humble and patient hope. "What characterizes the seekers of reconciliation is that, following Christ, they desire rather to fulfill than to abolish, rather to understand than to exhort. They remain within the Church, until the very weaknesses of the Church are transfigured."²⁹ In any case, to experience the passage of someone close to us from one church to another requires much delicacy and combined efforts of truthfulness and goodness, honoring the Gospel of reconciliation.

Eucharist

Finally we come to the crucial point: the Eucharist, the source and summit of the whole Christian life, is not fully common to all of us Christians. What a scandal, and what pain this causes! But this is the truth of our situation; it is the crying out of our need to be saved and healed of our divisions. Yet we are on the way, since, for each Christian of every ecclesial community, Jesus must be our Bread for the journey, and in Him we all have communion in the grace of reconciliation, in the Body given up and the Blood poured out in order to gather together the scattered children of God. In this way the first fruits of the new world that will be communion, bit by bit, are raising the dough of humanity until, in Christ, it becomes one single Bread, one Church, the fullness of communion. At La Paix-Dieu, when the Protestant sisters make a retreat at the monastery, most often they receive communion, but at times they abstain. Once, at the Lord's Supper with the sisters of Pomeyrol, celebrated at the time of our Mass, we ourselves fasted from the Eucharist. Together we had agreed that while they received communion we would chant one of the communion hymns in our repertoire; and that was the day we had chosen to have our festive meal together, as we usually do during their stay. That was an experience of "the already and the not-yet" of full communion. Through suffering offered in union with our common Savior, as well as in thanksgiving for all that we already share, we live out a communion of hope, a unity of desire.

With all the people of God, may we progress in conversion and in communion without ever despairing of the visible unity to which the Lord calls us, and as he wishes it!

²⁹ "Itinéraire d'un pèlerin", in *Les Sources de Taizé*, (1980) 115.

12.2.2. Ecumenism in the English-speaking World

(by Dom Mark Scott)³⁰

Our Constitutions establish the orientation and determine the framework for our role, specifically as monks, in the ecumenical efforts of the entire church. “The monks and nuns strive to remain in harmony with all the people of God and share their active desire for the unity of all Christians” (C. 3.4). This constitution goes on to say that monks do this precisely “by fidelity to their monastic way of life,” which, it explains, “has its own hidden mode of apostolic fruitfulness.”

This frank but positive acknowledgement of the limitations our very *charism* puts on ecumenical involvement should be a consolation to a number of monasteries in the English-speaking regions. Not infrequently they are apologetic or even embarrassed that the monastic value of “hiddenness” or “withdrawal” has not allowed them to participate in or host ecumenical activities with greater frequency. As one monastery says, “due to strict enclosure there was very little contact with the neighbors up to thirty years ago.”

In the Region of the Isles several monasteries attest to amicable and open relationships with the local Protestant, Anglican, and Methodist churches and communions. This was not always the case fifty years ago; indeed, it was infrequently so. Besides the distrust generated by historical events and passed on without critical reflection, the very seclusion of the monasteries, together with a “ghetto” mentality among some Catholics fifty years ago and more, made ecumenical contacts almost unthinkable. Then, as one house in the Region of the Isles says, “there was little or not contact between the Churches.” Now, however, “the people of the other Churches know they are welcome to visit the monastery and to pray.”

At the present time the guesthouses of the monasteries are used by local non-Catholic clergy and lay people, and there is often reciprocal attendance at funerals, ordinations, professions and other major events in the life of the local churches and of the monastery. Ecumenical retreats are conducted at monasteries of the Order. Several monasteries in the Isles continue to take part in the annual Harvest Thanksgiving, a tradition of the Church of England and the Church of Ireland. As early as 1968, in fact, at least one monastery began hosting a Harvest Thanksgiving celebration at the monastery.

Some monasteries in the Isles host other annual events such as ecumenical Vespers for local Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity. One monastery of nuns

³⁰ Monk of New Clairvaux, superior and abbot of Ava (USA) from August 2000 to February 2008.

attends the Christmas Carol Service each year in the Church of England Cathedral. One monastery of men, founded the same year as Vatican Council II ended, admits that they have always been very open about offering communion to Protestant visitors.

The political climate of Northern Ireland has tended to have an adverse effect on monastic involvement in ecumenical activities.

In the United States, the possibilities for ecumenical involvement are perhaps more numerous than in other Regions. This claim is based on the sheer fact that there are over 200 denominations of Christians that exist in the US. This fact also means that ecumenical involvement in the US is more challenging than in other Regions.

Contributing both to the opportunities and to the challenges is the fact that several of the US monasteries are in geographical regions where Catholics are in the minority. Historically, for some of the monks and nuns sent on foundations in the late 1940's and early 1950's, ecumenism meant simply being aware that they were the very first Catholics that their new neighbors would have ever encountered. Ecumenism took the form of meeting the neighbors on their own ground, being hospitable and sociable, and economically just and helpful. Even this latter witness, though, was difficult for the nuns because of the strict expectations about papal enclosure.

Increasingly, especially in the past twenty years, Protestant and other non-Catholic men and women have approached the monasteries as spiritual centers. It is not uncommon for clergy of Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopalian, and other churches and communions to seek out particular monks and nuns as spiritual fathers and mothers. There is a growing trust and mutual appreciation, something that certainly did not obtain even forty years ago in the US.

Several of our monasteries have been involved in inter-religious, as distinct from ecumenical (intra-Christian) dialogue and engagement. One community has sponsored an on-going series of conferences in the abbey by Muslim scholars. Gethsemani, but other abbeys, too, have had major events involving Buddhists, especially Tibetan Buddhists. In the 1980's and 1990's the international Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue (MID) sponsored visits in the US by various groups of Tibetan monks and nuns from India, and several of our monasteries were hosting communities.

Gethsemani itself has continued its "Gethsemani Encounters" (Christian-Buddhist) and has added Muslim-Catholic encounters. A wide range of national and international figures, lay and monastic alike, participates in these encounters. As Gethsemani says about its inter-religious activities, "Apparently the dialogues arose from the personal interest of Thomas Merton stimulating the community

to ecumenism. Much has blossomed as a result... The Dalai Lama desired to have his encounters at Gethsemani, and because of that relationship the monastery has acquired an ecumenical reputation. Muslim, Buddhists, and non-Catholic Christians, feel welcomed.”

As in the Isles, so in the US and in all the other regions, day-to-day concrete ecumenism takes place primarily in the guesthouse. Non-Catholics have felt increasingly welcomed and at home. They realize that by coming to the monastery for a retreat, they are not in danger of being proselytized or pressured to “convert.” Rather, they experience acceptance and are often given assurance that their experience of the Christian faith is complementary to rather than in contrast with the experience of their Catholic brothers and sisters. Again, the example and influence of Thomas Merton cannot be underemphasized. Says one US house, “We are much more sensitive today of the beliefs of others, both Christian and no-Christian.”

One monastery in the ASPAC-Oriens Region, founded in the early 1950’s in a predominately non-Catholic country, notes that openness to ecumenism was present from the very start and that “this pattern has been a constant in the life of the community ever since.” The coordinator of the abbey’s Associate program is an Anglican priest, and this fact fits the profile of the Associates themselves, nearly half of whom are Anglican, not Catholic. The Anglican bishop of the area encourages his clergy to make retreats at the abbey, which they do with more frequency than the Catholic clergy.

Another monastery of the same Region, founded in the 1970’s, notes active ecumenical activity in the 1990’s, but since then very little. They explain that in the country as a whole, which is overwhelmingly Catholic to begin with, there is very little ecumenical movement going on. Of greater importance at this stage in the history of the country is dialogue and promotion of mutual understanding and respect between the Muslim and Catholic/Christian communities. Another community in the same country, founded only in the early 1990’s, says, “since our coming here...as far as involvement of our community in ecumenical events is concerned, the answer is zero.” They go on to add, though, that the sisters consciously keep in their prayers the events sponsored by the local diocese.

One monastery of RAFMA, founded in the early 1960’s in a predominately Protestant area of its African country, says, “it was when the Protestants found out that we were not proselytizing but simply living an enclosed life of prayer and work, that relations with the monastery began to become more accommodating.” As is the case with other monasteries, the openness of the guesthouse to all men and women of good will, and the community’s willingness to help the local community regardless of church membership, eventually resulted in good relationships with the other churches of the region. The Catholic archbishop of the place once

called this particular African monastery “the principal ecumenical influence in the archdiocese.”

One monastery of the English-speaking Regions says, “it has to be admitted that today we are less active ecumenically than, say, twenty or even ten years ago, because the fervor and expectations” of those earlier post-Vatican II years have waned. This seems to be a general trend.

While a renewal of that earlier fervor might be a good thing, nevertheless, our monks and nuns should be encouraged by the affirmation of *Venite Seorsum* (1969): the contemplative life, “aiming as it does at eliminating all that might divide the spirit against itself in any way,” enables monastics “to achieve that fullness of their personalities whose hallmark is unity...”

In a sense, then, the principle ecumenical task of the Cistercian monk and nun is simply their daily life of *conversatio*, their unrelenting striving after personal integrity and coherence, their determination to break down barriers between persons in the local community and their refusal to construct new ones. In short, the chief ecumenical mission of Cistercian monks and nuns is just to be *monachos*, simple, unified, and whole, in communion of love with the brothers and sisters they live with. This is the essence of what John Paul II, in referring to Blessed Maria Gabriella, called “spiritual ecumenism.”

12.3. A FRUITFUL INITIATIVE: MONASTIC INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

(by Fr. Bernard De Give)³¹

One thing that I have discovered and that seems magnificent to me is this interreligious dialogue between monasteries, between contemplatives. Catholic monks and nuns who meet with Buddhist monks and nuns for example, or even with representatives of Sufism. This is something that seems important to me, it is what I call “the dialogue of spiritualities”. We speak about the dialogue of life, about theological dialogue, but the dialogue of spiritualities is the dialogue between persons for whom prayer is the reason for living, who make monastic profession of a radical life, whether in the Christian world or in the Asiatic tradition or in Islam. And I believe that we need to deepen this dialogue between spiritualities. Since, in the end, it is when man prays that he is greatest. (Cardinal Tauran, Interviewed by Zenith, February 10, 2008)

Is the current attraction to Eastern religions on the part of a good number of Westerners, the young and the not so young, a passing fashion, or is it a more lasting phenomenon with repercussions as yet unforeseen? In either case we find ourselves in the presence of a fact that no one can deny. Leaving aside an abstract and doubtless unrealistic study of the question, the purpose of these few pages is to highlight a significant aspect of this movement, namely, *the encounter between the monasticisms of different religions*.

Nostra aetate, the Vatican II declaration on non-Christian religions, a witness to openness and sympathy, may be considered as an official approbation. It was not the absolute beginning. Let it suffice to recall the names of pioneers of adaptation such as De Nobili and Beschi in India, and Ricci in China. In our century, to limit ourselves to the efforts of Catholic thinkers, long before the Council this inclination inspired the Jesuits Dandoy and Johanns in Bengal, and in South India Abbot Jules Monchanin and Dom Henri Le Saux, all of whose works are now be-

³¹ Monk of Scourmont (Belgium). Fr. Bernard entered the Jesuits in 1931, at 18. He taught in India from January 1947 to May 1955. He became a Cistercian in June of 1972 and was part of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID) since its beginning in 1977. He has stayed in several Tibetan centers and monasteries in India and Nepal and went to Tibet in July 1974. Cf. www.scourmont.be/degive/tibet/tibet2.htm.

ing published. An entire group of theologians in India have tackled this problem, and we know the depth of reflection evoked today by the names of Raimundo Panikkar, Fathers Yves Raguin and William Johnston.

Enlisting in this vast movement of openness, and no doubt responding to their most profound intuitions, there has also evolved among monastics a *properly monastic* interest in monks “from the other side.” Is it not astonishing that we have been able to live for so many centuries pretending on both sides to have been unaware of each other? It is just like those religious in Ceylon who, in the 1950s, near a famous Buddhist temple, met a group of monks in yellow robes on the road and, looking to the right, acted as if they had seen nothing, while the *bhikkus* looked toward the left. I cannot help but think that such behavior would be approved neither by Jesus nor by Sakyamuni.

We are no longer at that stage. The importance of monasticism in the dialogue with non-Christian religions has been highlighted in a letter that Cardinal Serge Pignedoli sent to the Abbot Primate Dom Rembert Weakland on June 12, 1974:

Historically, in every age the monk has been the most representative example of *homo religiosus* and as such, represents a point of attraction and reference for both Christians and non-Christians. The presence of monasticism in the heart of the Catholic Church is already, in itself, like a bridge cast towards all religions. If we should have to present ourselves to Hinduism and Buddhism, not to mention the other religions, without the monastic experience, it would be difficult to consider us as religious people.

Father Monchanin had understood this well, all the while gauging the complementary values that would procure for the two partners a mutual enrichment: “India is to give the West a more penetrating sense of the Eternal, of the primacy of being over becoming, and receive in return from the West a more concrete sense of the temporal, of development, of the person, of love.”

And Jacques-Albert Cuttat, in his book *La rencontre des religions*, proposed a golden rule: “The more profoundly we enter into our own religion, the more capable we are of understanding the religion of others from the inside, and the more profoundly we move towards faiths that are different, the more able we are to penetrate into the depths of our own religion.”

This is also to say that in no way do we have to leave aside our faith in Christ in order to engage in the encounter. As was very well said in the brochure published in 1977 at Varanasi by the Indian Bishops’ Commission for Dialogue: “Dialogue is the response of Christian faith to the salvific presence of God in other religious traditions, and the expression of a firm hope for their fulfilment in Christ.”

The pioneers of this ecumenism-in-the-larger-sense—whose names can be found in this account—clearly worked in this spirit. To speak only of one winning personality whose memory remains alive for many, Thomas Merton was a model of this alliance of an integrated monastic life with a heartfelt openness towards the spiritual values of other religions. One recalls in particular his sympathy for Zen. McNerny was able to say of him:

Merton was not a systematic thinker, but he had penetrating intuition about certain aspects and he went to the essential. In this sense, he was one of those who would favorably introduce the oriental traditions to the readers of the West. He went to the Orient as a monk knowing his own tradition well, which is a condition for a true dialogue.

12.3.1 The First Steps of Dialogue

BANGKOK – BANGALORE

The activities of AIM are well known. It was formerly called *Aide à l'Implantation Monastique*; the acronym at present means *Aide Inter-Monastères*. To speak only of Asia, very early in its history AIM had to its credit two great congresses of monastic superiors: that of *Bangkok* in 1968, which was marked by the tragic death of Thomas Merton; and that of *Bangalore* in 1973, the acts of which have been published under the title, *Les moines chrétiens face aux religions d'Asie*. As a result of this meeting, which was very fruitful also in other respects, Dom Rembert Weakland, Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order, made a suggestion that would prove effective. Without denying the contribution that specialists, whether lay or religious, could make to the encounter between religions, is there not a particular call *for monastics* to devote themselves to efforts to make contact with their counterparts from the great non-Christian religions?

The call was heard. Multiple initiatives in this area would soon be seen.

EVOLUTION OF THE COMMISSION FOR MONASTIC INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The commission for *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, known as DIM, takes care to establish and support fraternal relationships, in the majority of western European countries, with monks of Oriental religions. We have said a few words about its origins. England is especially active; Dom Cornelius Tholens in Amsterdam is also active. So are our members in Germany, Belgium, France, and Italy.

Among them are some of the great abbeys of the Benedictine Order. The NABEWD in North America publishes a bulletin, makes tapes available, organizes meetings, and collaborates with the Naropa Institute of Boulder, Colorado, founded by the Tibetan master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987).

Animated by the same spirit, the Benedictine abbey of La Pierre-qui-Vire, has for many years had an excellent relationship with the Kagyu-Ling Center in Saône-et-Loire, while the Trappist abbey of Tamié in Savoy sustains neighborly relations with Karma-Ling, formerly the Charterhouse of Saint-Hugon.

The North American branch was first called NABEWD (*North American Board for East-West Dialogue*). Recently, in order better to indicate its monastic character, it has been renamed MID (*Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*). Great Britain prefers to call it *Monastic Interfaith Dialogue* rather than DIM, which has an unappealing connotation in English. This is not the place to detail the activities of these groups, which are subdivided into regional commissions: France, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Netherlands, Switzerland, the Iberian peninsula, Italy, and even, later, an Indian commission. There is good reason to think that this tree will branch out in the coming years: Poland, Australia, East Asia...

A recent modification of structures (1993) has transferred greater autonomy to DIM (or MID) than was the case when it was a sub-commission of AIM, but the General Secretary is directly under the Abbot Primate of the Order of Saint Benedict and the Abbot General of the Trappists.

For anyone interested in our project, one has only to recommend the book by Dom Jean Leclercq, OSB, *Nouvelle page d'histoire monastique: Histoire de l'AIM, 1960-1985*. Published by the Secretariate of Vanves in 1986, it is based upon abundant documentation and was written with earnestness. In it one can see how the birth and development of DIM were linked to initiatives of AIM. The position of General Secretary of the AIM was entrusted to Abbot Robert de Floris, who soon had the assistance of Sister Pia Valeri from the monastery of Bethany, Loppem. When Abbot de Floris retired, his successor, named in July, 1982, was Fr. Marie-Bernard de Soos, former superior of Dzogbégan in Togo. The new secretary in 1984 was Sister Teresa Rodrigues of Stanbrook in England. Heading the commission of dialogue now is Fr. Pierre de Béthune, Prior of Clerlande, in Belgium.

AN EXEMPLAR OF DIALOGUE: THOMAS MERTON

Many years after his death, Thomas Merton still makes his prophetic voice heard. In the light of his biography by Monica Furlong and of his *Asian Journal*, one can clearly see a prominent element of his influence, namely, his interest in the spiritual traditions of the East. We remember in particular his connections with

D.T. Suzuki and Zen, his visit to monasteries in Thailand, his overwhelming spiritual experience in the presence of the Buddha of Polonnaruwa, his conversations with Tibetan monks and with the Dalai Lama. Without jeopardizing any part of his Christian faith, Merton believed that a real enrichment would come about through assimilating the living values of the oriental religions. All of this opens us to the challenges facing society and the world. There was coherence between Merton's work and his life, the latter becoming more supple and ready for change. His concern for authenticity and integrity brought him close to the oriental disciplines leading to dispossession of the self.

We must call attention to a more recent event, as well, the *Gethsemani Encounter*. There were seen the efforts of twenty-five Buddhists and twenty-five Christians, spiritual guides and teachers, authentic representatives of different religious traditions, gathered to promote mutual understanding among persons of different faiths. Under the aegis of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID), this group of mostly monks and nuns met during a week in July, 1996, at the Abbey of Gethsemani, in Kentucky. The location was not chosen by chance. *The Gethsemani Encounter* paid tribute to Thomas Merton, and it is clear that the colloquium would not have taken place without the meeting between Merton and the Dalai Lama thirty years earlier.

Moreover, we cannot omit mention of the Bön, the ancient religion of Tibet that preserves a monastic tradition that is still very alive. Their principal monastery today is located in Dolanji, India, in Himāchal Pradesh. I have had good relations with them. More recently, in 1999 the abbot of Menri sent two of his monks to stay for three weeks with the Trappists of Gethsemani, and then for one month with the Benedictine monks of Christ in the Desert in New Mexico, USA

TRAPPISTS IN EUROPE

Recognizing the importance of the witness of Thomas Merton and of the activities of the American monks and nuns should not make us forget the achievements of some of our Trappists in our own European countries. Many, notably in certain countries such as France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, have resolutely involved themselves in this dialogue, whether with the Tibetan monks or with the Zen monks of Japan. Neither do we forget what was done, through words and through their deeds, by the generous Trappists of Tibhirine. They were not officially in our DIM commissions. But we had some good meetings with Fr. Christian de Chergé, at En-Calcat (October 14–15, 1991), for example, and then at Montserrat in Catalonia in 1995. It is only in more recent times that dialogue with the Sufis, such as Sheik Bentounès, has been on the agenda. Finally, let us observe that in the domain

of interreligious dialogue, the Benedictine monks and Benedictine nuns have a much more far-reaching involvement.

In France, the interreligious encounters held by the group at Sainte-Baume should be highlighted, notably including Brother Jean-Pierre Hennes of the Abbey of Tamié. In the Netherlands, the leader with great vitality is Fr. Jef Boeckmans from the Abbey of Zundert. The Belgian commission of dialogue is directed by Fr. Bernard-Joseph Samain of the Abbey of Orval. He was part of a group who spent some time in a Zen monastery in Japan.

If I may speak of my personal experiences, being involved myself from the beginning in intermonastic dialogue, I am especially interested in Tibetan Buddhism. I have spent time in a number of Buddhist centers in various countries of Europe. In particular, in order to learn their language, I went regularly to Kagyu-Ling in Saône-et-Loire. I have participated in all of the Christian-Buddhist colloquia organized by the Karma-Ling Institute in Savoy. These colloquia continue to be held at Meylan, the major seminary of Grenoble. I have had the opportunity to live for many months in Tibetan centers in India, notably in Dharamsala, to visit centers in Nepal several times, and to go on pilgrimage to Tibet. Anyone wanting more details can find them in a book on the internet entitled *Un trappiste à la rencontre des moines du Tibet*. <http://www.scourmont.be/degive/tibet.htm>.

12.3.2. Christian-Buddhist Colloquia

I. AT THE KARMA-LING INSTITUTE, ARVILLARD, SAVOY

1 1983: Christian Meditation and Buddhist Meditation

2 1984: Word and Silence

These first two were published in mimeograph form by Éditions Prajna, Karma Ling.

3 1985: Love and Knowledge

4 1987: Spirituality in Daily Life

5 1988: God and Emptiness.

In 1993 *Convergence du christianisme et du bouddhisme* appeared (les Dossiers du Dharma, 18, Éditions Prajna, Arvillard). Text abridged in the journal *Dharma*, n. 18. The sixth colloquium was preceded by many sessions of study by a small group, and therefore had a lengthy period of preparation.

6 1996: *Trinity and Trikāya*. See summary in the journal *Dharma* (1997), n. 28.

II. AT THE THEOLOGICAL CENTER OF MEYLAN, GRENOBLE
FORMER SEMINARY OF GRENOBLE

- 1 1999: *Non-Duality*. Published by the journal *Chemins du dialogue* of the I.S.T.R. de Marseille (May, 2001), n. 17.
- 2 2001: *Buddhism, Christianity: Ethical Ways*. Published by the *Cahiers de Meylan* (2001), n. 2.
- 3 2002: *To Make Peace Together: In Oneself, With Others, and in Just Institutions*.
- 4 2003: *To Build Peace Together: Buddhists and Christians Mutually Pledge*. Published by the *Cahiers de Meylan* (2003).

12.3.2. East-West Spiritual Exchanges with Zen Monks of Japan

Since 1979 a new enterprise has taken shape, full of promise, of which the fruits are already evident. It is an actual exchange of monks. This has already happened in connection with two oriental traditions that are particularly interiorized and open: the Tibetan lamas and the Zen monks of Japan. Groups of Zen monks come to European abbeys, while European monks and nuns go to keep the strict discipline of Zen during a month in Japan. These spiritual exchanges have been taking place alternately in Europe and in Japan every four years since 1979. Such sojourns in monasteries foster an understanding of one another that is concrete and profound. The allocution of Pope John Paul II at the conclusion of the first exchange can be found in the *Bulletin of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*. After the second, a vivid account by Benoît Billot, OSB, appeared in his book, *Voyage dans les monastères Zen*. In the *Bulletin* just mentioned one may find an account of the second and third exchanges. For the fourth exchange, see the article by Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, M.A., in the *AIM Bulletin*. Regarding the whole project, we have available at the present time a dossier put together by Madame Mitchiko Ishigami-Iagolnitzer, researcher from the CNRS, *Dialogue interreligieux monastique au Japon et en Europe*, which has gathered a large number of reports and interviews made at these Spiritual Exchanges between 1979 and 1987.

Likewise it must be emphasized that this is not a question of meeting occasionally in passing, as if nothing happened in the intervals. For example, one Japanese Zen monk has had the constancy to pursue a course of theological studies over some years at the Abbey of Sankt Ottilien in Bavaria. Hozumi Roshi has begun to be a figure well known and admired among the communities of Europe for his conferences and the workshops he leads, while the lively personality of the Ab-

bess Aoyama Sensei makes us feel affection, through her, for the nuns of the Soto tradition.

- 1979: First Spiritual Exchange (SE), forty Japanese monks stay in European monasteries.
- 1983: Second SE, fifteen European monks and two nuns go to Japan.
- 1987: Third SE, thirty-seven Japanese reside in European monasteries.
- 1990: Fourth SE, fourteen monks and six nuns from Europe are welcomed by the Japanese.
- 1997: Fifth SE, five Japanese monks and two nuns are received in France and Belgium.

From this date on, some modifications were made to reduce the number of participants and to increase the frequency and length of the stays. The arrangements for introductory courses in Europe were more settled.

- 1998: Sixth SE, seven French, Belgian and Swiss participants stay in Japanese monasteries.
- 2000: Seventh SE, the Netherlands and Dutch-speaking Belgium host three monks and two nuns.
- 2001: Eighth SE, four monks and three nuns from Dutch-speaking regions go to Japan.
- 2003: Ninth SE, seven Japanese monks and nuns are guests of Italian monasteries.

The tenth Spiritual Exchange is now being prepared.

12.3.3. Exchanges with Tibetan Monks (The Intermonastic Hospitality Program)

In 1982, a young monk, thirty years old and a student of the Dialectical School of Dharamsala, spent four months in the United States, staying in turn in six Benedictine abbeys. He participated in their life and shared much with them. It was very satisfactory on both sides. The experience was repeated the following year on a larger scale. Three Tibetan monks visited a dozen abbeys of Benedictines and Trappists in the United States and Canada. In return, a group of Catholic monks and nuns went to India during the fall of 1986, to stay in a rather large number of Tibetan monasteries.

All of these encounters can be listed under the title *Intermonastic Hospitality Program*. These exchanges, which had begun in 1982, were in their seventh phase

by 1995. Already in 1993, about a hundred monasteries in Europe and America had welcomed Hindu or Buddhist monks and nuns, and more than seventy Christian monks and nuns had gone to stay in various Oriental monasteries. For the sixth and seventh phases of the program, involving monks and nuns on both sides in 1994 and 1995, see the bulletin of the NABEWD, entitled since 1993 *Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue Bulletin*.

Independently of these exchanges, in 1988 two English Benedictines, Dom Aldhelm Cameron-Brown, Abbot of Prinknash, and Father Francis Baird, under the aegis of the DIM, made a tour of forty-eight Tibetan monasteries throughout India.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Spread of Cistercian Culture

13.1. THE MAIN PERIODICALS OF THE ORDER

(by Dom Armand Veilleux)¹

In this brief presentation on the main periodicals of the Order—which does not claim to be exhaustive—we will speak mostly about the periodicals of the OCSO. However, we must mention from the outset an important publication of the OC, whose origin goes back to the period before 1892.

Cistercienser Chronik

The German periodical *Cistercienser Chronik* was founded at Mehrerau in 1889 by Fr. Gregory Müller, who continued as its director until he reached the age of ninety-three. This review described itself, first of all, as a sort of family newsletter of the Cistercian Order; but early on it also became interested in the history of the Order, as well as in various aspects of Cistercian spirituality. Today it bears the subtitle *Forum für Geschichte, Kunst, Literatur und Spiritualität des Monchtums* (Forum on Monastic History, Art, Literature and Spirituality).

It is published today by the abbey of Wettingen-Mehrerau, and members of our Order contribute articles to it. Sister Magdalena Aust, nun of Maria Frieden is one of the editors.

Collectanea

It is fitting to spend a little more time on *Collectanea* than on the other periodicals, since it is the only one that was an official review of our Order, at least during a certain period.

¹ Abbot of Scourmont, Dom Armand is presently the director of the publication *Cîteaux, Commentarii cistercienses*.

When the 1933 General Chapter agreed to begin publishing *Collectanea*, it was not a new idea. It had been proposed several times in the past but had met with many objections, mainly for fear of a certain kind of intellectualism into the Order. The project received the approval of the General Chapter when the Abbot General himself, Dom Herman Joseph Smets, took responsibility for it and presented it to the Chapter. He personally took charge of all the details of the first issue, including the choice of typeface (he had once been in charge of the printing press at Westmalle). But it was obvious that the Abbot General could not take on the publication of a review along with all his other responsibilities. Dom Anselme Le Bail, abbot of Scourmont, to whom this review meant so much and who, more than anyone else, had been its initiator, proposed as editor Fr. Camille Hontoir, a monk of his community. Fr. Camille edited the review for more than twenty years, from 1933 to 1954.

The editorship was then taken over briefly by Dom André Fracheboud of Tamié, from 1955 to 1959, and by Dom André Louf of Mont-des-Cats from 1959 until his election as abbot in January 1963. It then returned to Scourmont for another period of twenty years, under the responsibility of Fr. Charles Dumont, from 1963 to 1971, and Fr. Gabriel Ghislain, from 1971 to 1984. At that point the editorship went once again to Mont-des-Cats, where it was a joint effort by Fr. Yvon Petit, responsible for the articles, and Fr. Jacques Delesalle, responsible for the bulletin.

Collectanea began as an *official review* of the Order. The 1933 General Chapter set up a “doctrinal reading committee” composed of seven abbots, “in charge of censorship, without prejudice to the rights of the Definitory, whose job it was to apportion the material and judge the advisability of publishing it.”² From 1965 on, *Collectanea* lost its official character. The Definitory no longer assumed its direction, and a “Board of Directors” composed of six persons was formed. From then on, the inside of the cover page bore the notation: “The opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors alone.” This Board of Directors took on several other members in 1982.

Since *Collectanea* no longer depended on the central authority of the Order, it became necessary to give it legal status. Thus, a non-profit organization called *Collectanea Cisterciensia* (later simplified as *Cisterciensia*) was established, the purpose of which was “to publish reviews of spirituality.” This non-profit Association has had legal responsibility for *Collectanea* ever since. At the beginning Fr. Maur Standaert was its president; then it was Dom Thomas Vilain until his death in 2000; since then, the current abbot of Scourmont is its president.

A slight restructuring of the review in 2000 introduced an Editorial Board,

² Acts of the General Chapter of 1933, p. 18.

one of which is Editor-in-Chief. Fr. Bernard-Joseph Samain of Orval had this job for several years; the editorship was then passed on to Sr. Marcelle Bodson of Clairefontaine. At present this Editorial Board includes, apart from Trappists and Trappistines, a monk of Lérins and a Bernardine nun of Esquermes, emphasizing the review's roots in the Cistercian Family.

Collectanea was originally conceived in the spirit of the *Charter of Charity* as a medium for fostering communion, with the goal of reinforcing the bonds of fraternity among communities. Its purpose was to stimulate interest in Cistercian spirituality, history, and liturgy, through teaching adapted to monks and nuns of the Order, in order to enlighten them and sustain them in their vocation. In his introduction to the first issue, Dom Herman-Joseph, no doubt responding to fears expressed by certain capitulants, affirmed that *Collectanea* in no way sought to be erudite, but simply wanted “to assist souls in their ascent toward the love of God.”³

In reality, in spite of this fear of erudition, the review published, from the beginning, several articles of great scientific value on various Cistercian Fathers and on numerous liturgical and juridical aspects of the Order. This orientation was evidently due to the personality of the first Editor, Fr. Camille Hontoir, a man of great culture, to whom Dom Anselme Le Bail had passed on a love of the Cistercian tradition. In addition to these basic articles, there were announcements of important events in the Order and, most importantly, the annual chronicle of each monastery, along with bibliographical notes.

As soon as he assumed editorship of the review, Dom André Louf introduced the *Bulletin of Monastic Spirituality*, which provides lists and reviews of key publications in the field, and which remains to this day one of the gems of *Collectanea*. Another important gift of Dom André to the review was to enlarge its horizon to Christian monasticism in general (not just Cistercian) and to ecumenism.

The new spirit stirred up in the Church by the Council and in the Order by the beginnings of postconciliar renewal led the review to rethink its orientation and its objectives, all the more since other reviews were beginning to appear in the Order, each having a somewhat different orientation. The first issue of 1965 approached this question head-on, first in an editorial by Dom André Louf, member of the Board of Directors and abbot of Mont-des-Cats, then in an article in English by Fr. Louis (Thomas) Merton on “The Role of a Monastic Review.” Dom André described the orientation of *Collectanea*—which, let us remember, was no longer the “official review” of the Order—in these words: “Today, thanks be to God, after many vicissitudes, the Review can take a fresh start. It seems capable

³ *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorem*, 1 (1934) pp.6–7.

of humbly taking on its little role today's monastic renewal. By opening its pages wide to the, at times chaotic, but very fervent and promising spiritual upsurge almost everywhere in the monastic Order, it can hope to be more effectively present to an evolving Church in dialogue."⁴

Cistercium

Founded in 1949 and published under the authority of the Cistercian monasteries of the Strict Observance in Spain, *Cistercium* is a review of Cistercian and monastic history, art, and spirituality. In recent years, with Fr. Francisco Rafael de Pascual of Viaceli as Director and Fr. Jeremias Palacios of La Oliva as Editor, it has opened up to other themes as well, especially to the fundamental aspects of the religious and mystical life.

Cîteaux, Commentarii Cistercienses

Cîteaux, Commentarii Cistercienses is a multilingual and international review that publishes scientific articles on all the aspects of Cistercian history: art, architecture, archeology, law, music, liturgy, intellectual life, etc. Indications on the state of progress in academic research in these areas are also found there.

The two tireless initiators of this review were Frs. Roger de Ganck of Westmalle and Edmond Mikkers of Achel. The first issue, which appeared in 1950, was entitled *Mededelingen over het Cisterciënser leven in de Nederlanden* (Papers on the Cistercian Life in Holland). From the second issue on and in all the following issues up to the ninth, the title was *Cîteaux in de Nederlanden. Mededelingen over het Cisterciënser leven van de XII^e tot de XVIII^e eeuw* (Cîteaux in Holland. Papers on Cistercian Life from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century). As indicated in the first issue, it had to do with the former "Low Countries," which included the present territory of Holland, Belgium, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, as well as Northern France.

From 1950 on, the review was called *Cîteaux, Commentarii Cistercienses*. It was then transformed into a high level international review. Even if it was never an "official" review of the Order, the 1951 General Chapter intervened to approve its passage from a review *pro manuscripto* to a review *publici iuris*.

Beginning in 1962 (when Fr. Roger de Ganck left for America to serve as chaplain at the foundation of Redwoods), Fr. Edmond Mikkers was the sole editor until 1985. At that time he passed the torch to Br. Jean-François Holthof of the abbey

⁴ *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 27 (1965): 6–7.

of Cîteaux. Since 1993 Madame Terryl Kinder has been Editor-in-Chief, assisted by an Editorial Board of specialists from the Order and the academic world.

Hallel

The English review *Hallel* began at the abbey of Mount Melleray, in Ireland, in 1960. At that time it was a question of sharing liturgical texts when we had gone to the vernacular (from which came its name of *Hallel*, which means “praise”). The editorship passed on to the abbey of Roscrea, and, in 1968 this publication became a “Review of Monastic Spirituality and Liturgy” (see p. 157, above).

Monastic Studies

Begun at the OCSO monastery of Berryville, USA, in 1963, the review *Monastic Studies* was a follow-up on several volumes of *Cistercian Studies* published at the same monastery during the years 1961–1962. It was a review of monastic spirituality destined for English-speaking monasteries of the OCSO. However, it was transferred to the Benedictine monastery of Mount Saviour, USA, in 1965.

Liturgie/Liturgy

In 1966 in the context of postconciliar liturgical reform, the OCSO Liturgy Commission decided to publish a Liturgy Bulletin in both French and English, having with the simple titles *Liturgie* and *Liturgy*. Fr. Armand Veilleux, then a monk of Mistassini, became the editor of the two editions from the beginning. He was replaced for the English edition by Fr. Chrysogonus Waddell in 1970, and for the French edition by Fr. Paul Houix of Timadeuc in 1972. The English edition remained under the direction of Fr. Chrysogonus until it ceased to appear, about ten years ago. As for the French edition, it was revived as a “Nouvelle Série” in 1972, under the aegis of the CFC (Cistercian Francophone Commission); since then it has had several editors. The present editor is Sr. Marie-Pierre Faure of the abbey of Chambarand.

In their early years, the goal of these two reviews was to communicate to the monasteries of the Order the decisions of the Holy See and of the Order regarding our liturgy, and the fruit of the work of the Order’s Liturgy Commission, which was very active during the years 1965–1977. After that, especially the French edition, they opened up to a much larger public than just the Order—notably to the monasteries of traditions other than Cistercian—and contributed in a significant way to the elaboration and the quality of the liturgy after Vatican II.

Cistercian Studies Quarterly

Even though *Collectanea* was essentially a French review, up to 1966 it occasionally included articles in English. After that date, the need for an English version of *Collectanea* was felt. Thus began *Cistercian Studies*. In the early years English translations of articles found in *Collectanea* were published. Gradually, however, the two reviews became independent of one another, and *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* became an important and autonomous monastic review. Besides reflections on various aspects of monastic life today, it also includes solid studies of a scientific nature written either by monks of our Order or by other researchers from the academic world.

From 1966 to 1981 the editorship of the review was at the abbey of Caldey, daughter house of Scourmont, which at that time was responsible for *Collectanea*. Since then, the editorship of CSQ has been held by various monks of the USA Region. The present editor is Fr. John Eudes Bamberger, abbot emeritus of Genesee.

Cuadernos Monasticos

This review is not solely Cistercian, even if numerous members of our Order have played and are playing an important part in it. It is a review of monastic spirituality from the Conference of Monastic Communities of the “Southern Cone” of Latin America (SURCO), which is made up of Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries of monks and nuns in Argentina, Chili, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

This review began in 1966. Since 1969 it has appeared four times a year. It has three main sections: a) articles having to do with Christian monastic life since the first centuries of Christianity, b) translations of monastic sources from the first centuries into Spanish, and, c) book reviews and bibliographical notices.

Monastieke Informatie / De Kovel

This review, begun in 1967, is also not exclusively a publication of our Order. It is an medium of information and exchange of opinions among Cistercian monasteries—of both Observances—and Benedictines from Dutch-speaking countries. First published in a mimeograph form, the review has become more and more professional through the years, in content as well as in typographical presentation. It includes news and reflections on a great variety of events and monastic themes.

In 2008 the review was given a completely new and beautiful layout, and was

even renamed. It is now *De Kovel* (The Cowl). Its subtitle is *Monastiek tijdschrift voor Vlaanderen en Nederland* (Monastic Review for Flanders and Holland).

13.2. ARCCIS–CERCCIS

The “Association pour le Rayonnement de la Culture Cistercienne” (ARCCIS) was created on January 15, 1996, to make available, defend, and spread *Cistercian culture*, understood in its broadest sense, i.e., everything that gives life to a Cistercian community from the spiritual (spiritual literature) and material (architecture, economy, arts...) points of view.

Its orientation is:

- To promote the publication of texts dealing with Cistercian tradition and spirituality. Even though it is not itself a publishing house, it collaborates in publications by other publishing houses (particularly Bellefontaine) by providing academic expertise or editorial advice. About fifteen titles have already been published under its aegis.
- To distribute Cistercian writings published by other publishers, making them known, providing catalogues, bibliographies, data bases, and indexes. This distribution role includes all types of documents: books, cassettes, CDs, videos, etc.

This association has the advantage of including all elements of the Cistercian Family. Its Administrative Council includes representatives of the two Orders, OC and OCSO,⁵ the Bernardines of Esquermes, the communities of Collombey and G ronde (French-speaking Swiss), as well as lay Cistercians. It also includes guides to Cistercian sites, historians, and persons who contribute in one way or another to making Cistercian patrimony and culture better known. At its annual General Assembly, one day each year, most often at C teaux or at another Cistercian abbey, it brings together abbots and abbesses of various Cistercian Congregations to work at making their common culture better known and respected. The presidency is taken by turns. The Prior of S nanque has the honor for 2008. Today the Association numbers about one hundred members, principally representatives of monasteries in Europe, but also in Canada, Morocco, and Israel. Monasteries in Africa and Madagascar are also represented.

⁵ The Abbots General OC and OCSO each have a representative as ex-officio members of the administrative board.

ARCCIS publishes a small news bulletin annually, but also, since 2001, a semi-annual review entitled *Liens Cisterciens*, which opens multiple doors into the Cistercian world through articles written in simple language by monks, nuns, and lay persons. This review, intended mainly but not exclusively for lay people who frequent our abbeys, essentially tries to help others discover the Cistercian culture in the broad sense of the term, not as a culture from the past with its glories of former times, but as a living heritage that inspires the life of monks and nuns today. It modestly makes the link between yesterday and today, between cloister and the city. For those who live in close contact with a Cistercian abbey, the review is a way of getting to know its history and spirituality. It allows them to take a more in-depth look, to listen to representative figures, and to read selections from the Cistercian Fathers.

Since 2006, the Association's website (www.arccis.org) publishes a **bibliography** on things Cistercian. This bibliography, which will be regularly updated, mainly focuses on Cistercian spirituality. Primarily French, it has, nevertheless, many English references. It lists articles that have appeared in both French and English in the principle Reviews mentioned above in § 13.1. It covers the years since 1940 for *Collectanea*, as well as those from *Studia Monastica* and *Revue bénédictine* up to 1987. It mentions all the books reviewed in these journals. Although not exhaustive, it is 250 pages long all the same!

There were certain requests that needed attention. On one hand researchers and students were looking for assistance to clarify various points having to do with their study topics or with questions of history, patrimony, or spirituality, and were unable to find qualified help. On the other hand, there is the risk that information gathered by researchers will merely gather dust on a shelf or perhaps be lost. Thus the need to establish a "resource center," that can gather these documents and make them available to persons who would profit from them, and also put researchers in contact with others in the field. A scientific committee has been formed, which is in contact with universities and public libraries, especially in Burgundy, to study the projects for such a center and to support it once it has been established. The abbey of Cîteaux has put at its disposal an unoccupied space just outside the enclosure, but it needed fixing up. Little by little, things are falling into place, thanks to some generous benefactors, and on April 20, 2007, CERCCIS (Centre Européen pour le Rayonnement de la Culture Cistercienne), was inaugurated, with ARCCIS as its coordinator.

This center already houses materials from the Cistercian collection of the library of the abbey of Dombes, from several researchers like Fr. Maur Cocheril (who produced photos or microfilms of liturgical manuscripts), Eugene Manning, Marcel Aubert, Robert Thomas, and others. These resources need to be inven-

toried and catalogued, or even put in digital form. There is no lack of work for this Center, but it needs a sufficient operating budget, which has not yet been forthcoming.

One last initiative of ARCCIS–CERCCIS that deserves mention are the annual Cistercian Culture days, open to persons who are doing research on Cistercian life and who want to meet in an interdisciplinary setting. These days allow the participants freely to exchange their experiences and their methods, to share their questions, and to speak about the progress of their work. Three of these days have already been held at Acey, La Trappe, and Aiguebelle. At each of them there were contributions in such diverse areas as theology, architecture, institutional history, art history, archives, diplomacy, and liturgy. It is surprising to see that there are young men and women researchers, from universities and elsewhere, who are passionately interested in the Cistercian reality.

In the last analysis, what the Association and its Center want to provide is an interface between this world of students and amateur or professional researchers and the monastic world. The fact that they are located near a monastic community at Cîteaux shows that it is not only a question of preserving a past, but also of manifesting that the Cistercian tradition is a contemporary reality, very much alive.

13.3. INSTITUTE OF CISTERCIAN STUDIES AT KALAMAZOO

The Institute of Cistercian Studies exists to encourage and facilitate research on the history and content of the Cistercian tradition. Founded in 1973 as a cooperative venture by Western Michigan University and Cistercian Publications Inc., the Institute sponsors an annual Cistercian Studies Conference, held in conjunction with the International Congress on Medieval Studies sponsored by The Medieval Institute at Western Michigan University. There scholars from Europe and North America come together to discuss their research in the history, theology, liturgy, manuscript tradition, economics, art and archaeology of the Order. Visiting specialists are also invited to speak on campus and at Cistercian Abbeys in the United States.

Workshops on specific themes drawn from the Cistercian/monastic tradition and field trips to Cistercian sites are sometimes held during the summer months.

The Institute maintains a library collection of medieval manuscripts, incunabula (early books printed between the invention of the printing press and the

year 1500), rare and scholarly books from and about the Cistercian Order. This collection is housed in Waldo Library, under the direction of the Special Collections Librarian, who is also the Librarian of the Institute of Cistercian Studies. The combined University and Institute book and journal holdings in Cistercian and medieval studies form one of the best collections on the subject in the world. Graduate students are allowed access to the rare book collection as part of their training in paleography and historical studies, providing them with an opportunity to work with physical manuscripts in addition to facsimiles.

The Institute of Cistercian Studies has no course offerings of its own and hence no faculty or students directly attached to it. Classes in monastic history and Cistercian thought are offered through the Department of History and the Medieval Institute.

Cistercian Publications Inc., a publishing house specializing in English translations of medieval and late antique monastic texts and in studies on the monastic tradition, maintains its editorial offices at the Institute of Cistercian Studies in Walwood Hall. Its books are available at its offices and in the Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan Reading Room on the east campus. In 2004 Cistercian Publications entered into a partnership with the Liturgical Press at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville. Cistercian Publications produces several Series:

- *Cistercian Fathers Series* (CF): translations of the Cistercian Fathers and Mothers;
- *Cistercian Studies Series* (CS): works from all centuries pertinent to the study and appreciation of the Cistercian heritage;
- *Monastic Wisdom Collection* (MWC): a newly developing collection that will publish more popular volumes along the same lines to serve a wider audience, especially the many lay persons and associates of the Order who wish to enrich their lives from Cistercian sources.

Institute of Cistercian Studies and Cistercian Publications
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13.4. THE CHARTER OF CISTERCIAN ABBEYS IN EUROPE

Clairvaux, was emptied of its monks and became confiscated property at the time of the French Revolution, and eventually was transformed into a prison in 1808 (as were other monasteries). But the penitentiary administration, in the 1970s, built a modern prison beside the regular buildings, which are not very practical. These buildings were recently freed up and passed on to the Ministry of Culture. They are classified as historical monuments, and the lay brothers' wing from the twelfth century (cellar and dormitory) have been carefully restored. An Association (Renaissance de l'abbaye de Clairvaux) came into being around 1980, in view of reviving the site, of making it known; and of guiding the visitors (under certain conditions imposed by its proximity to the prison). On the occasion of the ninth centenary of the birth of Saint Bernard, in 1990, it organized a Conference on the history of Clairvaux,⁶ and also, in agreement with the inhabitants of the region, an outdoor event and other cultural exhibits that were very successful.

The President of the Association, who administers the site of Clairvaux, took the initiative to organize a confederative structure of mutual help for the diverse properties or associations that have been created around former Cistercian abbeys, to look after what remains, to stimulate visits, and to make them better known. This is the origin of the 1993 "Charter for Cistercian Abbeys and Sites," which was then extended to all of Europe. The review *Cîteaux* is one of the founding members.⁷ The Charter includes nearly 150 abbeys and Cistercian sites open to the public—some of which are still operative abbeys of our Order—out of the 750 listed monuments and the thousand former women's monasteries connected with the Cistercian Order.

The "Charter" has a website (www.cister.net) and a newsletter that comes out three times a year. The general assembly meets in the month of April, each time at a different site. There are usually about fifty participants.

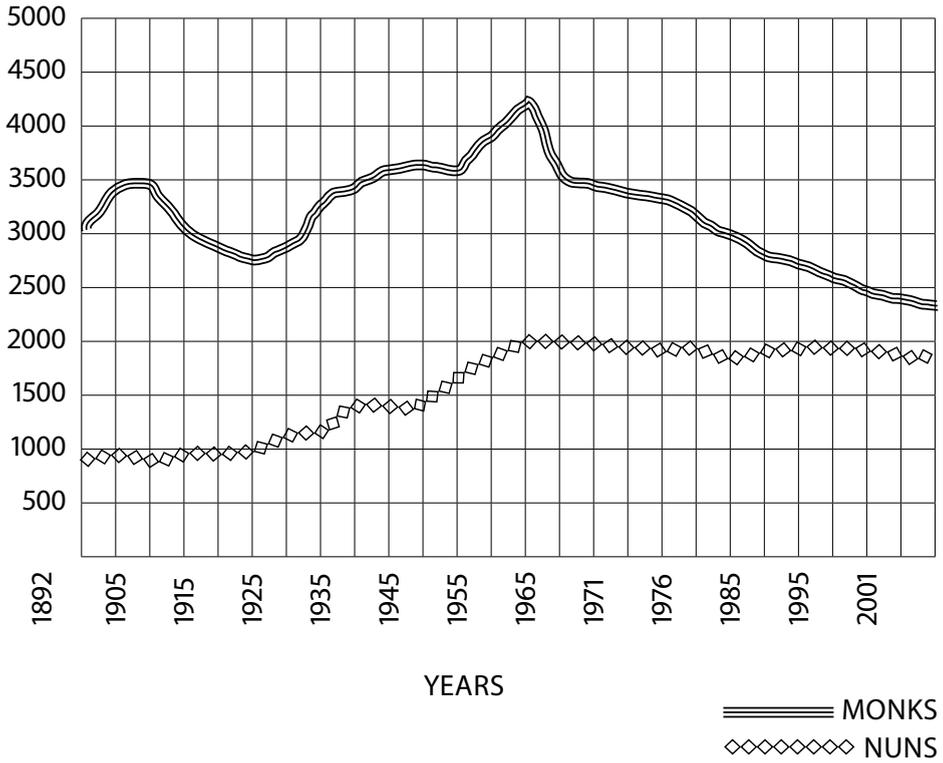
It also organizes formation sessions every other year for guides and coordinators of Cistercian sites. As the presentation of the Charter says on its Internet site: "Each year millions of visitors discover Cistercian spirituality, architecture or history more by the guides than by homilies of monks or the books of historians. It is a demanding responsibility that must be carried out without hagiography or polemic, and that justifies this pedagogical function of the Charter."

6 See the review of the Conference by Benoît Chauvin in *Cîteaux* 41 (1990): 169. The Conference brought together over 500 persons. The volume of the Acts appeared in 1991, published by the Association.

7 The abbot of Cîteaux belongs to the Committee of Sponsors.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the “tour” set up at the abbey of Cîteaux since the year of its ninth centenary. The visit, accompanied by a guide, focuses more on spirituality than on architecture. More than mere tourism, it is a spiritual initiative intended to make Cistercian tradition known both in its history and in its present reality in the context of contemporary human questions. In the course of the tour—set up in rooms that are outside the regular places but that resemble them—people are invited to get at least a small taste of the monks’ experience through the readings and commentaries offered by the guides. The tour ends in the fifteenth-century library, and conducts the visitor through 900 years of history up to the living community of today.

NUMBER OF MONKS AND NUNS OCSO 1892-2002



TOTAL MEMBERS OCSO 1892-2002

