



ReM 2023
Praglia, 11-18 October

PARTICIPANTS

AIGUEBELLE	Dom Georges	(Sup. ad nutum)
TRE FONTANE	Dom Emanuel	(Sup. ad nutum)
FRATTOCCHIE	Dom Loris	(Abbot)
ATLAS	Dom Jean-Pierre	(Prior)
BOSCHI	Dom Giovanni	(Sup. ad nutum)
VIALE AFRICA	Dom Bernardus <i>From 16 October for lunch to 17 morning</i> Dom Emmanuel	(A. G.) (Cons. A. G.)
BLAUVAC	M.re Anne-Emmanuelle	(Abbess)
BONNEVAL	M.re Michèle	(Abbess Co- President)
VITORCHIANO	M. Rosaria	(Abbess)
VALSERENA	M. Maria Francesca	(Abbess)
NAŠÍ PANÍ	M. Lucia (<i>absent</i>)	(Abbess Co- President)
SIRIA	M. Marta Luisa	(Superior)
MÃE DA IGREJA	M. Giusy	(Superior)
ACQUE SALVIE	M. Martha	(Superior)

INVITED

Dom Stefano Visintin O.S.B. Sr. Anne Claire	PRAGLIA BONNEVAL	(Abbot - one day) (Sub-prioress)
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INTERPRETERS

Br Benedict, O.C. Sr. Maria Teresa	Vitorchiano	It./fr. Fr. / it.
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SECRETARIES

Sr. Sabina Sr. Anne	Vitorchiano Valserena	Italian French
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ReM 2023 was held from 11th to 18th October at the Benedictine Abbey of St Mary of the Assumption, Praglia (Padua), and saw the Superiors of the French and Italian Houses, together with those of Morocco, Syria and Portugal, gathered as usual. Absent, to our regret, was Co-President M. Lucia of Naší Paní, due to a persistent fever since her return from Israel, where she had participated in the Latroun Community Commission. We did not give up on communicating with her at least something of the progress of the work and communicated with her by telephone, unfortunately not being able to use video call as we would have wished.

The Abbot General, on his way to Austria for a visit to some monasteries in the region, made a short stop with us and participated willingly and with interest in the work of the Region, offering us various reflections and useful insights for dialogue, which we report in the report.

The Benedictine community of Praglia welcomed us with wide-ranging and fraternal hospitality, giving us the opportunity to share the beautiful prayerful liturgy and offering us generous and helpful service. A special moment of sharing was experienced with the meeting of the Abbot, Dom Stefano Visintin - former Magnificent Rector of S. Anselmo and still professor of Fundamental Theology at the same Pontifical Athenaeum - who offered us a reflection on the theme of authority within RB.

The programme for this regional meeting included a brief presentation of the current situation in each House since the last General Chapter, and consisted of the following points:

- an evaluation of the General Chapter and the Synthesis
- a reflection on the role of the Regions
- an exchange on Prof. Thiel's lecture and the work done by M. Maria Francesca of Valserena on the problem of abuse
- an exchange on the Abbot General's last letter
- a presentation of the affiliation document with reference to *Cor Orans*.
- On the afternoon of Sunday 15 October, the Superiors alone were able to have a pastoral exchange, as well as a meeting with Dom Bernardus the following day.

HOUSE REPORTS

AIGUEBELLE

After the last General Chapter, two brothers returned to the Father's house, notably Dom Bernard Lefèvre, whose 100th birthday we were able to celebrate at the end of 2022, together with his family and numerous friends.

There are currently 15 of us, two not established, one absent, 14 present.

The General Chapter had left us with a roadmap for 15 months, until the end of 2023.

We want to highlight three key events:

- A 'Mother Immediate', M. Katharina, Abbess of Nazareth in Belgium. The experience is very positive. Relations are good, in trust, at all levels. She wanted to be assisted by a committee/council of 4 people. She also had to learn the function of the female Father Immediate. Mutual adjustments were necessary, which were successfully implemented.

Two main events marked his mission and the life of the community.

- The departure of F. Marc-Henri, cellerarius, 62 years old. He asked, before the commission and the community, "to leave the community". This request was accepted by the Mother Immediate, with the request to take a 2-month leave of absence to be able to pass on his knowledge of the work, activities, practices, etc. of the house; which he did indeed do conscientiously, even though it is extremely difficult to pass on 25 years of experience and skills in 2 months. Naturally, this departure caused an overload of work, especially for two brothers, but also for others, an overload that was carried with generosity. We are able to cope alone with the various productions of our workshops, and we take part in many of them.

Above all, the consequence of this departure is a great change in the community climate. No more fear or mistrust, more trust, more sharing, more collaboration, more freedom to speak, more simplicity in relationships. (F. Marc-Henri is in Bénin, for a service at L'Etoile Notre Dame, in Parakou, under the responsibility of the Abbess, for a period of at least one year).

- The arrival of Fr Jérôme, monk and priest of Sept-Fons, in mid-June 2023, by decision of the Abbot General. He is 40 years old, entered Sept-Fons at the age of 17, was in charge of the farm, sub-master of novices, professor of philosophy and theology, etc. for 5 years prior to Dom Patrick and also at the time of his resignation. A valuable person, to whom, however, we made it clear that it was useless to try to reproduce Sept-Fons at Aiguebelle. Now he is integrating well into the community, he is serene, relaxed, always ready to serve, responsible with well-targeted initiatives; he is reinforcing the group of cantors, managing the limited activities of the farm, looking after the guesthouse where he ensures a monastic presence and spiritual accompaniment, in which he succeeds well but which takes up a lot of his time: he still has to find the right measure, but he declares himself surprised by everything he discovers in this mission that is new to him. His presence put an end to two years of great difficulties in the guesthouse, to the great satisfaction of all. He is certain that his presence has given all the brothers greater confidence in the future, and we find it easy to live with him.

In conclusion, during her last visit in mid-September, M. Katharina told us that she was satisfied with the positive development of the community, that we were moving in the right direction

and that she did not intend to make any changes until the next Regular Visitation, scheduled for 2024. However it is planned that she and the whole commission will return in December '23, to take stock of these last 15 months, and report back to the Abbot General.

N.-D. de l'ATLAS

In the community we are currently five solemnly professed (including one from Huerta, who is not established, a brother who does not want to change stability but deeply desires to live with us, in our Islamic-Christian context).

We also have 2 Spanish postulants (1 is a nurse and 1 a lawyer) who are both between 55 and 62 years old.

And, at the beginning of 2024, we will have the arrival among us of the last novice from Neiges, who finished his novitiate in Tamié - the Mother House of Neiges - He had applied to come to Atlas and, on my advice, made temporary profession for 1 year in Tamié. After a probationary year with us, i.e. at the beginning of 2025, if all goes well, he will renew his vows for N.D.de l'Atlas.

Among the professed in solemn vows who have established here, we have Father Mickaël (Polish and former Dominican). He took the habit at N.D.de l'Atlas in 1997. He was part of the community that tried to restart monastic life in Algeria in 1998/2001. He then entered Aiguebelle; 20 years later, he returned to his first love and from the beginning of 2022 he came back to us. He is our Father Master and he draws us young people from Poland.

Our youngest brother professed in solemn vows has completed his studies and has also just finished writing the History of N.D. de l'Atlas. According to the connoisseurs, he has done an excellent job ...

BLAUVAC

Community dynamics:

Covid and its negative impact on our hostes production led us to work together with the ECTI association to find other outlets for our economy and to undertake a fundamental reflection on our work. We continue to focus on the marketing of our products: the new Blandinine formula and goose down pillows.

A new phase began after the last Regular Visitation with Dom Georges and M. Marie-Christine of Rivet, where we focused on the future of the community. With the imminent expiry of M. Anne-Emmanuelle's mandate, we had to find together the best solution for the near future. There were changes of Prioress (Sr. Benedicte) and sub-Prioress (Sr. Marie-Christelle, our last solemnly professed), as well as changes in some tasks.

Our Visitors have returned in friendship to share the fruits of our exchange. If the Abbot General agrees, we are moving peacefully towards an extension of our Abbess's mandate, to get a taste of our new organisation and to accompany the discernment process.

Hospitality:

- Internal: we welcomed two young people to discover monastic life. These young people are very representative of their time, and one of them has just joined us for an extended experience of living together, with no prospect of commitment for the time being.

- In the guesthouse we had many guests, many sessions and many young people: young people looking for meaning, students coming to prepare their exams here. We separated the spiritual support weeks for adults from those for young people. They have all been a success.

- Stronger ties with the diocese after the arrival of Bishop Fonlupt. Active participation in recent events related to the Synod and the Dicastery for Consecrated Life and opening of doors for Heritage Days.

Events:

- Sr. Marie-Christelle's profession on 22 June and Sr. Florence's first vows on 22 December.
 - Accompanying the death of three Chambarand sisters, including Sr. Marie-Pierre Faure, a pillar of the CFC.
 - Individualised training of the young professed to allow each one to develop their gifts: distance Bible courses, liturgy, working with wax, and management of a library, following the recent renovation of our premises. We also integrated the four 'white veils' into the church singing, entrusting them with the Little Hours. Sr. Marie-Christelle started a training course at Le Châtelard in Lyon, a Jesuit centre.
 - Resumption of community exchanges interrupted by Covid, to strengthen our fraternal bonds and share moments of relaxation, with the fraternal involvement of Fr. Antonio.
- We feel the effects of climate change, which has led us to stop garden activities due to lack of water, and we are cheerfully devoured by mosquitoes!
- Finally, M. Anne-Emmanuelle recently had the joy of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We accompanied her not only with prayer, but also by watching some very interesting programmes on this war-torn Country.

BONNEVAL

As you all know, at the last Regular Visitation in June this year, our community was asked to prepare for the abbatial election in the spring of 2025. Our new Immediate Father, Dom Godefroy, had the idea of creating a commission of 4 sisters to foster greater co-responsibility in the overall community dynamic. We were particularly touched by his death, but we are working in this direction. We have started to put together all the wishes and ideas that can be realised for the growth of the community and it seems that this is a good way forward.

Since the General Chapter we have had three deaths of elderly sisters. We received a Poor Clare sister in the novitiate who wishes to make a *transitus*, and we are expecting a Polish sister in December. Sister Marie-Angèle (Obout) joined us last month.

In July I was able to travel to Quebec and spend a month with our sisters in the Augustinian monastery where they have been living since 2017. There are 7 of them, as they too have had 3 deaths since the Chapter. This stay has further strengthened our bonds. Mother Marie's presence and the support of Val Notre-Dame make this otherwise unthinkable option of 'stability at a distance' possible.

BOSCHI

There are currently 12 of us in the community: 8 Solemnly Professed (including 2 Angolan guests), 1 Temporary Professed, 1 Novice (Andrea: vesting 15 August), 2 Postulants.

Change of Superior: The main event of this year was the change of Superior which took place during the last General Chapter: from Fr. Lino Colosio, Prior, to Fr. Giovanni Gazzera, Superior ad nutum. This change was quite troublesome, and we have to thank our Superior Immediate,

Dom Ginepro, who guided and advised us during this period, acting as an intermediary with the Abbot General and the Order, enabling us in Boschi to trust him.

The first consequence of this change of Superior was the absence of Fr Lino for a few months; during this time the Community tried to organise itself by putting into practice the teachings received over all these years from Fr Bernardo and Fr Lino.

Formation: The first area in which this 'putting into practice' took place was formation, in which each of the brothers is trying to make a contribution.

This is done in two ways: at the community level, some brothers prepare on specific topics which they then present to the whole Community; at the initial formation level, the Superior coordinates some brothers who take care of the courses for the youth.

On Dom Ginepro's instructions, we also called in some external people to help us in this: a big thank you goes to Dom Jacques, chaplain of Vitorchiano, who twice passed on to us his passion for the Desert Fathers.

Openings: Again on the advice of Dom Ginepro we are trying to open up more towards the Diocese, our Bishop, and also towards other religious Congregations. All this in a spirit of communion, but always trying to maintain our specific charism.

Structural investments: During this year we installed photovoltaic panels; this was a significant expense, increased by the fact that we had to adapt the entire house system to this new energy source, such as switching from 'single-phase' to 'three-phase' and introducing an air conditioner for the church.

Future: In conclusion, this is a special and delicate time for our Community, because, while on the one hand it is expanding due to the arrival of new members, on the other hand it has to deal with the ageing and illness of others: this means, among other things, reviewing the organisation of work and in addition making significant structural changes to the building, e.g., the insertion of a lift and the expansion of the infirmary are planned.

Throughout this process we thank the Lord and place ourselves in His hands.

FONS PACIS

Our community is going through a very intense period in its history. The Regular Visitation of M. Anne-Emmanuelle, accompanied by Dom Emmanuel, in April 2023 was an important moment for the community, and a great support for all that lies ahead.

In 2025, the year of the next General Chapter, the foundation (which in March 2024 will conclude its 19th year of presence in Syria) will reach the 15-year mark since its chapter approval, so the General Chapter encouraged efforts to fulfil as far as possible the conditions required by *Cor Orans*: suitable buildings, economic autonomy, and certainly a sufficiently large community.

Work on the monastery has resumed significantly and the construction site is progressing well. However, funds must be found to complete the project, which was assessed on site by Dom Emmanuel during the Regular Visitation.

Soap work remains for now the most realistic prospect for finding resources, given the economic situation of the country, and with the help of the Blauvac community and some Italian friends, we are looking for ways to develop it.

To this we would like to add some natural medicine products, given the possibility of cultivating the active ingredients, which could also benefit the local population. But this remains a next step.

As far as the community is concerned, we experienced a very strong moment of trial and then of gratitude: the worsening of Sr. Adriana's tumour, which had metastasised to such an extent that we feared she would not make it to the end of 2022, and then her improvement, which was truly somewhat miraculous according to the treating doctor himself.

This event has united and strengthened us in a reliance on the Grace that comes to us as a gift, day by day.

From mid-March to the end of September, we took in a young woman on probation (Hungarian, 40 years old), who has many gifts and just as many frailties. But she has made good use of this time and we think it is possible for her to begin a monastic formation. And now it is time for her to review her experience and decide on her vocation.

An important moment was the approval of the opening of the Novitiate by the Abbot General and his Council, an important sign for us of confidence and encouragement.

The big help we are about to receive is the arrival of two sisters from the community in Esmeraldas. We are making all the necessary paperwork and hope that by the beginning of Advent they will be able to join us. This is a great gift for us, and also a great effort to integrate them as best we can into the life of the community.

Other points:

- The relationship with M. Giovanna is very good, we feel supported in an open discussion, she has not been able to visit us yet, but this is planned for 2024. For now we mainly use whatsapp, which is easy for both our situations.

- The absence of a permanent chaplain has been very difficult for us for a long time now.

- Reception at the monastery is an important element of our presence and fully integrates us into the ecclesial reality, beyond rites and memberships.

Many people are seeking help, accompaniment, the possibility of confrontation. And even just a reality of peace and hope. Many appreciate the Liturgy of the Hours, which for them is a new way of praying the Psalms and, in general, of experiencing the liturgy.

- Participation in the Rimini Meeting, a religious and cultural event that has been on the Italian scene for years, was an important moment to make our experience known and create new friendships and contacts.

- Local Church situation: very fragile. A new Latin Bishop has finally been appointed, after more than a year. In general, the Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, are in need of a major renewal, especially in training. The clergy is generally very discouraged, also because of the continuous departures of young people and entire families. The religious are more active, more positive. But they too are in difficulty.

In such a situation, vocations are very rare, and if there are any, they are mainly male.

- The situation in the country is still very hard, the people are in poverty and hunger. There is no work, no electricity, even bread is scarce or very expensive.

The country is always under sanctions and the mafias inside are rampant. The cost of living is frightening (a salary of 200,000 Syrian liras, and a tray of 30 eggs costs 50,000!), there are worrying signs of possible social unrest and, above all, of unclear foreign policies (movement of American and Russian troops... attacks: a drone attack on a barracks in Homs, where young

career soldiers are trained, recently killed 103 people and wounded more than 250 during the graduation of young soldiers).

- In this situation, we try to do our best to help the poor, without unbalancing our life and the meaning of our contemplative presence. In a simple, discreet but effective way, we help as much as we can, also availing ourselves of the collaboration of lay people and associations already present. On the occasion of the earthquake, a lot of aid arrived, but ordinarily the situation of the war in Ukraine had caused Syria to be somewhat forgotten...

- Finally, we would like to thank all of you in the ReM, who have always encouraged us and who even now support this new time in our community life. Once again, with gratitude, we entrust ourselves to your prayers.

FRATTOCCHIE

Our Community consists of 12 brothers, of whom 10 are solemnly professed and 2 are novices (in their second year of novitiate). One third of the brothers are elderly, approaching 90 years of age, but they are still quite well and perform small services to the house. At the same time they are declining in strength. There are only two priests in the monastery, but only I can preside at Holy Mass because the other can no longer do it alone. When I am absent, we have to call a priest from outside.

The Abbot must also perform the service of novice master. For me this also means doing all the courses in initial formation, as well as spiritual accompaniment. I do this willingly, but it requires my time and energy.

The community is at peace, fairly united, simple even if it remains fragile. In this community phase, our economy is minimal and there is no real productive work. Our income comes from the small shop, rents and pensions. We have no salaried workers or outside help.

At the moment, our community work is concentrated on carrying out the project of our move to Fano: emptying the monastery, preparing the house in Fano, starting the move, following the bureaucracy and the technicians for the approval of the project for the new monastery and the various restoration sites. We also saw to the restoration of a second small house near the forest to accommodate a small part of our community, because the main house is not enough to accommodate everyone.

The point that pained us most was the sale of our monastery in Frattocchie. At the end of October, we should sign the sale contract with the *Fondazione Millennium*, which will build a university residence in our monastery to provide low-cost housing, training and cultural activities for young people with disabilities. They will retain the use of the large abbey church. We are happy to leave our 'legacy' to this foundation that is in tune with Christian and evangelical values. Our hope and our "dream" is to be in Fano at the end of this year, *Deo volente*.

My pastoral work is to revive the faith and monastic values of our *conversatio*, to instil confidence and courage in the brothers in the face of the hardships and unknowns of this move so as not to fall into discouragement and excessive anxiety. Within this movement, our regular life normally unfolds according to the rhythm proper to a monastic community with special care for the liturgy.

NAŠÍ PANÍ

There are currently 28 of us, 15 solemnly professed, 11 sisters in formation, 1 oblate and 1 probationary. The average age is 45.15, oblate included.

The most significant events of this year were the visit of the Abbot General, who encouraged us not to be afraid of motherhood and praised the community's lectio experience, and the regular visit of Dom Loris, who encouraged us to take on various responsibilities.

We have had a lot of work in the biscuit-chocolate sector and we have the challenge that the sisters working there maintain a healthy balance of the day.

The community has been able to easily welcome new vocations of different ages: for them we thank the Lord and Blessed Maria Gabriella.

Some sisters, who will have to do the Sacred Scripture courses at the novitiate, had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land together with the Abbess. These sisters then shared photos and explanations with the community and it was very nice.

Work will soon begin on a photovoltaic system.

PALAÇOULO

There are currently 13 of us in the community: 10 Italian founders (Sr. Alice has been absent since August due to her father's illness and to undergo an operation in Italy); 1 postulant (Ana Cecilia, 26 years old) who began her formation last February, Columba, a young Benedictine professed from a German monastery (with dual nationality of German and Portuguese, 51 years old) who is doing a probationary period and who will probably begin a formation with us on 30th November when her vows expire; Cátia, a 42-year-old diocesan hermit, who has asked us to do a 6-month community experience to overcome a period of crisis and who is expected to return to her hermitage at the end of November. We are expecting, for Christ the King, Matilde, a young 23-year-old who is about to discuss her thesis and, God willing, on 11 February Maria Gabriella, 30, a law teacher in a public school. Both enter as postulants, because they know the community well enough and have been in the guesthouse quite frequently over the past two years.

The new entries and a greater movement of young people, linked to the World Youth Day event, helped the community to experience a greater openness and willingness to collaborate, an elasticity in service and a commitment to the translation of formation courses that began systematically. At the end of June, we had the visit of the Abbot General, and in July the consent for the official opening of the Novitiate arrived. In July we also had the Regular Visitation with Dom Loris. Both encouraged us to grow as a community. Liturgy and faithfulness to lectio remain the heart of our community identity.

The deadline for delivery of the monastery was the end of August, but the construction company asked us for another four months because of the difficulty in finding workers. The next deadline is 15 December, but we have actually started to consider it more likely that we will be able to move in around Easter next year. This requires a little more effort and patience, as well as extra costs, but we are generally happy with how the work is coming along. Two of us continue to be very involved in the construction.

On the work level, this year we had the first harvest of almonds, our bees yielded a good quantity of honey, and we started with good fruit in the vegetable garden. The productive work, apart from the always generous guesthouse offerings, is that of the rosaries thanks to requests from some Portuguese shrines (such as Fatima).

Finally, the community's life this year has been marked by some health trials which have, thank God, been resolved well. We are now awaiting the operation of Sr. Alice, who is in Vitorchiano to face her health problem with more serenity and calm. She was also able to accompany the death of her father, which occurred just last week.

We give thanks to God for these gifts and for the strength of the Motherhouse that supports us with so much care and so much good.

TRE FONTANE – ACQUE SALVIE

Our two communities talked together about the experience of the past year and the current situation. The atmosphere was particularly free and open, already expressing our present reality. There was a real litany of positive things for which we can only be grateful.

Liturgy

- The ongoing work of the Liturgy Commission enriches the office
- Listening in dialogues for the liturgy has grown
- There is gratitude for the communion experienced in the choir and in the liturgy that constitutes our monastic identity.
- The collaboration between priests to unify different elements of the Eucharistic celebration goes on after the dialogue with Msgr. Lubomir.

Work

The work that is carried out together: the care of the house (maintenance and renovation of some rooms) and its surroundings (the chapel of Our Lady and the chapel of St. Joseph at the end of the garden, and the garden road adjacent to the Attached House, the cleaning of the cemetery), the collection of eucalyptus leaves (the process of choosing, drying and wrapping, in which almost everyone participated), fruit picking and jam making.

The weekly programme prepared by the person in charge of the work is appreciated, even if changes are very frequent. Responsible work, sometimes heavy, is a source of fraternal life. Employees have also begun to appreciate the commitment we bring, they too are urged to tackle things that were previously neglected.

The care and attention are an expression of a revitalisation that is bearing fruit and gives rise to a responsibility in us and also in the employees.

Fraternity

The celebration of Fr Henry's 90th birthday, in the form of a lunch offered to all the brothers in the garden of the nuns, was the crowning glory of moments of celebration together for name days and other exchanges. We truly felt like a family and it gave rise to a desire to continue these moments of joy.

Conversion and revitalisation

This experience of working together, of dialogue and moments of celebration becomes a path to dying to ourselves and our personal projects in order to give life to something new - that is,

communion: personal relationships that teach us to love, to give ourselves for the good of the community, for the good of the other, sacrificing ourselves, dying to our ego and our own will. But there was the question: does all this collaboration and fraternal activity automatically correspond to something substantially internalised? Is there a fruit of conversion? There is fatigue, frustration, concern about the limits of our efforts to organise work, uncertainty for the future, sacrifice.

Of course the path demands trust in the Lord and surrender to Him who has us and the future in His hands. We cannot rely on our own ability to handle things. We are on the way to God - conversion to communion. Working together is the place for conversion, a process of knowing oneself and others, learning to love, converting together. Our reality comes out in the work - the instinct of power, control, ambition, competition, autonomy, impatience, anger, mistakes, rejection - and leads us to the need to reconcile even for small clashes. A true conversion from our pride and selfishness, lived with all our weak and poor humanity... to be transformed by Mercy - together - as the Body of Christ.

Before, affectivity was discarded, buried as the weakness that had to be overcome. But St Bernard teaches that it is the conversion of our affectivity that unites us to God. We give our hearts to the community with total commitment otherwise we are deceived.

A final speech emphasised that this experience of ours is a revitalisation from the life of mortification, austere, individualistic, formal asceticism in which everyone lived their existence in parallel with the others, isolated, closed in their rut, without love/charity or joy. The search for personal perfection believing they were at who knows what level of spirituality, instead of seeking unity in the love of God. Each one working as he wished without true obedience or fraternal correction.

But the confrontation and comfort of common life works an inner, hidden transformation, it changes us, it opens us up. It certainly happens in a profound way in each of us. We are forced out of ourselves. These are the values we find in our Fathers. Even at the level of the Order, thanks to the Abbot General's letter, the experiences of other communities reach us and there is an affective participation in the problems of others.

This is how we choose to live a revitalisation, allowing ourselves to be changed from the overly individualistic Trappist mentality to the lived communion that the Church of Vatican II makes us understand and invites us to live.

Training

In addition to the weekly courses and dialogue in the Novitiate, our novice took an excellent Gregorian chant course in Fara Sabina together with the two novices from Frattocchie: a beautiful opportunity for the three of them to experience monastic fraternity. The presence of an Albanian aspirant teaches us what we must do to be able to welcome candidates who do not have all the basics of Christian life but sincerely seek God in consecrated life. It is a call to a change of mentality and behaviour for us.

Ecclesial welcome

Our proximity to the Generalate gives us the grace to welcome several members of the Order and hear news of other situations: Dom Bernardus, Dom Guillaume - who arrived last time with four brothers from Sept-Fons, Sr. Grazia Maria from Congo, Dom Loris and occasionally a sister from Valserena and Vitorchiano.

We had a visit from Tawadros II, Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt and his entourage, for a moment of ecumenical prayer in the Church of the Martyrdom of St Paul, with the Little Sisters speaking and reading Arabic. Countless other groups of pilgrims are welcomed to pray and celebrate Mass at the site of St Paul's martyrdom.

Economic/material situation

Since October 2022, thanks to decisions taken at the General Chapter, we have the invaluable assistance of Dom Emanuel, advisor to the Abbot General, who accompanies us in all aspects of the monastery's undertakings.

An Economic Commission was formed and meets every month to follow up various projects and problems, discern steps to be taken and make decisions. At the next meeting there should be a report on the implementation of the decisions taken:

- the brewery is now in the hands of the monks, it has not been closed, but there will be limited production for sale at the monastery and in the Rome area,
- the Ruggia family finally left peacefully, leaving the shop they used for years without paying rent, and now the place will be restored to become a refreshment point for pilgrims, with beer on tap,
- a property was sold to the diocese to pay debts and help cover expenses,
- lighting of the abbey church and a new electrical system for the church and monastery will soon be tackled. The Vicariate helped by sending a lighting expert and a generous contribution.

VALSERENA

Certainly the event that most involved us and continues to be central is the assumption of the situation of the community of Soke, following the commissioning and the decision to bring all the young women to Valserena for a time not so much of special formation, but of experience of normal life in a normal community. There are currently four young women divided between Monasticate and Novitiate, and three solemnly professed, the second Superior, a 'difficult' sister and the last 'solemn' for three months, still in Monasticate.

Another decisive event: the Sept-Fons affair that demanded the sacrifice of a chaplain appreciated and esteemed by the entire community, discreet and present at the same time, who also gave quality teaching, personally supporting the Abbess's teaching. Now we have some temporary chaplains, *ad libitum Providentiae*, and the situation that follows. Fortunately, the faithful Fr Giuliano makes up for the shortcomings.

We have a Father Immediate Delegate, in the person of Dom Samuel: his visit and the letter he left us were very positive.

Two jubilees, one of which of our own M. Monica, have cheered everyone up, at the same time they are a sign that the community is not exactly moving towards youthfulness. Our infirmary, with four sisters in need of rather demanding care and treatment, also says this. The two helpers in the infirmary are the two Mother Teachers ...

We also had the grace of one solemn profession and two temporary ones, of the Angolan sisters: professions for the Soke.

We have not had any new entries, and this year the vocational meeting has not had any enrolments... There are now two novices in the novitiate, one Angolan and one Italian, and two young professed who have just made profession, one Italian and one Angolan. By passing them into the monastery, the monastery will increase its population.

The problem is also that two of them, a novice and a simple professed, are of a certain age and have definitely put into question what it means to welcome adult vocations (70 and 55 years old) The community has reacted with a great spirit of discernment and at the same time with a precise judgement of faith.

Other facts were: the decision to set up an energy community in Valsereña¹ and to start the process to be recognised as a farm (which allows no small incentives for agricultural work) ...

The slow but steady resumption of guesthouse activity.

The cosmetics laboratory's performance is positive. In the past year, after the effects of the pandemic have passed, sales have rebounded very well.

Another quite decisive thing is the continuation of work on the renovation of the house, especially the roofs... We had the adventure of having a whole part raining in the cloister for a few days.

The overall economy is doing well, thanks in large part to the expertise of the bursar's sisters and the perfume and country sisters and their good work.

Perfume work and other housekeeping duties engage a small proportion of the sisters capable of handling these tasks, who are also those who would be 'entitled' and desirous of a more in-depth monastic formation.

We try to make up for this with ongoing formation committed as far as possible. In addition to the teaching of the Abbess, who tries to remain in the groove of the rich tradition she has received, and to the initial formation, the contribution of Sr. Patrizia, who in June completed her thesis on William of St Thierry in view of her doctorate on the same author, there are lecturers from outside: the annual retreat preached by the vicar of consecrated life of the diocese, a course on the psalms by Fr. Marco Pavan², a course by Fr Paolo Gionta OSB (S. Anselmo) on Marmion, another by Fr Giulio Meiattini (OSB Monk of Noci and professor at S. Anselmo), on theology and prayer... and Fr Francesco La Rocca (OSB) on patristic topics: these are appointments that the community happily follows. The 'Cistercian week' on the theme of the renewal of the charism and vocation is always an appointment that involves, gets people working and enthusiastic; this year it was particularly rich given the presence of Maestro Gian Martino Durighello (teacher at Coperlim and music teacher), and the Benedictine sisters from Florence, who were guests at the guesthouse at the time.

We are also looking after the performance of liturgical prayer, with teachers for both singing and playing instruments such as zither and organ, i.e. the accompaniment of a monastic choir. It is challenging but it seems to work. The two teachers are Sr. Elena Guidi (zitarist and composer, teacher at Coperlim) and Francesca Breschi (secular oblate of San Miniato and teacher of singing and...recitation).

VITORCHIANO

Beginning with the Abbot General's letter last January, the Community was urged for several months to reflect and share through dialogues in groups.

¹ An energy community consists of an association of citizens, businesses, local public administrations and small/medium-sized enterprises that decide to join forces with the aim of producing, exchanging and consuming energy from renewable sources on a local scale. This is intended to create a decentralised network in which the active and conscious participation of each citizen is required: community members are engaged in the various stages of energy production, consumption and exchange, promoting sustainable energy management. In addition to harnessing technological innovation and digitisation, renewable energy communities ensure a reduction in energy waste and promote the sharing of a basic commodity at a competitive price. Their deployment makes it possible to meet the energy needs of the population and to propose new socio-economic models centred on sustainability and circularity.

²He is a monk and lives in a hermitage in the province of Arezzo. He teaches Old Testament at the Pontifical University 'S. Tommaso d'Aquino' in Rome and at the Theological Faculty of Central Italy in Florence.

We began by reflecting on the theme of our vocation. Afterwards, the Mother Teachers gave two lectures on vocations today and on formation, and from these, we asked ourselves what is asked of us, what is the legacy we want to pass on.

This led us to desire to deepen the dimension of silence, solitude and separation from the world in our lives, thus reconnecting with the words left for us in the 2021 Visitation Charter. This year's regular visitation encouraged us to continue on this path of ongoing conversion to refocus ourselves in our relationship with the Lord.

Over the past year, the community has been marked by some health trials, most notably the cancer of a 41-year-old sister, resulting in surgery and chemotherapy, and now the very recent discovery of leukaemia in another 57-year-old sister who is currently hospitalised for treatment. These serious events have helped us to deepen a look of faith and a desire for communion and mutual service.

We have had the grace of one solemn profession, one temporary profession, and two vestments, but we are also experiencing a drop in recruitment (we currently have no postulants, and this year we have had no admissions) and a fragility in the young aspirants who approach the monastery, but struggle to decide to enter.

Another small ordeal we experienced was the lack of harvests in our vineyards: just when the sale of wine was bringing a good profit to the community and we had invested in enlarging our warehouses and making the places more dignified for the use of farm workers. In spite of this, the general performance of our economy is good: the production and sale of jams and editorial products is holding up well, thanks to the creativity and generosity of the sisters who work there.

In all this we are wondering what the Lord wants to tell us that apparently he is impoverishing us, but deeper down he makes us experience that this impoverishment is a call to grow in trust in him.

We have seen the willingness to mobilise ourselves to reorganise work (to close the holes left by the sick sisters) grow among us, as well as a look of hope and prayer. At the same time, we perceive that it is in this deeper dimension of our life that we must continue to grow in order to *serve God with all our goods* (Lk 8:3), that is, with our whole life. This is what brings us back to the heart of our vocation.

In the failure of our works, in the weakness of our flesh that becomes sick, it is precisely this that becomes evident: it is the Lord who carries out His plan and we must let Him do it.

On this journey we have seen two humble and luminous signs in two of our elders:

- a sister who in November 2022, after several years of hermit experience, returned, reintegrated into the community and is for all of us a sign of the Lord's goodness;
- and another sister, from Soke, who made stability with us and, after this step, abandoned plans to return to Angola and found peace.

At the bottom remains and prevails a gratitude for what God continues to work in us and among us.

POINTS RAISED

FROM READING THE REPORTS OF THE COMMUNITIES

1.

A live topic in the ReM is the various changes of abbotts and abbesses expected in the coming years and that will completely change the face of our regional meetings.

The challenge facing superiors approaching the end of their term of office is the realisation of the task of having to prepare their communities for the change, strengthening community unity in charity and responsibility.

Alongside this is a reflection on the testimony of some emeritus superiors. In the ReM, in fact, we have had luminous testimonies of superiors who have terminated their government and have been able to support their successor in assuming the abbey service, thus giving an example of great rectitude and even more of authentic monastic life. Alongside these, we have also had superiors who, after relinquishing governance, failed to value, support and help those who came after them, creating division.

2.

The experience of poverty is touching our communities, each in its own way.

Some experience the poverty of not having a structured economy, some suffer the lack or poverty of vocations, some the ageing or lack of resources, some the experience of illness in young sisters. In all communities, the experience of fragility and poverty has sharpened the awareness of inadequacy and the need for greater abandonment to the Lord.

All this brings us back to the experience of our Founders and sounds like a call to live the dimension of poverty with a Christ-centredness and to ask God for the necessary graces more strongly, in trust and abandonment to Him. Some ReM Houses have received vocations with the novena to Blessed Gabriella.

3.

The task and value of our witness to Christ, especially with respect to young people for whom the Christian experience is something unknown, whom they do not know and have not had the grace to see and experience, but who approach the monastery and are impressed by our way of life. This pushes us to deepen our mission.

People come to the monastery who are completely unfamiliar with a proposal of faith, who have absorbed the secularised mentality and customs, but who thirst for meaning and see in our form of life a hope for them.

How to welcome these young people? How to be a proposal for them, even before they manifest a vocational desire?

4.

The subject of adult vocations is a point of interest for some communities, which have opened up to receive people over 60 (Valserena, Bonneval...). It is a situation that raises several questions for the integration of these people both in the classic formation environment (novitiate) and in the community. Besides the problem of their real integration, there is the problem of not 'unbalancing' the mother teachers, who are often much younger than them and are put in difficulty by people like this. Nasi Pani has taken in a person as an oblate and this may be an appropriate solution.

5.

What does it mean to belong to the Order? And how do we internalise the experience of charity that circulates in the Order?

One can see how so many points of hope and light have arisen from this belonging, from this circulation of charity, which can be an answer for the most fragile or closed situations.

By closed situations, we mean those communities more anchored to the old Trappist way of life, or led by a charismatic superior, little open to the Order's current message and to the provocations coming from the young. Even these realities, within a larger membership, can receive a grace of openness.

Aiguebelle gave a testimony of this, regaining confidence and strength thanks to the support it has received from the Order and the ReM, in order to change some tiring aspects of community life. Fr. Georges also shared the positive experience of the accompaniment of the Mother Immediate.

Another testimony to this was the support given to Boschi by Mother House Tamié, and in particular by Dom Ginepro, to Boschi's new Superior.

The communities of Tre Fontane, Frattocchie and Fons Pacis, and all the others, have also received good from their experience in the ReM and the Order.

For all communities, the greatest challenge lies between leaving room for a secularised mentality - which seeks its answers only in psychology, sociology and the techniques of human knowledge - and the dimension of faith which, while remaining open to the contributions of the human sciences, recognises the centrality of Christ and his Love.

This is why there is also a mention of the importance of reflecting on the relationship between modernity and tradition.

These are, briefly, the points that emerged from the reports. We did not have the opportunity to go into them in depth, except for that of belonging to the Order, on which we dialogued by referring to Dom Bernardus' last circular letter.

GENERAL CHAPTER EVALUATION AND SUMMARY

1- Abbot General and his work

Both the dynamics of electing the Abbot General and the manner of his presence at the Chapter were appreciated. In particular, his willingness to intervene in ad hoc Commissions, which allowed progress in some difficult situations, and the time given for personal meetings.

Moreover, in the months between the two parts of the Chapter, Dom Bernardus animated the Order a great deal, attending all the regional meetings and writing circular letters that stimulated the communities' reflection.

2 - Program and preparation

Missing a Chapter and many Regular Visits because of the pandemic led to a build-up of many issues, as did the situation in the Generalate recently. We found ourselves with many situations with readings on a confidential level that we were not aware of, and people who were overburdened because they were involved in many Aid Commissions.

This makes us aware of our responsibility to prepare well for the Chapter, personally and as a Region. We often come without having read the working documents, without having looked at the work of the other Regions, or the topics already assigned to our Commissions.

We would like to receive information at the end of the Chapter on what the communities should work on, in view of the Regional Meeting and the next Chapter.

3 - With respect to emotional reactions in the hall. Subsidiarity

With respect to the emotional reactions that occurred in the hall, we recalled the importance, for the Superiors, of the consciousness that we go to the Chapter for our conversion, for the salvation of our souls.

The ad hoc Commissions must be very conscious of their responsibility to prepare clear and complete reports, saying whom they have listened to, the reasons for their decisions, and that they have already informed the people involved, before presentation in the plenary. The assembly must trust their report on the situation entrusted to them. In the last Chapter, we interpreted the emotional reactions as a sign of the surprise of the persons implicated, who seemed not to know what the Commission had said. In fact, during the ReM, we learned that they had been informed. Difficult situations should have already been dealt with by those closest and most directly responsible: the Past Fathers Immediate and the members of the Region to which the community belongs, so that there is already a way ahead before the General Chapter.

4 - The composition of the members of the 14 Commissions

It is hoped that the composition of the Commissions will be changed more often, since for more than ten years the Commissions have remained unchanged. We understood that this is the task of the Generalate and it is not easy.

5 - Greater attention to new superiors

We must give more attention, before and during the Chapter, to new members who do not yet know the participants or the situations and often have to vote for things they do not know. Points are addressed that the new superiors often do not know. Someone older, in their Commission, could perhaps help them. One is still reminded of the importance of prior preparation, at least that the Superiors read the material that is made available.

6 - Cor Orans

We appreciated the work of the Coordination Commission on *Cor Orans*, presenting the votes in a very clear and understandable way.

Cor Orans brought out how strong and alive is the unity of the Order and the solidarity between monks and nuns. Through the votes that were taken, the choice of the monks to go forward with the nuns emerged, even on points that restricted their legislation. We had a very strong expression of unity.

However, we would like to reflect further on our relationship with the Holy See and on our own identity in the Church. Dom Bernardus told us about the latest steps and meetings with the Dicastery.

7 - Other points

- One appreciates the introduction of the electronic system for taking votes, which allowed for more agility and speed.

- In general, we agree that there should be a summary that helps to fix certain points, open perspectives and fix the memory on the content addressed, but not as an interpretation. We pity the two people in charge of the drafting, for the heavy work they have to do during the Chapter.

- We now have the possibility of using alternative forms of meeting, such as video conferences at regional meetings... The Abbot General's intention to organise a meeting with the members of the Central Commissions in this manner at the beginning of 2024 is noted.

THE ROLE OF THE REGIONS *in the light of the principle of subsidiarity*

paper presented by M. Martha Driscoll – Acque Salvie

The Development of Regions

The Regions emerged as free associations of monasteries in 1964, when the Order began holding its General Chapter every two years. Neighbouring houses began to come together to have a meeting before the next General Chapter.

In 1965, some wanted the regions to be legally recognised, but 'regionalism' was feared. The opinion of Dom Gueric of Scourmont prevailed: *“They are all the more nice the more they remain spontaneous. Their main role is not to establish a new institution but rather to respond to a spiritual need: to establish dialogue and foster contacts. The great interest of these meetings is to get to know each other better in order to love each other better.”*

(See the book compiled by the Order on the History of the Order in the 20th Century, Volume 2, Chapter IX: The History of the Regions).

Their role grew to become a discussion body that helped plan the work of the Central Commission, in which they began to take part and thus participate in the planning of the General Chapter, also acting as the Abbot General's enlarged Council.

Their role has grown as a space for pastoral sharing and collaboration among superiors at the regional level. Initial and ongoing formation programmes were also developed. In this way, the identity of each group was strengthened.

The question arises: could their role and function become more important as a subsidiary body at the local level and, therefore, closer to the reality of the problems to be addressed? This theme has been put on the agenda for the General Chapter of 2022.

General Chapter 2022

The fourteen Commissions of the General Chapter repeated many things, of which we were all aware. Their suggestions could be grouped and summarised in the following topics:

- To streamline the work of the General Chapter.
- To collaborate with the Abbot General and his Council in the attention to be given to certain Houses or Superiors, since due to the considerable amount of problems to be discerned and acted upon, there is a long wait before receiving the attention that is needed.
- For a greater influence of the Regions in the work of the Central Commission.
- For a collaboration with the Fathers Immediate.

Suggested possibilities:

- **Regional Visitor:** It was not accepted by many Commissions.
- **Regional Procedure:** work on a topic assigned by the General Chapter or the Central Commission, as is done with the General Chapter Commissions and then reported to the Central Commission. A topic could be assigned to 1 or 2 or all the Regions.
- **Regional Adviser to the Abbot General:** the President or a Superior elected for this role. (As we shall see, this is already in place. The Abbot General informs and consults the President when a House has problems. Superiors of the Region are invited to participate in Commissions of Aid or in view of the closure of a House).

- **The Central Commission could be convened by video conference** (via zoom or otherwise) as the Abbot General's Enlarged Council whenever necessary.

- **Recompose the Regions** - because of the unequal possibilities of the various Regions.

In the discussion following the reports of the fourteen Commissions on the role of the Regions, the last word came from the Abbot General:

"We took a vote at the beginning of this Chapter (Vote 3): that the Abbot General and his Council must rethink the functioning of the Council. I think it is clear that we really have to listen to all these proposals regarding the Central Commission, the Abbot General's Council, and to take into account the proposals for a rethinking of the Abbot General's functions. We have already taken a vote and I think we will find some solutions and I hope to find a solution." (38,5)

Since the question of thinking and finding solutions was entrusted to the Abbot General and his Council, I asked **Dom Bernardus**, who replied, giving me full freedom to share his thoughts with the ReM.

"Regarding the role of the Regions, we have not yet given much thought in the Council. For me, there are three important functions for a Region:

- 1) pastoral care and support of Superiors and Communities among themselves
- 2) meetings to prepare the General Chapter and discuss matters of the Order
- 3) meetings to discuss issues peculiar to the Region, such as training

In my role as Abbot General, as far as possible:

- I try to encourage the Regions to find solutions together to the difficult situations in their communities.

- I try to inform and involve the President of the Region about possible problems in a House of the Region.

- When appointing members of the Aid or Closure Commissions, we deliberately seek the participation of the Region.

Points 2 and 3 should be organised by the Regions themselves. The participation of the Abbot General or a councillor in a regional meeting maintains contact between the Region and the Generalate.

Personally, on point 2, I have some questions. Currently, life in the Order with regard to the General Chapter is mainly determined by the influence of the American and European Regions. This is due to the fact that these Regions can easily meet every year and study possible items for the General Chapter properly and thoroughly. However, the other Regions, Remila, Oriens and Rafma, only have one regional meeting in which they can prepare and study topics for the General Chapter. So, in my opinion, too little comes from those Regions to the General Chapter. In this regard we must find some solution, because I regret that the contribution from these Regions (where there is life!) is too little.

My proposal would be to transform the current European Regions into Sub-Regions that meet for pastoral sharing once between the two General Chapters. Then the Sub-Regions could be grouped into three new Regions for the preparation of the General Chapter.

Another advantage that the reshuffle of the European Regions would give is that some Regions are becoming very weak. Other Regions are closed in on themselves, without the possibility of external input due to language and/or geographical situation. Another advantage of the three new European Regions is that it will simplify the composition of the Central Commission (fewer members)."

We can dialogue on these points but first I would like to offer a reflection.

New structures or new collaboration?

A Commission of the General Chapter asked: are we looking for more collaboration or more structures?

Another Commission, in its evaluation of the General Chapter, suggested that perhaps we need to come to the General Chapter with a more conscious attitude that we need to be helped, to receive suggestions, even corrections or decisions that are difficult to digest - to avoid emotional reactions in the plenary session.

The Charter of Charity admonishes us:

"In the Chapter the abbots will deal with matters pertaining to the salvation of their souls and will order what is to be corrected or added in the observance of the holy Rule and [regulations] of the Order. They shall also strengthen each other in the observance of the bond of peace and charity" (Charter of Charity [posterior] ,13). Constitution 77 paraphrases this text.

In the 1990s, we had a good dynamic of collaboration between the Communities, the Central Commission and the General Chapter. At the end of the General Chapter, a theme was chosen for the next General Chapter. The themes of the next three Mixed General Meetings were: Contemplative Cistercian Identity, The Community as School of Charity, Conformation to Christ as a Cistercian Charism Today. The communities were invited to explore the theme together, the Regions discussed it, and we arrived at the next General Chapter ready for an exchange - which led to the choice of the following theme. Later there were those who said it was better not to have a theme, it determined too narrow a scope, we wanted to be free, and so we voted to drop it.

After that, there were many issues and the communities did not do much work, not even the Superiors. There was no longer an orientation for a path together. We arrive at the General Chapter or the regional meeting after having prepared ourselves in a hurry, only the week before, and trying to understand which issues we need to address.

We often say that there is too much work at the CG, the pace is heavy, the discussions too long, the guests too numerous. But perhaps the problem is that we have not prepared, we have not read or studied the things to be discussed. Perhaps we do not have time to reflect. Or the things of the Order are not the priority... Maybe our fragility forces us to spend a lot of time on the more fragile houses.

Yet the Abbot General's letter invited us to deepen our awareness of our vocation and to live it with authenticity in whatever situation we find ourselves. Perhaps we need to give more time to listening to the Spirit. What is he saying to the Churches?

This reminded me of the theme of 'shared authority' that emerged at Oriens in 2010 and was presented in the Chapter in 2011. The issue we measured ourselves against was that we sometimes experienced situations where an issue was not addressed in a community because of what we called "boundaries/territories of power". The Abbot General felt that he could not interfere with what is the responsibility of the Father Immediate, the Father Immediate felt that he should not interfere with the Abbot General's government, to the point of not wanting to give lectures on our charism. A resigning Abbot could not say anything about the daughter House to his successor because that would prevent him from looking at things with new eyes. So the problems continued until they exploded or died out. But also the opposite: Fathers Immediate freely exercising undue power over their daughter house. (Examples)

When there was a strong individualism in communities, there was also a strong autonomy of houses. It was thought that no one should interfere with another community out of respect for this autonomy, although many saw that there were problems.

Fragility has changed us. Now many houses are more willing to be helped. The Fathers Immediate are missing, but hopefully the new 'delegates' of the Fathers Immediate want to learn something about their new daughter house from people who know it better than they do.

We do not need new structures, but more openness and willingness to communicate, to help each other in a compassionate and creative way. This is the way to express hope and believe in the possibility of change, of conversion.

It can also be an 'abuse of power' when authority that has been given to help others in their difficulties is not used for fear of hurting people's feelings - at community level and in other Order structures.

The Regions also have a responsibility to speak about the problems they know about in one of their houses, to the Father Immediate, to the Abbot General, to the Bishop. And if the Region does not do this, any Superior could make his concerns known to the competent authority without creating a new legal structure and without being told that each house is autonomous and there must be no interference. The Rule of St Benedict urges us to do this in the case of an irregular election, but also in other cases. An example of the lack of this cooperation in the service of authority was seen in the case of Westmalle.

Conversion

The Constitutions and Statutes speak of respect, mutual assistance, humility and charity, fostering concord. Every community will be sustained in its unity if there is unity between the Superior and the Father Immediate - partners in the service of authority - unity in the Region, unity in the Order.

So perhaps our reflection on the role of the Regions is not so much about new structures or practical ways of streamlining pastoral care, but rather about our conversion, trust, openness, humility, readiness to offer and accept help, to sacrifice ourselves for one another, as co-workers in the service of authority. Seeking the good of each House but also of the Region and how best we can ensure the transmission of our charism to the next generation. We must have the courage to speak the truth in love and welcome the truth that is spoken to us in love. Shared authority is shared care. We can share our brokenness, our fragility, our doubts, our regrets, as well as seek new paths in life, but we need to discern and make clear decisions. We all need to do our part, collaborating openly and without being afraid to step on someone's toes. Conversion and change do not happen without suffering.

I had the grace to go to Acey for Dom Godefroy's funeral. It seemed like the whole Order was there - I don't know if anyone counted how many of us were there. Everyone came with a sense of shock and loss at the tragedy. But by celebrating the liturgy, as in the Christian celebration of death, new life was born. It became a celebration of life, of friendship, of resurrection. I think everyone went home with a Word from God for the Order: the future of all our monasteries is in His hands. I think of that day as a celebration of fragility.

How can we not be free to help each other in every possible way? Not because we are mandated to do so, but because the good of the other is of the utmost importance. We may not be able to do much for each other materially because of our limitations, but we can speak the truth in love and help each other face each new reality as part of His plan.

I think Dom Guerric was right in 1964: the role of the Regions is to know each other better in order to love each other better.

DIALOGUE ON THE ROLE OF THE REGIONS

It seems to us that the idea of giving more responsibility to the Regions stems from the impression that the General Chapter has too much work to do, so that the schedule is too heavy and the pace too hurried. Similarly, the Abbot General and his Council are overburdened. In addition there is the lack of Fathers Immediate. But this is a richness, being an international Chapter with some 150 Houses: we feel that the programme will always be full. We must come well prepared personally and as a result of the Region meetings, with a collaboration between the Region and the Fathers Immediate.

We agree that problems must be dealt with at the local and regional level, but there is no need to set up new structures. Instead, the regions must become more effective pastoral bodies, because they are more open and courageous in opening up and tackling difficult and sensitive problems.

We discussed the need for openness and truth in the exchanges of the Regions. It is important to us that reports from the Houses are read and discussed together, at the beginning of our meetings. The further we go, the more we get to know each other, the more the sharing, questions and comments are concrete and pastoral, trying to understand together the situation of each community and what could perhaps be a good help for life. We can follow each community's journey year by year, in a spirit of shared authority, for the good of each House. We take difficulties to heart in order to seek new ways of life. We would like and hope that all Regions will move forward in this transparent dialogue for life.

We realise that the three large continental regions do not have the possibility of meetings and communication that we have. This makes it difficult to develop common thinking and bring it to the Chapter. We are all impoverished by this. But would the grouping of European monasteries into other large regions be the solution? Would it be possible for Oriens to split into two distinct regions, each with its own face, now that they have found an identity as sub-regions? Is it possible to divide the RAFMA into two regions, according to geographical area or language? Or could the Order give RAFMA financial help to have two meetings all together, in addition to the one before the Chapter? Perhaps some REMILA communities could join the RE, and this would help open up new horizons? Perhaps more frequent use of Zoom would help us all?

In any case, we believe that the Regions must remain free to choose their own composition instead of being determined by the General Chapter. The composition, however, must reflect diversity and openness, not a closed in on itself mentality. Our experience at the ReM shows us how the diversity of our situations enriches us and helps us to listen and deepen our discussions.

The Regions must be increasingly aware that they are instruments of belonging to the whole Order, as the General Assembly expressed in its letter of 20/08/2023. Beyond our differences, there is our underlying unity and identity: our charism and our mission in the universal Church, the Body of Christ.

We wonder if all Regions understand the importance of the votes taken in their meetings as a way to make their voices heard. The Central Commission must consider any proposal already

voted on by a Region. If, on the other hand, an interesting suggestion has been discussed, and perhaps appears in the Region's report but has not been voted on, it can be skipped.

- **MEETING WITH DOM STEFANO VISINTIN OSB, ABBOT OF PRAGLIA AND HIS LECTURE**

- **ANNEX 1**

ABUSE

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE CONFERENCE BY PROF. M. JO THIEL

As ReM, we wanted to resume the lecture on abuses in religious life given during the last General Chapter by Prof. Marie Jo Thiel, which, due to lack of time, could not be properly resumed during the Chapter itself.

We do not pretend to carry out a critique or a scientific refutation of the professor's assertions, but we feel it is important to go back to the foundations of monastic and, before that, Christian anthropology because we recognise in it a proposal of life and a path of truth that is authentic and valid even today.

Our reflection was stimulated by a contribution from the community of Vitorchiano, which contains some background remarks to Ms Thiel's lecture.

All of us members of the ReM recognise ourselves in this assessment and wish to share it with the Order, together with the important insight and study carried out by M. Maria Francesca of Valserena on the reality of abuse today.

The abuse scandal is a deep wound in the life of the Church today, and exposes not only a moral weakness, but above all the loss of a Christian vision of man and his destiny and the awareness that Christ heals and saves all mankind.

In dialogue and sharing, we broadened our reflection by trying to understand the place of the anthropological visions expressed by Ms Thiel in the concrete lives of people today, and in particular the young people we meet.

What seems to prevail in the majority of young people today is the idea of a self totally disengaged from any proposal or value judgement. This attitude used to be exemplified thus: 'I came by chance, I do what I want, I even choose when to die'.

Behind their apparent carefreeness, one perceives a deep despair, the need to encounter credible signs of life, friendship and hope. These young people, often unconsciously, ask us to continue to be a hope for them. This is the witness we must give in our monasteries, and we can say that this encounter with the younger generations, by grace, continues to happen.

However, this conference remains a challenge to begin a real reflection on the exercise of authority within our communities.

Rather than reacting to the situation of the abuse scandal in a merely 'defensive' manner, it seems important to us to be proactive, to be able to offer our communities and those who meet us a Christian vision of the relationship between master and disciple as proposed by the Rule, in a paternity/maternity-sonship perspective.

The ReM superiors agreed to start reflecting on this issue at the Region level and also to propose it for the next General Chapter.

Concerning the Protocol for the prevention of abuse: the French monasteries have been working on it for a long time; for the Italian monasteries, a draft Protocol was presented at this meeting, drawn up by Sr Gabriella of Vitorchiano (postulator), which the monasteries will still have to evaluate.

Below are the considerations on Prof. Jo Thiel's lecture presented by M. Rosaria and in annex the study on abuse by M. M. Francesca.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE LECTURE by Prof. Marie Jo Thiel

1. The vision of man from which modern psychology starts is not the Christian one, and it does not even seem true to us: man is not just his body and his instinct, he is not a set of stimuli that the brain must obey and with him everything else. This view reduces the dimension of freedom, of the possibility of choice that, although made difficult by the habit of sin, remains. Reason is seen in a negative sense: it is true that we are not made up of reason alone, but the ability to reason and the capacity for truth are proper to man because of the image of God within us.
2. Rather than taking into consideration our habit of sin and our fragility due to original sin, with the consequent necessary journey of conversion, Professor Jo Thiel questions the Rule and Scripture because they can be misinterpreted. But every text is subject to interpretation. What guarantees a correct interpretation of sacred texts, like the Rule, is the tradition of the Church and the Magisterium and a current authentic and shared experience of faith. If all the phrases of the Rule or Scripture that have been misinterpreted in history were to be removed instead of being rightly explained, what would be left? It is a wrong and also naive solution: we have experience that in the 1960s-70s many authorities, for example, many priests and fathers of families decided to call themselves 'brothers' or simply by name, and were in fact abusers. It is not by changing words that problems are solved, but on the contrary, by deepening their meaning according to the Christian vision and experience.
3. The author starts from a negative view of authority that immediately casts suspicion on every superior and does not consider the fact that abuses are generally committed by deviant or pathological persons.

4. It is very striking that the most 'indicted' points of the Rule are also the most Christological ones: obedience and humility.
5. It is not considered, as Benedict XVI showed in his writing on abuse, that such abuses are the consequence of a distorted theology and morality. Perhaps it is good to remember this, because thinking is the first to be healed.
6. In criticising the Prologue of the Rule and in particular the fact that it refers to a clear and punctual obedience to the abbot, the Professor does not take into account the sacramentality of our life: one cannot obey in the abstract (to God alone), but only to a concrete person, otherwise our obedience will always be adjusted to our own criteria and will be a reflection of what we want and not what God demands.
7. The author asks why there is "such a negative connotation of the will" in the Rule. This question stems from an inaccurate interpretation of the Rule. It is the term '*proprius*', contrasted in patristic spirituality with '*communis*' (common with God and the Church) that is negative and not the will: St Benedict speaks in those passages of the 'own will', our whims and sins that distance us from God.
8. It does not seem to us that in our spirituality there is a denial of the emotions, indeed in our Cistercian Fathers the theme of *affectus* is very present.

We feel it is important to reiterate these aspects of Catholic anthropology because today, when we are confronted with other anthropologies, it becomes urgent to be able to account for our identity.

• **THE ORDER FACING THE WOUND OF ABUSE
STUDY OF M. M. FRANCESCA DI VALSERENA**

• **ANNEX 2**

MEETING WITH DOM BERNARDUS

After the General Chapter of September 2022, I began visiting communities, choosing to start with the communities that had not had an AG visit for more than ten years: a nice group of monasteries. I feel, at the same time, that my presence is required in other monasteries, which are in difficulty. Here we touch upon a first problem of the Order, of which we have all been well aware for several years: that of the Fathers Immediate. There are many Fathers Immediate who are no longer able to fulfil their duties, and consequently a good number of problems end up on the table of the Abbot General and his Council. Obviously this is not a good situation, and some think that the Abbot General and his Council want to centralise the Order. If the structure of the Father Immediate does not function properly and problems end up directly with the Abbot General, it is not that I like it: but someone has to deal with it.

I am happy to see that we are beginning to have abbesses or prioresses taking on the role of Fathers Immediate; it is a real help in the present situation. Whether it is a good solution or not will be up to the Regions and the General Chapter to decide; I am happy that the skills of these women are being used in the Order, for help and support. The first experiences are positive, especially in the men's communities, which was not entirely taken for granted at the outset; we have seen that where abbesses act as Fathers Immediate it works. There are differences, but they are healthy differences and I think the men's communities are open to this. I am very grateful to these abbesses and I am also grateful to the communities that accept them in this service. However, we need to seriously reflect on the structure of the Father Immediate; I think it is a good and respectable structure; in my opinion, however, the question is not so much whether the Father Immediate is a man or a woman, but first of all, how it works as an Father Immediate, especially for the quality of the Regular Visits, which at times has been very neglected.

We had the opportunity to verify the Visitation Cards of all the Communities of the Order made after the Covid crisis; many Visitation Cards had not been made in the last three/four years. However, when it was possible, the Fathers Immediate worked hard and we received many more Visitation Cards than usual. There are good Father Immediate and good Visitation Cards. However, when there are problems in the community, we see that these often originate in a lack of vigilance on the part of the Father Immediate. The structure of the Father Immediate, therefore, is a good structure, but if the Father Immediate does not use it well, problems arise. It is not always about big problems, most of the time it is about small things.

I made a Regular Visit to a community and asked to see the accounts of the monastery. The cellarer and the accountant were surprised by this request: it had been more than twenty years since the Fathers Immediate had asked to see the accounts. A small example, but one that says something about the quality of the Regular Visitation.

Second point: After the General Chapter we had a lot of work to adapt the new Constitutions. During the Chapter we took many votes modifying the Constitutions; this took a lot of time in the Council, to group the votes according to a correct formulation, to work on them. We have three official languages in the Order and there were many differences between one language and another, in the formulation of the votes: a good lesson for the next General Chapter. Again, we have a good structure that we have not made good use of.

All this took a long time before we could present our votes to the Dicastery. Before the General Chapter we had a meeting with the Dicastery to present the direction in which we thought the General Chapter would go; we had another meeting when we presented the changes we wanted to make; we then waited quite a while before we got the answer, just before Easter, which you all know about. The Dicastery accepted all the changes planned for the monks' Constitutions and rejected almost all the proposals made for the nuns' Constitutions. The biggest problem for

us, however, was the large number of questions the Dicastery asked about foundations and communities in fragile situations. This created some confusion, because the members of the Law Commission argued that the Dicastery had no right to intervene in the Statutes of the Order, because the Statutes are internal law of the Order; this caused a good deal of discussion and wasted time. It is true: the Statutes are the responsibility of the Order, but if an internal law of the Order goes against universal law, the Dicastery has the right to comment on it. We started preparing the replies again, and a few weeks ago we received the Holy See's reply. I was forgetting one detail: when we presented our replies to the Dicastery, we also had a meeting with Msgr. Carballo and at that moment it was clear that we were moving in harmony; this gave us much hope and the Holy See's reaction was positive.

The issue that is most difficult to talk about is the timing of formation. Whenever it is mentioned, the answer is: *'this is the Holy Father's personal wish'*. The other answer one always gets, when discussing formation times with the Dicastery, is: *"Yes, it might be a good idea for the monks"* with the risk of a Cor Orans for the monks.

For the time being, all the proposals made for the Constitutions have been accepted. There is still a little discussion outstanding on Const. 29 regarding the enclosure. The Holy See does not have a problem with the monks' and nuns' Constitutions being identical ... but they want to add some words in the nuns' Constitutions; it is not a big addition, but we are not sure of the meaning such words might have. We asked some specialists in Canon Law to verify this addition: *"in everything they shall follow the universal law of the Church"*. These are words that must be carefully evaluated in order to understand the juridical implications they may have.

The Law Commission is working to incorporate the changes that have been made into all the Constitutions, in the three languages, because we have discovered that in the three existing versions there are differences in translation, and what complicates the work further is the Holy See's request for the Latin text, which was not requested in 2013. With the unification of the two branches of the Order, many changes had been made. We are looking for a Latin specialist: if you have names to propose, we are happy. For now, we have found a Cistercian nun from Seligenthal who is willing to do this translation: once again, female help.

We have kept the Constitutions separate from the Statutes, because there is already a written agreement with the Dicastery for the Constitutions and we want to finish with that. For the Statutes, we want to wait to have a meeting with the new Dicastery Secretary. The biggest problem for us at present is to make the Dicastery understand our monastic identity. Previously there was a French Carmelite as the person responsible for monastic life, and he had a good knowledge of it and personal experience from his own religious life, but at present most of the staff come from the new communities. We are also waiting for a new under-secretary to be appointed; the previous under-secretary was American and worked very well.

The changes to the Constitutions have been completed with Msgr. Carballo, but then it will depend on the next General Chapter to decide what we want to do with the point of formation, whether it will accept the status quo for the time being or ask the monks to do the same; or whether it will ask the Abbot General and his Council to return to the Dicastery for discussion. For now, let it drop, because the Statutes are very important. As an Order we have very elaborate Statutes on foundations, and basically we share the Dicastery's thinking that a person or group cannot establish a foundation without the community's consent. That is why we want to have a clear discussion with the Dicastery, without going back to the point of formation.

Third point.

There are some communities in our Order that need our prayers more than others:

- **Latroun, Israel.** The Brothers have been living in an air raid shelter since this new war broke out. Dom Patrick, abbot emeritus of Sept-Fons and local superior, sends me news of the situation every day. Next to the monastery is a military camp and many

missiles are headed there, which makes the situation very dangerous for the monks. Today they were able to leave the shelter, after eight days, but the situation remains tense.

- **Mokoto, Congo.** There are still thousands of refugees in their monastery. People cannot return to their villages and are starting to build more solid masonry shelters. The community therefore fears that it will be more difficult to send them away later. For the time being, they are able to offer food and medical care for the refugees.

- **La Paz, Panama.** In Nicaragua, the Church is persecuted. The sisters learned they were on the government's black list. Having consulted the Mother House, the Father Immediate and Father General, they took refuge in Panama. Welcomed by the Archbishop, they searched and found a suitable place for a monastery, 160 km south of the capital, Panama City. I plan to visit them at Christmas.

Last problematic point I would like to address.

We are 150 communities and more than half of them have less than 10 members, and among these half have even less than 6 members. This is an increasingly difficult situation at all levels, for which we have no answer. Some of these communities are viable and can think of growth, of a future, but most of them are old and have no future. It is very difficult to confront these communities with their difficulties, many just want to survive and will do anything to survive. They easily accept candidates, without discernment, because each new candidate offers a hope of survival, but in many of these communities instead of offering the candidates a formation it happens that it is the candidates who take over the community. We have many cases where a professed with temporary vows is prior, or has the responsibility of cellarer: you can imagine the problems this can create.

Dealing with these situations absorbs me and the Council, so much so that we no longer have the time and energy to support communities that are doing well; for both the Council and me, it is important to work not only for communities that are in difficulty, but also for those that are life-giving.

We will do a mini-Central Commission online in early December. I would like to use the Central Commission more as the Abbot General's enlarged Council. For the Central Commission, I would like to organise an online meeting every year and an in-person meeting the following year: I think this would solve many difficulties related to active participation.

As ReM we had a dialogue on the Abbot General's latest letter, which was then enriched by a further reflection offered by the visit of the Abbot General himself.

LETTER FROM DOM BERNARDUS
'United by an admirable bond of charity'

20 August 2023

Synthesis Dialogue

The theme of Dom Bernardus' circular letter elicited the testimony of some of the superiors of the ReM who in recent times have received special help and support either from the Father Immediate, or from the Region, or from other instances of the Order, and are grateful for it. Listening to their experience, the other Superiors also recalled some difficult moments in the history of their communities, and the help they received at the time.

We are all sincerely grateful to belong to the Order, and not only for the concrete help (pastoral or economic) we receive, but for the Order itself, for its structure and functioning, in which we see charity and communion at work. It is a singular grace, which comes to us from our tradition, which we do not find in other Orders and Congregations, and which we must nourish, preserve and transmit. Let us also think of the strength of belonging that certain documents drafted after the Council have generated: the *Declaration on Cistercian Life*, the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*, and the work done together on the reworking of the Constitutions.

Looking for the reasons that may cause the weakening of the sense of belonging to the Order, and therefore isolation, in the communities, it seemed to us that it depends more on the lack of awareness of being heirs to a tradition than on the geographical remoteness in which some communities may find themselves. We are the custodians of a charism that we have received, of a form of life that others have passed on to us, we come from a tradition: it seems to us that many of the current problems in the Order arise from the loss of this awareness.

We are convinced that we do not do ourselves alone, neither as individuals, nor as a community, nor as an Order, even where there is a particularly charismatic Superior. There is no belonging to Christ if there is no belonging to the Church in all its levels: community, Order, universal Church. We are certain of this and feel the responsibility to form in our communities a lively sense of belonging to the Order, which will always accompany us and not only in difficult and poor situations.

We are aware that the sense of belonging to the Order the community receives mainly from the formation that we Superiors offer: the Superior's task is to open the community to the beauty and suffering of the Order, to inform it of what is happening and above all, starting from the events that occur, to open a path of reflection, integration and prayer within the Community, because the Order is a living body in which each one is called to circulate life.

The examples that Dom Bernardus gives in the letter recall a very real and even tragic experience (the persecution of the Church in Nicaragua, the war in Congo where Mokoto is, and the death of Dom Godefroy) and yet the Abbot General does not stop at tragedy, but gives an interpretation of it in a paschal key and sees in them the incarnation of the ideal of the Charter of Charity. In this Paschal perspective, the experiences of some of our communities who have taken in or cared for sisters from recently closed Houses are also illuminated.

What we would like, because it seems to us it could greatly help the superiors and communities to make a journey together as an Order and to grow in the consciousness of mutual belonging, would be to have a theme for the General Chapter. A common theme helps to reflect, to compare, to prepare, to involve the communities, to work together to grow in a communion of intentions and in a common vision.

Meeting with Dom Bernardus

During the meeting, the Abbot General communicated the facts that aroused in him the desire to put the Order's sense of belonging as the theme of his last letter. Here they are in brief:

- Some small or fragile communities experience a closure: they defend themselves and retreat into their own precariousness.
- Some large and young communities, on the other hand, live in the illusion of self-sufficiency, without a desire for a relationship with the Order and the local Church, as if in a parallel universe.
- In the Order, a certain old-fashioned 'Trappist' mentality still survives, which understands unity as uniformity and does not question in depth the bond that exists between brothers in the same community and between communities in the Order. Thus, a certain individualism is experienced: each one seeks his own little truth and the will of God is not sought together.
- Sometimes communities isolate themselves by defending themselves behind a false vision of autonomy. The autonomy of each community is a true and good reality, but in the Christian sense, autonomy is relative.
- Finally, another factor that left some communities feeling isolated was Covid.

In the face of these challenges, **Dom Bernardus wishes to reaffirm** that being a Christian implies belonging to the Church, and that belonging concerns all spheres and levels of life. We do not do it alone. We are not in community by chance, but because we are called together by the Lord with the same vocation and to form a Church, as our Cistercian Fathers say. This is why he wished to emphasise in his letter examples of belonging and charity, which express the current vitality of our charism. In response to his circular, he received other testimonies of charity lived in Our Order, which document how life circulates in and among the communities of Our Order. And this is what he feels called to promote. In this light, he expressed some lines and wishes:

- A text to be rediscovered, to overcome the old Trappist mentality, is the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*.
- A connection between the communities should be fostered through the General Chapter, and for this it is important that the communities are involved in the preparation and that they are informed at the end of the Chapter.
- It is important that the regions are proactive, circulate ideas and, through their Presidents, bring ideas to the Central Commission in view of the General Chapter.

We were very grateful for the presence of Dom Bernardus at ReM and for the opportunity he gave us for this meeting, which we wish to share with the Houses of our Order, in a renewed desire to walk together.

PRESENTATION OF THE AFFILIATION DOCUMENT

M. Anne-Emmanuelle of Blauvac

Affiliation is a form of help proposed by *Cor Orans* (54-64) that nuns can use as of now, as a possible choice to revitalise a community that is in a very fragile phase, which is not truly autonomous.

The purpose must be clear: this is not a stage for closure; for that purpose there are other ways, it is instead a new opportunity to give life to a community. This bond of alliance between two communities is a new expression of the Charter of Charity, so that the community lives.

As yet I do not think the Order has made use of this possibility for a monastery of nuns, but we have the right to propose it.

*In the course of the GC, the Affiliation was presented (*P. 63-65 of GC File 2022*) and the Chapter Commissions studied it and made a number of comments on it.

*The REI and Récif regions worked on the subject. I have no other reports.

With the help of these documents, I propose that you read the text paragraph by paragraph and, from time to time, I will include the reflections made by the Chapter Commissions, which on the whole seem to be in favour of this new legal form to help a monastery. I will also add the contributions of the REI and RéciF Regions.

Affiliation is a legal instrument intended as an aid measure to give hope for life.

The community is affiliated (=affiliated) to another community (=affiliating).

The affiliated community retains its economy, capacity to receive novices, and stability in its own house.

Its autonomy, however, is suspended: there is only one conventual chapter.

The questions that arise touch on the place of formation, the votes for admission to temporary and solemn profession, the place of the Father Immediate in the affiliated community.

It is a process of suspending autonomy with a view to discerning the future. It is therefore a temporary structure, for a few years, with a view to making a discernment: whether autonomy can be regained, or whether there is a move towards closure, or a merger with the other community.

REM VOTES 2023

Voters: 14

1. We would like a summary of the General Chapter, as a memory of what was experienced.
YES 13 NO 0 AST 1 - proposition accepted
2. We would like the General Chapter to establish themes for reflection to be explored by the communities and the results of which should be reported to the respective regional meetings.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
3. We propose that the theme of the next General Chapter be 'Authority in its exercise of paternity/maternity-fraternity'.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
4. We come to the General Chapter, according to the Charter of Charity, in a spirit of conversion, with a readiness to receive criticism, correction and support for us and our communities.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
5. The Chapter leaders undertake to carefully prepare the Chapter and the documents entrusted to them.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
6. We believe it is time to renew the composition of the 14 Commissions.
YES 13 NO 0 AST 1 - proposition accepted
7. More attention should be given to the new Superiors, before and during the Chapter.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
8. We encourage the Abbot General to continue the dissemination of letters on various topics of Cistercian monastic life.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
9. The 'ad hoc' commissions must prepare clear and complete reports, indicating whom they have heard, the reasons for their decisions and that the persons involved have been informed before the presentation of these reports in the hall.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
10. When the 14 Commissions work on the same theme, we ask that the Coordination Commission draft or entrust the drafting of a summary of the 14 reports to a member of the General Chapter.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
11. It would be desirable if, from time to time, some meetings took place solely between nuns or monks, e.g. on the subject of the 'Immediate Mothers' experience.
YES 12 NO 1 AST 1 - proposition accepted

12. Rather than new structures, we want there to be open collaboration within the regions, where people have the courage to express themselves, for the good of each Superior and community.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
13. We wish to complete § 1 of the *Working Document on the adaptation to the Order's institutions of the instrument of filiation according to Cor Orans*, asking that "***the two Fathers Immediate, that of the affiliating monastery and that of the affiliated monastery, be consulted during the process***".
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
14. We demand that the affiliation process, as described in § 2 of the same document above, be revised to include a deliberative vote by the affiliating community and an advisory one by the affiliated community.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
15. We would like § 4 of the same document to be completed by including the Superior of the affiliated community in the "Commission for the Future".
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
16. We wish to modify § 5 of the same document as follows: "***With affiliation, the General Chapter suspends the status of autonomous monastery (...). The Holy See is informed***".
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
17. We wish to amend § 7 of the same document by replacing the expression '***appointed ad nutum***' with '***designated***'.
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
18. In § 9 we wish to add: "***In the event that a sister from another community wishes to join the affiliated monastery, the change of stability is made with the agreement of the conventual chapter of the affiliating community and after consultation with the solemnly professed sisters of the affiliated community***".
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
19. In § 14 we would like the expression "***fragile community***" to be replaced by "***affiliated community***".
YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted

SELF-CRITICISM - Everyone was pleased with the fraternal atmosphere that has been established in our Region and that characterises our meetings; the vitality and interest of the work being done together, both in preparation with our communities and among the superiors, was greatly appreciated.

Particularly appreciated was the frankness, openness and fraternity of the pastoral meeting, even in those aspects that could be 'uncomfortable' or difficult to deal with. Everyone was very grateful for the help that such moments offer. Much gratitude also for the presence and participation of our Abbot General.

The absence of M. Lucia di Naši Panì, Co-President, as mentioned above, was felt.

We need to grow in discipline during our dialogues: allow time to translate so that everyone can understand what the other is saying and not intervene immediately: this would also facilitate the work of the translators.

Another negative point noted: the density of a programme to be carried out compared to insufficient time: there was a request for more time not only to be able to dialogue on the reports of the Houses, which are always a very interesting point, but also to have the possibility of relaxing breaks.

They all appreciated being housed in a monastery and being able to follow the monastic liturgy, albeit with the handicap of the foreign language.

PROGRAMME FOR REM 2024
Service of authority as fatherhood and motherhood

NAŠÍ PANÍ: 29 April - 4 May

Work will begin on 29 April (morning) and end on 3 May evening.
It is possible, for those who wish, to arrive at Nasi Pani on 27 April.

Planned programme:

- Two lectures by His Excellency Msgr. Massimo Camisasca (Bishop Emeritus of Reggio Emilia-Guastalla) on the theme

Authority: paternity and maternity

- A lecture by M. Martha on the subject

Affectivity education (more on this later)

- Exchange on the topic within the ReM

*What consciousness do we have of our being fathers and mothers of the community?
What does it mean to generate faith?*

FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Reflection on the theme:

- *Obedience as a path of conformation to Christ, through sonship in belonging to the community.* (Each community can further elaborate and decline this question for its own dialogues.)

We suggest here some possible reflection questions both for superiors and for dialogues in the communities.

FOR SUPERIORS

1. How do you conceive the role of the superior? In your opinion, is it possible to speak of spiritual paternity and maternity? What do they consist of in your opinion?
2. What does it mean to you that your motherhood/paternity must be chaste?
3. What difference do you see in you when you experience your authority as motherhood/paternity or instead as power?
4. What are your fears in exercising spiritual motherhood/paternity?
5. What are the duties of the superior that make you struggle the most?
6. What does it mean concretely for you to let yourself be generated by the Church and the Order in order to live sonship in the first person? (You cannot be a father if you are not a son.) And what does it mean for you to build the Order in your turn?
7. What or who helps you in exercising your spiritual motherhood/paternity?
8. Do you want your sons/daughters to grow up and be able to take responsibility? What do you do in this regard?
9. Do you wish to sustain the unity of the community around whoever succeeds you in the superior's mandate? How do you transmit this value?

FOR COMMUNITIES

1. Is St Benedict's vision present in the Rule, particularly in Chapter V, still relevant for us?
2. What are the most important instruments through which the paternity/maternity of the superior is exercised?
3. What is obedience looking at Christ the obedient Son? Without this looking to Christ, how does my obedience become? What obedience does Christ desire for me?
4. What are the concrete signs of my living out true obedience/sonship in faith with judgement and heart, and what are the concrete signs of non-Christian obedience?
5. What are the concrete means to re-enter - after we have moved away from it - into a vision of faith with respect to Christian obedience?
6. For me, is obedience also a relationship of filial love? What does it mean concretely that this love must be chaste? What does it mean concretely that this love must be humble?
7. Is this filial relationship and obedience making me grow in responsible freedom and co-responsibility as an adult member called to build the community?
8. Does this experience of true sonship in Christ make me motherly/paternal towards the younger members of the community? What does this mean concretely?

ANNEXES

1. AUTHORITY IN THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT

Dom Stefano Visintin, OSB, Abbot of Praglia

In RB (*Regula Benedicti*) the figure of the Abbot, who is the head of the cenobitic community, not only appears early (Chapter 2), but appears almost everywhere. There is therefore no doubt that RB is strongly based on the person of the superior.

His role is preponderant, as he controls every aspect of the life of the monastic community, even those that may seem less important and could be delegated. In RB 32 we find the Abbot distributing the tools for daily work, and at the end of the day he receives them back and notes down what is missing. Elsewhere, in RB 38:6, the Abbot is told to assess when the monks need more food because of changed circumstances. In RB 55 the Abbot also takes care of the monks' clothing.

Even in community meetings, the role of the Abbot is primary. It is certainly true that he must convene all the monks for consultation and must listen attentively to each one of them, even the newcomers (RB 3). However, the leadership remains in his hands even in these cases: he sets the agenda, controls the discussion and makes the final decision.

Current legislation mitigates this authority of the abbot by also providing for collegial and deliberative votes (where the Abbot cannot go against the vote cast, but can nevertheless disregard it). In any case, complete 'democracy' is never achieved. Moreover, even the Church is a democracy *sui generis*, in that it is an organism that is properly hierarchised only in God and where strength and power are distributed; something can come from the people of God who are also guided by His Spirit. However, the fact remains that a charismatic view of authority applies in the Church and also in the monastery.

Given the Abbot's primary role, it is his turn:

- Determining the direction. What are we doing and why?
Clear and ambitious goals towards which to focus emotions and energy.
It is necessary for individuals to understand their efforts within an overall vision.
- Instilling discipline and the will to align. A structure formed by principles and values is the prerequisite for granting freedom.
It serves to channel all forces in the right direction. Discipline is a way of focusing energy and attention on what matters most.
People need both freedom and structure. St Bernard speaks of the triad: discipline, nature and grace. One must initially renounce excessive self-love (expressed in the Rule as 'self-will') by adhering to an external ideal through 'discipline', which must become as an integral part of oneself, as one's own, eventually there is the space for creativity illuminated by 'grace' (by the Spirit, by God).
- Share passion for the goal and energy. People must have a passion for goals and live accordingly. One must show optimism in front of the group, pessimism one keeps to oneself. People's inner chords are always ready to be awakened and utilised, but one has to understand the group and know how to assess the mood.

Conversely, given the Abbot's primary role, he must:

- Believe in himself, his mission and competence, but without becoming arrogant. As RB repeatedly reminds us, he must remember that he will be accountable to God for himself and

others. He must also observe himself and his personality at all times: something may have to be rearranged.

- Granting freedom. Freedom increases creativity and motivation, and co-responsibility builds group trust. Freedom must be granted especially with regard to the choice of tools and style.

RB also knows the importance of the delegation of authority for the good of the group and for the well-being of the abbot himself.

In RB 31, Benedict shows us an official to whom the abbot delegates a good deal of authority: the cellarer. He is the administrator of the temporal goods of the community and in particular of the distribution of food.

However, even this very important lieutenant of the abbot is strictly circumscribed with warnings about the limits of his authority. Far from being an autonomous authority figure, he is repeatedly told that he is strictly subordinate to the abbot's orders, from which he must not deviate in the slightest.

The abbot then shares his responsibility with the deans (RB 21). It is clear, however, that they must be trusted.

Another glimpse of Benedict's delegation of authority is found in RB 46:5-6, where the author addresses the sensitive issue of hidden spiritual faults and sins. Here RB seems to admit that, as important as the abbot's spiritual guidance is for the community, it probably cannot satisfy all people and all situations. Monks must be free to choose their spiritual director and that person must be considered a spiritual authority in the monastery.

Note that to us, these rather minimal instances of delegation of authority in RB may not seem too significant, but they are in fact a significant departure from its main model (the Master's Rule) where authority was all-encompassing.

This earlier Rule also provided for subordinate officers, but without any real authority. They are controllers rather than real leaders at any level. RB also has this tendency, but to a lesser extent.

One of the most significant aspects of authority according to RB is that it knows the monks and cares for them. That is, it proposes a *leadership* that emphasises caring for individuals alongside and perhaps above institutional concerns.

This element can be deduced from the title Benedict bestows on the superior, namely *abbas* or father. This appellation given to the superior refers to a personal and not just a juridical-institutional relationship. RB shows the abbot exercising direct and personal care for the monks in many situations.

After the initial treatise on the abbot (RB 2), this more pastoral dimension of the abbot emerges later on, as if to complement the aspects highlighted in the initial description. Here is a typical passage from RB 64:

... always let mercy prevail over judgement ... detest vices, love your brothers. Even when correcting, let him act with prudence and be careful not to exceed ... never lose sight of his own frailty, and remember that one should not tread on the reed that is already bent ... seek to be loved rather than feared ... dispose everything with measure.

Here the direct reference is the writings of St Augustine, which refer to the New Testament. The basic model is therefore Jesus himself.

Benedict's abbot is also dedicated to the mission of reconciliation and forgiveness. The place where this emerges most clearly is probably RB 27, on 'the abbot's concern for the excommunicated'. In the first verse we read: 'With all solicitude the abbot must take care of the brothers who have sinned'. Apart from the practical difficulty of devoting all his efforts to the rehabilitation of the problematic brother, it should be noted that Jesus was looking in the same direction when he stated categorically: 'It is not the healthy who need the physician, but the sick' (Mark 2:17).

As RB 27 again explains, however, in this case the sick, that is, the excommunicated, may not like the abbot's care. Indeed, they might be blocked by a struggle against his authority, so that he finds himself unable to help them directly. Benedict then suggests sending other officers who may have better access to his brother. This is probably one of the most remarkable instances of Benedict's profound understanding of the function of paternal authority. It does not stand on its own dignity; it may have to resort to indirect means to achieve its ends; it is primarily concerned with the salvation of the individual, not its own prestige.

This same kind of harsh but gentle care and concern is also evident in the next chapter of the Benedictine Penal Code, namely RB 28. Here we have a situation where a monk has relapsed into behaviour that renders him 'excommunicated'. Such a case deserves the abbot's full attention. It cannot be justified on the grounds that a problematic member should not occupy all his time.

This reminds us that the monastery is not just any impersonal institution. It is a collection of individual persons, all irreplaceable members of the body of Christ and made in the image and likeness of God. Today we live in a complicated world where the abbot often has multiple practical and institutional concerns. However, in the face of all these, the abbot must keep in mind that his role is primarily pastoral.

Attention to the person is finally found in the chapter on the care of the sick (RB 36). Here a separate room is provided for the sick and a special office of servant of the sick is also established. However, this person does not have the ultimate responsibility for caring for the sick. This task still falls to the abbot. "The abbot shall take the greatest care that the sick are not neglected...". One might ask why the abbot has to appoint nurses if he is still in charge. The reason is that for RB the individual monk always remains the abbot's main concern and he cannot delegate this responsibility and this relationship. If the community becomes so big that he does not know all the members, or cannot take care of them, the community is too big. One should not make an appointment with the abbot weeks in advance. Benedictine authority is 'direct' or it is dysfunctional.

The crisis of authority

It is recognised by all that we currently suffer from a crisis of authority. Many times, when contemporary monasteries have to elect an abbot or prior, they find that no one is able or willing to assume monastic *leadership*.

First of all, it is true that many people today do not want top-level roles. It is better to hold mid-level roles that allow smooth personal relationships. Many people cannot stand authority and are always at odds with it. This means that whoever holds the position of monastic superior will be disliked and even hated by some members.

Being a *follower* instead of a *leader* then offers the opportunity to learn from others, observing their behaviour, successes and mistakes. One then has the opportunity to maximise one's own learning. As a *follower* one then feels legitimised to ask questions and to make mistakes, to seek advice and help. As a *leader* this is seen as problematic, perhaps because of a wrong image of authority.

Being a *follower* ultimately means using one's skills and competences to win participation in interesting and valuable projects and initiatives. Becoming a trustworthy, reliable and capable follower can give one very wide spheres of freedom and action.

A *follower* who has managed to become recognised as a valuable resource perhaps feels no need to become a replaceable *leader* with many ties to institutional position.

Why should the management part of the job be more rewarding or fun? If a person is passionate about the content of what they do, why should they shift their focus to managing people?

Another possible explanation for today's lack of *leaders* is that *leadership* is not actively promoted. This can happen when the top authority is so jealous of its own territory that, instead of encouraging other members to develop *leadership* skills, it actively undermines them.

Finally, a possible explanation may also lie in the fact that sufficiently attractive *leadership* models are not yet emerging. In the religious field, pre-conciliar authoritarianism has been firmly left behind, but new models are still being sought, with even returns to models that had been abandoned.

2. ORDER IN THE FACE OF THE WOUND OF ABUSE

Work requested from M. Maria Francesca Righi at RGM-1-2022

- 1 - FOREWORD and recapitulation
- 2 - The problem of abuse and the amendment of Book VI of the CIC
- 3 - Causes and roots of the problem
- 4 - Clarification of certain terms
- 5 - At the level of the monastic world
- 6 - At the level of our order - Spiritual abuse of power and vow of obedience
- 7 - Sexual abuse and vow of chastity
- 8 - Exemplifications (Re-elaboration of a text by Dom Bernardo Olivera, 7\04\22)
- 9 - Doctrine and pedagogy for the post-modern perhaps post-Christian man

This work requested for the second part of the General Chapter of 2022 would now need to be updated in the light of new elements that have emerged, whether texts, studies and documentation or facts that have happened (cases such as Rupnik, or other major figures). I summarise some of the contributions.

Recapitulation

On the prevention of all forms of abuse: sexual, conscience or power abuse

In May 2019, Pope Francis promulgated *Motu proprio vos estis lux mundi*, which established new procedures to combat sexual abuse and ensure that bishops and religious superiors are held accountable for their actions. These new universal norms apply to the entire Church for an experimental period of three years starting in June 2019.

The Abbot General had already written to all superiors of the order in June 2015 on the need to have protective measures and procedures in every community. Pope Francis returned to the subject on several occasions and in a 'letter to the people of God' (2018) and in a 'letter to priests' (2019)³.

In the meantime, the canonical penal system has completely changed its face and has been profoundly rethought. The revision of the entire Lib. VI of the CIC that began in 2007 at the behest of Benedict XVI, has continued during the pontificate of Francis in the conviction that a reform was necessary to respond to the changed needs of the ecclesial community, and to correct the false assumption that justice is contrary to charity, and that church and criminal law are incompatible. With the Apostolic Const. *Pascite gregem Dei* of Pope Francis, the new criminal law in the Church, (Chapter VI), which entered into force on 8 December 2021, is now a reality.

The 2019 Central Commission voted to put a 'Declaration of Principles' on the agenda of the General Chapter of 2020 (then 2022 due to the pandemic), and to approve a 'Declaration of Principles', and asked the Juridical Commission to propose new texts to be added.

A declaration of principle was therefore drafted (Working Document produced at the request of the Central Commission of Cîteaux 2019,) Dom Richard (Mt. Melleray) Dom Bernardus (Tilburg), which was rejected by the work of the regions and an attempt was made to replace it with a working document.

The Declaration was not intended to be limited to the abuse of children (minors) or vulnerable persons. More and more, it is about putting thoughts and procedures in place to ensure the safety and well-being of all. This applies to persons in training, all members of our communities, the elderly, the infirm or vulnerable, and the relationship with the superior.

The biggest lesson we have learnt from the last 25 years is that we cannot be silent about this problem. We must be able to talk about it and put measures and protocols in place to help us do so.

The reasons for this change:

We do not want an eventual Declaration to be imprisoned by the current social and ecclesial atmosphere of dramatization, fear, distrust or guilt. **We must begin with a comprehensive anthropological approach, not only to sexual abuse, but also to the abuse of power and conscience These are the three parts of a Christian anthropology: body, soul and spirit....**

³ The latest documents on the subject: *Vademecum on certain points of procedure in handling cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics* (5 June 2022) - *To the members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (29 April 2022).

What does it mean to create a safe environment? An environment in which there are rules and procedures⁴. Our Constitutions already express our commitment to a safe environment.

Once again we are faced with the problem of the language of a secularised society that does not believe in God or sin. The obligation to make a place safe means establishing rules to prevent people from doing harm. But even if young people come with their families, anything can happen, because rules do not make people good and holy. The law should not prevent deep encounters between two people.

Laws can help, but our way of reflecting and expressing ourselves should focus on conversion, on formation to chastity, obedience, freedom, it should be based on and refer to a Christian anthropological conception. Questioning the founding values not only of monastic life but of the church on the grounds that they can be abused creates a climate of distrust that ends up blocking the role of spiritual fatherhood. To see authority only as a potential threat would create an obstacle to the transmission of life and our charism to new generations.

It is also possible to provide some criteria for a protocol on sexual abuse, but what about abuse of power and conscience? We lack the basis at the canonical level to address these issues. Our charism requires obedience, a promise of free consent, but this consent is not total at the moment of obedience. If things do not go well, one can say: 'I was forced to do this; this is an abuse of power'.

How can this be expressed in Christian and monastic language in a way that civil law can understand?

It seems that the documents on abuse do not even consider Superiors in the category of vulnerable persons. Instead, there are many examples of priests who have been unjustly accused precisely because of this mentality of suspicion, their guilt mediated, their proven innocence completely hushed up (See Abbot Vittorelli). A person who has difficulty obeying can accuse them of being abused; the question of how a community or authority can defend itself against false and unjust accusations is completely absent.

For all these reasons, we voted to revise the document.

The second part of the General Chapter then voted for a minimum of change in the Constitutions and the Ratio. The Church is asking for this, so it is being done. At the same time we reiterated that it is still a matter of working on the subject at a deep level.

We consider it important to introduce these changes into our legislation as soon as possible. However, we have formulated a new proposal for these texts, to make them more sober and in the style of constitutions.

⁴ For example, in the guesthouse, a rule could be that minors cannot be accommodated without a family member accompanying them, without a group leader. Or make parlours with partially glass walls.

Constitutions:

C. 30a. Protection of minors and vulnerable adults

Every community and every member of the Order is respectful and attentive to the rights and needs of minors and vulnerable adults, and takes care to prevent any form of physical or psychological violence or abuse in interpersonal relationships or in shared spaces and facilities. A community protocol is established to regulate this and the community receives training on the subject. The protocol and its implementation are reviewed during the regular visit.

For the composition of this protocol and training in this area, the superiors and communities follow the guidelines of the Holy See and obtain assistance in their respective countries from the Bishops' Conference and/or the Conference of Religious Superiors. The communities of a Region or a country may collaborate on this issue.

New text for the Regular Visitation

(g) the existence of a protocol for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults; the community's adherence to this protocol in the area of sexual abuse, abuse of conscience and/or abuse of power; the fact that the community provides training in this area (C 30a);

New text for the Ratio

4. Education for the prevention of sexual abuse, abuse of conscience and abuse of power

16a. Every community and every member of the Order is respectful and attentive to the rights and needs of minors and vulnerable adults, and takes care to prevent any form of physical or psychological violence or abuse in interpersonal relationships or in shared spaces and facilities (C. 30 bis). Communities provide training in this area. They are encouraged to seek assistance from their respective dioceses and regions.

Vote

125 We ask the Abbot General and his Council to place a statement on the Order's website on the prevention of abuse of any kind.

The first years of the new millennium have been marked by the emergence of the wound of abuse in the Church. One may recall the studies carried out on behalf of the Bishops' Conferences in the United States, Holland, Germany, and then in France with the Sauvé report, in Spain, recently in Italy etc.⁵

Following these events, some parts of the CIC were profoundly rethought. The revision of the entire Book VI of the CIC begun by Benedict XVI in 2007 continued during the pontificate of Francis⁶. Two false assumptions had to be corrected: that justice was contrary to charity, (the tendency was to almost eliminate punishments as contrary to charity), and that the Church and criminal law were incompatible. The new criminal law in the Church came into force on 8 December 2021 with Pope Francis' apostolic constitution *Pascite gregem Dei*. Its new sixth book responds to the need to effectively address the wound of abuse by working the unity of legal and spiritual as well as justice and mercy. The purpose of sanctions in law (both ecclesiastical and civil) is above all preventive, and includes the reparation of the possible

⁵ Many studies have been done to adequately address the problem. We refer to the study *La formazione iniziale in tempi di abusi* (A.Cencini-S Lassi. cur) Servizio nazionale per la tutela dei minori - CEI

⁶ BRUNO FABIO PIGHIN, *The New Criminal Law of the Church*, Marcianum Press, 2021.

scandal and the correction of the offender. Thus Benedict XVI in his letter to the Catholics of Ireland:

*"In the exercise of your pastoral ministry, you have had to respond to many painful cases of sexual abuse of minors in recent years. These are even more tragic when it is a clergyman who commits them. The wounds caused by such acts run deep, and there is an urgent task to restore confidence and trust when these have been damaged. In your continuing efforts to deal effectively with this problem, it is important to **establish the truth** of what has happened in the past, to **take all steps** to prevent a recurrence in the future, to ensure that **the principles of justice** are fully respected and, above all, to **heal the victims** and all those affected by these abhorrent crimes. In this way the Church in Ireland will be strengthened and increasingly able to bear witness to the redemptive power of the Cross of Christ. I pray that by the grace of the Holy Spirit this time of purification will enable all God's people in Ireland to "maintain and perfect by their lives the holiness which they have received" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 40)". (Benedict XVI Letter to the Irish Bishops. October 2006)*

Causes and roots of the problem

Abuse of power, of conscience, of sexuality. What was the breeding ground for such a plague?

The most profound analysis was given by Pope Benedict XVI's notes following the synod of bishops, which read the mystery of the darkening moon, looking for the causes of the phenomenon, its consequences and a perspective of response.

Among the causes: first and foremost the sexual revolution of '68 and the concomitant collapse of moral theology that left the church helpless in the face of difficulty, all in a social context which considers limitless sexual freedom to be progress but in reality denies its profound meaning, which advocates gender ideology and denies difference and complementarity, which affirms the goodness of homosexual ties while denying generativity, which favours the introduction of this ideology even into schools and misunderstands the connection between its ideological terrain and a church weakened in the depth of its faith is objectively an excellent breeding ground for the abuses it claims to scandalise. Important elements of this cultural shift have been the progressive blurring of a proper anthropology, the erasure of the father in Western society, and at the same time a crisis of faith in the church.

Even more profoundly, Bishop Varden reminds us that the crisis is not primarily moral but metaphysical, which is linked to the crisis of faith. He writes in a letter to the OCSO General Chapter this September:

"When the human element exceeds the divine, the Church does not flourish. "Anthropocentrism," wrote Bishop Meletios in 2001, "kills the Church and its life." These are harsh words, but words we must heed, for we live in a self-centred world...I do not think the main *skandalon* is ethical. I rather think it is metaphysical. The holiness of God! The splendour of his glory, manifested in Christ through an infinitely merciful condescension! These fundamental realities, which for the founders of Cîteaux were axiomatic, seem alien to an age whose perspective is completely horizontal. We are children of this age. Of this we must always be aware."⁷

⁷ ERIK VARDEN, *Letter to the OCSO*, <https://coramfratribus.com/archive/a-letter-to-the-ocso/>

Clarification of certain terms

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXTERNAL FORUM, INTERNAL FORUM AND SPHERE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

This is a sensitive issue in the Church because it affects all spheres in which governance is exercised: associations and movements, institutes of consecrated life, dioceses, etc.

If we refer to associations, their moderators are superiors of the external forum, so first and foremost they act in this sphere, which does not mean that they cannot also sometimes have to deal with the sphere of conscience of the members of the association.

Canon 130 determines as follows: "*The power of governance is exercised per se for the external forum, sometimes however for the internal forum only, in such a way that the effects which its exercise has originally for the external forum are not recognised in this forum, except in so far as this is established by law for specific cases*".

The 'forum' indicates the scope of exercise of governmental power or jurisdiction by the authority. The power of governance is **one and is exercised in two** different ways, for the external forum and for the internal forum. This is the first important innovation of CIC 1983 with respect to CIC 1917, where canon 196 configured two types of power of jurisdiction or governance, one of the external forum and another of the internal forum or of conscience, both sacramental and extra-sacramental....

CIC 1917 did not hold the notion of internal forum, at least as it is now understood by CIC 1983. This, however, sometimes leads to confusion, because people continue to read CIC 1983 with the vision of CIC 1917 and confuse the internal forum and the sphere of conscience, which instead must be clearly distinguished. In fact, if we take the definition of conscience that the Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 16, as "*the most secret nucleus and sacrarium of man, where he is alone with God, whose voice resounds in his own intimacy*", certainly the canonical internal forum, as the Code's reform commission expressly said, cannot be identified with the sphere of conscience, so a superior cannot intervene in the sphere of conscience by exercising the power of government he has.

If conscience is the place of moral choices where man finds himself alone with God and where his salvation is at stake (GS 16), no human authority can enter into it with a potestative act. No human authority, not even that of the Church, can have dominion over a man's conscience. That would be an act against the Lordship of God. The domain of conscience is proper to spiritual direction and the sacrament of penance, not to the exercise of the power of governance. When authority exercises power for the internal forum, it comes indirectly to touch the intimacy of the person, hence the sphere of conscience, but this does not mean that it exercises the power of governance over conscience, but over a situation in which conscience is involved.

Internal forum and conscience are not equivalent terms. Internal and external forum indicate the scope of exercise of governmental authority. Conscience is the absolutely personal and inalienable level.

At the level of the monastic world

A text prepared by the prior of the Carthusian monastery Dysmas de Lassus, *Risques et dérives de la vie religieuse (Risks and Deviations of Religious Life)*⁸ . analyses the phenomenon in its roots, consequences and ways of solution. He identifies a kind of system that encourages the phenomenon to take hold in the characteristics as summarised by Erik Varden⁹ in an article

*"There is **the paradigm of the charismatic superior** who usurps the place of the rule, and assumes control over others by means of affective alliances (...); there is the **paradigm of secrecy**, whereby the members of a community receive the rule to be read only after promising to obey, since the text, it is said, is too sublime for the uninitiated. There is the **paradigm of intrusion**, which demands the manifestation of consciousness and disdains distinctions between an internal and an external forum in the name of 'trust'. There is the **paradigm of distorted mysticism** that hails novices' collapses as triumphs of grace and brands their desire to leave as devilish temptation. There is the **paradigm of isolation** whereby religious are denied contact with their families and the confessors of their choice; they may even be made to promise (in one case with a 'vow of charity!') never to denounce the excesses of their superior. The conclusion is that: Such patterns are intrinsic to **totalitarian systems**. What makes them particularly pernicious in religious life is their application in the name of Christ, invoked as an instrument of power. The result is blasphemy. The damage produced can be incalculable'.*

All this is painfully true; however, we must also observe that all these drifts are deformations of realities that are in themselves just and healthy, which over time have weakened and perhaps lost touch with one another: that the superior is a transmitter of charisma is not in itself wrong, it becomes so when it is an absolute and a cult of personality; equally, the capacity for confidentiality that is linked to a sense of belonging is not in itself deviant, it becomes so when it precludes all relationship and contribution; the free manifestation of conscience to the spiritual father is simply what RB prescribes and is often the way to recover the experience of trust for people who have had the sad experience of abuse; mysticism that sees grace in the trial and resists the temptation to escape is not necessarily wrong, but it must interact with the freedom of the person, what the young person really wants. A certain separation with what was the previous world, with its points of reference, may be indispensable to embark on a new path and to immerse oneself in a totally new proposal with the possibility of understanding it from within.

*"A third concern is **unbalanced theology**. To give just one example: Several known aberrations have appealed to 'Johannine' mysticism read in a Gnostic key, used to justify practices that go beyond common norms: Others argue that the love of God made flesh must be expressed in carnal intimacy.*

⁸ DYSMAS DE LASSUS, *Crushing the Soul. Spiritual Abuse in Religious Life*, EDB 2021.

⁹ ERIK VARDEN, *On abuse again*, 6 -01-22, <https://coramfratribus.com/archive/on-abuse-again/>

...Note, in this regard, an observation that Dom Dysmas records: **when sexual abuse occurs in the Church, it is almost always preceded by spiritual abuse.** Remedies cannot, then, be limited to psychology and structural reforms. These are necessary, but not sufficient. Beyond them, **we need contrition, a rekindling of faith, a new heart. We must re-learn what it means to live and die in Christ. It was to enable this that the Word became flesh. The light shines "in the darkness. It will not be overcome."**

This reference to the doctrine underlying every kind of abuse seems to us fundamental. Spiritual abuse is a consequence of the deformation of the *depositum fidei* in its integrity, normally resulting from a failure to make the renunciations that the consecrated or priestly life implies. Thus a double existence is initiated: one that maintains the appearance of a healthy life and the other that fills the void of renunciations not taken with compensations of various kinds that then take an ever greater place. The second consequence is the abuse of conscience, that is, the perversion of moral judgement based on the distortion of doctrine, and consequently implements the physical abuse that is justified by the first two and is its saddest fruit.

It is therefore a matter of reversing course: this is what St John Paul II's theology of the body did, which starts from the last level, the physical, to integrate it with the first, the spiritual, in a theological vision of the integral *humanum*, it is therefore a matter of teaching the truth. Recover a moral theology in conformity with the dogma of faith and experience true spiritual paternity,

NATURE AND LEVELS OF ABUSE abuses of power of conscience of sexuality

First of all, it is necessary to clarify the nature of the phenomenon of abuse and abuse in general, then to specify the meaning of abuse of power, conscience and sexual abuse, places and structures of abuse, the prognostic-diagnostic signs of the abuser (or future abuser), the psychodynamics of abuse, the abused person.

I repeat the outline used in a lecture at the OCSO General Chapter¹⁰, which was very competent,

Abuse of power	Excesses and injustices in the use of power
Abuse of conscience	Forcing people to act against their conscience or preventing them from acting according to their conscience. Violating freedom of conscience, freedom of religion.
Psychological abuse	Mistreatment that damages a person's psychological well-being
Abuse of trust	Taking advantage of a person's trust by causing harm
Spiritual abuse	Abuse of trust and psychological abuse of people who are manipulated and held back in their search for meaning and faith. It can lead to the breakdown of their psychic and spiritual dynamism and vitality.

¹⁰ GILLES DE BERCEVILLE, "L'abus spirituel: c'est-à-dire?", in Marie-Jo Thiel, Anne Danion-Grilliat, Frédéric Trautmann (eds.), *Abus sexuels: écouter, enquêter, prévenir*, Strasbourg, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, Coll. Chemins d'Éthique, 2022, 115-135. Table p.130.

It may be useful here to refer to Augustine's classic distinction between the realities to enjoy and those to use.

Enjoyment and use of various things¹¹.

4. 4. For to enjoy a thing is to adhere to it with love, moved by the thing itself. Conversely, to make use of a thing is to refer what one uses to the attainment of what one loves, supposing one should love it. **Hence, an illicit use is to be called abuse or misuse.**

The three forms of abuse with which we are concerned, of power consciousness and sexuality, on closer inspection find their roots in the three fundamental concupiscences, which in turn are opposed to the vows of our profession: pride in the spiritual abuse that deforms doctrine, power versus poverty, and lust versus chastity.

And if even in these times the scourge of abuse has broken out dramatically, it is not foreign to the history of the church.

"In the threefold concupiscence (the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life,) fructifies ... the breaking of the first covenant with the Creator, with God-Elohim, with God-Jahweh. This covenant was broken in the heart of man." (John Paul II P II, 30 April 1980)

One can reread in this sense Sermon 28 on the Shepherds by Ælredo, witness to the golden age of Cistercian flourishing

Three virtues against a threefold plague (Par 24-33)

You therefore, chosen as kings and priests, put on this triple armour of virtue so that you may be safe from the threefold plague that devours almost the whole world. That is why we read in Revelation of the evil horses that an innumerable army of demons spurred on as if they were their mounts, spewing fire, smoke and sulphur from their mouths. Mankind was miserably ravaged by these three plagues.

By the name of 'horses' are signified carnal and proud men. ...Fire expresses the ardour of greed; ... Smoke denotes pride, for smoke always rises high and as it rises it becomes sparser and dissolves, ... Sulphur depicts the foul-smelling lifestyle of the lustful. " ...If therefore, dearly beloved brethren, with the Lord's help you wish to be saved from such plagues, take steps to guard yourselves with the virtues of which we have spoken. Let covetousness, which is the root of all evil (cf. 1 Tim 6:10), be extirpated from your hearts by charity; let true humility bring down the pomp of pride and arrogance; let the sword of chastity and continence sever lust. If you do so, then you will proclaim the virtues of God uprightly; powerfully armed and suitably adorned with these, with confidence and dignity, as children of eternal

¹¹ At the end of the first book of *De Doctrina Christiana* (I, 3.3.4).

light you will come to Him who has called you out of darkness into His admirable light (1 Pet 2:9) to whom be glory and honour for ever and ever (Rom 16:27). Amen."

At the level of our order - spiritual and power abuse and vow of obedience

The problem of abuse has also become painfully present at the level of the order...¹²

Evidently, the order reflects the general approach of the church, before and after the Council and in the change of attitude indicated by Benedict XVI and Francis: the need to unite justice and mercy, charisma and law.

Since sexual abuse is a consequence and/or manifestation of other levels of abuse, it is useful to mention them explicitly. In particular: those of *power*, which are often its source, those of *conscience*, and *spiritual abuse*.¹³

As for the charism, typical of the Rule of St Benedict, but also of the ancient monastic tradition, is the much problematic unity of external and internal forum, since the abbot and abbess are given the fullness of spiritual and material power in the community. According to Chapter VII of the Rule, the monk is recommended to be open to his abbot:

The fifth degree of humility consists in making a humble confession to one's abbot of all the evil thoughts that arise in one's soul or faults committed in secret, according to the exhortation of Scripture, which says: "Show the Lord your way and hope in him". And also: "Open your mind to the Lord, for he is good and his mercy is eternal", while the prophet exclaims: "I have made my sin known to you and I have not hidden my guilt. I said: 'I will confess my iniquities before the Lord' and you have forgiven the malice of my heart".

The reasons for this were clear, it was a matter of the unity and truth of the person who in his or her spiritual journey could in this way escape the duplicity, we would also say today, the dissociation between saying and doing, appearance and reality that, even in less serious matters, can so afflict religious life. The human maturation of the person and growth in the spiritual journey require a unity (if not uniqueness) of guidance and orientation.

On the other hand, for the just safeguarding of freedom of conscience, canon law has always added its own cautions; thus parallel to Benedict's recommendation to the Abbot to open his conscience, we encounter the norm taken up in our CST that prohibits him from inducing openness of conscience in any way. (cf. CST33 ST 33.3.B)

¹² Perhaps some kind of confidential summary would be useful? We seem to be faced here with the need to combine a just transparency with an equally just duty of confidentiality and discretion. E.g. if it is true that hiding one scandal leads to others, unnecessarily revealing a sin is contrary to justice. But how can one deal with a problem if one does not know the extent and manner of its manifestation?

¹³ Cencini-Lassi (ed.) *La formazione iniziale in tempo di abusi*, Sussidio CEI.

In fact, albeit with due limitations, the mother or father of a community has jurisdiction¹⁴ over both the internal and external forum. The guarantee that this does not become an abusive power lies in the conception and practice of authority as filial paternity.

The vast heritage of our Cistercian fathers is a veritable mine for the theme of fatherhood and the spiritual journey. How have we departed from this to the point of sometimes losing track of it? How can this wealth be recovered in today's context? ¹⁵

The spiritual abuse that justifies the abuse of power is a deformation of the exercise of authority. The Rule and Constitutions give a complete and extremely positive theological and spiritual vision of this ministry.

Cst 33 and 34, referring to the rule and tradition, outline the factors of the abbot's ministry and governance¹⁶ :

Collegially elected, she receives her power from God through the Church: the graceful circle of these elements allows her to be among her sisters shepherdess, teacher and doctor, in the image of Christ the Good Shepherd, Teacher and Physician; she is thus at the service of each of the persons entrusted to her care.

"We can therefore admit that all the norms concerning abbatial service rest entirely on the Rule and the Magisterium. And this means an immediate reference to our faith, to the sense of Tradition, and at the same time it is a source of tranquillity for those who choose, at the vocational level, obedience and the affirmation of authority as a space, sine qua non, of full manifestation of the will of God in their lives. Canon 618 states verbatim: "*Superiors are to exercise in a spirit of service that power which they have received from God through the ministry of the Church.*" " ¹⁷

The counterfeit of this gift is the exercise of authority as an instrument of worldly power. In this sense, abuse of power is a way of managing one's ministry *without respecting dignity and autonomy, without questioning freedom and responsibility, especially when in a condition of fragility, inducing, in more or less obvious ways, a personal way of understanding and willing, and in fact forcing one to act by placing oneself at one's own service in various ways.* Fragile and vulnerable in our communities are in particular the young and the elderly, the sick and anyone going through a particular period of trial.

This style of governance can manifest itself in a process that slowly transforms *authority into*

¹⁴ Can this term also be used for nuns?

¹⁵ For this reflection, which is indispensable and cannot be postponed, we give only a few elements.

¹⁶ Cf. C. 33 *The ministry of the abbess*

1 *The abbess, elected from among the sisters, receives her power from God through the ministry of the Church.*

2 *The abbess bears pastoral responsibility for the flock entrusted to her;*

3 *A teacher in the school of Christ, the abbess is the guardian of the disciples' fidelity to the monastic tradition.*

4 *Wise physician, ...But to heal the infirmities of the sisters, let him have recourse above all to the prayers of all .*

¹⁷ Cristiana Piccardo, *commentary on the Constitutions*, pro manuscripto

authoritarianism and then into power and the exercise of power, deforming what should be a service for the growth of the persons entrusted into a *tool for one's own affirmation*, resulting in the subjugation of others. In what does spiritual fatherhood consist? A new birth in the Son through the sacraments of faith. What threatens it? The authoritarianism that demands discipline and obedience without self-giving, but also the renunciation that refuses responsibility (cf. Aleredo's sermon for the Assumption that points out all the abbot's responsibility for the sins and failures of his brother-sisters) does not transmit the inheritance, or the formalism that does not exercise paternity but plays a role, fulfils a function, is no longer a friend of the Bridegroom at the service of the Bride/church but a corporate executive; the tyranny that reduces the other to an object, the seduction that seizes and robs the person of his dignity

The height of abuse of power is the submissive attitude of those subjected to it to the point of *defending and supporting the abuser*, without any awareness of the offence to their dignity and sometimes in a sort of 'delirium of identification' with the abuser. Abuse of power is contagious, or tends to reproduce itself in those who have been subjected to it if they are then called upon to occupy positions of authority, especially if they have not re-examined the experience, inwardly distancing themselves from it.

On the other hand, it must also be said that the situation can be reversed and the community can adopt a style of power management in which the abess or abbot is manipulated by a power group in the community or by particularly difficult people or who have an abusive style that manifests itself in jealous possession, a demand for exclusivity, frustration where one is not valued or where one's views and choices are not preferred. Bringing in difficult people is an integral part of the abbot's ministry. Care must be taken that they do not bring him or her.

Similarly, dialogue, which on the one hand is a sign of the capacity for truly authoritative governance, can become the tool of community power.

On either side, an unfair drift can creep in.

Elements of this drift on the part of the community: angry tantrums to the abbot or abbess in private and also in public, blatant disobedience in leaving one's duties as an instrument of blackmail ("either you give me this or I won't cooperate")

Similarly, in the social situation of abuse, the authority somehow becomes a vulnerable person: think of the many cases of unjust accusations that go as far as imprisonment (Pell).

Prudence and discernment are needed.

Answers from our oldest tradition:

"the love of the priest, it seems to me, must consist of a threefold virtue. For it is necessary that he be prudent, that he be gentle, that he be strong. Prudent so as not to be deceived, sweet so as not to be seduced, strong so as not to be broken. Prudent for discretion, gentle for compassion, strong for patience. It is certainly necessary for the priest to be on his guard against the sins of his subjects or to prudently cut them off, to be able to bear their weaknesses with compassion, to tolerate their stragglers with magnanimity. This is that *three-pronged rope that does not break*

so soon (Qo 4:12), as Solomon says"¹⁸

And more recent:

On the contrary, "To live authoritative service, basing it on benevolence and mercy, that is to say, allowing oneself to be cordially involved in the vicissitudes of each person, playing to affirm the life of the other, valuing his or her creative contribution as unique and irreplaceable, and at the same time not deflecting from the limpid furrow of a tradition of which one is the custodian, I believe is the most arduous art of governing. (...) Governing by force, repression, punishment, or at any rate by non-involvement - there may be superiors who never make precise judgments or strong approvals; they prefer to save themselves behind dubious or negative judgement - is infinitely easier: I impose my law and thread my own track. But to grow with everyone, to modify one's gift to the other on the need or reality that the other is, to renounce all comfortable authoritarianism and in everything serve life, is uncomfortable, both for the abbot and for those who want to live a following of an authority that moves like this. Authoritative service is the historical expression of the salvific movement of God's love. And that is no small thing!

And this means for the abbot and those who follow him, to take a path of solitude and self-forgetfulness, to the solitude of Christ on the cross.¹⁹ "

This quotation from a Cistercian abbess (ocso) of the 20th century shows us how the search for the authentic monastic path has not stopped, but has continued under the dual guidance of the roots of the charism and the current magisterium. We quote from the document: **The service of authority and obedience:**

"Authority at the service of obedience to the will of God 12. In consecrated life, each person must sincerely seek the will of the Father, because otherwise the very reason for his or her choice of life would be lost; but it is equally important to carry out this search together with the brothers or sisters, because it is precisely this search that unites, makes the family united to Christ. Authority is at the service of this search, so that it takes place in sincerity and truth. In his homily at the beginning of his Petrine ministry, Benedict XVI said significantly: *'My true programme of governance is not to do my own will, to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, with the whole Church, to the word and will of the Lord and to allow myself to be guided by Him, so that He Himself will guide the Church in this hour of our history'*"²⁰ .

"The Church grants the Abbess *'full power in both temporal and spiritual things'*. That is, what the Abbess establishes becomes a matter of obedience for each of us. There is therefore an investiture of objective power that cannot be overlooked. Many slogans are used today, and one of the most common is to call authority a service. And this is true. But this service, by virtue of ecclesiastical law and the law of the Order, requires the Abbess to establish and decide, correct

¹⁸ Aelred Sermon 63 to the Shepherds

¹⁹ Cristiana Piccardo, *Commentary on the Constitutions*, pro manuscripto.

²⁰ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, Instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Institutes of Apostolic Life, 11-05-2008)

and teach. And this, both in the material field and in the spiritual field.... "Propose and demand". Nothing better than these words determines the mystery of 'abbey power'" (Cristiana Piccardo)

The outcome of a free and voluntary obedience of faith can then determine an experience of communion: the common good becoming a common vision and common adherence to the will and design of another. This experience, which was that of our fathers and which we must not consider impossible, is situated within an ecclesiology of communion. It is precisely for this reason that the abuse of power, whether it occurs on the part of the abbot-bishop, or whether the situation is reversed, is always an attack on the heart of our charism. We paraphrase again *from the Cencini-Lassi study*.

Sexual abuse

The last sad consequence of the spiritual and power abuse is the homo- or hetero-expressed sexual abuse...A heretical vein is revived in this, which has been running through the history of the church since the time of the Cathars and which is a fruit of a distortion of the concept of incarnation and justifies physical abuse in the name of an alleged spiritual freedom on the basis of a dualist conception of reality: a strict spiritualism and a devaluation of the body on the basis of which one can do what one wants with the body. (In the CIASE report, the evidence of this drift is innumerable).

On the contrary, the theology of the body reads corporeality as an expression of man's spousal relationship with his creator, the body thus becoming a sacrament of the unity of the human person in himself and with God.

The paradigms of a system of abuse mentioned earlier are deformations of the doctrine of true Christian morality.

How can this situation be addressed? -We must start again from the need for an adequate anthropology, as we can find it outlined in the work of St John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, who have offered a formative proposal in which dogma and life faith and reason complement and integrate each other, particularly in the vision of the human. It remains more than ever to revisit and develop the theology of the body.

Exemplifications (Revision of a text by Dom Bernardo Olivera, 7 April 2022.)

-Most abuses of authority have a common root: the conversion of service into power and/or a deficient understanding of the monastic vow of obedience.

-The essence of abuse consists in turning service (promoting the lives of others) into power (controlling and using the lives of others). -There are different degrees of this degradation: from punctual to structural. Often the community cooperates or, at least, someone in the community who is close to authority and influential.... It is a triple perversion: of authority, obedience and communion....

From the point of view of reporting and possible sanctions, it is difficult to find clear and definitive evidence.

It also happens that there are false accusations of possible or imaginary abuse.

The tables compare the two sides: the abusive and superior authority (first column) and the abusive or arbitrary authority of community members)

Abuse of conscience:

questioning improperly on moral issues	Lying, hiding, self-justifying all kinds of deviations with the shield of privacy
limit due freedom with regard to the sacrament of reconciliation	Dispensing with the sacrament
omit to appoint ordinary and possibly extraordinary confessors to facilitate frequent confession;	little awareness of what sin is
sharing confidential information without the permission of the person concerned.	Not giving any information, or only giving information about one's own actions and never offering oneself for discussion and discernment

Abuse of power:

to the detriment of people's dignity and spiritual benefit	
distinguishing between people and applying selective justice;	
exceed the Order's own and ecclesiastical law	
Disposing of people without consulting them in matters that concern them	Remaining unavailable to anything but your own project
prevent adequate training for the good of the community	Acquiring theological training as a subjective claim at the expense of the community as a whole
Denying imposing the necessary psychological and therapeutic aid	Refusing all authoritative verification
transforming the service of discernment into a power of control	Evirate gone discernment
favour or allow despotic subordinate authorities, turning the vow of obedience into an instrument of domination...	There are 'bosses' in communities whom no one dares to ask anything and who boss everyone around

-*Spiritual*' abuse: a form of emotional and psychological abuse that nevertheless uses coercion of individuals and groups with a religious background: (here it is more difficult for there to be reciprocity. it is the typical form of abuse of those in structural or even charismatic authority)

It is the deepest and most difficult to recognise. It clothes the abuse of power with legality by using scripture to justify demands for undue obedience and docility, by using the Name of God to demand the fulfilment of certain commands, by threatening spiritual consequences for those who dissent.

lobbying for more and more time and service for work, exclusively	For his own work he lobbies for more and more dispensations from the choir and common moments
Exasperation of unity of vision that lapses into ideology and does not tolerate dissent or criticism	
Demanding frequent and thorough accountability for everything (<i>what you have done</i>)	Absolute autonomy at all levels (e.g. external contacts, phone calls, purchases, etc.).
One exaggerates a just retention in saying out community problems	Murmuring and spreading rumours and detractions about authority or persons in the community
A feeling of belonging to a select and exclusive group that is the bearer of ideas and a way of life superior to others, which justifies going beyond what the law of order states).	

Conclusion

-The criterion for discerning abuse is the evangelical understanding of authority (service as opposed to power) and obedience. This criterion is verified by the accumulation of abusive characteristics and the number of people negatively affected.

-The best response to the reality of abuse of authority is a radical return to the Gospel and timely and effective intervention once this reality has been denounced, recognised and confirmed. (end of text by B. Olivera)

Doctrine and pedagogy for the post-modern perhaps post-Christian man

The Cencini-Lassi study comes to this conclusion:

"The young candidate must be educated *to* first of all grasp the disturbing spectrum of possibilities and deviances *himself*, and to identify those correlations *within himself*: to choose to work on the *roots* of the problem in order to intervene in abusive *conduct*, and not only in sexual deviance; to prevent conduct that creates harm and suffering in others, not only in oneself; to learn to have the same feelings within oneself as Christ Jesus, as a shepherd or a servant. "

Now, while recognising the appropriateness of a non-gullible formation, as far as the monastic community is concerned, it will not be possible to base community coexistence on a climate of suspicion.

Instead, it will be necessary to remove possible predators in the most appropriate manner or, where this is not feasible, to refrain from training candidates in an unhealthy environment.

Having said this, the monastic community that decides not to close but to continue living cannot avoid a deepening of the Cistercian charism of communion and charity in the light not only of the problems but also of the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the church in our time. Among the many possible texts we cite, again from the CIVCSVA Instruction "*The Service of Authority and Obedience*", 2008:

"For a spirituality of communion and a communitarian holiness 19. A renewed anthropological conception, in recent years, has put much more emphasis on the importance of the **relational dimension of the human being**. Such a conception finds ample confirmation in the image of the human person that emerges from the Scriptures, and, undoubtedly, has also influenced the way of conceiving relationships within the religious community, making it more attentive to the value of openness to the other-than-self, to the fruitfulness of the relationship with diversity and to the enrichment that comes from it for everyone. This relational anthropology has also exercised an influence, at least indirectly, as we have already mentioned, on the *spirituality of communion*, and has contributed to renewing the concept of *mission*, understood as a commitment shared with all the members of the people of God, in a spirit of collaboration and co-responsibility. The *spirituality of communion* is envisaged as the spiritual climate of the Church at the beginning of the third millennium and therefore as an active and exemplary task of consecrated life at all levels. It is the way forward for a future of believing life and Christian witness. It finds its inalienable reference in the Eucharistic mystery, increasingly recognised as central, precisely because "the Eucharist is constitutive of the being and acting of the Church" and "shows itself at the root of the Church as a mystery of communion". Holiness and mission pass through the community, since the risen Lord makes himself present in it and through it,⁵⁰ making it holy and sanctifying relationships."²¹

We rediscover here the charism of our Brothers of Tibhirine that renews that of the origins of Citeaux, we rediscover today's call to synodality that summarises the attempt, still unfinished for many, to formulate an ecclesiology of communion²².

"This generates an equally important consequence for the ministry of the abbot. Since the fatherhood of Christ is a fatherhood of the Son, it always maintains a brotherly character. Jesus considers those who follow him as his brothers. In what concerns the abbot, this is fundamental. If he is entrusted with a power, this power is paternal insofar as it remains filial in relation to God and fraternal in relation to men. St Benedict thus clearly situates the exercise of abbey power at a Christ-like level. If abbey authority is juridically conferred at a precise moment, by means of a specific juridical act, the election, in its essence it is an authority to be received constantly at the level of a filial relationship that remains, from beginning to end, the consistency and soul of the task and the power that it can entail. This power does not proceed from the automatism of a legal act, but from the constant return to the source of a relationship of abandonment to the Lord²³."

Echoed by

²¹ *The service of authority and obedience* 19

²² To develop the theme we refer to one of the contributions in AAVV, *Chiesa sotto accusa*, Melina Rowley, Cantagalli 2020: "A filial fatherhood is the foundation for building a spirituality of communion" and: FURIO PESCI, *Il subvertimento dei costumi sessuali nella seconda metà del Novecento*, p. 93-109.

²³ MAURO GIUSEPPE LEPORI, *The exercise of power in the Cistercian family*, *Collectanea* 2002, *L'exercice du pouvoir dans la Famille cistercienne*, p. 236-248.

"So thinking about our theme, I ask myself: what is it that does not pass in relations of authority, in relations between fathers and sons, between abbots and monks, what is indestructible in the human being that not even the disintegrating force of nihilism can eliminate? I would simply answer: us.

Our heart is in need of relationship, of fatherhood, of sonship. We are made this way, our true identity is relational, and all the individualism and fictions of virtual reality can never completely destroy this yearning. We just have to have the courage to recognise it, to start from here, from this centre, and then it will not be difficult to find the way to be generated and to generate. The central category of human identity is precisely generation. ...To meditate, contemplate, penetrate with spiritual wisdom, more and more into the mystery of Christ, into the mystery of his filiality and his true humanity²⁴ ."

And both perhaps draw from the same source:

"4. Between encounter and fulfilment

After a long time I was able to understand that You do not want me to be a father without being a son. That is precisely why Thy Son came into the world. He is totally Thine. The word 'mine' finds absolute motivation in Him, it can be uttered with absolute certainty. Without this motivation and this certainty that word is a risk, and risk is also love. Why hast Thou imposed upon me a love that must be risk in me? Behold, Thy Son takes upon Himself all the risk of love.

How indeed must the word 'mine' hurt, when what it designates is then revealed as 'not-mine'! I think with dismay of the labours and efforts of Thy Son, of the immensity of His love. How much has He taken upon **Himself? Into** what empty spaces did He not penetrate? How much has He had to fill with Himself! Yet in all he encounters the common denominator of our loneliness, and in it, against all logic of existence, "mine" always seeks to supplant "Thine". Could I, too, become a Son? I did not want to be. I did not want to accept the suffering that the risk of love entails. I thought I would not be up to it. I kept my gaze too fixed on myself, and then love is the hardest thing.

When Your Son came, I continued to be the common denominator of man's inner solitude. Your Son wanted to enter into it. He willed it because he loves. Loneliness is opposed to love. At the limit of loneliness, love must become suffering: Your Son suffered. And behold, there are two of us in the history of each man: I, from whom loneliness begins and is born, and He, in whom loneliness disappears and sons are born again."²⁵ Karol Wojtyła, *Rays of Fatherhood*).

The word that makes the difference between authority that generates and authority that abuses is the word generate... which is a vital fact about which, in spite of all clericalism, women know more

"... The woman knows immensely more about generation than the man does. And she knows it above all because of the suffering associated with generation. The one and the other are her mystery. Motherhood, however, is an expression of fatherhood. It must always return to the

²⁴ M. ROSARIA SPREAFICO, *Filial fatherhood: some aspects of the service of authority*, Vita Nostra no. 16. (2019) p. 15-25.

²⁵ KAROL WOJTYŁA, *Raggi di paternità*, in *Tutte le opere letterarie*, Bompiani 2001, pp. 901.

father to take from him everything of which it is an expression. This is what the irradiation of fatherhood consists of.

One returns to the father through the son. And the son in turn returns to us in the father the bridegroom. This is very simple and normal. The whole world is full of it. We must enter into the irradiation of fatherhood, in it alone everything becomes full reality... We return to the father through the son. The son then in turn returns to us in the father the spouse. Do not divide love. It is one.²⁶ "

And all this happens within the Church, a circulation of generative love....

Monastic Pedagogy

If theology informs, enlightens, guides and reforms life, it is also true that life is not born of theology, but rather the opposite - by life I mean God's life in us and ours in Him. A new anthropology cannot be born except from new life in the ecclesial community, particularly in the family and monastic community - or of consecrated persons. So formulating it is not the 'business of theologians', but rather our task. This involves us all and involves everything, from the Order's structures also in matters of abuse²⁷ to the life of communities, calling into question the reflection of all those who are qualified to do so.

A particular problem was pointed out: different cultures and continents have different approaches and awareness of the subject. They also have to deal with sometimes very different ways of abuse, for which the Order is perhaps totally unprepared; we need to study the problem and make our experiences known. We can conclude that a great deal of work awaits us.

In summary

Reversing the course of spiritual abuse requires constant reference to sound theological doctrine and a consequent moral theology, taking into account the great magisterial inheritance that the holy popes of the last millennium have left us; I am thinking of such things as *Veritatis Splendor*, for example, or *Fides et Ratio*.

A true doctrine and experience of filial fatherhood is required to protect oneself from narcissistic and ego-centred pride.

And if the exercise of paternity is fruitful, it heals the abuse of power with the shared experience of true spiritual motherhood within a context of communion.

Against sexual abuse, a renewed awareness of the value of chastity is needed.

²⁶ IBID.

²⁷ There used to be the disciplinary commission or the statute on detraction, then the pastoral commission, finally replaced by the pastoral task recognised to each commission of the chapter. One may wonder, however, whether, when faced with cases as complex and delicate as those involving abuse, there is not a need for a specific competence, hence a specific commission, with an ad hoc statute. This would reopen a long-standing issue; on the other hand, a greater guarantee would be sought for the effective implementation of the new disciplinary codes proposed to us by the Church.

John Paul II, *Man and woman created him*, Città Nuova, 1985

Gabriele Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution. Destruction of freedom in the name of freedom*

Erik Varden, *Chastity: Reconciliation of the Senses* – **January 2, 2024**

In essence, it is none other than our lived vows that provide adequate protection against the drift.

I put in the table below next to the basic question: how to turn things around?

The three levels (body/body/spirit) of possible abuse and for each a possible path of reconstruction of conscience, the vow that fully expresses this reconstitution and its outcome in a true ecclesiology and spirituality of communion that express the life of the mystical body... Today, the word synodality would almost be inescapable, but what matters is the content we give to this word.

The problem	Sexual abuse	Abuse of conscience	Spiritual abuse and abuse of power
<i>How to reverse the drift?</i>	Theology of the Body of St John Paul II	Moral Theology Theology of Freedom Distinguishing good and evil, non-negotiable goods and intrinsic evils	Spiritual, dogmatic and mystical theology Spiritual fatherhood
Adequate anthropology	Vow and virtue of chastity	Vow and virtue of obedience	Vow of Poverty and virtue of humility
	<i>Ecclesiology of Communion</i>	<i>Spirituality of Communion</i>	<i>Theology of the mystical body</i>

Moreover, this path, against the trend, is also the thing that serves to return from gender thinking to a Christian anthropology. From a humanism now emptied of meaning to the ever new Christian humanism.

The globalist gender ideology aims at the creation and export of a new anthropological model, fully functional to rampant capitalism: the individual without identity, isolated, infinitely manipulable, without cultural depth, pure product of the strategies of manipulation. Man does not exist, says the gender ideology: he is what is created from time to time by consumption, we add. That is why gender ideology is at the service of the market economy. (D Fusaro)

Lawyer Gianfranco Amato: 'I explain what the Gender ideology is' by Rita Sberna
24 November 2016

Can you explain to us, too, what Gender ideology entails?

Not only is there a lot of ignorance on this issue, but there is also a lot of confusion because some people confuse the Gender ideology with sex education; others confuse it with gender equality between men and women and still others with homosexuality.

Gender ideology is a devastating idea that states that one is 'male or female', 'man or woman', not according to one's anatomical and biological structure, but according to what one feels one is at the moment because according to this theory, it is a condition that can vary over time.

This is why Pope Francis has called the effects of gender theory an atomic bomb! And this is also why Pope Francis on 21 March, speaking to young people in Naples, called the Gender theory, a mistake of the human mind that creates so much confusion. The Gender theory is a madness that is coming as a fashion from the United States. People still do not realise how dangerous it is.

Even Halloween, from the United States of America, has come to Italy and Gender risks the same thing! This is a power operation!

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