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HOUSE REPORT, MONASTERY N. D. DE MOKOTO for RAFMA 2023

Statistics at the time of dispatch										Since the last Chapter 2022				
S. P	T.P	Nov	Pos t	Pr P	Total	av.a	M.ag	Abs	N.st	hab	T.P	S.P	Deat h	Dep
29	5	0	4	1	39	42	41	3	1			1	1	N 1 PT 0 PS 0

1. Community life. This report is the product of several community discussions. Since the beginning of the year, our region has been going through an unprecedented war situation. This situation has pushed several families onto the roads. They live in makeshift cabins on the monastery compound. It is since January 24th that we have received displaced people. There are 21,000 of them, and they are still arriving at the time of sending this report. The kids have already missed a year of school and we are entering second grade. Some organizations promise to come and provide assistance but are each time forced to reschedule their trip to the field, following recurring clashes in the area. On July 17th, Caritas came to distribute High Energy biscuits to 14,833 displaced people, on behalf of the World Food Program. The second time was a distribution of tarpaulins and corn flour to 17,000 displaced people on behalf of Scourmont Abbey.

We noticed that the members of the community are dynamic, even if some are sick and have to spend a few weeks in care. Furthermore, we deplore the death of our brother Augustin on June 4th, when he had just finished his studies in Nursing and was already taking good care of our older brothers. May he rest in peace and intercede for us! Following the proximity of the camp and the noise that accompanies it, we are invited to make an effort to safeguard the values of solitude and silence.

2. Spiritual life. On February 27th, we had to make an urgent decision to move from the church, as in 1993, in order to shelter the displaced people, especially mothers who had small children, to protect them from the rain which was in full swing. But since July, the church, the gest house and the garage have already been vacated and we can once again pray and meditate in the church quietly and celebrate the daily Eucharist there, in which a small number of faithful participate, especially in this month of the Rosary. Our liturgy is beautiful and prayerful. From now on, the Little Hours are led by our young novice brothers with a view to their introduction to choral chanting. Finally, punctuality in divine service is necessary. We appreciate the way in which the Father Prior and certain brothers struggle to meet the needs of the displaced: often the brothers have to get up at all hours of the night to transport the sick to the health center next door, sometimes to the hospital which is 35 km away.

3. Formation. The training program for the prepostulate, the novitiate and the monasticate, the practice of the liturgy and ongoing formation constitute a solid basis for leading the monastic life in a fulfilled way. The sessions have always been opportunities for growth and exchange with others. But because of the war, Father Prior was not able to visit the communities of Kasanza and Mvanda. The challenge is to have external teachers and to organize sessions, following the insecurity.

4. The economy. To meet the needs of the growing community, we have expanded our vegetable garden. To protect the land from erosion, we have just established terrace cultivation, a project financed by our mother house and which gave work to the displaced. We have just carried out a floating cage fish farming project on our small lake. Our economy is good, but suffers from the theft of several cows: our milk and cheese production has therefore declined. And those who remain cost us, because we have to pay soldiers for their security. At the gest house we opened a small canteen to display our products and certain essential foods. This prevents those displaced by war from traveling 20 km before reaching the market. Dialogue and discipline in work help to spend little and earn a lot. The study and analysis of projects must be complete to ensure their stability.

5. Thanksgiving. We give thanks to the Lord for the wonders accomplished in our lives: the jubilees of the brothers (on March 25th, Father Bernard celebrated his golden jubilee of profession). Since 2020, we have had 5 solemn professions and 5 temporary professions. We give thanks for the regular visit

of our Immediate Father, at the end of which a letter was read to us, erecting our Monastery into an Abbey, pending the improvement of the situation for the abbey blessing. He invited us to work to live monastic values, despite the displaced people around us. We were helped by the community retreat on the theme 'Obedience, foundation of consecrated life'. We thank our mother house and all the communities who supported us in this difficult situation.

HOUSE REPORT OF VICTORIA ABBEY FOR THE RAFMA MEETING OF 2023

STATISTICS: We have 18 solemn Professed Brothers, 3 temporary professed, 4 novices, 4 postulants, and 6 aspirants. 5 brothers are absent. One brother is in Cameroon helping our brothers of Koutaba, one in the community of Caldey, two brothers are in our mother house and one brother is illegitimately absent. We have in our midst a brother from Bamenda Abbey for sabbatical time and a Cameroonian priest for spiritual nourishment.

COMMUNITY LIFE

In general, our community life is good. Brothers are in good health and peaceful. But silence, faithfulness to Lectio Divina and punctuality at singing practice and at the Divine office are still a challenge. Some brothers have made it a habit to come late for divine office and other community activities for no good reason.

We have made real progress in the area of work. Brothers work hard wherever they are assigned. And it is our wish that we do the same in all the other aspects of our monastic life.

LITURGY

Our Liturgy is well attended and appreciated by all. There is improvement in the singing of antiphons. And having 5 priests in the community is also a boost to our Liturgy. The Mass hymns sung in different languages are an enrichment. And almost all the young brothers in formation are musically very talented.

FORMATION

We have many vocations coming from different parts of East Africa. As we noted above in the statistics, we have 11 brothers in formation without counting the aspirants. It is a real challenge to find an adequate formation. Our novice master, with the help of four other brothers, try their best to initiate them to the Cistercian values. However, the formation of our temporary professed is still a challenge due to lack of qualified personnel.

In order to give them a solid formation, our temporary professed, after year one year in temporary vows, are sent to our mother house where they can follow theological studies at Tilburg University and at the same time live their monastic life as much as possible. Our ongoing Formation has improved. This year, through the help of our father immediate, we have been able to organise four workshops on community life and self-knowledge.

ECONOMY. Our economy depends highly on agriculture and our herd of cows. We produce most of the food we eat when the seasons are good. Sometimes we suffer from the effects of climate change. Our work needs to be better organized. We have an impression that everyone is busy but it is only the work that pleases him. Some brothers need to be reminded all the time of the necessity to work.

We have embarked on a very ambitious project of producing paper with bamboo. Two weeks ago we planted 2,400 bamboo seedlings on 5 acres of land. It is hoped that the planting will continue until we reach at least 10,000 bamboo seedlings on 250 acres of land. When it materialises, this project will be our main source of income and will give us an opportunity to work together on a daily basis.

HOUSE REPORT KASANZA 2023 BELGIUM SCOURMONT

Our community of Emmanuel Kasanza currently has 24 brothers including 14 solemnly professed, 5 young professed, 3 novices and 2 postulants. In addition to this there is a solemnly professed brother from the Kokoubou monastery (Benin) in spiritual rejuvenation with us. Among the 11 solemnly professed, one studying in Kinshasa, two in spiritual renewal: one in Mokoto and the other in Kakoubou (Benin).

Indeed, after the last general chapter, our community experienced moments of joy and sorrow. The most notable events were:

- The priestly ordinations of our brothers Martin and Guy including brother Cyrille as Deacon;
- The canonical entry into the novitiate of our three young novice brothers.
- And simple profession of our brother Georges KAKUBA.

He has just pointed out that our young professed brothers follow the course sessions organized at the Mvanda monastery, apart from the courses they receive on site at the monastery, including novices and postulants.

In addition, we should have the long-awaited regular visit as outlined in constitution 75 of our Order by Dom Vedaste Prior of Mokoko. But because of the insecurity especially in the east of the country where his monastery is located, the latter was made by Dom Emmanuel, one of the advisors of the Abbot General accompanied by Mother Elisabeth Marie Abbess of the Star.

Thus, this visit was an opportunity for regular life within our community. From a liturgical point of view, we have resumed the office of tierce, of nones on Sunday and the monastic requirements including the lectio divina in common (from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. shortly before the office of compline), the conferences given by our Father Superior, twice a week (Tuesday and Thursday) and community meetings every day after the third office. These requirements stimulate us to live the monastic life well under the authority of a superior (cfrRB chap.1,2). The community is joyful and great thanks to our visitors (Father Emmanuel and Mother Elisabeth Marie).

During the regular visit, several important decisions were taken for the smooth running of the community with regard to bad behavior and even the example of certain brothers in relation to monastic life. For this reason, the visitors asked two brothers to distance themselves from the community for a certain time. 3 brothers asked to leave the community permanently, including: one solemnly professed

and two temporarily professed. From an economic point of view, our accounting has experienced many uncertainties for several years. But for the moment, it works well even before the regular visit. To this end, there is an economic council which is put in place to monitor each service to avoid suspicion

regarding money. For this, we congratulate Dom Emmanuel for his spirit of discernment and his knowledge. Without him, our community should not continue regular life as it does now.

Furthermore, the economic situation in our country poses a problem and this does not spare us. The herd, which is our only source of income, also poses a problem for the growth of the animals given that the pastures have become poor. We have lost several animals due to the epidemic, which still continues in the region. This means that the number of animals has decreased considerably.

For the survival of the community, we are thinking about having a second source of income because the animals are not sold every day. In addition, we were supported by the mother house Westmalle, but for a considerable time we have not received anything. This has created economic instability in the community and even the pay of workers each month. There is a necessity and urgency.

Despite the difficulties that we live, regular life continues in joy, peace and in the search for God. Our superior never ceases to encourage us to move forward and never discourage us, the Lord is there, He accompanies us.

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and does not turn to the haughty and the liars! »
Psalms 40 (39.5)

Masina Maria Maromby Monastery Fianarantsoa Madagascar

MAROMBY HOUSE REPORT ON 06/10/2023

This report was made by the entire community after working in three groups. We are 46 members ; 27 Grand Professed Brothers of whom 9 Brothers are absent ; 8 at the future foundation in the Seychelles and one is at the mother house at Mont Des Cats. 9 young professed, 5 novices and 5 postulants. In addition ; we have 25 aspirants who are seriously preparing to return to the monastery, as soon as there is a free place !

SPIRITUAL LIFE

The brothers' intimate relationship with God is developing slowly, but we need stimulation and encouragement from the Father Prior. For the spiritual life of young people and elders alike. To be good at the work of God ; to divine services, Lectio Divina and personal prayer. It is true that there were brothers who were sick or tired or due to covid-19. Despite all this ! Each of the brothers must take charge of their spiritual life.

COMMUNITY LIFE

When we evaluate our brotherly life : We find that brothers love each other. There is a communion of Hearts in the love of Christ. We have fraternal help ; in case of illness or other difficult cases. We follow Christ in joy and fraternal peace.

TRAINING

We need more and more good organization for training at all kinds of levels. Above all, we must improve into French which is the basis of all training with the majority of our documentation which is almost all in French.

THE ECONOMY

Currently, our economy is still fragile ! Because of the great participation in the new wine cellar and the covid-19 crisis. As well as several brothers seriously ill.

Here are some suggestions to resolve this problem : First, it is essential to properly train all finance managers. Then, we must continue to buy grape, lychee, orange and pineapple products. Waiting for our products.

PREPARING OUR FOUNDATIONS

For the preparation of our near-foundation in Seychelles and Madagascar ; we will wait for the visit of the council of the Abbot General.

MAROMBY MONASTERY WISHES TO BE RAISED TO THE RANK OF AN ABBEY OCSO

Among us, there are those who wish that the Maromby monastery may be erected as an Abbey.

HOUSE REPORT OF OUR LADY OF BAMENDA ABBEY FOR THE RAFMA MEETING 2023.

COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP: At the time of writing this report, the community is made of 24 solemnly professed monks, 1 temporary professed and 1 novice. 4 Brothers are absent from the community for various reasons, namely: Health, Sabbatical and Formation. The total number of the community is 26, with an average age of 54.96

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: The last general chapter of 2022 brought about many positive changes in our community, with the appointment of Dom Bonaventure Ogbonna who eventually took over from Br. Polycarp as Superior *Ad nutum*, thus taking us away from the irregular situation of pontifical commissary, then our reincorporation into order. Dom Bonaventure has been with us since the 7th of December 2022 and the brethren have welcomed him with great openness and great zeal to grow deeper in the life of the Order.

We were blessed with one postulant who received the novice habit on the 1st of October 2023. He is determined and looks very promising in the life. We also happily experienced the solemn profession of one of our brothers on the 15th of July 2023. And on a sad note, we lost one of our solemnly professed, Br. Bernard Wuwih, who was called to his eternal home, at the age of 49.

THE SPIRIT AND LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY: The brothers are making efforts in the spirit and life of the community as they are much more united, with a great spirit of sacrifice all aiming for the common good as many brothers take their work seriously and happily with a spirit of generosity. The revival of the regular common work practice greatly fosters unity among the brothers.

LITURGY: In the area of liturgy, the brothers are getting more committed to the work of God. The active participation in the Divine Office and joyful celebration of the Holy Eucharist is also a glaring aspect of the community's liturgical life. Notwithstanding, there is always room for improvements.

FORMATION: As concerns formation, Dom Bonaventure is very regular with Chapter talks which is also a great source of spiritual nourishment for the brethren. Initial formation is also being taken seriously as some of the young brothers are undertaking courses in Philosophy within the community from visiting lecturers from the Catholic University. Whiles as concerns ongoing formation, one of our brother's has been admitted this year into the Catholic University of Bamenda for an undergraduate program in Philosophy. To this end our hopes are high and the future bright.

ECONOMY: The Socio-political crisis of the two English speaking regions has slowed down the economic progress of the community. Our products are not being regularly bought as before and many have fled from the region and movements are limited by the many lockdowns. This has negatively affected the community's income.

SOME CHALLENGES: At the end of 2022, our entire monastery was almost ravaged by flames, resulting from inconsistencies in Hydro-electrical supply. In a bid to redress this problem of inconsistent electrical supply, the community is seeking for an alternative solar electricity.

The irregular situation we had lived in during the time of the pontifical commissary has affected our paternity and the system of regular visitations. Dom Bosco - our Delegated Father immediate, had attempted to make a visitation to Bamenda at the end of 2022 but didn't arrive to Bamenda due to some difficulties at the airport.

Finally, we are very grateful to the Order and the RAFMA Region for their pastoral care of our community during its moments of precariousness.

OUR LADY OF KOKOUBOU MONASTERY - 84

House report 2023

Evolution of the community. The community is currently made up of 20 brothers: 14 solemnly professed brothers, including 5 absent for reasons of health, chaplaincy or other reasons, and 6 temporary professed brothers. We have an elder among the two founders still with us, whose health has become fragile. We wanted him to stay with us instead of returning to France where he would certainly be placed in a retirement home. After some hesitation he ended up accepting and getting used to it, and we organized ourselves to take care of him as best we as we can, taking turns watching over him during the night. He greatly appreciates this and does not miss the opportunity to show his gratitude to the community.

Despite some difficulties linked to different temperaments and sometimes misunderstandings, it should be noted that a good fraternal climate is evident in the community, through the kitchen service, the laundry service where the brothers take turns, mobilizations for harvests and other works of community interest.

Vocations and Formation. Those among the young people who have arrived since 2017-2019 and who have persevered, are now temporary professed. We thank God, in the coming months we will have the grace of several solemn professions, which we hope will contribute to consolidating our community and making it attractive to a large number of young people. These six temporary professed brothers have begun the monasticate and are currently completing the first year. One of them even followed accelerated training in accounting for two months in Cotonou to serve the community. The training given at the monasticate is supplemented by chapters, conferences and refectory reading. The emphasis continues to be placed on the need for each of us to cling to the essentials of our vocation through assiduity in prayer, in the work of God and in fraternal service. Currently we no longer have any novices or postulants and we pray that the Lord will send us some soon.

Economic situation. Currently, we are on an economic visit provided by a knowledgeable person from our country. The aim is on the one hand to clean up the functioning of our accounting by providing us with ad hoc tools, and on the other hand to give us advice on how to manage to boost our revenues, so that they exceed expenses and prevent us from living beyond our means.

Construction work. We are continuing our construction work as we obtain funding. Currently we are finishing the kitchen-refectory complex, a complex which will house the guest refectory in such a way that guests benefit from the readings we do at the table.

Communication and relationship with the Order. In the context of communication with modern means, telephone and internet, we felt that the time had come to allow professed people to have open access to these means, provided that everyone uses them responsibly. Our Mother house continues to accompany us and carry our worries with us. For our part, we remain in communion with our brothers of Bellefontaine, especially in these times when they have courageously taken directions affecting their future. Our communion with the Order is expressed through the reception of the travel chronicles of the Abbot General, through various aid received (Commission of Aid or individual monasteries) and through the solicitude of the Abbot General towards our community.

This house report is written by the Prior, Brother Clément, and corrected by the community.

HOUSE REPORT OF AWHUM ABBEY TO RAFMA MEETING OF 2023

Statistics of Membership: Numerically we have 68 Brothers:

1. Solemnly professed are 58, Temporary professed 3, Novices 5, Postulants 2. Mean Age 54, Average Age 53.
2. We have 12 priests among which 1 is a hermit, 1 chaplain to St. Justina Abbey, Abakaliki, 1 as a Pontifical Commissary at Bamenda Abbey, Cameroon, 4 are in Akokwa, Awhum Abbey pre- foundation, and then 5 priests in the Abbey.
3. 7 solemn professed Brothers are at Akokwa. 1 of our Brothers is in overseas and 1 is on leave of absence. We lost one of our priests, late Fr. Paul Usulor who was buried on the 24th of August, 2023. May his soul rest in perfect peace. Amen.

Liturgy and Spiritual Life: We enjoy full participation of Brothers at the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist and Offices of the liturgy of the Hours. Little Hours are not neglected except on occasions of ill-health or when Brothers are on essential duties and trips. The life of prayer, silence, enclosure and work are values we highly cherish. We have frequent community dialogues that have brought about mutual understanding and relative peace in the community. We have our one hour weekly Blessed Sacrament adoration as well.

Formation: We have 5 novices and 2 postulants who are well taken care of by the novice master and his assistant. We have 3 Brothers in the scholasticate (Juniorate). One of our Brothers has just completed his theological studies at the major seminary. We have two deacons. The Superior gives regular chapter talks to the Brothers.

Economy: The worsening and depressing economic situation in Nigeria resulting in hyperinflation is affecting every aspect of our economy, but we are working hard to keep afloat and as well trying to make every effort towards improving it. We are glad to say we have a newly constructed silo of about 500 tonnage in capacity, the project is already completed, and it was jointly sponsored by the generosity of Dom Damien of Scourmont Abbey and by support of the Commission of AIDS.

Challenges: Presently, we have a colliery company behind our enclosure walls. The haulage level of coal is getting deeper as they work and as a result, whenever they apply their explosives to hit the coal face, their operation shakes the foundation of all our buildings and this is repeated severally in a day with the effect that their activities is causing cracks on the walls of many of our buildings and it is really threatening us. We have lodged our complaints to the management of the company and they have not given any reasonable response to us. We are still cogitating on the appropriate measures to follow.

We are grateful to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit whose goodness, care, love and solicitude endures forever and ever. Amen.

NSUGBE ABBEY HOUSE REPORT FOR RAFMA SUPERIORS MEETING 2023.

STATISTICS: Presently the Abbey of Nsugbe has 36 members; 25 solemnly professed, 3 simple professed, 7 novices, 3 of whom entered novitiate on July 11, 2023. One of the solemnly professed Brothers is presently on the process of transferring his stability to one of the Order's community in Canada.

LITURGY: Liturgy remains the centre of our life. We are grateful to God for the brothers' active participation during the liturgy of the hours, and at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Participation in the office of vigils, and the little hours have improved, although we sometimes experience late coming during the divine offices consequent on human weakness. The monastic values such as solitude, silence, prayer, manual work etc and other spiritual activities of the community encourage and challenge the brothers on their monastic journey.

FORMATION: Our Formators are making tremendous effort to ensure that our novices and juniors have holistic programmes to cover their initial formation. The community also invites other experts in other fields of study to give conferences and workshop when the need arises. The Abbot's weekly chapter talks also contribute to the formation of the brothers. Seven of our brothers have rounded off their degree program on philosophy, and one of our brothers has completed his study on theology and has proceeded to do his master on moral theology. One of our Rev. Fathers has also started his program on canon law at CIWA. One of the Brothers is following a program at BECAN Institute of Monastic Studies, and another at St. John Bosco institute of technology Ondo State Nigeria. Also one is learning skill at Glory John Technical Centre, Onitsha. Lastly, one is studying at Nigeria College of accountancy, Jos.

ECONOMY: We are grateful to God for his blessings in the community. By the grace of God our water factory has been completed, and production is in progress. Our other establishments are functioning to the best of their ability. We look forward to establishing nylon factory.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY. Our community was raised to the status of an abbey in the general chapter of September 2022. The official declaration was done on the 15th of January 2023, by Dom Clement abbot of Mistassini Canada. On the 16th of January 2023, we had an election and Fr. Marius Mary Okoye was elected and confirmed as our first Abbot. We had our abbatial blessing on 20th May 2023. One of our brothers did his solemn profession on January 14th 2023. Indeed, the month of January is a blessing in the community of Nsugbe, and we are grateful to God.

CHALLENGES: Our challenge is maintaining silence, and striking the balance between work and prayer. Our church is very small. We have large congregation in that many stay outside the church every Sunday whether in dry season or rainy season. The church needs expansion. We need help for this purpose.

We are sincerely grateful to God for his innumerable graces and blessings upon our community, and we say: to him be glory and praise forever and ever. Amen.

House Report of Holy Cross Monastery Illah to the RAFMA Superiors meeting 2023

Statistics:

The Community of Illah is presently composed of 33 monks. 26 in solemn vows, 1 temporary professed 4 novices, and 2 postulants. Two of our solemnly professed brothers are in other Monasteries of the Order, while one is on a leave of absence, while we are offering hospitality to two brothers, one from a Benedictine monastery and another from our Order. Since the last RAFMA Superiors meeting, we have had 1 ordination to the priesthood, 4 solemn professions; one temporary profession, 4 reception of the monastic habit and one death.

Formation:

At both the levels of initial and ongoing formation everything is going on smoothly. Those in initial formation have regular classes given by the Novice Master and the junior director. The weekly chapter talks of the Prior and conferences given by some of the brothers help us in the area of ongoing formation. Readings at the liturgy and in the refectory are carefully selected to meet the formation needs of the community. Three brothers in the last few years have completed studies in Philosophy and Theology, while some are doing a monastic formation program organized by the Benedictine and Cistercian Association of Nigeria. The professed monks are encouraged to help in the formation of the new comers, by being faithful to the monastic way of life and their good example. A brother is doing an in-house training in hospital, to gain the necessary experience to better manage the infirmary.

Regular visitation and election of a Prior

In July last year, we had a Regular Visitation during which it was observed that there was a need for the election of a Prior since we had been under the regime of a superior ad nutum for a long time. Due to the timing of the second half of the General Chapter of 2022, we could not have the election at the time of the Visitation. After the General Chapter, Dom Armand had to visit Illah again to prepare the community and supervise the election that was held on the 15th of October 2022.

Dom. Augustine Bernard emerged as our new Prior at the end of the election. We remain grateful to Dom. Ogechukwu for his services to the community for more than sixteen years. The change of superior has not brought any changes in the structure of our way of life, but life in community has improved in terms of mutual understanding of ourselves and one another. The spirit of unity is being felt especially the mutual support we give to each other in times of joy, suffering and sorrow. We also maintain the spirit of generosity and hospitality in the community.

Liturgy:

Every day we try to improve our liturgy since it is where we get the strength to live our monastic vocation faithfully. In the celebration of the liturgy we experience the unity and bond of love that exists among us. However, some of us can still improve on their level of participation in the liturgy and punctuality to the Divine Office. On weekdays, attendance at the little hours is usually poor due to outings and work.

Economy:

We are experiencing the difficulties that most Nigerians are experiencing at this moment in terms of getting money and meeting up with our daily needs. Our main source of income is the piggery. We had hope in the poultry but last year we lost about 15,000 birds to flu. We are yet to recover from the tragedy. We are in the process of expanding our feed mill for the production of poultry feeds for

commercial purposes. The guesthouse, palm oil plantation, bee keeping and gift shop are other sources of income.

NOTRE DAME DE L'HARMONIE MONASTERY SEYCHELLES 2023

1- First of all, our community here in Seychelles warmly thanks the President and the members of this RAFMA assembly for inviting Father Etienne to join you. We see it as a mark of charity and recognition of our presence here in Seychelles.

Here, are some elements of the history of our community : community life began in the pre-foundation on the ground of Harmony in Seychelles on April 16, 2009 with the 2 brothers sent from Maromby, Father Jean Chrysostome and Brother Marie Joseph, as well as Brother Vincent from Mont des Cats who spent 6 months there. They worked very hard to arrange everything necessary to live there : earthworks, tree cutting, clearing, renovation and installation of the 2 existing small houses, etc. everything needed to lead a life of prayer and work.

Father Jean Chrysostome left us when he was elected, on January 12, 2018, prior of the Maromby Monastery where he is still in charge.

Many brothers have followed one another here, and have spent themselves generously, notably Father Daniel of Mont des Cats.

Brother Marie Joseph, sent from the very beginning, is still among us. So it's been 14 years now since the first brothers arrived here.

During these 14 years, a lot of efforts have been made for the development of our community as a Monastery and especially for our roots and our integration into our Diocese of Port Victoria.

2- Many Malagasy brothers from Maromby have passed here and worked so that this Monastery can become a real foundation. Some returned to Madagascar for health reasons, or tired by the hard work and poverty... Several times, during these 14 years, the community of Maromby and even the RAFMA, gathered in 2019 at the Etoile Notre Dame, voted in favor of presenting our community to the general chapter. Despite this, we do not even appear in the Elenchus of our Order as a pre-foundation. Why ?

Our current numbers are 8, from 68 to 36 years old, we would like to be 10 or 12. We are all solemnly professed at present. Regarding our work and the many projects that we plan to accomplish and which we will detail below, we can easily accommodate 10 additional brothers.

There are many visitors, immediate Fathers and others of our Order, who have already passed here to visit us throughout these 14 years : Dom Guillaume--Dom Jean Marc--Mother Myriam--Dom Jacques --- Dom Bruno-- Dom Marc André -- Dom Armand Veilleux-- Mother Annachiara -- Dom Bernard Marie (who has already been here twice). They were able to see the development and preparation of our community to become a foundation.

Everyone was able to share our life here, advise us and they testified with a visit card of what they saw and heard from us and the bishop of our Diocese. The last visit took place on July 3, 2023 by our immediate Father, Dom Bernard Marie of Mont des Cats ; in the visit card, he encouraged us to move towards autonomy with a view to becoming a foundation.

We mention, however, that the visit of Dom Bernard Marie carried out in November 2022, after his visit to Maromby, dismayed us : we learned without any prior announcement that the brothers of Maromby had just taken a vote to cancel the founding process of our community so that it becomes an annex house.

Unfortunately, they did not ask us for our opinion and did not notify us of this vote so that we could take part in it. Because if we had taken part in the preparation of this vote, we would have opposed it. Also, for this reason, we request the cancellation of the transformation of our pre-foundation into an annex house and we request that our monastery become a foundation here in Seychelles.

And even after this vote, we wonder about the usefulness of our projects and all the work accomplished if we had to remain an annex house. Is not everything that has been accomplished here in vain ?

Regarding our way of living the monastic life here, there should be a separation between the brothers and the guests ; but as we do not yet have real monastic buildings, nor refectory, nor a guest house, the guests take their meals at our table ; we don't have a fence either. Also, we want to have places reserved for us. But to be able to build, we must be recognized as a foundation.

3- The inhabitants of our region are beginning to know us and our presence here is appreciated so much so that many people wish to found a Monastery here in Seychelles. And there are also many who help us and advise us to develop our activities. Many people testify to the graces they receive in this place when they come to pray there or simply when they come to visit us.

On August 17, the Apostolic Nuncio of the Indian Ocean, Mgr Tomasz Grysa, came to visit us, he saw our place and our facilities and noted that we do not yet have a church or a guest house. He gave us the advice to make plans with the help of an architect for a monastery and send them to our bishop, Mgr Harel for his support. He himself is committed to supporting us for this project.

In addition to this, we regret not yet being financially independent because the Mont des Cats community pays us a pension every quarter. One of the reasons for this situation is that we are not yet sufficiently equipped for the work : all our agricultural work is done by hand (spades, sickles, etc.) but few of us have the necessary strength and we cannot hire here in Seychelles.

Despite everything, we are careful to maintain the monastic rhythm and not miss the community exercises of our Cistercian life which are the foundation of our presence here.

But it is important to emphasize, however, that the possibilities for "earning a living" are numerous in this place. We have a good, abundant source that we could tap to sell bottled water. We can undertake breeding (pigs, broilers, laying hens), beekeeping and various crops (cassava, potatoes, vegetables, coffee, vanilla, cloves, etc.) Our location is very favorable to all these productions, it is a true gift from God.

We are on a sufficiently large plot of land (8 ha) with a hot and humid climate where vegetation grows easily. It is located high up at 400m above sea level so that we do not suffer from excessive heat, surrounded by a very dense forest, with many springs, very calm... only the songs of the birds break the silence. This setting attracts many people who like to come here to recharge their batteries and pray because everything here leads to prayer. Our founders and we, following them, are committed to keeping this place clean and beautiful, full of flowers.

Vocations : We cannot think about vocations from a purely human point of view because the call is above all a work of God. It is difficult for us to say that there is no call from God in the Indian Ocean Islands and here in Seychelles but what we can say is that there are young people who want to enter, but we cannot welcome them because we do not have a place for them, nor even the possibility of opening a novitiate. We advise them to follow the training in an autonomous monastery, like Maromby in Madagascar, or Mont des Cats in France... but they do not agree because this is where they want to start the training.

We also believe that the Seychelles monastery is not reserved for Seychellois alone but that it is for the Indian Ocean. Therefore, we must not prevent the foundation because there are few Seychellois vocations ; the other congregations present here welcome vocations who come from everywhere, especially Africa and Madagascar.

This is our situation and our life and the life of the Church here at Notre Dame de l'Harmonie, in Mahé in the Seychelles. Yes, if we consider how the feast of Saint Bernard took place on August 20, where many Christians came to the Monastery and demonstrated their attachment to this place and to our community as an important spiritual place for our Diocese, for what serious reason should we abandon all this ?

L'ETOILE N.D 2023 house report for RAFMA

The community has 35 members including 32 solemnly professed, 2 temporarily professed, and one novice. A solemnly professed from the Abbey of Clarté-Dieu, not stabilized (since 2018). Among the solemnly professed, 6 are absent for various reasons: one returned permanently to the ND des Gardes abbey (founding house, France), Mother Geneviève, former abbess, in Mvanda (foundation of the Star in the DRC), 1 advisor to the 'Abbot General at the General House (Rome), one in Switzerland to lend a hand to the community of Géronde, one in Guinea (Friguiagbé), to help the community of the Holy Cross and also one at the IFIHM. (the Institute of Integral Human Training of Montreal).

On December 1, 2022, we had the joy of welcoming Mother Béatrice BLANLOEIL, Abbess emeritus of the Abbey of the Guards, delegated by Dom Jean-Marc CHENE abbot of ND de Bellefontaine (Pèreimmédiat) who came for the regular visit. This regular visit brought us a lot on a moral level.

The Liturgy: We are currently going through the transition from the BJ psalter to the liturgical psalter. At the level of the songs. The cantors work to prepare the office and the mass. They spend a lot of time rehearsing. We got to know Brother Didier, a young musician who offered to help us sing well after a stay with us. We set up a work program with him: music theory, instruments and work with the whole community.

Formation (constitution 45 and Ratio)

The first trainer is the Holy Spirit. The community is formative through its life. The monastic schedule allows us to punctuate our regular life. The training is well provided. The novitiate classes are taught by the Novice Mistress and the sisters from the community. The monasticate is well organized and the classes are shared between the sisters. Young people in training must ensure that they preserve the time allocated to assimilate lessons and complete homework. The community helps young people by living monastic values. We appreciate the sessions given by people from outside. We had a session on philosophy and music. Furthermore, sisters are sent occasionally for additional training: for example, two sisters participated in the Session of the SAINTE ANNE structure in IVORY COAST and one in the Annie session in France. Another has just left for IFIHM in Canada for 3 years.

The constitution 14-16. These lessons received help us to progress in fraternal relationships, but we still have a lot to do in mutual obedience, in the way of speaking to each other, of respecting each other, of forgiveness, and of welcoming each other. Fraternal communion is also built by participating together in services, meals, community meetings, and common work while avoiding absences and lateness.

Constitutions 17-29. Life balance: office, lectio Divina, work.

We love the Divine Office. It is prepared with care and we find our spiritual nourishment there. The daily Eucharist is a grace for us. The new schedule for LECTIO-DIVINA is appreciated by the greatest number of people. Those who are not available at that time try to find time during the day.

We work like all our fellow men to earn our living by the sweat of our brow. But some cannot let go of their work when the office rings. We have the impression that it is not us who direct the work, but that it is the work that directs us. Work is a great challenge to fight. It must not be to the detriment of monastic and community life.

Constitution 24. Silence is very poorly respected. It takes a lot of effort for us not to chat in regular places, around the Church, after services, during the time after Compline. As soon as two or three sisters find themselves together the temptation to talk awaits them. May the Lord grant this request from Psalm 141: “Set, O Lord, a guard over my mouth and watch, O God, over the gate of my lips. »

Constitution 28. Our life is simple; we have arranged the dormitory into cells. Everyone has their own cell and they must ensure that everything superfluous is eliminated and that they maintain sobriety.

The relationship with the world: some sisters are more directly concerned by relationships with people from outside: those who do the shopping, who are at the reception, in the store, in the guest house and those who take care of the workers. They have to be careful to behave according to the life choice they have made. But another way of being in relationship with the world concerns cell phones. We recognize their usefulness; they make many procedures easier, but they also have their disadvantages and risk becoming a trap if they are not used with discernment. In principle, we do not write first and we do not keep anything we receive without authorization from the Abbess.

We do not have a resident chaplain. It is the diocesan priests who take turns coming to celebrate the Eucharist for us.

The economic situation is depressing. This affects our economy. We cannot afford extraordinary expenses. Our products sell less and it's the same across the country. People don't have money. Lots of unemployment, so many poor people. We who have chosen to live in poverty must monitor our expenses and reduce our needs. Everyone is responsible in this area, there is also a big challenge to combat: accumulation of things in their job, waste, lack of attention, lack of availability to help in other jobs.

We are in communion at this time with our brothers from neighboring countries (Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria) who are suffering atrociously, dying brutally due to the action of terrorists.

May the Lord strengthen all of us and our steps on his path of faith, hope and charity.

HOUSE REPORT FOR THE RAFMA 2023 Clarté-Die.

Statistics at the time of dispatch									Since the last Chapter 2022				
So.P	Te.P	Nov.	Post.	Total	Av.Ag	M.Ag	Abs	N.Sta	Habit	T.Pro	Sol.P	Death	Depart.
16	4	2	3	25			1	0					Nv.2
													Sol.P 1

To write this report, we formed five working groups : four in the community and one in the novitiate. One sister with solemn vows has just left the order, after ten years of absence from our community. And also two novices returned to their families. Currently our community has twenty-five members : sixteen solemnly professed, four temporarily professed, two novices and three postulants. One solemn professed sister has been living at Etoile Notre-Dame in Benin for several years.

In this present report, we will briefly share the following elements : Fraternal life, Liturgy, Work and Economy, Formation, our current experience in the context of the war, our relationship with the local Church and finally our thanks.

Fraternal life : It is characterized by monastic values : charity, mutual listening, generosity, attention and communion around our Mother Abbess who guides us and leads us on the path of the Gospel and Conversion. We thank her with all our hearts for her tireless concern for our Community and for each one, for her dedication, her encouragement and all the unsparing efforts she deploys for us. Thus we move towards a future full of hope. Furthermore, we are well aware of our weaknesses knowing that we have to make efforts and constantly surpass ourselves to lead a more coherent Community life. Recognizing their limits, each person keeps at heart the desire to convert, and this through listening to God, to their neighbors and to other mediations with a view to promoting a good community spirit.

The Liturgy : Our monastic life takes place in a peaceful climate, maintaining the balance and the ordinary rhythm of Prayer, Lectio Divina and Work in solitude and silence. In this dark and uncertain period that our Country is going through, the Liturgy remains the heart and center of our life knowing that we have recourse and refuge in God because he is the Master of history.

We strive and encourage not to prefer anything to the work of God ; from Vigils to Compline we actively participate. We find that our liturgy is prayerful and lively. However, we deplore some delays to services and sometimes absences among certain sisters. Every day we have mass. It is celebrated by Emmanuel, a diocesan priest, who serves as chaplain. At Sunday and solemn masses our songs are performed in various local languages with a view to a prayerful and lively liturgy.

Concerning work as a characteristic dimension of our life

This monastic value makes us participate in the creative work of God, ensures our psycho-emotional balance, promotes our collaboration, each one puts her abilities and her expertise at the service of the community by giving her best, this promotes unity. However, our economy is not very reassuring, despite the efforts we are making. Our income does not cover all expenses. And the competition is breaking the record. The current tragedy is the rise in prices on the market.

Regarding our initial and ongoing training

We all benefit together : from the chapters of our Mother Abbess, readings in the refectory, sharing of the Word of God, the Holy Scripture course, retreats, sessions and conferences from the priests, religious men and women of our Archdiocese. In the Novitiate as well as in the Monasticate a group of sisters taught classes. Our wish : the intervention of our brothers and sisters of the Order, especially for courses in our Cistercian spirituality.

Our current experience in relation to the socio-political situation, especially in the east of the country

This recurring war affects us and destabilizes us somewhere. At certain times, we are upset not knowing what the next day has in store for us and the news we receive creates psychosis. To cope, we are looking for solutions as a community and are taking some resolutions together to show solidarity with our brothers who are suffering in North Kivu and Ituri. We remain in communion with our brothers in Mokoto where war is raging, with its harmful consequences ; including massive displacements of populations, nameless massacres ; the inaccessibility of basic necessities also affects us, etc. Our attitude in this situation is abandonment and trust in God.

***Our relationship with the local Church :** The relationship is well maintained. It happens that our Archbishop visits us, he calls himself our « sentinel ». Generally, he updates us on what is happening in our Archdiocese and in the Church. Collaboration with surrounding neighboring communities is good.

At the end of this report, we want to give thanks to the Lord who in his divine benevolence, keeps us and supports us with his presence. Our sincere thanks to our Abbot General and to the whole Order for prayer and proximity. We express our gratitude to our Immediate Father who took the risk of coming to us despite increasing insecurity.

We are again confining ourselves to the prayer of all our brothers and sisters of our order. May our Lady of Cîteaux intercede for us.

Yours, Trappistine sisters of Clarté-Die.

OUR LADY OF PRAISE ABBEY HOUSE REPORT RAFMA 2023.

First and foremost, we thank the Almighty Father for the blessings bestowed upon us. We worked as a community and came out with the following summary based, on our community lived experiences.

STATISTICS

At the moment we are twenty-eight members, twenty-three members in solemn vows, three in temporary vows and two postulants.

Four solemnly professed sisters are absent: One is in the nursing home in Holland, one on leave of absence [taking care of her sick mother], one on probation in the Congregation of Franciscan Sisters of the Heart of Jesus in Rome and one at home for health reasons. *The average age of the community is fifth two.*

CHAPLAINS

We express our gratitude to our bishop who has generously supported us with two Diocesan priests. Who work alternatively: serving the community with the celebration of the Eucharist, confessions and their touching talks during the Holy week. We are also nourished by their various Homilies.

LITURGY

Our liturgy is well animated and attended. Although at times we struggle to harmonize our voices in some challenging psalm modes.

RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS

We have good relationship with the local church and religious. Unlike some of our neighbours, who have given us hard time for years, by grubbing pieces our land from all corners but, we thank God who enabled us to restore part of it, with the help of our local leaders in the village.

ONGOING FORMATION

The community benefits from the chapter talks of mother Abbess, talks from visiting priests, annual Retreats, online classes from mother Eleanor on the constitutions. In addition, some sisters have followed online courses {that is consecrated life, Administration and finance}. One temporary professed attended transformative personal growth and Development course. Two of them attended a Benedictine Cistercian workshop in Nairobi Kenya. Grateful to the Benefactors. Lastly but not the least, some members of the community help in the formation program of the Novices.

SILENCE

It is still a challenge, though there is some improvement; especially in specific places. The remarks from our guests; our retreatants and all who value monastic life encourages us on our way to preserve this silence with utmost vigilance.

ECONOMY

Our economy is still fragile [It's still a challenge for our community.] what can be done for the future? Our projects, St. Stephen's retreat house, cassock, farm, coffee, Aloe-Vera and body cream, at least assists us in our daily basic needs. It is worth mentioning that Post-Covid has affected the prices of the commodities too.

VISIT OF THE ABBOT GENERAL

We are very grateful for the friendly visit of our Abbot General, Dom. Bernardus Peteers. We were spiritually enriched and encouraged in our monastic spiritual Journey.

CONCLUSION

We are privileged to have a very good Father Immediate, who is flexible and always available whenever we are in need. We thank God for the precious gift in the person of Dom John Bosco Kamali.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt gratitude in both triumph and failures to God who sees us through.

HOUSE REPORT OF OUR LADY OF SAINT JUSTINA CISTERCIAN ABBEY ABAKALIKI, NIGERIA 2023.

STATISTICS: Our community comprises of 44 Sisters, 35 sisters are in solemn vows, 6 are in simple vows, 2 novices and 1 postulant. We have five sisters in school; one is studying music, two sisters are doing online courses in theology, another sister is on one-year formation program while the other sister is in a nursing school.

LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY: We are vibrant community and happy to live out our Cistercian values. We are grateful to God for the gift of being hospitable and contentment given to us in our community.

LITURGY: We thank God for the improvement we have made in our liturgy through constant singing practices.

PROGRESS IN COMMUNITY: We are also grateful for the success of our election on the 29th October 2022, in which Mother Regina was re-elected and the Abbatial blessing was held on the 14th January 2023 and solemn profession of one of our sister. We have completed our new dormitory which comprises 20 rooms and it was blessed on the 1st of October, 2023 and 17 of our jubilarian Sisters are living there now. Our new altar bread machine full automatic mould model 3000 has arrived and this will improve our Eucharistic bread production. Finally, we want to inform our Region of RAFMA that, we are going to bring back the remains of our Mother Justina to our community from our Mother house Glencairn (Ireland).

FORMATION: The novice and junior mistresses, together with some of our sisters help to give classes to those in formation. Our two sisters that had just graduated from the one-year formation program, their presence enhanced our formation in the community. Occasionally, we invite experts from outside to help us in an ongoing formation.

ECONOMY: Our major sources of income still remain, the Altar Bread production and Poultry farm. We earn little income from other departments such as: fruits from the Orchard, farm, garden and Guest house. We are able to help the poor around us from our little resources. Our hospitality to visitors is very much appreciated by all who come to experience our life.

CHALLENGES: In the Months of February to April 2023, the selling of our poultry eggs froze due to cashless policy experienced in the country. In order to rescue those eggs from spoiling, our sisters would carry crates of eggs to travel for five or six hours away from our state to another in order to sell them at a giveaway price. Sometimes, some of these eggs were boiled for sell. Other challengers are: Health issues, Silence and Punctuality. We are trying different means so as to maintain silence in our community and punctuality.

Finally, the present situation in our country particularly bad leadership and the cost of fuel affects everything, to buy materials for making poultry feeds and other means of sustenance have become big challenges being faced for us and families today in Nigeria. Thanks.

REPORT OF THE SOKE DELEGATE SUPERIOR FOR RAFMA Huambo *55

The community of Soke has been going through a delicate and difficult situation for about two years now, but it is well looked after by the discernment of our Superiors who truly live the Charter of Charity and take thoughtful and wise steps to resurrect the rest that has survived the many long 'storms' experienced since the founding of Nasoma Y' Ombembwa.

From the beginning we received many vocations but almost all of them, after a time, decided to leave for strange reasons unknown to us at the time.

In addition, the Community thought it lived in a very unhealthy place and the Sisters were constantly ill. In truth, we were regularly given portions of poison in our food and water. In 2012 some key elements came to light to help us understand the causes and reasons for so much misfortune. Slowly in recent times God has given much clearer and clearer evidence, and the Sisters themselves, perpetrators of such disasters, in moments of grace have confessed their responsibility, although shortly afterwards, frightened by the supposed consequences, they have withdrawn and changed their words, but God has allowed clarity!

We are currently five sisters at Soke and we try to carry on an almost normal community, liturgical and working life.

We have a large farm with fields, animals and forest. We have a Pharmaceutical Laboratory in which we produce in abundance and sell to pharmacies in various provinces.

We thank God for the collaboration he gives us to realise with the workers and their faithful manager.

In addition, three young people help us very well with all sales and shopping in the city (in addition to the products of the Pharmaceutical Laboratory, we sell fruit, eggs and animals).

They also help us with documents, the implementation of initiated projects and everything else that involves contact with people.

In fact, people think we do not exist, that we have all been temporarily relocated to Italy for a period of training, and that some come for short periods to direct the work. In reality, many people in our town of Huambo knew from the beginning that there were serious problems threatening the community.

The Sisters in formation have already been received for a year in Valserena, the founding and, we hope, re-founding house. There they are in the responsibility of safe formators and within a Community with a normal path. They are also looked after by a Soke Sister who collaborates in formation. This year, one of the young women made Solemn Profession and two novices made Simple Profession (all for the Soke Community).

Careful discernment is continued with each one so that when one day we can start again; we can do so without any entanglement with the 'occult tradition' that is undermining the life of our villages.

We feel the closeness of RAFMA and the Order. We thank you and continue to rely on your prayers.



Md. Manuela Salvador Superiora del Soke

55*Soke (Huambo)

Relation for RAFMA from the Pontifical Commissary

The community of Soke, which has had a rather turbulent life since 2021, is under Pontifical Commissariat. I had to ask the Holy See for direct help at a time when the Order seemed unable to respond to a situation of profound need. From then on, the work began: listening, getting to know each other, reconstructing history, and trying to enable the community to resume a normal, regular life.

The traumatic departure of two young solemnly professed sisters was a painful moment, one because she had organized a series of thefts in collaboration with the workers, and the other scandalized by the situation experienced by the community. The Apostolic Visitor then took a closer look at the community's situation, finding it disunited and in great distress. Subsequently, the Apostolic Visitor was dismissed and the post was entrusted to the current Apostolic Commissary. My assistants are: a member of the Order, Dom Emmanuel, a member of the Angolan Church, Father Sissimo, who knows the monastery very well and who, in turn, visits them, listens to them and reports back to me in a punctual manner, and the exorcist priest as a stable helper.

The aim was to restore order among the solemnly professed sisters, and to ensure the formation of young people by asking those sisters who had caused lasting harm to the common life to leave. To this end, at least three sisters were suspended from their vows of stability under the direct responsibility of the Commissary.

It seems that these sisters' awareness of both their relationship with Christ and their belonging to the community is very low, and is weakening the whole fabric of the community (from the usual failings - I'm not talking about the lack of silence, but the lack of constructive speech, which is replaced by constant criticism and murmuring - to the use of traditional practices of poisoning and the like). Not all people are compromised with fetishism, but some are, and it's not a situation that can be ignored. This required the intervention of a very good exorcist, who did an excellent job of purifying people and places. He also accompanied the last visit last March. For the next visit in November, I will be accompanied only by one of the Commissariat's assistants, Dom Emmanuel.

Indeed, it seemed that the monastery had become a place of conflict between outside powers of various kinds. Stages of the Commissariat: apostolic visitation, placing under papal commissariat, taking charge of all the young people in formation, one element causing serious disorder and the second superior (seven in all) in Valserena for a period of at least two years, during which time the young people can experience a "normal" community, receive formation with others, take on a rhythm of life that is not usual for them but is healthy, cure their physical illnesses, and continue the stages of the monastic path; a solemn profession and two for simple is an act of trust in Soke's future recovery.

An important step was the appropriation of the monastery's spaces. Perpetual Eucharistic adoration keeps the sisters. A solemnly professed sister who had left has returned with the intention of persevering. They have the help of four trusted workers. They alone can continue the work of the laboratory, fidelity to the office and management of the recently built monastery, the fruit of a long history of fidelity and hardship.

The young people in Valserena are integrated with the young people of our novitiate and monastery, and have the opportunity to share common moments, with the help of the other solemnly professed sister who was Mother Manuela's second superior, in order to form a group conscious and united before leaving for an eventual return to the promised land of Soke.

The next and final stage will be the full resuming of regular life at Soké, the return of the youngsters in training and the re-opening of the monastery to guests and devotees, all of which is conditional on the definitive conclusion of the legal separation of certain sisters from the monastery. Until this is done, everything remains on hold.

M. Maria Francesca Righi
Pontifical Commissioner. –

e-mail: mfrancesca.righi@gmail.com

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The community is made up of 8 solemnly professed people; two temporary professed; a novice and a postulant. Currently are absent from the community. S Agnès and S Brigitte are both at Joy, S Brigitte for health reasons. Average age: 48 years, medium age: 45 years. Since the last general chapter our community has experienced significant changes.

The election of a Malagasy prioress, M. Angela, in December 2022 With this election, the foundation is taking deeper roots in Malagasy soil. We celebrated a simple profession, taking up the habit and entrance of one postulancy, an intern has just started a one-year internship. But we had two departures: a novice and a postulant, both at the end of their training stage. We are continuing the experiment of sending two of our aspirants to school. They are now in second and first grade. Our brothers from Maromby have re-established the training for young Benedictine, Poor Clares and Cistercians, the FTIMM: inter-monastery theological training in Madagascar. Our young professed sister is participating. This year, the community benefited from a “self-knowledge” session and a six-month course on “how to live in community”.

Community life: To have more time for reading in the morning, we have rearranged our schedule. Rising brought forward by a quarter of an hour is at 3 a.m., lauds at 6:30 a.m. and third at 8:45 a.m. Work time after shift is delayed by $\frac{1}{4}$ hour. We thus have 2 and half hours between the end of the vigils and lauds followed by mass, to devote to prayer and lectio. After three months, we evaluated this time of experience. All the sisters appreciated this long time after vigils. We are therefore maintaining this change of schedule but resuming getting up at 3:15 a.m. On Sunday Lauds is celebrated at 6 a.m. Our chaplain, a secular priest, extends his stay with us for an entire year. We really appreciate having mass every day.

A monastery is apparently still under construction. This is true for us. On the guest house side, we are building 10 additional rooms for guests. By looking for ways to earn a living in the community without always depending on outside help, advice and encounters that we could call providential, guided us towards the work of the bakery. It has been more than three months since this new work began and it is showing promise. We are also planning to build a workshop for making and selling bread. Currently, bread is made in our biscuit factory which is located in the monastery and which is already too cramped. We need to build a suitable workshop.

An accountant who works in the “FIC international expertise” accounting group came to help the accounting sisters manage our economy, she encourages us to continue this bakery work. On the agricultural side, we want to become self-sufficient in rice. The number of rice fields was increased and we tried growing rice on “tanety” i.e. on dry land.

For reforestation, we have created nurseries and our forest is already being embellished with trees other than eucalyptus.

At the end of the year, in November, there will be the presidential election. We hope that the social climate and security of the country will not be too impacted during this period. Also don't forget Madagascar in your prayers.

Mvanda House Report for RAFMA 2023 - 61*

The Community of Our Lady of Mvanda is made up of 11 solemnly professed sisters, two of whom are in Italy, one for health reasons and the other to assist her elderly mother; and one sister from the Community of Etoile-Notre Dame in Benin, 7 temporary professed, 3 novices and 7 aspirants.

SOCIAL CONTEXT. At the time of writing this report, the situation in the country is very fluid and worrying, in a troubled electoral climate. We are worried about the situation in the East, where our brothers in Mokoto are suffering a lot, along with the entire population of North Kivu, especially because of the displaced people they receive at the monastery.

COMMUNITY LIFE. In terms of our community life, several events have taken place since the September 2022 GC, and this has helped to further strengthen our community relations. At the beginning of Advent, we had the community retreat preached by our bishop, Msgr. Bodika, SSP. A month later, we experienced the death of Bishop Mununu, Bishop Emeritus of Kikwit and our brother OCSO. From January 31 to February 3, there was a visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to the DRC, and four of our sisters had the joy of meeting him on the occasion of the testimony requested by the organizers, at the Apostolic Nunciature. For the solemnity of our Founders, like all the houses of the Order, we solemnly celebrated the day of Cistercian (and monastic) vocations. In May, according to the indications given by the Abbot General in Assisi, the Bursar of the Generalate (and adviser to Dom Bernardus), Dom Emmanuel Cottineau, made an economic visit. He noted the difficulty of Mvanda to support itself, despite multiple efforts, with a self-financing result of 20%! Several hospitalizations of the sisters took place during this year, including the operation of an aspirant. The sessions of our continuing education program have continued regularly, with quality sessions. During this year, we welcomed two nuns from other congregations in Kinshasa, who had asked to be able to revitalize themselves, one for a year and the other for 6 months.

LITURGY. On the one hand we must ensure greater punctuality, especially at the Office of Sext, participation in the Offices is very regular and responsible. On Easter night one of our aspirant received the sacrament of baptism and first communion. Two sisters, a young professed and a novice, participated in the Third National Eucharistic Congress in Lubumbashi, being part of the Delegation of our Diocese of Kikwit.

TRAINING. At the level of initial formation, since the GC we have had three great sessions for young novices, postulants and aspirants open to young people in formation from neighboring Congregations, which saw the participation of at least 90 people each time. As for the continuing formation of the Community, we have organized three other sessions at a rather university level lasting 6 days each, (on the French STEM model) in which our brothers from Kasanza and other religious are present. and lay people of Kikwit. This year's themes: Philosophy, Prophetic Books of the OT. and Saint Augustine. We also followed a very interesting session on emotional maturity, reserved for our community only. Since April, two young professed sisters have been attending a home economics school with an Opus Dei structure in Kinshasa.

WORK. Remains an important challenge for us and has not yet been resolved. The serious economic, social, administrative situation, and above all the lack of electricity particularly in our region, does not allow the development of work that could ensure the livelihood of the Community. We continue to cultivate our cassava and corn fields, we have expanded our pigsty and our rabbit breeding. The small laboratory for the manufacture of ointments, creams and liqueurs is temporarily suspended, due to the absence of the sister in charge. The production of other ointments and herbal teas is mainly offered on the Kinshasa market. This year, the sale of hosts and Easter candles had a remarkable drop, due to new competition, which surprised us and prevented us from finishing our stock.

It is always thanks to the generosity of our Order, Trappist Aid and our Motherhouse, Westmalle, that we can live!

CONCLUSION. We recognize that the Lord has led us during this period towards a greater awareness of our monastic vocation in a world with multiple challenges at the religious, social and security levels. By working to form our conscience, by organizing training sessions and meetings, we realize that we cannot keep this wealth only for ourselves. It becomes natural and beautiful for us to share with other ecclesial realities of the Diocese all this spiritual heritage which is given to us, And we take advantage of this report to thank AIM which allows us to carry out this formative project.

Our Lady of Kibungo 69*

RAFMA HOUSE REPORT 2023

STATISTICS AT THE TIME OF SENDING THE REPORT								
Prof Sol	Prof Temp	Nov	Post	TOTAL	Aver age	Med age	Abs	Non Stab
9	3	0	3	15	52	40	0	0

Since the last RAFMA regional meeting in *Seraphicum* in September 2022, the community of Notre-Dame de Kibungo has continued its process of growth.

Particular emphasis has been placed on formation, to which various people have contributed: A priest from the Diocese of Goma (RDC) gave us a session on philosophy, one from the Diocese of Bukavu spoke to us about the Pentateuch and one from the Diocese of Butare (Rwanda) explained a series of psalms.

We should also mention the talks given by our Father Immediate during his visit last summer and the session on monastic life given by Dom Armand. Our thanks to all.

In addition, one sister attended the *Ananie* session, and two young sisters spent time at the source, in Val d'Igny, following in the footsteps of our foundresses.

Efforts are being made to improve our liturgy. It's not perfect, but we're persevering in our efforts.

More punctuality at the various community exercises, as well as more recollection, would be welcome.

For more than a year, the community has been coping with the illness of one of our sisters (metastatic cancer). Our sister's faith, courage and smile are contagious. And the community is experiencing this in a renewed fraternal spirit.

We count on your prayers for her and for us; and we express to you once again our prayerful communion.

Order in the face of the wound of abuse

(Work requested from Sr. Maria Francesca Righi at RGM-1-2022)

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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.

An eight-point document on Marie Jo Thiel's lecture, prepared by md Rosaria and her council, was presented to the Praglia Rem, which we worked on and supplemented with comments on the topic.

Again Md Rosaria presents a protocol proposal that could be valid for all our Italian homes... and not.

1 - 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)¹.

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.

¹ 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).

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....

What does it mean to create a safe environment? An environment in which there are rules and procedures². 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 mediatised, 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.

² 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.

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 soberer and in the style of constitutions.

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 Sauv  report, in Spain, recently in Italy etc.³

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 Francis⁴. 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 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

³ 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

⁴ BRUNO FABIO PIGHIN, *The New Criminal Law of the Church*, Marcianum Press, 2021.

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." ⁵

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*".

⁵ ERIK VARDEN, *Letter to the OCSO*, <https://coramfratribus.com/archive/a-letter-to-the-ocso/>

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)*⁶ . 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 Varden⁷ 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,*

⁶ DYSMAS DE LASSUS, *Crushing the Soul. Spiritual Abuse in Religious Life*, EDB 2021.

⁷ ERIK VARDEN *On abuse again*, 6 -01-22, <https://coramfratribus.com/archive/on-abuse-again/>

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.*

*...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,

1. 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 Chapter⁸, 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.

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 things*⁹.

4. 4. For to enjoy a thing is to adhere to it with love, moved by the thing itself. Conversely,

⁸ 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.

⁹ At the end of the first book of *De Doctrina Christiana* (I, 3.3.4).

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 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...¹⁰

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*.¹¹

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)

In fact, albeit with due limitations, the mother or father of a community has jurisdiction¹² 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?¹³

¹⁰ 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?

¹¹ Cencini-Lassi (ed.) *La formazione iniziale in tempo di abusi*, Sussidio CEI.

¹² Can this term also be used for nuns?

¹³ For this reflection, which is indispensable and cannot be postponed, we give only a few elements.

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 governance¹⁴ :

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.*" "

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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 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

¹⁴ 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 .*

¹⁵ Cristiana Piccardo, *commentary on the Constitutions*, pro manuscripto

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 abbess 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" ¹⁶

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

¹⁶ Aelred Sermon 63 to the Shepherds

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.¹⁷ "

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'*¹⁸ .

"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 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

¹⁷Cristiana Piccardo, *Commentary on the Constitutions*, pro manuscripto.

¹⁸ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, Instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Institutes of Apostolic Life, 11-05-2008)

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
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The 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</i>	Absolute autonomy at all levels (e.g. external contacts, phone calls,

<i>you have done)</i>	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).	

3. 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."¹⁹

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 communion²⁰ .

"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 Lord²¹ ."

¹⁹ *The service of authority and obedience* 19

²⁰ 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.

²¹ MAURO GIUSEPPE LEPORI, *The exercise of power in the Cistercian family*, *Collectanea* 2002, *L'exercice du pouvoir dans la Famille cistercienne*, p. 236-248.

Echoed by

"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 humanity²² ."

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."²³ 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

²² M ROSARIA SPREAFICO *Filial fatherhood: some aspects of the service of authority*, Vita Nostra no. 16. (2019) p. 15-25.

²³ KAROL WOJTYŁA , *Raggi di paternità*, in *Tutte le opere letterarie*, Bompiani 2001, pp. 901.

"... 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 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.²⁴ "

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 abuse²⁵ 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

²⁴ IBID.

²⁵ 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.

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.

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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OPINION ON THE ROLE OF REGIONS IN THE LIFE OF OUR ORDER TODAY BY DOM CLEMENT

Introduction: I begin by thanking Dom Jean-Bosco for trusting me by asking me to provide this communication. It focuses on the role of regions in the life of our Order today. More precisely, it will be a question of sharing my opinion on this role by focusing on the region which is ours, that of the RAFMA. Hence the need, first of all, to have an idea of this role and to know what our Constitutions and the last General Chapter say about it. It is only in second place that my personal opinion will come into play on the role of the regions and in particular that of our Region of Africa and Madagascar in the life of our Order today.

1. The role of the regions in the life of our Order as it appears in our Constitutions as well as in the last general chapter.

The reality of the regions in our Order was taken into account by our Constitutions in number 81, where the following was stipulated:

“The communities of the Order are grouped into regions approved by the General Chapter. Regional conferences stimulate communion and fraternal cooperation in each geographic area and in the entire Order. Regional conferences may be composed of both monks and nuns.

ST81.A

Such meetings of superiors and delegates are very useful for the preparation of the Central Commission and the General Chapter. They also provide the opportunity to deal with current issues or issues of common interest, even if they do not concern the Order as a whole.

ST81.B

Each regional conference is represented by a superior on the Central Commission and can send a non-superior delegate to the General Chapter.

ST81.C

These regional conferences, through their reciprocal relations, establish a dialogue between diverse nations and peoples which is likely to increase the appreciation of the common heritage of the Order.
»

The Constitutions clearly define the role of the regions: they stimulate communion and fraternal cooperation in each geographical area and in the entire Order, they provide the opportunity to deal with current issues or common interest, even if they do not do not concern the Order as a whole, and they establish a dialogue between diverse nations and peoples which is likely to increase the appreciation of the common heritage of the Order. With regard to our Constitutions, the regions of the Order therefore do not constitute a parade institution, but rather an organ through which vitality must be infused into the entire Order in terms of communion and fraternal cooperation. Each region, while having the faculty and duty to address the problems specific to it in its geographical area, is called to contribute to the good of the entire Order. The regions are therefore not structures called upon to close in on themselves in their own little world, but structures which allow the Order to take on local colors while remaining one and universal.

In this regard we can say that our Order, through the structure of the regions, has long been part of the logic of synodality, in the logic of unity in diversity with an increasingly emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity, as was revealed during the last general chapter and, before and as a prelude to this one, during the Central Commission of December 2021 which noted in its report the following: “In the opinion

General, the effectiveness of the General Chapter is greatly enhanced by the prior work of the Regions, given that the preparatory work can contribute significantly to the treatment of complex issues. Sometimes it has been suggested that if Regions were given additional powers, they might be able to undertake additional work in preparation for the General Chapter and perhaps even provide new resources, within our current structure., to address specific questions. In many respects the principle of subsidiarity, whereby matters are dealt with as close to the local level as possible, already works well in our Order, but it has been suggested that the next General Chapter could be an opportunity for a study concrete way in which it could be even better implemented. »

Unfortunately, in the last general chapter, time did not allow for deepening the theme of the role of regions, as appears in the evaluation of the general chapter where Commission 9 notes the following: "We deplore that very important issues such as the protection of minors and the role of the regions were worked on too quickly in the final. We are aware that the chapter had to urgently deal with a considerable number of particular outstanding situations. Should we consider a chapter in 2 years? » This theme of the role of the regions therefore remains an open theme for the next general chapter, but also for our regional conferences, like the one which brings us together now. What is my personal opinion on this topic, that is what we will see now.

2. My personal opinion on the role of the regions in the life of our Order today.

Here I will begin to emphasize the issue of subsidiarity which was highlighted at the last Central Commission as well as at the last General Chapter. This is a very important point in our current world where we are more sensitive to cooperation, collaboration, constructive discussion, in short, synodality. It is this subsidiarity which allows the region to be something other than a sounding board for the central pole of the Order, that is to say the general chapter. This means that if we follow the logic of subsidiarity to its limits, questions that can be resolved at the regional level must be able to be resolved without waiting for the general chapter. It is still necessary to determine with sufficient precision the type of questions whose solutions can be found at the regional level. There is therefore a balance to be found between the central pole and the regional pole, a balance which is the guarantee of true unity.

The emphasis placed on the question of subsidiarity appears, in my opinion, to be an opportunity for a region like ours. This is potentially a springboard for us to dare local solutions to our specific problems such as the fact for example that we hold our regional meeting in Scourmont in Belgium instead of holding it in our African region, the fact that we have for a very long time, for most of the monasteries in our region, problems at the level of training, at the level of the economy and finances, and recruitment too. It is true that the Order as a whole carries these specific concerns with us, but it is up to us to open paths, to dare solutions, to risk making mistakes in making choices, in taking decisions with the support of the Order. This momentum will allow us to also propose, regarding problems of more general interest, solutions coming from our African cultural era and our multi-millennial civilization.

Playing the subsidiarity card will require regions, particularly ours, to make significant efforts in terms of training. Because without well-trained subjects in several areas, a region like ours will not have the capacity to deal with sometimes complex situations which require a great degree of analysis and reflection before reaching conclusions that hold up. It is true, our main work is prayer, but the monastic tradition reveals to us that it does not hate knowledge and high knowledge. The question of training is proving crucial at this moment when on our continent the call once launched by one of the greatest African scholars on earth, Professor Cheikh Anta Diop, who addressed his students in these pathetic terms: "There is only one salvation, that is direct knowledge and no amount of laziness can exempt us from this effort. It will absolutely be necessary to acquire direct knowledge. With equal training, truth triumphs. Train yourself, arm yourself with science to the teeth (...) and uproot your cultural heritage. »

These words resonate more and more in Africa, particularly at the political and religious levels. And it is very quickly reconnecting the new African generation to the long history of our continent and our

civilization which was, according to so far irrefutable scientific data, the first great civilization of history and the mother of all civilizations on earth. The young people who knock on our doors are young people who have an increasingly vivid and more precise awareness of this long history and how we have come to be considered as the less than nothing on earth, continually in need of infusions. to live and survive. (Cf. The question of secret colonial agreements in the appendix). This Africa which finds itself and regains confidence in itself requires from us locally another look at our monastic formation at the level of our region, but also, certainly, at the level of other regions, because we hear, and more and more, that in certain countries of the northern hemisphere, there is a sort of failure of intelligence, of knowledge, of truth. It is important to note here that Negro-Egyptian Africa experienced the most stable political system in human history for millennia and this system was not democracy, but maatocracy, a political system based on three fundamental pillars at namely, justice, truth and solidarity. You see what the principle of subsidiarity opens up to: a vast field of possibilities which could affect, even indirectly, the political domain.

Because we must be able to draw certain consequences from the third role recognized for the regions by our Constitutions in statute 81.C: "These regional conferences, through their reciprocal relations, establish between diverse nations and peoples a dialogue which is likely to make people appreciate more the common heritage of the Order." An aspect of the common heritage of the Order which goes in the direction of a dialogue between diverse nations and peoples is expressed in paragraph 1 of Constitutions 3 which states: "The Cistercian form of life is cenobitic. Cistercian monks seek God and walk in the footsteps of Christ under a rule and an abbot in a stable community, a school of fraternal charity. Because all brothers form one heart and one soul, everything is common to them. Bearing one another's burdens, they fulfill the law of Christ and, participating in his sufferings, they hope to enter the kingdom of heaven. » A school of fraternal charity, we are ad intra as a community whose members must learn to love one another, but we are also ad extra as called, as a community, to radiate from love of Christ on our contemporaries.

Can we radiate the love of Christ around us while being unaware of the vital problems of our contemporaries and the challenges they face, while remaining silent about the flagrant injustices of which they are victims? In other words, can a region like ours remain insensitive to all that our contemporaries endure of injustice and wars imposed by extra-African powers (distinguish the people from political regimes which are for the most part oligarchies dominated by voracious multinationals)?

Can we remain silent in the face of the instability of the greater Congo, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and other countries which are experiencing the same situations of destabilization when we have the means to know scientifically that this destabilization has been consciously maintained for a very long time? for a long time at the cost of thousands of deaths each year. Can we remain silent in the face of these situations when we come from these countries and we are in an Order that we share with brothers and sisters from countries which maintain these destabilizations with the aim of continuing to freely exploit the enormous wealth of our country? continent? Is it possible for constructive and well-documented exchanges to be initiated in our Order on these questions so that our brothers and sisters in destabilizing nations can awaken to the reality which is often unknown and unsuspected on the other side? Because the fraternity and charity that we experience as an international Order must in a certain way be able to reflect on our contemporaries on both shores, so that our world can finally leave the dark valleys of domination and exploitation and of international terrorism to establish themselves on the sunny heights of justice and peace! It is not for us to become politicians, but as Father Abbot General said the day before yesterday, "what we can do to bring to the attention of decision-makers the difficult situation of the Mokoto (and of Africa), we need to. » It is about becoming watchmen in the night of this time and awakeners of conscience for a world free of wars, a world where universal justice and fraternity embrace each other!

Conclusion: In conclusion, we can say that the structure of regions provided for by our Constitutions is an important thing insofar as the principle of subsidiarity is honored and encouraged and insofar as each region like ours draws all the consequences in order to to fully accomplish its mission in the

service of the communities that compose it, in the service of the entire Order and, beyond that, in the service of all humanity. It is to be hoped that the next general chapter will return to this theme of the role of the regions in the life of the Order, and that particular emphasis will be placed on the principle of subsidiarity in connection with the synod on synodality.

ANNEX ON THE ELEVEN SECRET COLONIAL AGREEMENTS SUBSCRIBE ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

Agreements signed between the former French colonies and their former administrative authority, France, although little known to the general public, are agreements signed on the eve of independence and which allowed the latter to continue to control its territories in many areas, such as the military, the political, but above all economic agreements.

In this article, lebledparle.com offers you the eleven main components of these agreements.

1. Colonial debt for reimbursement of profits from colonization

Newly independent states must reimburse the cost of infrastructure built by France during colonization. We are still looking for details of the costs, the evaluation of the benefits and the payment conditions imposed by France on African countries.

2. Automatic confiscation of national financial reserves

African countries must deposit their financial reserves with the Banque de France. Thus, France has "guarded" the financial reserves of fourteen African countries since 1961: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

Thus, the governance of monetary policies remains asynchronous and incomplete due to the fact that they are managed directly by the French government, without any link with the financial authorities of countries such as CEMAC or ECOWAS. Thus, due to the conditions which bind banks in economic and financial zones, they are obliged to keep 65% of their foreign exchange reserves in an operations account held by the French Treasury, as well as an additional 20% in order to cover "the financial risks".

In addition, banks in CFA zones impose a credit limit on each member country equivalent to 20% of state revenues for year N-1! Although the BEAC or BCEAO have greater withdrawal possibilities from the French Treasury, these withdrawals must be subject to the agreement of the French Treasury. The final decision therefore rests with the French Treasury which itself invested the reserves of African countries on the Paris stock market.

In other words, 80% of African financial reserves are deposited in an operations account controlled by the French administration. The two banks in the CFA zone are African in name, but do not decide any monetary policies on their own. Worse, the countries themselves do not even know what share of financial reserves belongs to them as a group or individually as a country, but held by the French Treasury administration.

3. The right of first refusal on any raw or natural resource discovered in the country

France has the first right to purchase the natural resources of the land of its former colonies. Only after France said, "I'm not interested," were African countries allowed to look for other partners.

4. Priority to interests and French companies in public markets and public calls for tenders

In the award of public contracts, French companies have priority over the award. Although African countries can get better value for money elsewhere.

As a result, in most former French colonies, all the economic levers of the countries are in the hands of French expatriates. In Ivory Coast, for example, French companies own and control all major public services including water, electricity, telephone, transport, ports and the major banks. It's the same thing in commerce, construction and agriculture.

5. Exclusive right to supply military equipment and train military officers of the colonies

Thanks to a sophisticated system of scholarships, subsidies, and the "defense agreements" attached to the colonial pact, Africans must send their senior officers for training in France.

6. The right for France to deploy troops and intervene militarily in the country to defend its interests

Under what are called "defense agreements" attached to the colonial pact, France has the right to intervene militarily in African countries, and also to station troops permanently in fully managed military bases and installations. speak French.

7. The obligation to make French the official language of the country and the language of education

An organization for the French language and the dissemination of French culture was even created. It is called the "Francophonie" and has several satellite organizations. These organizations are affiliated and controlled by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs.

8. The obligation to use the CFA franc (franc of the French colonies of Africa)

Although this system is not shared by the European Union, the French colonies are forced to use the FCFA exclusively.

9. L'obligation d'envoyer en France, un bilan annuel et un rapport d'État des réserves

Pas de rapport, pas d'argent. Le directeur des banques centrales des ex-colonies présente ledit rapport lors des réunions bisannuelles des ministres des Finances sur les ex-colonies. Ce rapport est ensuite compilé par la Banque de France et le Trésor français.

10. Renoncer à toute alliance militaire avec d'autres pays, sauf autorisation de la France

La plupart de ces pays ont seulement des alliances militaires avec leurs ex-colonisateurs simplement par le fait que la France leur interdisait toute autre alliance militaire.

11. L'obligation de s'allier avec la France en cas de guerre ou de crise mondiale

Plus, d'un million de soldats africains combattus pour la défaite du nazisme et du fascisme au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

REPORT OF THE REGION SECRETARY FOR FORMATION (English speaking)

My word of thanks and appreciation to you all dear fathers and mothers of the Region. This responsibility has given me opportunities to prove my ability as secretary since 2017. The last time we were in Notre Dame Benin in 2019 and now here in Scourmont, Belgium. Am glad that am able to be here thanks once more to all who worked hard Especially Dom Damiens Joseph and Dom Armand for the tireless efforts in providing the right documents.

Since the last Regional meeting held at Benin, many things have happened and there are many changes also in terms of formation. We are all aware that since Covid many formation programs were put on hold and it is just of recent that some were resumed.

In June the workshops of BECUEA (Benedictines/Cistercians of East Africa) were slated and one for the Novices was held at Our Lady of praise Butende on Self sustainability and Self-reliant and the signs of the time. This workshop was well attended as you will see in the Report of the Central Secretary. In July another workshop was held in Nairobi Karen for the junior Brothers and sisters.

The last time while in Benin I had humbly requested to be given some information from BECAN that deals with formation in Nigeria. And Fr. Benedict by then had offered to do so but with covid everything changed. However, for us from East Africa some of our members have attended courses at Namugongo Spiritual center. There have been scholarships given to our community through the association for the Religious in Uganda to foster ongoing formation and three sisters have attended intensive courses online for one month in view that they also teach other three members or persons as criteria for obtaining certificates in the courses covered. Some of these courses are Stewardship and finance. These courses will be continued in 2024 for another month and then they will be awarded certificates at the end. These sisters are very eager to share this knowledge with the brothers and sisters of the Region if means are devised where they can share by using google meet or zoom. This of course needs competent personnel in terms of communication and network.

There is also a course that was started by the Decastry for Institutes of consecrated life and societies of Apostolic life. The intention is to offer qualified formation experience in theology and law of consecrated life, that is magisterial formation on Canon law and practice. This course started in 2019 during the pandemic of covid to enable online formation of religious men and women. Through the Association of Religious in Uganda some women contemplatives have been given this offer and in my community Mother Abbess offered me this opportunity to follow this course. The Decastry has created a forum on its website called the estudium where all information and registration can be retrieved as well as fees

What are the targets? Or who can follow this course? Heads of services pertaining to the governance of institutes, episcopal vicars or delegates of consecrated life, heads of formation (formators), those responsible for formation programs in diocesan seminaries and international colleges, priests charged with animation and accompaniment of consecrated life, consecrated persons who wish to enhance their own ongoing education, those who have a research interest regarding ecclesial magisterium, Canon Law and praxis relating to the forms of consecrated life in the Church.

The estudium is divided into inter disciplinary and Canon Law. It takes two years consisting of two modules with a single final diploma. Classes are normally on Tuesday and Wednesday from 3:00 to 6:30 pm Roman time. They begin in the 1st week of November and end in the 1st week of June. Exams are in February, June and September. To obtain a diploma one has to pass the exams in various subjects and preparation of a final paper under direction of a lecturer. The course is given in Italian with simultaneous translations into English and Spanish. Here is the link if any is interested.

e-studium.org

How should we look at formation during this era? What should be considered as important especially in our region?

Recommendations

Pope Francis in His Apostolic constitution *Vultum Dei Querere* highlights the need for formation. "It is worldwide and a never-ending process No.13" formation should therefore be more directed to communion and fraternal life. In our African set up emphasis should be on formation to human, vocational, labor and service. While formation to service is the best path way to communion, our fidelity to the Cistercian charism is our first mission. Yes, truly our Cistercian life is Synodal, Cenobitic, typically ecclesiological. Our brothers and sisters should be helped in these areas so that those we form come out stable, rooted in the Gospel, faithful and able to harmonize between the real choices in a given situation and the core identity of the institute.

True, technology has proved helpful more so since after covid but it should not replace presence. Arranging helpful programs that will help facilitate the added years in formation especially for the nuns, to curb the anxiety of not belonging anywhere and keep them focused can be helpful, so that they don't lose interest in following their call to the monastic life.

Therefore, we need a unified spirit in our communities so that it can impart a single orientation to the upcoming generation.

Thank you

Sr. Elizabeth.

Testimony of monastic life for Formation

It is obvious to thank all those who saw us grow, saw us take the first steps of initiation into human, spiritual and monastic life. And the path continues. I am not coming to give a conference. But as I was asked, it is simply a testimony, at the end of the service of secretary of the Region.

It is since 2013 that I have fulfilled this service, which has allowed me to understand monastic life as a life of seeking God. And as John Cassian says so well: monastic life has a double objective: *the immediate objective is mercy* (purity of the heart) and *the ultimate objective is "what the eye cannot see, what the ear has not heard, what our hands have touched of the Word of life"* (1Jn 1:1-4), in other words, the final goal of monastic life is *the kingdom of God*.

And the entire tradition of the desert' fathers has shown us that it is not easy to achieve these objectives, since man is a slave of passions which lead him to swell with pride, in vain presumption of greatness. We followed that in this meeting, that it is a risk to send brothers and sisters to study, because, often they come back seven times meaner or more proud than they were before. The Abbot General and the superiors said that two conditions are necessary in this case: the exclusive love of Christ at the one hand; as well as the preservation of authentic humility at the other hand. The two Christian values push the nun and the monk to descend so that their exaltation will be greater after their studies.

What is the use of monastic formation?

Here our life has something to say to today's world which tends to close in on itself. These are values that expand the heart and strengthen the sense of belonging to the local and universal community. And makes the monk the citizen of the world, a universal brother, a messenger of peace and love (Frateli touti).

Indeed, what is the goal of monastic formation? The constitutions say it well: "to *restore divine resemblance to monks/nuns*" (Const n°45). The fence protects against dissipation and not against love.

Benedict also lived in troubled times and what he advocated is: "*that nothing should be preferred to the love of Christ*" (RB 4:21; 71:11). All who are at the monastery: brothers, guests and strangers, minors and vulnerable adult, all reflect the presence of Christ (Cf. RB 31:10). What interests Benoît is a way of thinking and acting that is both anthropological and Christological.

Love for Christ is translated into prayer: The Abbot General said that our formation must take into account the mystical aspect: that our communities become schools of prayer. Indeed, prayer is the answer to our desires.

Liturgical training must be put in place, so that "our spirit is in harmony with our voice" (RB B19:7). We have put in place formation structures from the Aspirancy to solemn profession.

We had to collaborate with the central secretary and each time there were sessions organized, he always published the summary in the News Letter of the Order. We

participated in the Formators Program (MFP) in Romme in 2017. In 2020 (January and February) we had sessions with Benedictines from Kinshasa: on Initiation into the mystery of the Liturgy, Book Two of Canon Law: *People of God*; on Solfas (music notes), on the Bible, on Moral Theology; on Psalter Book of Prayer par excellence; and many others. Recently in June 2023, we organized a session on several themes: Conflict Resolution, Communicating skills and Monastic Spirituality.

We recommend to strengthening the sense of belonging, to the community, to the local church and to the Order. We recommend revitalizing the sessions on current themes: environmental protection, synodality, and universal fraternity. The formation of formators for the region is necessary.

We thank the Abbot General and his Council, Dom Védaste *in absentia*, Dom Jean Bosco, and all of you present here for your support. And all the secretaries we worked with! "For weaknesses sorry, for any progress thank you".

God bless you!

Fr. Justin.