

# **MGM 2011**

**Conference of Dom Vedaste of Mokoto  
on Formation**

**Conference of M. Giovanna of Matutum  
on Formation  
Formation to Unity in Truth**

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## **Conference of Dom Vedaste of Mokoto on Formation**

The question of formation in the ocsa is very complex, for the monk or nun is called to be formed throughout his or her monastic life. In our Order's *Ratio* we speak of different aspects of formation, namely: the formative role of Cistercian *conversatio*, initial formation, continuous formation, specialist formation, formation in the spirit of the *Charter of Charity*. This programme of formation is intended for all the members of the Order.

When I began to work on the present conference, I had just read the working documents on the subject, which the Central Commissions (at Tilburg in 2010) had requested of Mother Lucia Tartara, Dom David Tomlins (Tarrawarra), and Mother Magdalena Aust (Maria Frieden). I was also able to glance at a few Regional Reports that touch on the matter. I found these texts most interesting, but they did raise a question: What remains for *me* to say? When, in spite of my limitations, I have endeavoured to put some thoughts together, you will notice that I have drawn not only on my own ideas; sometimes I have also been inspired by the works just cited. For whatever differences may exist between our various Regions, we share the same concerns regarding the area of formation. Having said as much, my contribution, without being exhaustive, will touch on the following four points:

1. the formation of candidates for monastic life,
2. the formative role of the community,
3. monastic formation and the challenge of modern culture,

4. a few suggestions.

## 1. The formation of candidates for monastic life

Monastic formation begins when we receive candidates and integrate them into the novitiate. This stage is very important and calls for keen discernment. The community that welcomes the young must discern their vocation. In his fifty-eighth chapter, St Benedict gives us a few criteria for discerning an authentic vocation. First of all, we entrust the candidate to *a senior [...] who is skilled in winning souls, to watch over them with the utmost care. Let him examine whether the novice is truly seeking God, and whether he is zealous for the Work of God, for obedience and for trials. Let the novice be told all the hard and rugged ways by which the journey to God is made.*

Thus, the first stage of formation is an initiation that occurs with the help of a senior, here presented as the novice master. St Benedict asks the formator to attend to the motivations of new arrivals. He should clearly communicate to them the essential elements of monastic living, while at the same time speaking of the mortification involved.

In our monasteries, indeed, formation is not simply a matter of the mind; it involves exercise in self-giving. One must give one's time to God in order to participate actively during the Divine Office. One must participate in the community's humble work and in *lectio divina*. We find a biblical role model in St Paul who, in *Acts* 18:2-3, is said to have joined forces with a Jew called Aquila and his wife Priscilla, for they exercised the same profession as he. They worked together as tent-makers. This passage shows us that Paul, for being an ex-Pharisee, a man learned in Scripture, and a great preacher of the Gospel, was also someone who invested himself seriously in order to earn his living by the work of his own hands. St Benedict reminds us of this in chapter 48: *'then are they truly monks, □ when they live by the labour of their hands, □ as did our Fathers and the Apostles'* (cf. *Constitutions*, 26).

Such an attitude is the monk's antidote to laziness, idleness, and dependency. In this regard, we are exposed to a temptation at the level of both initial and continuous formation. It concerns the whole community. I mean the temptation represented by the principle of minimal effort, inasmuch as we receive financial support from our Mother House or from benefactors. On the contrary, the gifts we receive from them, the fruit of *their* labour, should spur us on to concrete application of the principle, 'Ora et labora'. The young people who join our communities must be formed to this by the good example of the seniors.

## 2. The formative role of the community

The arena *par excellence* for our basic formation as monks and nuns is the community, understood as a school of charity. We are all called to spur one another on mutually as we work for the growth of our communities. Dom Eamon, our Abbot General, has pointed out that the purpose of monastic formation is the witness of a life based on love. His words echo those of Jesus, who said: people will recognise you as being my disciples if you love one another (cf. *John* 13:35). For that reason, St Benedict exhorts us to practise the virtue of mutual respect. We read that 'the young should reverence the old while the old should love the young' in *RB* 4, 70, and 71. When a younger person finds the community ridden with conflict, he or she will easily be discouraged. Each member is called to share in the responsibility of ensuring the community's growth. The young, too, must collaborate in the enterprise of their own growth and in the growth of the entire community.

A monk who always has an excuse or pretext for not participating in community exercises does not build up the younger brethren. No, all the monks and nuns, with their different God-given gifts, must participate in the building up of their own community. We find this point stressed in *Ratio*, 12: 'A community's ability to form new members depends largely on its having a unified spirit so that it can impart a single orientation to the upcoming generations.' This is equally true in African tradition. When young boys are initiated into adult life, the method of formation followed is above all that of forming them in the community's particular genius for living together [savoir vivre]. The cohesion of this community permits them to discover the various talents of their elders. Lovely examples drawn from nature likewise help them grasp the validity and sense of community life – e.g. the unity and organisation of bees and the excellent fruit of their labour, honey. In order to prevent the risk of harm done to social harmony, a

series of sanctions punish transgressors. For example, an elder who dares to scandalise the group is sequestered; a young man unable to rise to the stakes of initiation is restored to his mother, where he may mend his ways before resuming initiation.

These African anecdotes permit me to speak of a number of similar challenges that are in store for us in the area of formation.

- It may happen that we close our eyes to signs of manifest psychological imbalance in our candidates. For lack of vocations, we are sometimes drawn into the trap of simply wanting to make up numbers. We are bold to take on difficult cases in the belief that we are on our way out of the vocations crisis. There is no denying it: with recruitment of this kind, the future of the community is at risk.

- Another challenge in interpersonal relationships regards class conflicts or bids for power. For instance, since I am a monk-priest I consider the others as second-class monks. St Benedict warns the priest against the risk of a superiority complex. In his sixty-second chapter he says: 'If an Abbot desire to have a priest or a deacon ordained for his monastery let him choose one who is worthy to exercise the priestly office. Let the one who is ordained beware of self-exaltation or pride.'

- Further, we must be on our guard against the dangers of nepotism and tribalism in our communities. If the superior, or the formator, creates a privileged class at the heart of the community in the pursuit of interests that are not explicitly acknowledged, the community runs the risk of being divided. As a result, the group that feels hurt will not experience the peace and joy of fraternal life. It may then happen that the young are turned away from the purpose for which they came to the monastery. If there is too much justified murmuring in the community, it will necessarily end up losing its formative vitality.

In *Vita Consecrata*, 67, Pope John Paul II calls to mind the privileged role of the community in the area of formation: 'Since formation must also have a *communal* dimension, the community is the chief place of formation in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Initiation into the hardships and joys of community life takes place in the community itself. Through the fraternal life each one learns to live with those whom God has put at his or her side, accepting their positive traits along with their differences and limitations. Each one learns to share the gifts received for the building up of all, because "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7).'

- Another challenge that sometime arises touches the delicate relationship between the community and its Father Immediate. To ensure a harmonious relationship, and with a view to its own maturing, the community should be mindful that transparent dialogue with the Father Immediate is necessary. It must no less be able to take onboard and put into practice his directives.

To sum up: the new arrival should find the monastery to be a haven of peace, dialogue and mutual assistance. It is the arena within which brothers or sisters are disposed to forgiveness during the conflicts that inevitably arise in human lives. The shared joy of festive occasions constitutes another way of defusing a tense atmosphere and of fostering unity (cf. *Ratio*, 13-14). Our own formation, as well as that of new candidates, ultimately depends a great deal on the atmosphere that reigns in the community.

### **3. Monastic formation and the challenge of modern culture**

For a long time, one often spoke in Africa about adaptation and inculturation of the Gospel message, and indeed about the inculturation of monasticism. There was at the time a sense of the necessity, over and above inculturation, of deepening our faith by trying to make the Gospel take on certain traditional values. At the present time, there is less talk along these lines. Quite on the contrary: in the light of the phenomenon of globalization, many people are fearful of being left behind if they refuse to play the game. We are currently living in a pluralist, multicultural world. A certain form of ideologically dominant globalization is, in the name of secularity [laïcité], about to level humanity down to the lowest common denominator. We should desire everyone to be like everyone else and to live like everyone else. Modern means of communication face us with an information highway running globally. Clearly, these means of communication can also, in some ways, be useful to us, but we must show great discernment in our use of them. Everything depends on what we are looking for.

The young people we recruit today are products of this environment, fascinated by a new global culture, a culture that develops at dizzying speed. We may ask ourselves what kind of formation we may offer these young people while remaining faithful to our Cistercian charism. Faced with the steamroller of a new global ethics, tending towards secularism, are we sufficiently well armed to safeguard our Cistercian identity?

Another factor, arising out of the rapid development of our society, is the multiplication of educational institutions at university level, the working out of new sciences. Young and old meet at university [to prepare] for life's battles. The race for degrees guarantees people a better future.

In the preparatory documents for this Chapter, it was said that formators must listen to those in formation. Sometimes they do not hesitate to suggest, for instance, that all the monks and nuns might benefit from specialist formation at university. In monasteries of monks, young brothers ask themselves why all the brethren should not proceed to ordination? Why could we not do what other Orders do, and send all the young in formation to seminary or university? It is not always easy to provide an answer that will satisfy. And according to the *Ratio* it is not beyond possibility that one or other monk or nun may follow a course of specialist formation according to the needs of the community. For the rest, for those who must pursue their formation at the heart of the community, we cannot escape a question like this: How do we form monks or nuns in a way that nurtures their flourishing in Cistercian life while developing their talents for the service of the community? When questions such as these are posed squarely, in a spirit of dialogue, they are welcome, for they challenge us to ask how we may improve the quality of our monastic formation for all. However, when they are posed by way of demand, in a spirit of possessiveness, they indicate a crisis of identity.

#### 4. A few suggestions

This is what monastic formation requires of us:

- 1) Cistercian *conversatio* as the basic element of formation;
- 2) the necessity of ensuring adequate intellectual and monastic formation for formators;
- 3) that we do not neglect continuous and personal formation in our communities;
- 4) human formation in the sense of paternity/maternity (to use an expression of our previous Abbot General, Dom Olivera);
- 5) that each monk and nun takes care to maintain the balance of community life by faithful participation in prayer, work, and *lectio divina*;
- 6) access to correspondence courses through the Internet;
- 7) spiritual accompaniment;
- 8) recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation.

By way of conclusion: intellectual and practical formation is useful for monks and nuns, but the example of each monk or nun is no less a precious tool in the transmission of the Cistercian charism. In a world that is continuously changing, we must be able to discern the signs of the times. We must be able, not only to pass on a given theoretical know-how to the young in formation, but to teach them how to live as monks following in the footsteps of Christ.



## Conference of M. Giovanna of Matutum on Formation

### Formation to Unity in Truth

If in the 20th century humanity singled out with certainty its greatest value in the word “freedom”, we can also say that the journey towards freedom – pursued with passion by modern men – has not actually created a freer world. Instead it produced a more unjust and confused world because freedom has been identified with the possibility of doing whatever one desires. In doing so, the human person’s desire has been dislocated from its goal: truth, goodness, beauty and eternal life.

If we have to identify the problem of contemporary thought marked by relativism, we have to say that this lies in the word “truth” or, better still, in the relation between truth and freedom. The falsehood of modern educative project lies in saying that “I am my own project”. Therefore the satisfaction of desire becomes my right. Every person has the right to pursue his own desire and no one – if he does not want to be branded as a tyrant – can interfere with this plan.

It is evident that if the truth imposed from the outside (authority, family, church, society, etc....) thwarts my desire, the truth is perceived as oppressive and therefore does not correspond to me, to my conscience. So we have left the young people at the mercy of their own desires. Not only that, but we have complied with and manipulated them through the media and fashions, reaping a fruit of death in artificial paradises of drugs, sex, alcoholism and pleasure. The elimination of authority is the abolition of the principle of growth, of the transmission of an experience, of the possibility to receive a legacy with which to confront oneself in order to build up, in one’s own turn, the good that we want to transmit.

The elimination of the “father” and, consequently, of the relation between freedom and truth is the great challenge to be faced if we want to educate our young people. The lack of the father is the great void which we discover as being behind their choice of not entrusting themselves and their “gentle” refusal to follow. They are afraid of being deceived once more and of undergoing additional violence.

On the other hand we find ourselves before phenomena such as that of the World Youth Day in which hundreds of thousands of young people participate and we conclude that the Church can still be their home.

Perhaps we have to concern ourselves more in listening to them or in understanding why gatherings such as these draw them.

A teenager from Moscow, for example, gives this testimony: “Why am I so keen in going to Madrid? The answer is simple: in the Church I have encountered something beautiful, and my life has been completely turned upside down. I go, therefore, to pray that this encounter be for ever. However, this journey is not possible by ourselves alone, we need stable points”.

For Tim, an Australian teen-ager of Sandhurst, this stable point was the word of his bishop Joe Grech. After the latter’s sudden death, Tim decided to continue his work with the young people and to devote himself in preparing and guiding them to the World Youth Day in Madrid, as well as to accompany them in a pilgrimage to Avila and Segovia only because his bishop was devoted to St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

At bottom, the heart or the conscience of the young people desires fulfillment: namely, a project that fulfills their desire, and fulfills it for ever. They desire a true proposal that can change their life, that allows them to experience something beautiful, that brings hope, that is real and meaningful. They desire this from us adults, even though they do not know how to express it or are not able to entrust themselves: they desire to encounter true, authoritative persons. Someone who tells them the truth.

The truth – not the satisfaction of desire – sets us free.

The Cistercian charism is so profoundly rooted in the truth, that St. Bernard summed up the twelve steps of humility in his four degrees of truth.

In the Cistercian spirituality the restoration of the divine likeness takes the form of a journey from the misery of self-knowledge (to know oneself in truth through humiliation), to a renewed acceptance of oneself, sacramentally in the hands of Mercy (by which one’s own misery is accepted and loved), to the sharing of misery in the community of those who are in the hands of the same Mercy (by which the misery of the other is accepted and loved), to the contemplation of Mercy itself. This experience is also described as a continual conversion from one’s own to the common, that is, from pride to the mercy that we all receive, lived out in a stable community, dedicated to the contemplation of God.

So, how do we transmit this charism to the new generations who perhaps do not even understand anymore the terms that we are using to describe it?

It can be transmitted only if we offer it as the experience that has given consistency and joy to our lives, either at a personal or communitarian level. It is not a question of competencies or of particular strategies, but that of entering into the creative and recreative action of the Holy Spirit. It is a question of fidelity to that which we were called above all as men, to our original destiny of priestly mediation between God and creation; of children in the Son through whom the whole universe acquires its voice to praise God.

To affirm the monastic life and the Cistercian charism as fundamentally ordered to make the human person's essential vocation shine forth is the challenge which the contemporary world - that seems to have completely lost awareness of it - throws at us.

This is why the anthropological question is more than ever essential. Education presupposes always a concept of the human person, a philosophy, and from this vision, it draws the method, namely, the way, the manner of accomplishing it (see working paper of M. Lucia of Naší Pani ).

Our Constitutions synthetically express the Cistercian anthropological concept, stating that the aim of the Cistercian formation is to restore the divine likeness in the person who enters the monastery to seek the Lord. It is evident that this work of restoration, and the Constitutions immediately specify it, is the project of faith and can be brought to fulfillment only within the sphere of faith and with the help of the Holy Spirit. This "form" which we want to restore in whoever comes to the monastery presupposes a vision of the human person in relation to his Creator, defined by the plan of salvation, which is fulfilled in Christ, leading the person back to the Father from whom he has strayed.

From this anthropological concept based on Revelation is derived the method, the way. For us the method, the way is to give precedence to the liturgical sacramental life, the structure of which is already an image of that which ultimately we will be one day in heaven, a priestly people. In this way, which is the plan of God for us, we re-discover our true dignity, namely, to exist for the "praise and glory" of the Father, and not for power, success, pleasure and appearance.

Remaining at the heart of this fundamental vocation, we finally come to know who we are: children in the Son to the praise of the Father's glory and with this dignity we live out all the gestures of the *conversatio monastica* orienting them to the glory of God.

This liturgical sacramental vision, that is, this clear orientation to Christ, becomes transparent in the way in which the community lives out the *conversatio monastica*. The way of the liturgy is also the way of the Word of God, of *lectio* ordered to the Mystery, of work to support ourselves and to be free from external conditionings, of the tradition, of love for the beauty of the place and of the service to the community. In this vision, everything, from the humblest to the greatest gesture of our life, is held together and acquires meaning. It is the way to unity. By this way all of us re-discover ourselves finally in the house of the Father, children, all prodigal, forgiven and invited to the celebration of mercy. This way which is offered by the tradition of the Church and by our Cistercian Fathers who made of it the center of their contemplative spirituality is the royal way that leads us to charity and to unity.

Dom Timothy, in our visitation card of last July, wrote that Father Chrysogonus of Gethsemani frequently said that the praises of God were as important to the early Cistercians as charity and that the two could not be separated. This path must be continually re-taken and become the common project of the community, its common vision, the vision by which everything is oriented towards the celebration of the glory of God, by which all the observances are continually referred to this end. In our dialogues therefore we remind each other simply about the essentials of our vocation, with patience and with friendship and this continual mutual exhortation towards our common destiny creates a strong and enduring communion.

In this sense it seems to me that this vision surpasses the apparent dichotomy contained in the affirmation: "We have passed from a community of observances to a community of communion." By now it would be better to say, we are a community of communion through the observances or that we live out the observances in (a spirit of) communion. The spirituality of communion, Blessed John Paul II said, consists in abiding at the heart of the Trinitarian mystery which dwells in us and in seeing God's light shine on the face of every brother and sister who is beside us, in regarding our brothers and sisters in the faith as part of the Mystical Body and therefore as a part of myself, to whom I can offer a genuine friendship. To offer genuine friendship, Blessed John Paul II goes on to say, means to affirm the positive and to make room for the other; in one word, to live out mercy.

This vision moreover permits us to surmount the dichotomy between *Lectio Divina* and Liturgy and to find once again the unity experienced by our Cistercian Fathers between the *ruminated* word and the *celebrated* word.

The future springs up from common convictions and from common experiences, capable of giving form to our existence, from a common vision based on tradition and re-embodied in the present, in such a way that it can become experience for others. A liturgy lived out personally and as a community appeals to the young people. Many of our young members enter because they are struck by it, by its beauty, by the experience of the glory of God which has spurred them on to seek further, to question themselves on their future.

However, this common vision on the purpose of the monastic observance is not automatically transmitted. It implies a constant effort of reflection and choice in order that fidelity to Christ be continually renewed and sustained. Only in this way can the vision become experience. It becomes experience in verifying oneself with the tradition of the house and its authority, with the patristic and Cistercian tradition, with the magisterium of the Church. This verification must be carried on through honest dialogues and sharing of thought and responsibility in such a way that we can support one another in living out together the mystery of being the mystical body of Christ. The objective unity of the community is the foundation of education to truth in freedom because this unity is always a celebration of mercy that constitutes us and keeps us together. To educate to truth means to introduce (a person) into a life of mercy.

- If the journey of self-knowledge that one undertakes in the initial years of formation is clearly a journey of faith by which one encounters the mercy of God who saves us from our misery and sheds new light on our existential poverty and on the power and beauty of grace;

- if this journey is the return to creaturely dependence and is experienced in the welcoming acceptance of a community that receives me as son/daughter and is lived out in a spirit of openness to a spiritual mother or father who is sign of the heavenly Father's forgiveness, guide to the internalization of the *conversatio* and intermediary to relations of friendship with the entire community,

then the person finds the way to truth and can express him/herself freely with total dedication and responsibility.

Only the son, - Jesus warns us, and St Bernard knows it well when he says that in order to love gratuitously we must be sons, not slaves nor mercenaries, - is free. The son is free because he belongs to and acknowledges a center outside of himself. This center outside of himself becomes principle of discernment by which he can judge and decide, he can heal the ambivalence of his will and bend it decisively to the common good. Thus, the experience of mercy becomes a fount of thought, a capacity to ask ourselves every day the essential questions ("Ad quid venisti, Bernarde?") both at personal and communitarian levels and, therefore, it creates persons responsible for their own choices and capable of self-giving.

This is why to teach mercy to the young, it is necessary to teach them, first of all, to discern, that is, to give a right judgment on reality and on persons. The young do not know anymore how to think because their education is highly technical and they are accustomed to stop at appearance. Only the person who learns to discern can make responsible choices.

Oftentimes, the young, even those who seem to be very independent, are not free but are conditioned by fears and what others say of them. The relationship with an authoritative person who encourages openness of heart and poses all the existential questions, and the dialogues, starting from the novitiate period, educate one to a true discernment.

When a person knows the reasons, then he/she can walk on his/her own and becomes in turn a source of authoritativeness for others. He/she knows how to go against the current (conversion), and embraces obedience not passively, but in order to build up.

In addition, this person is no longer afraid to welcome persons who are poor and fragile. I am always amazed at the variety of persons whom St Bernard welcomed into his monastery with the conviction that the house of God is the place of peace for all, even for criminals...

I think that this welcoming acceptance is the tribute that we can offer to contradict the violence of the world. A community that assumes its weakest members is truly a community in which formation (to become school of charity) has been internalized. Mutual forgiveness and the patient acceptance of all: is this not perhaps the anticipation of the eternal life towards which we run together?



## Conference of Dom Patrick of Sept-Fons on Formation

One should not expect to find in this presentation anything new with respect to what I have already said by writing or orally 5 or 10 years ago, insomuch as it is true that, in the domain of formation, my profound convictions have not changed. All the more one will find here, consequently, specifications or nuances with respect to the past. The apparently impersonal aspect of these reflections will fool no one: they are all born from a long practice and from experience made in reality<sup>1</sup>, but they obviously have no pretension to be all-embracing.

**A sufficient clearness** about the vision and the principles to transmit is at the base of a veritable formation. A community must know what it is and what it wants in order to be truly forming. This clearness must first express itself in a practice. It is important that all adhere sincerely to that which our founding texts express and their realisations for our time, such as the Church gives us. Beware of brothers that “generously” commit themselves so that *the others* will have time to be true contemplatives! The sense of priorities is indispensable; their order ought to be verified and brought back to mind regularly. Under these conditions, the brothers will develop a capacity for judgment which distinguishes the persons from their points of view, the objective data from sentiments and which can sort out the true from the false without hurting anyone. The community thus finds itself made at once free and dynamic. Dynamic, since set apart from the false questionings which hinder communion and transmission; free, for these energies are intact for facing today's questionings. Those who enter can thus find the necessary support for bearing their weaknesses and the power for living a constructive experience.

It appears to me necessary to insist on the fact that, for assuring a quality formation, we ought to be able to count on a **team of formers**. Of course (as our constitutions and the *Ratio Institutionis* say), it is important that the abbot and the Novice Master not only work together, but above all work in the same direction, I mean that they be clear about the finality of the formation, on a “theoretical” level (objective agreement on that which our fundamental documents say), but also on a “practical” level: on the way of giving life *hic et nunc* to these fundamental orientations. In effect, in the domain of the formation, actions count as much as (and sometimes more than) words; it is from day to day that the young brothers receive, in the same movement, both the goal to pursue and the concrete means for getting there. If there is no harmony on these points between the formators, the work will be sterile and even counterproductive. But if that unity of thought and of action is to extend itself to all those who participate in the formation: teachers, sub-masters, work leaders..., in order to create a framework where the brothers will be able to grow in a coherent manner. It is not a matter here of a sort of external uniformity which prevents personalities from expressing themselves or from developing, but a kind of common consciousness which gives on the contrary a great liberty of expression to those doing the forming as to those who are being formed, for the risks of individualism or of division are considerably diminished. This requires, on the part of the formers, a real capacity of adaptation, a flexible quality which one must not, certainly, confuse with weakness, but which is the condition of balanced and constructive relationships. One must evidently expect from the formators that they be capable of reflecting together for evaluating with lucidity their work.

To be efficient, the **formation** must be **global**, that is to say embrace all the aspects of life in a unifying perspective:

- The spiritual formation is certainly the most delicate reality to assume and it is mainly in the contact with an “elder” that it can be done usefully, for the spiritual experience<sup>2</sup> is transmitted mainly in a living and personal manner. One must avoid believing that, being given the theoretical principles of spiritual life, one has done enough and that it suffices to let each brother make his way alone. Discouragement comes fast and experience shows that the brothers need to be reenergized regularly. In addition, one must be careful to not let more or less marginal practices take root under the pretext of fervor. In this domain, prevention is surer, and taking up again is often difficult, if not impossible, when certain behaviour is installed.
- The intellectual formation requires being closely integrated to the rest of the formation in order to avoid making it a domain apart, disconnected from real life. The harmony is not easy to put

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<sup>1</sup> The same with the imperative (one must, it should, etc...) is a facility of style and must be understood with an optative meaning.

<sup>2</sup> By this I understand: the concrete means of seeking God and of lasting in that research.



into practice but, if one does not try, one risks to have so-called “intellectuals” who make use of their “science” for escaping in particular the common life, of those who are always ready to go a thousand kilometers to talk about enclosure! The quality of the intellectual formation allows confronting the questionings without being destabilized or troubled; it avoids as well to be impressed by fashions which pass, in distinguishing the accessory from the essential.

- The human formation is more necessary and doubtless more delicate today than in the past. The young brothers are more marked by the framework (or rather the absence of framework) of their life outside the monastery, personalities are very little structured, often because of a chaotic family life. The community is asked for things which it is not prepared to give and which can go beyond its capacities. The discernment is sometimes long and one is tempted either to renounce receiving persons of this type (but then who would enter?) or to turn into a doctor. The middle path is often heavy to assume but it is the only one possible.
- The professional formation ought never to be neglected, for it is at the workplace that many constitutive elements of the life of the brothers are verified: attention to others, patience, sense of responsibility; one sees just how far brotherly love is a discourse or a reality. By giving the brothers the means of acquiring a true technical competence in one domain or another, one assists at the birth of a solid general equilibrium of the personality.

**Today's life** asks us questions that are not easy to identify, and to which is not evident to reply. Beforehand, one must avoid “mistaking the war” and understand that today's questions (and consequently the way of answering them) are not those of twenty or forty years ago. One must keep from exercising the young brothers in combats with which they have nothing to do and are not theirs. An analysis of the situation requires a lot of care and nuances, but it is indispensable for confronting the questions which will be asked to us.

I will point out here, as examples, three points:

-the fragility of today's youth. In the way of a paradox I will first say that this is perhaps less important than is often said. Confronted with situations which our generations have not been confronted with, I find that they do not react so poorly. They are said to be immature, but they are also better informed, more open to different realities and more lucid on the weaknesses of their time than we were before them. However it remains true that the conditions (in particular the family ones) to which a certain number of them are confronted with hit directly against some of the major requirements of our form of life, role of the father<sup>3</sup>, balance of sentiments, place of sexuality, management of conflicts etc... We must be conscious of these obstacles, without overemphasizing them. We must not play at being replacement fathers and even less as buddies; one must measure up to what point it is possible to accept their limits, to be capable of managing a certain gradation in the evolution of their attitudes, and not let ourselves to be impressed to the point of balking on the true requirements of our form of life; the youth, even wounded, have nothing to do with a life at reduced price which, instead of helping them to advance, would maintain them in their weaknesses.

-the use of today's media obligates us to make a serious reflection and delicate choices. The formation is very directly concerned here. The immediately accessible aspect of the virtual universe goes directly in counter current of our way of living which supposes a patient use of time and a sense of reality, barrier against illusions. However, it is not above all by fear of dangers in the usage of these means that we must react, but by a positive choice of fragile values which suppose a distance with respect to that which competes with them and could dissolve them. We must measure what we win and what we lose in the utilisation of these media and draw the practical conclusions which impose themselves. Certain ones are obvious, others are more nuanced, but one cannot escape questioning these things without major risks. One should note equally that, quite often, young arrivals are not surprised at our reservation in that respect; it is rather the contrary that would surprise them, for they do not have, with respect to this, a certain number of illusions which were proper to former generations.

-the differences of generation, of origin, of culture, require a particular attention today where the movements of persons are more numerous and more frequent than in the past. It is fortunate that they be in a society which has a tendency to harden the differences and the oppositions. We must obviously make distinctions:

-the difference of generations is a biological fact for which the resonances of common life are numerous. To live a certain “symphony” of generations is not evident and requires a reflection proper to each kind of generation: the elders for accepting their state, the younger ones for relativising their own.

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<sup>3</sup> It is not certain that it is more difficult to live life “without a father” (the case of current generations) than “against the father” (the case of preceding generations)!

This harmony is not given beforehand and must be sought after; one must distrust (here as elsewhere) easy slogans: the elders are incapable of evolving or the young ones have so much to teach us, etc... The true challenge seems to me to one of transmission, I will come back to it later on.

-the difference of origin or of culture does not seem to me to need to be emphasized artificially as a barrier impossible to cross. Wherever they come from, the brothers are first of all men who have more in things in common than otherwise. It is necessary to pass from a sentimental perception of each other, or at any rate mainly sensitive, to a reflection capable of distance for analysing behaviour (and firstly one's own!); one may thus relativise many differences and count on a solid and large common fund. The differences, better put in their place, are thus also better respected and better integrated in a whole which enriches it. This is a decisive path in their formation.

A lucid process of formation must necessarily integrate the notion of **failure** and try to do it as positively as possible. Whatever may be our efforts and our good will, we will nevertheless hit against failures: errors in judgment and discernment, limits which are too profound to be overcome, use of time, unforeseeable faults, and resistances too strong for the work of God. We must neither be surprised nor discouraged nor, even worse, resigned. We are the servants of a plan which is not our own and we never have all the cards in hand. Human liberty is, for us as well, a mystery and the combat of darkness and light, and it is a reality that sometimes is tangible. Time, finally, the master of us all, is here a determinant factor: it reveals without pity our aptitude of building solidly on a solid base or putting up something provisory which will fall apart with the first gust of wind. Discerning the capacity of perseverance is delicate and never assured; without this work however, we build on sand. That is why the work of the formator requires a good dose of humility, of humor, of patience and of optimism. Always begin afresh (for all formation imposes repetition) "without tiring or backing away" (R.B.VII, 4<sup>th</sup> degree) must be the law of the formator. Failure puts him before his own limits (in avoiding guild as much as possible) and invites him to revise his way of doing things to act better in the future. Thus the formator is formed by his own work of formation!

To finish, I would like to emphasize that the formation depends a lot on our relationship to **memory** and to **its transmission**. Our epoch entertains an ambiguous relationship with its past: we adulate it or we scorn it but we are rarely lucid about it: precisely because it is seen first off as "past" and not as an element of transmission of memory. The rupture of memory, for a person as for a group, is something dramatic which leads to complete disorientation, to anguish and to lack of hope. Analogically, the group which is affected by the same sickness has difficulty finding its marking points, to make comparisons, to recognize itself inheritors more than creators or more exactly creators because inheritors. One of the lacking elements the most marking of the young brothers who present themselves is precisely that: they do not know what they are because they do not know from where they come (today's manipulations give a physical character to the problem which cause trembling). It is thus of the first importance that they meet people who are (at least nearly) clear about these questions and communities which live a balanced relationship with their memory. If this is the case, a sort of osmosis will happen by which the young brother will appropriate the common memory and will become in turn a "passer of memory," in enriching it with his own experience. If this is not the case, we will produce nostalgic or disoriented people. This is one of the major factors today, it seems to me; by seeking our own manner of confronting it, we are at the heart of the Church which lives by the same dynamic process.



## Conference of Dom Bernardo of Novo Mundo on Formation

### *Formation as Transmission of Life*

- 1) As I reflected over the theme of this sharing, “transmission of life”, there came to mind the text from St. Paul, “I handed on—transmitted—to you what I myself received” (I Cor. 11:23)
- 2) As a matter of fact, *that* has been my effort over the past 15 years—to pass on what I myself was given.
- 3) To pass on—not to improve—because it was in reality so very rich, especially in the years of formation.
- 4) Let me relate some of what I received in my formation and what I therefore know by experience that a monastery is capable of transmitting, and what I believe it is called to transmit.
- 5) In the first place, the monastery (Spencer) was the place where I received Christ. All of you know that I am a convert from Judaism, but I think that, especially today, this is the absolute that the monastery possesses and passes on, and not just to converts: “the unsearchable riches of Christ”; to know him as “the living Son of the living God”. This is what the monastery said to me from the first moment when I entered the guesthouse door: “Christ is God”.
- 6) The monastery by being itself gave me the Kingdom of God on earth. It revealed itself as the locus of beauty, holiness, struggle for fidelity, and an environment of human love. It occupies that place in my dreams up until this day.
- 7) In the monastic formation, *everything* was demanded of me. That was the central experience of the novitiate. Many were the times when I prayed the verse of the psalms, “I have reached the end of my strength” (Ps. 68:21)—which was the plain truth, and yet I was asked to keep on going.
- 8) In one interview with the abbot, I was asked, “What is the greatest sacrifice God could ask of you?” When I told him, he answered, “After we finish talking, go before the Blessed Sacrament and offer that to God.”
- 9) I did not experience this as inhumanity, but rather as an immense honor. I was being asked to be a man, and a Christian.
- 10) At the same time, I was constantly aware by discreet words, gestures, silences of the monks that to the extent that I couldn’t carry myself, I was being carried by the community.
- 11) Through spiritual direction, it was brought home to me that *nothing* is more important than hearing and doing the Father’s will—no matter how long you have to wait to find out what that will is. I learned that one must wait for a revelation and that God reveals his will to the one who waits for it in faith and desire.
- 12) One great surprise was the ambience of theological confidence I encountered in the monastery—the mysteriousness and sureness of faith. On telling my novice master that I was bound in conscience to leave the monastery because I experienced doubt at some of the formulations of Marian doctrine in one of the novitiate courses, I was told to “Doubt as much as you can”. Which I did, only to discover that paradoxically it was the way that brought me to peace and faith.
- 13) At another moment, when I felt my theological world was collapsing, an elder monk said to me, “Well, you’re a theologian, aren’t you? Every five years, it’s all going to come apart, and God will build it up again.”
- 14) Life in the novitiate convinced me that my vocation is not a burden. One day at *lectio* a jingle composed itself: “My vocation is my salvation.” One stays in the monastery because monastic life is one’s *salus*—in this life, and in preparation for the life to come.
- 15) Above all, I experienced myself as prayed for, loved, sacrificed for...and yet left to be completely God’s. It was something very special to be enfolded by paternal and fraternal chastity. (Chastity—monastic form of charity).
- 16) My conclusion: “I am no better than my fathers.” I say this with gratefulness and joy, not with bitter resignation. “A disciple is not greater than his master. It is enough if he is like his master.”
- 17) This is my wish, the wish I have given everything for as best as I can: that through the community of Novo Mundo and myself as its abbot, someone has received life—lives: God’s, the Church’s, the Order’s, the community’s, my own, and their own, most of all, God’s and their own.



## **Conference of M.Cecilia of Tenshien on Formation**

In Japan there is the saying: “children are raised by seeing the backs of their parents.” I believe that other Asian countries as well share the same way of thinking. This proverb implies that “forming a person is not something done according to a theory, but according to a model. A person looks at the model, studies it, accepts it, and by imitating the model he comes to life and develops.” This is an expression of a certain set of values. I will use this traditional view of education in Asia as a foundation to share my personal experience of “transmitting life.”

I believe you will all remember that on March 11 at 2:46 pm a tremendous earthquake of at least 9.0 magnitude hit the eastern region of Japan, that is to say, an area including Hokkaido which covers half of the eastern part of Japan. Following this earthquake a huge tsunami carrying waves of 15 meters high slammed into the coastal area. The tsunami reached the Fukushima nuclear power plant located in that area and in an instant the buildings and equipment were destroyed, enveloping not only Japan but the rest of the world in a nuclear alarm. Because Japan is an earthquake prone country reasonable precautions are in place, but this time, the scale of the earthquake and the height of the tsunami waves were far beyond any calculations. In one moment the tsunami destroyed coastal towns exceeding the highest probable estimates of 10 meter waves and a seawall of 2000 meters. At that moment we also felt the tremors of a big earthquake 3 times in our monastery. I turned on the switch to an emergency radio and listened to the “breaking news” of the earthquake. The radio repeatedly announced, “A big earthquake has struck, within 10 minutes there will be a giant tsunami; escape to high ground as quickly as possible.” You all know what happened immediately after that. My talk on “protecting and transmitting life” will be a modest sharing on what I felt and what I learned during the course of that time when Japan was particularly desperate to “protect life and to transmit life.”

Actually, when first I heard about the theme of this General Chapter, my simple question was, “What is this life that we transmit?” Now, I would answer in this way. The life that we pass on is “the life of Christ.” Beyond our limitations, weakness and misery, the pure grace of God dwells within us, i.e. the deathless and imperishable life of a child of God. It is the life of God dwelling within the body of clay of the human person made in the image of God, and this is the life that we protect, nurture and pass on.

**To protect life.** The following are the 4 conditions I have experienced for “protecting life.” 1<sup>st</sup>: To teach, to instruct and to command. 2<sup>nd</sup>: To listen, to receive, to follow, and to act. The 3<sup>rd</sup>: is to join both of these conditions together, so that finally mutual “trust” is present. Trust is an important element, because if there is distrust, doubt, hesitation or rejection between the two parties, “the bond of love” will be extinguished. And this means the possibility of death. In the case of the tsunami, it hit shore just a few minutes after the evacuation warning. It came surging in, not only once but several times. Instantaneous instructions and prompt obedience were the conditions for survival. In previous disasters in Japan, at the same time that an earthquake occurs there is continuous 24 hour radio and TV coverage in order to convey necessary information. For example, “where and on what scale have the aftershocks occurred. Is there a possibility of a tsunami coming or not? If so, after how many minutes would it come? How high would the tsunami waves be? What do we have to do now, what should we not do, what action must we take, etc?” is constantly broadcast. The survival of those listening to this information depends on whether or not they follow these instructions. On the other hand, we demand from those who provide the information, precise and accurate information and instructions on the necessary action to take. It goes without saying that for these information broadcasts a lot of prerequisite knowledge, experience, definite material, and accurate judgment are required.

**Nurturing Life.** This is personal, but I remember a conversation I had with my father when I was young. It was a conversation about the written Japanese character for “parent.”

Now Dede, (Dede is my nickname) The Japanese character for parent is made up of three parts, “tree,” “stand” and “see.” So a Japanese parent must stand up on a tree, and watch his children from above, he must teach them the right way to go and show them what must be done. And if there is danger, he has to jump down to save you.

Life is nurtured in the soil of love. Life, I think, is when someone gives you a look of love, to know that there is somebody watching over you always, and to grow up by accepting to follow that person. The meaning of the Japanese character for “life” is what God gives to those who pray to Him and are waiting for Him. “To nurture life” means to search for God’s will, and to repeatedly listen to Him and follow His will.

**To transmit life.** During the last disaster I learned there is nothing that can destroy the truth that man has been created in the image of God, and as such, is protected by the hand of God. It was an opportunity for me once again to reaffirm the pure grace of God. As the series of events of Japan's disaster unfolded I realized that the excellence of human beings is something rooted in our very nature. From the day of the disaster people from around the world stood close to us in this tragedy. Especially in Japan, every one surrounded the victims fulfilling their role with the utmost energy, supporting and helping one another. It was especially a pleasant surprise to see the response from the heart of the youth. In the midst of a harsh life under extraordinary circumstances, we saw the effort to conserve water and electricity voluntarily, the acceptance of shortages, being patient with inconvenience, drawing near to the victims in heart and prayer, and the good intention to find out what one could do. On the other hand, children seeing and hearing this trend in society received it, imitated it, and so began groping to find their own way of life. Japan's tragedy this time, 3 major disasters occurring simultaneously, earthquake, tsunami, and danger at the nuclear power plant was, in a sense, an event shaking the foundations of human existence. The experience of immeasurable fear, profound grief, and unfathomed anxiety was an experience of the smallness and powerlessness of human beings. However, what we experienced during that passage of time was that "lurking within this tiny, weak, miserable humanity there comes gushing forth an immeasurable power." That is to say, we reaffirmed the latent energy within in the redeemed person, however distorted by sin: the solemn presence of God's image, the supernatural power inherent in a child of God is released. I think it is this conviction that we are to transmit.

Life, how to live one's life, is passed on by repeatedly looking at and imitating. In this sense, the transmission of our particular way of life depends on how each one of us, called to a hidden monastic life, sincerely lives our own life. I believe that the transmission of life to the subsequent generations happens by their wanting to live by repeatedly looking at studying, receiving and imitating.



## Synthesis on Formation of Dom Bernardo of Novo Mundo

### *“Handing on the Life we have Received”*

It is useful to remember the background to the choice of the theme of formation as transmission of life for the General Chapter. As in other areas of our monastic life (father immediate, role of the abbot), we are rightly convinced of the great value of what we possess and what we have to hand on. In the area of formation, the difficulty we experience of forming candidates that persevere with joy in the monastic life forces us to a reexamination of our practice of transmission.

The central value that has emerged in the conferences given at the Chapter, whether implicitly or explicitly, as the necessary foundation for the transmission of life in formation, is that of *truth*.

The primacy of truth manifests itself immediately in the process of evaluation of candidates. Despite our eagerness to receive candidates and to be merciful in our response to their desire to enter, it is clear that objective discernment of the candidates' capacity fully to live our life is indispensable. Lasting harm is done to the community by admitting candidates that have no aptitude—and *eo ipso* no vocation—to our monastic way of life. It is likewise potentially harmful to persons who are admitted without the requisite qualities.

This same honesty should mark our presentation of the monastic project to the young. We are not a university, offering a program of higher studies; we are not a media center, offering unlimited access to internet and telephones; we are not the guarantee of a comfortable lifestyle or the fulfillment of the desire for power. We are a school of the Lord's service and the Lord's praise, a school of self-transcendence in which we aim to attain a common will—common among ourselves and common with Christ. Far from shocking the young, this honesty will attract them. They have not come to the monastery for the easy satisfaction of their desire—the outside world can give them more in this sense than we can—but to recuperate their identity as sons and daughters of God in Jesus Christ. This Jesus is often unknown to them at the time of their entrance—the whole scope of his power and love. We need to participate in the transmission to them of the “truth that is in Jesus”, not so much by catechesis as by evangelization.

In this initial formation, young monks and nuns must be helped to come to the truth of themselves. This saving self-knowledge comes through regular spiritual direction and through an ever growing gift of self to the one who is Lord of their lives. In order for spiritual direction to be fruitful, a relationship of mutual trust must be slowly and patiently constructed. With regard to self-donation, we must not be afraid of asking from those in formation everything that the Lord is asking of them. This will be ultimately experienced by them not as a crushing weight but as an honor and a call to correspond to the fullness of their spiritual identity. Here it will be important for us formators not to impose a sacrifice but to come to see the particular greatness of soul that the Lord is asking of each person and to call him to that greatness.

The community's commitment to truth expresses itself in its efforts towards ever greater unity. We are well aware that only the unified community is formative. A united vision is built and maintained by the teaching of the superior, the work of ongoing community dialogue and the living out of a coherent behavior on the part of all the brothers and sisters. Failures are inevitable in this process, but these in themselves can be productive as they stimulate us to gestures of pardon, to recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation and a renewed experience of ourselves as saved—again and again—by God's mercy. When this happens, the young will experience the monastery as “the house of peace, dialogue and mutual assistance” that they have a right to expect.

The abbot's contribution to all this is the faithfulness he manifests in corresponding to the common monastic vocation. He is an exemplar of truthful living—his relationship to Creative and created reality. He is permeated by a deep reverence for God, a spirit of honor extended to all his fellow human beings and a loving respect and delight in God's creation. This ever deeper “fear of the Lord”, based on the truth of who God is and who he is, will get him beyond such obstacles as favoritism and pride, and will enable him to overcome the tendency to discouragement and self-pity. It will also enable him to take difficult but necessary decisions with compassionated objectivity. It is advisable that he himself find a spiritual advisor, inside or outside the community, in whose company and friendship he can increasingly discover and accept the truth of his own self.

All these aspects of truth should lead us to *liturgical living*—to the constant praise of God who has made us and daily remakes us, more and more according to the form of the truly human and divine man, Jesus Christ. We gather together daily in the liturgy to declare: In Him, we have known the truth and the truth has set us free.

