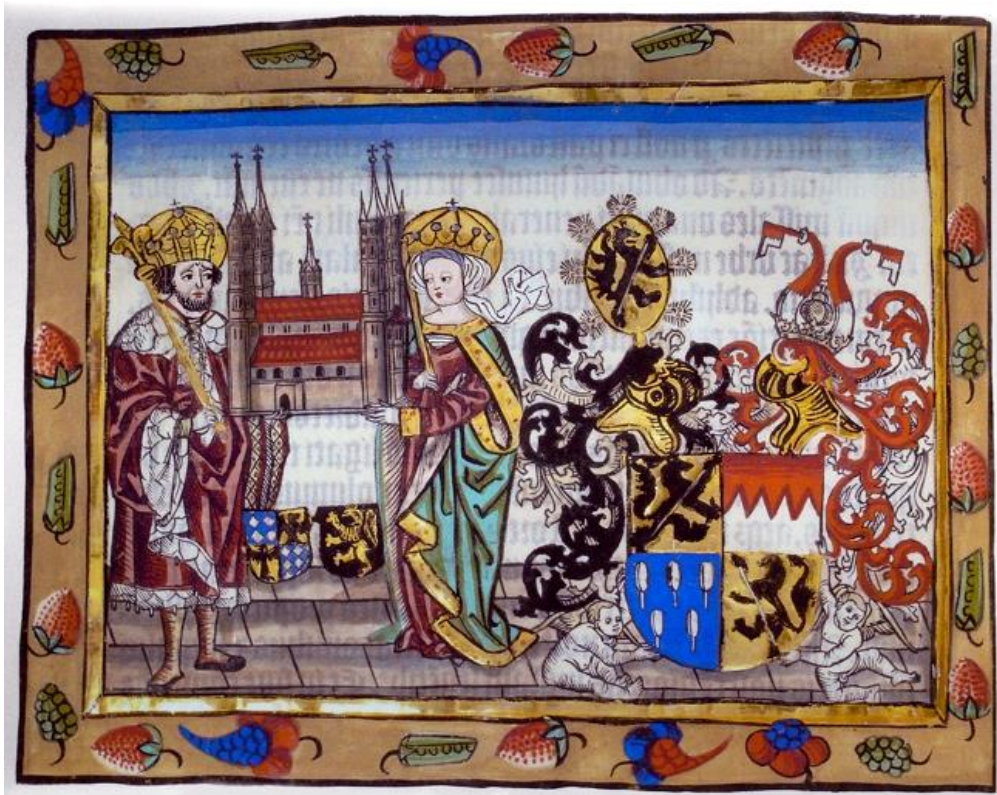


Conference from 10 September 2023 - International Congress of Benedictine
Oblates. Rome.

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Introduction

Gathered to move forward together, and to learn to live the wisdom of the Rule of Saint Benedict, coming from the four corners of the world, we constitute a cell of the Church, on this 10th September 2023, here and now, a cell of the Mystical Body of Christ, called to form a synodal assembly. A challenge, for sure, that of the Spirit, the Gentle Host of our hearts, the Master of prayer, one of the two Hands of the Father, according to the expression of Saint Irenaeus. There is also the risk of allowing ourselves to be led astray by the Evil One, the enemy who goes out to sow the tares. Let us take the risk, since we have the good fortune to live, of fighting under the banner of the Lord Christ, our true King, the other Hand of the Father. We are not alone, but accompanied by the whole Church, the Church in heaven and the Church on the move. St Irenaeus, Teilhard de Chardin, Benedict XVI, among others, and above all our contemporaries, with three major texts that are current, even very current, today: Pope Francis' encyclical, 'Laudato Si', his apostolic letter of June 2022: 'Desiderio desideravi', and the Church in synodal process, communion, participation, mission, the 'Instrumentum laborem', Oct 2023. We'll be following the paths that he outlines in dotted lines.

The Oblates you represent will also be present. Those from my monastery have helped me to reflect and to orientate my readings. Unfortunately, for our international congress they are too French-speaking, with Amédéo Cencini, Roger Dewandeler, Marguerite Lena, Henri Jérôme Gagey, but also German-speaking with Hartmut Rosa, and English-speaking with P. Timothy Radcliffe, not forgetting an unexpected diversion into Manga culture.

Methodology: on reading the theme sent to the oblates, I was looking forward to working freely on the wisdom of the Rule, to letting the Spirit guide my lectio, my work times, opening me up to certain overlaps, those of life with regard to my commitments and encounters.

And then the roadmap that had been sent to me suddenly emerged from the emails I had saved. What a surprise it was to read the subject that had been proposed to me: **Exploring the training needs of the future**. A nice four-point roadmap, lots of hows, a few whys... A roadmap, GPS mode. A sudden great fear! My inability to follow any of the suggested itineraries in the long term. Because how can one not take a detour, a break, or even a more adventurous escapade when reading or writing an article? How can you put together, within a given framework, the fruit of a long walk in the garden of life? In short, you get the idea: the two wings, that of faith and that of reason, have had me foraging here and there over the last few months. As a Benedictine bee, rather than a Cartesian speaker, on this first day of the Congress I offer you a little spoonful of honey from the thousand flowers of today. A spoonful of honey from the Hodie of God, honey from his Love for us, honey as nourishment to continue the journey and return to the One from whom we have strayed.

My today? We are all members of the universal Church, on a synodal journey. For my part, I am president of my small Benedictine congregation of Saint Bathilde, still young, founded in 1921, with a missionary desire to respond to the call of Pope Pius XI to establish religious life and therefore also monastic life in places where it did not exist. I am familiar with our monasteries in Madagascar, Vietnam and Benin, and we are supporting the beginnings of monastic life in Ethiopia.

Our today: we are experiencing a radical change in civilisation that is both promising and worrying. One crisis follows another, leaving many fields of ruin. The climate crisis that Pope Francis urges us to tackle head on: at number 13 in 'Laudato Si': "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not

abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.”

We are here today, we are part of this changing world. Heirs, co-heirs, responsible, sometimes powerless in the face of such increasingly complex challenges, we have to respond, to give an account of the hope that lives within us and shapes us.

It's a huge challenge to be and to invent this new way of being the Church, in the heart of our disorientated world, which has lost touch with God. There's no point in taking stock of the situation with you. Let's just keep a few key words in mind: faith, commitment, instability, institutions, abuse, misuse, lies, individualism, the culture of death, war, violence, dignity, freedom, responsibility... a veritable rosary of catchwords. It's up to each of us to open one of these suitcases and explore it! Training as exploration...

Together, let us be like the bees that gather pollen and carry it back to the hive for honey. For us it is the honey of wisdom to offer to the world, not as experts, but as fervent sons and daughters of the same Father, as joyful seekers of God, as humble workers filled with the Spirit.

For the spoonful of honey, I'm bringing you here are a few nectars I've gathered:

1. The nectars:

1. 1. Teilhardian nectar to set the tone, or not be set as arrows according to an expression of this mystic and man of science. For him, man is not the centre of the universe but rather the upward arrow of the great biological synthesis.

"Since Jesus was born, and grew to his full stature, and died, everything has continued to move forward because Christ is not yet fully formed: he has not yet gathered about him the last folds of his robe of flesh and of love which is made up of his faithful followers. The mystical Christ has not yet attained to his full growth; and therefore the same is true of the cosmic Christ. Both of these are simultaneously in the state of being and of becoming; and it is from the prolongation of this process of becoming that all created activity ultimately springs. Christ is the endpoint of the evolution, even the natural evolution, of all beings; and therefore evolution is holy." Hymn of the Universe, LVIII. Pocket edition.

Teilhard gives impetus to a dynamism that comes from elsewhere, this state of permanent research. When we talk about ongoing research, we mean evolution, movement, trial and error, distance and, more broadly, the cosmos and the

noosphere. Here again, these words inform and shape us: we are part of this dynamic that goes beyond us, and yet we can grasp it without grasping it... as if we were glimpsing it from afar. Seeing it makes us want to come closer, and the light becomes shadow, and "at once we are and we become". Today, this cosmogenesis teaches us that the evolution of matter is in continuity with spiritual evolution. André Manaranche, a Jesuit, asked: "Can we remain in our First Communion costume when we are adults? Ever-evolving science raises questions about faith. Is science for us an untouchable amount of knowledge or something that joins us in our present day to walk with us and challenge our saved world? **From Teilhard, let us keep this nectar of ongoing research that challenges us to articulate science and reason at the heart of human current affairs.** Let's simply remember these breathtaking words: *Christ has not finished forming himself. He has not brought back to Himself the last folds of His Robe of flesh and love that His faithful are forming for Him.*

We are thus folds of his Robe of flesh and love on the returning path to Christ. This is a good reason to believe in the need for ongoing formation; a good reason to love being part of this movement towards completion, and to respond to it; a good reason to invite our contemporaries to bring their folds of flesh and love for the one Wedding Robe!

1. 2. Let's rediscover the Nectar of the Bible!

Three words from the same root in French: to form, form (noun) and formation. Let's keep the two main ones: form and to form.

Form:

Num 12:8: "Moses contemplates the form of God".

Is 44, 13: "The sculptor gives him human form".

And Luke 3, 22: " And the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (synoptics)

To form:

Gen 2, 7: The Lord formed man out of the clay of his hands.

Job 10, 8: Your hands formed me and fashioned me.

Ps 118, 73: Your hands formed me and fashioned me; give me insight to learn your commands.

Wis 9, 2: By your wisdom you formed man...

Sir 17, 1: God formed man in his own image.

Is 42, 6: I took you by the hand and formed you... or Is 44, 2 : The Lord formed you from the womb.

1 Ti 2, 13: Adam was the first to be formed.

God forms man with his hands, in his image according to his wisdom, so that he may learn his will.

Sir 51, 17: Praise him who forms the whole universe.

Heb 11, 3: The world was formed by the word of God...

And God forms the universe

Other meanings, few in number, where God is not the subject...

Dan 13:48: "Daniel, in the midst of the circle that was forming, cried out, 'Sons of Israel, are you mad?'"

Ga 4, 19 - 20 : "My children, you whom I give birth to anew in sorrow until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be close to you now and be able to change the tone of my voice, for I do not know how to deal with you".

Col 3:15-17: "Let the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, to which you were called as one body. Live in thanksgiving. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you in all its richness; teach and admonish one another with all wisdom; with psalms, hymns and inspired songs, sing your thanks to God in your hearts. And whatever you say, whatever you do, let it always be in the name of the Lord Jesus, offering thanksgiving to God the Father through him."

2Ti: All scripture is useful for training in righteousness.

We can quickly grasp **the force of this biblical pollen**: God forms the universe and all that it contains, he forms man in his image and he gives man the Spirit so that he forms the living Christ in man. Paul unfolds the image and says: "You are one Body", and he gives us the program of formation by the Master Formator: the Spirit. The Father desires for us this stature of perfect man, the Spirit is sent to give us a share in his life. What exhortation do we hear? Let the Word of Christ dwell in you

Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and how, through psalms, praise, songs... So, what does the training lead to? To praise God at all times, in everything, to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus and to offer honour, glory and praise to the Father through Christ.

An appeal: to have a Bible, to have a psalter. Have them with you... and open them.

1.3. Patristic nectar: A Father has held my attention for more than twenty years, having had the privilege of working with Ysabel de Andia, director

of research at the CNRS and a specialist in Irenaeus of Lyons. Under her direction, I worked on "the progression of man according to Saint Irenaeus of Lyon". A great teacher! I'm setting the scene to better highlight the foundations of our question: what about training?

The question posed by Irenaeus in Book IV of *Adversus Hæreses*, "Could not God have made man perfect from the beginning" (IV, 38,1), places the problem of the creation of man against the backdrop of a triple theological controversy with the Gnostics, namely:

- Is the Demiurge powerless to create man perfect from the beginning? In fact, what conception of God did Irenaeus defend against the heretics?

- Why didn't God create man perfect from the beginning? In the face of the Gnostic conception of the three natures of man, what conception of man does Irenaeus affirm?

- Is there salvation in the flesh? What concept of time, death and therefore the flesh does Irenaeus oppose?

From this triple controversy we see the emergence of the future of man in a perspective of the economy of salvation. Irenaeus' anthropology is situated within soteriology, in the light of recapitulation. He characterises the future of man as an increase, a progression.

Irenaeus is opposed to the Gnostics, who set out to "weave ropes out of sand" (I, 8, 1). To do this, he chooses to give "in all simplicity, truth and candour" (I, Pr), the seeds to refute their doctrines and weave the ropes that keep the mast upright, strong and resistant to the various attacks: "Jesus Christ our Lord, who because of his superabundant Love, made himself what we are, in order to make us what he is" (V, Pr).

In 'Adversus Hæreses', Irenaeus explicitly develops the question of human progression. Progression means formation.

Like this Adam-child, the newly born human being is called to attain the perfect charity poured into his heart by the Spirit and thus, by participation in this same Spirit, to become "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5,) by acquiring the power of the Uncreated.

Irenaeus marks Books II and III with the affirmation of the rule of truth, which is thus deepened: "A sound, circumspect, pious mind, enamoured of truth, will turn to those things which God has made available to men and of which he has made the domain of our knowledge. It is to these things that it will apply itself with all its ardour; it is in them that it will progress...". (II, 27, 1), "This man... abiding in his love, in submission and in the state of grace, will receive from him

a greater glory, progressing until he becomes like Him who died for him..." (III, 20, 2). (III, 20, 2).

Basing himself on the law of truth received within the Church, "the ladder of our ascent to God" and "his breasts" (IV, 24, 1), Irenaeus develops his response and gives the means to adhere to it, through enlightened faith.

Enlightened faith: this is indeed the way to progress, to become "concorporeal" with God, participating in his divine nature, to respond to our vocation as men, to become free with the freedom of the children of God.

The semantic field is interesting to note: **first**, the vocabulary that indicates time: nouns, adverbs and verbs. It marks the conception of time.

- at the beginning, at the end, initially, in the middle (e.g.: III, 24, 1)
- first, then, finally, newly (*nuper*),
- duration, extension: to last, to prolong, to persevere,

Then there is the vocabulary that indicates an action or a passage. This becoming is oriented towards the individuation of time: ascent (e.g.: III, 17, 2), to grow, to increase, to become (e.g. II, 34, 2), to get accustomed, to exercise, to seek and to find, (a couple which emphasise the search).

Finally, the vocabulary that indicates a state. It highlights the nature in question: to be, existence, to exist; seed, unfinished; child, adult; completion, to complete; maturity, fruit; perfection (*perficere*), to make perfect (e.g.: III, 12, 5).

This simple semantic survey reveals an induction, characterised by a first state, a **passage** in time leading to a **final state**. This passage through time can be seen as the interval of progression, an interval open to the infinity of He who is the Uncreated. This passage is also the **time of becoming**, which crosses duration to blossom into eternity.

Enlightened faith is therefore enlightened by and in this time of becoming...

The images chosen by Irenaeus are developed in two registers throughout his work, intersecting and responding to each other, mutually enriching each other:

- vital images: plant: seed, growth, fructification and animal: child, maturity, adult
- musical images: rhythm, melody, symphony, polyphony, tuning.

These images are a **work of representation, of creation**, and stimulate the creative process. In this way, the concept of man becoming accustomed to the symphony of love and opening up to the silence of contemplation is gradually developed.

For Irenaeus, this revelation is in no way a science reserved for initiates, but *"having received it from us as seeds, as mere beginnings, you will make what we have expressed to you in a few words bear abundant fruit in the breadth of your mind, and you will forcefully present to those who are with you what, though insufficient, we have made known to you"* (I, Pr 3).

Like me, you can hear some of the tasty nuggets that give a special flavour to our spoonful of honey.

Three of them stand out in my mind: enlightened faith; the work of representing and creating the chosen images; and the capacity of every human being to bring to fruition and share the seeds of the Word.

I'll summarise the harvest before going any further:

An appeal to live, Bible and psalter in hand, inhabited by an enlightened Faith, worked on, fruitful: yes, all capable.

1.4. Benedictine nectar

The same semantic method was used in the search for words that convey transformative dynamism, enlightened faith and commitment to the school of St Benedict.

One key word, the portal of the Rule: Listen; a second, the door on the side: School; the third, the person who passes through the portal: Disciple; and the fourth, the action that explains the passage: study to find the goal: the return to the Father.

Five words like five flowers planted in the heart of God. This gives a very special pollen for the spoonful of honey: **a school for every disciple who wants to return to the Father, by listening and studying.** This is not reductive, but perhaps a vision for the 21st century of what the Spirit can give us to see and live in the manner of our Father St Benedict, who saw the world as a luminous point! I will read just two passages from the Rule this morning:

In the Prologue: "12. We have therefore to establish a school of the Lord's service, in the institution of which we hope we are going to establish nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. But if, prompted by the desire to attain to equity, anything be set forth somewhat strictly for the correction of vice or the preservation of charity, do not therefore in fear and terror flee back from the way of salvation of which the beginning cannot but be a narrow entrance.

1.3. For it is by progressing in the life of conversion and faith that, with heart enlarged and in ineffable sweetness of love, one runs in the way of God's commandments, so that never deserting His discipleship but persevering until

death in His doctrine within the monastery, we may partake by patience in the suffering of Christ and become worthy inheritors of His kingdom. Amen.

The school is a place not only for correcting one's vices and safeguarding charity, but also for advancing and progressing along the path of the commandments in order to share in the reign of love. Progression and advancement are thus proposed as a way of realising the Father's plan of love in a perspective of continual learning. To found this school is to commit oneself to it forever through stability. There are many topical perspectives in our changing, unstable world, with no reference points other than those we choose for ourselves. A school that teaches the doctrine of faith, as a return to the Father for life and happiness, and at the same time a path of participation through patience in the sufferings of Christ.

What an audacity that we hardly dare: do we thus present life in the school of Saint Benedict as a **pedagogy of participation through patience in the sufferings of Christ**, even if we seek a more attractive formulation...? "We proclaim your death Lord Jesus, we proclaim your Resurrection, we await your coming in Glory". I return here to the centre of what we are talking about, the centre of our faith, Christ who died and rose for us, calling us to share in his life and giving us access to the Father. To live under the Rule is to choose to respond to this call to become disciples of Christ, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, the first fruits of the Kingdom.

Saint Benedict speaks of **reading**, the tools of the spiritual art, and of **study**. I read the second very short passage that I have retained:

RB 8, 3: "For the time that remains after the Office of the night, they shall use it to learn the Psalms and the Lessons they need."

Some translations speak of study: the study of the psalms. Verse to be compared with verse 5 of chapter 58: "He will spend in the novices' dwelling where they meditate, eat and sleep." Study, read and meditate on the Scriptures, the psalms and the books of the Catholic fathers "which teach the right way to reach our Creator". (RB 73, 4)

Let's remember this insistence on teaching, on asking people to study, to meditate, to read, and to show the way to the Father, the Creator. Ascending to reach the heights, the summits of love through the practice of good works. An unvarnished coherence outlines the monk's life, a coherence between listening and practice, disciple and master, brother and community, *noviter veniens et perveniens*. The emphasis is clearly on a journey of growth, through conversion, praise and service.

Saint Benedict undoubtedly gives us a precious experience, the search for varied nectars with the scents of **conversion, praise and service** drawn from the well of the Scriptures, through meditation, study and rest in God, which is presented first and foremost as patient participation in the sufferings of Christ.

I'll summarise the harvest before going any further:

A call to inscribe our path of conversion, praise and service on the way back to the Father, through participation in Christ's sufferings. **A pedagogy to be initiated.**

There would be many other nectars to pick out, but these four categories are enough for today.

The bee still collects pollen with its legs, before returning to the hive and working to produce a variety of products: wax, propolis, royal jelly, honey and even venom. Let's take a look at a few pollens before entering the hive.

2. Pollens

2.1. Anthropological pollen

Man is in search of himself: "What is man that makes you think of him? This is nothing new. As Ecclesiastes says: "Nothing new under the sun". What is new is the acceleration of science, which has profoundly altered our anthropological reference points and even turned them upside down. We cannot ignore the major ethical questions and the dizziness caused by the lack of solid reflection. One question leads to another: from augmented human beings to artificial intelligence, there are many ebbs and flows that networks amplify and explode, to the point of causing real existential tsunamis. What kind of men and women are we? Which men and women are we addressing? What kind of men and women are we becoming? Far from the barbarians St Benedict addresses in the Prologue. But are we so sure? This man, this enhanced woman, endowed with artificial intelligence, with an omnipotent will, a desire for immortality, a pronounced taste for individual well-being without suffering, a frightening appetite for consumption, don't they have some things in common with biblical man? Fear, mistrust, desire, thirst for happiness, the ability to beget, love, tenderness, forgiveness, gratitude, wonder, growth, words. Father Timothy Radcliffe points to this path of incarnation: "Our words give life or death, they create or destroy. At the climax of the drama that unfolds, the passion, there are the last words of Jesus on the cross. They are precious to us because it is there that our conviction is rooted that human words are indeed the quest for an

ultimate destiny and that they can reach it. Our words may be clumsy and only scratch the surface of the mystery, but they are not empty". (Seven Words of Christ on the Cross, p 13) The place of words in our contemporary anthropological vision is everywhere. You know better than I do that we no longer know how to speak or write; everything is in acronyms, abbreviations and other condensed words, SMS, minimalist words or logorrhoea.

So, I see **the relationship between man and the word as the foundation of the culture of dialogue** that Pope Francis is trying to foster in the Church and the world. Yes, the primacy of the word, the primacy of dialogue because of the primacy of mystery.

2.2. Philosophical pollen

Let's continue our pollen harvest and turn to a contemporary German philosopher, Hartmut Rosa. At a time of climate questioning, of man's role in the degradation of the world, he takes an uncompromising and rigorously analytical look at man's situation in a world that he wants to be his own, within his reach, always available. "The cultural driving force behind this form of life we call modern is the idea, the wish and the desire to make the world available. But vitality, contact and real experience are born of the encounter with the unavailable. A world that is completely known, planned and dominated is a dead world. This is not a metaphysical discovery, but an everyday experience: life is achieved in the interaction between what is available and what, while remaining unavailable to us, is nevertheless "watching" us. It takes place, as it were, on this borderline. ... (p 6)

Rosa himself defines his working hypothesis, which resonates with us: "Insofar as we members of late modernity aim, on all levels - individual, institutional and structural - to make the world available to us, the world always confronts us in the form of a "point of aggression", or a series of points of aggression, that is to say, objects that must be known, reached, conquered, dominated or used, and it is precisely in this, that life, what constitutes the experience of vitality and encounter, what enables resonance, that life therefore seems to evade us, which, in turn, leads to fear, frustration, anger and even despair, which are then expressed, among other things, impotent political behaviour based on aggression. " (9)

There are two unavoidable words: availability and unavailability, which structure Rosa's research, starting with the acceleration of the world, which seems to him impossible to slow down. If we can't slow things down, what can we do? Return to the earth its unavailable part so that it can resonate with what

is received, taken in and assimilated. In fact, to simplify things, our relationship with the world can be understood as consumption on every level. Consumption of everything that is available, all the time, everywhere, by everyone. From harvesting to extracting precious minerals, to the quest for renewable energy, we operate under this mode of consumption, to such an extent that we have established a day of excess, a day of the year, between the end of July and the beginning of August, when our annual consumption of the earth exceeds what it produces in the year. We are devouring the earth exponentially. This is true in all areas, and this consumption, which is never satisfied, leads to frustration, anger and despair, which in turn leads to violence and creates a culture of death. Leaving the world its unavailable part means integrating what has been given, allowing it to make its way and thus to resonate and respond, by producing, through a fertile gap, a fertile space for life, dialogue and exchange, the seeds of a culture of sobriety, dialogue and fraternity.

I spent a year at the priory commenting on the Rule in the light of this philosophical reflection. We discovered the extent to which we were consumers, not responsible enough and aware that everything is linked and that our small part is essential to the world's progress. Our understanding of today's world must take into account what Rosa highlighted: "the unavailability resulting from the process of making things available produces a radical alienation. The modern programme of extending access to the world, which has transformed it into a heap of points of aggression, thus produces in two concomitant ways the fear of the world's muteness and the loss of the world: where 'everything is available' the world no longer has anything to say to us; where it has become unavailable in a new way, we can no longer hear it because it is no longer reachable." (p 140)

Not inconsiderate pessimism, but a serious call to look at our inconsistencies, our paradoxes, our contradictions, to discern our resonances and look at our places of availability and unavailability. We need to take a closer look at the frustrations and angers that are expressed in our personal lives, in our communities and in society. Then we will perhaps be able to better discover what will open up and become available by consenting not to what is forbidden or refused to us, but simply lost, because we had it as dominators.

From this post-modern philosophical foundation, I keep this borderline between availability and unavailability, and therefore consumption/integration, acceleration/resonance. In any case, a change in metaphysical position leads to a change in praxis.

Without mentioning training, you heard it right, always underlying: starting and ending point!

2.3. Sociological pollen

A brief look at this societal flower, which is particularly specific to each country and continent. Our bee's legs are already full of this pollen, based on our anthropological and philosophical approach.

In "Les ressources de la foi", Henri Jérôme Gagey engages in a dialogue with the promoters of a pastoral of begetting and the American post-liberal currents, with which some of you here are more familiar with than I am. The author then shows how forms of Christian life committed to a service to humanity are emerging. It's all about inventing new ways of living in a world marked by hyper-consumerism. I'm quoting from a rather long passage that sums up what we're talking about: HJ Gagey himself quotes Gilles Lipovetsky (p 222):

"How can we put the role of consumerism in our lives into perspective? How can we encourage interests and passions other than consumption? We need to invent or develop ways of giving people a taste for culture, discovery, creativity, work and commitment, and a desire to build their identity in ways other than through consumption. The changes to come will be driven by the invention of new goals and meanings, new perspectives and priorities in life. When happiness is less identified with satisfying the greatest number of needs and the endless renewal of objects, the cycle of hyper-consumption will be over. This socio-historical change implies neither a renunciation of material well-being nor the disappearance of the market organisation of lifestyles, but a new pluralism of values, a new appreciation of life to remove the obstacles to the development of the diversity of human potential. This is a gigantic task... because an entire civilisation has been built around consumption. It calls less for a revolution in modes of production than for a profound redefinition of schools and education."

Pollen brings a particular nuance to our thinking, linked to hyper-consumption approached from a sociological point of view. It's an appeal to consume differently, an apprenticeship that starts with education: family and school. Initial training is certainly needed to reverse a state of affairs, but is the gigantic scale of the appeal realistic? How far are we going to saturate consumption before we can hope to stop and do things differently? The covid crisis is still fresh in our minds: a before and an after. Right? I doubt it... A question for us all!

2.4. Theological / ecclesial pollen

A final outing for our industrious bee: heading for the XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission" with the *Instrumentum laboris*. This document was first sent to the participants so that they could work on it. A document that is accessible to us. It's up to us to pick out what is useful, good and necessary for us today.

I have retained point A2: Chapter 1 is entitled "For a Synodal Church: An Integral Experience". A1: The characteristic signs of a synodal Church and A2: A way forward for the synodal Church: conversation in the Spirit

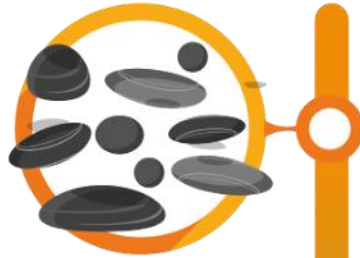
This dynamic, born of the Church and given by the Church, reaches out to us today and touches us. Here we are, called together to make our own way, to let ourselves be carried along by this happy Pentecost Wind. The WYD has already borne fruit, and the *Instrumentum* is still in its infancy. It's up to us to see what this way of living encourages, calls for and generates in terms of change. We are one big family, living under the same Rule, stemming from the same intuition, that of the Spirit who immobilised the man of God, Benedict, in order to teach him to remain under God's gaze, in a tireless search for his Peace, and therefore for his Face, discovered in each person we meet.

The Spirit invites us to this "*habitare secum*" to dare the frontiers of fraternity, by listening to the Word, meditating on it, celebrating it, putting it into practice, not alone in one's corner, but in community. A place of stability, a crest line, a tipping point, a rock buried in the inner cave from which the publican cries out: "Have mercy on me, a sinner".

As Benedictines, we will really have to study how to make this new ecclesial dynamism our own: how can we journey together to discern in the Spirit what he is saying to the Churches? The proposed outline seems clear to me, with the different phases presented, which are quite familiar to us when we practise lectio and group lectio. (Diagram)

The conversation in the Spirit

A dynamic of discernment in the synodal Church



Silence, prayer and listening to the Word of God

PERSONAL PREPARATION

By entrusting oneself to the Father, conversing in prayer with the Lord Jesus and listening to the Holy Spirit, each one prepares his or her own contribution to the question about which he or she is called to discern.

«Taking the word and listening»

Each person takes turns speaking from his or her own experience and prayer, and listens carefully to the contribution of others.



Silence and Prayer



«Making space for others and the Other»

From what the others have said, each one shares what has resonated most with him or her or what has aroused the most resistance in him or her, allowing himself or herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit: "When, listening, did my heart burn within me?"

Silence and Prayer

«Building together»

Together we dialogue on the basis of what emerged earlier in order to discern and gather the fruit of the conversation in the Spirit: to recognize intuitions and convergences; to identify discordances, obstacles and new questions; to allow prophetic voices to emerge.

It is important that everyone can feel represented by the outcome of the work.

"To what steps is the Holy Spirit calling us together?"



Final prayer of thanksgiving

A revolution for our Church today that Pope Francis is sowing like good grain. What is this good grain falling on now? I've chosen one single issue as the formative pollen, issue 42:

"Bearing in mind the significance of conversation in the Spirit to animate the lived experience of the synodal Church, formation in this method, and in particular of facilitators capable of accompanying communities in practising it, is perceived as a priority at all levels of ecclesial life and for all the Baptised, starting with ordained Ministers in a spirit of co-responsibility and openness to different ecclesial vocations. Formation for conversation in the Spirit is formation to be a synodal Church."

Let us also learn that this synodal Church must above all be a "listening Church" and that, consequently, it "desires to be humble, and knows that it must ask forgiveness and has much to learn". Isn't that what St Benedict proposes as the path to life and happiness?

It "unceasingly nourishes itself at the source of the mystery it celebrates in the liturgy", during which it "experiences radical unity, expressed in the same prayer", but in the "diversity" of languages and rites. Isn't this what St Benedict proposes as the path of conversion that leads to the Father?

It is a Church "of discernment, in the wealth of meanings that this term takes on within the different spiritual traditions". A1. Isn't this what St Benedict proposes as a path of conformity to Christ, using the tools of spiritual art?

We are at a favourable time, albeit a laborious and painful one, in the midst of the Church's renewal, which is affecting all sectors. The preparatory document specifies some of these, such as the need for "integral, initial and ongoing formation" for all; the "effort" to renew the language of liturgy, homilies, catechesis, the sacred arts and all forms of communication. In Lisbon, the Pope drove a nail in the coffin with young university students: "Be pilgrims of knowledge..." Isn't that what St Benedict proposes as a way of seeking God, by listening to the Word, put into practice in fraternal life and praise?

Nectar and pollen are not placed side by side, preciously guarded by the foraging bee; they are pooled and transformed by an alchemy unique to the hive to produce its fruits, including honey. Is this not what St Benedict proposes as a path of disappropriation to found the stability of the community?

3. Our spoonful of honey today

Let's leave the day behind and enter the night, the darkness of the beehive, the place of labour, the place of interiority, the place of transformation. This is our place of formation, of continual conversion. So, what's going on?

3.1 Conformity to Christ: the aim of formation

Formation is therefore a process that is not just a matter of content, duration and concepts to be learned. It is an inner readiness that is gradually being formed and transformed, and is destined to acquire a profound stability. Growth, progression. Nectar of Irénée de Lyon.

Formation by **imitation**: we copy a model, the most remarkable of which is Christ, himself the perfect image of the Father. A grace and a danger: the grace of the relational context, the master/disciple relationship, well known to the desert fathers. Danger: the imitation that computer technology transforms into a copy/paste that replaces the other, takes its place and therefore eliminates it. It's a danger that René Girard has highlighted throughout his ethnological research. Imitation leads to violence and chaos.

Formation by **following** in the footsteps of Christ, the sequela Christi: we follow a Master, Christ, in the best of cases, on a path to journey with him. This is a process that imparts an effective change of direction, absolute trust, and a personal, and therefore emotional, commitment.

The danger is that the following is very external to the self, with no commitment of the heart, of the feelings, no integration of the road as if driving in GPS mode... fidelity of behaviour, blind obedience, without taking into account the person who is walking.

Formation by **identification**, as Saint Paul exhorted the Philippians: "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus". (Phil 2, 5) Diving from the outside in, from following, imitating to integrating, no longer consuming but integrating the feelings that accompany words and gestures. Biblical and philosophical nectar) It's about taming the inner vibrations of life, feeling, experiencing compassion, seeing life according to the etymology of *phronein* that St Paul uses.

"Christ therefore becomes the form of the person who is being formed, not just the norm of his actions and the trace that his footsteps follow", according to Cenini (p. 24).

In fact, formation transforms us so that Christ is formed in us and we become members of Christ, concorporeal with Christ (Irenaeus). This journey goes right down to the depths of the heart, to the most existential instinctive powers, with its resources and weaknesses, to engender us as new men, molded according to the sentiments of Christ.

In the final analysis, formation is the passage from image to likeness, a total and profound identification with the Son, through a slow process of

conformation and assimilation to the sentiments of the Only Son, the obedient Son, the suffering Servant, the innocent Lamb, offered in sacrifice.

Is it not this slow process of growth that Saint Benedict proposes when he founds a school of the Lord's service, "we may partake by patience in the suffering of Christ and become worthy inheritors of His kingdom."?

3.2 Fusion of the constituent elements

How does this slow process of forming the new man, called, loved and saved by Christ, take place? How can we welcome and participate in this new begetting, the gestation of the Son in us through the work of the Father and the power of the Spirit? How can we respond with a global, integral commitment of our whole being, whether human, psychological, emotional or spiritual? The whole man in every man... by all men!

The passion for our Lord brings to life and encourages us to beget others, a kind of permanent revitalisation, we could say a perpetual *aggiornamento*, made possible by the life-giving Spirit, given to each person according to the grace of the Father, for the good of all. The Passion of the Lord opens up this path, from the burning bush of the initial experience, through the light breeze of the desert, to the face-to-face encounter so ardently desired. Solitude, silence, withdrawal, for the prayer that leads to contemplation, work in us as an inner conversation, a growth in the knowledge and love of God. Along the way, with our feet firmly on the ground of reality, in the ordinary through the ordinary, through mediations that are also ordinary and daily, we are drawn by the Father in more or less broad strokes to become adopted sons, pilgrims of the future, to **"to the extent of the full stature of Christ"**. (Eph 4:13)

Everything is material for God's creative, shaping and transforming action. It's up to us to provide this material, these sometimes minute details of life, like a glass of fresh water, a cushion in the boat or a patch of green grass. It's up to us to nourish ourselves, wisely: not too much, not too little, balanced, varied, sometimes indigestible but necessary food, leaving a bitter taste or too little to return to; nectar, pollen from the ordinary path, but also exceptional, extraordinary nectar and pollen like this Congress, WYD, the Synod, a retreat, a training session. Our capacity to integrate - without hyperconsumption - will gradually grow and open up, not to give answers to everything, to dominate everything, to know everything, but on the contrary to give meaning to life, to limits, to suffering, to death. That's what it's all about, conforming to the Son, the lofty heights of love.

Everything can then be welcomed, gathered up to be offered, in this privileged place that is the liturgy.

Pope Francis, a shepherd attentive to all, teaches. His Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio desideravi* (DD, 29 June 2022) offers some food for thought to help us contemplate the truth and beauty of the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. The key appears in the title itself, "I longed for the desire". God desires us. Let's be clear: "God desires us with a great desire". "God, through the new fact of the Incarnation ... goes so far as to desire to be eaten by us. (DD24) The source, the heart of God, the act of love of Christ who gives his life to return us to the Father. Let us draw from this source abundantly to desire to open ourselves to the love with which we are thus loved. Our desire is indeed a response to God's primary desire. The free and unique resonance of each person as a member of the Body of Christ, resonance because it is the integration and symphony of salvation as a mission.

I would like to highlight a few points from the Letter:

Let's focus on paragraphs 34-36, where he encourages us to begin, continue and persevere in a serious formation in the liturgy, which itself shapes us.

The liturgy plunges us into the furnace of God's love (DD56) to become beings of desire. Training in the liturgy involves the art of celebrating. *Ars celebrandi* "is one of the ways of caring for the symbols of the liturgy and growing in a vital understanding of them". This art is passed on, evolving, with rules, knowledge and learning that "is done for the liturgy and through the liturgy", since, in part, it is by doing that we learn. The sapiential dynamic of practice as pedagogy.

"Ah, what art are we summoned to learn for the proclamation of the Word, for the hearing of it, for letting it inspire our prayer, for making it become our very life? All of this is worthy of utmost attention — not formal or merely exterior, but living and interior — so that every gesture and every word of the celebration, expressed with "art," forms the Christian personality of each individual and of the community." (DD 53)

Here we are, nourished and equipped with a powerful word that opens up our horizons as Oblates of the 21st century: through the celebration of the Paschal Mystery we become what we receive, the One we receive, through and in a real adaptation of the art of celebrating.

At this point, let us dare to take a leap of faith as born blind men, as thirsty Samaritan women, as discouraged Emmaus pilgrims: The Paschal Mystery is a mystery of death and resurrection, a path to freedom, a reversal of mentalities, expectations and perspectives. "Not perfect, but happy" according to the title of the book by Br Michaeldavide, an Italian Benedictine monk. (Ed Salvator 2015) He calls for "a paschal spirituality that engenders an ethic of failure capable of caring for and healing wounds, rather than sprinkling on them the salt of judgement that discourages and belittles." (p 37)

3.3 Pedagogy of doubt, dissatisfaction, fear and suffering: Easter spirituality.

We are now integrating all that we have gathered along the way, to understand that we are yes, in exodus, in change, in outwards movement, in transformation, starting from the Cross of Christ, from his Salvation on Easter morning: "Mary", "Rabboni". St Paul forcefully preaches **the folly of Christ's Cross** (1 Co, Ep, Ph), our way, our life, our joy. From "all is accomplished" to "not yet finished", the dynamic of the provisional, the dynamic of the Spirit, provokes believers to doubt and frustration. Jesus has opened and continues to open passages: from fear to love, from suffering and death to life. He opens them in us, through docility and availability to the power of his resurrection, which does its work, that of growth. As the aforementioned Cencini writes: "The alternative to growth is not the status quo but regression". (p 45)

The Bible diffracts fear and doubt, from the Genesis account "Adam, where are you? I was afraid and hid myself..." to Revelation, via the doubting disciples whom Jesus accompanies to the scandal of the Cross: "Man of faith, why did you doubt? "Blessed is he who believes without having seen!"

We are of this calibre: in resistance, debate and protest in the service of faith. We dare to cross the line without wanting to give a perfect answer, a lesson to others, an archaeological, untouchable certainty. We are beings of doubt before our God who reveals himself on the Cross. " The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor 1:18)

Let us contemplate St Paul's attitude in order to hear **our appeal today, so that we can dare to include doubt in our faith**: "I came to you in weakness, and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive (words of) wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Cor 2, 3-5)

Saint Benedict writes down his response and invites us to follow him, to run with our eyes open to the light that recognizes the divine, with our hearts attentive to the Word, with an army of brothers to resist the devil... the service of the Lord, the service of our brothers, the service of faith lived out and doubts assumed, "by participating through patience in the sufferings of Christ to deserve a share in his kingdom". (RB Pr 50)

Participation at every moment, by every means, in every place, at every time... through the bond of faith, which becomes the patience of the future, the patience of love, the passion of love.

Participation is therefore **formation** for St Benedict.

In contemporary terms, Cencini defines ongoing formation as follows: "active and constant availability to learn the life of life (*docibilitas*) which is expressed in a set of ordinary but also extraordinary activities, vigilance and discernment, asceticism and prayer, study and apostolate, personal and community verification which help to mature daily in the believing identity and in the creative fidelity of one's vocation, the different circumstances and phases of life." (p 82)

By way of CONCLUSION, an image and an appeal

The image: pollination

Every bee that passes from one flower to another, carries something of itself with it. When it lands, it leaves something of itself behind, transforming the world microcosmically through the phenomenon of pollination. Wouldn't we be called to invent this new art of evangelising, by pollination, integrating the support of our oblation, of our links with our oblate monasteries, still depositing this taste for formation as incorporation into the totality of Christ? Wouldn't the oblate thus be a messenger of peace and freedom through praise and fraternal life in relation to his or her oblate monastery? If we are truly bearers of the living Christ, then with his Spirit, we will know how, as the Hands of the Father, to encourage new paths of formation for a happy humanisation, divinisation and thus communion in the image of the Trinitarian life from which we come and to which we are going.

The appeal: inculturation: hic et nunc

Gaudium et Spes defines culture as "that body of personal and social data which marks man, enabling him to assume and master his condition and destiny". (53 à 62). Culture is therefore the means by which man becomes human, a man of a place, of a time, and therefore of a culture. Benedict already

adapted clothing to the place where he lived. It's up to us, then, to keep up this process of inculturating our faith so that it becomes truly rooted in our whole life - "everything is linked". We believe that "the Gospel frees the ultimate truth of the values contained in a culture, and that the culture itself expresses the Gospel in an original manner and reveals new aspects of it". (Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes, CIVCSVA 1990 No. 92)

So perhaps it's up to us to create a culture of lifelong learning by harmoniously integrating the three dimensions of the human being that Cencini identified: the intellectual and cognitive dimension, the emotional and affective dimension, and the existential and methodological dimension.

Let's take flight loaded with that taste of honey, the *docibilitas*, perhaps a little bitter, but nourishing: "that full capacity of the spirit to undertake, typical of someone who doesn't wait for orders from heaven, but who takes the initiative to look in reality for the resources and training possibilities he needs for his growth". (Cencini, p 7)

Great joy and happy congress in conversation in the Spirit and may the millennium, on 13 July 2024, of the death of St Henri, patron saint of the Oblates, be a landmark for us in verifying the quality of our faith and our formation!

Thank you very much!

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