

## Exploring the Essential

Right after Vatican II, many Orders wanted to write a “definition” of their way of life. In our Order, there were a few projects of “definition” of Cistercian life. Rapidly we realized that it was impossible to write such a definition of Cistercian life, or even of monastic life in general, because monastic life is not an absolute, objective reality, that can be defined. You cannot find it as such in the Scripture. And in Tradition, what we find is not a univocal reality but a series of facts, of phenomena, to which the name of “monasticism” was given. And, as a matter of fact, the use of the adjective “monastic” has been more or less elastic according to centuries and traditions.

Then, we thought of writing rather a “description” of Cistercian life. But that was no longer possible, because in order to make such a description you have to decide beforehand which elements you will include in that description and which ones you will exclude, that is, what you consider authentically monastic and Cistercian and what you consider off the mark. This would be what in scholastic logic we used to call a *petitio principii*.

We concluded that the only thing we could do was a *Declaration* or a “statement” on Cistercian Life – a declaration that was at the same time an act of faith and a commitment. That is, an act of faith in the values we felt called to live and a commitment authentically to live them. It was a rather humble approach. The meaning was: We, Cistercians of today (1969), with the lights (necessarily limited) we have at this present time, consider that we are called by God to live these values, that is, to live our monastic life in this way, and we commit ourselves to do it.

The text that came out of that approach, at our General Chapter of 1969, has influenced all the renewal and the evolution of our Order ever since. What we then described in that short text of less than one page was what, at that particular time in history, we considered the *Essential* in our monastic life.

Now, more than 35 years later, I am asked to say a few words to you about the *Essential*. Fortunately, there is also something humble in the title given to me: *Exploring the essential*. So, let’s embark together

on some form of exploration, without knowing beforehand what we are going to discover.

Of course, what we are going to discover depends on what we are looking for. Our monastic way of life is composed of a number of practices, that we usually call the “observances”. Some of them seem to us to be still meaningful nowadays, and other are considered out of step with today’s culture. Some of them, we have already abandoned, sometimes only to see new forms of monastic life re-assuming them, at time with a vengeance! So we may be tempted to a pause and ask ourselves which of those observances are essential to a monastic way of living, and which are not essential. I sincerely think that this is a misleading question and a wrong approach.

In our way of life there is something that is more important than the observances. Or, to say it another way, what is essential in our way of life is something anterior to the practices or the observances. It is the goal of our life, what Cassian describes as the “perfection of charity”.

In monastic life, as in any form of Christian life, or even of human life for that matter, there is only one absolute - God. In relation to that absolute, everything else, however important it may be is relative (and to say this can certainly not be considered “relativism”). Our various forms of monastic life, whether it be Benedictine, or Cistercian, or Carthusian, Camaldolese, or whatever, are so many ways of living out our Christian commitment. And our Christian life is a manner in which to live our human life according to the light given to us by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot be real Christian monks, without being authentically Christian, and we cannot be Christian without being authentically and fully human. This is really the essential.

The mystery of the Trinity that we celebrated a few weeks ago, reminds us that God is communion - *koinonia* - and, because we have been created in the image of God, because God has breathed into us his breath of life on the day of creation, we are called, as human beings, to enter into that communion. As Christians, we have received from Jesus of Nazareth the revelation of his communion with His Father in their common Spirit of love, and the call to enter into that communion. “If someone loves me, he will listen to my words, my father will love him. We will come and we will make our dwelling with him. There is the essential: Christian life is a life of communion. Monastic Christian life is a particular manner to live out that communion.

Our monastic life is therefore, essentially, a life of communion. This

is true of any form of monastic life, including the eremitical one; but it is particularly true of the coenobitic way of life, as described in the Rule of Saint Benedict, according to which we all live. I would like to look at monastic observances or practices in relation to the various aspects of that communion.

That communion is obviously, first of all, a communion with God. If it is not, nothing else in our way of life has any meaning. We are all called, as any other human being, to a contemplative union with God, through a life of continuous - or unceasing prayer. This is the only real precept of the New Testament about prayer: that we should pray unceasingly. Never does Jesus tell us that we must pray so many times a week or so many times a day. He simply tells us that we should pray all the time, unceasingly. This is not an observance; it is a way of being. To pray unceasingly, or to live in a contemplative union with God, is to be constantly present to God's presence in us. We are constantly united to God in every fibre of our being, since he is constantly creating us and keeping us in existence. He is more present to us than we can be present to ourselves. To pray is to bring to the level of awareness that communion, that groaning of the Spirit of God in us, as Paul says in his chapter eight to the Romans.

Again, this is not an observance; it is a way of being. But in order to be able to live that communion with God with at least some level of consciousness, we need to use various means, and our monastic way of life - concretely, for all of us here, our Benedictine way of life -- offers us a series of tools, that are so many observances. The use of those tools is what makes us authentically to be called monks or not.

A constant communion with God in an attitude of unceasing prayer is not possible without, not only an attitude of listening to God, but also some frequent moments of explicit listening to God through what we now call *lectio divina*, that is the reading and the meditation of the Word of God. And in a coenobitic way of life, this is lived also through a frequent collective listening to the Word of God and collective answering to that Word through a common celebration of what Benedict calls the *Opus Dei*.

Therefore, we can ask: what is essential here and what is not essential? An attitude of contemplative communion with God through a constant, unceasing prayer belongs to the essential. As for the collective expression of that communion in a personal listening to God's Word through *lectio divina*, and through a common celebration of the Liturgy is what I would call a basic characteristic of the Benedictine monastic life, without which there is no authentic Benedictine monastic life. Now, how this Office is structured and celebrated, whether in Latin or in the vernacular, according to this

or that schema of the distribution of psalms, with so many moments of gathering in church every day, etc., all this may be very important - in various degrees; but all this is secondary and even "relative" in its "relationship" with the essential. In each choice that needs to be made in this regard, in any particular context, the real question is not "is that observance essential", because no observance as such is essential; but how does that observance help us authentically live the essential, that is the communion with God, and also, how much is that observance a basic characteristic of the Benedictine way of living the essential.

Communion with God can never be lived in the abstract. It must always be incarnated. It is the communion with a group of brothers or sisters with whom we form a community. It is the communion with the Church - the local one and the universal one; it is the communion with the society around us, with the whole of humankind and also with the whole cosmos.

Since our Benedictine way of life is coenobitic, communion with our brothers or sisters in a life according to a common Rule belongs to the essential. In order to be authentically "Benedictine", that common life must be structured in a certain way. Benedict expresses this in his chapter on the various types of monks, when he describes what a coenobite is. He says that a coenobite is someone who lives in community, according to a rule and under an abbot. Those three elements -- and the right order or relationship between them -- is the most basic structure of the Benedictine way of life. The more you go into the details of how the daily life of a community is structured, the more you need to distinguish the various degrees of importance; and this is basically determined by the common understanding of those who live that way of life. In the end, to live an authentic life of communion with brothers or sisters *belongs to the essential*. No observance of the common way of life is in itself essential. They are all *relative* and the importance of each one has to be judged according to its degree of *relationship* with the essential.

Communion, by its very nature, has to be open to others, as I have already said. The communion that binds a group of brothers or a group of sisters together in a monastic community would not be Christian, if it were not open to all the other communities that, through their *koinonia* with one another make the Church.

Communion with the whole Church belongs to the essential. And by Church we must understand not only the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, not even the Catholic Church as such, but the great *Koinonia* made up of all those who believe in Christ. An ecumenical dimension to our monastic life belongs also to the essential. Now, how this communion

with the diocesan Church, with the Church of our nation, with the whole Catholic Church will be concretely expressed and how we will participate in the ecumenical dialogue, all this belongs to the realm of decisions that each one of us has to make daily, taking into account the particular tradition of our community, the needs of the Church around us, our own possibilities and our own limits. None of those various practical expressions belongs to the essential. Their value resides in the relationship with what we consider the essential.

Likewise, we cannot be fully human, and therefore we cannot be fully Christian or authentically monks if we do not live in communion with people around us, if we do not share the preoccupations, the fears, the expectations and the hopes, the joys and the sorrows of all our fellow human beings. This, of course, is essential. All the concrete expressions of that communion are relative and should be judged according to all the circumstances. Something does not become essential because our community has always done it for the last 50 or 100 or 500 years. A judgement about how our various implications in the building of society are still opportune has to be made constantly, taking into account all the changing situations of the world as well as those of our communities.

Then there is the communion with the whole cosmos of which we are a tiny part. A preoccupation with the preservation of our planet and our world also belongs to the essential and a monk should have an ecological sensitivity, especially in our time when the general balance of the ecological system is threatened by our Western lifestyles, and when also some radical political theoreticians of a certain superpower consider that the faster we destroy our planet the more we will hasten the Apocalypse and the return of Christ. Of course that does not mean that we should all join anti-pollution demonstrations and all get into biological agriculture. It means however that it is "essential" for each one of us, in each one of our concrete, daily, relative decisions to maintain that ecological preoccupation.

I am aware that my approach and the meaning I give to the word "essential" may sound unsatisfactory or even annoying to many of you, when, in our time of renewal and reassessment, the preoccupation is to determine what are the "essential" monastic observances, that we must maintain at all cost, and those that are not essential and that we can discard or modify. At least let us be aware of the fact that when we speak in this way, we give to the adjective "essential" a rather specific meaning.

Of course, it would be more reassuring if we could find an easy way of

determining which monastic observances are essential and which ones are not. Or simply to determine what is “monastic” and what is not. But that easy way does not exist. Since the time of the wandering ascetics of the second century in Palestine and the time of the hermits of Lower Egypt or the Pachomian coenobites in Upper Egypt to the time of today’s new monastic communities, without forgetting the great Cluniac monasteries of the 10<sup>th</sup> century or the Cistercian Reform of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the adjective “monastic” has been given to a very large spectrum of forms of life.

Concretely, when we want to assess what we have been doing up to now in our local community -- or in our Congregation, or Federation, or Order -- in order to determine what must be kept at all cost, and what may or must be abandoned or changed, we cannot avoid a careful and often painful analysis of the situations in which those practices or observances were born and the meaning they still have or can have - or maybe cannot have - in today’s situation.

When we study the history of Christian monastic life, we immediately realize that every time there was an important new foundation or a significant reform, it was at a time of profound social and cultural changes and as an answer to those changes. I know that a lot of people like to say that monastic life is or should be counter-cultural. I know what they mean; that is, that monastic life runs counter to the negative aspects of our or of any culture. That is true, but that way of speaking, which goes back to 1968, is ambiguous. In reality every time there was a significant monastic movement, it was when a group of monks were particularly sensitive to the culture of their time, and found in their own way of living an answer to the challenges and aspirations of their contemporaries - an answer that was valid not only for them, but for every other person.

The real question, therefore, concerning each aspect of our way of life is: how far that aspect is linked with and is dependent on a specific cultural context and to what extent it still has a meaning nowadays. And there is a place nowadays as in the past for many quite different forms of monastic life. There is a place for a large community involved in superior education with a university or a large school attached, and there is a place for a small community of 5 or 10 monks in a poor suburb or in an isolated corner of the countryside. There is a place for a community heavily involved in social services for the surrounding population, as there is a place for small poor monastic communities simply sharing the conditions of the surrounding population.

Being a monk is a quality of being and does not imply any activity in society or in the Church; but it does not exclude any activity that is

worth doing by any human being and any Christian. We have to be aware that monks have often been called to fulfil roles that do not necessarily belong to them, at a time when nobody else was available to fulfil those roles. Saint Benedict wrote his Rule at a time when the Roman Empire was crumbling under the successive invasions of the various groups of "Barbarians" that make up all the present European nations. The process of building Europe started then and is not yet achieved.

During a large part of the Middle Ages, and even before, when most of the nations and the various feudal lords were constantly at war, monasteries were often the only place where there was enough stability to preserve the culture of the past, to copy manuscripts for the future generation and to offer education, hospitality and various forms of social and medical care. When Saint Augustine of Canterbury was sent here by Pope Gregory, or when Saint Boniface and his monks went to the continent to evangelize the "Barbarians", they were doing something that nobody was available to do at the time. When Cistercians developed new forms of agriculture and revolutionary forms of land management, they were making possible a quick transformation of the feudal system and new forms of relationship between the various classes of society, and provoking a cultural evolution. None of those ecclesiastical or social involvements were incompatible with monastic life, just as there was nothing in the nature of monastic life that required such an involvement. For each community the question is: is the form of social, cultural and ecclesiastical or pastoral involvement that we have known in the past still necessary or simply opportune nowadays. The answer to that question, in each case, involves a careful analysis of the situation - past and present -- and can never be solved by a simplistic approach like: "This is monastic and that is not monastic".

The question is a little more complex when we speak of observances or practices. But even there, one of the difficulties resides in the distinction that should be made -- but is neither simple nor easy - between what is a *constitutive* element of the monastic way of life and what is not.

According to the first and most important meaning of the word *monachos* -- and, before that, of the Syrian word *ihydaya* -- the monk is the one who has only one goal, only one love, and who organizes all the other elements of his life around that one love and that one preoccupation. It has rightly been said that "blessed simplicity" is the most basic characteristic of the monastic way of life, and it implies a number of renunciations. So much so that, at the time of early Egyptian monasticism, monks were called the *apotaktikoi*, that is, those who have renounced their family and the world in order to

give themselves totally to the Lord.

Celibacy is the most basic of those forms of renunciation. Is celibacy a constitutive element of monastic life? It has certainly been considered so during almost two thousand years of Christian asceticism and Christian monasticism. As such it certainly belongs to the essential, that is, it is a constitutive element of the monastic way of communion with God. Nowadays there are new forms of communities that include both married people and celibates, men and women, some living a secluded life and others involved in economic, social or even political life. Those new forms of communities have certainly a place in today's world and today's Church. Some of the members of those communities insist on calling themselves monks whether they are married or celibate. Well, vocabulary and language belong to the realm of social conventions. To call a married member of such groups a "monk" is certainly to give the word "monk" a meaning it has never had so far in any monastic tradition. On the other hand, to refuse the name of "monk" to a married ascetic does not imply any negative attitude towards married life.

As I mentioned before, Benedict says that a coenobite - for whom he is writing his Rule - is someone who lives in community (*in monasterio*), under a common rule and an abbot; and therefore when a candidate is admitted to commit himself permanently to the community after a lengthy and serious discernment (cf. RB 58), he promises stability (in the community), conversion or rather *conversatio* (that is the life according to the Rule), and obedience (to the Rule and to the abbot who has the responsibility of looking after the quality of the community's life according to the Rule).

Therefore, one cannot be a monk, at least a monk according to the Benedictine tradition, without belonging to a community (with all the rights and obligations implied by such a belonging), without conforming to a common rule of life that is the rule of that concrete community and without accepting that someone in that community has the responsibility of exercising within it God's fatherhood, as representative of Christ. Those three elements belong to the monastic way of living out the various aspects of communion that constitute the essential of monastic life.

That's really simple!... But from that arise a large number of rather complex questions? Let's start with the last one of the three elements, the abbatial authority, or, if we prefer, the abbatial pastoral care. This certainly belongs to the basic characteristics of the Benedictine way of life; but perhaps nothing has been more dependant on the cultural context, throughout the centuries, than the manner in which that authority and that care are exercised. During the



Document extrait du [site de l'abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont](#), qui se trouve sur le territoire de Forges, à sept kilomètres au sud de la ville de Chimay, en Belgique. Notre-Dame de Scourmont est une abbaye de l'Ordre Cistercien de la Stricte Observance.

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Middle Ages, the exercise of the abbatial authority was very much influenced by the practices of the feudal system and the examples of the feudal lords. Likewise, the present practice as a whole, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, owes very much to the nostalgic monarchical approach of the monastic restoration in France and in Germany by Dom Guéranger and the Wolter brothers. Some recent experiments, perhaps especially in the United States, owe something to the modern democratic sensitivity, and new foundations in Europe seem to return to the old tradition of the *paterfamilias*. And, in African communities, it is often influenced by the figure of the local "chief". Therefore, while the role of the abbot in a Benedictine community is "essential" (if we want to use that word) or is a constitutive element of the Benedictine way of life (as I prefer to say), we should be attentive not to establish as normative any of the culturally and historically conditioned manner in which the abbatial authority and the abbatial pastoral care have been lived in the past; and therefore we should not consider as normative any of the culturally conditioned ways of practising obedience to the abbatial authority.

Let's move to the first element mentioned by Benedict, the life in community. It is pretty obvious that you cannot be a Benedictine monk without belonging to a monastic community. But that does not simply require that you have made a valid profession in a community, that you are on the books and that they will have to bury you there when you die. What is essential to a community is that all the members are united by bonds of brotherly love and that each one feels responsible for the quality of the monastic life of each one of the others. Now, how will that express itself in daily concrete life? That will depend on several factors. In some cultures it seems that it is considered that the more time you spend together in a day, the more you are a community; and the more things you do together, the more you are a community. In that perspective, if, apart from celebrating all the hours of the Office together in the Church, you do *lectio divina* together in a scriptorium, and you do some common work, and you all share the common meals three times a day, you are a very authentic community. I obviously have nothing against any of those things done together, but I would add that all those common exercises have a meaning if they express an authentic deep communion of the hearts; and if the communion of the hearts is missing, all those things done together don't have any meaning. On the other hand, the situation of a community and the demands of work (of any kind) done for the community or in the name of the community may require some members of the community to absent themselves from some or from all of those exercises and that will not affect their community spirit.

I mentioned meals. Meals are something important; and common meals

have a sacred dimension not only in monastic life, but also in any culture. However the frequency or regularity of common meals may change from one situation to another. When I grew up as a child in a large family, we always had three meals as a family every day, and we would normally not begin a meal before everyone was there (and we were twelve children). Nowadays, even the closest families rarely have more than a meal a day -- if they have -- at which everyone is present. Therefore, the cultural meaning of a common meal has changed. Saint Augustine, when he was asked about the best practice concerning the frequency of the celebration of the Eucharist, whether it was better to celebrate it once a week, twice a week or daily answered that the best thing for a Christian was to follow the practice of the community in which he lived. The number as such was relative. We can certainly say the same thing concerning the meals. According to circumstances, a community may require all its members to be at all the meals; another community may choose to have only one common meal a day. All this is relative. What is important is that people do not simply start absenting themselves from the common meal, as well as from any other community meeting, for purely personal and selfish reasons. Then the community is disrupted.

What about poverty? Renunciation of material goods is a constitutive element of monastic renunciation. Often in the past this has been transformed into simple dependency through a system of permissions. You could have all the gadgets you wanted to have - even if you did not have any need of them, but you were still poor because they did not belong to you but to the community, and you had a valid permission to use them or simply to keep them in case you might need them some day. What is essential in this field is that there be a real communion between the brothers, expressed in the fact that everything is common, and that nobody considers anything as purely his own thing, and also that there be an authentic simplicity of life, with the renunciation of anything that is not really necessary or that is unnecessarily luxurious. All the rest is relative and secondary. Many monks nowadays, either for their study or for their pastoral work or for some work for the community, need a personal computer. Personally I consider that for reasons of efficiency, as well as for reasons of good management and therefore of economy a personal computer must be in most of the cases as personal as a tooth brush. The fact of having one at your more or less exclusive use is not what is against poverty, as long as the use you make of it is justified by your service of the community. A community may still require that each monk will receive all their most personal items like clothing, pens and pencils, books, directly from the cellarer or will ask for money to buy them, every time they need to buy something; another community may decide that each monk will have a certain allocation every month for this type of personal needs. All this is extremely relative. I don't think one

practice is any better than the other, as long as there is a real detachment of the heart and that no artificial needs are created, and that tools remain tools to perform community responsibilities and not gadgets to enjoy personal unjustified moments of distraction.

Through these few examples we have already touched upon perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Benedictine triad: the Rule, and more especially the series of observances and practices, that make up the Benedictine *conversatio* or way of life. That goes from the form of our buildings to the way we receive guests and the way we celebrate the Divine Office, from the type of work we have to earn our living to the manner in which we prepare and make community decisions. All of this, to my mind is extremely relative in itself. What is essential - really *essential* - is the manner in which all of this expresses and fosters an authentic communion - a communion with God, with our brothers, with the Church and the World and with the Cosmos.

We constantly have to make choices. In making those choices in these various areas, we have to be aware that most of our monastic practices and observances have essentially a symbolic value and that a great cultural shift has occurred in the last half-century or so; a type of shift as happens only rarely in human history and has deeply affected that symbolic value.

Monastic life as all of us have known it, developed in a long phase of history that was called "Christendom" (in French "Chrétienté"). Whether we like it or not, whether we are nostalgic or not, that phase of history is finished and every effort to restore it is bound to be a pathetic failure.

The main characteristic of that period in history was that the Christian values were for everyone points of reference -- for those who lived according to those values as well as for those who did not live according to them. Men (and women) as a whole were probably not any better than they are nowadays; but for everyone, whether they were saints or sinners, whether they lived according to Christian values or not, those values were points of reference. Consequently almost everything in the life of a Christian and particularly in the life of a monk had a symbolic value. The forms of our architecture, the height of our churches and especially of the steeples, the enclosure of the nuns, with the veils and the grills, our monastic habit, etc. - all of that had a symbolic value and spoke of those values to people outside as well as inside. At least it reminded them of those values. Now a symbol is really a symbol only when its meaning is spontaneously perceived. Nowadays, most of those symbols are no longer symbols. They have completely lost their symbolic value. The habit, for example, is no longer a symbol at all for men and women of today. (For most people

nowadays, when a man goes around clothed in a robe, it is a symbol of something else, we prefer not to think about). It is simply a means of identification. When people see us with a monastic habit, they know we are monks, although they may have a very vague idea - or no idea at all -- of what a monk is and they may not have a clue about what values we are trying to live in our monasteries. Don't get me wrong. I am not opposed to using the habit. There might be a good number of reasons to continue to wear a habit, as there may be a number of good reasons for discarding it. But let us be clear that the meaning of wearing a habit is no longer what it was in the past.

As a matter of fact, very few of the traditional Christian symbols, including the liturgical ones, are perceived as symbols by most men and women of today, including the good Christian. In most cases, those rites and gestures have lost their symbolic value. My personal conviction is that we should not try to invent new symbols with the hope that they will speak to today's men and women. We should rather try to recognize the symbolic value of everything we do in our daily life and of everything around us. And this is linked with something still much deeper, culturally as well as theologically. I mean the place of the "religious" dimension in human life. This is probably the most important cultural change of our time, touching not only Christianity but all the great religious traditions of the world; and that change is, to my mind, a fruit of the Gospel, at the end of a long evolution of humankind.

This has to do with the place of the religious dimension or religious "practice" in human life. And most of our monastic observances are in fact types of religious practices.

All cultures of the past, including Judaism and early Christianity, lived in a sacral world. For that sacral world, the language of religious rituals was more important than the language of life. The centre of gravity was the sacral and ritual activity, by which human beings could enter into relationship with God. The teaching of Jesus on that point was so revolutionary that it has taken two thousand years for its meaning to be gradually grasped. For Jesus, the centre of gravity was not the ritual activity, but the quality of daily life.

In the Western world, since the time of Jesus, and certainly as a consequence of its teaching and influence, the centre of gravity has constantly moved from the area of the religious and ritual expression to the area of daily life. The new awareness of human freedom has led people to a deeper sense of personal responsibility. The temple of stones has become less and less important and the living temples have acquired more and more importance.

Our daily life of every day is the place where we are called first of all to live the message of love of the Gospel. We must become more and more aware of the fact that each human being, by the very fact of his/her humanity is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Of that temple, Jesus is the corner stone.

The difficulties met nowadays by the Church in our old Christian countries of Western Europe (and rapidly so of Eastern Europe too), as well as of North America come most probably from the fact that its heavy institutional structure often reposed on foundations that have crumbled. Besides the phenomenon of the loss of Christian attitude or Christian sense, which is real in our time, we must be aware of another phenomenon that is quite different although apparently similar. And that other phenomenon is precisely this gradual shift from the ritual to life - a move that was started with Jesus himself. Many authentic Christians nowadays are very attentive to practice the Gospel values in their daily life - in their family life as well as in their professional life - but are not interested any longer in what we call "religious practice", like going to Mass on Sunday.

I think that we have to take into account that important cultural and religious shift, when we try to assess our monastic practices. Of course, we should not try to be too abstract and we all know that there is no "monastic spirit" without that spirit being put into practice in concrete life. But, at the same time, we should not be too quick in identifying the monastic spirit or the monastic values with the observances in which they were expressed and lived out in the past.

To be true, we are dealing here with a phenomenon of inculturation. From the experience of the great number of monastic foundations made by our communities in Africa and Asia, especially during the last fifty years, we know that inculturation cannot be planned and cannot be devised at a working table. It simply happens when the conditions are realized.

Therefore, I think that we should not spend too much energy and time trying to find new monastic observances more adapted to today's culture. Let us rather put all our energy into trying to deepen in our own life as well as in the life of each one of our communities the communion - with God, with our brethren, with the Church, the World and the whole cosmos. Then let us be somewhat detached in relation to our traditional observances, and new observances, more adapted to today's culture will most probably appear of themselves. Good practices are not created or invented. They are born from life.