



DECLARATION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER
ON THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CISTERCIAN LIFE TODAY

(1969)

(Revised Text, 2000)

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Purpose of this Declaration

1. We, the members of the General Chapter gathered together for the appropriate renewal of our Order, after duly deliberating and seeking advice, and having also examined the reports from the consultation of all the members of our Order, have decided to set down above all the essential elements of our vocation and way of life so that we might in some manner establish the foundations for the entire work of renewal. In this Declaration, therefore, we wish to set forth sincerely and honestly what we propose for ourselves as appropriate renewal, what goals we wish to achieve, and how we will strive to achieve them.

2. In our Declaration, however, we do not wish to preclude further reflections or new solutions, for future generations of Cistercians will have the right and the duty to find apter and better forms of the monastic life, no less than the Cistercian Founding Fathers in the twelfth century or the subsequent generations. For we truly follow the Founding Fathers of "Novi Monasterii" if we do not cease searching out the ways and means by which we can live our vocation ever more fully according to the will of God.

2. The Sources of our Life

3. To formulate the fundamental elements of Cistercian life today, it is first of all necessary to see from which sources we can draw the guiding ideas and motives for organizing our religious life today. We should also see how to use these sources.

a) The Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church

4. The gospel, especially the life and teaching of Christ as it is presented in Scripture, expounded to the Church by the ever-living Magisterium and reflected in the conscience and experience of the Church, is the primary source, the highest law and the norm according to which we should pattern our lives. Among the documents of the Church's Magisterium, the constitutions and decrees of the Second Vatican Council hold a special place for us, especially "Perfectae Caritatis," and subsequent documents of the Church's magisterium that deal with monastic and consecrated life, which call for the appropriate renewal of our life.

b) The Monastic Tradition

5. The principles of Cistercian life even today are rooted in the monastic tradition. We, indeed, want to consider the entire tradition of Christian monasticism, both before and after St. Benedict, Cistercian beginnings, and the monastic and Cistercian life of the subsequent centuries. In the task of renewal we are striving to achieve that our Cistercian life is a fruitful and organic continuation of the values of the monastic tradition. However, we are not unaware of the historical nature of this tradition, which must also be illuminated and judged by the criteria of historical research. More recent investigations into both the history and the theology of monasticism show clearly a rich

variety in the efforts and forms of ancient monasticism. They also call for a distinction between the elements that are permanently valid and those that are transitory.

We should, therefore, come to know through careful study the traditions and documents of the entire monastic history. In establishing the principles and tasks of our life, we should use them prudently, with fidelity and freedom.

c) The Rule of St. Benedict

6. Among the documents of monastic life the Rule of St. Benedict occupies and will continue to occupy a preeminent place as an exceptional witness to the ideas and experiences of ancient monasticism. Through their regular meditation, Benedictine and Cistercian monks have studied, interpreted and adapted again and again the Rule to the goals and needs of their own times. Consequently, the principal ideas of the Rule have pervaded the entire history of the West and constitute to this day a preeminent part of the monastic heritage. For us, however, the Rule of St. Benedict not only provides a permanent source of inspiration for correctly organizing our life but has in its essential and permanent elements full authority, whether in regard to the fundamental line of our spiritual life or the constitutive forms of coenobitic life.

7. At the same time the Rule is an historical document, intimately connected with the conditions of its own time. Even its use and interpretation through the centuries has reflected the conditions and mentality of each period. It has, therefore, practically never been observed "according to the letter" but according to diverse interpretations and adaptations. Since the conditions of human life in our age have undergone more profound changes than in any earlier period, the sixth-century Rule can determine so much the less all the particulars of our life today. Such material fidelity would correspond neither to the intentions of St. Benedict nor to that freedom with which the monks of past ages have made use of the Rule.

In a more direct manner the Rule is incarnated in the tradition and the actual life of each monastery which with the light of the Holy Spirit and under the authentic direction of the abbot preserves the Rule as an ever relevant and living inspiration. Thus, it is in this respect that we should also study the Rule and live it so that once those elements that are contingent or obsolete have been left aside, it might always remain the true guide of our life.

In this sense, then, the Rule should be the source and norm of our life. We should use it with filial reverence and Christian freedom to promote the renewal of our life, rather than a collection of material prescriptions that restrict and impede us in our search for solutions truly suited to our problems.

d) The Cistercian Tradition

8. We should keep especially in mind whatever belongs to the Cistercian tradition, namely, the documents of the Cistercian origins, the writings of the Order's eminent masters, men and women, of the spiritual life, the lives of our saints, and the history and experience of almost nine centuries. All this we should diligently study, evaluate, and refer to in our task of renewal with the same spirit of fidelity and freedom mentioned above.

For above all a tradition is not to be received as something that has passed but as something living and relevant which looks dynamically to the future and calls for a new actualization befitting new circumstances. For this reason the inner force of a tradition must be uncovered, and this can only be obtained from study and a living dialogue with it.

The Cistercian tradition, therefore, should not be restricted to the very beginnings, although the initial inspiration certainly possesses primary importance. One must take into consideration as well the later development which has shaped and determined in no little way the course of our life through the introduction of new elements and has thereby also established worthy traditions.

e) Participation in the Life of the Church and Society Today and their Promotion

9. We should be very familiar with the needs and desires of the Church, and draw from them directives for shaping our lives so that we might be ready to serve her as our Cistercian predecessors were. The Cistercian Order as a vibrant and useful part of the living Church has the duty and the desire to be prompt in understanding her intentions and her undertakings, and to support them according to her strengths and possibilities.

Just as the Church understands that the modern world's joy and hope, struggle and anxiety are hers and intimately joined with mankind strives to offer her aid, so we ought also to look with an open mind upon the needs and efforts of human society, which we should serve effectively insofar as we can while safeguarding the fundamental character of each congregation or monastery.

Consequently, in our task of renewal we must also see that the forms and tasks of our life correspond to the characteristics and needs of society today. We should look carefully at the opinions, judgments and behavior of our contemporaries, among whom we are living, and we should ourselves make use of whatever is found to be good and just in them as valuable elements.

f) The Action and Inspiration of the Holy Spirit

10. The most important and fruitful source for our life is the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit in us. For we firmly believe that the Spirit of God is at work also in us, that He enkindles our hearts to recognize the will of God better and to follow it more promptly. There is nothing so important for us as to look carefully at our vocation with a sincere heart in the light of the Holy Spirit and to respond without hesitation to His promptings. His working, even if mysterious, is without a doubt especially evident in the fraternal communion of confreres sincerely searching out the will of God and seeking appropriate and worthy forms for the service of God. Honest and open dialogue, sincere deliberations in common, the responsible cooperation of all members -- these above all are the means through which the Spirit's leading and prompting become manifest.

3. The Criteria to be Applied

a) A Sense of Reality

11. Our goal is not to draw up theoretical ideals removed from our way of life in order to preserve or restore obsolete forms but to examine and perfect our modern, real life today and to apply principles for its renewal. We are striving to give form to Cistercian monastic life of the twentieth century, the life which follows upon a vocation given us concretely by God. For God calls us here and now, and He wants us to be saints in this age, in the circumstances of these times, and He wants us with the possibilities of man today to follow Christ and to serve men with charity.

Our efforts should always be rooted in the truth and reality of life. For this reason we want in this Declaration always to have before our eyes the facts, possibilities, needs, and tasks of our confreres and communities, as well as the life of the Church and the world today.

This understanding of reality hardly means the acceptance or approval of the imperfections and vices of the present situation, as if, content with the common and banal reality, we did not want to reach toward better things. We rightly reject this as contrary to the essence itself of religious life, to the zeal for the life of perfect charity. On the other hand, we clearly understand that the ideals and goals, although sublime, are of no value if the men to whom they are proposed can not freely and, indeed, willingly adopt them and effectively carry them out.

b) The Unity of our Life

12. The renewal of our religious life should embrace the whole of our life. We should, therefore, consider all its constitutive elements and give each part its due weight. It would be altogether false to extol certain aspects of our life as if the essence of Cistercian life resided only in these and to neglect other parts as if they were only accretions or obstacles to true monastic life. For we are and should be Cistercians in each moment of our life, not only when we come together for prayer or carry out community observances but also in our studies, work, priestly ministry, private prayer, service to the needs of others, and similar activities.

For this reason we seek an integrated vision that unites harmoniously all the parts of our life into the one service of our Lord. If certain elements of Cistercian life today do not pertain to all members of the Order (such as the priesthood) or do not concern all monasteries (such as the education of youth and pastoral care), they should still be diligently considered and their importance and seriousness sincerely recognized. The elements of the monastic life which are only barely or not even at all found in the Rule or Cistercian beginnings should not for that reason be looked upon as secondary or suspect. For the monastic life, as with every living thing, evolves over the course of time, assimilating much that is new and rejecting not a little that is old.

c) A Harmonious Diversity

13. The institutional forms in which the reality of Cistercian life manifests itself concretely today are the various living communities. It is clear that our communities have over the course of time adopted in diverse regions various forms of life and diverse kinds of service. This diversity is not in itself to be deplored as if it were some sort of perverse degeneration. It should rather be recognized not only as an indisputable fact but both as a sign of vitality and as God's invitation to action. For through the cooperation of the communities, the values and various tasks of the individual congregations and monasteries will be able to serve the good and the progress of the whole Order if mutual trust prevails. Of much greater importance is a harmonious diversity than a forced and discordant uniformity. For this reason the General Chapter recognizes and encourages the legitimate autonomy of the individual congregations and monasteries in working out the forms of their life, and it will strive to offer them its help in these efforts.

Therefore it is of the greatest importance in the work of renewal that the individual communities first of all recognize and reconsider their own goals and values, and suitably adapt their forms to their life. For the burden of labor lies primarily upon the individual communities. The General Chapter intends to offer them only its help when it encourages and coordinates the work of renewal; it can neither suppress the role of the monasteries and congregations nor take it upon itself.

d) The Continuation of the living Cistercian Tradition

14. Keeping all this before our eyes, we want to renew the reality of Cistercian life in such a way that it be a natural continuation and organic development, as it were, of the monastic and

Cistercian tradition. Clearly, we desire to understand -- and, indeed, more accurately than before -- the monastic and Cistercian traditions, and we intend to draw from them as much as possible for our enrichment and inspiration. But we do not want to be restricted or hindered by them in solving today's problems. Our predecessors were very often able to know only a little or nothing at all about the problems we face, for the conditions of life have fundamentally changed. We may not shirk our own responsibility in shaping our religious life, nor may we shrink back in fear of new paths and solutions. History should be the teacher of our life, not its tyrant; it should teach and inspire, never hinder us.

PART I: Our Order in its Concrete Existence

A. The Cistercian Order Today as a Social Reality

15. Our Order is above all a social reality. For it consists of several congregations, monasteries, and ultimately individuals joined to one another multiple relations. Each one of us should form for himself a clear image of this concrete reality -- not only of the status of the monks with regard to their numbers but above all of the vocation, tasks, and aspirations of the members and the concrete circumstances in which this vocation is lived.

Cistercian monasteries exist today in Europe, Asia, Africa and in both Americas under the most diverse economic and cultural conditions. Some of these are in mission lands, while the majority are in those lands which up to our own times were imbued in the Christian tradition and for the most part still are. Some of our monasteries belong to one of the so-called Oriental churches (the Ethiopian monks), but the others differ greatly among themselves because of language, mentality, and education proper to each region. Even though our Order numbers barely more than 3, 000 members (divided almost equally between the monks and nuns), this geographic, cultural, social, and ecclesiological diversity constitutes a very complex state of affairs. In many issues virtually each community has its own problems and desires, which are explained from its own special situation. The Cistercian Order cultivates friendly relations with "circles of friends" that are gathered around our monasteries, both active and suppressed, and with Cistercian Communities of the Lutheran Confession.

16. A great variety appears even in regard to the kind of life to which the individual monasteries see themselves called. Some monasteries strive to cultivate a life which they call contemplative, while in others different works of the apostolate are carried out, such as pastoral work in parishes, the education of youth in schools, various works of priestly ministry, scientific and cultural work, etc. The vast majority of the members in our monasteries of men are not only ordained to the priesthood but also look upon the exercise of priestly ministry as an integral part of their vocation. The proportion of prayer to work, the intensity and form of contacts with the world outside the monastery, the importance of activities carried out beyond the walls of the monasteries, the nature and forms of the common life are so diversely conceived that the diversity appears first and the unity can be uncovered in the common aspirations and values of the monastic way of life rather than in the uniform ordering of life.

17. This diversity, however, even though it exists in certain fundamental questions is not so great in our Order that it would render impossible or superfluous all common effort of renewal. Clearly, as we have already said, in many areas the individual monasteries and congregations should reach their own conclusions. However, we possess many values from our common tradition, and we are attempting to solve almost the same problems as our Mother the Church is, in fact, attempting to solve everywhere in the same world of today that is unifying itself so quickly. Therefore, elaboration of common solutions in several areas of life seems not only useful and possible but also clearly necessary. For a common need calls for common solutions:

1. with regard to questions of the fundamental means of religious life, such as professing vows of the evangelical counsels, life in community, work and the apostolate, liturgical life, etc;
2. with regard to the fundamental values of monastic life that are founded in
3. the spiritual tradition of the Order and in the spiritual life of today's Church;
4. with regard to the general problems of the juridical structure of the
5. monasteries, congregations, and the Order, with regard to the questions of the superiors' tasks, the responsible participation of all members in the affairs of the monastery;
6. with regard to forms of cooperation and mutual help among the individual communities, that is, with regard to common plans and projects.

Whatever will be established in this general manner will require a further application to the individual congregations and monasteries.

B. The Cistercian Order as an Historical Reality

18. Our Order -- just as the individual human being and any particular society -- preserves in itself its past, carries the inheritance and the weight not only of its own history from the beginnings of Citeaux but also of the general history of monasticism, whose roots reach back to the first centuries of Christianity. For this reason it is useful to recall briefly the principal parts of the history of monasticism and their importance.

1. From the Beginnings of Monasticism to the Rule of St. Benedict

19. Primitive forms of monastic life have been present in the Church from the beginnings (confessors, virgins, whose life some call a "domestic monasticism" [*monachismum domesticum*]). In the third century, the anchorites and coenobites make their appearance in the universal Church. Thus beginning in the fourth century, rules were composed to regulate the new monastic institutions and to pass on the experiences of the "spiritual fathers." The Gospel, however, remained the "Rule that is not regulated" (*Regula non regulata*), which all rules serve.

20. Among these rules a place of preeminence is held by the Rule of St. Benedict, in which our holy Patriarch has condensed from the other rules his "very little rule for beginners." According to it the monastery is "a school for the Lord's service, " and in this school the community under the paternity of Christ, whom the Abbot represents in the service of the brothers, follows the guidance of the Gospel and through the balanced harmony of the *Opus Dei*, *lectio divina*, work and other exercises runs along the path of the commandments of God.

21. In addition to the regulation of affairs within the monastery, the Rule receives a sort of supplement in "The Life of St. Benedict, " as composed for us by St. Gregory. Although it is not perfectly historical in all details, it does show us how according to the tradition our Holy Father himself received those who came to his monastery and how he acted outside the monastery. For St.

Gregory teaches that St. Benedict "dwelt there and called from all sides a multitude to the faith by his unceasing preaching, " and indeed that he even sent frequently his confreres to the neighboring village "to exhort the souls."

2. Benedictine Monasticism up to the Cistercian Beginnings

22. The Rule of St. Benedict was neither the sole rule, nor did it enjoy universal acceptance up to the times of St. Benedict of Aniane. (This was the period of the "mixed rule.") At that time it was, however, slowly introduced in almost all the monasteries of the Carolingian Empire. From then on a certain uniformity of life appeared in Western monasticism which can be called Benedictine.

The synods of the 9th – 11th centuries then attempted to distinguish the monks from the canons regular more clearly, but without any great success. For the number of monks receiving Holy Orders and thus passing into clerical status was steadily increasing, while the canon regulars were organizing their life according to monastic practices. Moreover, monasticism in the 10th – 11th centuries was abandoning the simple life and constantly increasing the role and significance played by the liturgy in monastic life so that the balance between prayer and work was completely lost.

3. The Cistercian Origins

23. In the 11th century new spiritual movements were arising among the monks (and canon regulars) with the goal of returning to the true poverty of the Gospel, to manual labor, to the "purity of the Rule, " and to the authentic sources of ancient monasticism.

Citeaux was founded with such a goal. The founders of "the New Monastery" restored a balance between liturgical life and work even though they did not return to the letter of the Rule in all matters. For they retained many liturgical rites unknown to St. Benedict and introduced later (as, for example, daily conventual mass) and thus changed the daily schedule. Moreover, they admitted lay brothers (*conversi*) because they said that without them they could not "observe the precepts of the Rule day and night." As in many ages, they understood the Rule, therefore, not according to its 6th-century meaning but according to later interpretations.

The monasteries founded by Citeaux and its daughter houses were from the beginning abbeys *sui juris* united among themselves according to the regulations of the *Charta Caritatis*. Their abbots met annually in Citeaux for a general chapter in order to further the spiritual care of the monks entrusted to them. From the first decades of the 12th century, abbots of our Order promoted the foundation of monasteries for nuns and helped them in organizing their lives. Convents, just as monasteries of men, were under the jurisdiction of bishops up until 1184. After exemption was received, very many monasteries of nuns were incorporated into our Order. Initially, founding abbesses made regular visitations of their daughter abbeys, and these monasteries related by filiation even held chapters. But because of the law of *clausura*, which became ever stricter for nuns in the Middle Ages, the visitation passed over to the *pater immediatus*, and the chapters of abbesses were no longer held.

4. The Evolution of the Order up to the 19th Century

24. As the Order grew with the very rapid foundation of hundreds of abbeys as well as with the incorporation of diverse congregations (the Congregation of Savigny and Obazine already at the time of St. Bernard), "the similarity of customs" that existed at the beginning slowly but surely became diversified without reason. The transformation of the social, intellectual, and political life also influenced the evolution of the Order. The General Chapter, therefore, strove to adapt the Order's legislation to ever new circumstances, not fearing in the twelfth century even to make several, significant changes in the *Charta Caritatis*.

25. The large number of abbots in the General Chapter then led to the creation of the Definitorium, which received its form in 1265 and retained it up until the French Revolution. Because of the abbots' great number and on account of wars and other difficulties, abbots began to attend the General Chapter ever more rarely. At that same time Cistercian life assumed new aspects in various regions, especially in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Portugal.

Over the course of time other political and ecclesiastical circumstances were added, such as the institution of *commendae*, which called for new solutions in various regions. In this way various congregations arose: the Congregation of Castile in 1425, the Congregation of St. Bernard in Italy in 1497, the Congregation of Portugal in 1567, all by pontifical decree; in the 17th century the General Chapter also cooperated in the formation of the Congregation of Calabro-Lucana, the Roman Congregation, the Congregation of Aragona, and the Congregation of Northern Germany.

27. The instruction of youth in schools has deep and strong roots in ancient monastic tradition. Although the first Cistercians renounced educational work because of the circumstances of their times, nevertheless even among our forefathers this work later became important. Many monasteries have assumed the task of teaching in publicly recognized schools, especially since the 18th century, when the modern system of education originated.

28. The Order suffered grave damage in the 16th century because of the Lutheran Reformation and its consequences, but in the 17th century it began again to flourish in many regions. At this time abbeys which had come to participate in the tasks and concerns of the local churches through their assumption of pastoral care and schools largely tried to adapt their life to these new tasks. However, the French Revolution, Josephinism, and the secularizations that arrived in other places not only destroyed a very great number of the monasteries but also fundamentally destroyed the organization of the Order.

With the suppression of Citeaux, since there were no constitutions for the Order capable of overcoming the difficulties and it was impossible to convoke the General Chapter, the ancient constitutional law of the Order was substantially changed. After the death of the Abbot of Citeaux, the Holy See, itself in grave difficulties, was able to provide for the Order only in a provisory manner. When he returned to Rome from captivity at the hands of Napoleon, Pius VII immediately appointed a head for the Order, who was from that point up until 1880 the Abbot President of the Congregation of St. Bernard in Italy. The jurisdiction of this Abbot President General was restricted almost exclusively to the confirmation of newly elected abbots of the Stricter Observance. In this way, however, the unity of the Order was preserved.

When the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin Mary of La Trappe was first erected by the Pope in 1834, it was clearly said that the congregation was subject to the jurisdiction of the Abbot General. Since the efforts to convoke a general chapter of all the abbots were not successful, the first general chapter after the French Revolution was held only in 1880. Its members were

determined by the Holy See. In a chapter in 1892 bringing together three congregations of the Stricter Observance, the capitular fathers freely established the autonomous Order of Reformed Cistercians of the Blessed Virgin Mary of la Trappe. When he realized the impossibility of reuniting the two Orders, Pope Leo XIII spoke in 1902 of the "Cistercian Family," and attributed to the Order of Reformed Cistercians all the privileges of the Cistercian Order.

5. History of the Order in our Century

29. Abbots of the other monasteries came together at general chapters several times already in the last century. Three times in this century they have even composed constitutions on the highest government of the Order. Also at this time several monasteries that had arisen outside the Order (Phuoc-Son, Boquen) as well as the Congregation of Casamari have joined the Order. Similarly, many new foundations have been made, even in mission territories. After the Second World War the monasteries of nuns in Spain and Italy formed federations of pontifical right. These federations of nuns have great merit in both spiritual and material matters, and they should continue to follow their work for their monasteries and the Order.

In this way our Order today has come about, encompassing a very complex reality. From this it is also clear that it is especially necessary in the work of appropriate renewal first of all for individual monasteries to recognize their tasks and goals, and clearly and sincerely to define them. Such clarification will promote vitality and mutual understanding also in the Order.

C. The Cistercian Order as a Living Part of Today's Church and World

30. The history of almost nine centuries has left deep traces in our Order, which was always part of the Church and the world, and which has always participated in their changes and crises. Also today the movements, aspirations, convictions, and anxieties of our time are keenly felt in the Order and to a large extent shape the work of renewal.

It would be too long to describe here all the principal movements of the Church and world today, even if only summarily. They are to a large extent, moreover, found in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent documents of the Church, which examine many of the problems facing the Church in the world today. Here we want to explain and to apply to ourselves only certain of the more principal concerns of religious life today.

1. Theological Renewal

31. In recent decades Catholic theology has been profoundly renewed and is still in a state of rapid development. The biblical movement is probing Scripture with new methods, the patristic movement is opening up for theology previously unknown treasures, the liturgical movement is casting new light on the Church's sacramental and prayer life. Theological anthropology, ecclesiology, the theology of the religious life -- to name just a few fields of intensive work -- are offering in more than a few areas new perspectives and new understandings of God's life in us. The principal elements of Cistercian life today and our appropriate renewal should be directed according to the approved perspectives of this contemporary theology, which has already born such fruit in the Second Vatican Council.

2. A Properly Understood Personalism

32. Today more than earlier, we are aware of the dignity and freedom of the human person. We know that God draws us to Himself not by force but by our own decision. The human being of our age rightly rejects impositions that repress his nature as a person because no one will perform a deed pleasing to God if he is constrained by force or fear. Moreover, psychology has sufficiently shown how important the development of one's nature as a person is for his whole life, which must be considered of the greatest importance also in our monastic life.

3. The Sense of Community

33. On the one hand, our age greatly values the communitarian forms of life in which a person enters into dialogue with others and thus grows, manifests and perfects himself. On the other hand, contemporary ecclesiology points out most clearly the communitarian nature of salvation as an essential mark of Christian revelation. Moved by such considerations, we too should see to it that honest and sincere communication be promoted among persons whom the life of community and common goals and work join together.

4. New Appraisal of Creation, of Human Work, and of Progress

34. In our days theology also sees more clearly the positive value which creation, work and human progress hold for the whole of human life. Consequently, the sense of responsibility should grow in us so that with the entire human community we would also concern ourselves with earthly values. For we recognize that we too should share in the work of promoting that progress by which the created world is more and more subjected to the power of the human being, and the entire society in a just and equitable way shares in the fruits of their work. For only by such serious work is the sanctification of all things in Christ and the return of every creature to God brought about.

5. Ecumenism and Missions

35. Recently not only have contacts with non-Catholic Christians multiplied but the spirit in which those meetings take place has also been renewed. Today we feel ever more a common responsibility for restoring the unity of the Church. Therefore, it is useful for our monasteries to help nurture and promote the unity of the Church, if the necessary conditions are present and according to our own possibilities.

We should also have a lively conscience with regard to our task to spread the Gospel in mission territories so that we might promote insofar as we can the missionary work, still a huge task. Moreover, we know that the catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in non-Christian religions. With mutual respect and with all syncretism excluded, our monasteries should acknowledge those spiritual and moral goods as well as the cultural values that are found in non-Christian religions, and thus promote the peace of the human family.

6. The Desire for Authenticity and the Cultivation of Simplicity and Sincerity

36. Together with men and women of our age, we also greatly desire to embrace authentic values, even in our religious and monastic life. Therefore, we want simple forms of life which manifest our attitude. Our actions should express the interior state of our soul. We desire to

understand the meaning of our rites, and we want to conform our minds to our voices. We shun formalism and rituals that lack sense. With a sincere heart and an open mind we want to live for Him, who sees our hearts and does not judge according to appearances. By this search for simplicity, we feel that we have been united in a special way as well with the intentions of our Founding Fathers.

37. In this way our Order participates in the vital movements of the Church and secular history. And so while the Order draws constantly from the springs of her traditions, she should have before her eyes especially the future. For it is not allowed to believe that all perfection is contained either in remaining immobile in the church's and the Order's past ways of acting or in not approaching to some extent ways of acting congruent with the spirit of men and women in our age. These ways of acting, however, can be tested, according to the teaching of St. Paul, "Test all things; keep what is good."

The duty of seeing and interpreting the signs of the times according to light of the Gospel lies upon us just as it does upon the Church. We should do this in such a way that we can answer the questions of men and women in a manner appropriate to our generation. We should recognize and understand the world in which we live and its expectations, its desires, and its characteristics, for only in this way will our monasteries be the seedbeds to build up the Christian people.

Part II

The Fundamental Values of Cistercian Life Today

38. Our Order in its concrete existence, as we have shown above, exhibits pluralism and a rather great deal of diversity. This diversity, however, tends towards harmony and is not lacking in unity. Our unity consists not only in a goal common to all members of the Order, but also in the sharing of most of the means for attaining this goal. These should not be considered as disjointed elements, but should be integrated into a living whole. Obviously, in our Declaration we do not want to elaborate a treatise on the monastic life that we have promised to live in the Cistercian Order. We will, therefore, explain only a few aspects which can and should give inspiration and direction to our activities and institutions today.

A. The Goal and Essential Characteristics of Cistercian Life Today

1. The Vocation to Seek God by Following Christ in the School of Love

39. Our life can have no other ultimate goal than God, whom we must glorify in all things and seek as man's highest good and supreme happiness. The mediator and the way to God the Father is Christ present in the Church, in the community of our brothers and in the sacraments. We have embraced the monastic life so that we might live a life ordered toward toward this goal in a special, immediate and radical way, and so that we might be directed and led continuously and effectively to this same goal.

40. The monasteries of our Order should serve, protect and develop the vocation of the individual members. Therefore, the goal of seeking God is not only the individual's obligation. Both

the general structure of the monastery's life, the school of the Lord's service, and the Abbot's commands and teaching -- "the leaven of divine justice" -- should support this goal. Thus, in this goal is the ultimate set of rationale for the life of our monasteries. Any other good, such as social recognition, usefulness to mankind or society, or material gain, must be subordinated and adjusted to this goal. They should never be put before spiritual progress, personal improvement, or growth in virtue.

41. If the monasteries should serve the vocation of the members, we must also realize that, should we ever lose this spirit of our vocation, no matter how much we might wish to be of use to the monastery, we estrange ourselves from the community and make our way of life senseless and empty. For his vocation and the response by which he accepts it make the monk. From this alone flows the only reason for our monasteries and our Order to exist.

42. Since God is only reached through Christ and in love, we have entered the school of love. Our love should, in a single, undivided act embrace God and our neighbor, who has been created in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ. Therefore, true love should manifest itself in the twofold service of God and man. It is not right to oppose the two services as if service to God would not at the same time benefit man or as if service to our neighbor shaped by true love would not be a sacrifice offered to God. The undivided character of the act of love is the foundation of the unity between our prayer life and our work. In this way our work is integrated into divine worship, and the time given to contemplation is brought into harmony with endeavors serving society. Moreover, as love is the sum total and peak of all virtues, even devotional practices and observances must be subordinated to it.

2. The Response Given to Our Vocation by Our Profession

43. We seek God not out of our own initiative; He has first loved and sought us with an invitation to share His life. Our unceasing effort to seek God in Christ is rooted in our God-given vocation by which Christ is continuously calling us to a response full of love. We give a lasting response through our profession according to the Rule of St. Benedict, by which we subject our whole life to the service of Christ. Consequently, our profession consecrates our whole existence in a special way. This consecration has its deepest roots in the sacrament of Baptism and brings the sacrament to a fuller expression. The Church unites it to the sacrifice of the Mass.

3. Service to the Church

44. Since our profession is accepted by the Church, it also means a special dedication to her service. This is because Christ is present for us in the Church; with her He is inseparably united. Thus, service to Christ is and must be service to the Church, whether through prayer and penance, or also through different forms of apostolic work. Lived in this way, our life becomes an example of the faithful fulfillment of the Christian vocation and a witness to that new life in Christ which is already now a beginning and a sign of life eternal in the heavenly Kingdom.

45. Although our Order enjoys the privilege of exemption, each community is by both fact and law part of the local Church and shares in her divine gifts, good fortunes, troubles, persecutions and sufferings. Therefore, our monasteries have a moral obligation to help the Church in her needs, each according to its ability. This obligation weighs especially upon our monasteries of men, in

which the majority of the members are ordained to the priesthood; for, in the New Testament, priesthood is directed to the ministry in its different forms. Therefore, we should see to it that our monastic communities of priests be ready, according to the Church's intentions and local needs, to exercise pastoral ministry in an appropriate way. This does not mean that for pastoral reasons we may alter simply as we please the elements of monastic life, such as the common liturgy or the like. We should seek primarily those forms of priestly ministry by which we can give to the Church our own type of service.

In serving God and the Church we wish to be always under the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Patroness of our Order. According to the example of our Fathers, we follow her with filial devotion by asking for her help and imitating her life.

B. The Means to Attain the Goal

46. God not only calls us to the goal explained above, but also urges us to use the means He has determined for us. These are mainly the evangelical counsels, life in a Cistercian community, prayer, the love of the cross and the service of mankind by our work.

1. Leading a Life Consecrated to God and Church through the Observance of the Evangelical

47. The purpose of keeping the evangelical counsels is to follow Christ the Master as His disciples in a special way. We want to be united to Him more and more through the monastic way of life and follow Him always more closely and intimately.

a) Celibacy

48. Celibacy freely chosen for the sake of God's Kingdom consists not only of renouncing marriage and the joys of a natural family. It should free us to attend with care to God's affairs and those of the Church with all the strength of mind and soul. By our religious profession we want to bear witness in a more direct and personal way to the Christian expectation of the future age in which people will "neither marry nor be given in marriage." For this reason celibacy is the outstanding eschatological sign of our life.

49. This total consecration of the self to God is the foundation on which the monastic family is built. In this family of God, the common love of God and the same vocation form the basis for our loving and helping each other. On the one hand, we should faithfully carry one another's burdens; on the other, we all receive a share of the graces and virtues in which each one excels. Consequently, we find a definite access to the communitarian path of salvation which God has prepared for all mankind in the Church. God opens our heart so that we might love all our neighbors, especially our brothers and sisters in the monastery, with sincere and active love.

b) Poverty

50. We do not practice poverty only for the sake of privation or out of contempt for material goods, but in order to obtain the freedom of the sons of God and to use this world as if not using it, aware that the form of this world is about to pass away. Therefore, renouncing the possession or quest of wealth, our desire is to be poor with Christ Himself poor. This also makes us true disciples following the model of the early Church in which no one claimed anything as his own, but everything was held in common. In this way our hearts are freed from material worries so that

there, where our treasure is, our hearts might also be, that is, in and with Christ and the Church.

51. Yet, as long as we are in the body, we must use the things of this world. But the spirit of poverty which derives from our vow should direct us in the use of material things for our own benefit and for that of our neighbors, remaining duly respectful toward creatures. Therefore, let us make every effort to provide help for the poor of our times by our renunciation. The fruits of our work we should use for the sake of our neighbor and the Church. For this very reason it is most appropriate that we undertake those jobs by which we are able to take care of our needs and at the same time to benefit others and preserve safe and intact created nature.

c) Obedience

52. Obedience means, above all, a heart open to receive the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, for He blows where He wills and makes known to us the will of God in many ways. Just as Christ's food was to do the will of the One who sent Him; and assuming the form of a slave, He became obedient unto death, death even on a Cross, so wishing to follow Christ more closely we should also, like Him, look for the will of the Father so that we might fulfill it promptly

Most often the Church's voice transmits to us the voice of God by the teaching and exhortations of the Pope, by the Holy See, the Bishops and the Abbot. These should not only regulate externals, but should shape our spirituality. Also, the charismatic movements of today's Church express in an ever relevant way the intentions of the Holy Spirit. Constantly renewing the Church's youth, He also renews our monastic life.

53. In a spirit of faith and love, and out of the desire to do God's will, monks want an abbot to be over them and represent Christ for them. They offer the abbot humble obedience according to the norms of the *Rule* and the *Constitutions*. They apply their powers of intellect and will as well as the gifts of grace they have received to carrying out the commands and fulfilling the tasks entrusted to them. In doing this they know that they help build up the Body of Christ according to the will of God. In this way religious obedience does not lessen the dignity of the human person but enriches it with the freedom of the children of God, and thus leads it to maturity.

54. Even when it consists practically in carrying out the commands of the superior, religious obedience is always directed to God and is a free and personal human act requiring mature and responsible deliberation. The changed conditions of our times require new forms of giving and obeying commands. They also call for new relationships between superiors and monks. Our age rejects anything that smacks of servilism, paternalism, or the cult of feudal forms. It rightly desires that the dignity of the human person be always and everywhere kept in mind. Moreover, because the working conditions and the members' tasks today quite often demand specialized knowledge and they suppose personal responsibility on the part of individual monks, superiors should leave ample room for personal initiatives. In giving orders they should be concerned with advice that is based on principles and is forward-looking rather than with minor details. More than before, it is necessary that superiors formulate their commands only after having heard the experts and having consulted with their confreres. They should always remain open to receive further suggestions. Superiors should listen willingly to the members of the community, yet their authority to discern and command what is to be done must remain firm. In giving counsel, the brothers should respect the person and judgement of others, and they should present their position with solid reasons and not following the will of their own heart.

55. The good of religious obedience will only then be truly preserved in our monastic life only if the superiors together with their confreres sincerely seek the will of God with one mind and realize that their obedience is due not to human authority but always to God Himself who calls them. Although the good of the community demands clear and firm orders which bind the members without ambiguity, nevertheless the government of the monastery can never do without the responsible cooperation of all for the good of the monastery, the Order and the Church. For this profound consensus among all, rooted in a common vocation and religious profession, is itself the foundation for the daily exercise of authority and obedience.

2. Life in a Stable Fraternal Community Imbued with the Cistercian Tradition

56. Following his vocation, the monk looks upon the community of brothers in the monastery as God's family and his own. For he knows that present in the monastery in a special way is Christ, who is present wherever two or three are gathered in His name. Therefore, we want to organize our life in such a way that the example of the early Church is realized, which demands "one heart and one soul" not only in prayer and in the teaching of the Apostles and in the common breaking of the bread and in the common possession of goods but also in sharing goals, tasks, responsibilities and activities. Just as the Apostle wanted to rejoice with those who rejoice and cry with those who cry, so it is fitting that the successes and failures, sorrows and joys, difficulties and advancements of every individual affect all of us. Above all, however, the common concern of the monks should be for whatever pertains to the monastery's spiritual life. They should feel responsible for the eternal salvation of each individual and for the fulfillment of his vocation. In this way, community life itself provides spiritual guidance in a broader sense, insofar as it strengthens the weak, encourages the disheartened, restores zeal to the indifferent, and daily proclaims for all the values of the service we have undertaken.

57. Concern for the community's life is, therefore, not only the task of the superiors, even if it is primarily for them to uproot vices and abuses by exhorting, warning and correcting. Yet this task is more easily and efficiently carried out by superiors if the community shows both patience towards the brothers and fidelity to the values of religious life, and if they always know how to combine love for the offender with hatred for his offense. One must strive, therefore, to prevent community life from becoming just a burden or an occasion, as it were, to sin against charity. Community life should, rather, be experienced as the school itself of love in which we anticipate one another in showing respect and willingly obey one another. In this school even our weaknesses offer us the opportunity to advance in love, and through the example and counsel of our brothers we are effectively drawn to God.

Although it is especially appropriate to the office of the abbot that he himself teach the community about the spiritual life and spur them on to virtue, he can, however, often delegate some part of this task to other confreres. It is very fitting, nevertheless, that spiritual conferences be held regularly and that the brothers share with one another the gifts of grace and intellect.

58. In the life of the community we should, in addition, cultivate the riches of the monastic tradition, by seeking out authentic forms of monastic life that fit today's circumstances, above all the living tradition of our own monasteries, whose values we must preserve, make fruitful, and handed on to others. We should also cultivate an awareness of larger communities, such as our own Congregation and the whole Order, so that we might effectively help each other live our vocation even better.

3. Prayer Life

59. Seeking God by following Christ and desiring to serve Him, the monk prays often. Both by meditation on the Word of God who reveals himself to us and by common and private prayer that responds to the Word of God, our minds and hearts are raised to the things of God. In this way we can also find a source of inspiration for all our activities. At the same time we can more clearly discern the direction our lives are taking and quite often straighten it out.

60. Just as the religious vocation is a grace of God, so also our ability to pray does not come from ourselves but from the Holy Spirit, in whom we cry out: "Abba, Father." In the reception of the sacraments and particularly in the daily celebration of the Eucharist, this life of grace is constantly nourished in us, and our prayer is sacramentally united with the saving acts of Christ.

As it is clear from the whole monastic tradition and the directives of the Church, monks are, however, called in a special way to continue Christ's prayer in the Church by the celebration of the Mass and the Divine Office, the two of which should hold primacy in their lives, as well as by other forms of prayer which in their own way should penetrate their whole lives.

61. In the Eucharistic celebration the sacrifice of Christ offered once on the cross for us is rendered present for us daily, and human acts of divine worship become the effective sign of Christ's acts in such a way that God's gift and word and man's response through thanksgiving and praise are united as much as possible for the glory of God and the sanctification of man. For all the Church's ministries are directed to the celebration of the Eucharist, which is truly the center not only of the entire liturgy but of all Christian life. Therefore, the leading role in our lives should also be played by the sacrament of piety, the sign of unity, the bond of charity, the paschal meal, in which Christ is received, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of future glory is given us.

Adoration of Christ present in the Eucharist provides an outstanding aid for extending more effectively the active participation in the sacrifice of Christ throughout the whole day.

62. In the reform of the Divine Office, which is to be continued and completed, we should pay attention above all to the unity and harmony between the liturgy and the other parts of our religious life. For although the liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church tends and at the same time the spring from which all her power flows," it does not exhaust all the activity of the Church or the monastery. Consequently, both our daily life should be suited to celebrating the liturgy fruitfully, and the structure and forms of the liturgy should be such that they can nourish and animate our daily life. The day's labor should not suffocate the liturgy, nor should those liturgical forms be retained that are foreign to today's mentality and render the celebration sterile.

63. Spiritual reading (*lectio divina*) belongs necessarily as well to the life of prayer. It calls for an appropriate education and certain conditions that aid it in becoming a truly prayerful, quiet and continuous reading. Enriched with these qualities, spiritual reading helps the monk to become ever more a man of God and to perceive clearly the presence and the will of the Lord. The observance of silence should help us greatly to foster the spirit of prayer. For by faithfully observing periods of silence, our hearts are prepared to hear the Word of God better and to pay heed to Him more openly.

64. The unity of our life should manifest itself in the harmonious integration of its elements. Above all, the liturgical activity of our monasteries should be a light enkindled and enlightening that sheds its rays on the entire local Church. Our liturgical celebrations should invite the local Christian faithful to active participation and should offer the Christian people an abundant resource for their spiritual life.

4. Following Christ Who Humbly Carries His Cross

65. The life of the monk should be a following of the humble Christ. Sincerely penitent for our sins and aware of our limitations yet uplifted at the same time by divine mercy, we should seek the glory of God, not our own. Out of this spirit of humility we should accept sufferings and privations patiently, and we should be content with even a modest income and living standard.

The monastic life can only exist under the sign of the cross. For as we follow the love of Christ, greater than which there is none, we set out on the path of renunciation, and we mortify our bodies in order to serve the living God. For just as He called the disciples, Christ has called us also to carry His cross daily.

66. We have been called to share in the cross of Christ, which consists for us most often in the following:

1. to humble oneself, fleeing vain glory and egotistical ambitions;
2. to perform our daily work well, which today often demands of us such sacrifices that we are right to compare it with the austerities of ancient monastic life;
3. to exercise patience, by which we endure with a good spirit the infirmities of body and soul, the inadequacies of our abilities, and the burdens of common life;
4. to love our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers;
5. to accept old age and death in such a way that we profess as much as possible our faith and hope in eternal life.

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67. As we have promised in baptism to resist and renounce Satan with all his attractions, in monastic life we also want to flee the world insofar as it is subject to the devil, the desires of the eyes, the concupiscence of the flesh and the pride of life. Fleeing the world consists, above all, in an inward separation of ourselves from the mentality of this world that expects nothing beyond the grave and values nothing in this life more than the pleasures of body and soul. External separation from the "world," practiced differently and to various degrees in our communities, serves as both sign and instrument for this inward renunciation.

68. Our love of the cross and resolute resistance to the spirit of this world should not leave us indifferent to the true values of this age, which should be used in the service of God's Kingdom. Values offered by technology, economics, social and cultural life are by no means foreign to us. Their use and promotion both enrich our life and make us part of the human family.

5. Our Work

69. Like all men we, too, are subject to the common law of serious work so that through our work we might collaborate in the task of rendering the world ever more perfect and of carrying out God's plans in this world. By doing this we also fulfill our vocation. For it is false to say that the

perfection of each person's soul and the tasks of this life are at odds when, in fact, they can be combined very well. No one should of necessity remove himself from the affairs of this mortal life to strive for Christian perfection. For this activity carried out in the proper manner not only does not endanger one's dignity as a man and as a Christian but perfects it.

Our work, therefore, is not only a measure against idleness or some sort of "occupation" only to be carried out temporarily. It is an essential part of our striving to acquire Christian perfection. At the same time, it is also brotherly service to the monastic community and to people living in the world if, of course, we perform it competently and responsibly.

70. Since the value of our work depends also on its quality, it belongs to the essential tasks of the superiors to provide their co-workers, clerics or lay, with a thorough training, and when necessary with technical skills, so that they might be able to carry out their jobs as well as possible. One should understand that in our age of specialization and in our modern circumstances good will and dedication are not sufficient. The main fields of work found in the various congregations and in our monasteries are the following (The order of the list does not indicate any order of value or excellence.):

a) The Education of Youth

71. The formation and education of youth in schools and colleges suits monastic life very well, and those who dedicate themselves to such work contribute very much to furthering God's Kingdom and human society. For they intend to enrich not only the intellect but the whole person by showing the intrinsic connection between the arts and sciences and the Christian spirit. When communicating truths about created things, they lead their students to the source of all truth and creation, Christ Himself. Furthermore, since whatever we do to even one of the least of Christ's brothers, we do to Christ Himself, one serves Him in a special way in the education of youth.

b) Pastoral Ministry

72. The Priesthood of the New Testament in its fullness is not merely cultic, but is directed to the ministry of the Christian community. Pastoral ministry both ordinary (in the monastery, in parishes, or in foreign missions) or extraordinary (spiritual conferences, retreats, lecturing and the administration of the sacraments, among others.) clearly contributes most effectively to building up the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church. Through such work the monks of our Order ordained to the Priesthood offer people outstanding service, obeying their vocation received from the Holy Spirit and like the good servant who distributed grain to his fellow servants serving as good ministers.

c) Manual Labor

73. We should consider manual labor not only as a very useful and frequently necessary element of common life but as a sign of solidarity with all human beings, especially the poor, who provide for themselves and their families the necessities of life by their daily and humble work. It is also an effective instrument of self-denial and participation in the Lord's cross as well as of serving the neighbor, especially one's brothers in the monastery. Therefore, it should never be considered simply as an occupation that is in itself indifferent for one's spiritual life. It should rather be exercised competently and effectively as an instrument of love.

d) Scholarly Work

74. Several confreres in various monasteries make significant contributions to the promotion of sacred and secular disciplines by research in philosophy, theology, history, social and natural sciences, and others. Such work is of great value not only for the respective disciplines, but also for the whole of monastic life, which receives true riches from the deeper understanding of both created things and the things of faith. Special importance is due, however, to theology, which excels all other fields in its aid to the spiritual life of monks, spiritual guidance and pastoral ministry.

Many values accompany scholarly work: fidelity to truth, a sense of solidarity deriving from the need to work with others, ever clearer awareness of responsibility, and other such values.

e) Hospitality

75. A very old form of the apostolate of monks is hospitality, which should offer not so much material relief as spiritual food in its various forms.

All guests are to be received as Christ, for He himself will say, "I was a stranger and you received me." Insofar as it is possible, the divine law should be read to the guests to edify them, and afterwards every form of hospitality is to be shown them. One of the brothers should take care of the guest room, and the House of God should be administered wisely by wise men.

76. If we are to be able to give ourselves cheerfully and promptly to our tasks, we should also concern ourselves with recreation. In establishing the daily schedule of the monastery, we should aim at a healthy balance between prayer life, work and recreation, keeping in mind the principles of psychology and medicine. For when it is directed to its due purpose, recreation is not some sort of deviation from the spirit of monasticism but the condition for a well-balanced life. Only in this way will we be able to fulfill the Apostle's instruction: "God loves the cheerful giver."

Part III: The Proper Organization of Life in the Order And its Communities

77. Having sketched the image of our Order in its concrete existence and briefly explained the fundamental values of Cistercian life, we must still consider the practical organization of our life and the fitting juridical structure of both the individual communities and congregations, and of the Order. For it is not sufficient only to propose a doctrine on our goals and values. The practical and juridical structures must also be sought out that will organize and direct the life of our communities to reach those goals.

We believe that in the following only those elements or principles should be presented that seem clearly necessary to resolve correctly the problems of today. We leave the more precise arrangement of daily life to the constitutions of the Order and of the congregations and to local legislation. We will, therefore, first present the fundamental aspects of any juridical organization or of the exercise of any authority. We will then speak specifically of the systems of governance for monasteries, for a congregation, and for the Order. We will add at the end a few remarks about the relationship of our Order to other monastic orders and to the offices of the Church.

78. The following is valid in all respects also for the monasteries of our nuns unless the contrary is clear from the nature of the matter. For the nuns of our Order do not constitute a “second order” next to the “first order” (of men), but they belong fully to the Cistercian Order. Their monasteries are truly *sui juris* even if they depend on a *Pater Immediatus* or a bishop in certain matters of jurisdiction. Moreover, there are very many members of our congregations who observe the same legislation as the monks. Therefore, one must certainly promote effectively and constantly, even if slowly, the participation of the nuns in decisions that concern their life as well as their congregation and the whole Order.

A. Fundamental Aspects of the Juridical Structure

1. *The Monastic Community – A Society of Free Individuals*

79. Following our vocation, we have entered a Cistercian monastery that we have freely chosen so that we might receive the instruction of the Lord’s school of service. Then, after we have made our profession, we have voluntarily taken up the tasks and the ideals of the life of our monastery. Our monastic life has, therefore, not been imposed on us, but we have voluntarily and with free commitment taken it upon ourselves. And so our communities consist of free agents who all strive for the same goal that has been made known to all and that is desired by all in such a way that we live harmoniously in a house and that we have one mind and one heart.

80. The foundation of the monastic community is, therefore, the free and voluntary commitment of the monks who esteem greatly the values and tasks of the monastery’s life and look upon them as their own. This free dedication and cheerful attitude is the moving force of the observance of the laws and of obedience, and it is the foundation for the whole juridical structure. If this is lacking, the monastic community, like any voluntary society, is unable to maintain its true vitality. It is therefore of the greatest importance both that the monks preserve that lively and cheerful commitment by which they freely undertook the monastic life and that any arrangement or organization of community life respect as well as strive to promote and encourage that free will and effort.

2. *Monastic Life Demands Organization by Laws and the Precepts of the Superiors*

81. Even if a monastic community should be based first of all on the love of Christ and the brothers and on the voluntary undertaking of the goals and tasks of one’s own monastery, nevertheless as a stable union of human beings directed to a definite and constituted end it also needs a firm structure, that is, the correct organization through laws and the commands of superiors. For in this way stability and continuity of life are made firm, the individuals’ strengths are directed more efficiently to the common goal, and the life and activity of the members is coordinated in peace. Beside the laws and other written statutes by which the more permanent aspects of life are regulated, there is need for the personal authority of the abbot and his officials so that the concrete ways of acting, which cannot be determined by minute laws among such varied and changeable conditions of modern life, might be responsibly and promptly determined. The chapters, the councils, and other representative organs play a large role in passing laws and norms. In some cases determined by law they also have a determinative vote. These same organs should also aid the superiors or other officials in concrete decisions that by law belong to the abbot

alone or some definite official of the monastery. They should, however, not take away or reduce their responsibility and right to decide.

82. Although the authority of the laws and superiors in a monastery has indeed much in common with the legitimate authority of civil society, they are nevertheless not to be simply equated. For, in the first place, authority exercised in a monastery always has an ecclesial character deriving both from the Holy See's approval of the Rule and the Constitutions and from the Church's acceptance of our profession. Hence, love of a monastery springs from love of the Church. By our profession we are bound more closely to the Church, and that bond is increased the more we love her. Secondly, it has also a deeply religious character, for the root of monastic obedience is not necessity or human opportunity but our vocation itself and our voluntary dedication to the service of God's will. Those in the community who possess the power to pass laws and to give commands are, as it were, the means of knowing what the concrete will of God is for that community. Although one may not simply identify obedience to God with obedience to a human being, nevertheless in monastic life we obey in a real sense Christ's representatives, and the obedience shown superiors is a part of the Lord's service.

Authority in a monastic community has deeper roots indeed than authority in merely civil societies. Nevertheless, one must not neglect or reject their experiences and new methods of exercising authority; one must rather examine them with an open mind. For very often in various social movements or in new forms of governance one finds something useful that can also be of benefit to us in the proper organization of monastic life today.

3. Christian Principles of Legislation and Governance Applied to our Life

83. In the organization and legislation of monastic life as well as in the exercise of personal authority one must carefully respect those sociological principles based in natural law that have been perceived more clearly in recent times and are proclaimed with great insistence by the Magisterium of the Church. The most important of these for us are the correlative principles of personalism and solidarity as well as subsidiarity and a legitimate pluralism within a necessary unity.

84. *The principle of personalism*, the fundamental teaching of Catholic social doctrine, states that the subject and the end of all social institutions is and should be the human person. Therefore, all our juridical structures should above all serve the purpose that all our confreres can obtain more fully and more easily their own perfection, and carry out the duties of their vocation more easily and better. The sacred dignity of the human person, which is rooted in the nature of the human being and still more in his supernatural vocation, and the inalienable rights deriving from that dignity must be recognized and respected also in the legislation and governance of the monastery and the Order.

From this it also follows that the precepts of the laws and the commands of the superiors should not confine the monks in puerile dependence but should lead them to mature Christian freedom and responsible participation in governance for the good of the whole community. They should also respect the monks' personal competence and allow ample space for their prudent initiatives.

85. From the principle of personalism, however, it hardly follows that we can indulge the vice of individualism. For the correlative of this principle is *the principle of solidarity*. By his nature the

human person needs the life of society and, what is more, has a supernatural vocation that is essentially communitarian. For it has pleased God to sanctify and save human beings not singly, as if any sort of mutual connection had been precluded, but to establish them as His people so that united by the bond of the Spirit they might be gathered into the Body of Christ. In a special way our cenobitic life ought to express and manifest to the world the communitarian nature of salvation and the Christian life.

Appropriate legislation and the governance of the monastery play an important role in forming and confirming this union based on a life of solidarity if they especially promote the consensus of everyone with regard to goals and values, if they effectively coordinate the community's strengths for those goals, and if they aim at bringing about the appropriate forms to encourage a familial life. In the spirit of solidarity each of the members should gladly and promptly take up the tasks assigned to him, even though sometimes unpleasant, as service to the community and the common good.

86. *The principle of subsidiarity* orders the relations between individuals and the community as well as between narrower and wider communities. It states that the higher authority of the broader community should leave those things to the subordinates themselves which they can accomplish well, and indeed very often better, but that when the subordinates are of themselves inadequate or neglect their duty, then the higher authority should offer assistance and help. In this way both the vitality and the responsibility of the subordinates remains intact and the higher authority can carry out more effectively its own task of coordination and higher decision.

In our case this principle is true both for individual local communities and for congregations and the Order. For in a monastery it is the superior's task to promote and direct to the common good the prudent initiatives and personal responsibilities of the members and the particular officials. The authorities of the congregations and of the Order best fulfill their duty if while respecting the legitimate freedom and particular tasks of the monasteries or congregations they offer them practical assistance to reach their goals more easily and surely, and furthermore if they strive to elaborate and promote those proposals and larger projects that benefit all but exceed the resources of the individuals.

87. *The principle of legitimate pluralism within necessary unity* now follows from the preceding. For a legitimate pluralism must be acknowledged – that is, the diversity of the members coming together in a union – nor may one suppress in the name of unity the variety of abilities or talents. Also in a monastery there are diverse charisms: each one has his one gift, but to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given to be useful. The diversity of the members serves what is useful for the whole body, and only through the communion of their diverse gifts can the individuals can participate in the fullness of the Spirit.

The same is true also for our monasteries and congregations, which differ among themselves more than a little with regard to their historical evolution, the native character of the members, the social and cultural circumstances, tasks and duties that they must undertake according to the various needs of the local church. The differences, however, do not prevent the members from coming together into a living unity. Indeed, the variety of gifts can give the whole Order greater force and vitality if the sense of communion and the will for cooperation is present.

Whether the equilibrium of pluralism and unity can be brought about depends very much on appropriate legislation and the proper exercise of authority. For the security of pursuing the

particular goals through stable laws, the clear delineation of competencies, the clear presentation of common goals and projects, the establishment of practical forms for mutual assistance – these and similar steps will encourage everyone to embrace and to nurture union quickly. Similarly, it is very beneficial if the authorities of the congregations and of the Order do not look with suspicion and distrust on the special characteristics and particular interests of the communities but try to cultivate more fully whatever is good and valid in them and to direct them to the benefit of all. At the same time the individual communities of the Order should recognize the demands of unity and in promoting them should be prepared to cooperate with sincere trust with other communities of the Order and with the organs of higher of authority.

4. Today's Problems Regarding Monastic Legislation: A Law for Life

88. As we have seen, a juridical structure and the organization of our life by laws are altogether necessary for a monastic community; however, they are not ends in themselves but only means of great importance serving the goals of monastic life. Law is for life and not *vice versa*. Legal structures and precepts should promote and aid the life of individuals and the community, and should help them reach their goals. They should not hinder or suffocate them. The cause of the unrest and the “crisis of authority” that is manifested in our times not only throughout civil society but also the Church and religious communities derives to a large extent from the fact that laws and institutional structures often do not correspond sufficiently to today's circumstances or to life's just demands. Not infrequently these laws and institutional structures appear to subordinates as obsolete, foreign, and irrational. It is the responsibility of the competent authorities to see that the laws and institutions truly promote and support the life of today's community and that they not be obsolete and incongruous and thus impede the progress of life. The Second Vatican Council also demands this of us when it decrees that we submit to an examination and appropriately revise the constitutions and manner of governance of the monasteries, the congregations and the Order, and that we suppress those precepts that are obsolete.

89. So that the structures of governance and the legislation can in a true sense prove useful for our life, the following must be kept in mind:

a) *Laws are not to be overly multiplied*: freedom for action and initiatives should not be excessively restricted by detailed norms. Only those matters are to be subject to legislation which demand a certain uniformity of action and coordination of efforts for common goals. Other matters, however, are to be left to the responsibility of superiors and officials or the free and responsible decision of the confreres.

b) *Laws are to be constantly adapted to the conditions of life*. Since the conditions, demands, and tasks of life are constantly changing, and in our age the changes are uniquely profound and fast, the means of organizing life – that is, the laws and juridical structures – are to be reviewed and revised again and again. Even the means and structures which at one time seemed useful, indeed were very good, lose their force and usefulness as the circumstances of life change. In fact, they can harm the progress of life. The Founders' proposals and precepts with regard to the organization of monastic life and its juridical structures, although they are to be held in great esteem, are however not unchanging and virtually everlasting norms, for they themselves were connected with the changeable conditions of their times. One must therefore consider prudently whether and to what degree they correspond to the new demands of life. Nor should such a review of the laws and norms of life be postponed too long, so that a community's vitality perishes and dangerous tensions

arise among the confreres because of the excessively rigid and obsolete norms. In the constitutions and in the local statutes themselves, the manner and legitimate reasons are to be included by which the revision and change of the laws can be petitioned and carried out by the respective community.

c) *The continuity of legislation: one must respect the tradition.* Although varied and changeable, life has nevertheless a marvelous continuity and tenacity. In the organization of our life, we should also be careful not to throw away the whole Cistercian tradition, about which we have just spoken and thus violently interrupt the continuity of monastic life. Just as it is destructive to retain obsolete forms of organization and inadequate laws, it is also dangerous to uproot ourselves from the values of our tradition and in the name of accommodation to overturn fundamental elements of our life. So also in the revision of a juridical structure or in the formulation of new legislation, it is fitting that we regard the experiences of previous ages as a model and that we preserve the natural continuity and harmony with the tradition. We must, however, beware that fidelity to tradition not lead to immobility or false security, and that it not blind us to the new demands of life whether in the Church or in the society of our time.

d) Laws and other statutes are only then useful for living if *they prudently prescribe a possible norm for acting.* For if they define things that are too difficult for modern man or that are foreign to him, they invite him to neglect the laws or embitter even well-intentioned men by imposing insupportable burdens. The law should, therefore, be simple and clear so that it not disturb the normal course of life with too much complication or ambiguity. It should always respect the reality of our monasteries and their members, nor should it enjoin what is foreign or removed from their way of life. On the other hand, they should not approve existing imperfections or vices. It should be moderate and should positively point out the path to the good rather than serving negatively as a deterrent so that monks of good will can fulfill it willingly. This same principle also reminds us that laws and precepts strictly speaking can sometimes not determine the norm for acting but that the norm is more appropriately determined by more flexible guidelines, by showing several possible ways of acting.

5. The Role of the Community in Passing Legislation

90. In preparing laws or in reaching decisions that affect the community, the conditions of modern life call for and the Second Vatican Council demands that all the members of the community play a role. If all matters are determined by the judgment of the superiors or a few counselors, the members of communities will rightly feel that the norms of their lives and decisions made are foreign to them. This participation of all can take place in differing ways and degrees (by the prior consultation of individuals and communities; by the vote of the conventual chapter; by the election of officials and delegates; by the right to make proposals, etc.). It is, however, altogether necessary that everywhere and on every level of the Order's structure appropriate forms for real and active participation be established.

6. The Exercise of Personal Authority

91 While laws and other written norms regulate the more general and permanent aspects of monastic life, in many matters the organization of concrete daily life and particular decisions belong to the personal authority of the superiors and officials. The exercise of this authority has certainly become more difficult and more involved than before both because of the new circumstances of our times and because of the changed attitude of modern man toward authority.

On the one hand, because of very rapid changes and developments, which can hardly be foreseen much less governed by general laws, very many issues call for the personal and immediate decision of the superiors, and that often in matters that are very complex and call for professional expertise. On the other hand, men today respect the superior's office itself less but often demand of the superiors human qualities and perfections to an excessive degree. They pass judgment openly and bitterly on the superiors' errors and deficiencies, they want to see the reasons for an order clearly, and they do not readily show obedience if an order opposes their personal judgment or convenience.

Although the task of those who exercise authority in the community is certainly difficult, it is not a labor taken up in vain. Indeed, if appropriate forms and methods of governing are worked out, it can become much more effective than in any age before: for in our age confreres are prompter for sincere and active cooperation, and they have been even better prepared to share with the superiors the care and concern for the common good.

92 To this new type of exercising authority the following belong:

a) that superiors inform the members about matters of the monastery and the Order, that they apprise the members of difficulties and problems sincerely and openly, and that they seek out and learn their opinions and proposals;

b) that they not fear prudent criticism or blame, and that they not disdain to carry out necessary corrections;

c) that they recognize the complexity and multiplicity of their task and not think that they can carry out everything alone, and that they share their roles and functions with qualified members and freely seek out their experience;

d) that they grant ample freedom for action to individual confreres and especially to officials or those assigned a special duty, and that they respect their competence in the assigned task; but at the same time they should not neglect to require an accurate report on the matters that have been entrusted to their care and execution.

B. The Governance of the Monastery

93. Having presented the general considerations which must be respected and applied in the overall organization and government of the Order and of communities, let us now treat the special questions of the governance of a monastery, a congregation and the Order. We begin with the monastery because it is the primary and fundamental element of monastic organization. Monastic life, however, hinges on the abbot. We must therefore describe him beforehand.

1. The Abbot of the Monastery and His Helpers

a) The Abbot as Shepherd of Souls, Mediator of the Word of God, and Discerner of Spirits

94. The abbot is above all the shepherd of souls – that is, his task is before all else directed to spiritual matters and the good of souls. His authority is a ministry and has the character of humble service according to the teaching and example of Christ, whom he represents. Therefore it is fitting that he express and show toward his brothers that paternal love with which the Father loves the monks.

95. The abbot is, moreover, the mediator of the Word of God, fulfilling the office of interpreter of the Divine Scriptures in the manifold circumstances of daily life. The abbot can never overshadow

the Divine Word. He should rather become more and more subject to it.

96. The other office, which the Apostle calls the discernment of spirits, is no less important. The abbot should therefore strive to discern whether each of his monks is being led by the Spirit of God or is being deceived by the solely earthly desires of his own talent or by lying spirits. To be able to discern the voice of the Spirit from any other voice, he should himself also be well versed in spiritual matters and in theology and in experience.

b) The Abbot as the Center of Unity

97. The abbot is the community's center of unity, promoting the individuals' common efforts toward common goals, coordinating the efforts and work of all. The abbot should therefore highly prize, understand, and treat with due respect the personalities of all the members. Available and with an open heart to all, the abbot should concern himself not with just any kind of obedience but with active and responsible obedience and with the individuals' cordial cooperation so that the gifts of all might bear fruit in the service of God. He should seek to promote sincere and open dialogue. He should make all the members of the house participants in the concerns and plans for the monastery's life and in all its business, for it is indeed their business that is at issue. He should, nevertheless, accept the responsibility which belongs to him in virtue of his office if he must determine clearly what seems after careful examination to be the will of God.

98. As the promoter of unity the abbot should set aside all that tends to separate him from his confreres, such as an exaggerated use of pontifical insignia and antiquated signs of respect (These privileges are understood today only with difficulty.), in place of which today's customs of etiquette should be observed. He should lead a life in common with his brothers, offering himself to them as an example by his fidelity and zeal. He should restrict to the minimum, as much as possible, whatever demands his absence from the monastery. For even though he has been made an abbot, he remains a monk and a brother among brothers in such a way that he gives his whole self for his brothers as the center of unity and love in the love of Christ.

c) The Abbot's Assistants

99. The image of the abbot that we have drawn above following the traditions of the Order and the opinion of confreres shows clearly that the abbot has such great and varied roles and functions in the life of the community that rarely can one person fulfill them correctly and fully. Nor can these roles and functions be simply omitted because of the limitations of the human person. Therefore the prudent abbot, aware of his duties and at the same time of his limitations, will see to it that he acquire for himself suitable helpers, not only the regular officials of the monastery or those assigned to financial and administrative jobs but also others who can offer him help in his pastoral and spiritual task and in strengthening the unity and coordinating the efforts of individuals.

100. While reserving the final direction and supervision for himself, the abbot commits to skilled officials and other suitable brothers, insofar as it is possible, the financial and administrative tasks, the daily distribution of activities and jobs (specific permissions, organization of work, correspondence, reception of guests, and other affairs) so that he might remain free to carry out his task.

101. Among the officials of the monastery, the prior holds first place, whom the abbot uses in his jobs as his closest companion and administrator so that when he is absent or impeded the prior presides over the monastery. Next, in educating and training the younger members the master of novices and the master of professed monks exercise their skill and concern. Their office is very

great important and weighty, indeed, for the hope of the harvest is in the seed. The Choir Master assists the abbot in preparing and taking care of the worthy celebration of the Eucharist and the Work of God. In the administration of the material goods of the monastery, the cellarer offers assistance to the abbot. It is his task to look after the community's goods, to provide and care for the things necessary for the life of the house.

2. The Conventual Chapter and the Abbot's Council

102. Whenever more important matters of the monastery are concerned, especially in the cases prescribed in the congregational constitutions and common law, the conventual chapter participates in the governance of the house. In a truly collegial act the election of the Abbot takes place there, and in a collegial manner decisions are taken regarding the activity of the monastery, the admission and formation of new members, and the administration of the property.

103. But the task of the Chapter should not be restricted solely to those cases in which the members of the chapter should give their deliberative or consultative votes according to common or particular law. The members should be brought together frequently for discussion, for truly fraternal dialogue, so that the participation and concern of the confreres for the good of the monastery might be exercised effectively. Therefore the conventual chapter should also be a forum for information on matters of the monastery, the congregation, and the Order, and at the same time the place where the officials of the monastery and specialists report on events and current issues.

104. Topics to be treated in the Chapter should be selected with the cooperation of the more restricted council of the abbot and with respect to the desires and problems brought forth by any of the brothers. The community should be notified in a timely and appropriate manner of the topics so that they have time to study the questions and reflect. In certain matters responses will be given more suitably in writing. The obligation of secrecy should be restricted to those matters that absolutely demand discretion. To people outside the monastery, however, the members should use the greatest discretion about matters dealing with the family of the monastery.

105. In individual communities, moreover, the appropriate means should be provided so that all members, even those living outside the house, are informed in a timely and accurate manner about the matters of the monastery, congregation, and Order.

106. The Council of the Abbot, more restricted in the number of its members and often called the council of "seniors," is convened appropriately for any necessity and need of the family and for matters which must be treated as a secret. The community usually elects about half of this council, while the abbot appoints the other half.

107. If these principles and counsels are put into effect, communities will be able to acquire new vitality, and they will be families living through charity in the house of God. They will be well-ordered ranks of brothers rejoicing in their firm unity, where each fulfills his task, serves all and is strengthened by all.

C. Cistercian Congregations

1. *The Origin and Purpose of Cistercian Congregations*

a) The Origin of the Congregations

108. In his Rule St. Benedict does not speak of the union of monasteries among themselves but only of the internal organization of a monastery. In the course of history, however, various forms of joining monasteries together came about so that the religious life in the monasteries might be led more effectively and securely. In some of these unions the dangers of isolation were removed through the organization of a congregation, while the legitimate autonomy of the monasteries was preserved. In others, however, a form of centralization was arrived at in which the individual monasteries were dependent on a central abbey, as was the case in Cluny and generally in the foundations made from Molesme.

109. According to the principles set forth in the *Charta Charitatis*, the founders of Citeaux strove both to safeguard the legitimate autonomy of the monasteries and to establish a necessary union and to assure mutual aid through the General Chapters and annual visitations. Once the Order had grown greatly and the way of life had changed in many respects over the course of the centuries, congregations arose, as we have already very briefly outlined above.

Thus, our Order now consists *de facto* of monastic congregations according to the juridical norm, as the General Chapter has explicitly defined:

1. Congregatio Regularis Observantiae S. Bernardi seu de Castella,
2. Congregatio S. Bernardi in Italia,
3. Congregatio Coronae Aragonum,
4. Congregatio Augiensis
5. Congregatio B.M.V. Mediatrix Omnium Gratiarum,
6. Congregatio Austriaca,
7. Congregatio Immaculate Conceptionis B.M.V.,
8. Congregatio Circensis,
9. Congregatio Purissimi Cordis B.M.V.,
10. Congregatio Casamariensis,
11. Congregatio Reginae Mundi seu Poloniae,
12. Congregatio Brasiliensis,
13. Congregatio S. Familiae,
14. Congregatio Monasteriorum Cisterciensium de S. Bernardo and of some monasteries of men and of women that are not incorporated into a congregation.

The federations of monasteries of nuns that are of pontifical right have great merit and should continue to pursue their task for the benefit of their monasteries and of the Order.

b) The Principle of Subsidiarity and Legitimate Pluralism in the Congregation

110. The principles of subsidiarity and of legitimate pluralism have great importance in the structure of the congregations. Whatever the individual monasteries for their part can carry out through their effective competence and more accurate knowledge of local conditions should be left to them. It belongs to the organs of the congregation to help the efforts of the individual

communities with fraternal advice and aid, to coordinate their efforts toward common goals, and to correct abuses if any should creep in; they also represent them before ecclesiastical and civil authorities. According to the principle of pluralism, the monasteries' specific characteristics and special tasks are to be recognized and the diversity of their gifts are to be directed toward the harmony of common goals lest the unity of the Congregation be endangered.

111. Among the monasteries, the principle of pluralism notwithstanding, there is very often not only the bond of juridical organization but also a certain common ideal. The delineation of this ideal and of the more important means appropriate and necessary for reaching it will be found in the constitutions of each congregation which, after consultation of the individual communities, are worked out by the congregational chapter and approved by the Holy See.

c) The Goal of the Congregations

112. The union of our monasteries under their respective congregational chapters and the Abbot Presidents has as its goal above all else that Cistercian life flourish more abundantly in our monasteries, the observance of the Rule be preserved more safely, charitable help be offered one another more promptly in times of necessity, the strengths of the individual communities, if necessary, be joined together for larger projects to be accomplished with common work, whatever is in opposition to the life of the monasteries be more effectively attacked and the tasks which the Church and modern society demand of monasteries be completed more securely and easily. In addition to this common goal of the individual congregations of the Order, the congregations can have a special goal, clearly articulated in this case in their own constitutions.

2. The Congregational Chapter

113. The Congregational Chapter is the highest power within the congregation, the principles presented above having been observed. In addition to the major superiors, delegates are also present at the Congregational Chapter with a deliberative vote, elected for this task by all the members of the congregation according to the congregation's constitutions.

114. The primary task of the congregational chapter is to be a forum for fraternal discussion and legislation, so that it might:

- a) elaborate constitutions appropriate for our times, with a clear definition of the goals, ideals, and common tasks of the congregation;
- b) compile and publish books of customs, declarations and other instructions, in which the principles of the congregation's constitutions are applied to the circumstances of time and place;
- c) investigate new possibilities with regard to life and work, communicate and coordinate among all the monasteries the experiences and experimental undertakings of individual monasteries;
- d) work out projects and plans that are to be accomplished by the common exertion of forces; strive to find a solution to difficulties by a common effort;
- e) promote the better and more rational use of material and personal resources.

To provide as well as possible for the common good, the Congregational Chapter should be held often and, if it would prove useful, meetings of the members of the Congregational Chapter should take place in another form more often.

3. The Abbot President of the Congregation

115. The Abbot President governs the congregation according to the intention of the congregational chapter and is a sign of the fraternal union by which the monasteries are joined among themselves. He offers his service so that in the monastic families life in the monastery might flourish, grow stronger, and increase according to the constitutions of the congregation.

It is his task to promote relations among monasteries for the good of the whole congregation. In this work the abbots and monks of the individual monasteries should help the Abbot President by cultivating fraternal exchanges among themselves, by receiving one another freely, by working together in studies, by coming together for conferences on spiritual and administrative matters, and by striving daily to know and appreciate one another better.

4. Regular Visitation

116. The *Charta Caritatis* established an annual visitation that the abbot of the founding monastery or his delegate according to the law of filiation was to carry out. The goal was to encourage fervor and, if necessary, to serve as fraternal correction in charity. The annual visitation was the central element of the juridical structure of the Order. It was very highly regarded by all, even those outside the Order, and certainly contributed greatly to strengthening and promoting life in the monastery.

After completing his investigation, the visitor can often give the local abbot very good advice, direct his attention to those questions and problems which the abbot has perhaps not perceived or whose interconnections or personal aspects he has not seen clearly. However, if the visitor sees that the precepts of our Order are being broken in the monastery, he should strive with the advice of the local abbot to make corrections in charity.

In a few places the law of filiation is still in effect. In place of the ancient and almost natural relationship which filiation established, there is very often today a union of monasteries in congregations so that the ordinary visitor is in general the Abbot President of the congregation, except in those cases in which the law of filiation is in effect and the constitutions of the respective congregation organize the matter differently.

117. The goal of visitations still remains the same now as before, even if certain forms for carrying out the visitation must be adapted to new conditions. Even in our times visitations should take place frequently, even if they do not have to be always canonical so that the needs of the monasteries are taken care of in a timely manner. The visitor is certainly neither a legislator nor a "reformer," but he should promote an examination of conscience by everyone. For the solution of problems will hardly be imposed from above but will only come from internal persuasion. This, however, demands much both of the visitor and of those visited. The visitor, whose task is before all else a service of charity, should strive first of all to understand the psychological state of the community. He should also respect the legitimate autonomy of the monastery and its proper and legitimately approved goals so that the visitation will bring true increase to the monastery.

Those visited should, however, humbly and sincerely open their hearts, truly seeking the good of their souls and the progress of the community in the service of God. They should also keep in view the various limitations of the visitation, namely the limited range of the matters in which the visitor can act and the real possibilities of his actions. Not infrequently the visitation is deprived of

fruit because of an unthoughtful and unfounded expectation of many members of the community who demand unreal things from the visitator and quickly say that they have been deceived.

5. The Importance of Congregations in the Structure of the Order

118. The congregations are of vital importance in our Order: on the one hand, individual monasteries are too small and weak to live and work in full and absolute independence (*autarkia*); on the other hand, the Order itself includes such various and differing observances, forms and apostolates, that very often it cannot be governed with uniform norms or methods. Therefore, the congregation is, or should be, that living and concrete unity of action that joins together the resources of very many houses that have the same ideals and similar tasks in life. From this the necessity and utility of congregations in the structure of our Order is clear.

D. The Governance of the Order

1. The Order—A Union of Congregations. Unity and Diversity

119. Our congregations are united in the Cistercian Order, both in virtue of a common goal and ideal and in virtue of common structures and juridical organs. The primary goal of this union is mutual inspiration and mutual practical aid in cultivating and carrying out the monastic life.

Our congregations manifest differences that are not insignificant both in monastic forms and traditions and in their work because of their diverse historical evolutions and various cultural and social conditions. Those differences, however, do not destroy the Order's deeper unity but serve the vitality and richness of the Order's life if the gifts of this manifold grace are directed to one another and shared. It is, therefore, of great importance that this pluralism be recognized in its positive social and spiritual meaning, and that the diverse but complementary resources be united for practical and effective cooperation.

2. The General Chapter and the Synod of the Order

120. The General Chapter of the Order is the central legislative and juridical organ for fraternal deliberation, with the legitimate autonomy however preserved that according to common and particular law belongs to each congregation and monastery.

The task of the General Chapter is to encourage members to strive toward the Order's common ideal:

- a) to declare and explain the fundamental values that constitute our common vocation (Christian, religious, monastic, and Cistercian) even if these values cannot be realized in the same concrete manner by all;
- b) to effectively promote communication among the congregations, mutual aid, and cooperation in common tasks.

121. The strictly legislative function of the General Chapter, although it does have great importance, is no longer today its primary task. On account of the diversity of forms and apostolates in our communities as well as because of the rapid change in the conditions of life,

uniform regulation through laws in the strict sense is very often impossible or useless. Therefore, the General Chapter will rarely establish laws obliging the whole Order. It will most often define only general norms for acting, which one will then be able to adapt to the particular regional and congregational needs. While the field of the Chapter's legislative function will be restricted on one side in the future, the other tasks of the General Chapter listed above (the interpretation of goals and values; fraternal discussion of mutual assistance in common causes) will receive much greater importance.

122. In the first centuries of the Order, General Chapters were held annually according to the precepts of the Charta Caritatis and of the Roman Pontiffs. In our times both because the individual congregational chapters meet more frequently and because the expense of trips to the Chapter is burdensome for some, ordinary General Chapters are held more rarely, every five years. The meetings of the Synod of the Order will be held more frequently.

The Synod of the Order is a group called together so that they might gather advice on issues that regard the entire Order, discuss them, and propose them to the General Chapter for a decision. If an issue is urgent, the Synod should decide it preliminarily until the decision of the next General Chapter, according to the norm of the Constitutions of the Order.

It is also the task of the Synod to see that, in so far as there should be need, those matters are carried out which were prescribed by the Holy See or the General Chapter; to gather accurate information on the status of the Order so that it might better provide for its good; and finally, to receive the reports of the Abbot General on the status of the Order and of the Abbot Presidents on the status of their congregations.

3. The Abbot General

123. The Abbot General, elected by the General Chapter, governs the Order according to the intention of the General Chapter and the norms of the Constitutions, and promotes the goals of our union.

The Abbot General is:

a) the promoter and center of fraternal unity in the Order, especially in that he is prepared to serve the customs of many, with just and impartial zeal embracing, promoting and representing all the Order's families. He makes his own the Order's values and common ideals both in his personal way of life and in his official acts. He thinks and feels with the Order as it actually exists in our communities, perceiving with an open mind its concerns, tendencies, and opinions.

b) the promoter and coordinator of common projects and plans, which go beyond the resources of individual communities and congregations but which benefit all, or many. In conceiving and working out such projects, he both has an active part himself and encourages others' initiatives. With his advice and actions, he then moves the projects forward to completion.

c) Using his authority established in the Constitutions for the service of all, he is a father, indeed a confrere among brothers, according to the intention of Christ, desiring to be of service more than to be over. In his letters, sermons and other communications with the Order, he speaks as a confrere, a fellow disciple and servant of the Lord, who together with the other brothers seeks the truth and will of God. Filled with conviction and a vision of the values of the religious vocation, he also strives to show to the members and communities new perspectives and possibilities, and to

infuse into them hope for the future.

E. Collaboration with Other Monastic Orders and with the Hierarchy

124. Our Order clearly has much in common especially with other monastic orders. Therefore of the greatest importance is collaboration with them in matters that are common to monks, such as promoting the study of the monastic patrimony, cultivating and investigating liturgical matters, solving juridical issues, forming and educating novices and young monks, finding appropriate forms of community life, daily schedule and practical governance.

Furthermore, we should dedicate ourselves to prayer for one another, freely offer charitable assistance, and also communicate with others as well as possible events of the Order, congregations or monasteries.

125. In virtue of their primacy over the universal Church, the Roman pontiffs have exempted from the local ordinary's jurisdiction our Order, its congregations and our monasteries with both their male and female members, though not to the same degree everywhere, so that one might provide for a more perfect observance of the monastic life according to the character of our Order. This exemption, however, does not prevent our monasteries from being under the jurisdiction of bishops in certain matters according to the norm of common and particular law, nor does it prevent our monasteries, according to their proper vocation, from working closely together with the local church.

We want always to follow the Roman Pontiff and the bishops, as the successors of the Apostles, with obedience and reverence and to be of help to them insofar as we can and should, keeping in mind the nature of our vocation. It is of great importance that in our apostolic works there be an ordered cooperation with the hierarchy, indeed with the entire diocesan and religious clergy, which is usefully established and nourished in diocesan synods and other meetings.

In this way we promote that ecclesiastical communion which should be so close to our hearts and the peak of which is found in the Eucharistic celebration, in which we offer daily prayers for the hierarchy and the entire people of God.

Conclusion

The Need for Continual Renewal

126. By putting an end to this declaration on the chief elements of Cistercian life today, we do not think that by what has been said – even if it is fully put into effect – we have put an end to the renewal of our life. For just as the Church herself is on pilgrimage and is called by Christ to an ongoing reformation, which as a human and earthly institution it always needs, so all the more our Order, the individual congregations, the monasteries and their members.

This continuous reformation is necessary because human history is progressing at an ever faster pace and introducing always new circumstances and creating both new advances and new problems to which our life also must be adapted in those aspects that are subject to change. The necessity, however, of this continuous renewal follows still more from the fact that we never perfectly fulfill our ideal. In this way we will always be in need of that continuous and sincere

conversion by which we – both as individuals and as communities – are transformed into the image of Christ the Son of God.