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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

Our celebration of St. Scholastica's day this year is accompanied with the joy of having elected a new Prioress in the person of Sr. Lumen Gloria Dungca. The month of February calls us to reflect on LOVE. We not only give tribute to the woman who loved much—Scholastica, but both the Church and the secular world celebrates the feast of St. Valentine who is associated with LOVE. Do you know who he is? Actually he was a priest in Rome who was known for his great charity to the poor and the needy. The Roman authorities who got jealous of his popularity put him in prison. The daughter of the Jail keeper befriended him. And when he was about to be executed he wrote a farewell note to the girl and signed—Your Valentine. Throughout the centuries St. Valentine's Day has developed into the celebration of eros. But actually with the original Valentine, it was more a celebration of agape and amicitia—charity and friendship. Again charity has taken the nuance of a condescending love for the poor whereas originally, Valentine helped the needy out of empathy, a genuine suffering with the needy, the oppressed, the lonely and the poor. Because of natural catastrophe we are given today many occasions to show this empathetic love for the victims of floods and typhoons. This does not stop with the relief part. There is still the rehabilitation part not only of houses but also the consolation, the healing of the traumatic experiences of the victims.

The other feature of love that St. Valentine practiced was friendship. This feature of love is truly worthy of reflection. It has to do with psychological chemistry between two or more people. It is more unselfish than erotic love since it does not demand anything. It is not prone to jealousy or possessiveness. It does not seek to change the other but accepts him/her for what he/she is. It is enduring. I think the words "for better or for worse, in sickness and in pain, till death do us part" is more fitting for friendship than for marriage.

During this month of February, as we celebrate the feast of St. Scholastica and St. Valentine, let us thank God for the many opportunities to be of help and service to the needy and especially for the wonderful gift of friendship.

Sincerely yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

STATIO CONFERENCE

FUNDAMENTALISM

New Evangelization and Conversatio Morum

Sister Josefina G. Nepomuceno, OSB

Still fresh from the exhilarating election Chapter, we are naturally excited with bright expectations of what the new phase in the life of our priory will be like with S. Lumen Gloria Dungca as our new prioress. What will be new, what will remain the same? Certainly we can be sure that the priory -wide renewal we lived through in the last three years will proceed steadily and with even greater impetus. The New Evangelization beckons us with challenges to our Missionary Benedictine way of life through our *conversatio morum*.

The Lineamenta for the 2012 Synod of Bishops states that Pope Benedict XVI chose the theme “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” This is an expansion of the scope of the New Evangelization which primarily addressed “*those who have drifted from the Church in traditionally Christian countries,*” *those of the first evangelization mainly in the old world, Europe, to include the offering “of the Gospel to the need for a new evangelization for the Middle East.” (Lineamenta, Preface)*

Scanning the horizon of the New Evangelization, the Synod aims “*to examine the present situation in the particular Churches and to trace ...the new methods and means for transmitting the Good News to people in our world today with a renewed enthusiasm proper to the saints, who were joyous witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” (*Ibid*)

What then should distinguish the new evangelization? It is to be “*new in its ardour, methods and expression.*” Consequently, the new evangelization is not a matter of redoing something which has been inadequately done or has not achieved its purpose... Nor is the new evangelization taking up the first evangelization again, or simply repeating the past.....Instead, *it is the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today. (Lineamenta, 5)*

Fundamentalism

Briefly mentioned in the Lineamenta as within the scope of the New Evangelization, fundamentalism is a movement existing in substantial areas of the world and would therefore constitute part of what the Lord Jesus meant when he commissioned his apostles to make disciples of all nations. What is fundamentalism?

When I mentioned that I was working on a statio conference touching on fundamentalism, a sister spontaneously said, Ah, born again! Her quick remark illustrates the broad way the term is commonly understood by many people. To get a clearer understanding of the term is the first task.

The simplest definition of the term fundamentalism is: “A usually religious movement or point of view characterized by a return to fundamental principles, by rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism.” It is an

“organized, militant Evangelical movement originating in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century in opposition to Protestant Liberalism and secularism, insisting on the inerrancy of Scripture.” (Free Online dictionary)

The term has become “general designation for revivalist conservative religious orthodoxy.” (Fighting the Good Fight) Author Karen Armstrong defines fundamentalist movements as “*embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged as a response to a perceived crisis*” - namely the fear that modernity will erode or even eradicate their faith and morality. That concern is shared by Fundamentalist Christians, Jews, and Muslims, Sikhs, and others. (Fundamentalism in Christianity and Islam)

In reference to Christianity, Judaism, Islam, the media generally use the term to refer to the most conservative wing of the religion. For example, fundamentalist Christianity is often described as the most conservative wing of Evangelicalism. Sometimes the term is used as a general-purpose “snarl” word which is intended to denigrate a religious group, implying that they are intolerant or prone to violence. (ibid)

Fundamentalism then is a self-defensive reaction, a kind of retreat to basic ideas and beliefs, therefore fundamental, as a form of religious security against the threats of change. It is not confined to a single religious persuasion or denomination but is found in most religious systems.

Christian Fundamentalism

How did the term fundamentalism start?

The word fundamentalism originated with an early 20th Century American religious movement which was named after a compendium of twelve volumes published between 1910 and 1915 by a group of Protestant laymen entitled: *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth*. This testimony proposed five required Christian beliefs for those opposed to the Modernist movement. (Fighting the Good Fight) Spurred on by reactions to Darwin's theory of evolution, the original Fundamentalist Movement was seen as a religious revival. “It came to embody both principles of absolute religious orthodoxy and evangelical practice which called for believers to extended action beyond religion into political and social life.” (ibid)

The spread of Christian fundamentalists to Roman Catholics is attributed to some extent to changes in 1960's in the wake of the renewal with Vatican II.

By the late 1930's Christian fundamentalists had formed a sub-culture and had largely withdrawn from the rest of society. Following major revisions to Roman Catholic beliefs and practices during the Vatican II conferences in the 1960's, the term “*fundamentalist*” started to be used to refer to Catholics who rejected the changes, and wished to retain traditional beliefs and practices. Thus it became a commonly used word to describe the most conservative groups within Christianity: both Protestant and Catholic. (ibid)

A Catholic source confirms that Catholics seem to constitute a disproportionate share of the new recruits to Fundamentalist groups. In many Fundamentalist congregations, anywhere from one-third to one-half of the members once belonged to the Catholic Church. Among Hispanics, often former Catholics are the congregation. (Fundamentalism. Catholic Answers.)

The strength and influence of some fundamentalist groups can be gathered from the positions taken by the Moral Majority in the US.

[The] Fundamentalist-led *Moral Majority* emerged to challenge social and religious beliefs and practices. Today, Fundamentalists are the most vocal group, on a per-capital basis -- who oppose abortion access, equal rights for homosexuals, same-sex marriage, protection for homosexuals from hate crimes, physician assisted suicide, the use of embryonic stem cells for medical research, comprehensive sex-ed classes in public schools, etc. (Fighting ...)

Distinguishing Marks of Fundamentalists

Certain characteristics mark the belief system of Fundamentalists.

The belief that is first and foremost the defining characteristic of Fundamentalists is their reliance on the Bible to the complete exclusion of any authority exercised by the Church. The second is their insistence on a faith in Christ as one's personal Lord and Savior. "Do you accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?" they ask. "Have you been saved?" (Fundamentalism. Catholic Answers)

A Catholic reaction to this is that there is something missing in this idea of salvation.

This is unmodified Christian individualism, which holds that the individual is saved, without ever considering his relationship to a church, a congregation, or anyone else. It is a one-to-one relationship, with no community, no sacraments, just the individual Christian and his Lord. And the Christian knows when he has been saved, down to the hour and minute of his salvation, because his salvation came when he "accepted" Christ. It came like a flash. In that instant, many Fundamentalists believe, their salvation is assured. There is now nothing that can undo it. Without that instant, that moment of acceptance, a person would be doomed to eternal hell. And that is why the third most visible characteristic of Fundamentalism is the **emphasis on evangelism. If sinners do not undergo the same kind of salvation experience Fundamentalists have undergone, they will go to hell.** Fundamentalists perceive a duty to spread their faith—what can be more charitable than to give others a chance for escaping hell?—and they often have been successful. (ibid)

Many criticism are thrown to Fundamentalists but they do succeed in attracting adherents. And it is only fair to credit them for the "praiseworthy task of adhering to certain key Christian tenets in a society that has all too often forgotten about Christ." (ibid)

In the Philippine experience, the fundamentalist tag has been applied to the Born Again charismatic groups which usually claim to be non-denominational. The vast majority of these Born Again Christians are former Catholics who have left the Catholic Church. Other charismatic groups in the Philippines remain Catholic and form a substantial support to parishes. Some of these claim national membership, having chapters in provinces. The fundamentalist strain in these is their adherence to the Bible

but they adhere to the Catholic interpretation of the Bible and have contributed to the spread of the practice of reading and praying with the Bible.

Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism (Arabic: *usul*, the "fundamentals") is a term used to describe religious ideologies seen as advocating a return to the "fundamentals" of Islam: the Quran and the Sunnah. (Islamic Fundamentalism.) Scholars of Islam disagree on the meaning of the terms Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism. American historian Ira Lapidus calls Islamic fundamentalism "an umbrella designation for a very wide variety of movements, some intolerant and exclusivist, some pluralistic; some favourable to science, some anti-scientific; some primarily devotional and some primarily political; some democratic, some authoritarian; some pacific, some violent." Moreover, he says that a fundamentalist is "a political individual" in search of a "more original Islam," while the Islamist is pursuing a political agenda. (Ibid)

Author Olivier Roy distinguishes between fundamentalists (or neo-fundamentalists) and Islamists. Fundamentalists are "more passionate in their opposition to the perceived 'corrupting influence of Western culture,' avoiding Western dress, 'neckties, laughter, the use of Western forms of salutation, handshakes, applause.'" Islamists like Maududi didn't hesitate to attend Hindu ceremonies. (Ibid)

Other differences between Islamists and Fundamentalists are:

Islamists often talk of "revolution" and believe "that the society will be Islamized only through social and political action: it is necessary to leave the mosque ..."
Fundamentalists are uninterested in revolution, less interested in "modernity or by Western models in politics or economics," and less willing to associate with non-Muslims.

Islamists generally tend to favour the education of women and their participation in social and political life: the Islamist woman militates, studies, and has the right to work, but in a *chador*. Islamist groups include women's associations. While the fundamentalist preaches for women to return to the home, Islamism believes it is sufficient that "the sexes be separated in public." (Ibid)

The Islamic fundamentalist tag has been further confused with its association "with political activism, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism, and anti-Americanism. ...which are better termed "Islamic revivalism and Islamic activism." Terrorist attacks by Arabs come to mind. In contrast, American author Anthony J. Dennis accepts the widespread usage and relevance of the term and calls Islamic fundamentalism "more than a religion today, it is a worldwide revolutionary movement." He notes "the intertwining of social, religious and political goals found within the movement" and states that Islamic fundamentalism "deserves to be seriously studied and debated from a secular perspective as a revolutionary ideology." (Ibid)

Common to all Muslims is the practice of praying four times a day, the men kneeling facing Mecca and touching their foreheads to the ground.

Highly controversial is the women issue in Islam which calls for caution in any discussion due to lack of objectivity. Rights granted to women in the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed “were a vast improvement in comparison to the situation of women in Arabia prior to the advent of Islam” but “ after the Prophet's death the condition of women in Islam began to decline and reverted back to pre-Islamic norms.” (Women in Islam)

Concurrent with the feminist movement in the West in the 20th c, a movement of Muslim feminism started which was mainly among upper class Muslim women. Eventually Muslim feminism stepped out of the western model following the shift to the socio-political models in the Muslim world. Muslim women have been developing a distinctly "Islamic" feminism.

An example is the wearing of the veil or *hijab* which in the eyes of western feminists is an obvious sign of oppression and “a symbol of a Muslim woman's subservience to men.” But the veil “has become increasingly common in the Muslim world and is often worn proudly by college girls as a symbol of an Islamic identity, freeing them symbolically from neo-colonial Western cultural imperialism and domination.” (ibid) It will be recalled that the wearing of the veil has become an issue in France and other European countries which have large Muslim populations.

The cultural practices grown from the basically fundamentalist orientation of Islam govern social relations. An example is the wearing of the burkha by Muslim women in some countries. Another is the rigid prohibition of marrying a non Muslim. Even dating a non-Muslim carries a death sentence which is meted out by the family in violation of all the laws of the country they have settled in.

The future outlook of the spread and reach of the Islam religion is projected below.

Muslim population has been ever increasing through birth rate as well as high rate of conversions. Islam is fastest growing religion and consequently this religion has become now the largest followers on this planet. At this moment Muslim population stands at 2.1 billion which is far greater than currently estimated 1.6 to 1.7 billion whereas Christian Population is 1.98 billion... It is expected that if present rate of increase of Muslim population continues that by 2030 One out of Three person will be Muslim. (Muslim Population in the World.)

In contrast the Christian populations are decreasing.

In many parts like Europe [[Cambridge University](#)], North America [[CNN](#)], Christian's are getting away from their religious belief. On the contrary among the Muslim Population the faith to their religion is ever increasing [[CNN](#)]. (Ibid) In many parts like Europe [[Cambridge University](#)], North America [[CNN](#)], Christian's are getting away from their religious belief, On the contrary among the Muslim Population the faith to their religion is ever increasing [[CNN](#)]. (Ibid)

Moreover, Muslims are much more likely than Christians and Hindus to say that their own faith is the only true path to paradise.

New Evangelization and Fundamentalism

Clearly, Fundamentalism of both the Christian and Islamic kind poses grave difficulties to the New Evangelization. The Fundamentalists' rigidity in embracing their beliefs, black-and-white convictions, intolerance of other religious groups, and their aggressive zeal to convert others to their way of salvation provide little room even for dialogue.

Shall we then just leave the fundamentalists to continue spreading their brand of religion and salvation? Do we feel helpless against the rapid spread of Islam to cover the whole world? Can we ignore the encroaching American Evangelicals who attract baptized Filipino Catholics to their sects? How shall we relate to the Born Again "non-denominational" groups who have recruited our students, and even our own family members and relatives?

New ardor, new methods, new expressions are the "battle cry" of the New Evangelization which we Missionary Benedictines are challenged to learn. In what ways can we take up the challenge in our approach to fundamentalists?

We would dearly love to share our Catholic faith with them because we are convinced that our way to salvation in Jesus Christ and membership in the Kingdom of God is the true way. But that is a monumental task which can be approached only in incremental steps under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It's important that we know their beliefs. Those of us who have to deal with Muslims specially in Mindanao will do well to study Islam as a religion and the Muslim social practices.

All of us have to deal with Born Again groups. We need to admit our negative attitude and prejudices towards them and treat them with respect. We also must find out what they hold against us and the Catholic Church. And to be able to hold our own, we must be sure and convinced of our own faith and our beliefs. Perhaps it is with some Born Again groups that we have more chances of holding dialogue and to come to some level of understanding. For all these, ardent and sincere prayer is needed, for it is only the Holy Spirit working in us that any approach to peoples of fundamentalist persuasion is possible.

Challenge to *Conversatio Morum*

Again and again it has been emphasized that witness of life is the most convincing and persuasive way of drawing others to our faith. For us Missionary Benedictines this witness of life is through our *conversatio morum*. As our Constitutions states so briefly and simply, "*Conversatio morum* encompasses our whole life as Missionary Benedictine Sisters; it is the following of Christ in religious community." (Constitutions, Chap II, 5)

In the spirit of the New Evangelization we are challenged to discover how our way of living *conversatio morum* can be infused with new ardor, new zeal so that the way we live will be a convincing confirmation of what we proclaim by our Missionary Benedictine calling.

In his talk in our Election Chapter Archbishop Luis Tagle's first point was the renewal of culture, what he termed evangelization of culture (Tagle) In our priory we have our own monastic culture which encompasses our liturgical prayer including the Divine Office, other

religious practices, our feasts, our community exercises, etc. Our formation initiated us into this monastic culture and as we grew in monastic life these practices have become almost second nature, almost automatic. Faithfulness to these exercises is expected of a MBS of good standing.

In his book “Making Time for Yourself,” Abbot Primate Notker Wolf remembers a scene in the play “Death of a Salesman.”

The scene takes place in the first act. Willy Lohmann, the hero, is talking to his wife Linda and at the same time remembering another woman. His thoughts and feelings are elsewhere while he is talking to Linda. During their conversation someone is walking backwards and forwards in the background. The woman he is really thinking about is already visible. She is the one who is really present for him. (Making Time ... Abbot Notker Wolf, p. 84)

We can ask ourselves, when we are at Holy Mass or praying the Divine Office, are we really there? How often are our minds elsewhere? Like the woman in the scene our worries, problems, concerns are present and alive in the background and they are the ones really present for us, more than the Lord we are praying to. Our prayer becomes a cultural activity which we do everyday almost automatically. This holds true of our participation in the liturgy of the Mass everyday when we hardly join in the responses. The challenge is for us to shake ourselves out of routinary prayer, and to reclaim unity of heart and voice that Benedict admonishes us to do so that our prayer will be real worship that draws down God blessings on us, the Church and the world. That is why we say that our prayer is a missionary activity.

We could ask similarly about community recreation. Do our recreations serve to strengthen the bonds of community relationships from the sharing of experiences? Do we converse only with the sisters we like to be with? Do we give the sister who is speaking the respect of listening? Do we try to draw into the circle those who tend to sit in the margins of the group passively waiting for the recreation to end?

Moving to our labora, do we give to our assignments in school, social apostolate, health service, etc. the energy, full-hearted dedication, reliability and spirit of self-giving – the excellence in service -- that we expect from the seculars? Have we grown in a work ethic that does not count the cost of serving? Or have we settled on ways of giving 50% of our selves and reserving the other 50% for an undetermined future need?

Our living of our monastic cultural needs renewal of meaning, attention, commitment, excellence and a spirit of joy that can be contagious.

From the fundamentalists we could learn to hold fast to the basics of our faith and to be faithful to the promises of our vows. We could emulate their eagerness to convert others to their way of thinking. From the Muslims we could learn faithfulness to daily prayer. Without being rigid and reactionary, we could reclaim the tradition of fidelity of our Missionary Benedictine forebears, infusing them now with deeper meaning and appreciation that we have discovered from years of living the life. This requires some form of denying ourselves so that a more vigorous faith life can mature in us.

The witness of life through our faithful living of *conversatio morum* in the details of our monastic culture draws power from on high for the advancement of the purpose of the Lord Jesus for his people, even of the rabid fundamentalists. We are Missionary Benedictines, and Evangelization is our task. By our very lives of prayer and work we evangelize, and it is only fitting that we are clear enthusiastic channels as well as committed, zealous laborers that the Lord can count on in the mission of bringing all peoples into the Kingdom of the Father.

Guide questions:

1. Take an honest and critical inventory of your own attitude towards fundamentalists and share what you can do to change that attitude.
2. From the brief and limited presentation in this conference, what do you think we can learn from fundamentalists?
3. Discuss suggestions on how we can overcome our fear of the spread of fundamentalism and what we as Missionary Benedictines can contribute to contain that spread.
4. In what more ways can our *conversatio morum* make us more effective evangelizers?

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ST. SCHOLASTICA: FINDING MEANING IN HER STORY

By: Ruth Clifford Engs

EXCERPTS



St. Scholastica, based upon centuries of tradition, is considered the twin sister of St. Benedict of Nursia, founder of monastic communities and compiler of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, a guide to common-sense living and monastic organization. Over the centuries, icons and other religious works have often depicted Scholastica and Benedict together.

Although some aspects of Benedict's life have been described, little is known of Scholastica. Only a few short paragraphs from the *Dialogues, Book II*, which tradition suggests were written by Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), discuss the last few days of her life. This brief information, augmented by centuries of tradition, suggests she was probably a nun, who was a deeply devoted and strong woman.

Scholastica is the patron saint of Benedictine women's religious communities. Although the narrative material about Scholastica (translated below) is very brief, she is considered significantly more important than might appear by this short description. Lessons can be learned from her actions and the symbols and paradoxes surrounding her story.

A Biography for St. Scholastica? Contributions from Fifth- and Sixth-Century Culture and Institutions

To synthesize a possible life-history for Scholastica, we need to examine the circumstances of Benedict's life and the role of women in the early Middle Ages. By conjecture, we can then paint a possible biography for her. Benedict (c. 480-547?), as told in *Dialogues, Book II* (D for short) appears to have been born into a wealthy late Roman empire family in Nursia (Norcia) of Umbria in the mountains of central Italy. It was probably a Christian family, as Scholastica "had been consecrated to the Almighty Lord from the time of her childhood."

Benedict was sent to Rome for his education, but became dismayed by the city's worldliness: degeneration of the culture, low standards of classical education, sexual debauchery, and general corruption. He left school, fled Rome, and lived in a church in the rural area of Effide. His only companion was his nurse/housekeeper, whom he subsequently left to live by himself in a cave near Subiaco, about 30 miles east of Rome.

Over time, he attracted a following and established several monastic communities. After several clashes with some monks and clergy, he built a large monastery on top of Monte Cassino, a mountain about 60 miles south of Rome, about halfway between Rome and Naples. Benedict wrote his rule (*Regula Benedicti*, or RB), based upon parts of the "Rule of the Master" (*Regula Magistri*), other rules for monastic living, and perhaps from his own experiences in organizing monasteries.

Scholastica, as the daughter of a good Roman family, would have been under the direct control of her father, the *paterfamilias*, until marriage or a religious vocation. Marriages were arranged and young women generally had little choice in a husband inasmuch as marriages were frequently accomplished for political and economic reasons. If no suitable marriage could be found, the girl generally dwelled in her father's house. Upon his death, a brother or other male relative would have authority over her and be responsible for her care. However, wealthy women could inherit property, divorce, and were generally literate. Sometimes several young women would live together in a household and form a religious community.

At the turn of the sixth century, western Europe was led by Germanic leaders. Theodoric (d. c. 534), who respected Roman culture, headed a relatively tolerant regime in Italy; however, terrorist attacks by Germanic groups sporadically continued to terrorize the country. An underlying anxiety concerning attacks and the growing strength of the Church would have formed the social and political background in which Scholastica lived (Brown 1971, 122-131; Hollister 1990, 9-10, 30-33).

Tradition suggests that, at some point in her life, Scholastica moved to a religious community or a large convent in Plumbariola several miles from Monte Cassino. However, it has been proposed that it is more likely that she lived in a hermitage with one or two other religious women at the base of Mount Cassino in a cluster of houses, *vicus*, as there is an ancient church named after her. Rome often dedicated chapels or churches where saints or martyrs resided (Schuster 1951, 338-342). No evidence of a convent during her lifetime exists at Plumbariola.

Since *Dialogues* indicates that Scholastica was dedicated to God at an early age, perhaps she lived in her father's house with other religious women until his death and then moved nearer to Benedict. Several times, *Dialogues* mentions she was a holy woman or nun. Some suggest that Scholastica might have been an abbess, but no information is definitively known about any of these points (Kessler 1996, 22, 25).

From *Dialogues*, it appears that Scholastica routinely visited Benedict once a year. He would come down to meet her a short distance outside the gate of the monastery. Some scholars suggest this was immediately before the Lenten fast and that their last supper together was February 7, 547, the Thursday preceding the first Sunday of Lent (Schuster 1951, 341). Her feast day is February 10. Of course, all kinds of associations and symbolism can be made with this meal and the subsequent miracle with biblical references--Christ's last supper with his disciples, the wedding at Cana, etc.

Dialogues then relates that, after a whole day of holy conversation, they ate their meal as night fell. Scholastica then requests that her brother not leave her that night so they can talk until morning about heaven. However, he tells her it is completely impossible to remain outside his cell overnight. It is interesting to note that Benedict needed to get back to the monastery. If Scholastica were a nun, she also would probably have had to get back to her community.

On the other hand, the shelter likely provided sleeping accommodations for women, since they were not allowed inside the monastery and it would be too far for them to walk down the mountain before dark. Therefore, it might have been acceptable custom for her to spend the night in this hospice. Or if the shelter were on the bottom of the hill, as suggested by some interpretations, it would have been too far for Benedict and his party to return up the hill before nightfall (Kessler 1996, 25).

Some Historical Interpretations: The Spread of the *Rule* and the Path to Sainthood

Benedict's *Rule* and monastic tradition were not a continuous expansion from the first monastic foundations in the sixth century until the present. Within 30 years of Benedict's death, Monte Cassino was destroyed circa 577 by Germanic invaders, and the monks scattered. Some went to Rome and likely had contact with the future Pope Gregory, who based his writings upon their tales.

Dialogues, however, was not widely known before 670. In the years of the Germanic invasions in Italy, outside of a few monasteries, Benedict began to be forgotten and did not appear in official Church circles until around 720. Monte Cassino was not rebuilt until 730. He entered into "the liturgical cult" of sainthood between 670 and 750. Until the mid-eighth century, both the "Benedict Rule" and the "Rule of the Master," an earlier, harsher rule of monastic living, along with several others, were used in monasteries.

In the eighth century, a Benedictine resurgence emerged due to several factors. Northern people, now France and western Germany, were eager to receive whatever art, literature, religious writings and relics that came from Rome. Anything Roman was considered superior. *Dialogues*, which gives extraordinary praise to Benedict, was lauded and helped create a revitalization of Benedict and his *Rule*. Under the Charlemagne regime that began around 800, Benedict's more balanced *Rule* was preferred over others and spread throughout western Europe. The tradition of Scholastica and Benedict being twins dates from around the ninth century (Kessler 1996, 22; Hallinger 1985, 196-199).

For decades, there has been a debate as to the whereabouts of the relics of St. Scholastica and St. Benedict, and whether they even left Monte Cassino. Some early manuscripts suggest that around 672, monks from a Benedictine monastery that had been founded in Fleury (on the Loire river near Orleans, France) went south and stole the relics from the Monte Cassino ruins. Capturing the relics usually happens at the start of a "liturgical cult"--the process of gaining sainthood. The monks reportedly found a double tomb with the remains and carefully washed the bones of each saint and wrapped them separately.

However, other manuscripts suggest they were wrapped together (Goffart 1967, 122-123; Hallinger 1985, 200-201). These relics were then brought north to Fleury and buried in a shaft under the crypt of either the main church of the Abbey, St. Peter's, or in the secondary church, St. Mary's on July 11, ca. 673. Other interpretations suggest that Scholastica's relics, once they had been brought north, were then transferred to a convent in Le Mans and that only Benedict's remained in Fleury.

However, little evidence of a convent near Le Mans for St. Scholastica's relics has been found (Goffart 1967, 107-108, 118-125). One interpretation of early manuscripts suggests that, in 936-37, Benedict's bones were dug up, transferred from the abbey church to St. Mary's and that his shrine was placed on the central altar of the crypt on his feast day of July 11. Some English communities began to celebrate the feast of St. Benedict on March 21, the traditional day for his death, beginning around 704 (Hallinger 1985, 201).

When Benedict's remains were dug up, no mention was made of Scholastica's bones and some speculate they remained in St. Peter's. The earliest evidence for the feast of St. Scholastica on February 10 appeared in the eighth century. By 1004, the celebration of her feast was well established among the monks in Le Mans (Goffart 1967, 129). To add to the mystery, after Monte Cassino was bombed during World War II, bones found in its crypt were claimed to be those of St. Scholastica and St. Benedict. Today, the monasteries in both France and Italy claim the relics of the saints (Kessler 1996, 25-26).

What St. Scholastica Says to Us Today: Some Paradoxes and Symbols

Paradoxes and symbols emerging from St. Scholastica's story have meanings for contemporary living and spiritual life. These include the daily struggle for balance, the transcendence of love and compassion over dogmatic law, strength of character, the ability to listen, the importance of prayer and love in mending relationships, the significance of talking to God, "seeing the light," and the ability to live within a framework that can open the door to eternity.

Finding Balance

The attributes of Scholastica and her brother spiritually complement and balance each other. Benedict's name, from the Latin *benedictus*, "the blessed one," connotes great spiritual affinity with God, compassion, or "heart." Scholastica's name, on the other hand, from the word *scholasticus* or "student or teacher of rhetoric," connotes exactness of scholarly pursuit, discipline and "mind." Another interpretation of the two names suggests the "active" versus the "contemplative" life and that Benedict loved contemplation like a sister (Wansborough 1965, 147-148).

Although the two names were in use during the early Middle Ages for both pagans and Christians, it is interesting to note that these two names together form wholeness or completeness. Their attributes become the balance of *yang* and *yin* found in Eastern philosophy. When *Dialogues* reports that the siblings are buried in the same tomb, heart and mind, male and female, and the active and contemplative life are brought together in balance and wholeness. This balance found in "prayer and work," of course, is a cardinal principle of Benedictine spirituality.

Strength in Listening

Throughout the many stories of *Dialogues*, Benedict shows compassion and love and is able to wrought miracles. However, in the Scholastica story, their roles are reversed. Scholastica receives God's blessings for her greater love and heartfelt prayer when Benedict does not listen to her need and attempts to rigidly stick to his monastic rule of not staying away overnight from the monastery. Law and order, or mind, is important and essential for daily living, but sometimes brotherly love and compassion need to overrule it.

For example, during the Nazi regime, it was against the rule to harbor Jews, yet compassion caused many to break this rule to hide Jews in monasteries and private houses. When Benedict severely admonishes Scholastica for her part in the thunderstorm by telling her, "May God have mercy on you, my sister. Why have you done this?", she stands up to him and tells him defiantly, "I asked you, and you would not *listen* to me. So I asked my Lord, and he has *listened* to me. Now then, go, if you can. Leave me, and go back to the monastery" [*italics mine*].

In daring him to go home, she showed her strength of prayer and conviction. Benedict, in his insistence on following the *Rule*, ironically breaks his own first rule of "Listen carefully...with the ear of your heart," the first line of the *Rule's* Prologue.

Mending Relationships

Brotherly love is a basic premise of Christianity. Scholastica was one of two women mentioned in *Dialogues* who loved Benedict. Each woman shed tears resulting in a miracle that mended two broken parts. Benedict's nurse/housekeeper shed tears after she had broken a borrowed sieve into two pieces. Her tears of anguish, repentance and sorrow for breaking something not hers caused Benedict heartfelt concern and compassion. Through his tearful prayers, God brought the two pieces together and mended the sieve.

Scholastica shed tears of pleading to God to allow the two of them to stay together for a few more hours in their final earthly relationship as sister and brother. Since her conversations with Benedict concerned the "joys of heaven," she may have known this was to be her last meeting with him as she anticipated her death. Through a miracle of a thunderstorm out of a clear sky, God brings together again this relationship.

The stories of the two women who loved Benedict show the power of maternal and sisterly love. In both cases, God mends through earnest prayer and compassion. Both Benedict and Scholastica had an active prayer life and were used to talking to God, and God mended the situation.

Seeing the Light

While praying in his tower cell and looking out the small window three days after Scholastica has left, Benedict "raised his eyes to the skies and saw the soul of his sister leaving her body and penetrating the secret places of heaven under the form of a dove" (D 34.1). He is ecstatic, as he knows she is now experiencing the glories of heaven. This dove, which is far away and which he longs to join, perhaps symbolizes her purity, spiritual attainment, and the non-sexual love that connects the two. He also hungers to join her in the glories of heaven.

This story is in contrast to the black bird that flew close to his face, symbolic of sexual temptation, found in an earlier story of *Dialogues II* (D 2.1-3; Cusack 1976, 148). Benedict wards off these sensuous passions with the sign of the cross and by rolling naked in nettles and thorns.

The window in Benedict's cell can have several meanings. A window lets light in, but it also allows a person to look out to see the light. After Scholastica's prayer results in a fierce thunderstorm out of a clear sky, Benedict admonishes her for her action. Perhaps in the vision of Scholastica's soul rising to heaven, Benedict finally "saw the light" in terms of what his sister was attempting to communicate, namely a premonition of her death and that this would be their last earthly supper and time together. He may have also seen the glories of heaven that awaited him. At Benedict's death, he was buried in the tomb with Scholastica and joined his soul mate in the womb of Mother Earth.

Structure for Living the Rule

St. Benedict's visions, seen out of the confines of a narrow window, can have other meanings. In the next chapter of *Dialogues*, after Scholastica's death, Benedict sees "a light spreading from on high and completely repelling the darkness of the night...the whole world was brought before his eyes," perhaps the blinding brightness of the kingdom of God from creation to infinity. While looking at the light, he saw the soul of the Germanus, Bishop of Capua, being carried to heaven in a ball of fire. Benedict has an overnight guest witness this great event. In the next story, Benedict himself, "with his hands raised to heaven and breathed his last breath amidst words of prayer," was taken into the kingdom of heaven and reunited with Scholastica.

Perhaps the stories of the visions seen through the narrow confines and limitations of a window in Scholastica's and Germanus' deaths infer that living within the physical, mental and spiritual parameter of the *Rule* paradoxically permits one to experience God's eternal glory. Boundaries give structure and order to a life, just as laws do in society. For example, if vehicles were permitted to be driven on either side of the road, there would be chaos. The parameter of the rule is a guide to keep us on the right side of the road.

St. Scholastica's attributes have important relevancy to Benedictine oblates, nuns and monks, and indeed anyone who is seeking a more spiritual life. She is not just an appendage to Benedict or a weak-willed sister for a brother to control and keep out of trouble. Her attributes are a necessary component for the balance that is taught in Benedictine spirituality. Rule and organization are necessary for living in a safe environment.

However, sometimes love and compassion are more important. Bringing love and rule together brings comfort and security. Scholastica personifies a strong woman assured of her convictions, one who is contemplative and pious. However, if necessary, out of love, she is willing to defy a rigid convention.