

STATIO JUBILEE YEAR January 2008
The General Chapter Documents 1976 - 2006

Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus U I O G D
So that in all things God may be glorified

1 Pet 4:11; RB 57:9

After we read, studied and prayed our Constitutions together, we move to the Documents of our General Chapters during 2008. We do this according to the Direction Statement I of the last General Chapter:

Deepen our Missionary Benedictine Spirituality.

b. The priories compile the Messages of the General Chapters since 1976 into one booklet and study their provisions.

It is only since 1976 that a document has been sent to all the Sisters in different languages upon completion of a general chapter. Our Constitutions say in norm 401.3: The reading of general chapter documents and the priory statutes is also recommended.

The General Chapters have been steadily growing into more internationality together with the Church. They are held in Rome every six years and it was during the last General Chapter 2006 for the first time that all proceedings were in English language without any translation. Each Sister will receive a booklet of six documents with the following Themes of the General Chapter:

1. Our Role as Missionary Benedictine Sisters in Evangelization Today; 1976
2. Introductory Letter to the Constitutions, 1982 (this chapter worked out the Constitutions)
3. The Prophetic Role of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the Church of the Poor; 1988
4. Benedictine Values for Evangelization; 1994
5. Our Missionary Benedictine Response to the New Signs of the Times; 2000
6. Our Missionary Benedictine Response to the Challenges of Our Contemporary World; 2006

All documents have the same ending: **So that in all things God may be glorified**, mostly abbreviated from the Latin text: U.I.O.G.D . Furthermore the booklet of the documents has this text on the back of the cover. The message of 1976 ends as follows:

So that in all Things and above all Things God may be Glorified.

We are so used to that ending phrase that it is worth to meditate about it. It fits as well for starting the New Year 2008 and as theme for Epiphany.

Benedict quotes this text from 1 Pet 4:11. St. Paul writes: if anyone serves, let it be as in strength granted by God; so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ, since to him alone belong all glory and power for ever and ever. Amen

This doxology is the only one in the NT which is addressed to God *through* Jesus Christ and then *to* Christ himself.

The context in the RB is establishing prices for selling products of the monastery to avoid avarice. We find the sentence in the chapter on the artisans of the monastery, RB 57. *Holzherr* writes in his commentary: Benedict restates the primacy of the spiritual order in the monastery... the commercial behaviour of the monastery should proclaim the glory of God to those outside. Work is a realization of the general priesthood in Benedict's eyes. (*Holzherr*: The Rule of Benedict, p.259). *Kardong* mentions that U.I.O.G.D. has become the Benedictine

motto (Terrence Kardong: Benedict's Rule, p. 461). I do not know since when this motto is used and how it came to be.

Let us meditate what it might have meant to Benedict. I believe he was fascinated by God, by Jesus Christ very early on. He experienced God in such a way that he would give up everything and could stay in his cave alone for so long. God in Jesus Christ, the Risen one, was his love, his longing. There was nothing too difficult and too hard to give up for this young student from Rome. God was the centre of his life, his passion, his great love and believed as the centre of the whole creation. All created things give glory to God as they mirror the divine perfection. But as human beings we can praise God for what he is and what he has communicated to the world in creation and salvation. For Benedict the most important work, the *Opus Dei*, is the liturgy. We know what he says about the inner disposition for prayer. So many times each day we sing and pray *Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*. When the cantor begins it all immediately rise in reverence, RB 11:3. But Benedict as *vir dei*, man of God, was whole in his life. He did not separate prayer, work and leisure. Everything was prayer for the glory of God, he was always in the presence of God (RB 7) In his school for the service of the Lord he wants to teach this to all who follow him. Therefore there is no area of the monastery or area of human life which has not the primacy of giving glory to God for Benedict.

I believe this is what our pioneer sisters understood and wanted to live. For the glory of God in all things they gave up family, career, property, salaries and did it joyfully. How little value has all this before the God whom they had experienced in their calling? And as missionaries they want that those who do not yet know God in Jesus Christ hear of him, but more: experience him in his goodness, love, as the real treasure. That in all things God may be glorified, good and bad ones, easy and difficult ones, joyful and sad ones, in hunger and in plenty, in the hot desert and in the green fruitful garden, in inner dryness and in consolation.

Yes, we as well know that; we have experience. But often we forget. We can summarize our religious profession with the intention that each second of our life, each doing of our life gives glory to God. But when I scrutinize the day in the evening I see how often my intention was not the glory of God, but my own glory. The centre of my life is not God, but myself. For years I pray and yearn that I really and truly put God in the centre of my life and myself at the periphery giving him glory through my service. That exchange did not yet take place. Will it ever? This seems to me is the real conversion which we express in our vow of *conversatio morum*. It is grace and my own daily striving for years. The danger is that we give up, that we settle with the mediocrity, that we loose the passion for God. The wheel turns round and round, but the centre is missing, the fire of the experience of God, of our longing for God as individual and as community. May the Lord throw his fire of love, of enthusiasm for him, his glory and his mission into the midst of our hearts and each community. What can we do to enkindle it? What can we do to live in such a way that in all things God may be glorified? May all our Pioneer Sisters intercede for us and let us pray for each other.

Some more questions:

- What is the centre of my life?
- Do I experience God? How? Do I treasure the grace of experience?
- Does my life give glory to God?
- Which areas of my life do I exclude?
- Am I ready to give up everything for the sake of God and his glory if needed?
- How do I give glory to myself or other persons, things?
- How do I understand and live *conversatio morum*?