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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

EDITORIAL *October, 2008*

Dear Sisters,

I am truly grateful to God that I had this opportunity to visit the beginnings of our missionary activity here in East Africa. I have never visited so many cemeteries in all my life as in these three weeks. And I realized that cemeteries are like history books. They tell you so much about your past. Let me tell you about some cemeteries I visited.

The first one was Peramiho. The only one whose name I actually recognized was that of Abbot Norbert Weber. But seeing his grave brought to mind all the Benedictine History I learned from Sr. Withburga. The second one which we visited on our way back to Dar es Salaam was the one in Tosamagannga. What struck me there was how young these pioneers were when they died-- in their twenties, and thirties. One, Sr. Anna, died on the way and did not even reach her missionfield. Although not a cemetery, St. Joseph's Cathedral in Dar es Salaam held the bones of our Sr. Felicitas and Sr. Cordula who were killed in the Maji-Maji rebellion. Then there was Pugu. That was where our Sr. Martha Wansing died with 7 orphans under the altar. And although she did not die, that place reminded us of Sr. Benedikta Sievering who was sold to slavery. The thing that was in all our minds but could not express was whether she suffered the fate worse than death. And our conclusion was that—that was inevitable in such circumstances. I believe that this was a worse martyrdom than just being killed at an instant. But to be under someone's power who could and did do whatever they wanted to do for three months is infinitely worse. No wonder she lost her mind for sometime and never talked about her ordeal for the last 36 years of her life. Then there were the tomb of Sr. Walburga Diepolder who offered herself as a sacrifice to save her companions.

Remembering all these brave women, our foremothers, aren't you proud you are a Missionary Benedictine Sister?

Lovingly yours,

Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

S T A T I O   C O N F E R E N C E

THE EUCHARIST
God's Testimony of Love

by

Sister Baptista Busmente, OSB

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> "In the Eucharist which is the center of our liturgical life we encounter the Risen Lord in a special way through word and sacrament. Here above all, our community is ever renewed and united" (Const. III, no. 2)

To write a statio conference on the Eucharist is not an easy task for me. As I tried to read and reflect on this theme it got more difficult. Why? Because the Eucharist is a **mystery of our faith**. This essence of mystery will never change. Pope John Paul II in his decree *Dominicae Cenae* writes, "*Beginning with the Upper Room and Holy Thursday, the celebration of the Eucharist has a long history, a history as long as that of the Church. In the course of this history the secondary elements have undergone certain changes, but* ***there has been no change in the essence of the "Mysterium"*** *instituted by the Redeemer of the world at the last supper*.

This is why at the very beginning of the Mass the celebrant says: "to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins." And at the end of the consecration the priest exclaims: "the mystery of faith" and we respond what is hidden in the consecrated Bread and Wine: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

We are indeed privileged that we have our daily Eucharist and if one or the other community has no priest available it has at its disposal the communion service. What a rich bonus for us to start our day with this liturgical act as "*we offer ourselves to the Father at the sacrifice-banquet of the Mass, receiving his word, nourished at the table of the Lord. Our day is sanctified and we go forth empowered with blessings of energy, courage and good will for the challenges of the day."* (Cenobial Culture, p.41)

We know that the word Eucharist means thanksgiving. We thank the Father who "*loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).*

Pope John Paul II continues, *"Thus it is also a response that tries to repay that love immolated even to the death on the Cross: it is our "Eucharist," that is to say our giving him thanks, our praise of him for having redeemed us by his death and made us sharers in immortal life through his Resurrection."*

For our reflections and prayer today, let us recall what the catechism has taught us about the Eucharist.

EUCHARIST AS A MEMORIAL

Years ago in one of my retreats in Rome, our retreat master, Fr. Kurt Belsole, OSB of Sant' Anselmo spoke in one of his conferences about the Eucharist. I remember him saying that the most significant sentence after the consecration is *"Do this in memory of me."* He explained that *"do this"* refers to what we actually are doing with the bread and wine at Holy Mass. The *"in memory of me"* refers to Christ's death and resurrection. It is this **mystery of faith** which St. Paul wrote*: "When you eat this bread and drink this cup (do this), we proclaim your death Lord Jesus (in memory of me).*

Pope John Paul II explains it this way:

> *"to remember is therefore to bring back to the heart a* ***memory of love****, and to celebrate* ***a presence.*** *In the Eucharist we are able to keep alive the memory of Christ's love for us. "Do this in memory of me" means repeat and renew the sacrifice of my Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine."* (Homily on August 8, 1987*).*

The Eucharist is also a memorial of God's ***"Mirabilia Dei"***. In the Old Testament the memory of God's mighty deed was the Passover liturgy of the Exodus*. "This day shall be a memorial day and you keep it as a feast of the Lord."*(Ex. 12:14). This memorial makes present the Covenant of God and his chosen people. When Jesus partook of the Passover meal, he and his apostles remembered the saving power of God when Israel was saved by the blood of the lamb on their door posts. That was the night when they ate and drank with loins girt and sandals fastened, ready to depart from the slavery they have experienced and ready to venture across the desert to find the Promised Land.

EUCHARIST AS A SACRIFICE

At the Last Supper Jesus said these words over the bread: *"This is my body which is given for you"* and then over the wine: *"this cup is the New Covenant in my blood which will be shed for you."* (Lk. 22:19-20). These words were fulfilled on his death on the cross. Pope John Paul II writes beautifully on this:

> *"This took place only once in Calvary on Good Friday, but in the Upper room, the Lord Jesus instituted the most Holy Sacrament of the Church under the species of bread and wine…and so while the bloody sacrifice on the cross was fulfilled once for all, the Sacrament of this sacrifice, under the species of bread and wine, must be fulfilled continually from day to day and from generation to generation."* (Homily on June 13, 1987)

Therefore, the Holy Mass is not a sacrifice separate from the Cross, it did not end in death but in a new glorious life. (Catholic Catechism for Filipinos p. 486) Christ then is the living sacrifice present in the Eucharist in an un-bloody manner.

EUCHARIST AS A PASCHAL MEAL

The Eucharist is essentially a Paschal meal. The altar where we are gathered at the Eucharist is not only the table of sacrifice but a table of the Lord. At the last Supper the setting was a family meal with the disciples and Jesus said to them*: "Take, eat…drink, all of you."* (Mt: 26:26-27). At Holy Mass we are also invited to partake of this sacred mystery when we hear these words: "*Happy are those who are invited to his supper.*" So when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in holy communion, He gives himself to us: *"My Flesh is truly food and my Blood is truly drink. Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me and I in him.*" (Jn. 6:55)

What joy and blessing for us that we are transformed into the body of Christ in a kind of mystical union with him. What a revelation and testimony of love by God to us that we can partake of this heavenly banquet which nourishes our spiritual life .This encounter with the Risen Lord can convert our hearts and instill in us a greater capacity to love. As Christ is present in each one of us we can also see Christ in others and radiate this love through the witness of our life.

EUCHARIST AS A PLEDGE OF ETERNAL LIFE

The Eucharist is not only a memorial of Christ's passion, death and resurrection but it is awaiting his coming again in glory. Vatican II describes this eschatological dimension of the Eucharist as follows:

> *"Christ is now at work in the hearts of all by the power of the Holy Spirit, who animates, purifies, and strengthens both the human yearning for our heavenly home, and the generous service to make life here on earth more human."* (GS#28)….

The discourse on the Bread of Life by Jesus assures us this promise of **eternal life:** *"If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever and he who eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood has eternal life."* (Jn. 6:51, 54)

Christ left us this pledge of our own resurrection and new life. He gave us this food for our earthly journey and gives us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Therefore when we celebrate the Eucharist we are "*awaiting the blessed hope and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Eucharistc Prayer)

Our encounter with Christ in holy communion which we enjoy as pilgrims on earth is already an anticipation of that encounter with him on the day when "*we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*" (1 Jn. 3:2)

This is the Paschal Mystery of our Faith.

Having reflected briefly on the Mystery of the Eucharist let us now reflect on the effects of the Eucharist in our spiritual life, on our community and our mission.

OUR ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST – (In Word and Sacrament)

Our Constitutions states that the Eucharist is the center of our life. Why? Because all other forms of the liturgy merge into it. It is the worship "par excellence". As the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ it contains the fullness of the mystery of Christ "*all that Christ is and all that he did and suffered for all us*." (CCC, no. 11)

In the same paragraph our Constitutions tells us that we encounter the Risen Lord in a special way through **word and sacrament**. Like the early Christians when they gathered together for the "breaking of the bread" (Acts 2:46) we also experience the sharing of the **word** and the **bread** in the Eucharist. In the Liturgy of the word God speaks to us of an event that is made present. I like the comparison made by Fr. Jeremy Driscoll in his book "What Happens at Mass." He said that the words proclaimed are like the notes of a musical score. The score is not the music. But the score makes the music sound. When from the score of the biblical book the words are proclaimed in the midst of a believing assembly, the music of God's events sounds forth in the midst of that assembly." God speaks to us and we respond. Therefore, we are to be **good listeners** to the Word but oftentimes we forget what we hear and because of this, we do not do what we have heard.

St. James tells us: *"Be doers of the Word and not hearers only. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks his own face in a mirror. he sees himself then goes off and forgets what he looked like."* (James 1:22-24)

In the silence of our heart let God's word sink down into our very being so as to make our response through the witness of our life. Sharing the Word of God as Good news with others is keeping alive the memory of Jesus in the joy of our heart.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist Jesus gives himself to us through his Body and Blood. We enter into communion with Christ and we are **transformed** into the same risen Lord. We become **bearers of Christ** to one another. *"It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me."* (Gal. 2:20) Our faith tells us this truth and we believe it. It is true what Bishop Tagle said in his book "An Easter People" that in our communion with Christ" we share the gift of ourselves and thus give birth to community." This encounter makes us a more loving person, a more caring person for each other and more mindful of the needs of others especially the poor. This was the mark of the first Christian communities. This is also affirmed what our Constitutions say that through the Eucharist our community is ever **renewed and united**. We are more open with each other so that faith sharing becomes a part of community living. From this we build lasting relationships that makes us more compassionate, forgiving and accepting each other in spite of differences. All that we do during the day should be an overflow of the Eucharistic presence in us. We become united as a community every time we gather around the Table of the Lord and experience and encounter with the Risen Lord. St. Augustine tells us: *"Be what you have received."*

EUCHARIST AND MISSION

Our encounter with the Risen Lord in the Eucharist does not end with the celebration of the Holy Mass. When the celebrant dismisses us we are called to be **missionaries** to continue to

spread the Good News we have heard and what we have received. The Catechism states that the Eucharist involves a "commitment in behalf of the poor" We cannot remain indifferent to those who seek and need help. The Christ who is present in the Eucharist is the same Christ who is present in the least of our brothers and sisters. Therefore, our love for God has to be translated into the love of Christ present in our brothers and sisters especially those in need and poor.

Our mission should be rooted in our encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist and in our life of prayer. Our mission will only be effective and fruitful if it is an overflow of our experience of the Risen Lord. Pope John Paul II exhorts us by saying:

> *"Don't ever forget this: Christ, who nourishes us under the consecrated species, is the same One who meets us in our daily lives, he is in the poor who stretches out a hand, he is in the suffering who seeks assistance, he is in the brother sister who looks for our readiness to help and awaits our welcome. He is in every human being and even in the smallest and most helpless."*
> (On the Mystery of the Eucharist p.165)

CONCLUSION

Let us learn from the example of our Blessed Mother who allowed herself to be the "Tabernacle of the Most High" (Mary's title revealed to Sr. Reinolda May), who by her life was a living witness of God's presence in her life. We, too, can become in some way also a "living tabernacle" of Christ by radiating his love, peace and joy. We can assimilate gradually the inner dispositions which the mystery of the Eucharist can produce in our lives.

** Gratitude: to thank God for the gift of the Eucharist and the manifold blessings that we receive daily through the encounter with the Risen Lord. We thank God for the experience of community and the gift of each other.

** Self –Sacrifice: we unite ourselves with Christ in his sacrifice on the Cross and offer our little trials and difficulties that come our way.

** Love: we are nourished daily by the Eucharist and share our very selves to those in need of help. We acknowledge the presence of the Risen Lord in all creation and spheres of life. Love builds up our intimate relationship with Christ.

** Adoration we believe of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and we manifest our love and reverence to Him.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTIONS:

1. Knowing the inexhaustible treasurers that the Eucharist have, do I really make it the center of my liturgical life? If not, why?

2. Am I a good listener to the Word of God and eager to share my experience of it to others?

3. How do I prepare myself for the reception and encounter with the Risen Christ in holy communion? Do I take time to make my thanksgiving after having received the Body and Blood of Jesus?

4. Is my life a witness of the Risen Lord by radiating love, peace and joy to others?

5. Does my love and the gift of the Eucharist impels me to share it with my students and co-workers in my ministry?

GROUP SHARING:

1. What does the Eucharist mean to us as a community?
2. Why is the Eucharist the center of our liturgical life?
3. How does the Eucharist renew and unite our community?
   What can I contribute to the renewal and unity of my community?
4. As a community, do we give time for common adoration?

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‘Shaping Holy Lives’, a Conference on Benedictine Spirituality

by Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

Trinity Wall Street, New York
'God's Workshop'
29 April 2003

Benedict is, as usual, uncompromisingly prosaic in describing the monastic community as a workshop; it’s a place in which we use specific tools – listed with blunt simplicity in chapter 4 of the Rule – which are lent to us by Christ, to be returned on the Last Day, when we receive our wages. It’s an imagery that conjures up a landscape in monochrome, a grey sky, a stone wall: the tools worn smooth with long use and skillfully patched up over time, taken from the shelf each morning until finally hung up when weariness and age arrive. The holy life is one in which we learn to handle things, in businesslike and unselfconscious ways, to ‘handle’ the control of the tongue, the habit of not passing on blame, getting up in the morning and not gossiping. A monastic lifetime is one in which these habits are fitted to our hands. Simone Weil wrote somewhere about how the tool is for the seasoned worker the extension of the hand, not something alien. Benedict’s metaphors prompt us to think of a holiness that is like that, an ‘extension’ of our bodies and our words that we’ve come not to notice.

In a recent essay on Benedictine Holiness, Professor Henry Mayr-Harting describes it as ‘completely undemonstrative, deeply conventual, and lacking any system of expertise’ (*Holiness, Past and Present,* ed. Stephen Barton, London/New York 2003, p.261). Very broadly, that is the picture I want to develop with reference to this early and potent image of the workshop and its tools – though I might, while fully understanding the point about expertise, want to think about what sorts of communicable wisdom it also embodies. At this stage, though, perhaps the most important thing to emphasize is the ‘deeply conventual’: the holiness envisaged by the Rule is entirely inseparable from the common life. The tools of the work are bound up with the proximity of other people – and the same other people. As Benedict says the end of chapter 4, the workshop is itself the stability of the community. Or, to pick up our earlier language, it is the unavoidable nearness of these others that becomes an extension of ourselves. One of the things we have to grow into unselfconsciousness about is the steady environment of others.

To put it a bit differently, the promise to live in stability is the most drastic way imaginable of recognizing the otherness of others – just as in marriage. If the other person is there, ultimately, on sufferance or on condition, if there is a time-expiry dimension to our relations with particular others, we put a limit on the amount of otherness we can manage. Beyond a certain point, we reserve the right to say that our terms must prevail after all. Stability or marital fidelity or any seriously covenanted relation to person or community resigns that long-stop possibility; which is why it feels so dangerous.

At the very start, then, of thinking about Benedictine holiness, there stands a principle well worth applying to other settings, other relationships – not least the Church itself. How often do we think about the holiness of the Church as bound up with a habitual acceptance of the otherness of others who have made the same commitment? And what does it feel like to imagine

holiness as an unselfconscious getting used to others? The presence of the other as a tool worn smooth and grey in the hand? The prosaic settledness of some marriages, the ease of an old priest celebrating the eucharist, the musician's relation to a familiar instrument playing a familiar piece – these belong to the same family of experience as the kind of sanctity that Benedict evokes here; undemonstrative, as Mayr-Harting says, because there is nothing to prove.

The 'tools of good works' listed include the Golden Rule, several of the Ten Commandments and the corporal works of mercy (clothing the naked, visiting the sick, burying the dead, and so on); but the bulk of them have to do with virtues that can be seen as necessary for the maintenance of stability as a context for growth in holiness. It is as though Benedict were asking, 'What does it take to develop people who can live stably together?' He does not begin by commending stability, but by mapping out an environment where the long-term sameness of my company will not breed bitterness, cynicism and fear of openness with one another. If you have to spend a lifetime with the same people, it is easy to create a carapace of habitual response which belongs at the surface level, a set of standard reactions which do not leave you vulnerable. It is the exact opposite of the habitual acceptance of otherness which we were speaking about a little while back, though it can sometimes dangerously resemble it. With a slightly artificial tidiness, we might see the practices Benedict commends for nurturing the stability of the workshop under three heads. The monk must be transparent; the monk must be a peacemaker; the monk must be accountable. Let's look at these in turn.

Transparency: those who belong to a community such as Benedict describes are required 'not to entertain deceit in their heart' (24 in the list of 'tools'), and, intriguingly, 'not to give false peace (25); to acknowledge their own culpability in any situation of wrong (42-3 – a principle regularly stressed by the Desert Fathers); to be daily mindful of death (47); to deal without delay with evil thoughts, breaking them against the rock of Christ, and to make them known to the spiritual father (50-51 – again a familiar precept in the desert). These and other precepts suggest that one of the basic requirements of the life is honesty. First, honesty about yourself: it is necessary to know how to spot the chains of fantasy (which is exactly what 'thoughts', logismoi, meant for the Desert Fathers), to understand how deeply they are rooted in a weak and flawed will, and to make your soul inhospitable to untruth about yourself. Exposure of your fantasies to an experienced elder is an indispensable part of learning the skills of diagnosis here. In the background are the analyses of Evagrius and Cassian, pinpointing what simple boredom can do in a life where ordinary variety of scene and company is missing. The mind becomes obsessional, self-enclosed, incapable of telling sense from nonsense; the reality of the other in its unyielding difference is avoided by retreat into the private world where your own preference rules unrestricted. Hence the stress on making thoughts known: it is a simple way of propping open the door of the psyche, a way of making incarnate the consciousness that God sees us with complete clarity in every situation (49).

To become in this way open to your own scrutiny, through the listening ministry of the trusted brother or sister, is to take the first step towards an awareness of the brother or sister that is not illusory or comforting. The recommendation against 'false peace', I suspect, belongs in this context: one of the ways in which we can retreat into privacy is the refusal to admit genuine conflict, to seek for a resolution that leaves me feeling secure without ever engaging the roots of difference. If we are to become transparent, we must first confront the uncomfortable fact that we are not naturally and instantly at peace with all.

This could of course read like a commendation of the attitude which declines reconciliation until justice (to me) has been fully done; but I don't think this is what Benedict is thinking of. The recommendation follows two precepts about anger and resentment (22, 23), which, taken together with the warning against false peace, suggests that being wary of facile reconciliation is not about a suspicion of whether the other has adequately made reparation but about whether I have fully acknowledged and dealt with my own resentment. It is a hesitation over my honesty about peace, not the other's acceptability.

One of the most profound books I know on the subject of Christian community is the late Donald Nicholl's wonderful journal of his time as Rector of the Ecumenical Institute at Tantur, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, *The Testing of Hearts: A Pilgrim's Journal* (London 1989). Here he records a conversation with a visiting Spanish scholar, who observes that many members of the community have come 'with much heavy matter of unforgiveness and resentment lodged inside them from previous experience…it is precisely those who talk most about community-building who block the flow because they are the ones least aware of the matter of unforgiveness that they are carrying around with them, like a lead ball attached to their waists' (p.62). Is this what is meant by 'false peace' – to talk about community-building as an alibi for addressing the inner weight of anger and grief? And it isn't irrelevant that Nicholl contrasts the attitude of the Catalan Benedictines who live at the core of the community with that of the more transient scholars, who all come with an agenda that connects to other settings and other communities; the issues are different for those who are not living with stability.

All this gives something of a new edge to the commendation that the monk should be a peacemaker. The precepts are clear enough: there should be no retaliation (29-32), no malicious gossip (40), no hatred or envy or party spirit (64-67). And the climactic items in the list of tools make the priority of peacemaking very plain indeed:

70. To pray for one's enemies in the love of Christ.
71. To make peace with one's enemy before the sun sets.
72. And never to despair of the mercy of God.

Stability requires this daily discipline of mending; it is the opposite of an atmosphere in which one's place always has to be fought for, where influence and hierarchy are a matter of unceasing struggle. As Professor Mayr-Harting notes, the idea that position in the community depends on seniority of entry (ch.63) may seem banal to us now, but it was a most unusual way of understanding hierarchy in late antiquity. It seems obvious because the Rule has had such a sustained impact on the institutions of our culture. But we need also to note that the same chapter that establishes the principle of seniority insists that specific responsibilities in the community do not depend on age but on the discernment of the abbot and that the order of age should not become a ground for insisting on rights and rank. It is a delicate balance, but one whose goal is evidently to secure an ethos in which open conflict over position or influence is less likely. And while rumour suggests that monastic communities are not completely immune to power struggles, the point is that the Rule provides a structure that will always challenge any assumption that conflict is the 'default position' in common life.

To put this another way, what the Rule outlines is what is to be the 'currency' of the community. All communities need a medium of exchange, a language that assures their members that they are engaged in the same enterprise. It involves common stories and practices, things that you can expect your neighbour to understand without explanation, ways and styles of doing

and saying things. Once again, Donald Nicholl has a pertinent story; this time, he is listening to a visiting English priest, who relates the experience of a university mission. Fr Aidan is, naturally, interested in what the currency of the university is, and he spends time trying to pick up what people talk about and how. ' "And eventually", Aidan said, "one day the penny dropped. What did those people exchange with one another when they met? You'd be surprised – they exchanged grievances. So the currency of that University is grievance"'.

Nicholl comments by translating this into the image of the circulation of the blood in a body: what you receive is what you give, what you put into the circulation. 'If you put in grievance, you will get back grievance' (p.142). And he refers to an elderly religious in Yorkshire, unobtrusive and to the untutored eye rather idle; but it is he 'who sets the currency of goodness and kindness circulating through that community' (143). Without some such input into the 'circulation', communities will be at best dry and at worst deadly.

Peacemaking, then, is more than a commitment to reconciling those at odds. On its own, a passion for reconciliation, we have seen, can be a displacement for unresolved angers and resentments. What it may put into circulation is anxiety or censoriousness, certainly a situation of tense untruth when there is pressure to 'make peace' at all costs. The peace which the Rule envisages is more like this 'currency' we've been thinking about, a habit of stable determination to put into the life of the body something other than grudges. And for that to happen, the individual must be growing in the transparency we began with, aware of the temptations of drama, the staging of emotional turbulence in which the unexamined ego is allowed to rampage unchecked.

It's all quite difficult for us in the twenty-first century. We have been told – rightly – that it is bad to deny and repress emotion; equally rightly, that it is poisonous for us to be passive under injustice. The problem, which half an hour on the street outside will confirm, and five minutes watching 'reality' programmes on television will reinforce as strongly as you could want, is that we so readily take this reasonable corrective to an atmosphere of unreality and oppression as an excuse for promoting the dramas of the will. The denial of emotion is a terrible thing; what takes time is learning that the positive path is the education of emotion, not its uncritical indulgence, which actually locks us far more firmly in our mutual isolation. Likewise, the denial of rights is a terrible thing; and what takes time to learn is that the opposite of oppression is not a wilderness of litigation and reparation but the nurture of concrete, shared respect. The Rule suggests that if concern with right and reparation fills our horizon, the one thing that we shall not attain is unselfconsciousness – respect as another of those worn-smooth tools that are simply an extension of the body.

None of this is learned without the stability of the workshop. The community that freely promises to live together before God is one in which both truthfulness and respect are enshrined. I promise that I will not hide from you – and that I will also at times help you not to hide from me or from yourself. I promise that your growth towards the good God wants for you will be a wholly natural and obvious priority for me; and I trust that you have made the same promise. We have a lifetime for this. Without the promise, the temptation is always for the ego's agenda to surface again, out of fear that I shall be abandoned if the truth is known, fear that I have no time or resource to change as it seems as I must. No-one is going to run away; and the resources of the community are there on my behalf.

I realize that I am describing the Body of Christ, not just a Benedictine community. But how often do we understand the promises of baptism as bringing us into this sort of group? How often do we think of the Church as a natural place for honesty, where we need not be afraid? Hence the need for these localized, even specialized workshops, which take their place between two dangerous and illusory models of human life together. On the one hand is what some think the Church is (including, historically, quite a lot of those who actually run it…): an institution where control is a major priority, where experts do things that others can't, where orderly common life depends on a faintly magical command structure. On the other hand is the modern and postmodern vision of human sociality: a jostle of plural commitments and hopes, with somewhat arbitrary tribunals limiting the damage of conflict and securing the rights of all to be themselves up to the point where they trespass on the territory of others - so that the other is virtually bound to be seen as the source of frustration. The community of the Rule assumes that the point of authority is not to mediate between fixed clusters of individual interest but to attend to the needs and strengths of each in such a way as to lead them forward harmoniously (as the chapters on the abbot's ministry make plain); and it also assumes that each member of the community regards relation with the others as the material of their own sanctification, so that it is impossible to see the other as necessarily a menace. Neither simply hierarchical (in the sense of taking for granted an authority whose task is to secure uniformity in accord with a dominant will) nor individualistic, the Rule reminds the Church of how counter-cultural its style of common life might be.

But we have already begun to move into thinking about my third element in Benedictine holiness, accountability. At the simplest level, this is almost identical with the transparency already discussed; but it is made very clear that the exercise of the abbot's rule has to be characterized by accountability. Although what the abbot says must be done, without complaint (ch.5), the abbot is adjured at some length to recall his answerability before God, his call to be the image of Christ in the monastery and to 'leaven' the minds of those under his care, and his duty to ignore apparent claims of status among the monks. His work is seen as, centrally, one of instruction and formation, and Mayr-Harting is absolutely right to see this as grounded in the language of St Paul: authority exists so as to create adult persons in Christ's likeness, and all discipline is directed to this end – with the added emphasis in the Rule of attention to the requirements of different temperaments (ch.27 is the most humanly subtle of the various accounts of this in the text).

The abbot makes distinctions not on the basis of visible difference (rich or poor, slave or free) but on the basis of his discernment of persons. You could say that his accountability is both to God and to the spiritual realities of the people he deals with. And this perhaps fills out the significance of the idea of accountability in the Rule as a whole: we are answerable to the concreteness of the other. Obedience to the abbot is the most obvious form of this, but that obedience itself refers to the life and health of the whole community, since the abbot exercises discipline only in that context, and is ultimately accountable in those terms. In short, everyone in the community that the Rule envisages is responsible both to and for everyone else – in different modes, depending on the different specific responsibilities they hold, but nonetheless sharing a single basic calling in this respect. The workshop is manifestly a collaborative venture with the aim of 'mending vices and preserving love' (Prologue).

So the Rule envisages holiness as a set of habits – like goodness in general, of course, but not reducible to goodness only. The holy person is not simply the one who keeps the

commandments with which the catalogue of tools for good works begins, but one who struggles to live without deceit, their inner life manifest to guides and spiritual parents, who makes peace by addressing the roots of conflict in him or herself, and, under the direction of a skilled superior, attempts to contribute their distinctive gifts in such a way as to sustain a healthy 'circulation' in the community. You can see why Benedict is clear about the need for long probation of the intending solitary, and why he is so hard on wanderers, who can never have adequate experience of living with the same people, becoming habituated to charity with these particular, inescapable neighbours (ch.1). Until stability has soaked in, it isn't much use reading the Desert Fathers or Cassian or Basil: to borrow a notion from Jacob Needleman's remarkable *Lost Christianity* (New York 1980, esp. pp.117-9, and ch.8 passim), the words of the Fathers are addressed to 'people who don't yet exist'. To know even a little of what the great spiritual teachers are saying, you need to have lived through the education of instinct that the Rule outlines. It is just worth noting that there are seventy two 'tools of good works' to correspond to the first seventy two chapters of the Rule; it is the seventy third chapter that points forward to the greater challenges of the Fathers. And this suggests that the seventy two tools are precisely, like the seventy two chapters, a preparation for hearing what the Fathers have to say, a method by which persons who can hear the questions may come into existence.

The product of the workshop is people who are really there; perhaps it's a simple as that. What Benedict is interested in producing is people who have the skills to diagnose all inside them that prompts them to escape from themselves in the here and now. Just as much as in the literature of the desert – despite his insistence that he is working on a different and lower level – Benedict regards monastic life as a discipline for being where you are, rather than taking refuge in the infinite smallness of your own fantasies. Hence he can speak, in one of those images that continue to resonate across the centuries, of the expansion of the heart that obedience to the Rule will bring. The life is about realizing great matters in small space: *Cael neuadd fawr/ Rhwng cyfyng furiau* – 'inhabiting a great hall between narrow walls'. That is the definition of life itself offered by the Welsh poet Waldo Williams in one of his best-known poems, and it is not a bad gloss on the Rule.

But I have already hinted at some of what makes the Rule hard reading these days, and in the last bit of these reflections I want to draw out just a little more on this, so as to suggest where the Rule is salutary reading for us, individually and corporately. The idea fundamental to the Rule (and to practically all serious religious writing) that there are some good things that are utterly inaccessible without the taking of time is probably the greatest brick wall. And it is not just a matter of personal neurosis; given the twenty four hour pattern of news provision, we are discouraged very strongly from any suspicion that the significance of events might need time to understand. Recently, of course, in the aftermath of the war, those who were doubtful of its wisdom or legitimacy have been urged to retract, since we have, after all, won; it doesn't seem to be easy to convey that until you can see how relations of various kinds are properly mended it might be premature to speak of victory - even of endings. It is rather symptomatic of our urgency in wanting what we these days call closure. But the truth is that serious and deep meanings only emerge as we look and listen, as we accompany a long story in its unfolding – whether we are thinking about the meaning of a life (mine or anyone's) or the meaning of a period in international affairs. Stability is still the key, a staying with that gives us the opportunity ourselves to change as we accompany, and so to understand more fully.

And what we have been thinking about in relation to peacemaking has an uncomfortable pertinence just at the moment. Are we capable, as Western societies of peace that is not 'false' in Benedict's terms? That is, are we sufficiently alert to the agenda we are bringing to international conflict – resentments, the sense of half-buried impotence that sits alongside the urge to demonstrate the power we do have, the desire to put off examining the unfinished business in our own societies? And, for that matter, there is the falsity that can also afflict would-be peacemakers, who are more concerned with condemning what's wrong than with planning for what might change things, and who derive some comfort from knowing where evil lies (i.e. in someone else, some warmongering monster). What do we do to help our culture discover or recover habits of honesty? Is there a healing of the 'circulation'? 'Peace work', writes Donald Nicholl (p.224), 'demands a far higher degree of self-discipline, spiritual preparation and self-knowledge than we are generally prepared to face.'

And as for accountability – we tend these days to pride ourselves on taking this seriously; we have introduced the notion of audit into most of what we do, and are encouraged to challenge anything that looks like non-accountable exercising of authority. But I suspect that all this is actually rather a long way from what the Rule has in mind. First of all, the accountability of the Rule depends on a clear common understanding of what everyone is answerable to: the judgement of Christ. The Rule has nothing resembling a speculative Christology; but all the lines lead to Christ, the central instance of authority rightly used and attention rightly directed to God and the immediate other. There is no interest at all in the Rule in challenging authority on abstract principle. What there is is a clear commitment to listening, as a central and necessary aspect of making decisions, listening even to the most junior (ch.3); the possibility of explaining difficulties and asking for consideration of special circumstances (ch.68); and the repeated insistence that the abbot is measured by and must measure himself by the standard of Christ's pastoral service, with its focal principle of self-gift for the sake of the life of the other. When abbatial decisions are made, the monk must ultimately obey; but the context remains one in which we are being urged to think not about an audit, in the sense of an assessment of whether the processes in use are delivering the desired results, but about the degree to which the community is genuinely working with a shared focus and common language, in which both discussion and decision are possible.

The Rule is in no way a primitive democratic document, and its appeals to obedience are undoubtedly counter-cultural these days. But what the discomfort arising from this misses is the sense of standing together before Christ, becoming used to Christ's scrutiny together. In this way, we both see ourselves under Christ's judgement and see others under Christ's mercy; and we are urged not to despair of that mercy even for ourselves. Not to despair of mercy is the last of the tools of good works; we could say that the final point of accountability before Christ was that we should have as the extension of our natural bodily being the habit of hope, trust in the possibilities of compassion. And the abbot is in a unique position to put that into circulation.

What the 'audit' culture lacks is usually a positive shared focus. We have a clear sense of what counts as breach of responsibility, and usually a clear (if often artificially clear) account of what effective exercise of responsibility should produce. What we don't often have is the tacit or explicit reference to the shared focus of meaning that allows real mutuality in the life of the group under authority. Challenges belong in the context –yet again – of a stability that guarantees we all know what we are talking about and what we hope for.

So the Rule's sketch of holiness and sanity puts a few questions to us, as Church and culture. It suggests that one of our main problems is that we don't know where to find the stable relations that would allow us room to grow without fear. The Church which ought to embody not only covenant with God but covenant with each other does not always give the feeling of a community where people have unlimited time to grow with each other, nourishing and challenging. We have little incentive to be open with each other if we live in an ecclesial environment where political conflict and various kinds of grievance are the dominant currency. And, believers and unbelievers, we'd like to be peacemakers without the inner work which alone makes peace something more than a pause in battle. We are bad at finding that elusive balance between corrupt and collusive passivity which keeps oppression alive and the litigious obsessiveness that continually asks whether I am being attended to as I deserve. And no, I don't have a formula for resolving that, I only ask that we find ways of reminding ourselves that there is a problem.

So we'd better have some communities around that embody the stability that is at the heart of all this. 'Each [religious] house is meant to be a model – an 'epiphany' rather – of the condition of mankind reconciled in Christ' wrote Fergus Kerr in an essay around 1970 (p.44 in *Religious Life Today*, John Coventry, Rembert Weakland and others, Tenbury Wells, n.d.). And he goes on to say that this is impossible unless we face the real condition of unreconciledness in and between us; which is why religious houses are not always exactly easy places…But in the terms of these reflections we should have to say that without the stability the work isn't done; the tools don't become extensions of the hand in such a way that the other's reality really and truly ceases to be an intrusion and a threat. How right Benedict was to say that it is only when community life has done its work that someone should be allowed to take up the solitary life: only when the other is not a problem can solitude be Christlike – otherwise it is an escape, another drama.

A monochrome picture? Perhaps, but the self-indulgent technicolour of what are sometimes our preferred styles needs some chastening. The workshop is at the end of the day a solid and tough metaphor for that spirituality which is a lifetime's labour, yet also an expansion of the heart; just as all good physical work is an expansion of the body into its environment, changing even as it brings about change. Holiness is a much-patched cloth, a smooth–worn tool at least as much as it is a blaze of new light; because it must be finally a state we can live with and in, the hand fitted to the wood forgetful of the join.