

The Cistercian Diakonia **Fr. Olivier Quenardel**

Today there is general agreement that Stephen Harding's conception of the Order of Cîteaux was that of a vast school of charity. Basing his thought on the kinds of relationships provided for in the Rule of Saint Benedict for the internal functioning of the monastery, he extends them to relationships between monasteries. The school of the Lord's service can therefore be understood as the Order itself, which became a great School of schools that safeguarded the autonomy of each house and at the same time established between the various houses of the Order-especially those linked by ties of filiation-a profound solidarity characterized by its gospel spirit.

Is it possible to imagine nine centuries later, without lacking in realism or discretion, that we can follow the example of Saint Stephen and use the Rule of Saint Benedict to seek both new and old ways of building up, not just our Orders and Congregations separately, but the whole of the Cistercian Family, along the lines of a true school of charity? It would no longer fall to each Order or Congregation whose origin or inspiration comes from Cîteaux to see itself as a vast School of schools, but to the entirety of the Cistercian Family , doing so with utmost respect for the internal organization proper to each.

John Paul II's letter *To the members of the Cistercian Family on the Occasion of the Ninth Centenary of the Foundation of Cîteaux* no doubt encourages us to move in this direction. Many noticed the frequent and certainly intentional use of the expression "Cistercian family" in that document. Conversely, it never mentions the words Order or Congregation. Clearly, what interested the Holy Father in that document was not first of all the juridical organization proper to each of our Orders or Congregations but "communion" within the "great Cistercian family":

In this celebration of Cîteaux's foundation, I warmly encourage the communities that form the great Cistercian family to enter the new millennium together, in true communion, in mutual trust and with respect for the traditions bequeathed by history. May this anniversary of the "new monastery," which for nine centuries has had such great influence in the Church and in the world, be for all a reminder of their common origins and lineage, as well as a symbol of the unity which must always be accepted and built!

In order to make a contribution toward true communion in "the great Cistercian family," as the Holy Father encourages us to do, I would like to meditate on some aspects of chapter 35 of the Rule of Saint Benedict that seem particularly relevant here.

SERVIRE

Beginning with the Prologue of the Rule, Saint Benedict clearly expresses his intention to establish "a school for the Lord's service." This expression gives meaning to the entire

Rule. In this school the monk will learn many things, all of which are summarized in one thing: "to serve the Lord." Consequently, whoever enters the monastery with a right intention will seek to become a "servant" of the Lord, and, better yet, a "good servant" (RB 64.21).

Starting at chapter 35, Saint Benedict elaborates on a particular aspect of this service that he had not yet attended to, namely, the mutual service the brothers must exercise for one another. Within the space of a few verses he reiterates it twice: "Let the brothers serve one another . . . in charity." What he says here with regard to the weekly kitchen servers applies on a greater scale to the whole of the monastery's activities. They must be understood as services, and the brothers must fulfill them as true servants. Moreover, as we will see again later, the brothers must apply themselves to these services by serving one another in charity.

Many possible outlines have been proposed for the Rule. Each is of value to the extent that it forces us to look more closely at the contents and find renewed meaning. To that end, may we not consider chapter 35 as marking a division? After laying the foundation of the school of the Lord's service with a great deal of realism in the first thirty-four chapters, Benedict then turns to a whole series of practical tasks by which this service is authentically carried out: kitchen, infirmary, guesthouse, porter's lodge, etc. It is there, in the area of fraternal service, that the true servant of the Lord will be recognized. To consider the rule in this way is to see it as a large diptych in which service of the Lord and service of the brothers are as inseparable as the first and second commandments. Anyone committed to Saint Benedict's school learns to combine the two.

No doubt, a reading of this type applies first of all to each monastery that lives according to the Rule of Saint Benedict. To the extent that Saint Stephen Harding drew from the Rule to institute relationships between monasteries in the Charter of Charity, this same reading applies equally well to the early Order of Cîteaux, which was conceived as a vast School of schools of the Lord's service. Let us dare to go a step further: Today, beyond our various Orders and Congregations, and not forgetting the latest shoot from the tree of Cîteaux, namely, the lay Cistercians you represent here at Clairvaux in June, 2005 at your third international meeting, may we not apply the same reading to the "great Cistercian family," called by the Holy Father to build itself up more and more in authentic communion of gospel love? Thus, by fostering among our Orders and Congregations the sense of service that the Rule institutes in such a masterly way, our Cistercian communities, be they religious or lay, will truly correspond to what is expected of them, i.e., to be "seeds of charity" buried deep in the heart of a humanity ever in search of unity and peace.

INVICEM

In chapter 35 of the Rule, Saint Benedict describes fraternal service with the word *invicem* (35.1-6), which is generally translated with the word 'mutually' or by the

expression 'one another'. It occurs ten times in the Rule. With the exception of chapter 22, which reminds the monks to encourage one another "mutually" to go to the Work of God when the signal to rise sounds, *invicem* occurs only in the second part of the Rule, which is precisely the part dealing with those "practical works" that teach the brothers to serve each other mutually in charity. Whenever they meet they are to anticipate one another in showing mutual honor (63.17; 72.4), and all their tasks are presented as so many opportunities to obey one another (71). In this way the school of the Lord's service opens out into a network of reciprocity (*vicinalité*) in which the common life is held together by charity.

Light from the Word of God

In the last chapter of the Rule, Saint Benedict refers his followers to the books of the Old and New Testaments to find matter for further progress (73.3). Let us follow his advice and look through the Word of God for specifically Christian resonances of reciprocity. The results are impressive. First, simply at the level of totals, out of the 118 occurrences of the word *invicem* in the Vulgate, there are 35 in the Old Testament and 83 (i.e., more than twice as many) in the New Testament. Above all, the use of the word in the New Testament brings about a kind of revolution with regard to human relations. Whereas in the Old Testament it hardly means more than reciprocal verbal communication, in the New Testament reciprocity becomes a fundamental characteristic of charity. It is no longer a matter of just speaking to one another, but of loving one another as Jesus commands: "*Hoc est praeceptum meum, ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos*"; "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." In other words, reciprocity becomes an inseparable element of the language of charity, not only for verbal expression, but also in action and in truth.

John the evangelist shows himself clearly to be an apostle of Christian reciprocity who rejects one-way charity. For him, love, which he calls *dilectio*, i.e., love that cherishes and lets itself be cherished, is of its very essence both receptivity and gift. If it were only one or the other it would be in danger. It must be both, keeping persons in an absolute reciprocity of receptivity and gift.

Reciprocity is no less important for Paul, the apostle of the nations. The concordance of the Vulgate lists 40 occurrences of the word *invicem*. It comes across strongly beginning with the first pastoral epistle (1Th 3:12; 4:19.17; 5:11.15), and truly abounds throughout the Pauline corpus, especially in paranetic contexts. Here are some examples taken from the Letter to the Romans:

- *Caritatem fraternitatis invicem diligentes*; Love one another with brotherly affection (Rm 12:10).
- *Nemini quicquam debeatis nisi ut invicem diligatis*; Owe no one anything except to love one another (Rm 13:8).

- Non ergo amplius invicem iudicemus; Then let us no more pass judgment on one another (Rm 14:13).
- Quae aedificationis sunt, in invicem custodiamus; Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding (Rm 14:19).
- Propter quod suscipite invicem sicut et Christus suscepit vos in honorem Dei; Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (Rm 15:7).
- Salutate invicem in osculo sancto; Greet one another with a holy kiss (Rm 16:16).

In the same way, in his other letters, Paul does not hesitate to use the word *invicem* to encourage manifestations of charity within the communities. In chapter 5 of the Letter to the Galatians alone he persuasively uses it five times: "Through love be servants of one another (*invicem*) [...] But if you bite and devour one another (*invicem*) take heed that you are not consumed by one another (*invicem*) [...] Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another (*invicem*), no envy of one another (*invicem*)."

It should especially be noted that it is within the framework of his theology of the "body" that the apostle of the nations presents reciprocity as a fundamental characteristic of Christian behavior. The foremost occurrence is in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another"; *sed Deus temperavit corpus ei cui deerat abundantiorum tribuendo honorem ut non sit scisma in corpore sed id ipsum pro invicem sollicita sint membra* (1Cor 12:24-25).

In his epistles of the captivity Paul spells out the ethical consequences of his grandiose theology of the Church, the Body of Christ. Reciprocity naturally takes pride of place: "with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love . . . supportantes invicem in caritate (Eph 4:2); let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another . . . quoniam sumus invicem membra (Eph 4:25); be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you . . . Estote autem invicem benigni, misericordes, donantes invicem, sicut et Deus in Christo donavit vobis (Eph 4:32); Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ . . . Subjecti invicem in timore Christi (Eph 5:21)."

One last point needs to be made in order to grasp the scriptural originality of the word *invicem*, which is also used in the Rule of Benedict. This Latin word translates the Greek word *allèlos*, which, by its very root, *allos*, stresses otherness more than reciprocity, and consequently the respect due to the other or to others in all human relationships. Indeed, in the Christian dispensation, the other, whoever it is or however disfigured, is in some way the sacrament of the Wholly Other. Therefore, throughout our reflection it is important to recall that reciprocity is as marked by the aspect of otherness as by the reciprocal aspect. *Invicem* is not fusion; rather it requires persistent work to allow otherness, which is often perceived as a threat, to become on the contrary shared

richness. Christian reciprocity is based on faith and not on common natural dispositions. The same applies as well to monastics as to laypersons.

An Ethic of Reciprocity?

What comes out of this enquiry into the Word of God is that the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ causes a revolution in human relationships. Christians are aware of this, but, unfortunately, their lives do not always witness to it in a convincing way. They should be the vanguard of this revolution of love that the New Testament proclaims as being not only a gift but also an exchange in which love is received as much as it is given. That is the specifically "revolutionary" thing here, something we have not yet sufficiently taken into account. *Invicem* holds its secret. It is our task to bring it out into the open.

What does this mean? If reciprocity is an inseparable component of Christian charity, it places all men and women of whatever age, origin, or culture on a plain of equal dignity by the very fact of their belonging to a single humanity. Such a statement is today taken for granted as a matter of human rights whose Christian roots, whether officially recognized or not, cannot be doubted. Our responsibility as Christians is to draw all the consequences from the universal recognition of these rights in the practical area of human relationships, beginning with our communities, our particular Churches, and the People of God as a whole.

To be credible today in the enormous confusion brought about at all levels by globalization, we have nothing more to say than that we are all brothers and sisters. Everything else is secondary and is only important in so far as it concerns the universal fraternity instituted by Jesus, Christ and Lord. If the Cistercian family is not at the heart of this fraternal revolution, what use will it be? If we close ourselves in with distinctions—legitimate as they may be—between our Orders and Congregations, between clergy and lay, between religious and secular life, between life in the cloister and life outside the cloister, we risk turning them into barriers, whereas baptism has first of all united us as brothers and sisters in the heart of the House of God.

As from the beginning of evangelization, we are to manifest before the eyes of the world that we are sons and daughters of light and that the Holy Spirit has been given us to teach us to walk in communion with one another. If there has been a time when it was otherwise, if we have walked one without the other, or worse, against the other, it must no longer be so. Such is the cost of *invicem*, the price to be paid to build up the Cistercian family. Attentive to John Paul II's letter for the ninth centenary of Cîteaux, and using the discretion so dear to Saint Benedict, our great family is called today to look for ways to decompartmentalize where compartmentalization no longer serves a purpose, so that all its members can recognize each other as brothers and sisters serving one another in the kind of charity that is able to benefit from our legitimate diversity. This is going far, very far. Rather than a gift-based ethic in which to the other is always at risk

of being enslaved to the giver, we prefer a reciprocity ethic based on reciprocal exchange. This is a radical reversal that goes so far as to abolish all vassalage of one to another. From the deepest kind of Christian reciprocity, the Cistercian family is invited to imitate Jesus, who, for love of us, became the vassal of all humanity. It thus falls to each of us to become the vassal of his brother.

SOLATIUM

A second characteristic of fraternal service is characteristic of chapter 35 of the Rule. It comes from the word *solatium*, generally translated as 'help':

But let helpers (*solacia*) be provided for the weak ones, that they may not be distressed by this work; and indeed let everyone have help (*solacia*), as required by the size of the community or the circumstances of the locality. (RB 35:3-4)

We will better understand what Benedict means by identifying the other passages of the Rule where *solatium* is used. It is no accident that we find it already in the first chapter, twice, moreover: the first time as such, and the second time in the form *con-solatio* where the prefix places stronger stress on the comfort and even "consolation" of this help. To say that hermits, in contrast to cenobites, no longer need this kind of help to wage spiritual battle, is to say, a *contrario*, not only that cenobites can find it in the monastery, but also that it is in some way indispensable for them. This may seem an innocuous observation, but as soon as one realizes that Saint Benedict makes this *solatium* the primary characteristic of the common life in the Rule, it must be taken quite seriously, because it means that a community whose members do not provide each other with this comfort may quickly become prey to the devil. To state it positively, it is a call to the whole community to become a body whose members honor one another with mutual comfort. They will thus be better armed to battle the vices of the flesh and of thoughts. They will be "consolers" for one another, "paracletes," together facing the harsh and bitter things that can arise in the school of the Lord's service.

Further on, it is in the concrete area of various community services that the word *solatium* comes up again. The Rule speaks of it explicitly when treating of the cellarer (31.17), the weekly kitchen servants (35.3-4), the kitchen for the abbot and guests (53.18 and 20), and the porters (66.5), but these are only particular cases of a general principle according to which, "in all the offices of the monastery let this arrangement be observed, that when help (*solacia*) is needed it be supplied." This wise measure shows once again Saint Benedict's delicate pastoral sense that seeks to avoid whatever may harm peace of soul or give rise to sadness. In an era when people did not yet speak of stress, he shows himself to be aware of the phenomenon of overwork, which, if prolonged, risks causing turmoil, agitation, and murmuring, and thereby hindering the search for God. A sustained practice of *solatium*, comforting help given to brothers who need it, will prove to be a good means of pruning away the bad shoots that spring up quickly when the burden becomes too heavy.

This type of help, even if it undoubtedly involves a corporal aspect, has a clearly spiritual aim. As always, Saint Benedict seeks to protect the life of the soul and the quality of community life. In this sense, it is possible to see in this help, as in reciprocity itself, which is inseparable from this help, one of the fundamental elements of the human condition: "It is not good for the man to be alone. . . ." The help given him in the garden of Eden bears new fruit when he enters the new creation. Whereas the first Adam, upon seeing the "help" given him by the Creator, cries "behold flesh of my flesh", the New Adam enlarges his heart by saying: "here is my brother, my sister, and my mother." Thus completely renewed in the New Covenant, the conjugal state remains, but its true fruit becomes universal fraternity in which, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we all cry "Abba, Father."

In order to detect still further the profundity of the word *solatium*, there is nothing to prevent us from seeing it as a verbal extension of the word *sol*. This connection sheds particular light on the help the brothers must give one another. This help will not only be comforting but also deeply radiant. It will be "solar" help, a warm and "sunny" help like the help the earth receives from the sun. It will be a trinitarian help-given by the Father of Lights, the Sun of Justice, and the Spirit Consoler-that the brothers show to one another in the House of God.

Invicem and *solatium* thus form the two pillars of the fraternal service Benedict conceives of in chapter 35 of the Rule. Upon this basis a solid theology of "mutual fraternal aid" may be constructed, the phrase "mutual aid" combining the characteristics of both terms, and at the same time lowering the risk of an enslaving kind of help that would come from on high without being sufficiently open to otherness and reciprocity. Indeed, "All things are twofold, one opposite the other, and he has made nothing incomplete. one confirms the good things of the other, and who can have enough of beholding his glory?" What more could we ask than that the Cistercian family be founded on and soar into flight from these two pillars.

MANDATUM

The rest of chapter 35 of the Rule provides a ritual framework in which what was said earlier is taken up again in actions whose gospel significance leaves no doubt. Let us dwell on the one that seems the most important, namely, the washing of the feet. It is no accident that Saint Benedict here gives it a prominent place. While hearing what he just said about the mutual service the brothers should show each other as a sign of charity, who could fail to think of the washing of the feet? What other passage of the Gospel is as enlightening as the one about the Master washing the feet of his disciples? The night before his Passion the rabbi of Nazareth is no longer only the one who stated "The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many"; he is the one who accomplishes in action and in truth the two fundamental signs that he explicitly asked his disciples to do in the full sense of the

word: the first, according to his example, is the washing of feet, a sign of service; the second, in memory of him, is the Eucharist, a sign of sacrifice.

"The Gesture of Salvation from Below"

In the Rule, Saint Benedict gives the washing of the feet pride of place, more so than to the Eucharist. It is clearly unwarranted to see here a preference for one at the expense of the other. On the contrary, given the nearly complete abandonment of the washing of the feet today, not only in the ordinary life of the Church but also in ordinary monastic life, there is cause for serious reflection on the Rule, and even more so on Jesus' own injunction: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

Today everything would indicate that the washing of the feet has lost the ordinary status given it by Jesus in the Gospel and by Benedict in the Rule. In contrast to the Eucharist, of which the Church encourages frequent and even daily celebration, the washing of the feet is practically limited to Holy Thursday, even in the monasteries, which, shortly after the Second Vatican Council, basically dropped the practice Saint Benedict had provided for. What we have, then, is a practice in which the Eucharist completely overshadows the washing of the feet, the one being a daily matter and the other an exception. Ecclesial and monastic circles seem rather accepting of this situation. And yet, is this not an unbalanced "practice" that should find more disturbing?

It is not a matter of calling into question the daily celebration of the Eucharist, but of wondering if we should not have a greater sense of our deep memory's fidelity to the Lord's gestures on the night before his Passion. Why, apart from Holy Thursday, do we separate what the Lord has united? If it is legitimate to celebrate the Eucharist without including the washing of the feet, why would the opposite not be legitimate, perhaps not as frequently the Eucharist itself, but at least often enough to avoid giving the impression that the sign of the Servant is practically obliterated by the sign of the High Priest? Is it enough to revive the washing of the feet once a year in order to be faithful to the memory of Jesus? Moreover, in a context where more and more people find themselves in situations that require them to think twice before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in communion, is there not good reason to take up the proclamation of the gospel from the bottom up, even physically, that is, starting with the feet? This is the way a young theologian recently presented the washing of the feet: a gesture of "salvation from below," distinct from the Eucharist, which is then presented as a gesture of "salvation from above":

[...] this part of the body is the "lowest," first of all in the material sense of the word, and thus, in addition, with a connotation of moral "lowness" or contempt, so that to wash someone's feet might be considered as a humiliating task. But the feet are also our link with the earth from which we were taken, a reminder

of our human condition, which is the condition of a creature. To be concerned with the feet is therefore to take seriously human persons' need for a just relationship with their origin and their deepest nature.[...]

[...] it goes without saying that Christians do not spend their whole life with a washing basin in hand; rather, it is an example placed before our eyes. But the audacity of the liturgy expresses an essential truth: we must get to the bottom of the signifier to reach the thing signified. One might object that, since it is not a matter of mimicking Jesus' gesture, it is useless to dwell on the washing of the feet. Once the message has been understood (i.e. fraternal service), the gesture is superfluous. [...] But it is salvation that is being set before our eyes with a sort of fleshly rawness. [...] The Eucharist addresses the body, but from above. [...] The day on which the Church commemorates the institution of the Eucharist, she brings together and unites in a remarkable way two gestures that are both carried out in the bodily condition: the gesture of "salvation from above" and the gesture of "salvation from below." From the feet to the mouth, it is the whole body that receives and welcomes salvation in order to be made capable of sharing it with the world.

By way of justifying the nearly complete abandonment of the washing of the feet in the ordinary life of the Church and of monasteries, it is not unusual to hear that this gesture belongs to a culture that is no longer ours. While keeping the thing signified, we therefore need to invent other signifiers that correspond to the same intention. Maybe! The fact is, however, that, up until now, nothing of equal eloquence has been found. Nor should we forget that the argument of cultural inadequacy has been advanced with regard to the Eucharist itself in geographical areas where bread and wine are rare or nonexistent, and, therefore, "meaningless." Up to the present, however, the magisterium of the Church has never found this a sufficient argument for the celebration of the Eucharist using other "matter." This is proof of the weakness of such an argument with regard to the incarnational strength of the Lord's gestures at the hour when he showed his love for us to the end. By means of the washing of the feet he wants to lead us into service that goes all the way; and by means of the Eucharist to sacrifice all the way.

Other arguments are also brought forward in favor of the cogency of dropping the washing of the feet or at least of using it rarely. First, there is the indecency of a gesture that interrupts the liturgy, whereas normally the liturgy "addresses the body in such a way as to extol and ennoble it. Liturgical vestments, postures, and gestures are not those of everyday life; they are marked by a certain solemnity and are carried out with care for a certain fullness and beauty." On the contrary, in the case of the washing of the feet, "the liturgy takes a considerable risk, for it is bare flesh that breaks in . . . there is something incongruous or even obscene that bursts in through this gesture. [...] It is never far from being awkward or ridiculous. You have to get down to the level of the feet, that is, go look for it where it is, down low, and then bare it, whereas it is usually kept hidden. All of a sudden the body reclaims its rights in what is most fleshly and

concrete-another 'real presence.'"

The Reciprocity Inherent in the Washing of the Feet and in the New Commandment

Some are also tempted to reserve the gesture of the washing of the feet for ordained ministers alone. If this had been the Lord's intention, the Church would therefore have been unfaithful for two thousand years by letting women engage in it, as is the case in monasteries where the abbess washes the feet of her sisters on Holy Thursday. This example shows right away how weak such an argument is, especially if we make the connection between this gesture of the Lord and the new commandment that he leaves his disciples a few moments later: ". . . love one another; even as I have loved you . . . you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." If the washing of the feet is reserved for ordained ministers alone, what kind of theological gymnastics would we have to invent to guarantee that the new commandment is not equally reserved to them? Moreover, we cannot fail to be struck forcefully by the verbal power of the Lord's injunction, which is much the same in both cases:

- if I have washed your feet, you also must wash one another's' feet.
- as I have loved you, you also must love one another.

The reciprocity commanded and signified appears here in all its forcefulness. This explains why the celebration of the washing of the feet that took place each Saturday in the monasteries, in accordance with chapter 35 of the Rule of Saint Benedict, took on the name *mandatum*: as the table servants began and ended their week of service, the community recalled the Lord's "new commandment" (*mandatum novum*).

Considering this gesture, which was opposed from the moment of its establishment (just remember Peter's reaction!), I would like to point out that, in doing so, Jesus is doing nothing new. He is doing no more than repeating a gesture of which he himself was once the recipient and the memory of which was preserved in the gospels. It was a gesture carried out not only by men but also by women, and, what is more, at least in the case of the supper at Simon the Pharisee's house, by women of ill repute. Perhaps it is for this reason especially that he was taking a great risk. In spite of everything, Peter ended up accepting, for Jesus made it a requirement for "having part with him." Of course, we must not lose sight of the fact that, by making such a gesture his own and by asking his disciples to "do" so following his example, Jesus is universalizing a posture that not only connotes a servant's posture but a posture that also, as far as the gospels are concerned, brings to mind the faces of certain women. If this is the way things are in new life in Christ, Christian men and women should no longer have to be ashamed to take turns being at one another's feet following the Teacher's example.

THE CISTERCIAN FAMILY: A DEACONAL COMMUNITY

Mindful of John Paul II's encouragement to the "the great Cistercian family" that it "enter the new millennium together, in true communion, in mutual trust and with respect for the traditions bequeathed by history," I have tried to show how we can find in chapter 35 of the Rule of Saint Benedict a rich source of inspiration for moving in this direction. No doubt it applies first of all to the lives of our communities, all of which are called to be schools of charity. But Saint Stephen Harding's way of drawing on the Rule to write the Charter of Charity incites us to seek in the Rule those things that even today can stimulate relations not only in our various Orders and Congregations but also in our "great Cistercian family."

Saint Benedict constructs fraternal service on the basis of two pillars, *invicem* and *solatium*, whose roots extend into the Word of God, especially the New Testament. In doing so, a veritable revolution takes place in human relationships, the revolution of charity, made up entirely of mutual fraternal aid in which one never goes it alone, in which all can count on the one another; and that, with equal dignity for all and absolute respect for their otherness.

If we want to continue walking in the direction of "true communion" within the Cistercian family, chapter 35 presents itself as a call to break through separating walls or walls of incomprehension that, for various reasons, have been set up over time. Only at such a cost will Cistercian-or simply Christian-reciprocity become effective.

This communion in love will only last and exercise influence if it is deeply marked by the eminent sign of mutual service, the example of which Jesus gave us in the washing of the feet. This should be a diaconal communion that is enriched by our respective identities and that rejects any kind of vassalage. The nascent lay Cistercian way, not yet hindered by the weight of history or institutions, seems to be in a good position to open out and remind the whole of our great family of the stunning newness of Jesus' words: "You have only one Teacher, and you are all brothers." So as not to fall into illusion; it must, however, remember that it is more "in the world" than monks and nuns. This means that to a certain extent, it is more vulnerable to the old leaven of the spirit of the world, which is opposed to vows of stability, conversion of life, and obedience. It must keep alert in order to do spiritual combat and truly become newly leavened in Christ.

May this international meeting at Clairvaux, placed under the patronage of Our Lady, Queen of Cîteaux, Saint Bernard, and Fr. Marie-Joseph Cassant, beatified last year on the third of October by John Paul II, bear the fruit of communion within the lay Cistercian way, so that charity may increase in our great family, and so that we might be seeds of peace and joy for the humanization of today's world.

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