

Observantiae

Continuity and Reforms in the Cistercian Family

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Rome, September 14th 2002

Observantiae

Continuity and Reforms in the Cistercian Family

Observantiae : Introduction (Dom Bernardo Olivera) 5

Prologue :

To familiarise ourselves with the word « Observances » and to make the link with the Exordium programme 9

1° part : Necessary adaptations in a wished for continuation

1. Cistercian development in the 12th and 13th Centuries21
2. Continuity and Reforms from 12th to 15th century 31
3. The Cistercian Congregations in the Iberian Peninsula..... 40
4. History of the Cistercian Congregation of Upper Germania..... 47

2° part : Reformers searching an authentic renewal

5. The Birth of the Strict Observance..... 55
6. A generation of Reforming Women..... 70
7. Port-Royal..... 75
8. The Bernardines of Switzerland..... 84
9. The Abbot de Rancé and La Trappe in the 17th century..... 90

3° part : Growing diversity in an often heroic fidelity

10. Cistercian Life in the Century of Enlightenment (18th century) 101
11. French Monasticism during the Revolution , the saga of Dom Augustine de Lestrangé 105
12. Bernardines of Esquermes..... 118
13. The Cistercian Congregations in Italy..... 126
14. Cistercian Congregations in the 19th century..... 140
15. The Trappist-Cistercians during the 19th century..... 150
16. Cistercian Foundations outside of Europe in the 19th century. 160

General Bibliography 165

OBSERVANTIAE

At the time we were closing the Regional Meeting of FSO at Chambarand, in 1999, I was asked to share my views on the Region. Profiting by this occasion, I threw out a real concrete invitation : that the FSO Region should prepare and offer to the whole Order a program : “Observantiae” as a continuation of “Exordium” , on the occasion of the third centenary of the death of Abbot de Rancé.

Concretely, it would be a question of studying the movements of Reform in the Cistercian Order up to 1892. Everyone would esteem that these centuries cannot be considered as a parenthesis in the history of the Order. But on the one hand, it would not be easy to derive for us, today, the spiritual values and teachings given by the monks, nuns, communities and Congregations of that epoch. Certain people fear that such a research could re-awaken former polemics which, perhaps, were not completely extinct and forgotten.

On the other hand, the benefits of this work were evident enough : it would enlarge the horizons of the movement of the Strict Observance, heal our collective memory, to understand in a more ecumenical manner the Cistercian patrimony, to accept the pluriformity within the same charismatic family.

Thus it is that a group of monks and nuns belonging to different branches of the Cistercian Family, under the direction of the Central Secretary for Formation, met at the Abbey of Tre Fontane , in order to coordinate the work and draw up the diverse units. It is not a question of achieving a work of erudition intended for the experts, but really a serious work of popularization in view of formation.

Today, the fruit of this work is handed over to the communities of the OCSO and to the Cistercian family who desire it. It comprises a prologue and three parts of varying volume :

- Prologue : the link between the “Observances” and the origin of Cîteaux
- First part (13th to 16th centuries) : Necessary adaptations in a wished for continuation.
- Second part (17th to 18th centuries) : Reformers searching an authentic renewal.
- Third part (18th to 19th centuries) : Growing diversity in an often heroic fidelity.

Each unity offers doctrinal contents, to which is added a questionnaire in order to help reflection and interior development of the values which are presented. A common bibliography for all the units resumes the most important works in the different languages.

We hope that this “ecumenical” effort of our brothers and sisters will be put to profit in a wise and serious manner by our communities.

A tree without roots has no foundation ; without a trunk, no visibility ; without branches, leaves, flower and fruit, it has no life.

Rome, 14th September 2002, Bernardo Olivera, Abbot General

Observantiae

Prologue

**To make the link with the “observances”
and the origin of Cîteaux**

PROLOGUE

Unit prepared by Père Placide Vernet, Cîteaux.

***To familiarise ourselves with the word ‘Observances’
and to make the link with the Exordium Programme.***

On hearing the terms ‘Observance(s)’ and ‘Reform(s)’, is not instinctive to think first of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ? Observances have been the concern of Cistercians from the foundation of the new Monastery, and the story of the Cistercian Family from its beginnings is a story of continuity and reform.

In this unit, we will look successively at three areas :

1. ‘Observance’ in the Rule of St. Benedict.
2. ‘Observing the Rule of our holy Father Benedict’ – the intention of the founders according to the primitive documents.
3. An exemplar of observances – St Bernard.

1. The word OBSERVANCE in the rule of St. Benedict :

In the Rule we find two frequentatives (i.e. words expressing frequent repetition or intensity of action) coming from the root of the verb *observare* : *observantia* and *observatio*.

Observare the verb itself, is found in four places :

- In chapter 7, verse 68, thus at the top of the ladder of humility :
“Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to *observe* without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue.”

This first citing, in the 12th degree of humility, shows in a marvellous way the greatest benefit of the practice of the *observances*.

- In chapter 58, verse 10, concerning the first petition of the new brother :
“This is the law under which you are choosing to serve. If you *observe* it, come in. If not, feel free to leave”

It is in the Rule – *observe* the rule of the community.

- In chapter 65, verse 17: this time concerning the Prior... who is not liked by St. Benedict (the Prior in the Rule did not have the role that our Priors have now) :
“...because the more he is set above the rest, the more he should be concerned to keep what the rule commands.”

- In Chapter 73, verse 1, the beginning of the last chapter of the Rule:
“The reason we have written this rule is that, by *observing* it in monasteries, we can show that we have some degree of virtue, and the beginnings of monastic life.”

Observantia : this word is only found twice, both times in the Prologue :

In verse 21:

“Clothed then with faith and the performance (*observantia*) of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom.”

In verse 29 :

“These people fear the Lord, and do not become elated over their own good deeds (*observantia*); they judge it is the Lord's power, not their own, that brings about the good in them.”

Observatio : if we omit 7:18, which has no meaning in this respect, all uses of the word *observatio* and of the word *observare* concern Lent and the practices of the Rule.

In chapter 3, verse 11: concerning the brother who has the boldness to stray from the Rule and contest the authority of the Abbot:

“However, let the Abbot himself do everything in the fear God and *with observance* of the Rule.”

In chapter 49, in the title of the chapter : “On the *observance* of Lent”

In the first verse :

“Although the monk's life the whole year round should be an *observance* of Lent, yet because few have this virtue....”

In Chapter 60, verse 9, concerning priests who would like to enter the monastery:
It is possible “...if they promise *observance* of the Rule and their own stability.”

In chapter 73, it is the title of the chapter :

“of the fact that the *observance* of the whole of righteousness is not laid down in this Rule.”

In chapter 73, verse 2, we find the concept again :

“But for anyone hastening on to the perfection of monastic life, there are the teachings of the holy Fathers, the *observance* of which will lead him to the very heights of perfection.”

The rest of the text develops this idea explicitly.

In all these citations, it is a matter on the one hand of *observing* the Rule, and on the other specifically of the *observance* of Lent.

- *Observing* the Rule is a question of carrying out day after day, week after week, season after season, year after year, all the prescriptions of the Rule even when these are in the form of spiritual directives. This is precisely what the last verses of chapter 7 are highlighting.

- The *observance* of Lent means devoting oneself especially to reading, a timetable which somewhat limits the amount of manual work, and to prolonged fasting until after Vespers. (Chapter 48:14). It includes prayer (prayer with tears), compunction of heart, the addition of something extra to our ordinary efforts – (individual prayer, abstinence from food and drink), depriving one's body of food, drink, sleep, talking and joking, and waiting for the holy Pasch with the joy of spiritual desire.

2. Observing the Rule of Our Father Saint Benedict

The intention of the Founders of Cîteaux according to the Primitive Documents :

The title '*Primitive Documents*' clearly expresses the contents of this collection of texts. Only the narrative documents and juridical documents are of interest to us here. The Founders of the New Monastery and their successors in the first half of the 12th century had several opportunities to express their intention. This intention leaves no place for doubt and can be expressed in a few words : "observe the Rule." This is said in various ways using words derived from the Latin root "*observ*". Intentionally, we limit ourselves here to a simple inventory, but the reader is invited to research the context of these citations. In this little overview, we will meet the term 'observance' or "observance of the Rule" ten times. The expression: "observance of the Holy Rule" prompts our attention.

Exordium of Cîteaux 1,4 :

(...) at the same time perceiving that, though one could live there in a holy and respectable manner, this still fell short of their desire and purpose to *observe* the Rule they had professed. (*ipsam quam professi fuerant regulam observari*)

Capitular Decisions

XI, 2 – Clothing (...) such as the Rule describes it, they will *take care* that their cowls are simple, not ornately decorated or pleated ... (*sed observandum de cucullis*).

X11, 2 – For food, besides what the Rule states, (...) one must *take care* that the bread (*hoc etiam observandum*).

Little Exordium of the Monastery of Cîteaux

1, 4: (...) so that (...) they may the more tenaciously love both the place and *the observance of the Holy Rule* (*locum et observantiam sanctae Regulae ament*)...

III, 6: (...) they were coming to this solitude (...) to carry out their profession by *observing the Holy Rule*. (*professionem suam observantia sanctae Regulae adimplerent*.)

XV, 3: So that, directing the whole course of their life by the Rule over the entire tenor of their life, in ecclesiastical as well as in the rest of the *observances*, they matched or conformed their steps to the footprints traced by the Rule. (*tam in ecclesiasticis quam in caeteris observationibus regulae vestigiis sunt adaequati seu conformati*).

Charter of Charity :

2, 2: Now, however, we desire and we command them, that they *observe* the Rule of the Blessed Benedict in everything just as *it is observed* in the New Monastery (*regulam beati Benedicti per omnia observent sicut in Novo Monasterio observatur*).

7, 2b (...) if something is to be emended or added to in the *observance* of the Holy Rule or of the Order, let them so ordain it (*in observatione sanctae regulae vel Ordinis*).

8, 2b (...) that all the abbots from every region are to come to the New Monastery on the day they decide among themselves, and there they are to obey in everything the abbot of that same place and the Chapter in the correction of things amiss and in the *observance* of the Holy Rule and of the Order. (*in observantia sanctae Regulae vel Ordinis obediunt per omnia*.)

9, 6 But if the abbots of our churches see their mother, that is the say, the New Monastery, growing listless in her holy resolve (.) and swerving from the most straight path of the *observance* of the Holy Rule. (*ab observatione regulae*)

3. A Cistercian Exemplar of Observances : St. Bernard :

It is clear that the founders of Cîteaux wanted to observe the Rule of St. Benedict. It is equally clear that this Rule includes the notion of Observances. How did the first generation of Cistercians integrate and express that idea? We need to research what has been written on this subject by the Cistercian Fathers of the 12th Century, especially at the time when the Order was expanding rapidly, and when 'Cîteaux' was captivating the Western Christian world. By necessity we will limit ourselves to St. Bernard and to the references given by the *Thesaurus* of his works on the word *observantia*; even then, we will only quote a selection.

From the Treatise : *On Precept and Dispensation* 3 :

"...as regards the subject, the precepts of the Rule (*regularis institutio*) in external matters at least *corporales observantiae*) - are voluntary at first, but compulsory once he has promised to observe them."

Excerpts from some letters :

Letter 13, to some Canons Regular who wished to become Cistercians :

"For the sake of a stricter way of life they desired, with the help of God, to transfer from the Institutions of St. Augustine to the *observance* of St. Benedict."

Letter 18, to Peter, Cardinal Deacon :

"I remember that I wrote, for the benefit of a friend, (William of St. Thierry) an Apologia where I wrote about the *observances* of Cluny and our Cistercian observances."

Letter 277, to Eugene III about the Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable:

"...although it is well known almost from the first instant of assuming office, he reformed his Order in many ways, in the matter, for instance of the *observance* of fasting, silence, and costly and luxurious clothing."

Letter 307, to his friend Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh:

"I have sent back to you my very dear son Christian, having instructed him as well as I could in the *observances* of our Order and I hope that he will keep them with zeal."

Letter 142, the famous letter to the Monks of Aulps, intentionally quoted last, because the word *observance* isn't mentioned :

"Our way of life is an awareness of our need. It is humility, it is poverty freely accepted, obedience, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Our way of life means learning to be silent, exerting ourselves in fasts, vigils prayers. It means working with our hands, and above all clinging to that most excellent way which is love. It means furthermore to advance day by day in these things, and to persevere in them."

Following the letters, some Sermons :

Sermon 71, 14 on the Song of Songs :

St. Bernard has just said (written): "If my fasting reflects my own self-will, it will not be acceptable to my Bridegroom." He continues "And the same thing, I feel, must be true not only of

fasting but of silence, vigils, prayer, spiritual reading, manual labour, and indeed every detail of the monk's life, when self-will is found instead of obedience to his masters. Such *observances* – although good in themselves, are not to be accounted as among the lilies, that is, among the virtues.”

Sermon 2, 6 for Pentecost:

“And lest you complain or sorrow at my absence (says Jesus ascended to heaven) I will send you the Spirit, the Paraclete, who will give you the pledge of salvation, the force of life, and the light of knowledge (...) He will give you the force of life, that what is by nature impossible for you will through his grace be made not only possible, but even easy. (cf. *RB* 7, 12th step.) Thus you will proceed with delight, as ‘in all riches’ in labours, vigils, in hunger and thirst, and in all observances which, unless sweetened with this meal, may seem to be ‘death in the pot’.”

The First Sermon for the Dedication, 5

This sermon is a spiritual commentary on the liturgical rites for the Dedication of a Church: the anointing of the twelve crosses on the walls or pillars and their illumination. This is essential for understanding this teaching :

“Hence it is necessary that the unction of spiritual grace should help our weakness, lubricating with the oil of devotion the cross of our regular *observances* and of our various penitential practices. For without the cross we cannot follow Christ, and without the sweetening unction, who could support the bitterness of the cross? Here, my brethren you have the reason why so many abhor and flee from penance, because, namely, they see the cross plainly enough, but cannot see the unction. But as for you who have had experience, behold you know, that our cross is truly anointed, that through the grace of the Spirit who helps us, our penance is sweet and delightful, and that our bitterness, as I may say, is become most pleasant. But after anointing us with the unction of grace, Christ surely will not put his candle under a bushel but upon a candlestick, because the hour has come when your light should shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in heaven.”

Diverse Sermons, 22, 2

“Stay firm in the Lord, very dear brothers, so that, like those (the children of Israel during the Exodus) who followed faithfully the royal way of justice through hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, labour and fasts, vigils and other *observances* (of justice) you equally...”

Diverse Sermons, 55, 4 (on the six stone jars at the Wedding Feast of Cana)

Let us understand that the six jars correspond to the six *observances* recommended to the servants of God, by which, like the true Jews, they must let themselves be purified (or purify themselves) These are : silence, psalmody, vigils, fasting, manual labour and purity of the flesh.

After Letter 142 and ‘Sermon Divers’ 55, we are ready to read the Sermons of St. Bernard for the Sunday after the octave of the Epiphany, on the Gospel of the Wedding feast at Cana, because this episode belongs to the “Manifestations of JESUS.” These sermons offer a synthesis of St Bernard’s teaching: the wedding is the principal theme, and from this point of view, the sermons are really sermons on the Song of Songs, but the Abbot of Clairvaux does not elaborate or say so specifically.

There are clearly six empty stone jars, which need to be filled with water. Who gives the order? The Lord does; he gives the order to the servants at the wedding. Who are these servants? They are the Abbots and Abbesses. At the same time he says that all the souls taken together make up only one spouse, the Church, and that each individual soul is a spouse of Christ.

1st Sermon for the Sunday after the Octave of the Epiphany :

“Consequently there are six water-pots set for the purification of those who relapse into sin after the reception of baptism: it is of such that I speak, because such we are ourselves. We put off our old garment, (the word garment – or tunic is the same as in RB –in Latin *exuimus*, as for the tunic given at profession: *exuere veterem hominem*) – but alas ! We have put it on again. We have washed our feet and we have dirtied them again.”

“These then are the six water-pots set for our purification, which however, remain empty or are only filled with air, if used (*observed*) from a motive of vainglory. (St. Bernard has already listed their contents) But whenever we approach them from fear of God we shall find them filled with cleansing water, because the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. (...) But by the power of God, that water shall at length be changed into wine, for “perfect love casts out fear.”

We can recognise Chapter 7 of the Rule of St. Benedict here. Elsewhere, Sr. Bernard develops his idea, by explaining the two or three measures necessary to fill the stone jars: two or three measures because of the two-fold fear, one of being condemned to hell, the other of being excluded from eternal life.

This sermon, which does not go into detail, is full of the idea of conversion (chapter 7) and prepares us for reading the second one.

2nd Sermon for the Sunday after the Octave of the Epiphany

The first five sections are magnificent, consecrated to the wedding feast – but what a feast! 2. “For we are all invited to the spiritual nuptials in which Christ Our Lord is the Bridegroom (...) We ourselves, my brethren, are the Bride, incredible though it may seem to you; we are all collectively, one same Bride of the one Christ, and, moreover, our several souls are, so to speak, several Brides.”

Saint Bernard gives a mystical reading of this Gospel of Cana step by step in the manner of a homily. He reaches the point of the six stone jars that were kept there for the purification rituals of the Jews. He interprets the Jews as those who confess their sins, and counts us among their number, because the Spouse needs to be purified for the heavenly wedding feast (here below, it is only the *prandium*, the midday meal).

7. “It seems to me, my brethren, says the abbot of Clairvaux, that by the six water-pots, we are to understand six *observances* instituted by the holy Fathers for purifying the hearts of those confessors, and if I mistake not, all the six can be found in this very monastery...” I keep here the term ‘confessor’ because St. Bernard does not say anymore, and because one cannot confess one’s sins without confessing the mercy of God, and without confessing His praise. The expression “instituted by the holy Fathers” is borrowed at the blessing of the cowl at profession, and is taken from Cassian. ‘Here’ in the last phrase above refers to Clairvaux.

The first of the spiritual water-pots is the practice of the continence of chastity, whereby we wash away the stains contracted from sensual indulgence in the past.

The second is fasting, for we employ abstinence from food as a means of cleansing what gluttony has defiled.

By sloth also and by idleness, which is the enemy of the soul (RB 48, 1), we have contracted much defilement, eating our bread, not, as the Lord has commanded in the sweat of our own brow, but in the sweat of our neighbour’s. We have therefore a third water-pot set before us in manual labour, by which we can wash ourselves clean from the stains of sloth.

Again, we have committed many sins through somnolence and the other works of the night and darkness. Hence there is another water-pot set before us, namely, the observance of regular vigils, whereby we rise in the night to confess to the Lord, and to redeem the many nights we have spent in evil.

But concerning the tongue, who does not know how much defilement we have each of us contracted from it through idle and untruthful words, through detraction and flattery, through malicious and boastful speeches? A fifth water-pot is plainly needed to cleanse us from this, and we have it in the observance of silence, which is the guardian of religious life (*custos religionis*) and the source of our spiritual strength.

The sixth water-pot is regular discipline, by which we no longer live according to our own will, but with dependence upon the will of another (R.B. 5,12) in order to purify ourselves from the effects of our former license.

St Bernard continues: "These water-pots are stony in their hardness, nevertheless, we have no choice but to wash in them, that is, unless we desire to receive a bill of divorce from the Lord because of our filthiness. However, it is not merely to indicate their hardness that they are described as of stone, but also and more particularly to signify their durability; for unless they (the *observances*) continue firm and stable, they cannot render us pure."

The Abbot of Clairvaux reaches the point where the Lord gives his order to the servants:
8. "We (superiors) are the waiters and servants of the brotherhood; and whenever the wine happens to fail, we are commanded by Christ to fill for you the water-pots. It is as if the Lord should say to us, "The brethren desire devotion, they want wine, they are asking for fervour; but my hour is not yet come: fill the water-pots with water."

Then St. Bernard talks of the capacity of the water-pots; each one contains two or three measures. He takes up again the theme of his first sermon.

"What are we to understand by these two or three measures? Well, there are two kinds of fear common enough and familiar to all, and a third less common and less known. The first kind of fear is the fear of being condemned to the torments of hell; the second is the fear of being excluded from the vision of God and deprived of so inestimable a glory; the third inspires the soul with the most anxious solicitude lest she should ever deserve to be abandoned by grace."

St. Bernard continues his thoughts about fear and arrives at this conclusion :
9. "Therefore the Lord commands us (the abbots) to fill the water-pots with the water of these various species of fear. For the water-pots are sometimes empty or only filled with air. This happens whenever a man becomes so insane as to allow the love of vanity to render void of their eternal reward those *observances* whereof I have been speaking - which was the case with the foolish virgins whose vessels were found empty of oil. Sometimes too - and this is worse - the water-pots are full indeed, but only full of poison, that is to say, full of envy, of murmuring, of rancour, of detraction. Therefore, to prevent such things from entering the vessels when the wine happens to fail, we are told (by Jesus) to fill them with water; so that in the meantime, until fervour revives, the commandments of the Lord may be obeyed (*observed*) in fear. But this water shall be changed into wine when fear is cast out by perfect love, and then all the vessels shall be filled up to the brim with spiritual fervour and joyous devotion."

Thus concludes this marvellous sermon, a masterly bernardine commentary on Chapter VII of the rule, in the form of a homily on the Wedding Feast of Cana.

Let us re-read chapter 7 of the Rule :

10-12: "The first degree of humility then is if he absolutely avoids forgetfulness, always putting the fear of God before his eyes, always remembering everything that God commanded, always turning over in his mind that hell burns up for their sins those who despise God, and that eternal life is prepared for those who fear God. And keeping himself at every moment from sins and vices..."

55: "The eighth degree of humility is for a monk to do nothing except what is encouraged by the common rule of the monastery and the example of the superiors." (*maiorum exempla*)

67-68: "Now, therefore, after ascending all these steps of humility, a monk will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear. Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to accomplish (*observabat*) without effort..."

Parallel reading of this sermon of St. Bernard and the Rule is necessary to grasp just how much this 'mystical' reading of the Gospel of the wedding feast of Cana actually reveals a masterly commentary on chapter VII of the Rule. Whence the title of sermon 56 *de diversis* : "The mystical jars - to be filled with a threefold fear" where we read right from the beginning, "They are said to be full when they are *observed* through fear of God." There is no doubt that for the Abbot of Clairvaux, the way that leads to the wedding feast, to which we are all invited, individually and together, cannot be any other way than by *observances*. Not only does the abbot of Clairvaux, the 'mellifluous doctor', construct a whole spirituality around observances as the way of attaining to charity, the way which leads from conversion to union with the Word, but the abbot of Clairvaux also spells out the observances for his readers and his listeners. These certainly include some variations, but also and above all, common points. Although this reading of St. Bernard's use of *observances* is not exhaustive, it would seem that we can attempt to draw up a list.

In six texts (including letter 142) we have:

5 times fasting, to which hunger and thirst should be added,

5 times vigils, to which Psalmody should be added,

5 times manual labour,

4 times silence,

Twice prayer (once in the plural, once in the singular)

Twice, clothing once of cold and nakedness – from which the Cistercians suffered!)

Twice, chastity (once of the continence of chastity, the other of the purity of the flesh),

Once, reading

Once, discipline (a regular way of life, according to a Rule).

Clearly we need to take each of these varied observances one by one and pick out what is written about each of them in the works of St. Bernard. We would also have to extend this research to include the other Cistercian authors and would find wonderful things among them. The readers of the programme '*Observantiae*' could then share their discoveries with their brothers and sisters!

Questions for reflection :

1. Reflect on the biblical background to the ideas raised in this unit.
2. Our age attaches much importance to the body, bodily expression and to the wholeness of the person. Can this rediscovery help us to understand better the role of observances?
3. In the first phrase of the Prologue of the Rule, look for the verb to which the notion of observance can be linked. Which verbs precede it and follow it ? Reflect on this sequence of verbs. Is it always present in our community life? In our personal life? If one of the verbs is absent, what happens?
4. Have another look at the Rule, chapter 73 verse 1. Which important term in this verse relates to the word *observatio*?
5. Monastic life has been defined as “a lived theology”. What is the place of observances in this definition?
6. What is the difference between usages and observances? On what conditions do the usages help the correct living of the observances?
7. What do the other three ‘Evangelists’ of Cîteaux have to say on the subject? Consult the index of their works and translations. St Bernard speaks to us of the ‘stone jars’. What are the other images used, for example by St. Aelred, to speak of ‘observances’?
8. What words do they use to speak of the reality of ‘observances’ ? For example, discipline, corporal exercises, spiritual exercises ... Continue this research in contemporary documents: e.g. the Constitutions, Declarations... etc.

First part

13th -15th centuries

Necessary adaptations

in a wished for continuation

Cistercian Development in the 12th and 13th Centuries The Nuns

Unit prepared by Fr. Francisco Rafael de Pascual, Viaceli

We have much more information on Cistercian nuns in the 12th and 13th centuries than we had a few years ago. This is due to the fact that we know medieval women better as a result of numerous modern publications and also because a number of specialists have studied the subject of Cistercian nuns. In addition, monastic studies on this theme have been of a better quality, based as they have been on documentary sources and the published writings of nuns of the period.

1. Historical background :

The first point to realise is that we should not try to impose on the medieval world our modern ideas about words such as order, religious life, incorporation and even nuns and monasteries. Still less should we project present-day monastic structures on the Middle Ages – for instance, by speaking of a nuns' monastery being 'dependent on' or having been 'founded by'... Again, the structure and organisation of a monastery of women at that time was not necessarily the same as that of the men nor of a nuns' monastery today.

In monastic history nuns have always existed alongside monks and the 12th century is no exception. In fact, the spiritual flowering at the end of the 11th and beginning of the 12th century was greater among the women than among the men. This may have been due to the fact that nuns needed more assistance, that their structures were simpler than those of the monks and, finally, also because the echoes, the urgency and necessity of the Gregorian Reform were reaching the nuns. To counter abuses and scandals, the Gregorian Reformers in the 11th and 12th centuries tightened up the legislation dealing with nuns. After the second Lateran Council (1139) feminine monastic life became impossible if it did not take on a community form under one of the three great rules – those of Basil, Augustine or Benedict.

This is a good place to consider the situation of nuns at the beginning of the 12th century in order to help to us to see what was behind their extraordinary development.

Hence, we must take account both of the situation of women in society at the end of the 11th and beginning of the 12th centuries and also the diverse community structures they evolved in order to progress in their spiritual life. Sometimes their very survival was at stake. Sometimes they reached the heights of mysticism, at others the depths of perversity. Anything could happen. This explains the well-known opposition of the Cistercians to the incorporation of nuns' monasteries. It was based on prudence and a discernment of the consequences arising from incorporating into the Order communities with a very different type of life. The nuns would often in all good faith use this incorporation to ensure their survival and to profit from the same exemption as the monks.

It should be remembered that from the middle of the 11th century until the appearance of the Mendicant Orders a solution had to be found to a specific economic and social problem. For many years the Crusades and other regional conflicts had deprived women of their husbands, their sons, their fiancés and even of the possibility of marrying – in other words, of their natural supports and breadwinners. One means used to remedy this situation was to multiply monasteries for women. Since the founders, whether nobles or bishops, priors or canons regular did not wish to increase difficulties, they saw to the smooth running of these communities according to ecclesiastical norms and generally put capable persons in charge.

There were, then, different types of communities (not monasteries as we would call them today) living very different forms of life.

- Monasteries next to those of men, between which relations varied, dictated by local custom and the judgement of the abbots involved.
- Double monasteries in which in various forms, monks and nuns and lay associates shared the church and regular life under an abbot or abbess who was generally an outstanding person endowed with a gift for organisation.
- Multiple monasteries, monks, nuns, widows, pious men (*conversi*) and women (*mulieres religiosae*) who were all seeking a spiritual life and mutual support. Each group had its own quarters and way of life. The best known case is that of Fontevault.
- Women's monasteries specially created as such by an important family and governed by someone from that family. These monasteries had servants of both sexes and pious men who helped in different ways.
- Finally, exclusively female monasteries which normally followed a Rule and were under an abbot or prior in regard to jurisdiction and discipline. Sometimes they helped with the work of a masculine community and thus their own livelihood was assured.

In Carolingian and Merovingian times many monasteries were founded according to one or other of the above forms. We do not have much information about their way of life. Generally, the recitation of the Divine Office and private prayer nourished their interior life; good organisation helped their community life; enclosure was not always strict, and was not uniformly applied. Sometimes an important person was outstanding, while the majority tried honestly to lead a saintly and ascetic life. However, since the original motivation for the vocations were often quite different, the result was a way of life hard to control, individualistic and subject to all sorts of exaggerations. Yves of Chartres, St. Bernard and others showed themselves worried about discipline in these communities. That is why the 2nd. Lateran Council had to legislate, as was mentioned above. In the same way Alexander III was also forced to intervene. Idung of Saint-Emmeran had published *Argumentum de quattuor questionibus*. One of the questions was whether monks and nuns following the Rule of St. Benedict ought to have the same enclosure. The other questions treated of monks preaching, the possibility of a person being a monk and a cleric at the same time, and the status of laypersons.

The 12th century was the golden age for eremitical life and numerous authors wrote treatises and recommendations: Goscelin of Saint Bertin, *Liber confortatorius*; Aelred of Rievaulx, (Letter to a Recluse) etc.

It can be maintained in general that the most flourishing communities of women were those who had the protection of a reformed monastery of men or ones actually belonging to a reform movement.

For work, the nuns copied the monks. It is true that farm work was not very common, but we have evidence about the pluckiness of certain nuns in that regard. They did the typically feminine jobs of the period and many monasteries engaged in copying manuscripts and providing the choir books. Some of these were noted for their scriptorium. But the most common work of all for these 12th century nuns was the education of girls. This was a natural development. From the Middle Ages until the 13th century the young were not normally educated in their families and State schools had disappeared because of the invasions of the barbarians. The Church and its monasteries had a monopoly in education. Future novices were formed in these schools with or without a real vocation. It has to be admitted that this formation was first-rate and given by trained and capable nuns.

We do not need to say more. All the authors quoted do so adequately and show the diversity in these monasteries, and their desire to adopt a reformed life.

A Spanish writer, Fr. Garcia M. Colombas, expounds the example of Marcigny, and cites the praise of Peter the Venerable (*De miraculis*, 1, 22, p.874. The development of this monastery is much the same as many others. At the end of the 12th century the vitality, evident in the middle of the previous century, had disappeared. Vocations were less numerous. The influence of monks on women's monasteries had lessened as the monks themselves began to feel the social effects of a new period. At the beginning of the 13th century medieval monasticism had achieved the full extent of its expansion as well as its social influence and the emancipation of lay people. The views that had most influence on the new spiritual currents came from the Franciscans and Dominicans. Their message was novel, attractive and easy to understand. The theory of the *three states* was abandoned as well as the idea that a few heroic people could take on themselves the sin of the world. All people, not just religious, were called to pray and lead a life in harmony with the law of God and the Church. Everybody had to work out his or her own salvation. It could not be bought in monasteries or obtained through the use of relics or other spiritual practices. Thus monks began to lose their usefulness. Whoever wanted to be a monk or nun could no longer count on the aids of the past and had to have the right motivation.

The first Cistercians were looking for simplicity and they simplified everything. They did not work to enrich themselves, but only to have the basic necessities of life. Their ideal was the purity of the Rule. But the wonderful enthusiasm of the first generations gradually weakened towards the end of the 13th century, due to wealth and temporal administration. Their economy became increasingly based on profit and so they lost favour in the eyes of ordinary people. The gap between the few rich and the multitude of poor became increasingly evident.

The monasteries of nuns tended to follow the same path, but with notable exceptions. In many cases the nuns' monasteries were simpler than those of the monks and thus they were able to hold on to their Cistercian spirituality and mysticism, as we will see.

2. The nuns in the wake of the monks' monasteries :

All the authors mentioned in the bibliography, and others too, agree on one basic fact: the incorporation of nuns into the Cistercian Order is historically obscure. It did not take place in any uniform way within the Cistercian legislation. Moreover, it was on such a huge scale that in some cases the monasteries of men were overwhelmed; the General Chapter nonplussed; and abbots had to do the best they could under the circumstances.

Incorporation for women's communities involved accepting enclosure and a Father Immediate as well as being able to live from their own revenues. The Customary of Cîteaux was adapted for the nuns. As far as possible chaplains were provided to give instruction, celebrate the liturgy and give spiritual direction. This sometimes caused problems for the monasteries that had to give older monks and priests. A case in point is Villers, a monastery renowned for its observance and human resources.

One thing that caused confusion for the monks – and for historians in consequence – was that many monasteries of nuns spontaneously embraced the Cistercian observances without any formal consent from the Order and then started calling themselves Cistercians.

The monks could not get out of their obligations towards the feminine monasteries once these were established. The nuns insisted on this. There is another reason, a practical one, which has not been given much notice: only the bigger abbeys could allow themselves the luxury of looking after the material and spiritual needs of the nuns in a way which would ensure monastic discipline and the demands of the reform movement. A monastery of women was a costly business, involving large donations and the community concerned had to have a good spirit. At the start of the 12th century few Cistercian monasteries could afford all this.

The three best known foundations that have been studied by historians are Jully, Tart and Las Huelgas. What is interesting for us is that they represent three different approaches for nuns and three separate moments in the history of incorporation with an Order of monks.

- Jully was a foundation belonging to Molesme. A group of women lived near Molesme and in 1114 the abbot who had succeeded Robert brought them together in the chateau of Jully. In 1118 the Bishop of Langres gave his approval for the foundation and in 1145 the Cistercian pope, Eugene, confirmed this. St. Bernard and his family it seems, together with a few Cistercian abbots at a later date, helped Jully materially and spiritually.

As early as 1120 some of the nuns from this house wanted to go a stage further and embrace the Cistercian observance completely. Both Cîteaux and Clairvaux were on friendly terms with these nuns, but neither was very keen on the idea. St. Bernard's sister and sister-in-law entered Jully and not Tart. The saint is not mentioned in any document from Tart. There were advantages and disadvantages in these houses and nuns transferred from one to the other. By 1170 Jully had founded nine priories and their organisation was similar to that of Cluny.

The abbot of Molesme had full jurisdiction over these nuns in spiritual and material affairs. He it was who gave postulants the habit and admitted novices to profession. A prior was delegated to each house in order to carry out these powers on the spot. He acted as the superior of a little community of monks who administered the nuns' goods and looked after their spiritual needs. These priors represented the nuns at the General Chapter held at Molesme. This form of relations and government was found almost everywhere.

-Tart was founded about 1125 under the immediate responsibility of the abbot of Cîteaux, Stephen Harding. Towards the end of the 12th century it was attached to the Order. Every year on the feast of St. Michael, the abbot of Cîteaux held a Chapter with the abbesses of Tart and its daughter houses.

But this was unofficial and the monks' General Chapter did not interfere in the nuns' life.

- Las Huelgas was a Cistercian foundation. It had a rather long and stormy journey towards incorporation into the Order, but this process changed the General Chapters' attitude in such a way that it was prepared to incorporate not just one house but all the monasteries which depended on Las Huelgas.

Guy, the abbot of Cîteaux, was in Spain in 1199. Alphonsus VII King of Castile and Léon and his wife Eleanor of England took advantage of his presence to obtain what they had long been fighting for, a new Cîteaux in Spain that would be feminine and Spanish. Their idea was to forestall the snare of Cîteaux being without authority over nuns outside its jurisdiction. What better way than to give Las Huelgas to Cîteaux. The poor abbot could not refuse the king's wish.

It is helpful to consider carefully the different phases of this story so full of politics, the rank of monasteries and diplomacy towards the General Chapter of Cîteaux. A few years ago when the Cistercian Congregation of St. Bernard of Spain was incorporated into the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, one could see the same problems repeating themselves, those of jurisdiction, the spiritual assistance to be given to the nuns and the effect on the General Chapter of a massive influx of monasteries. This was so despite the fact that some of these monasteries such as Las Huelgas, Canas or Gradefes had been following the Cistercian way of life uninterruptedly for eight centuries.

The history of these three monasteries (Jully, Tart and Las Huelgas) shows not only the particular situation of each but also how monasteries came into being, the sympathies or antipathies involved, the initiatives of some abbots, the enthusiasm of the nuns to live the Cistercian ideal and finally the efforts of the General Chapter to avoid being swamped by a phenomenon which

threatened to harm the life and discipline of the monks' communities – a phenomenon often found in monastic history.

In 1147 the General Chapter had to deal with the problem of incorporating the Congregations of Obazine and Savigny. The former was more or less a double monastery linked to the nuns of Coyroux, their neighbours. It also looked after the nuns of Fountmourlhes. The Congregation of Savigny included three monasteries of nuns, but that did not present any problem since these nuns would remain in the same juridical situation after becoming Cistercian, with the same abbots and monks looking after them as before.

Those who have recently carried out careful research in local archives have pointed out that contacts between Cistercian abbots and monks' houses with those of nuns and *mulieres religiosae* were much more frequent than had been previously supposed.

Such would be a summary of the situation. It might seem exaggerated to some, but this present document cannot spend more time on it.

Until quite recently what was known about the origins of these monasteries came from A. Manrique and C. Henriquez. However, while it is true that these authors had studied Cistercian nuns extensively, they had done so from a hagiographic angle and without reference to correct historical documents. In many cases, far from shedding light on the matter in an objective fashion, they had contributed to certain prejudices and incorrect information on the origins of nuns in the Order.

As has been pointed out already, the spread and development of women's communities in the whole of Europe at that time was considerable. It would be too long to quote a list of the monasteries here, even of the most important ones. Suffice it to say that by and large the same phenomenon appeared throughout Europe and the same issues were raised.

3. The spiritual life of the nuns :

Although we are always meeting the problem of the lack of documents, we can deduce from the sources and writings that have come down to us that in general the nuns were fervent right from the beginning. In the first place the ground had already been prepared by the communities of *beguines* and *mulieres religiosae*. The measures taken by the ecclesiastical hierarchy to watch over and organise these groups ensured the establishment of a salutary form of life and, despite a few inevitable exceptions, these women gave themselves sincerely to God and to a continual growth in holiness.

The nuns' observances were not the same in all regions although they maintained a considerable uniformity in liturgy, manual work, spiritual reading, Eucharistic devotion and asceticism. In Northern Europe the spiritual life was cultivated with greater intensity. Monasteries that had girls' schools and scriptoria or were close to one of monks, with its preachers and confessors, enjoyed a more cultured life and it was not difficult to find women of outstanding human and spiritual qualities there. Although doubtless there were some forced vocations, Jacques de Vitry states clearly that many nuns, even those who had entered by parental decision, found a true call from God and followed Christ joyfully and wholeheartedly.

Certain monasteries were not well planned and therefore not very suitable, while others were truly solitary. We are forced to admit that there was a good religious spirit and Cistercian climate in these monasteries. However, in Germany and particularly in Belgium, countries where Cistercian mysticism for women was born and flourished, it was mixed, more or less consciously, with a taste for the extraordinary and miraculous and an admiration for supernatural gifts hardly compatible with their Benedictine and Bernardine heritage. Such tastes could give a false impression of true Cistercian holiness. The monks found all this somewhat distasteful and a source of worry as well as giving them a sort of inferiority complex.

4. Their observances :

It is impossible to speak of uniformity in observances among the nuns. In this they differed from the monks who found in the Charter of Charity an important aid to uniformity of observances. True, the nuns regarded the Rule of St. Benedict as the basis of their monastic life. But we find countless variants in their form of life, due perhaps to their origins, to a particular Superior or to climatic conditions and poverty. We will mention here some customary elements of the community life, essential points of the Rule: prayer, work and *lectio divina*.

Prayer, Office :

On this subject we have a firsthand document, *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness* of St. Gertrude, a nun of Helfta, which was a monastery in Saxony following the Cistercian usages without being officially incorporated into the Order. Gertrude like all nuns of her time lived the liturgy and, so to speak, lived to the letter, all that she had written.

Work :

We should give particular attention to the richly endowed monasteries. They were foundations made by kings or nobles – like Las Huelgas in Spain or Notre Dame la Royale de Maubuisson and Le Lys in France. Blanche de Castile, mother of St. Louis, spared no expense in the founding of Maubuisson in order to make of it the most opulent and most noble of abbeys. Bouchet, an abbey founded by a Prince of Provence, was more modest but rich all the same. The sumptuous ladies' dormitory measured forty metres by eleven. The abbey church, which actually served as a parish church, was thirty metres long. A convent of nuns in Velay had a church that was thirty-two by sixteen metres. All the nuns' cells had a window overlooking adjacent buildings that were surrounded by walls. Walls two feet thick separated the cells. At the south end of the cloister garth there was a fine garden, twenty-two metres by seventeen, and the monastery was encircled by a high wall with a tower at each corner.

There was a great variety in the life-style of nuns' monasteries but it is clear that in the majority of cases they had begun in real poverty. The nuns themselves had to till the ground to feed themselves. To give an example, the Benedictine nuns of Yerres in the diocese of Sens had their way of life codified about 1130 by the Bishop of Paris and the Cistercian abbot Hugh of Pontigny. The sisters went to work in small groups well outside their enclosure. The enclosure had been greatly relaxed from what it had been previously and this continued until the beginning of the 13th century. An order from the abbess was sufficient for the sisters to leave the enclosure to work in the fields or woods. In his Bull *Prudentibus Virginibus* of December 1184, Pope Lucius III forbade the professed nuns of Tart to leave the enclosure without the abbess' permission. These few examples give us an idea of the material side of the nuns' life. In the 12th century all monks and nuns had to live by their manual work. Surviving documents show that the type of work varied according to the place and strength of individuals as the Rule of St. Benedict stipulates and sometimes it involved leaving the enclosure.

From the *Vita* of Ida of Nivelles we learn that while the nuns of La Ramée in Brabant were resting in the fields after the harvest she had a vision. Another day she was with her abbess in a meeting with a number of *mulieres religiosae*. On another occasion at harvest time several sisters from La Ramée were with the Prioress of Kerkhom, the place from which La Ramée had originated, doing the harvesting. Ida was among them and spent eight days in this grange. In the *Vita* of Ida of Léau, a nun of the same monastery, we read that at harvest time she remained alone in the house while the community went out to the fields to collect the crops. Obviously the fields could be within the enclosure, but in the 12th century the word enclosure was still understood in the most liberal

sense of the word. The estate of the nuns of the abbey of Vernaison, founded in 1167, was scattered along the two banks of the river Isère. To reach it they could either go by the main Provence to Lyons road (*via magna*) that crossed the river by a bridge or take a boat. After the floods of 1221 the nuns built a new monastery on higher ground.

The enclosure became much stricter in the 13th century and it was customary to find lay brothers attached to the women's houses in order to do the physical work. These brothers entered directly into the service of the nuns and made their profession in the hands of the abbess. The history of Cistercian lay brothers belonging to nuns' abbeys is well documented. With the help of paid workmen they looked after the fields at a distance from the abbey.

Certain abbeys of nuns undertook important work. The nuns of Mollèges drained the marshes and developed fishponds; those of Saint-Pons-de-Gemenos raised cattle. Most had sheep and oxen. A lay brother of Bouchet is mentioned as being in charge of reaping. All this was a source of income. We can add that the nuns of Mollèges had the right to take tolls on the alpine roads.

But when the enclosure became stricter the nuns concentrated more on inside work. The Cistercians did not have schools like the Benedictines, unless we consider as scholarly activity taking young girls into the monastery to give them an education. Gertrude was received at Helfta at the age of four and Mechtilde of Hackeborn at seven. These young girls learned in the monastery workshops to use wool, to ply the needle and other feminine tasks such as weaving, sewing, embroidery and the way to attach gold and pearls to silk stuffs. This constituted a valuable source of income for the community and was more in harmony with the gifts and physique of the nuns and less taxing than field-work, particularly for the old and infirm. Moreover it was prayerful work and could be a continuation of or preparation for the Divine Office. Once, Gertrude had to go off quickly and this caused her to drop several hanks of wool. Although she had given herself fervently to God during the work, she saw the devil gathering up the wool as proof of her carelessness. She called upon the Lord and saw Him chasing the devil away while reproaching him for having dared to interfere in a work which was so explicitly and completely consecrated to God.

In the Cistercian Order there were real centres of mysticism. In her account of Cistercian saints from the diocese of Liège, Simone Roisin writes: "If the nuns outdid the monks in this matter also, it was more by the frequency than the sublimity of their raptures. They lived in almost uninterrupted ecstasy and derived from it an ever deeper knowledge of divine mysteries, especially of the Trinity." Henriquez in his *'Quinque Prudentes Virgines* (Antwerp 1630) recounts the lives of Beatrice of Nazareth, Alice of Schaerbeek, Ida of Nivelles, Ida of Louvain and Ida of Léau. But there were many others. The same Henriquez published the *Lilia Cistercii, the origins, lives and deeds of the holy virgins of Cîteaux* (Douai 1633). However, it would be wrong to imagine that all Cistercian nuns were saints. As elsewhere there were foolish virgins together with the wise.

Although a list of Cistercian authors would contain more names of men than women, many nuns worked at the copying of manuscripts. Beatrice of Nazareth wrote an autobiography that was used by William of Afflighem in writing her life. He added long passages on her writings and visions. It is an extremely mystical collection of short treatises. The main treatise is called *The Seven Forms of Love*. John Doyère wrote of St. Gertrude: "The intellectual activity of St. Gertrude was abundant. She not only copied manuscripts but while reading she liked to make a note of the better passages, and to keep certain quotations and prayers to feed her devotion and that of others...She also wrote spiritual and theological treatises on Scripture in German and Latin. All has been lost except for her devotional work, the *Spiritual Exercises*."

All this could be applied to other nuns. So many monasteries were laid waste, burned or destroyed including all their archives. We will never know their contents. In the style of romantic novels so prolific in the 13th century, the lawyer Philip of Novare used to say: "Never teach a woman to read or write unless perchance she is a nun." This advice was repeated later. Hence we can

conclude that many nuns were literate. Pope John XXII at the request of the abbess of Saint-Pons-de-Gemenos, agreed that a certain Graciette Audoarde might be received into the monastery. He described her as a “walking encyclopaedia.” Later the distinction between literate and illiterate (the lay sisters) was more marked and the latter were considered and treated as servants. This tended to divide the community into two groups and in certain abbeys two social classes were created: daughters of nobles who might become abbesses and the rest. But let it be added that Christian love solved possible conflicts and, apart from a few specific instances, it is difficult to find a community divided on this account – at least in the 13th century. The distinction between literate and illiterate seemed quite natural. The 12th century is the outstanding century for nuns’ monasteries – outstanding on account of the number of foundations, although some were short-lived; outstanding on account of the intense fervour reigning in these houses. At the end of the 12th century there were perhaps a hundred monasteries following the Rule of St. Benedict according to the Cistercian usages. Although the nuns lived a life similar to that of their brothers of Cîteaux, in certain monasteries of women it was difficult to see a likeness to the monks’ abbeys. When we see certain ruins we would like to know the plan of the regular places. To be honest, there was no greater uniformity in the planning of buildings than there was in the observance of the Usages. Many monasteries started as a group of *mulieres religiosae* living around a chapel. The regular places were added piecemeal: chapter, refectory and, generally on the first floor, the dormitory. The chaplain’s house was clearly separated from the nuns’ buildings, but gave on to the chancel of the church. The nuns’ life was austere: they rose during the night to sing the Office, observed the fasts prescribed by the Rule of St. Benedict and did manual work.

Texts

1. Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald*, 2, 1, 2 :

At the hour already mentioned, then, I was standing in the middle of the dormitory. On meeting an elder sister, according to the custom of our Order I bowed my head. As I raised it I saw standing beside me a young man. He was lovely and refined, and looked about sixteen ; his appearance was such as my youth would find pleasing. With kindly face and gentle words he said to me, “Your salvation will come quickly; why are you consumed by sadness? Do you have no counsellor, that sorrow has overwhelmed you?

While he said this, although I knew I was physically in the place mentioned it seemed to me that I was in choir, in the corner where I used to make my lukewarm devotions, and it was there that I heard the following words: “I shall free you and I shall deliver you; do not fear.” At these words I saw a tender, finely wrought hand holding my right hand as if confirming what had been said with a promise. He added, “You have licked the dust with my enemies, and you have sucked honey among thorns; return to me at last, and I shall make you drunk with the rushing river of my divine pleasure!”

While he spoke, I looked and saw that between us (to his right and my left) there was a hedge of such endless length that I could not see where it ended in front or behind me. On its top the hedge seemed to bristle with such a great mass of thorns that I would never be able to cross it to join the young man. While I stood hesitating because of it, both burning with desire and almost fainting, he himself seized me swiftly and effortlessly, lifted me up and set me beside him.

2. Alice of Schaerbeek, *Vita*, 4, 2-7,10-11:

Inwardly she united herself to God in her sufferings; outwardly she subdued her body with various practices. Interiorly she was continuously flooded with tears at the thought of her weakness and desire to see God’s glory; exteriorly she had to deal with the needs of her sisters. Despite her timidity she wanted to comfort everyone and be a source of new hope for them. She showed true

compassion for the unfortunate, patience towards others' weaknesses and did not bother about the insults she received. Inwardly she tried to conform herself to the image of God in her heart. Outwardly she tried to live always in God's presence and show herself gracious, friendly, kind, charming and of service to all. Inwardly she submitted herself completely to God's majesty and will, while burning with the fire of charity. Outwardly her good works brought light and joy to others. Since she knew that idleness is the enemy of the soul she accomplished her duties promptly and swiftly. At no moment did she waste her time, since she was either meditating interiorly or engaged in edifying conversation. She had noted in the Gospel that the Lord had gone up a mountain with three disciples, so she wanted to reach the summit of God's mountain. To this end she joined work and meditation with prayer. She grasped many things while at work and even more so when she pondered on them, but most of all this illumination happened while she was at prayer.

3. Colman O'Dell, OCSO, "Ida of Léau : Woman of Desire", in John A. Nichols, Lilian Thomas Shank, ed. *Hidden Springs, Cistercian Monastic Women, Medieval Religious Women*, Volume Three, Book One, Kalamazoo 1995 (Cistercian Studies Series 113A) pp. 439-440.

Ida shows us that we must desire the source of the joy, not the joy itself. She also illustrates for us the viability of the traditional ways of prayer found in western monasticism: *lectio, meditatio, oratio and contemplatio*. We need not search outside our own living heritage for prayer techniques more efficacious for attaining union with God. In the long run, it is not this or that technique that accomplishes this goal. Prayer itself is a gift for which one can only dispose oneself to the best of one's ability. The four-fold "ladder" for monks has proved itself adapted to our western pragmatic and intellectual turn of mind. Some spiritually minded people tend to have a slightly guilty feeling about their intellectual or pragmatic tendencies. Ida can reassure us in this regard. Like everything else, these tendencies can be a gift, and God always takes his creatures as they really are, not what they think they should be.

Ida can also lead us to a deeper appreciation of the liturgy as a means of union with God. The public worship of the Church has undergone a cataclysmic upheaval in the post-Vatican II era, and the dust has scarcely begun to settle. Some liturgists seem determined to insure that this will never occur, confusing "stagnation" with the tranquillity of mind which is a basic necessity for contemplative prayer. Ida shows us the value and beauty of the *Opus Dei*, adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church --- factors of the spiritual life too often neglected in our times.

Primarily, Ida can show us how to practice what Gilbert of Hoyland calls the "discipline of desire", that is "most characteristic of cloistered brethren", or of any person who truly seeks God and desires perfect union with him for whom his or her soul longs "as a doe longs for running streams", and who is never content to say "It is enough."

4. Beatrice of Nazareth, CF 50 *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, translation. R. de Ganck, Kalamazoo 1991 Book 3 *The Seven Manners of Holy Love* p. 313.

When the spouse of Our Lord has made progress and has reached a higher degree of virtue she experiences yet another way of loving; she feels a greater presence and a deeper understanding. She realises that love has overcome all her inner resistance, has corrected her imperfections and subdued her whole being. Love has completely overcome her so that there is no further resistance. Love possesses her heart in a restful security. She can rest in it joyfully and act with complete freedom.

When the soul finds itself in this state, whatever she has to do for love seems of little consequence. She can act or not act quite easily. She can suffer gladly. In this way she experiences the sweetness of giving herself to love.

She feels a divine force acting in her, a real purity, a spiritual sweetness, a desirable freedom, a deep wisdom, a happy conformity to God.

Now she is like a woman who has put her house in order, who has arranged it properly, governed it wisely, furnished it with taste, established it by her foresight and acts intelligently. She introduces things or removes them, does and undoes according to her own ideas. Such is the life of one who finds herself in this state. She is love; love rules in her strong and without a rival, active and peaceful, doing and undoing, outwardly and inwardly according to her wish.

As fish swim in deep water and rest in the depths, as birds fly swiftly in the length and breadth of space, so she feels that her spirit moves freely in the breadth and height and depth of love.

The sovereign power of love has drawn her soul to itself, has guided, upheld and protected it. Love has given understanding, wisdom, sweetness and power. However it has hidden from the soul its all-powerful force until she is sufficiently ready, until she has reached the point of freeing herself completely of herself. Then love rules in her with still greater force.

Finally, love becomes so strong and free that she fears neither men nor demons nor angels nor saints nor even God himself in whatever she does or does not do, in work or in repose. She is aware that love is alert and active in her inmost being, whether she is sleeping or working industriously. She knows and sees clearly that those in whom love is paramount are not vanquished by suffering or work.

But all those who want to reach such love must search for it with reverence, follow it faithfully and live it with great zeal. It cannot be had if they recoil from hard work, or intense suffering and ills, or humiliations. They must give full attention to the least detail until love gets to the point in them when it renders everything easy, work light, suffering sweet and faults wiped out.

Such love brings freedom of conscience, sweetness of heart, goodness and nobility of soul, spiritual uplift --- the basis of eternal life.

Even now such a life is angelic. Afterwards there is only eternal life which God in his goodness grants to all.

Questions for reflection :

1. What does this paper teach us about the practice of enclosure ; the seriousness with which work and formation were undertaken and the skills that were to be learnt ?
2. Medieval monasteries, as far as we can see, were helped by lay brothers and others well-known to them. Can this type of monastery still be a source of inspiration for us as we respond to new needs and situations? How, under what conditions?
3. A split appeared between literate and illiterate nuns. In what ways would/could this show itself today? How do we address this?
4. In our communities, do we have the same desire to live an intense spiritual life as these medieval nuns had? Compared with the nuns we have read about here, how are we helped or hindered to live such a life?
5. The texts given in this unit contain a certain number of references to the Rule of St. Benedict, to the liturgy and to Cistercian spirituality. It would be a useful exercise to pick them out.

6. What theological and spiritual message do these texts offer us?

Continuity and Reforms from 12th to 15th Century

Unit prepared by Fr Placide Vernet, Cîteaux.

1. Evolution during the 13th Century :

Before the end of XII Century, Cistercian legislation drew up reference texts, both for the functioning of the order -with the Charter of Charity and the Decisions of the General Chapters, and for the government of daily life - with the Book of Regulations and the Lay Brothers Regulations. These Documents remained as the texts of reference right up to the Council of Trent, and even after that the various Reformers would refer to them; this shows how much these customs gave Cîteaux its character and something of its spirit in so far as they reveal the Cistercian way of setting about their monastic observances.

Even if the development of the Order was important: it would number more than 500 monasteries at the end of the XII century, reaching a total of nearly 742 before the end of the XVII. Nevertheless the XII century marked the peak of the Order; it was in a special way the century of the Nuns. But even though, from 1235 that entity which would soon become the celebrated College of St Bernard or of the Bernardines ; was gradually taking shape at Paris on the whole the number of the conversi was diminishing.

The General Chapter met faithfully each year and legislated for the Order and the Communities or for the members of the communities. Even though there was no question of a Code of Reference which constituted the Observances, yet rapidly the need was felt for another codification, and that from as early as 1202. This first attempt gave birth to the collection entitled *Institutiones Capituli Generalis*. This attempt which corresponded to a necessity and a need resulted in the codifications of 1237 and 1257. New codifications would also come into being. The *Libellus antiquarum definitionum* (1293/1316) and the *Libellus novellarum definitionum* (1350). These concern, at the same time, the prescriptions necessary for the governing of the Order and the prescriptions necessary for the practice of the observances; we can consider them as a development and adaptation of the Charter of Charity and of the Usages.

The ecclesial power, both economic and territorial, of the Order was considerable at this time. This does not exclude human weakness: wealth and virtue do not live well together!

In 1265 the Bull *Parvus fons* of Pope Clement IV aimed to regulate the relations between the Abbot of Cîteaux and the four Senior Fathers and therefore it also regulated the constitution of the Definitory at the General Chapter

There was no question of observances here. The Chapter itself took care of that. Thus it is that in 1279, Statute 38, it was led to define how those monks who, after the dispersion of their communities, find themselves left with very few numbers in the monastery, are to behave.

They must keep silence in the cloister, in the dormitory and in the church, as was customary ; all will eat in the refectory and they will not eat fish that has been bought. No one will dare to speak after Compline. The Conventual Mass will be celebrated each day ; the signal will be given for all the regular Hours which will be chanted solemnly in the Church; and if there are twelve monks or more they will be bound to keep the full observance of the Order. This Statute clearly evokes the consequences of all sorts of troubles, wars or, in Eastern Europe, the invasion of the pagans.

2. 14th and 15th Centuries

Due to the weakness of human nature, the excessive economic undertakings of the abbeys and the various fluctuations of the times, the health of the communities deteriorated, if not throughout the whole order, at least perceptibly enough, and especially in certain regions. So the General Chapter was invited to take note of it and to do something about it. Whence Statute 4 of 1312:

"Since in many regions the fervour of regular observance is too lax and since complaints have been made in that regard to the General Chapter this same Chapter gives to the Abbot of Cîteaux and to the four Senior Fathers the mandate to send, by common request, on this occasion, into the regions which need reform, wise and discreet persons having God before their eyes and their hands free of any suspicious gifts, and in virtue of the authority of the Chapter they will correct and reform, in both head and members that which they know to have need of correction and reform, and, if they discover any serious or dubious matters which leave them uncertain, let them refer them to the next General Chapter."

Thus, at the beginning of the 14th Century the evil is growing.

A) The Reform of the Order "Shining like the Morning Star" :

From 1305 the Pope resided at Avignon. At this time a Cistercian Abbot called Juste had already drawn up a charge and Pope John XXII had seriously envisaged a reform of the order, but the Abbot of Chaalis intervened to the contrary. We have to wait until the Cistercian Pope Benedict XII, elected in 1335, before this intention of reform was put into action and he began with his own Order. This was not easily done and his Bull *Fulgens sicut stella matutina* (Shining like the Morning Star) for the reform of the Order of Cîteaux, can seem a bit weak.

In this Bull there was a lot of discussion concerning fiscal affairs, but also about colleges and studies. From the end of the XII century the number of conversi diminished. The year St Thomas Aquinas died, 1274, was also the year of the official foundation of the Cistercian College at Paris. Between the two subjects, money and studies, there were twelve articles which touched the lives of the monks in the monasteries. These articles should be read in order to grasp their content and something of the situation.

19. "Only those who are suited to this state in the Order should be received as monks, otherwise the reception is invalid." or conversi. Only the Abbot or whoever presides over the government of the other conventual houses (which already have no abbot at that time!) is qualified to receive subjects into the monastery; he should always take counsel with the seniors of the community.

20. "All the monks will wear brown or white. Care must be taken to avoid superfluity or wealth in tableware or bedding."

21. "Because those who have made profession of the regular observance must abstain from forbidden foodstuffs, both for the love of virtue and for the fear of punishment so as not to fall into the sin of gluttony, meat must not be eaten in the monastery, neither in the rooms nor anywhere else except the common infirmary. If such a permission did exist, it is hereby revoked. Transgressors will fast for three days on bread and water. Those who do have permission will not eat meat in the infirmary rooms. Nevertheless, an abbot Emeritus may eat in his room and invite one or other of the monks from time to time."

23. "All the monks must sleep in the dormitory except the sick and the officials ; these latter are to sleep in the places assigned to them ; the sick, in the infirmary rooms."

24. "Cells must no longer be constructed in the dormitory. Any that have been constructed will be destroyed within the three months following the notification of this Apostolic requirement. The Visitors will see that this is done."

25. "In certain monasteries the monks have the right to a certain part of the corn, the bread, the wine and the income. That must no longer happen; everything will be common to all. It will no longer be possible for anyone to have any revenue or pension for his sustenance, his clothing or for anything else."

26. "Likewise to be abolished is the sharing of the revenues among the Abbot, the officers and the community. The Abbots opposing this decision are to be deposed, the monks to be imprisoned for life."

27. "On the other hand, to abbots Emeritus who have voluntarily resigned, their successors may, with the counsel of the seniors, offer or assign a sufficient and suitable provision."

28. "To avoid all wandering about and useless expenditure it is forbidden for any monk or conversus, whatever his age or condition, to have a horse or mule for travelling. Nevertheless, for cellarers, procurators and masters of granges, if it seems opportune, they may have one single mount."

30. "The Abbot must provide each one - in good health or sick, the necessities of life, taking into account the goods of the monastery and the region where they live. He is therefore not bound to receive any more members than he can support."

This Bull -- which in its way, is a constitution to which future reference will be made by all the reformers, who will call it the "Benedictine" -- allows us to gain some idea of the life that was led, or could or should have been led, by the monks of the Abbeys in 1335. To crown it all, in that very year the hundred years' war broke out. (1335-1435) The Abbots, whether French, English or other could hardly participate in the General Chapter -- And that was so for a century! The ancient fortifications of the Abbeys of Bonnecombe and Bonneval bear witness to that epoch. Now, during this same time, 1378-1417, the Eastern Schism was raging at the heart of the Church. Inevitably the monasteries were divided between the two papal allegiances.

B) The "Great Desolation" :

It is surprising then if, in 1379, in Statute 28, the General Chapter demanded the "reform of each and every one of the monasteries of both sexes in the diocese of Poitiers, Luçon, Nantes, Tours, and Saintes". That same year, Statute 54 demands "the reform of each and every one of the monasteries of both sexes in Castile, Léon, Galicie and Portugal".

It is not surprising that in 1425, ten years before the end of the hundred years war, a certain Martin de Vargas in Spain had formed the project of returning to a more austere observance: he was to be the founder of the Castile Congregation, (The first of all the Cistercian Congregations) which would take the name of "Regular Observance of St Bernard."

While in western Europe, the Hussite wars were beginning in 1420 and 1439 saw the beginning of the commendatory system among the Cistercians, the General Chapter of 1422 was able to call a Chapter of reform, we know this because Statutes 20, 22, 23, 24, 25 (for the nuns) 26, 27 to 34 (for all that was common to the Order) concern the reform. And after that the General Chapter followed up with the reform of particular monasteries. The word reform was heard everywhere.

And thus it was that in 1429 the General Chapter could speak of the lamentable desolation of such and such a monastery. There really was something to weep for. The General Chapter, in Statute 66, rose "against the 'picnics' with seculars in certain little rooms, during community meal times." "On account of information received and verified, and in order to remedy the relaxation regarding the late hour of rising, this General Chapter lays down (Stat.69) that from now on and for ever, in all the monasteries, on ordinary days, the sacristan will ring for Vigils at 2 a.m., and on other days of solemnity, as also on Sundays (when the twelve responses were sung!), he will ring for them at one hour after midnight, according to the custom handed down to us by the saints."

The General Chapter was not lacking in zeal, but the state of affairs was terrible.

C) The Articles of Paris: 1494

This terrible state of affairs did not only come from the monks and nuns of the Order of Cîteaux; it was also the consequence of the wars and of the commendatory system. As regards the Cistercians it was also the consequence of the almost complete disappearance of the conversi and of the extension of the vast domains of property. It could not help but increase. Nevertheless, during the last quarter of the 15th century, the policy of economic recovery operated in France by King Louis XI and continued by the regent Anne of Beaujeu, then by the new King Charles VIII, at last enabled the latter to convoke, an assembly of bishops and abbots at Tours in 1493. The Abbot of Cîteaux, Jean de Cirey, was present. He even made a proposition of remarkable courage, says Père Jean de la Croix Bouton, without however giving us an account of it. But according to the remark which he adds, the wars in Italy were going to cause the matter to be forgotten and twenty-four years later, Luther would fix his theses to the door of the Church of Wittenberg. Dom Jean de Cirey, himself, did not forget his proposition and set himself immediately to the task. Thus "Articles of Paris" came into being.

Dom Jean de Cirey, abbot of Cîteaux since 1476, had had a catalogue of the books (manuscripts) of the abbey drawn up, prior to the construction of the library. At Dijon in 1491 he had printed a list of the Privileges of the Cistercian Order, in which, of note, there is a list of the Saints and Blessed of the Order.

A mere three months after Tours, on 15th February 1494 Jean de Cirey held a convention at Paris, in the College of the Bernardines, of about forty French abbots. His idea was that the reform must not be something new, but a return to the primitive traditions; otherwise it would be the creation of a new religious Institute.

35. By Statute 35 of this same year, 1494, the General Chapter, with one exception, agreed to the Articles of Paris: "The present General Chapter, desiring as much as it is possible to desire, both the return to its proper state and the reform of our holy Order, accepts, praises, renews, confirms and approves the articles transcribed here below on the subject of the aforementioned reform, drawn up by the great Fathers of the Order after mature deliberation and unanimously, furnished with their seals and written signatures, and strongly commands all the abbots, the commendatories, the abbesses, priors, cellarers and other regular persons of the Order, the conversi, those entrusted to the order or oblates according to the measure in which it concerns their status, and under pain of the censures contained in these articles, to observe and to cause to be observed the said articles with diligence and in as full a measure as possible, and it is imposed as a duty of conscience before the Sovereign God upon the abbots, the commendatories, the abbesses, all the officers, and likewise the Visitors, excepting the article which begins *Item, etsi omnino...*

Numbers 36 to 39 constitute a long and sublime introduction. It begins with the list of the forty abbots who have signed the articles. We quote number 39 :

"Having established a firm resolution in our hearts to embrace this holy *reform* we, the above mentioned abbots, even if we believe this holy Order to be protected by God, in such a way that it seems to have received with Elijah this divine response: ' I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bent the knee to Baal'; if one considers that there are many monasteries of this holy Order where the primitive observance of the religious life is kept to this very day, if there are others also which, because of the fragility of the human condition, had at some time become relaxed in some point, have come back, thanks be to God, to the primitive purity of the religious life and seem actually to have no need of reform, nevertheless for all that, considering the other monasteries, the devastations of war, the ravages of epidemics, the gravity of lawsuits or the enormity of bad government of the abbots or monks, and all that has need of reform, whether spiritual or temporal, both among the monks and among the nuns, we the above mentioned Abbots....decided, in full agreement that the following articles, drawn from the Holy Rule and the statutes of the Order, will from now on be inviolably observed as a beginning of the reform wherever the need is found."

This single n° 39 contains the word 'reform' five times and 'deform' (relaxed) once, 'observance' once and 'observe' once. Already n° 38 includes the word "'reform-reformer' five times and "observance" once.

This situation was not going to improve: This was the eve of the Council of Trent. In the year that followed the articles of Paris, after Spain with the Congregation of Castile, Cistercian Italy saw the birth in 1496 of the future Congregation of St Bernard. From 1517 in the countries of the 'reform' (Lutheran etc.) countless monasteries were destroyed or suppressed. From 1545 to 1563, the Catholic Church set into motion the Principles of the Counter-Reformation at the Council of Trent, whose final session was consecrated to the religious life. But a year before the end of the Council, in 1562, the 'wars of religion' broke out in France, having already drenched all of central Europe and the Latin-rite East in blood. Cîteaux was devastated four times.

It took a long time for the reform to take shape in the Cistercian world, this reform would not forget all that was decided before the Council and which was already part of it.

Reforms of some local Cistercian monasteries in the 15th century :

In 1442, at the end of the Great Schism (1378-1417) the General Chapter, after taking stock of the overall situation in the Order, declared, "In the different parts of the world where the Order is to be found, regular discipline and reform seem to be in abeyance. Therefore from now on, canonical visits must be carried out with exactitude and severity." The supreme authority then

delegated carefully chosen abbots who were known reformers, to set about correcting weaknesses and putting those of good will back on the right road. It is comforting to see the unflagging energy of the Chapter of Cîteaux as it laid down measures to maintain fidelity to the rules. Unfortunately these worthy efforts did not always meet with success. The voice of the General Chapter, once so powerful, reached the far-flung houses only as a faint echo; that was not enough to stifle the separatist tendencies, the desires for independence, and dreams of how things might be otherwise.

In 1423, the Chapter dealt with the monasteries in the province of Bremen, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. In 1424, it was the turn of Castile, Aragon, Portugal and Navarre, along with the filiation of Morimond in Germany. In 1425, the Chapter turned its attention to the monasteries of Hungary, Poland and the province of Besançon. In 1426 and 1427, it was the turn of England and Wales.

The Reform in the Low Countries : the Union of Sibculo

At the start of the 15th.century, a holy secular priest, Jedan Clemme along with a couple of brothers founded the little community of Sibculo, in the inhospitable region of Overysse, not far from Deventer. In 1407, they adopted the Augustinian rule, and in 1412, the Chapter incorporated them into the Order of Cîteaux. The Abbot of Cîteaux, Jean de Martini (1405-1428) accorded them specific conditions: the superior ranked only as Prior; they could choose a new visitor every three years, with the agreement of the Abbot of Clairvaux, their Father Immediate. The number of priories grew rapidly. A great fervour reigned in these communities and the Chapter of 1489 gave high praise to the Priors for their zeal "in the regular observance of the Order" and their "spirit of obedience and uniformity". The prior of Gross-Burlo (Mariengarten), a saintly man, was called by his contemporaries "a second Bernard."

The Reform in Flanders

Several abandoned women's monasteries were handed over to the monks. In 1414, the great Abbeys of Villers and Aulne took over the Monastery of Moulins with Jean de Gesves as Abbot. The monastery of Jardinet was taken over by the monks of Aulne and Cambron. The first abbot of this Community, was Jean Eustache de Mons, one-time prior of Mons. Three other houses joined the Monasteries of Moulins and Jardinet: Nizelle in 1441, Bonneffe in 1461 and Saint-Remy de Rochefort in 1464. The influence of Jardinet under Dom Jean-Eustache was very important. This community provided abbots for several monasteries and confessors for a good number of women's monasteries. Le Jardinet flourished until 1560.

The Reform in Northern Germany

Helped by the Abbey of Riddagshausen, Marienrode near Hildesheim, which had been in decline since the first half of the 14th century, began to show new signs of life from 1379, thanks to able and zealous abbots. Of particular note was Heinrich von Berten, who died in 1462, and was the author of a remarkable *Chronikon Marienrodense*. He also worked with Cardinal Nicolas de Cuse for the reform of the Church in Germany.

The Reform in Hungary

The fervour of the Abbots of Germany was manifest in the help they gave to reforming the monasteries of Hungary. The initiative was due to Matthias Corvin (1458-1490), a great humanist king who asked the General Chapter to help him restore the monasteries. The Chapter of 1478 had recourse to the monasteries of the Order; these responded generously by sending monks to Hungary. The monasteries of Bebenhausen, Ebrach and Heilsbronn deserve particular mention. About a hundred monks boarded at Ratisbon and sailed up the Danube to Hungary in 1480. The success of the following decade witnesses to the energetic work of the German monks. One of them, Jodoc Rosner became abbot of Pilis and received special authorisation from the General Chapter to

visit and reform the other communities. Alas the success was short-lived. After the disastrous Battle of Mohacs (1526), central Hungary was occupied by the Turks and for two centuries, the country was a theatre of bloody battles. In the middle of the 16th century, all the Cistercian monasteries in Hungary had died out, to be revived only in the 18th century.

All the reforms noted here were carried out with the agreement of the General Chapter, which was not the case for some other reforms, which took place in the 15th century.

Source Texts : The Articles of Paris

Here is the substance of the Articles of Paris (without always giving their complete and literal translation)

40. The divine Office, the churches of the Order and the regular places :

The Divine Office, must be celebrated with regard to the traditional times both night and day, slowly, with the pauses, the ceremonies and inclinations required according to the advice of St Bernard and the definitions of the Order. Both the Abbots, especially at Vigils, and all the others must take part in them. No one will dare to come to them without a cowl. The Church and the regular places must have a certain beauty and be suitable for the religious observance.

No one will be excused from the divine service except those that the abbot, in conscience, believes that he can dispense on account of the service of the community or of sickness.

41. The abbots :

In order that this reform begin at the head, we beg all the fathers of the Order to be, according to the saying of the Apostle, a model for the flock, to walk at the head of the disciples as much by example as by words, avoiding all pomp and superfluity in their manner of life and their clothing, to do everything with the advice of the seniors.

42. The daily Chapter :

Each day the community will enter the Chapter room at the approved time; the president will there fulfil his responsibility for the correction of faults or the restoration of regular observance, at least if he does not wish, himself, to be punished by the Visitors.

43. The refectory, the food of the monks :

Meals will be taken in the refectory, wearing the cowl. Meat will not be eaten on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, nor on feasts of Sermons [solemnities] during Advent, Septuagesima and Lent, nor on Rogation days, nor on fast days of the Church or of the Order. (Reference is made to the Rule and to Benedict XII). All the left overs will be given to the poor according to the praiseworthy tradition of the Order.

44. Formation of the young brothers :

The Abbots who are not accustomed to doing so, are commanded to instruct the young monks in matters of the divine service, the sciences, good habits, and also to obtain for them teachers to instruct them in the basics of arts and the sciences in such a way that afterwards the most capable of them may sent for studies in the Colleges of the Order.

45. The dormitories, forbidding of linen garments :

The community will conform to the Rule, and so in the dormitory, apart from those who are dispensed from this and acknowledged as such by the abbot. According to the Bull of Benedict XII, no fireplace will be allowed in the dormitory, the locking of cell doors will be forbidden. Feather beds will be replaced with hard beds, all underwear of linen or hemp will be replaced by wool and all clothing will be of wool.

46. The infirmary :

According to the Rule, there must be an infirmary.

47. The regular visits :

The regular visitations must be made every year by the Fathers Immediate or delegates who will take care to reform the communities.

48. Silence :

The abbots, priors and sub-priors, will observe silence (which is the key to the religious life), and will make sure that it is observed at all times in the regular places and especially at the time for reading and after Compline. If a monk meets a secular, he greets him, wishes him well and informs him that he cannot speak further. Everywhere, in the monastery and outside a monk will observe that religious gravity which befits the monastic vocation.

49. Poverty :

In the 15 days which will follow the notification of these present articles and their application, the abbots will remove from all the religious every kind of private possession of whatever nature it may be: animals, vines, lands, gardens, and they must apply all these revenues to the common funds. No one must send or receive letters or presents without the special permission of the abbot.

50. The enclosure of the regular places :

The abbot will make the prior and sub-prior responsible for seeing that the doors of the cloister, the refectory and dormitory are locked at the appointed times. The abbots, priors and cellarers will see to it that the doors of the monastery are closed in such a way that no one may leave or enter, especially women.

51. The bursar and the presenting of the accounts :

It would be completely in conformity with the Bull of Benedict XII that there should be in each monastery one or more bursars keeping strict accounts and obliged to give account of their administration four times a year. But since many of the monasteries are not in that position, they will at least present to the next General Chapter a detailed and complete account of all their receipts and expenses, and they will continue to do so each year.

52. Brethren on a journey :

Henceforward the brethren will not go to celebrate Mass for seculars or in the neighbourhood, unless it is a case of nobility who cannot be refused. No one will leave the monastery without permission of the abbot or, in his absence, the prior, and only from necessity or for the good of the monastery; and then one will take a cloak or a cape with the regular hood showing over it, and this whether on foot or on horseback. In the towns - and this under pain of prison - one will wear the cowl or a cloak and a black hat so that, in this way, it can be seen that there is a servant of God there. No one will go to local celebrations, weddings or shows any more, or to stay the night at a tavern, remembering the Chapters of the Rule on Brethren going on a journey etc. No one may sponsor a child for baptism.

53. The abbesses and the nuns :

All that is valid for the abbots and monks or for the conversi is valid for them and the conversae. As well as this, they must conform to the Bull 'Periculoso' of Boniface VIII and the statutes of the Order, to lead the common life and to live by the work of their own hands. They will not leave the cloister and no one can enter it except in the cases provided for by law.

54. The prisons :

Under pain of suspension *a divinis*, all the abbots must, before the next General Chapter, provide or repair good strong prisons to punish transgressors severely; those who refuse to obey this holy reform or who seriously disobey the statutes of the Order.

55. The observance of the statutes :

In Order that all that is to be reformed in the Order may be well understood, in virtue of the apostolic authority and of that of the Order, it is ordained for both abbots and monks, that, besides the daily reading of the Rule, they must gather, before the feast of the Holy Trinity, in such places and at such times as are suitable, for the Reading of the Rule, the Usages and the Definitions of the Order, without chant but rather in the manner of a conference.

56. Epilogue :

Respectfully, we entrust all this to the next General Chapter, (which is more a brief recapitulation of the statutes of the Order than any new proposals), and all that concerns the putting into practice of the holy reform.

Questions for reflection :

1. Do you not think that our lives, personal or as a community, experience times of 'desolation' to a greater or lesser degree? This can be due to negligence of some monk or nun or of our superiors, or even come from outside events: war, sickness, extreme poverty, economic prosperity, buildings which are inadequate or under repair, ageing of the community etc.
Do we not have a tendency to seek compensation ? How? Who should have the care of helping us to live through the difficult times? What are the ways of fidelity, in the throes of difficult situations?
2. Re-read the articles of the Bull '*Fulgens...*' and the Articles of Paris cited above. To which points do they draw our attention? Are they pertinent? Look at what is behind these articles in the Rule, the insistence on what is superfluous, things that are ones own (personal). Do these Articles appear to be in continuity with, or disruptive of, the purposes of the founders of Cîteaux?
3. Do these Articles not indicate the risk of digression in our lives? What warnings can we receive from them that are still of value? How can we translate that into contemporary language, allowing for our conditions of life? Which points are obsolete, unsuited to our era?

The Cistercian Congregations in the Iberian Peninsula

The Congregation of Castile, the Congregation of Aragon and of Navarre, the Congregation of Alcobaça

Unit prepared by F. Francisco Rafael de Pascual, Viaceli.

Although the three Congregations of the Iberian Peninsula, the Congregation of Castile, the Congregation of Aragon and Navarre, and the Congregation of Alcobaça may have owed their demise to the religious politics of their respective countries, their origin is not traced to the same motivating cause, rather, the three were born in the historical context of the religious reforms effected in the peninsula, under strict ecclesiastical, civil and political regulation alike.

1. Introduction :

The Congregation of Castile was born of an authentic desire for reform, and as a reform; those of Aragon-Navarre and Portugal of a desire to achieve independence from the political influences of other countries and of a desire to protect the weaker monasteries from foreign visitors.

The origins of the autonomous Congregations are intimately linked to the regional reform movements. Perhaps the most celebrated, prior to the 15th century was that of Joachim of Fiore, in Calabria, which was short-lived.

The *Statuta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensi* are full, during these years, of the decisions of the General Chapters related to the expansion created by the Congregations. A sincere desire for reform led the different monasteries to look for the point of departure of their regeneration in the re-grouping of monasteries, not on the too vast scale of medieval Christianity, but on the more restricted scale of nationality groupings. The “individualism” of the Renaissance and of the Reformation did no more than embitter the separatist tendencies to extreme limits.

All the reforms set about working out their “particular law” and their own juridical institutions: constitutions, bulls, royal privileges, statutes approved and elaborated in their own Provincial Chapters. Apart from its interest for history, the study of the sources of all these particular laws of the Cistercian congregations frequently gives an account of the variant interpretations introduced into the spirit and the general law of the Order.

Certain features are constants in the birth and the development of the Congregations: the desire for reform, the support of influential persons connected with the Papacy, the angry protest of Cîteaux and of the General Chapters. This protest indicated the incapability of promoting the reform and of controlling the non-French houses. It also shows the fact that all the Congregations, some more, others less, attained to a stage of development, spiritual and intellectual, and of organisation much better than the French houses, which, from the 15th to the 17th century, persisted in carrying on a fruitless “war of Observances”.

Each Congregation worked hard and seriously in three domains essential for every monastic reform: the domain of canon law, the intellectual-spiritual domain and the domain of liturgy.

A) The Spiritual and Cultural Context in which the Congregations were born

From the fact that the Congregations developed on the line of transition between two worlds, (the ancient and the modern) on an horizon of history which linked the close of the Middle Ages with the dawn of modern times, they tried to bring about a convergence of the monastic tradition that extended from that of the Fathers to that of the Middle Ages, with the modern tendency to a personal, experiential and psychological way of thinking.

With different results according to the personages and the spiritual climate, they succeeded in this, because they knew how to cultivate dogmatic theology, history and preaching as well as the Bible and the Church fathers, putting the science of theology at the service of spirituality and the monastic life.

The reform of the Castilian Congregation for example, was not an isolated fact, but it was influenced by the Congregation of St. Justina of Padua and by that of St. Benedict of Valladolid, at the same time as by the forms of piety of the Franciscans, Jesuits and Carmelites. It would be interesting to follow the course of this influence, but we lack even the minimum of monographs on the Spanish Cistercian authors and it is not yet possible to present a general view or any work of synthesis.

In the three Congregations of the peninsula, there are extant evidences of authors who devoted themselves to the Cistercian philosophy, whose task was the very same philosophy of Christ; in the Cistercian colleges and studies, the young monks "were initiated into the disciplines of the heavenly philosophy". The word "philosophise" is there meant in the classic sense of: lead the monastic life, understood as a lived wisdom, a way of living in accordance with reason.

But, for all that, it is not justifiable to understand and apply this medieval concept of Cistercian philosophy to the Castilian, Aragonese and Portuguese monks of the 16th to 17th centuries. Did not a progressive separation take place during the preceding centuries, between dogma and spirituality, between knowing and living, between doctrine and holiness - things so united in the writings of the Fathers of the Church? For these latter, it would have been pointless to divide their works between those which dealt with dogma and those which treated of the Christian life (spirituality), a division which we find in the writings of the Cistercians of the Congregations. If, in their writings, theology is put at the service of spirituality, it is because theology is not, in the first place, spirituality.

The Castilian, Aragonese and Portuguese even at this time did not pretend to be pure "contemplatives" in contrast with "practical Christians in the world", but in their simplicity they wished to achieve the early Christian synthesis of action and truth, and to present it again to the Church of their time.

The world in which they found themselves was already no longer that of Dante, who expressed the discord of the world only in order to discover a higher harmony. At the end of the 16th century and at the beginning of the 17th, the realisation that the earth rotated on its axis, and the new Copernican science of the open cosmos had progressively undermined the old theological vision of the world. It had undermined the myth of an obvious or intuitive connection between heaven and earth, nature and grace, knowing and believing, man and God. The answer of the Catholic post-Tridentine reform in attempting to repair this rupture was to centre above all on the theological speculation of the baroque Scholasticism and on mystical ecstasy. The reform attempted to re-think the problems

and tensions through, a new metaphysical synthesis and the science of the saints and the treatises of mystical theology.

The answer of the Spanish Cistercians was much more modest, but no less daring. It consisted in showing the Christian life as the authentic way to philosophise, intending to go on and sketch the place of encounter, literally: the encounter between the Christian life and the monastic life. It is true that they were not able to avoid the unrelatedness of modern thought; but precisely, their intellectual orientation allowed them, while beginning with the Cistercian tradition, to receive and assimilate the Renaissance and Humanism, to dialogue with them, instead of opposing to them distrustfully. But with this critical adaptation, could they continue to maintain the contemplative tension necessary for preserving the sense of the mystery of Christ?

B) The Historical Context :

During the first four centuries of their existence, despite the rivalries that arose very quickly between the Abbot of Cîteaux and the first Fathers of the Order, despite the break up provoked by Joachim of Fiore, the Cistercian Order preserved a great unity, despite its prodigious expansion.

In the middle of the 15th century the first divisions began, ensuing, no doubt, from the weakening of the authority of the General Chapter and of the Fathers Immediate. Nevertheless the divisions had been furthered by the fevers of nationalism which had been on the increase since the end of the Middle Ages and which marked the birth of the modern world. We must not forget other causes, signs of which had been seen earlier. Among them, the most important was the renewal asked for by the Council of Trent and by other authorities, social and ecclesiastical, in different European nations.

A sincere desire for reform led many of the monasteries to look for the basis of their renewal in the regrouping of monasteries, not on a scale as large as that of the Middle Ages, but on a more restricted scale, imposed generally by the geographical regional limits. The reforms relied, not on the old feudal regime, but on the regimes of monarchical centralisation, which were common at the time. The individualism of the Reformation and of the Renaissance caused the development of nationalist feeling and led the separatist tendencies to certain excesses.

This accounts for the rise of the Cistercian Congregations, which gave a touch of originality to the Order of the same name and left a marked influence on the evolution of Cistercian law. All the new congregations aspired to establish their particular law and their own juridical institutions: constitutions and definitions, pontifical bulls, royal privileges, statutes elaborated in the Chapters.

2. The Congregations

A) The Congregation of Castile (1427-1835)

It was the first in order of appearance, and of them all the most exposed to controversy, by reason of two factors principally: the personality of its founder, Martin de Vargas, and the controversies that arose with Cîteaux and the General Chapter.

The beginnings were, indeed, not easy, and for the founder meant being put in prison, deposed, excommunicated by the General Chapter of the Order, and the Congregation even suppressed. In 1458 the measures of suppression were lifted, and up to 1670 the congregation did an enormous amount of work to liberate the monasteries from the commendatory system, restore

regular observance, set up various colleges (the most notable were those of Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares) and promulgate a great quantity of statutory norms and of definitions for the improvement of the original aims. In 1809 more serious difficulties began to appear. These were due to the War of Independence, and thus, by way of various trials, expulsions, returns to and flights from the monasteries, it came to the “*désamortización*”¹ of 1835, when all the monks were expelled from their monasteries and their properties sold, their libraries confiscated and the Congregation suppressed. It is odd to see that the Congregation, without being in an altogether not in an altogether flourishing condition, was not entirely decadent, as was the case with other Orders and religious houses.

Practically the whole of the Capitular Definitions (*Definiciones capitulares*) of the Congregation have been preserved and have recently been transcribed and computerised, although they are not yet published. That means that the “chronicle” of the Congregation’s evolution has been preserved and it is possible to follow the trail of the activities of numerous important monks who played their part in its government and organisation.

The Congregation of Castile is generally known for the flourishing state of its studies. Little emphasis has been placed on the great human and spiritual quality of the “Reformers” and of the abbots of the monasteries, many of whom were wise men and saints. The best evidence of this is the study by P. Roberto Muñiz Biblioteca Cisterciense Española, published at Burgos in 1793, where all the illustrious men and writers from the Spanish Congregations are mentioned.

Among those who distinguished themselves in the Congregation of Castile were : Luis Bernaldo de Quirós, Cipriano de la Huerca, Lorenzo de Zamora, Luis de Estrada, Angel Manrique and Pedro de Lorca, Marcos de Villaba, Miguel de Fuentes and Nicolás Bravo.

Up to the time of its suppression, the Congregation kept the rites of the Order for the celebration of Mass and Office.

The more negative aspects of the Congregation, as in that of Aragon and the Portuguese Congregation from the middle of the 17th century onwards, were the “abuses” for the purpose of obtaining prestigious rank, both ecclesiastical and civil (in the College and the Universities) because all this entailed dispensations from choir and the regular life. Likewise, the legal proceedings for landed properties sometimes tarnished the image of the monasteries, which asserted themselves in too high-handed a manner in the rural areas.

B) The Congregation of Aragon and Navarre (1616-1835):

The origin of this Congregation is different from that of the Congregation of Castile, and took place within the framework of a tendency that developed within the Cistercian Order for monasteries to come together in Congregations. This was a consequence of the great distance between monasteries, the difficulty of being present at the General Chapters, the continual wars at this time between Spain and France and, above all, the nationalist tendency to prefer an independent congregation which would have a national character.

A beginning of this evolution could already be detected, when, in 1418, the abbot of Morimond established a sub-commission, which he sent to Poblet to visit the monasteries of the Peninsula, in order to limit to some extent their practical independence.

A hundred and twenty years later, a Chapter met at Saragossa which decided on the union between the abbots of the kingdoms of Aragon and Navarre. In 1561 King Philip III of Spain witnessed the confirmation of the consent for of an independent Congregation on the model of that of Castile.

In 1616 after a succession of difficulties between the king of Spain, the king of France – Charles IX – and the General Chapter of the Order, Pope Paul V erected the Congregation by the Brief *Pastoralis Officii* (19th April 1616)

This Congregation enjoyed a certain autonomy, while maintaining some connection with the Order: the obligation of being present at the General Chapter, the right of the Abbot General to make visitation, the financial contributions to the Order. Temporary abbatial mandates were introduced, and Chapters to be held every four years. The system of filiations was abolished, and definitors, visitors and a Vicar General were to be elected for four years. The resistance of certain monasteries had to be overcome, particularly that of Poblet, which finally, was forced to join the project.

In 1626 the Provincial Chapter of Rueda published the Constitutions of the Congregation which, with little change, remained in force until the end. In 1634 the monasteries of Navarre definitively joined the Congregation.

Thus the following autonomous monasteries formed the Congregation: four Aragonese monasteries (Veruela, Rueda, Piedra and Santa Fe); four Catalanian (Poblet, Santa Creus, Escarp and Labais); two of Valencia (Valldigna and Benifassar); one of Majorca (La Real); five of Navarre (Fitero, La Oliva, Leire, Irujo and Marcilla). Nine monasteries of women joined these sixteen houses: Trasobares, Casbas and Santa Lucia (Aragon); Valbona, Valdoncella, Saint Hilari and Cadins (Catalonia); La Zaidia (Valencia); Tulebras (Navarre).

The monasteries of men died out in 1835. In 1887 its last Vicar General died, Padre Bruno Lafuente.

C) The Congregation of Saint-Bernard of Alcobaça (1567-1834) :

On 26th October 1567, by the Bull *Pastoralis Officii*, Pope Pius V raised the Portuguese monasteries to the rank of Congregation : the official title was *Congregation of Saint Mary of Alcobaça of the Order of St. Bernard in the Kingdoms of Portugal and El Algarbe*.

The Portuguese monasteries had suffered severely from the commendatory system, and had also received a visit from the Abbot of Clairvaux, Dom Edmond de Saulieu in 1533. The abbey of Alcobaça, the most important abbey in Portugal, was the focus of attraction and union for all the monasteries.

The origin of the reform was very closely connected with the ‘conversion’ of the brother of King John III, Henry – infant Cardinal – who had received Alcobaça ‘*in commendam*.’

There was no explicit intention of separating from the authority of the General Chapter; but, as in other cases, it was already many years since the Portuguese abbots had taken part in this Chapter. Henry obtained from Pope Gregory III the privilege of remaining in charge of Alcobaça and of being the first General of the Congregation, despite the fact that he was neither a monk nor a professed member of the monastic community. He gave two important reasons for this: the monks did not wish to depend on commendatory abbots for their subsistence, and, besides, they wanted superiors for a three year term as in the other Cistercian Congregations.

In externals and in legislation, it acted according to the norms of the Congregations : an ‘Abbot-General’ - in this case, the Abbot of Alcobaça – assisted by a Council and a Definitor; the abbots were elected by the General Chapter and could be elected for a second term. There were Visitors who possessed, especially during the time of General Chapter, full powers of applying the norms of the Congregation. The vow of stability was suppressed, and the monks could be transferred

from monastery to monastery by obedience; the abbots and the local priors were always answerable to the Visitor and the General Chapter for each of their houses.

This Congregation was well organised, with fourteen houses of monks, twelve houses of nuns, two colleges and a hospital.

Many monasteries were in a state of almost complete ruin at the end of the 16th century, and had to undergo an enormous amount of restoration. This work was done, of course, according to the architectural styles of the time.

The spiritual and intellectual renewal went hand in hand with the architectural renewal. The number of monks and of nuns tripled in most of the abbeys and the students in the colleges worked hard. The Portuguese Cistercians kept their observance intact up to 1834, as the statutes of the General Chapter attest.

Unlike the Congregation of Castile, that of Portugal was not notable for its spiritual writers or theologians. The *Biblioteca Lusitana* by Diego Barbosa cites a list of illustrious monks, which was corrected by Manuel de Figueiredo ; but the Portuguese Cistercians were famous as historians. The group of monks known as "The Chroniclers of Alcobaça" published the *Monarchia Lusitana*. P. Bernardo de Brito (1586-1617) published a work, *La Cronica de Ciste*, which if not brilliant, was nevertheless appreciable.

The Portuguese abbeys suffered enormously from the occupation of the French troops of Napoleon ; as also from the prevalent anticlericalism, the influence of freemasonry and the political revolts. After the revolution of 1820 anarchy reigned in the country. A decree of 1831 appointed a 'Commission of General Ecclesiastical Reform.' Alcobaça and the other monasteries had to be abandoned and were pillaged and confiscated. The abbeys were sold at public auctions. The abbeys of women were not closed, but a decree of 1833 forbade them to receive new vocations. After the death of the last nun, sometimes before it, the abbeys of nuns were also confiscated. Little by little the Portuguese houses died out until in 1886, the last remaining house, Arouca, disappeared.

D) General Overview of the three Congregations :

The three Congregations of the Iberian Peninsula endeavoured from the very beginning to re-establish, maintain and improve the Cistercian observance in its purity; this was done without the usages of the medieval time, but by adapting to their times, to the general reforms of the Church and of the religious orders undertaken by the Council of Trent.

The spiritual renewal, the improvements in the area of formation, and a strong unity around the Chapters of Congregations (and their *definitions*) were the most solid supports of the development attained by certain abbeys which, certainly, '*produced*' monks of great merit, both in virtue, and in gifts for government and holiness.

The spiritual and cultural patrimony bequeathed by the Congregations to posterity should be recovered today by the Cistercian Order, in order to promote knowledge of it by the publication and spread of the written works.

In order to get a clear idea of the atmosphere of fervour and enthusiasm which reigned in many monasteries, and of the obstacles which they had to overcome, one could refer to a discourse of P. Basilio Mendoza, well-known as one of those who played an important role in the Congregation of Castile in the 18th century.

His hearers were the monks who were present at the General Chapter of the Sacred Congregation of Castile and Leon, assembled at the College of Palazuelos (Palencia) in the year 1753. He appealed to them to live their monastic commitment fervently so as to be able to pass it on to new generations.

He gives the impression that this is a key moment for the Congregation, calling for faithful leaders fully committed to living the Gospel. We should at least recognise this man and his thought [in this work] as a living message, relevant (for us today) which, expressed in a polished literary style,

allowed his philosophical erudition to come through and disclosed a glimpse of an urgent appeal to respond to the demands of the time. In a kind of introductory discourse, he tries to make it clear that it is not his intention to deliver nothing more than a panegyric, taking advantage of the assembly just to boast, but that his intention is only to stimulate all those present in their work for the Congregation. He sees the latter as being at a moment of splendour, having experienced many misadventures. This experience does not prevent him from recognising objectively how far they are from their origins, which makes him say: “ O Cîteaux! O Cîteaux! If, after six centuries, after much harm done to you, many calamities, which at least did not destroy you, you still shine in such a way, you are resplendent, you are re-born, you deservedly win back the recognition of ‘Order’ - which by epithet, you have merited - what must you have been like at your beginnings!”

Our author appears to be a man of talent, sincere and realistic, an expert in what it is that makes up the fabric of his Congregation, its achievements and its aspirations.

3. Conclusion

It is very difficult to sum up in a few lines, the misadventures of all the Cistercian Congregations, their somewhat fleeting history, the great personalities who were formed in them and who subsequently had an influence on the life of the Order.

However, three basic factors can be discerned :

- a) The Congregations, each in accordance with its region, brought with them a definite desire to revitalise the Cistercian spirit.
- b) The monastic observance came under an extremely strong influence from outside, both from the Church and society, so that the Congregations had to ‘adjust’ their manner of life to the norms imposed on them by the reform movements surrounding them (something which did not happen in the Middle Ages in such a drastic manner, because, during this period European culture was much more uniform, less fragmented and less undermined by nationalist movements and the influence of the temporal powers).
- c) The historical period of the Congregations, from their beginning to their extinction (more or less the middle of the 19th century for them all) was extensive and during this period, the monasteries likewise went through great transformations – from liberation from the commendatory system to relapse into decadence, but, during the period which spanned the 16th century to the end of 17th century the growth of the spiritual, intellectual and community life left profound records which should be studied again.

Questions for reflection :

1. The rise of the congregations is linked with the appearance of nationalities (indeed of nationalisms or even regionalisms). Is this not an issue that can be seen throughout the centuries that followed and which remains a current issue?
2. How does our being rooted in our particular locality colour our monastic life and the way we live ‘observances’?

History of the Cistercian Congregation of Upper Germany

Paper proposed by Dom Kassian Lauterer, Mehrerau.

The Cistercian Congregation of Mehrerau can look back on four centuries of history. Frequently it had to change its name because of the internal developments of the order or because of political upsets. Its juridical continuity, however, did not undergo any real interruption.

The old Cistercian Order was not made up of national or regional congregations. Rather the autonomous abbeys were bound by the principle of filiation, as branches of the same trunk and the same roots, that is to say, bound to the founding house Cîteaux and the four senior abbeys.

As the general chapters and the annual visits of the abbots became more and more impossible because of the geographic extension of the Order, especially in troubled times, regional congregations came into existence with the approval of the Holy See. They remained in union with the Order for the most part but sometimes also led a life completely independent of the General Chapter. So came into being:

- 1425 Martin V, Congregation of Castile (see the previous unit).
- 1497 Alexander VI, Congregation of St Bernard in Italy (see the following unit).
- 1567 Pius V: the Congregation of Portugal (previous unit).
- 1616 Paul V, Congregation of the Crown of Aragon (previous unit).
- 1623 Gregory XV, the Roman congregation (following unit).

1. The Congregation of Upper Germany

The initiative for putting together the Cistercian monasteries of monk and nuns of Upper Germany seems to have come at once from Rome and from Cîteaux. In fact, the decisions of the council of Trent did not affect the Order of Cîteaux directly. The monastic orders had to develop relations between monasteries with a view to reform. In practice, in the German speaking regions of the Order, participation in the general chapter was poor and visitations by the abbots were infrequent. So the order was obliged to change its structure. In any case, Clement VIII encouraged the abbot of Cîteaux, Edmond of the Cross (1584-1604) by two successive briefs to visit the monasteries of Upper and Lower Germany as well as those of the outlying provinces and kingdoms and to hold a provincial chapter. The abbot general set to work at once and visited many monasteries of monks and nuns. His precise accounts, which have been preserved, give a good idea of the extremely fragile personnel situations and of life in the monasteries which was not always edifying. The first provincial chapter was held on 15 November 1593 at Salem, without the abbot General however. The abbots present elected the abbot of Salem, Christian Furst, as *abbas provincialis*.

On the feast of the exaltation of the Cross in 1595, Abbot Edmond of the Cross again convoked a provincial chapter at Furstenfeld. Seventeen abbots responded to the invitation. The most notable event at this chapter was the acceptance of the reform statutes of Furstenfeld, probably drawn up and presented by the abbot general. The successor of Edmond as abbot of Cîteaux, Nicolas II Boucherat (1604-26) visited Germany and Switzerland in 1607 and again in 1608. Already in 1606 Pope Paul V had exhorted the Nuncio of Lucerne, Giovanni Della Tore, to unite all the Cistercian convents of his territory into one Congregation. The idea was acceptable to the abbots of Switzerland, Alsace and Brisgau who had before their eyes the model of the Swiss Benedictine Congregations which began in 1602. The abbot of Wettingen, Peter Schmid (1594-1633), for fear of interference by the German abbots, became an obstinate defender of this 'small scale solution' especially in the interest of the monasteries of nuns.

The Congregation of Upper Germany owes its existence to the energy and involvement of Abbot Thomas Wunn of Salem (1615-1647). On the insistence of the abbot general, he invited to Salem the abbots and delegates of Southern Germany to a meeting on November 1617, for the purpose of founding a congregation. The decisions taken at this meeting did not correspond exactly to the ideas of the abbot of Cîteaux, and so the approbation of the new Congregation does not figure in the list of subjects dealt with by the General Chapter of 1618.

On 12th of November 1618, a new provincial chapter was held at Salem. This undertook the desired changes. On the impetus of this meeting, on the 27th December of the same year, there was a new session to which Dom Nicolas II Boucherat delegated with full powers his commissioner, Fr. Baudouin Moreau, in whose presence the statutes were signed and sealed. At the end of June 1621, an extraordinary provincial chapter was held at Salem. There the question of visitation of monasteries of nuns was raised, as there was still no arrangement for the seven catholic regions of Switzerland. The General Chapter of Cîteaux approved the Congregation of Upper Germany on the 28 May 1623.

At the request of the abbot President, Thomas Wunn of Salem, Pope Urban VIII granted the privileges of the Castile congregation to the new congregation by the *Brief Romanus Pontifex* of July 10 1624. By another Brief of October 17, 1624, *Cum sicut accepimus*, the same Pope exhorted the abbot of Cîteaux to encourage all the abbots of Upper Germany, keeping in mind the wish and desire of his Holiness, to join the said congregation. This was at least an indirect approval by the Pope.

The chapters of 1624 and 1627 at Salem and of 1626 at Kaisheim revised the statutes once again and divided the whole congregation into four provinces. This meant an end to any reservations about too much centralisation. It was in this form that the Abbot General Peter Nivelles approved the statutes on 25 October 1628. The provinces thus erected included

1. The province of Souabe : Kaisheim with the female monasteries of Oberschönenfeld, Niederschönenfeld, Kirchheim and Lauingen; Salem with the feminine monasteries of Wald and Heiligkreuztal, Rottenmünster, Heggback, Gutenzell, Baidt and Neidingen: Schöntal, Stams.

After the Edict of Restitution of the Emperor Ferdinand II, the masculine monasteries of Maulbronn, Herrenalb, Bebenhausen, and Königsbronn and the feminine monasteries of Rechenshofen, Zimmern, Frauenzimmern and Lichtenstern were again part of province for a short while. But efforts at restoration failed.

2. The province of Franconie : Ebrach, with the feminine monastery of Himmelsporten, Langheim, Bronnbach, and Bildhausen.

3. The Bavarian province : Aldersbach with the feminine monastery of Seligenthal, Waldsassen, Walderbach, Raitenhaslach, Fürstenfeld, Fürstenzell, and Gotteszell; to which the monasteries of nuns of Seligenporten and Bülenhofen attached themselves.
4. The province of Switzerland, Alsace and Brisgau: Lucelle with the feminine monasteries of Königsbrück and Olsberg, Neubourg, Hauterive with the feminine monasteries of Maigrange and Fille-Dieu; Pairis, Tennenbach with the feminine monasteries of Günterstal, Wonnenthal, Lichtental and Friedenweiler, Saint Urban with the feminine monasteries of Rathhausen and Eschenbach, Wettingen with the feminine monasteries of Frauenthal, Magdenau, Kalchrain Feldbach, Tänikon, Wurmsbach and Gnadenthal.

It was only in 1642 at Schöenthal that the next chapter of the Congregation was held. There was a small attendance because of the troubles of the war. In 1645 the abbots, some of whom were in exile in Switzerland, met at Wettingen for the sixth chapter of the Congregation. When the Thirty Years War was over, a chapter was held at the abbey of nuns at Rottenmünster near Rottweil, in 1645, under the presidency of the Abbot General, Claude Vaussin. This chapter revised the statutes once again. In Dist. I, Chapter I, it was decided that the superior of the congregation would no longer be called '*President*' but '*Vicar General of the Congregation*' and the four superiors of the provinces, '*Vicar General of the Province*'. Evidently, people at the top were worried about an increasing independence or even a separation of the congregations.

So began the golden age of the Congregation. Freed from the burdens of war, from sackings which sometimes obliged whole communities to flee, the monasteries re-established themselves economically. They began to construct new buildings, to renew their membership, to adopt little by little a stricter discipline, a liturgy following the ancient tradition of the Order, and an *ordo*. New forms of spiritual life such as meditation, an annual retreat, examination of conscience, the promotion of popular piety and of pilgrimages took on fully the Jesuit orientation of South Germany. Many young monks received their theological formation in the great Jesuit schools. Soon the more important abbeys would have their own *studium* and small monastic schools.

In a catalogue of monasteries and personnel done in the *Idea Chronotopographica Congregationis Cisterciensis* throughout Upper Germany there are twenty-two monasteries of monks with 595 priests, 123 professed brothers, 79 lay brothers and 30 monasteries of women with 732 choir nuns, 243 lay sisters. That makes a total of 1772 without counting the novices.

Some efforts of the four senior abbots, especially that of Morimond, to restore the visitations of their lineage according to the structure of the Order and against the law of the Congregation were fully and energetically resisted at the General Chapter of 1667.

The Revolution saw the disappearance of Cîteaux and all the monasteries of the French region. The last abbot of Cîteaux, François Trouvé, retired to his family at Dijon, where he died in 1797, very old and in the forty-ninth year of his abbacy! Before he died, he passed on his full powers over the monasteries of the Congregation of Upper Germany to the President, Abbot Schlecht of Salem who, in turn, passed them on to his successor Caspar Oechsle.

After 1802 and 1803 secularisation destroyed all the monasteries of the Congregation in Germany, except the monasteries of nuns in Seligenthal, Oberschönenfeld and Lichtenthal, where the sisters received permission to live in their monastery till their death. This congregation which was so strong in the past was reduced to Stams in the Tyrol and the three Swiss abbeys of Hauterive, St Urban and Wettingen, as well as the eleven monasteries of nuns in Switzerland.

2. The Swiss Cistercian Congregation

The abbot of Wettingen, Sebastian Steinegger (1768-1807), took up the idea of his predecessor Peter Schmid and did a lot of work to set up a Cistercian congregation in Switzerland. With the help of the Nuncio in Lucerne, the Swiss abbots and abbesses obtained this favour by the decree *In Sublimi Apostolicae Sedis Specula* of Pope Pius VII of 12th December 1806. The last abbot of Salem, Caspar Oechsle, opened the way when, on 3rd October 1806, he renounced all his rights over the Swiss monasteries.

The statutes of the Congregation of Upper Germany were essentially retained. The Superior General was not elected, however – as the papal decree wanted – every three years, but the three abbots took the chair in turn. The Superior General made the visitation in the monasteries of monks, presided at the abbatial elections and confirmed those elected. He could also preside at abbatial blessings in the consistorial abbeys of Hauterive and Wettingen, unless the Nuncio was presiding. In the monasteries of nuns, these duties always belonged to the Fathers Immediate, apart from the confirmation of elections, always asked for from the Superior General.

A letter of Abbot Joseph Fontana, of Santa Croce in Rome, who declared himself Superior General of the Cistercian Order, invited the abbot of Wettingen, Alberic Deutzler, to make a journey to Rome on the occasion of the Jubilee Year. The purpose of the invitation was to negotiate a union of all the abbeys still existing, with the Swiss Cistercians. After consulting the abbot of Hauterive and St Urban, the abbot of Wettingen politely refused the invitation, invoking the political difficulties and the distance. So no chapter of the Congregation was held.

The *Acts of the Helveto-Cistercian Congregation* compiled by the secretary of the Congregation and by the abbot of Wettingen, Alberic Deutzler, later by the Father Abbot Alberic Zwyssig describe minutely, up to 1845, all the events, as well as the acts and actions of the Abbot General.

About 1830 the radical liberalism of the Swiss changed into an ever-stronger anti-clericalism which declared war on all the religious houses. The first victims of this combat were Wettingen in 1841, followed by Hauterive, St Urban and Rathsau in 1848 and the three monasteries of Thurgovie: Kalchrain, Feldbach and Tänikon.

After his three years as Superior General, Abbot Leopold Hoechle of Wettingen (1840-64), although he was banished from his monastery, obtained from Pope Pius IX on 7th October 1849 the power to remain Visitor of the Austrian Cistercian Congregation with the full powers of Abbot General. When the community of Wettingen changed to Mehrerau in Austria, a decree of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars dated 14th August 1854 confirmed that the abbot retained his rights as Superior General of the Swiss Congregation. The acts of the abbot in the abbeys of nuns in Switzerland, as well as the large surviving body of information on and correspondence with the surviving monks of Hauterive and St Urban prove that he exercised those rights.

In 1859 the abbeys of Wettingen-Mehrerau joined with the priory of Stams under orders from Cardinal Schwarzenberg of Prague so as to join the Austrian Cistercian Congregation. But the ex-abbot of Wettingen-Mehrerau remained Superior General of three monasteries of nuns of the Swiss Congregation that had survived.

3. The Swiss German Congregation

When the abbey of Marienstatt was re-founded in 1888 the idea of a revival of the old Congregation of Upper Germany and Switzerland was present. Abbot Maurus Kalkum of Wettingen-Mehrerau (1878-93) and the bishop of Limburg asked the Holy See for approbation of the restoration. It was expressly requested to incorporate the abbey of Marienstatt in the Swiss Cistercian Congregation. The Papal rescript was received on 9th May 1888.

On 17th June 1891 a general chapter of the Order was held at Vienna where the abbot of Hohenfurt, Léopold Wackarz, was elected Abbot General. For Mehrerau the important question was separation from the Austro-Hungarian province. The general chapter accepted this proposition. A decree of the Congregation for Bishops and Religious of 20th July 1891 approved the most important decisions of the General Chapter. This decree also suggests that it might be better for the Order to subdivide itself into three vicariates subordinate to the Abbot General alongside the Italian Congregation, which was already set up. Those would be the Belgian Congregation, the Swiss-German Congregation and the Austro-Hungarian Congregation. There we see the official confirmation by the Pope of the renaissance of the Congregations. The Procurator General, Heinrich Smeulders, was very anxious to avoid the word 'Congregation', but Mehrerau and Marienstatt would not agree as they wanted to preserve the continuity with the Congregation of Upper Germany and Switzerland.

The statutes, rather similar to their models, received the approbation of the Abbot General on 8th March 1894. It was not just to be a vicariate but a Swiss-German Congregation. The function of the Vicar General was given to the abbot of Wettingen-Mehrerau. In the edition of the Catalogue of 1895 Mehrerau, Marienstatt and the two surviving fathers of St Urban are regarded as monasteries of monks. For the nuns, Frauenthal, Magdenau, Wurmsbach, Eschenbach, but also Mariastern-Gwiggen, Rathausen-Vézelise and the two surviving sisters of Gnadenenthal are counted as forming the monasteries of nuns.

In 1898 Mehrerau re-established the old Cistercian abbey of Sticna in Carniole.

As for the monasteries of nuns, Frauenthal, Magdenau and Wurmsbach remained, without interruption, under the direction of the Order and the Congregation. Eschenbach was under the jurisdiction of the Nuncio, later under that of the bishop of Basel who had delegated his powers to the abbot of Mehrerau in 1870.

Maigrauge was able to resume contact with the Congregation in 1901 and to obtain a Father-abbot. Oberschönenfeld remained until 1897 under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Augsburg. After that it was united to the congregation and under the vigilance of the abbot of Marienstatt. Mariastern-Gwiggen put itself under the abbey of Kalchrain in Thurgovie; Feldbach and Tänikon had come back to Mehrerau in 1856, but the question of their incorporation was not clarified for many years. The situation of the convent of Rathausen was similar; after a time at Vézelise, near Nancy, this house settled in 1902 at Thymau near Passau.

The history of the congregation and its development in the twentieth century will remain very closely linked to the historic events in Germany, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland.

Questions to help reflection :

1. This phase of Cistercian history is characterised by a concern for unity. Why is such importance attached to unity? What are the sources of this unity?
2. What are the values on which there ought to be absolute unanimity?
3. In the context of the present time, how would we express fidelity to the values of the Golden Age of Cîteaux? How could we be roused to 'creative fidelity' in the Cistercian family?
4. The fidelity of Cîteaux creates communion between languages and cultures, races and mentalities. How do we see this reality in the concrete life of our communities?

Second part

17th-18th centuries

Reformers searching an authentic renewal

The birth of the Strict [Etroite] Observance

Unit prepared by Soeur Marie-Paule Bart, Peruwelz.

Tracing the reasons for the emergence of the Strict Observance is a difficult task for historians. We still do not know enough about the people involved and the internal and external influences that were at play. It is also quite possible even, that there are still quite a number of documents that have not yet been discovered.

However such a task is not without its benefits: it helps us to come to a better knowledge and, therefore, understanding of different Cistercian trends, and at the same time it offers us the possibility of coming into touch with the Spirit at work at the very centre of our humanity and of our hearts. Hearts which at their very best are capable of a generous reply to God's call, once it has been discerned, a sincere desire to stay faithful to the vows, once pronounced, and the determination to change one's life in consequence. At their worst they can become engrossed in the pursuit of interests that are not quite those of the Kingdom, they can be tempted by power, even spiritual power, and they can become embroiled in the ever present worldly and political influences.

Reflecting upon this period of our history we also find that it can be a source of hope, because God is quite capable of turning the rough stones that we are, into beautiful ones, for his Church and for the service of his Kingdom.

For the sake of clarity we have chosen to use consistently the term 'Etroite' Observance instead of 'Strict'. We realise that in doing so we differ from certain other authors, but we do so in order to avoid confusion with the juridical meaning of the word today.

1. A Changing World, a Self-reforming Church

Historians are inclined to situate the birth of the 'Etroite' Observance at about 1600. We have to realise, however, that this was no spontaneous birth but represents one of the fruits of all that was coming to the life in the 16th century. It is useful, therefore, to place it in its historical context.

A) A Changing World

We are in the period that followed that of the great explorers (Vasco de Gama, Christopher Columbus, Pedro Alvarès Cabral, Magellan) ; and the 16th century also saw the expansion of Europe as overseas empires began to appear. It was also the century when modern nations came into being, nations that wanted independence from former powerful figures, such as the Pope and the Emperor of Germany.

The Italian Renaissance gradually spread throughout Europe and there was renewed interest in classical art, science and especially literature (Machiavelli, Thomas More, Erasmus), and there was printing which allowed a much wider and quicker circulation of written material. All that brought about a new culture, a new vision of life, of the world, and of man.

Despite all this there was still a deep anxiety in the hearts of men and women of that time ; the memory of the disasters of the previous century was still fresh: the Black Death, the Hundred Years War, the Great Schism and the heresies which came from it. Europe had been devastated, death seemed ever present and there seemed to be few who could give guidance to the people and answer their questions about life, death and the after life. While all this was happening the Church

and the Papacy had grown rich and worldly. Thus a desire for reform began to take shape encouraged by the writings of certain Humanists who were studying and publishing the original texts of the Scriptures.

Demands in favour of Church reform came from all over Europe. In 1512 the Second Lateran Council put forward a programme of reform; there was no follow up but at least the Council had recognised the need. Then men who were passionate about the Christ of the Gospels came on the scene (Luther, Zwingli and Calvin...) and thus there developed, unintentionally at first, a movement that broke away from the Catholic Church.

B) A Church in the process of being reformed

The movement of Reform in the Catholic Church did not have to wait for the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the religious orders were already moving:

- The Dominicans under the direction of Catherine of Sienna and Raymond of Capua.
- From 1388, the Franciscans at the Convent of Mirabeau, then Brother Olivier Maillard in the 15th century and Francis of Paul (1436-1507), who founded the Order of Minors.
- The Benedictines in Italy
- Carmel in Spain with Theresa of Avila (1515-1582)
- The Augustinians...

The laity were also affected: they were attracted to a movement which began in the Netherlands at the end of the 14th century, that of 'The Devout Life'. This allowed Christians to lead an exacting Christian life in the world and to make it flourish on their home territory. Neither must we forget the new foundations : the Oratorians, the Jesuits, the Théatines...

It was in this context that the Council of Trent took place.

2. The Council of Trent and the Cistercian Order:

A) 'Decadence' of the Order

When we hear the word 'reform' we imagine a loosening up of discipline, some kind of abuse or failing, which leads to a 'decadent style of life' in comparison with the intentions of the founders. Then, because we see the risk of ruin or even death of a project, we feel the need to react vigorously. If we want to understand properly what is implied by the use of the word 'reform' with regard to the 'Etroite' Observance, we must distance ourselves from this meaning which is too simplistic and remember that, when dealing with two ways of interpreting the same vision and two ways of adapting that vision to the changing times, it is possible to bring about reform by which the two parties remain equally vibrant spiritually. Take Molesme and Cîteaux for example.

Do we have any idea of the state of the Order at the time of the Council ?

If we can believe what is written in the Articles of Paris (1494), "...in several monasteries of the Order the original observance still holds... other abbeys, having deviated from this for a while, have now returned ...while there are still others which are in need of reform." It is clear that this kind of generalisation must be avoided because many things must be taken into account taken: the situation of the abbey, the local history, (wars, looting etc.), the statutes of the abbey, and the kind of people who make up the community!

It is possible, nevertheless, to get some idea of what was happening in the monasteries at this time, from the notes of regular visits and the statutes of successive General Chapters. Here we can see evidence of abuse, which is due in the first place to human weakness, but is then compounded by external circumstances of which the monks are, more often than not, the victims.

The system whereby an abbey had a Commendatory Abbot who administered the monastery but was not necessarily a monk, was undoubtedly the first misfortune which could happen to a monastery; such a person was often looking for the profit that he could make for himself from the monastery.

Consequences of such a system were :

- The monks sometimes did not have enough to eat.
- The Commendatory Abbot sometimes limited the number of novices so that he gained more money for himself. In practice this meant that the vow of poverty was often transgressed because each monk had to fend for himself in so far as food and clothing were concerned, and this in turn led to a weakening of the spirit and practice of the communal life.
- The monks began to go out of their monasteries too often.
- As the supply of funds diminished, so the buildings deteriorated and were not repaired.
- The spiritual life of the monastery became lax; it is hard to live the life wholeheartedly in such conditions.

The effect of War, particularly the terrible destruction of monasteries in those countries where the Reform had taken hold: Hungary, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries and England under Henry VIII, a list that gets longer with the Wars of Religion. The battles and even the troops who passed through the monasteries caused the monks a great deal of suffering. There was also another consequence of war: abbots were unable to meet regularly and in sufficient numbers at the General Chapter, so there was a big gap in the government of the Order and in the way that the discipline in individual monasteries was monitored.

The lack of a true vocation in certain monks. It was becoming the habit for the youngest sons of families to be sent to a monastery so that they need not be given a share in the family heritage. It was evident that many of these young men did not have a monastic vocation and that their presence in the monastery could only result in a certain weakening of discipline and consequently a weakening of the spiritual life of the individual monks. Besides which the peace of the monastery could be disturbed when one of these monks took out a lawsuit against whoever reproached his particular way of life or that of the community as a whole.

B) Application of the Decrees of the Council of Trent in the Order

On December 4th, the day of the closure of the Council, the decree on the Regulars and Nuns was promulgated. Here we read: "Before anything else they should faithfully observe all that relates to the perfection of their religious profession, their vows of obedience, poverty and chastity and any other precepts which are proper to certain Rules or Orders, which apply to their specific way of life and the safeguarding of the communal life, to food and clothing. Superiors will make every effort to ensure that no-one disregards any of these matters, it being understood that it is not within the powers of a superior to relax monastic discipline in anything that relates to the essence of the life."

Three Cistercians were present at this session of the Council: Dom Louis de Baissey, Abbot of Cîteaux, Dom Jérôme Souchier, then abbot of Clairvaux, but who would succeed Dom Louis at Cîteaux, and Nicolas Boucherat who would become abbot of Cîteaux after Dom Jérôme. This shows that from 1560 to 1583, (and even until 1604, because Dom Edmond de la Croix, who succeeded Dom Nicolas, had been Dom Jérôme's secretary at the Council), the superiors of the Order were monks

impregnated with the spirit of Trent and who did all that they could, for more than forty years, to ensure that the spirit became practice. This they did by their visits to the monasteries. These visits were undertaken either by the abbot of Cîteaux himself, or by his Procurator, or by Provincial Vicars named for those areas which, because of the troubled times, were not easily accessible to the normal visitors.

Here are some dates that give an idea of what was involved :

1565 : 25th May : The General Chapter met to try and promote the practice of the Decrees. Some abbots were instructed to visit the monasteries in their countries.

1569 : Nicolas Boucherat, Procurator of the Order, visited Southern Italy and Sicily.

1570 : 1st April: Dom Jérôme Souchier published a list of instructions of how to apply the Decrees of Trent to the Order.

1572 : Nicolas Boucherat visited the Italian monasteries and called a national Chapter there.

1573-1574 : He visited monasteries in Switzerland, Sweden, in Upper and Lower Germany and in neighbouring regions.

1575 : He visited Flanders.

His two successors kept up the pace too: they went to Poland, Bohemia, France, Italy, Savoy, Burgundy, Belgium, Germany, and Dom Edmund even went to Spain. From this list it is easy to see that some real work was done to put the decrees of Trent into practice, despite the difficulties which we have stated above. Thus the ground was being prepared for those who wanted a more rigorous life, to begin to take steps to accomplish it, but with the risk that they would go too far.

C) The Feuillants

A Cistercian Abbey founded in the Toulouse region in the 12th century, Feuillants descended from Morimond but was then affiliated to Pontigny. In 1562 Jean de la Barrière became Commendatory Abbot. In 1573 he decided to make his novitiate so that he could become a regular abbot. After he had made his profession he was “not very well received” by the community at Feuillants, mainly because the monks there were mostly younger sons who had no intention whatsoever of leading a rigorous life. The point was reached where there were even attempts on his life. Wisely, he decided to resign and go back to Toulouse for a while, but returned to Feuillants in 1574 as an ordinary monk. It was only in 1547 that he received the abbatial blessing and on the following May 3rd he announced that he intended to return to a more rigorous observance of the rule. The monks hastened to leave as quickly as they could and joined monasteries more to their liking. Only two professed clerics and two novices remained at Feuillants. Having revived the observances Jean then wanted to return to the primitive observances of Cîteaux; and more vocations began to arrive.

However, carried away by spiritual fervour, Jean began to add more and more observances and the Cistercian authority had to intervene in order to temper his lack of discretion and to safeguard unity. With Dom Edmond, abbot of Cîteaux, opposing him, Jean decided to ask the Pope to intervene and received papal approval of his reform. Monasteries were founded in 1586, San Vito; 1587, Paris; 1589, Bordeaux.

The abbots of Cîteaux and Morimond asked the Pope’s permission to hold a General Chapter at Feuillants. This Chapter took place in 1592 and at it responsibility for Feuillants was taken from the abbot of Cîteaux and his successors and thus Feuillants became an Order in its own right, independent of the Cistercians. The Constitutions were approved in 1595 and these softened a little the austerities which had been introduced at the beginning: thus the monks were allowed to wear sandals instead of going bare foot, and they were allowed to eat eggs, fish, dairy produce and oil. Feuillants went on developing until the Revolution, which was the cause of its suppression.

D) Students at the German-Hungarian college

In 1601 ten students at the German-Hungarian College, influenced by the ideas of reform which had come out of Trent, asked to enter the Cistercian Order. These were men well-trained in Theology and Philosophy and some of them had Masters or Doctoral degrees. They were also marked by the spirituality of the Jesuits and the Cistercian abbots sent their young students to the College to study. The ten signed a Declaration saying that they wished to have a Cistercian formation at Cîteaux and Clairvaux so that they could draw from the very source from which the Cistercian life had sprung into being. However they had no intention of making their stability there; they wanted to return to Germany to work at the reform of the German monasteries.

Six of these students were to die before 1615, four became abbots. Those who went back to Austria joined the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz, apart from one who stayed at Salem. One of them, Antoine Wolfrad, became abbot of Wilhering, then of Kremsmünster (Benedictines) before becoming Prince-Bishop of Vienna in 1631.

E) Orval

We must draw attention, if only briefly, to the work of reform which took place in this monastery.

1. Lambert de Hansimbourg put in place the reforms asked for by the decrees of the Council of Trent and by the Ordinances of Dom Jérôme Souchier.

2. Bernard de Montgaillard, the 'Petit Feuillant' was imposed on the community and he was, therefore, not well received. However he finally managed to impose his views and, reinforcing the reforms of his predecessor, he introduced the 'Etroite' Observance. At this point the 'Etroite' Observance broke through French frontiers but it must always be remembered that future quarrels were for the most part restricted to France, where they were linked with French politics; non-French monasteries did not get involved.

3. Birth of the 'Etroite' Observance

A) The emergence

As we have already seen the practical application of the decrees of the Council of Trent brought about the necessary reform of the Church and therefore of the monasteries. At the end of the 16th century, as can be seen from an enquiry at the time of a change of Abbot at Orval, the tridentine reform was being lived in certain monasteries and consequently a desire to go back to the primitive Observance began to be expressed here and there. In the first place there was nothing said formally and in some monasteries monks, 'reformed' and 'unreformed', lived side by side, the two styles of life not being all that different. For a reform to be of any importance, to be co-ordinated and to take on an official structure, there must be individuals for whom the idea is of such importance that it becomes part of their lives, and who also have strong enough personalities to attract others to be their disciples.

For the expansion of the 'Etroite' Observance there were notably three men, three monks :

- Dom Denis LARGENTIER, Abbot of Clairvaux, who supported the movement without ever becoming part of it juridically.
- Dom Octave ARNOLFINI who took the first steps.
- Dom Etienne MAUGIER, who joined them and who worked at reform with a passion which was sometimes excessive.

They were supported and assisted by the humble and discreet, but none the less influential, Dom Jérôme PETIT, Abbot of Étoile.

B) The men

Dom Denis LARGENTIER

Dom Denis was born at Troyes in 1557 and he entered Clairvaux when he was sixteen years old. He studied at the College of St. Bernard in Paris and after being Procurator of the Order in Rome he was elected abbot of Clairvaux. What kind of person and monk was Dom Largentier? He was probably quite humble because he chose as his spiritual director Dom Jérôme Petit who was much younger than he was. The author of the 'Life' of Père Jérôme writes: "Dom Denis Largentier, who was at home among kings and princes and had the respect of lords, in order to keep his conscience clear and to follow strictly the observance of the Rule, chose our kind Father Jérôme for his master and director, and was so humble and obedient in following his orders that he was an example to all the other novices and professed in the house. He did the ten days' exercises under Dom Jérôme's direction, so zealously and courageously, with so much mortification and such austerity, that he encouraged even the lukewarm and the cowardly to practise virtue. He expressed his sorrow for his faults and asked for a penance and did every thing that a young novice would do in order to progress in virtue." Dom Largentier was also very careful about fulfilling his role as Father Immediate and used the visits he made to the daughter houses to introduce the reform. He would also pick out monks whom he judged to be open to the question of reform and, if they were young monks, he would take them back to Clairvaux to form them or he would give them responsibility for one of his abbeys. Some examples:

- Dom Octave Arnolfini, abbot of La Charmoye, whom he had elected abbot of Châtillon.
- Etienne Maugier, about whom the author of his life wrote: "Dom Denis Largentier, abbot of Clairvaux, had a burning zeal for the Order and was looking for men who could help him in such an important work. He had heard the Prior of l'Aumône preach on several occasions and realised what great graces God had given him; he thought him to be the right person to bring about the Reform which he had planned. He pleaded so forcibly with the Reverend Abbot of Cîteaux, with whom he shared the same understanding of the Order and the same perception of what was good for it, to allow him to change his filiation from Cîteaux to Clairvaux, which he did."
- Dom Jérôme Petit: "Dom Largentier, Abbot of Clairvaux, was making his visit to the Abbey of Montiers. Having seen Dom Jérôme, he wanted him at Clairvaux, so he asked the abbot and the community who all agreed immediately. He was sent to Clairvaux to make a second stability and to renew his vows, which he had first made when he was under the required age.
- Dom Jacques Minguet, a young monk at Clairvaux, who was sent by Dom Denis to Châtillon where the abbot, Dom Octave Arnolfini was trying to bring about the reform. This meant that there was another monk there who was favourable to the reform.
- Dom Louis Quinet, whom Dom Denis met at Val-Richer, and whom he sent to study under Dom Octave Arnolfini. These monks were to meet regularly either at the College of St Bernard, during visits to the monasteries or during consultations with Cardinal Rochefoucauld, in difficult circumstances where they too often became involved in human pettiness and political interests.

It is also interesting to note that Dom Largentier was a conciliatory person; although he believed in reform he did not force it upon others, even if he did send men who were pro-reform to key positions in certain monasteries, or changed monks from one house to another to help with the

cause of reform. He was on the side of reform but he was never part of it in a juridical sense. Quite simply he lived what he believed and was respected for it. After he died on October 5th 1624, the tensions and hostility between the two observances began.

Dom Octave ARNOLFINI

Without in any way minimising the influence of the others it is possible to see Dom Octave as the initiator of the 'Étroite' Observance, the one who went further than the reforms recommended by Trent. The only other exception is Jean de la Barrière, but he eventually separated from them. Dom Octave was born in Lyon in 1579 and his father was from Tuscany. He spent his adolescence at the court of Henry IV. In 1598 he was made commendatory abbot of Charmoye. He worked hard at improving the material aspect of the monastery, then in 1602-3 he made his novitiate at Clairvaux under the direction of Dom Largentier and pronounced his vows there. On 5th July he was recognised by the king as the regular abbot of Charmoye. There was a strong friendship between Dom Largentier and Dom Arnolfini, a friendship that was put entirely at the service of the expansion of the reform in the daughter house of Clairvaux when Dom Octave was elected Abbot of Châtillon on February 24th 1605. Up to that time nothing had been written down and there had been no official decision; there were little islands of reform but there was not necessarily any link between them. Clairvaux, la Charmoye, Châtillon, Cheminon and Prières were the main centres.

The first 'official' act was made on May 9th 1606 at the College of St. Bernard, Paris. Etienne Maugier, monk of l'Aumône, and Abraham Largentier, monk of Cîteaux, signed the text, in which they affirmed: "We promise that, after having been enlightened by the truth, we will meticulously observe and keep the Rule, the precepts, sanctions and constitutions which will come to us from General Chapters. But we will pay no regard to any dispensations which may be introduced by the Holy Pontiff..."

This can be considered as the founding text. This time, publicly, and without ambiguity, there was an obvious intention to create a new form of life. Don Arnolfini would work energetically at implementing this.

Dom Etienne MAUGIER

Dom Etienne had a strong personality; he believed in reform and would even take measures which could be considered suspect to bring it about and impose it on everyone. The part he played in the expansion of the 'Étroite' Observance was of capital importance and he counted no cost in serving this cause. Born in 1573, he entered Aumône around 1584 and was professed in 1589. After studying at the College of St. Bernard in Paris where he obtained a degree in Theology, he was made Prior of Aumône and ordained priest. In 1604 he was back in Paris; it was at this time that Dom Largentier asked him to join him. He signed, with Dom Arnolfini and Abraham Largentier, the Declaration of the 5th May affirming their determination for reform. On December 6th 1608 he succeeded Dom Arnolfini, who had become abbot of Châtillon, as abbot of Charmoy. From that moment on his zeal for reform knew no bounds. He was helped in this by the different offices that he was asked to take on in the Order and which gave him the opportunity to act, namely: Superior at Port-Royal du Champ (1609-1625), Superior at Maubuisson, but also, in 1609, assistant to the abbot of Clairvaux. He was seen intervening in the Abbey of Lys and supporting Dom Bernard Carpentier in the reform of the Abbey of Prières.

In 1623, with Dom Octave Arnolfini, he visited the fifty-eight monasteries affiliated to Cîteaux and on July 28th, Dom Nicolas II Boucherat named him Vicar of ten monasteries of the 'Étroite' Observance, a nomination which was renewed in 1628 and 1634 by Dom Pierre Nivelles and confirmed in 1635 by Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, Apostolic Visitor, and then in 1636 by Cardinal de Richelieu, the new abbot of Cîteaux. On March 11th of that same year he signed the Prescriptions drawn up by Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld for the reform of the Cistercian Order.

In July 1624 he convoked a Chapter for the 'Etroite' Observance at Vaux-de Cernay.

In 1626 he convoked another Chapter this time to draw up the Constitutions. He constantly asked Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld to impose the 'Etroite' Observance on all the French monasteries and he was present at each consultation organised by the Cardinal on this subject: in November 1633, February, April, and May 1634. He worked in close collaboration with other promoters of the reform: Dom Largentier and Dom Arnolfini, of course, but also with Dom Jérôme Petit and Dom Jean Jouaud, his assistants in his role as Vicar General.

Dom Jérôme PETIT

Perhaps less well known than these others, he equally had an important part to play in the institution of the 'Etroite' Observance. Born in 1586, he entered the novitiate at Montiers in 1600 where, according to the author of his 'Life' "...he gave himself entirely to the practice of virtue," whilst "the religious were living a lax life and were trying to get him to abandon his devotions." He made his profession there. In 1603 when Dom Largentier was visiting that monastery he took Jérôme to Clairvaux where he became a member of the community. After studying with the Jesuits and at the College of St Bernard he became responsible for the studies at this College and was ordained priest. About 1617, Dom Arnolfini asked that Dom Jérôme be allowed to go to Châtillon to help with the reform there. After a stay at Cheminon where he consolidated what he had begun with Dom Maugier he became Master of Novices at Clairvaux, the perfect post to sow the seeds of reform. When he was named Abbot of Étoile, he worked at the renewal of the monastery while at the same time going with Dom Arnolfini and Dom Maugier to the consultations with Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld. With Dom Maugier, he accompanied the Cardinal when he visited the College of St. Bernard 'manu militari' in May 1634. On 15th September 1634, he was named first assistant of Dom Maugier. If we remember that Dom Largentier chose him as spiritual director then we realise what a major role he played in the birth of the 'Etroite' Observance. He died at the age of forty-nine on October 25th 1635.

4. The Etroite Observance : an ideal, some men

A) Important points made by the reformers

Once again we find the strong influence of the Council of Trent but this time in reference to the Rule of St. Benedict and the first Fathers of Cîteaux, in fact at times the influence of the New Monastery is very obvious:

"...Promise and determination to observe the Rule of St. Benedict to the letter, as laid down by the Statutes, Constitutions and Decrees of the earliest General Chapters..." (Declaration of May 9th 1606)
 "... to respect the Rule with the same generosity as our holy Fathers showed..." (Monks of Châtillon March 12th 1622)

Then began the adaptation of certain observances, in order that they would be lived in the same way as they were in the earliest years, with particular reference to St Bernard: poverty, silence, common life and enclosure, the care to be taken when reciting the Divine Office. However, a certain stress was laid on asceticism and practices of mortification: a return to fasts on top of those prescribed by the Church, and especially, in line with the Rule, abstinence from meat. This latter came to symbolise the 'Etroite' Observance, although, in fact, it was just one practice among others. We also see a more important place being given to manual labour, which had been gradually abandoned.

We can see some examples of this in the 'Life' of Dom Petit: "He retired to his room or to the chapel to pray. Often he would go up to the bell tower to get some cord which he would wear round his waist next to his skin." At Châtillon he began to resemble St. Bernard, observing every point of the Rule: he was the first to come down to church, to prayer, to work and to all the exercises of the monastery; he often gave himself the discipline, using iron chains, and he nearly always wore a hair shirt, he fasted all the time, was prompt to obey and was content to do the most menial of jobs in the monastery. "Rev. Father Dom Etienne Maugier, seeing how this good abbot worked, wanted to do the same and, during his stay at l'Étoile, he worked in the same way as the other monks despite the fact that he was the Vicar General. Dom Petit's "devotion to the Holy Virgin" was also noted.

B) The "War of Observances"

It would take too long, neither is it necessary, to go into the details of the struggle which brought about the confrontation between the Common and 'Etroite' Observances, All we need do is to look at the people who were involved and what was at stake:

- The "reformers", like others of similar calibre, were passionate men, a passion which leads to a genuine conversion of life but can also lead to a person becoming attached to his own views and determined to impose these on others.
 - The quarrel between the abbots which is almost a part of tradition, a quarrel which did not allow for peaceful and fraternal discussion.
 - The hasty methods which were used :
 - * Monks were thrown out of their monastery so that 'Abstinentes' could take their places.
 - * It was forbidden to take novices unless they were seen to be future 'Abstinentes'. These could only be seen as ways of ensuring the disappearance of the Common Observance sooner or later.
 - The quarrel between the abbot of Cîteaux and the proto-abbots, for example the threats made by the proto-abbots that they would declare null and void the statutes of the General Chapter which Pierre Nivelles had convoked on 20th August, because he had written 'Abbot General' after his signature, as his predecessors had always done.
 - The disparaging statements when Richelieu was in power.
 - The political situation in Italy.
 - * The wars which resulted in Spain becoming an enemy.
 - * Italy is hated by Spain because of Marie de Medici, and Dom Octave Arnolfini is Italian!
- To want to create a Congregation was to follow the example of Italy and Spain (and their congregations were judged to be 'nationalist'). It was also to separate from the Order going against the Charter of Charity. The struggle was a question of who had the greatest influence: the King or the French Parliament.

Some dates to remember, some facts :

Until 1618 : peaceful co-existence of local movements

- 1613 : The monks of Châtillon, through the mediation of the abbot of Clairvaux, asked Dom Nicolas Boucherat II for permission to abstain from meat and to observe the fasts laid down by the Rule.
- 1614 : March 14th, reply from the abbot of Cîteaux saying that as their request would have an effect "...on the unity, the conformity and the peace of the Order," he would have to refer the matter "to the proto-abbots and ask for their consent." He added that, "abstinence is only the outside of the fruit, what is inside is the essential." Permission was granted to the Châtillon monks on Easter Sunday, 30th March, until the next Chapter. Other monasteries received the same permission under the same conditions.

1618 : General Chapter : The whole matter was taken to the highest authority and this became a turning point.

Nicolas II praised the observances of the reform as being in conformity with the Rule, but at the same time the Chapter was concerned about the unity of discipline within the Order. A compromise was reached:

- The Common Observance will abstain from meat from September 14th to Easter and will keep the fasts of the Order all through the year.
- From now on the 'Etroite' Observance will conform to the rest of the Order.

But no one was really satisfied :

- The Common Observance feared that there would be further restrictions in the future.
- The 'Etroite' Observance was not ready to give up total abstinence, and wanted to see it spread to the whole Order...

The two parties began to confront each other.

1620 : December 31st: Claude Largentier is elected co-adjutor to the abbot of Clairvaux. Dom Maugier is disappointed and tries to change this. Conflict at Clairvaux between 'Abstinentes' and the 'Ancients.'

1622 : Gregory XV names Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld,, 'Apostolic Visitor of the Orders of St. Benedict, of St. Augustine and of Cîteaux.' As a result of this, the question of the 'Etroite' Observance would from now on be treated by an authority external to the Order.

July 15th, Louis XIII promised the Cardinal his support.

1623 : January 30th : A special commission, without a Cistercian representative, put forward a plan to turn the 'Etroite' Observance into a Congregation.

May 15th: General Chapter with vote on decrees for reform. Total rejection of the idea of a Congregation. However the Chapter allowed the 'Etroite' Observance to abstain from meat all year round.

July 28th: Intermediate Chapter at which Dom Maugier was named Vicar General for the 'Etroite' Observance and was given permission to hold a special Chapter.

October 12th: de la Rochefoucauld sent a decree to the novitiates. The idea of a Congregation is put forward again. The 'Ancients' would be supportive but would play no part in the running of the monastery

1624 : July 11th: First Chapter of the 'Etroite' Observance at Vaux de Cernay.

September 4th: Nicolas II Boucherat approved the statutes of this Chapter apart from the election of the Priors.

October : Dom Denis Largentier was at Orval. The 'Etroite' Observance, therefore, had moved outside France.

October 25th: Dom Largentier died at Orval. The conflict worsened.

November 9th: Installation of Dom Claude Largentier, whom the 'Abstinentes' refused to recognise; the Prior was suspended. Clairvaux went over to the Common Observance.

1625 : Death of Nicolas II Boucherat, abbot of Cîteaux.

Thus there was :

At Clairvaux : between April 1625 and June 1626: Controversy over Dom Claude Largentier.

At Cîteaux : between May 1625 - May 1626: Controversy over the abbatial election.

1626 : May 13th: Dom Pierre NIVELLE became abbot of Cîteaux. He experienced opposition from the proto-abbots for a while.

After these elections, the abbots of Cîteaux and Clairvaux were no longer favourably disposed towards the Etroite Observance.

1628 : General Chapter: it ordered that those who did not want abstinence should not be sent to houses of the 'Etroit' Observance, and, on the other hand, those who wanted to abstain should not be sent to houses of the Common Observance, so that "unity should not be broken." This Chapter named Dom Octave Arnolfini Vicar General of the 'Etroite' Observance.

1632 : Second Apostolic visit from Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld. He gave the 'Etroite' Observance their Statute.

1633 : August: the Cardinal called together the abbot of Cîteaux and the proto-abbots. Only the abbot of Pontigny arrived. Similar convocations were also ignored.

1634 : February 16th: a plan was put forward to introduce the 'Etroite' Observance into the main houses of the Order.

March 20th: Letter under seal convoking the proto-abbots to Paris and forbidding the General Chapter.

May 5th: Dialogue between the Cardinal and the Common Observance broke down.

May 9th - 12th: visit "manu militari" to the College of St. Bernard.

May 19th: New propositions put forward by the Common Observance. These were rejected.

June: Appeal to the King. During the summer the two sides choose Richelieu as mediator.

November 25th: the King's Council ordered the gradual application of the Prescriptions ('Sentence') of de la Rochefoucauld in the monasteries, but said that they must be applied immediately in the College of St. Bernard.

1635 : March 25th: Articles of Royaumont.

May 6th: Royal authorisation for the convocation of a national Chapter.

Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld feared that this Chapter would attack his 'Sentence', especially as his term of office as Visitor ended on September 10th. He did everything he could to have his reorganisation imposed before this date.

September 6th: de la Rochefoucauld, himself, introduced the 'Etroite' Observance into the College of St. Bernard.

September 10th: His mandate as Apostolic Visitor ended.

October 1st: and the days following : National Chapter. He rejected the Prescriptions, declared them null and void, and approved the Articles of Royaumont.

End of October: Resignation of Dom Pierre Nivelles in favour of Richelieu.

November 16th: The Sacred Congregation annulled all the Acts of de la Rochefoucauld that impinged on the authority of the abbot of Cîteaux.

November 19th: Richelieu is 'elected' abbot of Cîteaux. But the programme that he proposed was similar to that of de la Rochefoucauld. The 'Etroite' Observance was imposed on Cîteaux.

1642 : Death of Richelieu. The struggle started again between the 'Ancients' and the 'reformed' for the position of abbot of Cîteaux.

1643 : January 2nd: The 'Ancients' bypassed the decisions of the Council of State and, supported by the Parliament of Burgundy, elected Claude Vaussin. This resulted in arguments and intrigue on the part of the 'Abstinentes' and appeals to the King and to Rome...

1646 : January 15th: Claude Vaussin was installed as Abbot of Cîteaux, and Jean Jouaud made obedience to him on behalf of the 'Etroite' Observance. But nothing was clear, the two sides got deeper into litigation with the civil authorities, which did not help matters.

5. The Apostolic Constitution *In suprema*

A new stage was reached when, on June 18th 1661, the Council of State once again demanded that the Prescriptions of de la Rochefoucauld should be put into practice. There remained one course of action for the Common Observance: an appeal to Rome. Dom Claude Vaussin met Pope Alexander VII on November 29th. The Pope recognised the basic need for a general reform and in order to invite reflection on what such a reform might imply, he published a "Brief" on January

16th 1662. The abbots of the 'Etroite' Observance made appeal to the King against the Instruction putting its legality into question. Once again three years were to pass, of discussion, lawsuits and so on, before the Council of State sent everyone to the Papal Commission!

Claude Vaussin went to Rome and the 'Etroite' Observance sent two delegates, Abbot de Rancé and Dom Dominique Georges, abbot of Val-Richer. In the end, on April 19th 1666, Alexander VII published the Bull *In suprema*.

This Bull made direct reference to the Rule of St. Benedict, something which neither of the two parties could argue with, and it affirmed that the reform of the Cistercian Order, in line with the Council of Trent, was a return to the Rule. The Pope pressed home this point by commenting on the chapters and deriving from them certain concrete applications:

- The limits of the rights of abbots.
- Regular visits and the status of the proto-abbots.
- The General Chapter and abbot visitors.
- Silence.
- Divine Office.
- The dormitory, the common life and poverty.
- Abstinence: where it was already practised it should be kept, but when someone entered he could opt not to practise it.
- The practice of the monastic fasts.
- The Definitors, a chapter which gave a definite advantage to the 'Etroite' Observance.
- The recommendation that the proto-abbots should promote the 'Etroite' Observance.

The result of this Bull was that the unity, so dear to the Cistercians was saved: the discipline was the same for everyone with the exception of abstinence from meat. As for the 'Etroite' Observance it remained under the authority of the abbot of Cîteaux while at the same time retaining a certain independence. The Bull brought with it a certain hope for peace and there is little doubt that it helped in avoiding a total break. However men do not easily give up their wishes or their prerogatives and, unfortunately, other matters of discord arose from the decisions of 1666.

After all this there is one question that immediately comes to mind: what, at the deepest level, is the essence of the Cistercian life, if one accepts that many of the external practices are linked to certain times and places? No doubt the Holy Spirit has the answer...

Documents

1. Source text : Letter of Nicolas II Boucherat to Dom Denis Largentier, in Polycarp ZAKAR "*Histoire de la Stricte Observance de l'Ordre cistercien depuis ses débuts jusqu'au Généralat du Cardinal de Richelieu*" Document 4, p 144-145 ; Editiones Cistercienses, Rome, 1966.

"Dom Nicolas II Boucherat to Dom Denis Largentier concerning the petition of the monks of Châtillon, 14th March 1614

Sir,

Our rule commands me not to neglect the good of those confided to my care. In my capacity as spiritual father of the whole Order, I owe it to them to obtain the growth of all things, material and spiritual. Thus I rejoice in the Lord and give thanks to Him, when I learn that some monks are advancing on the monastic way, on condition of course, that it is done according to the spirit of our

legislator, Benedict. If not, the apparent link will just be damaging. Now, permission to eat meat was given to us by the Holy See. But I have no doubt on this point: those who did not accept this concession when it was accorded to us - which is the case in certain priories of monks and some monasteries of women in Lower Germany - because they were content to keep the exact prescription of the observance, have shown themselves to be more perfect than if they had gone out rejoicing at the concession of the Holy Father.

But those who have accepted this grace could not have done so without permission. It is this permission which you have asked for three times now, and through you, because you are their abbot, the religious of Châtillon ask for this permission. As abbot you have the power to exempt anyone in communal or personal matters, but not in that which regards the whole Order, so that the Order is not troubled nor charity broken. That is why you have kept me up to date.

The affair is important because it touches the Order as a whole, I cannot make a decision except after mature reflection and with the consent of the first abbots. This cannot be done until the next General Chapter, which will give an answer on the subject. I wish therefore - so that everything is as it should be - that our brothers at Châtillon would keep the common observance until after Pentecost. I promise you that we will have looked at it by then, will have reflected together and will be able to satisfy these brothers, allowing them to abstain perpetually from meat, but in accordance with our Rule.

My dearest wish is that each one will take a general resolution to return to this early observance, one which all have received and observed, but with a view to making it truly agreeable to God. In fact, with regard to our vows, it is from a secondary observance that we have been dispensed. It is only something that accompanies the fruit and the essence of what our vows involve.

It would be advisable to establish what we cannot be dispensed from, for example community life and sharing of goods and to put this into practise in the way recommended by our Rule. In sum to be truly and freely poor, according to the vow which we have made to God.

The same should be done for obedience and the respect due to Superiors, which must be lived better than they are at present. It is absolutely forbidden to allow women into our monasteries, however young they may be. The enclosure itself must be fixed - I am speaking about monasteries of men - as it has been in the past. It is practised now in several monasteries of Upper Germany where the monks - if they do not have a job that necessitates it - never leave the cloister and where no one speaks to another without permission or necessity.

If all that does not remain vigorous, abstinence from meat and all other external observances will be, in my opinion, vain and without merit. However, in this, as in all that touches the reform of our Order, I want to subject my judgement to the advice and council that you and your brother abbots give.

During this time, Sir, I will ask the Creator to continue to give you His grace.
I recommend myself to your kindness and to your Holy Prayer.

From Cîteaux 14th March 1614

Your very humble and affectionate brother and confrere Nicolas, abbot of Cîteaux"

2. Constitution *In suprema* of Pope Alexander VII, 19th April 1666

Translated into English from an unpublished translation of Père Placide Vernet, which is published here with his kind agreement

Article 12 : The visitors of the provinces of the Common Observance Monasteries (...) will be chosen not only from among the 'tested' religious of the Common Observance, but also, if they find it expedient from the religious of the 'Etroite' Observance or the 'Abstainers', to whose advice and help they can have recourse in order to get on with putting the present reform into practice. (c.f. R.B. 3)".

Article 31 : "The postulants are received by the visitor of the Province and the novice master: then examined by them, and if it seems appropriate, they will receive the habit and will be tried in such a way that they understand well that, apart from the abstinence of meat, they will be held throughout their lives to all the chapters of the Holy Rule as they are presented here (cf. R.B. 58)".

Article 35 : In the future, no one will be elected as abbot General of the Order of Cîteaux unless he is specifically professed in the Order; if not the election will be null and void, *ipso jure* and the electors will, without prior warning, be deprived of active or passive vote for the rest of their lives (...)

And one will avoid, in these elections, all ambition and disordered procedures, but they will be carried out by scrutiny according to the canons, and all the monks of the said Order, of whichever Observance, will hold passive vote provided no other impediment is found. (cf. R.B. 35)

Article 39 : "And so that in the future everyone everywhere will live under a single rule, with the same charity and with identical customs, and so that all those of either sex belonging to the Order know what constitutes a stricter Observance (apart from the abstinence of meat) a short, clear compilation and resumé will be made of all the apostolic constitutions and statutes which have not been repealed by contrary usage or for some other reason (...)

Article 40 : "We have no intention of harming the monasteries of the reformed monks in the kingdom of France or their strict observance. On the contrary our intention is to encourage, this Strict Observance in its laudable manner of living and to use our pastoral office to help its preservation and development. That is why we caution and seriously admonish the abbot of Cîteaux and the first four abbots, in the name of the Lord. We order them in virtue of obedience not only to protect the Strict Observance and to surround it with the zeal of their charity, but also to apply themselves, according to their strengths, to spread and disseminate it so that daily, with the blessing of the Lord, it will bear more abundant fruit for the Church militant."

Questions for reflection :

1. With this unit we begin into a time of reform. Does this demand for reform not seem to be linked to the Cistercian charism ? Why ? Do we not have, in the life of each community, small reforms to put into place, the right times, times of salvation, when God calls us to a renewal of heart and of our ways of being ? What are these times? How do we welcome them ?
2. Reflect on this assertion, "A life which has no bite is not Cistercian." (M. Casey, *Collectanea* 1998:1 p. 23)
3. At the beginning of reform, as at the foundation of Cîteaux, there is often a core group of brothers or sisters. Can we not recognise in that a steadfast expression of Cistercian grace as community grace?
Does this steadfastness have its source in the Rule ? How can we live this dimension of our calling ?

A generation of Reforming Women

Paper prepared by Mr. Alain Guerrier, Blois.

One of the basic facts about the religious vitality of modern France is the involvement of a whole society of young women in the monastic renewal by the reform of the older Orders or the creation of new Congregations. Four of them, who are quite well known, were born in 1591. They were :

- Jeanne de Courcelles de Pourlans (1591-1652) reforming abbess of Tart.
- Françoise de Néréstang, (1591-1652) reforming abbess of Mégemont, then of La Bénisson-Dieu.
- Angélique Arnauld (1591-1661) reforming abbess of Port Royal.
- Louyse Perrucard de Ballon (1591-1668) foundress of the reformed Bernardines of Savoie, who came from the Abbey of Sainte-Catherine of Semnoz.

1. Vocation and family strategy

The families of these four nuns belonged to the middle aristocracy and they had long standing connections with the Cistercian order. Profiting from their friendship with princes and knowing how to use the commendatory system, these families sent their daughters to Cistercian abbeys hoping that they would rise to the rank of abbess. In this way they hoped to win renown, recognition and power for themselves as they had seen happening in recent history. With this in mind then, and in line with the customs of the time, these future reformers entered the monastery at a young age and were educated there.

Jeanne de Courcelles de Pourlan was brought up in the monastery of Tart until the age of fourteen or fifteen. She was taken home by her family when she became ill and at that time felt no attraction either for marriage or for the religious life. Eventually, attracted by the choral Office, she entered the community of Poor Clares at Migettes. When the office of abbess became vacant at Tart her father obtained it and finally managed to make her accept it, even seeing to all the formalities himself. Thus Jeanne received the abbatial blessing, did a year's novitiate again and made profession at the end of 1618.

Françoise de Néréstang was put in the position of abbess at Mégemont by her father, whilst her brother Claude became abbot at La Bénisson-Dieu. Her father, in order to make his daughter's life more comfortable, succeeded in obtaining the permutation of these two abbeys. This took place on the 2nd and 3rd of July under the supervision of Dom Denis Largentier, abbot of Clairvaux.

Jacqueline-Angélique Arnauld was coadjutrice at the age of eight and became abbess at the age of eleven!

Louyse de Ballon affirmed at an early age the choice her parents had made and was a novice at the age of seven.

2. A sad situation

These four young girls entered ancient Cistercian abbeys, all founded in medieval times. But in the 17th century each of these abbeys was in a sad state both from a material and a moral point of

view. The commendatory system and the wars of religion had diminished their temporal goods and contributed to a relaxation of observance.

Thus we learn that at Tart ... *they abandoned abstinence and instead gave themselves up to the demands of the body ; the Religious, far from shunning the dealings of the secular world, actively sought it out; as a consequence the monastery received so many visits it became a place of constant comings and goings or, if you like, a guesthouse never empty of people, men and women, all were received irrespectively. Solitude and mental prayer were banished ; the sisters danced and amused themselves as though they were in a secular house or rather an Academy; so their spirit was completely worldly, surrounded only by luxury, vanity and pleasure. They had altered their habit to such an extent that one would not recognise them as religious. Only the veil and wimple remained and even these were arranged in such a way as not to prevent them from curling their hair or taking them off. Neither did they prevent them from wearing ear-rings or pearl necklaces which could be seen through their starched, transparent wimples. Their black and white habits were made of silk and their underskirts of the best material available, decorated with silver or gold lace. Anyone would take them for brides rather than the religious spouses of Jesus Christ.*

Similar descriptions are written about the abbey of Sainte-Catherine of Semnoz. However, one has to make allowances for these biographical accounts which tended to over emphasise these features in order to highlight the work of the reformers. At Port Royal apart from the enclosure, community possessions and extravagant dress, the nuns lived a reasonably regular life.

But, without being scandalous, this way of life was tolerated less and less by a part of society who could no longer see in these religious the heroines or saints which the catholic Reform needed.

3. The desire for reform and its implementation

The work of each of the four reformers began with a realisation – sometimes even a crisis – concerning the demands and obligations of the abbatial office or of the monastic life. The council of Trent had reminded the whole Church about these duties. Sometimes this realisation was brought about through another sister in the community, a confessor or a particular event.

An early maturity seems to have led Françoise de Néréstang towards a more regular life. It was the realisation of the obligations of her office which led Jeanne de Courcelle to re-establish the complete observance of the Rule of St. Benedict. Angélique Arnauld was deeply moved by a sermon on the humiliations of the Son of God. Louyse de Ballon carried out her duties satisfactorily, but was urged on to greater fervour when challenged by a cousin. This cousin had been a worldly nun too, but had a sudden conversion following a scandal which had befallen another member of the family who was also a religious.

This desire for reform burned strongly in the heart of each of these nuns as their writings testify. Reform was something which they ardently desired and hoped for and this spurred them on.

But reform was more than just a human work, the re-establishment of observances: it was the work of God, based on the Passion of Christ as Louyse de Ballon wrote. That is why the ‘grace of reform’ was immediately asked for in prayer.

But wherever this reform was put into practice it brought with it a great deal of trouble and suffering; lack of understanding and opposition from subordinates, sisters, families and authorities. Faced with difficulties the reformers acted with prudence and patience and without violence. They preached by example rather than by command. But they were not able to prevent the splits in their communities at Mégemont, Tart and Sainte-Catherine.

The different reforms had common elements: the re-establishment of enclosure, the sharing of material goods, regular prayer and the return to a more austere life-style. This austerity was

manifested in the wearing of a habit which was simple and poor. But nowhere, in the abbeys studied, did they go back to a communal dormitory, they all had individual cells, however basic these might be. In all these abbeys great attention was given to what would nourish, support and give expression to the interior life. This interior life was seen as the mainspring of the reform.

4. The sources and points of reference for the reform

The four nuns placed themselves under the authority of the Rule of St. Benedict which they wanted to practise to the letter following the desires of the first Cistercians. They also consulted authentic Cistercian patrimony. The most explicit mention of this desire is with regard to Françoise de Nérestang: in order to re-discover the Cistercian tradition she had the medieval texts translated. In depth research would be necessary to see which texts were available and how they were assimilated. We can at least note the reference to St. Bernard, their enduring model, as indeed he was for the initiators of the Strict Observance. In a dream, Françoise de Nérestang, was acknowledged by St. Bernard as his daughter. Bernard is also present in the writings of Louyse as well as in the legislative texts.

The reformers cited the example of the first Cistercians remembering practices observed or held in honour at Clairvaux.

Port Royal, during their work in common, *tried to imitate the early monks of Clairvaux, of whom it is related, in the life of St. Bernard, that during the monks' work the only sound heard in the monastery was the sound of their tools.*

At Tart they communicated by *signs according to former practice in the Order of Cîteaux.*

5. Monks and Nuns of the reform (1601-1625)

This reforming work has often been presented as taking place against the general trend of evolution of the Cistercian monks, even in opposition to it. But chronology shows that these reforms were a part of the overall work of renewal undertaken in the order since the end of the 15th century. The abbot general had taken part in the work of the Council of Trent (1645-1663) and his successors drew their inspiration from this Council in their renewal of monastic life. Visits carried out in different regions made it possible to assess their state of affairs and to restore observances. The General Chapter of 1601 reviewed the situation and took decisions which were codified in thirty-five chapters. Chapter thirty establishes, in forty-three articles, most of the elements in the life of the nuns. It insisted on the practice or reinstatement of strict enclosure, a demand which was made again by the Chapters of 1605 and 1609.

It was precisely at this time, during the first two decades of the 17th century that the work of the reformers was taking place: from 1605 at Mège-mont (transferred to La Bénisson-Dieu in 1611) from 1609 at Port-Royal, from 1617 at Sainte-Catherine, a work which culminated in the move to Rumilly in 1622, in 1620 – 1622 at Tart.

The superiors of the Order, the Abbot General and the Fathers Immediate who favoured reform were involved. It was the initiators of the Strict Observance who helped the beginning of the reform at Port Royal. In Savoie, although François Nicolas de Riddes (abbot of Tamié and Father Immediate of Sainte-Catherine) could not be linked with the radical reformers, he was committed to promoting a more regular life. The Abbot General, Nicolas II Boucherat, was everywhere at once, in demand himself to authorise reform and pleading with others, as for example in 1608 when he asked François de Sales to encourage the reform at Sainte-Catherine.

Admittedly the superiors acted with prudence, concerned for the unity and the reputation of the Order in these undertakings and challenges which raised opposition and demanded material and human resources. They played their part by their visits and their letters. The Cistercian supervisory system (mother-house/ daughter-house) worked well.

6. Bishops, new “Fathers immediate”?

However, as from 1625 the reforms of Tart, Port Royal and Savoie (Sainte-Catherine/Rumilly) left the jurisdiction of the order for that of the bishops. What happened? The abbot reformers Largentier and Boucherat died in 1624 and 1625. On the side of the monks, the Strict Observance came to a halt: the General Chapter of 1625 refused it permission to form a congregation. The nuns probably caused a balance of power between the Common and the Strict Observance. The brief of July 1628 putting the abbey of Bussières under the authority of the archbishop of Bourges gave as its pretext “the discord and division among the superiors of the Order” who claimed to have power over the abbey. As far as the nuns of Port Royal and Tart were concerned this transfer took place when they moved into the city (Paris and Dijon)

In Savoie when the reformed nuns wanted to make a foundation at Grenoble, the bishop insisted that they come under his jurisdiction.

Whether of their own accord or at the demand of the bishop, the nuns of the reform thus distanced themselves from the Fathers Immediate. They gave the reasons for their decision: Angélique Arnauld deplored the ignorance of the confessors of the Order and the preachers who were the laughing stock of her community. Louise de Ponçenas, (a professed nun of Ayes in the diocese of Grenoble) a companion of Louyse de Ballon, later her rival, summed up the grievances of the nuns with regard to the monks: ... because they were in no way reformed; they had no bonds among themselves, they had insufficient capable monks and therefore could not send one to each house of the congregation, they were too far away to assist them in time of need, besides which the nuns could not call on them without going to excessive expense, and also the monasteries of nuns were too poor to contribute to the expenses of their chapters. (Vie, p. 256)

This tendency to favour episcopal jurisdiction followed the general line of thinking of Trent. As well as this the reforming nuns, whose points of view are transmitted in their biographies, do not fail to recall the submission of the first Cistercians to the bishops and the position of Bernard himself on this subject.

7. At the crossroads of the major spiritual movements

François de Sales and Sébastien Zamet who were involved at Sainte-Catherine and at Tart respectively were two reforming bishops who were particularly conscientious about their duties and aware of the disciplinary and theological implications of the monastic reform. They were also two great spiritual men. Through them the nuns under their direction had access to the spiritual and mystical currents of thought so influential in Paris during the first quarter of the 17th century: the Theresian reform of Carmel, the masters and those who popularised the French school of spirituality. Through them, directly or indirectly, these four reforming women were in contact with or at least had knowledge of these disparate initiatives. Thus we know through Angélique Arnauld that François de Sales discussed with her the reform of Sainte-Catherine and the problem of austerities. Françoise de Néréstang made the journey from Tart in 1624-1625. Jeanne de Courcelle was involved in the ‘Institut du Saint-Sacrament’ and she would have been consulted by the reformed Bernardines of Grenoble.

The biographers point out that in their work of reform the nuns were surrounded by wise advisors. These were often confessors who had been named by the bishop and all belonging to orders or congregations working for the Catholic reform.

Françoise de Nérastang benefited from the help of the Recollects of Murat. At Tart and later at Dijon, Zamet confided the direction of the nuns of the reform to the Oratorians. These accompanied the Bernardines of Savoie at Rumilly, and then in Provence. A Jesuit, Père Dangles, helped them in the drafting of their constitutions. Another Jesuit, Père Suffren became involved for a time at Port Royal.

Such are the outline and common points of the reforms though each one had its own originality and particular characteristics.

Questions for reflection :

1. The nuns mentioned in this unit were subjected to family and social constraints. They proved themselves to be free and resolute women. What was the source of this freedom? What have they to say to us?
2. The four reforming women mentioned in this unit lived at a time when great spiritual currents were beginning or being consolidated. Receiving very little, if any, help from the Cistercian monks, they were open to all these developments in a way that is difficult for us to really appreciate. What are the ideas or the attitudes affecting us consciously or unconsciously today? They are varied: new Christian spiritual movements, diverse “theologies” (feminist, political) ecological concerns, etc. the contribution of non-Christian religions, new religiosity (New Age), etc. Are we open to these? Or are we non-receptive? What are the implications for the choices we make in these areas with regard to new entrants and the milieu in which we live?
3. In the reforms outlined here, the authority of the monastic superiors (Father Immediate, Abbot General) and that of the diocesan bishop are often found to be in competition. How is this question understood and lived today? How do we take our part in the local church?

PORT ROYAL

Paper prepared by Sr. Marie-Dominique Seguin, La Grâce- Dieu.

In the introduction to her work "The Evolution of the Reform of Port-Royal" Ellen Weaver pictures one of the first Cistercian monks visiting, between 1609-1626, a monastery of French nuns near Paris. Nothing of what he saw or heard surprised him, he recognised the life there as that of early Cîteaux.

What was this monastery, where at the dawn of the 17th century, the golden age of early Cîteaux was blossoming once again?

The abbey of Port-Royal :

Port-Royal was founded by a noblewoman in 1204 not far from the abbey of the Cistercian monks of Vaux-de-Cernay. Port-Royal obtained its integration into the Order very quickly. Four centuries later in 1599, the monastery, under the Commendatory regime, received as its abbess a child of eight years : Jacqueline Arnauld who took the name of Angélique. The abbot of Cîteaux, Edmond de la Croix, conferred the abbatial blessing on the 29th September 1602 when she was eleven years old. In order to receive the bulls from Rome, they said that she was seventeen.

A young abbess :

The abbey was in a sad state financially, and the community of a dozen sisters were not much better. The Arnauld family was aware of this. The running of the monastery was confided to a Prioress "who was wise and wished for a more regular life". But the young abbess had a difficult and restless adolescence, escaping from her boredom and the "unbearable burden" of her religious life with distractions and visits from outside. She fell ill, left to recuperate and came back purely to "satisfy her parents". But then the grace of the Lord fell like a thunderbolt. One evening in March 1608 a Capuchin arrived unexpectedly and offered to preach. "We went to this friar's sermon and during it God touched me so intensely that now the happiness I experience as a nun totally outweighs the misery I experienced before".

This conviction never left her. Slowly and with patience firstly for herself and then for her sisters, she increased the desire and the joy of serving God according to the reform brought about by the Council of Trent. She was not yet 17 years old.

The context of the times :

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) in its constitution no 25 recalled "the splendour and value which monasteries bring to the Church" and asked that "regular discipline should be restored where it had all but failed".

In Gallican France the impact of the Council was slow to make an impression. Counter reform was not obvious but was at work here and there. Mère Angélique was on the look-out because she knew "she had little light on what she should do".

What follows, then, is an account of how she came to involve her community in the Tridentine movement. Her reform was to be supported by two fundamental documents:

- a general charter : the Rule of St. Benedict and the spirit of the first Cistercians.
- a collection of regulations for everyday life – the Constitutions.

Mère Angélique knew how to find inspiration and ideas in many places and was open to the different influences which eventually determined her policies.

What were those influences? Looking through the pages, the following play their part:

- The Capuchins, well-reformed religious : Père Bernard who would get the reform underway and who kept the flame alive albeit sometimes in an over zealous and misguided way, and Père Archange de Pembroke, known for his reforming zeal.
- Carmel introduced in France by Bérulle in 1604. The works of St. Teresa of Avila were read and appreciated at Port-Royal and the abbess visited the Carmel of Pontoise.
- The Oratory. Bérulle was a great friend of the Arnauld family and from afar followed the work of Mère Angélique.
- The Feuillants in the person of Dom Eustache of Saint-Paul “who was more enlightened than most” wrote Mère Angélique, and had a reputation for his knowledge of spiritual matters.
- The Jesuits, Père Binet and Père Suffren, both renowned directors. Père Suffren was to be confessor at Port-Royal from 1613 to 1626.

From 1619, Mère Angélique was in contact with the bishop of Geneva, François de Sales. By then the reform was already well underway at Port-Royal and Dom Boucherat, the abbot of Cîteaux, had sent Mère Angélique to restore order in the abbey of Maubuisson. Her meeting with François de Sales was the beginning of a solid and wise spiritual direction but which lasted too short a time because the bishop died on the 28th December 1622. He introduced to the abbess of Port-Royal, Jeanne de Chantal and the recently founded congregation of the Visitation. This was to become a faithful and precious friendship and there were others...In these steady friendships her zeal for reform found a solid support.

It is important to take note of the significant rôle played by the Arnauld family, who were well placed in the capital to maintain relationships with many religious personages and to have recourse to them in their worries about the determined resolution of their daughter “to carry out the reform”.

Without this, in the solitude of Les Champs the 17 year old abbess would have been helpless and had little to rely on.

How did the Cistercian Order receive and support the reform of Port Royal ?

Mère Angélique was harsh in her judgement of the regular confessors which the Order gave to her community. She certainly had disappointing experiences and we know how relieved she was when Père de Kersailoux, sent for a time by the abbot of Morimond, was recalled.

There was suspicion on the part of the Order: “At the beginning of our reform we were seen as innovators and like schismatics who were ruining the good customs of the Order”.

Fortunately she met understanding and solid support from those who in these years were the greatest artisans of the reform in the Order.

- Dom Nicolas II Boucherat, abbot of Cîteaux and General of the Order. After his death Mère Angélique said of him : he was a very compassionate man who never refused his help when I asked for it. He gave confidence to the young abbess and encouraged her until his death.
- Etienne Maugier, abbot of La Charmoye "A true religious. He was very fond of our house and sympathised with the difficulties we had with the Order." He was made their superior, that is to say as Father Immediate until, alas, the new abbot of Cîteaux, Dom Nivelles took him away! It was Etienne Maugier who in 1624 presided at the first meeting of the convention of the Strict Observance at Vaux-de-Cernay, a stone's throw from Port-Royal.
- Denis Largentier, abbot of Clairvaux. In May 1610 he came to receive Mère Angélique's profession because she was very troubled by what she had been made to do at the age of ten and deemed it to be invalid. Rome was asked again for sanction and her conscience was greatly relieved.

Beginnings of a reform :

Mère Angélique, profoundly touched by grace in 1608, desired only to be an ordinary nun, "in this house" or elsewhere, provided that it was in a reformed house.

She prayed to God "as often and as well as I could."

She was penitential regarding her living quarters, and in the way she dressed, she lived in extreme poverty.

Père Bernard, Capuchin, urged her to undertake the reform of Port-Royal. The Prioress and her family judged that the regular discipline which had already been restored for some time, was good enough. The poor abbess knew that her every move was being watched. She was alone in her discernment of the right way. But then a young sister said that she shared her ideal. Soon there were five or six of them trying to win the others over by the example of their lives.

This did not stop opposition, on the contrary, the climate of tension grew. The community seeing their abbess become paler, thinner and sadder, were worried, because they liked their young superior. The implacable prioress gave in and nearly all the other nuns followed her example. Then without haste or impatience but with perseverance, goodness and spiritual persuasion, Mère Angélique helped her sisters to make progress in the way of reform.

She began by giving them the opportunity to be instructed and to pray better. A sign that the Holy Spirit was at work in this concern for doctrinal and spiritual formation, which are essential pillars.

Thomas Gallot, confessor of the Carmelites, an excellent theologian and director of souls came to Port-Royal dedicated to the instruction of the nuns. He remained very attached to the abbey and asked to be buried under the church.

Others, cited above, also lent their support with their knowledge and their piety. Louis Cognet wrote in his history of Port-Royal: "It is probable that it was their presence which gave Port Royal its very specific character and from which the abbey took its specific features. And it was to them too that Mère Angélique, Mère Agnès and the others owe this profound spiritual, even theological culture that we will find in the texts which they wrote. It is certain that the influence of these first directors was considerable and that these years were critically important in a way that has sometimes been misunderstood." Mère Angélique also had the burden of finding good confessors for her daughters. All these things and people made solid foundations possible.

The stages of the reform :

From the 21st March 1609, feast of St. Benedict, all had been placed in common, in accordance with the vow of poverty. In April the decision was taken to re-establish a strict enclosure. And the 25th September was the famous "Day of the Convent Wicket" (*Journée du Guichet*) epic and dramatic: the Arnauld family were categorically refused permission to enter the abbey except to visit in a parlour with grilles. A terrible scene, the young abbess fainted but she had won. From then on she had the upperhand.

Soon the hour of rising was set at two o'clock, the habit very much simplified and all made of the same coarse material. Sign language was brought back to help the silence. Work was organised and each one took her part.

Admittedly, all this was not done in a day, they had to wait until 1614 and overcome the reluctance of Dom Boucherat before they were able to have total abstinence from meat.

But the great axes of Benedictine life were in place :

- The full divine office which was well executed.
- Useful manual work which allowed for charity towards the poor.
- *Lectio Divina* based on sacred Texts which had become familiar. The Word of God and the Eucharist were placed side by side; "The divine book which must enter the depth of the heart in order that the Scripture which it contains on the outside is seen in all actions and is printed in the soul." wrote Mère Agnès in *l'Image de la religieuse parfaite*. [*The Image of the Perfect Religious*]
- In fact an authentic reform. And unanimous ! One sister rebelled, she was transferred to the Holy Paraclete at Amiens. Another, stubborn at first, finally brought "the key to her little garden."

How can this success be explained ? What was the method used by this great reforming woman ?

Her sisters testify : "She always acted with discretion and charity." "She had a particular gift of winning souls and all the daughters of this dear Mother had perfect confidence in her and could speak to her freely and openly." She took counsel with God, followed the advice of wise people, and first practised herself anything she then asked others to do."

Without reckless haste, without feverish impatience, she went her way with a step that was firm and sure. She directed hearts towards one end: "Serving God first" the first love, without compromise. Uncompromising, yes, sometimes abrupt, but always attentive to the weakest, especially the sick.

Her basically positive disposition never led her to a questionable mysticism, her spirituality was simple and direct, founded on rock. Port-Royal had no mystics in the rigorous sense of the word but souls of great quality and depth, generous and devoted to the imitation of Christ, well instructed in the ways of perfection.

An important element must be added, one which has been noted by all who have studied this reform: what proved to be a critical factor was that the abbess was always careful to receive into the noviciate only girls whose vocation seemed to her to be solid and authentic, absolutely single-minded, which was far from being the case at a time when family pressure and the amount of the dowry was a determining factor. It suffices to read chapters 10 and 11 of the constitutions, these lines are almost unimaginable at this time: "If a girl comes who is poor, but who is sound and seems called by God, she is not to be refused, even if the monastery is inconvenienced, trusting that God

who sent her, will also feed her. We must not be afraid to commit ourselves in this situation.” For her the criterion of discernment was clear: “A vocation where a girl has only God before her eyes.”

The influence and spread

Already in 1609, the abbot of Clairvaux was writing to the abbess of Eau : “The whole of Paris admires the devoted prudence and the religious zeal of an abbess of 18 years who has led her monastery in such good observance with enclosure according to the Rule and charity in the community.”

Missions were entrusted to her. Racine (1639-1699) in his *Histoire de Port-Royal* made the same sort of remark: “Several houses not only admired this reform but resolved to follow it themselves. But everyone believed that they could not succeed in such a holy enterprise without the help of the abbess of Port-Royal. She was ordered by the General to go to most of these houses and to send some of her nuns to all the convents which she was unable to visit herself. She went to Maubuisson, Lys and Saint-Aubin while Mère Agnès, her sister, and others of her nuns went to Saint-Cyr, Gomerfontaine, Tart, to the Isles d’Auxerre and elsewhere... Thus it can be truthfully said that the house of Port-Royal was a source of blessings for the whole Cistercian Order where one could begin to see the revival of the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict and the spirit of St. Bernard, a spirit which had almost been extinguished.”

Rancé came several times to visit Monsieur d’Andilly the abbess’ brother, at Port-Royal. The vision of this fervent community must certainly have encouraged him to persevere with his own resolutions both for himself and for his abbey of La Trappe.

Neither must we forget the gentlemen at Port-Royal, authentic lay monks, born out of the influence exercised by the female community and then enriching it with their own advanced culture.

To save her reform and faced with “the repeated threats” of the new abbot of Cîteaux, Dom Nivelle “to take from us all the permissions which his predecessor had given us for the Reform”, Mère Angélique resolved, in 1627, to put her monastery under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Paris. There was also, without doubt, this intense and clear desire in the air at the time to adopt perpetual Adoration, a permission which could not have been obtained within the Cistercian framework.

But although juridically separated from the Cistercian Order, Port-Royal remained a Cistercian abbey, each of its members was well aware of this.

“It is true that Port-Royal remained more Cistercian than Tart. This abbey, the first Cistercian community of women founded in 1125 and reformed by its abbess, Jeanne de Poulans at the same time as Port-Royal borrowed much more from Poor Clare and Carmelite traditions.

The Constitutions of Port-Royal

Written by Mère Agnès Arnauld, they were the fruit of the experience of the whole community “practised a long while before they were written.” They were edited for the first time in 1665 in Flanders for more security because Port-Royal was beginning to be seriously threatened by the quarrel concerning *l’Augustinus*. They were completely re-edited in 1721.

They showed the evolution of the community over more than fifty years:

- their change of jurisdiction to that of the Archbishop of Paris
- introduction of perpetual Adoration and modification of the habit
- adoption of the Breviary of Paris, then their return, in part, to the Cistercian breviary.

The text [of the Constitutions] is both juridical and spiritual, the names of St. Benedict and St. Bernard and reminders of the Rule of St. Benedict and the customs of Cîteaux are often found in them. Port-Royal truly remained an authentic Cistercian community.

The 42 chapters witness to an experience gained over time and inscribed in a minutely elaborated code. Law and moral teaching are in harmony and contained in the spirituality [of the Constitutions].

In the first six chapters, themes dear to the post-tridentine church are found : the Eucharist, the priesthood, confession.

These nuns have a keen sense of their mission in the Mystical Body of Christ : “During their time of adoration they should be occupied in bringing to Jesus Christ all the needs of Holy Church” (chapter 1). These are enumerated at length.

Processions and special prayers are prescribed at the time of priestly ordinations. (chapter 2).

Personal prayer is rooted in fidelity to the ancient monastic tradition and not in the new methods which were appearing in the 17th century.

Chapter 8 “On reading” is literally an echo of the Golden Epistle of William of Saint- Thierry and is found again all through chapter 26 “Of the dormitory.” The personal cell is kept, along with all its symbolism: *cella-coelum* (see Angélique de Saint-Jean : *Conferences on the Constitutions*).

The interior rule of the house gives us the full range of the differing posts of responsibility for the material tasks [in the monastery] (the “obediences”). (Chapters 32 – 40)

The emphasis is always on poverty, silence with sign language and separation from the world.

Chapters 27 and 28 on the election of abbesses and what their duties entail, as Chapter 31 with its 43 articles on the mistress of novices show the extent to which they understood the meaning of their responsibility before God. The lines on the cellarer, the infirmarian and all that pertained to the younger sisters show a right balance, a shrewd psychology and both kindness and respect for persons. It is full of the discretion which was so dear to St. Benedict. The abbess is always referred to as “Mother”.

These Constitutions are truly a book of life, of the life of a well reformed community, well directed, well supported, completely devoted to the service of God, to the praise of his glory.

The community of Port-Royal des Champs was dispersed in 1709 at the order of King Louis XIV for reasons which were more political than Jansenist. But these Constitutions remained the Manual of the surviving community of Port-Royal of Paris until 1911, the date at which this community, having transferred to Besançon in 1841, asked for re-integration into the Order, which was accepted at the General Chapter of 1921.

In 1927 the ancient abbey of La Grâce-Dieu, left empty by the monks who had moved to Tamié in 1909, welcomed the inheritors of this long monastic history of Port-Royal, a community which has existed continuously since 1204.

Legislative Text : Constitutions

Chapter 21: Of work with one's hands

... The time for work will be during all the intervals between the Offices, except for the time which is intended for reading. If there is some work to be done together or by several sisters, they will remember to keep the silence as did the holy Fathers of the Order of Cîteaux...

...The Mother abbess will give each sister work commensurate with her strength, but no-one will be idle, remembering the words of St. Paul, that each one working peacefully earns his bread, that is to say, according to St. Bernard, the bread which he acquires by his work..

Chapter 22: On enclosure

Enclosure will be strictly observed according to the specific terms of the Council of Trent, the practice of which is so familiar in the reformed monasteries that there is no need to speak of it in greater detail here...

Chapter 9: On silence

The sisters will keep the silence in all the regular places, i.e. in the choir, in the cloister, in the dormitory, in chapter and in the refectory. In all these places talking is not permitted except for what is strictly necessity and then extremely briefly.

At other hours and in other places one can speak at greater length about essentials. Nevertheless in such a way that one is careful not to speak too much because it is written...

The sisters are urged to observe and appreciate the usefulness of sign language which has been practised in the Order of Cîteaux since its beginnings... God has desired that it should be retained until now out of consideration for souls who want to be renewed in the spirit of their Order which has remained holy as long as silence is observed in a holy way...

Spiritual text :

The aim of these Constitutions.

I have not regarded this work as the ordinary Constitutions of a specific house which have no other use except to regulate conduct and observances; but as a book of piety which can be of use to all religious houses, as well as for the one for whom it was written, and not only for houses of religious but for all truly christian souls who are able to take solid instruction from them in order to nourish their piety...

For there are two things in the practices prescribed here: the exterior which can be likened to the body, and the interior which can be likened to the soul. The first might only belong to the nuns of Port Royal, but the other is relevant for all the faithful. Now what is special about these Constitutions is that they are not a dry letter which simply gives orders, as in a strict rule, but counsel, full of insight, which enlightens as it commands and which stops short of stipulating what is to be done, but rather indicates the dispositions which all Christians must have in order to act in a Christian way. The most difficult points of christian perfection are portrayed there in such an edifying and fervent manner that we find ourselves drawn to them in love in a way that we could never have imagined ourselves to be. The content, of use to all manner of Christians, is so widespread in this teaching that there are none who could not learn from it to live and act as christians in whatever form of life they find themselves committed to by divine Providence...

Text both legislative and spiritual :

Chapter 18 The ceremonies of the Office :

The most ordinary and the most important ceremony of the Office is standing up, the sisters will have a devotion to this posture considering that in this manner, they offer themselves to God as servants ready to receive commands, as the angels are in the presence of God...

Secondly, that they are discharging one of the principal purposes of the faith, because they are in the state of those risen from the dead, and hoping to be so one day. They will be standing during Lauds as prescribed by a Council, because this hour was instituted for the praises of God (of which it carries the name.) It imitates the Blessed in heaven where all prayers end in praise, so it is sensible to be standing as they are before the throne of God.

We will stand at Compline because it is the last Hour of the day, and represents our preparation for death, for which we must be found vigilant and alert as the servants of the Gospel and like the wise virgins ready to go before the Bridegroom when he calls us...

Some words of Mère Angélique, abbess of Port-Royal

Ask God to give you the grace to put into practise what he commands in his Gospel : [that is to say] to watch and to pray, to seek his grace unceasingly, to entreat him, knocking at the door of his divine mercy...

To a sister who asked her "to tell them what the greatest commandment of Religion is, in the same way that Our Lord said that the greatest of the law is charity, she replied that she believed that that which is the greatest of the law is also the greatest of our Rule, because our Rule does not hinge on orders, but [it's purpose is] to make us capable of accomplishing this great commandment of loving God and our neighbour".

To her religious gathered at a conference, who asked for "a helpful word" she replied: "I am afraid that if I tell you what I think, you will not believe it: it is that we must be poor in poverty, humble in humility, acquiescent in submission, detached from detachment; in a word, we must practise the virtues without pretension. God will do the rest".

"Our strength is not in the light, but in the source of light, who is God and who enlightens and strengthens in the greatest darkness of souls which have recourse to him".

Questions for reflection

1. Compare what this unit teaches us about the beginnings and the success of the reform of Port-Royal with chapters 2, 3 and 58 of the Rule. What lessons can we draw from this comparison?
2. Re-read the texts cited in this unit : what phrases contradict the preconceived ideas that we might have had about Port-Royal ?
3. We see that a movement of fervent lay-people sprang up around Port-Royal. How was it born and how did it develop? For the community, what were the advantages and the disadvantages of this presence?
Under what conditions is it possible (and advisable) to have such a clear and direct influence on a group of lay people? Under what conditions and to what extent can a monastery have links with a group of lay people, with a view to helping them spiritually or receiving help from them (practical or economic help) and at the same time remain faithful to its vocation and free in its choices?
4. In what did this reform “the most beautiful and the most balanced of its time” find its foundations, its support, its structure, its possibilities of success?

The Bernardines of Switzerland

Unit prepared by Sr. Marie-Bénédicte Lattion, Géronde.

The congregation of St. Bernard, sometimes known as the Congregation of St. Bernard of Savoie came into being from the Cistercian abbey of Sainte-Catherine of Semnoz near Annecy in the context of the catholic reform which followed the Council of Trent. From 1607 to 1622, at the request of Dom Nicolas II Boucherat, abbot of Cîteaux, St. François de Sales, bishop of Geneva (a see transferred to Annecy at the time of the protestant reformation) endeavoured to re-establish a more regular life at Sainte-Catherine. With his support a small group of reformers banded together, all were nuns who longed for change. The self-opinionated resistance of the older sisters made reform impossible at Sainte-Catherine and so in 1622, with the approval of their Cistercian superiors and of St. François de Sales, five young sisters went to Rumilly (Savoie).

Louyse de Ballon (1591-1668) was elected superior there and appeared to be the figurehead of the reform. Louyse had entered Sainte-Catherine at the age of seven and made profession at sixteen. God endowed her with many graces in preparation for her mission.

The intention of the reformers was to live the Rule and in particular to keep the enclosure. This not only assured a climate of solitude and silence but also protected against the intrusion of seculars, particularly their families. It also furthered community life and the sharing of material goods. Cells replaced the personal apartments customary at Sainte-Catherine and the nuns changed cell each year. The monastic habit was brought back: a white dress with a black scapular and veil. Silence was re-established, but interrupted by two periods of recreation each day as an opportunity for spiritual conversation. They vied to outdo each other in fasting, vigils and flagellation but for some sisters this led very quickly to a deterioration of health, both physical and psychological, so much so that community life was disrupted. So they discussed the observances and then made a decision to follow a less rigorous regime: the night office was anticipated the previous evening to allow more time for prayer when they got up in the morning, and they abstained from meat only on three days a week. These mitigations were justified by the nuns' desire to avoid dispensations or open doors to particular regimes, destructive of regular observance. A less severe regime was supposed to promote a more "communal" lifestyle, in accordance with simplicity and humility. The young community adopted the Roman Breviary because it was "the one most commonly used in the Church" and because they could not find Cistercian breviaries.

Their model was clearly affirmed: they lived under the authority of the Rule of St. Benedict. The constitutions were prefaced by an "adapted" Rule, a summing up in forty articles which introduced the spirit of the Chapters following the literary style of 'la forme brève' which was in favour in the 16th and 17th centuries. This did not mean that the full text of the Rule was put aside, there are numerous citations and echoes of it in the writings of Mère de Ballon. St. Scholastique, linked with St. Humbeline, both figure in the retables of conventual churches and in the names given to sisters. Bernard of Clairvaux held an authoritative position as did Benedict and the Council of Trent. The legislative texts (Constitutions, Customary, daily directory) refer to his teaching. It is not that he is mentioned directly but the writings of Mère de Ballon, read carefully, are permeated with Bernard's teaching.

The juridical status of the new community evolved rapidly. In 1623, three Cistercians from the abbey of Ayes came to Rumilly to be formed in the regular life before setting up a community in Grenoble, which they did in 1624 under the direction of Mère de Ballon. But the establishment was only allowed under the express condition that it was placed under the jurisdiction of the bishop. The nuns thus made their request to the Holy See, which in August 1628 put them under the jurisdiction of the ordinary of the dioceses. In this way they confirmed a *de facto* situation, Cistercian direction was either non-existent or judged insufficient.

The first Constitutions, lost today, were produced at Grenoble in 1631 under the title of *The Rule and Constitutions of the Congregation of St. Bernard, order of Cîteaux*.

They owed their basic content to Mère de Ballon who gave them to Père Dangles, a Jesuit and asked him to formulate them and probably also, to give them the authority of a man and a cleric.

In 1636 at Aix, Mère de Ballon had printed the Constitutions of the *Congregation of Divine Providence*, a term proper to the monastery of Rumilly. She gave this house precedence over the other monasteries.

Louyse de Ponçonas, superior of Grenoble, then accused her of setting herself up as a superior general and she had the Constitutions of 1631 reprinted in Paris and demanded that those of 1636 be destroyed. Louyse de Ballon gave in and the idea of a central authority was abandoned.

The re-edition at Lyon in 1648 of the first Constitutions, a customary and a directory appears to be the definitive form of the legislative texts of the congregation which was not divided in two by the crisis of 1636-1637 and was always called the *Congregation of St. Bernard, order of Cîteaux*.

The congregation developed rapidly and quickly numbered thirty monasteries, situated for the most part in what is today south-east France. All were swept away by the Revolution with the exception of that of Collombey (Valais/Switzerland). Founded by la Roche-sur-Foron (the sisters arrived at St. Maurice d'Agaune in 1629 and established the monastery at Collombey in 1647) this monastery founded at Géronde in 1935. A little while later the community began a progressive re-adjustment to Cistercian tradition on certain points from which they had been distanced by the 17th century reform.

Mère Louyse de Ballon and the spirituality of Cîteaux

When considering the reform of Mère de Ballon in the historical context of the 17th century it is important to distinguish between its juridical aspect and its spiritual aspect. On a juridical level its outcome was independence from the central government of the order.

It must be pointed out, however, that for a long time the effectiveness of this government had left a lot to be desired despite the merits of several abbots of Cîteaux who, in the 17th century, were genuinely concerned with the renewal of monastic life. The history of Cîteaux teaches us that the juridical situation of a monastery is not a conclusive criterion for judging its fidelity to the Cistercian spirit. From the 12th century there were nuns who led a Cistercian life and were considered true Cistercians without being under the jurisdiction of the Order.

This autonomy allowed Mère Louyse to adapt certain customs for the purpose of renewal. She mitigated the harshness of certain observances (cf. as above, the intentions of the reformers) and she put more emphasis on the interior demands of humility, obedience, prayer and death to self.

Mère Louyse was not doing anything new when she put superiors with a three year mandate at the head of her communities. At this time, in the Order of Cîteaux, it was accepted that a superior was elected for one or several terms of three years. The use of the Roman breviary seems to have been a necessity. But in fact this question is secondary because at this same time the question of a change of breviary was certainly discussed within the Order.

The monasteries found themselves deprived of spiritual direction from Fathers Immediate and Cistercian chaplains. But in any case, which monasteries would have been in a position to help them at this time when, in most abbeys, the number of religious was so reduced ?

Did Mère Louyse remain faithful to the Cistercian ideal ? The answer is undoubtedly, yes. Her aim was nothing other than that of the founders of Cîteaux: to re-find real poverty, true solitude and an effective separation from the world which allowed her sisters to lead a life of prayer. The value that Mère Louyse gave to simplicity and the importance that she attributed to it, only served to emphasise and deepen the desire for simplicity and authenticity which was so characteristic of the founders of Cîteaux. All that she taught and lived was nothing but continued and conscientious application of the Rule of St. Benedict, in fidelity to the purest Cistercian tradition. Her fidelity to Cîteaux is shown again in her attachment to the holy humanity of Christ. This devotion is the most excellent means of salvation and the surest way to come to the love of the Word made flesh who is the love of the God-Word, as St. Bernard says. Other values inspired by Cistercian tradition can be indicated: her doctrine on love and charity; fraternal and community love; ascetical practices etc.

Her language seems strange compared with primitive Cistercian literature, but fidelity to the tradition of the Order does not consist in a literal reproduction of the language or customs of the 12th century. She thus used ways of expression proper to her time. Yet this language expresses a spiritual reality which is identical to that which we find in the fathers of Cîteaux.

To conclude, it can be maintained that Mère Louyse lived according to the tradition of Cîteaux and knew how to interpret it very successfully for her time. An authentic expression of the permanent values of the Cistercian monastic life, her example and her teaching is just as relevant today.

Legislative texts

Poverty must be apparent in the buildings, the furniture of the house, the habit and in all things, in such a way that everything is sound, well made and turned to good use, but without undue decoration or embellishment: the dishes must be made of pewter, no silverware with the exception of the spoons and what is for use in the church.

When the monastery has been built and furnished reasonably well, the amount of income needed must be decided on as soon as possible and once it is sufficient for the upkeep of thirty religious, the community is obliged to receive those who are judged suitable without asking anything of them. Nevertheless the community can accept anything which they or their parents offer of their own accord. In the case of those entering without money, the community gives preference to those whose status would not allow them to earn their living in the world, provided the community sees that they are called and that they have the necessary qualities.

Constitution 1/1, On Poverty, nos. 5 & 6.

The sisters must state that they are entering not just to flee the world, but in order to hold themselves in contempt, forgetful of the quality of their parentage and the worldly comforts they had or could have now, forgetful too of the kind and thoughtful attentions they were used to (though they would receive these in case of necessity) in order to live the common life which St. Benedict insisted on in his Rule. When they experience difficulty with this they must find their help in the thought and words of St. Bernard who said to himself: *Bernard, Bernard, why have you come here? Only to renounce yourself and take up your cross with Our Lord, and to keep the bundle of myrrh or mortification in the depth of your heart.*

All, including the superior at times, must undertake the humble tasks such as the sweeping, washing up or service in the kitchen (...) seeing as their prize the fact that, though in the eyes of the world their work is contemptible, in the House of God and in God's eyes it is honourable. It is honourable because they are imitating Our Lord and showing that they want to annihilate themselves in order to manifest His greatness, if that is possible.

Constitutions III/III On humility and contempt of self. Nos. 1 & 2.

The sisters will meditate carefully and frequently on the gentle but strong and loving words which the Saviour of souls said to his disciples a little while before he gave himself up to death. "By this sign will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" and these "Love one another as I have loved you." And the sisters will be convinced that these words are addressed to them too because they are counted as blessed disciples of the Son of God. He has loved them so much, that he has not only taken their faults and sins, both small and great, on himself but he has poured out his blood to blot them out, so in the same way will they cherish their sisters. In imitation of Him they will never shun one of their sisters for any fault or show contempt for her in any way whatsoever but will do all they can, with gentleness and patience, to help the sister make amends, excusing her before others and ensuring that she is supported patiently and without bitterness.

Constitution III/VI On the love of sisters for each other, no. 1.

For her (the superior) whether in clothing or meat (provisions) or in anything at all, she does not allow herself to be treated differently, but must have only what is strictly necessary, the same as any other sister, mindful that the Son of God who should be her mirror, held himself to be the least of all. But, in the same way that the superior ensures that each sister is given what she needs, so another sister must take care of her.

Constitution VI/VI On the superior no. 4

Spiritual writings of Mère Louyse de Ballon

Simplicity knows neither disguise, nor pretext, nor human respect, nor concern for self, nor fear of losing favour when a reprimand is received. 'What will they say if I do this? What will they think of me if I say that?' Simplicity does not let itself stray after superfluous subjects of curiosity such as these: 'Why do they order us to do such a thing? Why do they forbid this other thing?' Simplicity is the adornment and, as it were, the enamel of truth. The more we are possessed by simplicity, the more prudence will lead us. "Be as prudent as serpents, the Saviour tells us, but at the same time be as simple as doves" (Mt. 10:16) (...)

This virtue would not wish to be dressed in, so to speak, that is to say does not want to be covered with or associated with anything which is characteristic of the world. Multiplicity must be entirely banished and set aside, and on the contrary unity must be inseparable from simplicity. It

must be practised in the least little things (...) It seems, in fact, that simplicity only becomes attached to small things, it is so focussed on everything. The one who fears God, and as a result, is a truly wise person, neglects nothing, says Wisdom itself (...)

My God, may simplicity take away the multiplicity in our spirit! It is like an abyss where everything that is not of God in us can be lost and destroyed. We must abandon ourselves to it and hold to it, then leave everything to God, for he will change such an abyss in us into an abyss of grace.

Treatise on simplicity I, I-II and VI, *Ecrits spirituels* II p. 52-55

United to the offering of Jesus

Your specific duty is to love the divine humanity of the Saviour who was crucified for us and you must be, each one, the image of Jesus on the cross (...)

The true and special happiness of the daughters of St. Bernard comes from this sacrifice of ourselves to the cross. This saint is commonly represented with the instruments of the Passion which he clasped to his breast. He himself said that he had made of them a bundle of myrrh which he bore on his heart to teach us that he takes delight in this loving Passion, that he loves it above all else and that the most important thing to him was that his spirit should remain continually joined to the cross. What also distinguishes us [as daughters of St. Bernard] is that it is principally our spirit that we must crucify, since God asks principally for our heart, that is to say, what is interior. Yes, the daughters of this passionate lover of your Cross must also have a special love for it (...)

No other way keeps us in such a state of surrender to the spirit of our institute, which is the spirit of simplicity, as the one by which we remain united to the holocaust of Jesus by the holocaust of ourselves. Mortification, which is crucifixion of the soul, is inseparable from simplicity; and anyone who wishes to abide in simplicity should be in [a state of] continual sacrifice of herself (...)

Nothing keeps our soul cleaner or purer than this virtue. It brings inexplicable treasures with it. It desires nothing but God.

The true book of simplicity is Jesus Christ. Simplicity must be seen and read in him and we must abandon all our multiplicity to him (...) It is with this thought that I replied to our Mother {Claude-Thérèse de Buissonrond} that I would give her Our Lord as her book of simplicity, that he himself must teach it to us and imprint it on our hearts.

Be, then, O my Jesus, this book, be the book where, each day, we read what you will for us, where we learn the lesson which keeps us faithful, where we discover your design for us so that we can follow it, where we find strength to do what you teach us. Yes, my God, be yourself this book. May your love and the simplicity of your love be its author.

Text cited in J. Grossi, *la Vie de la vénérable Mère Louyse de Ballon*, Annecy, 1695, pp 304-308

Questions for reflection

1. What was the social milieu of the nuns, the part sometimes attributed to the monasteries? In this context how can one live in imitation of the kenosis of Christ? And how do we live today in imitation of Christ's self-giving?
2. With regard to the discussion on more or less austerity in our life how is this question asked of us today?
What are the pitfalls to avoid?
3. Separation from the world is connected with community life and poverty (sharing of goods). Is this viewpoint relevant today?
4. Can certain adaptations in our life of prayer (shorter Office, *lectio divina* of half an hour followed by a conference or sharing, mental prayer following 'points for meditation' given to the community) be explained by the level of formation the sisters received?
Do the same questions sometimes arise in certain communities today?
5. Using the texts of Mère de Ballon reflect upon simplicity, conformity to Christ and the notion of the image of God. What relationship do these have with each other?

The abbot de Rancé and La Trappe in the 17th century

Unit prepared by Frère Bernard Duymentz, La Trappe.

1. The context

Having finally come through the Wars of religion in 1598 thanks to King Henry IV, reorganised and energised with a strong and centralised royal power established by Cardinal de Richelieu and King Louis XIII (1610-1643), France, at the beginning of the XVII Century, was progressing and developing politically, economically and culturally. At the same time a strong movement of religious rebirth, a delayed result of the Council of Trent, was developing, following the inaugurators of the French school, such as Mr. Vincent, Berulle, Olier.... A new birth, which affected religious such as the Benedictines of Saint-Maur and of Saint-Vanne, or the Cistercians of the Strict Observance in the glorious setting of this "Great Century" dominated by the "Sun King" Louis XIV (1643-1715). This is the renaissance in which the abbot de Rancé would be involved. It was with this passion of the XVII century for the absolute, the heroic, but also for what was real and pragmatic, that Rancé achieved his work of returning to the sources of monasticism in a very specific community, that of La Trappe.

2. The life of Rancé and his work of restoration at La Trappe

It is impossible to separate Rancé from La Trappe, because "he identified himself totally with it" and his writings make no sense except in the context of community life where day after day he drew his inspiration.

A) Childhood and youth (1626-1657)

Armand-Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé, born in Paris on the 9th January 1626 was given the christian name of his famous godfather, Cardinal de Richelieu. His family was, in fact, on familiar terms with the government and aspired to parliamentary position and to riches. Initially destined for a military career, Armand-Jean at the age of nine was unhesitatingly steered in the direction of the clerical life and tonsure at the request of his parents who wanted to transfer to him the ecclesiastical benefits of his eldest brother who was dying. Thus he was to become a canon of Notre Dame de Paris and in 1637 inherited five abbeys under the commendatory system, of which one was La Trappe. His mother died the year he was twelve years old.

He was a gifted and intelligent young man and excelled at classical and theological studies, which led him to a priesthood that held little attraction for him. However, with the prospect of becoming coadjutor to his Uncle Victor, the archbishop of Tours, he gave in to his family's self-seeking pressure. Rancé was thus ordained priest on 22nd January 1651 and received a doctorate from the Sorbonne in 1654. Made archdeacon by his Uncle Victor he led a worldly life as abbot at court according to the customs of the times. He was very keen on hunting and horse riding and regularly frequented the hotel of Madame de Montbazon. He seemed to have everything going for him, he was a delegate to the Assembly of Clergy in 1655 and in 1656 he became chaplain to Prince Gaston of Orléans, uncle of the king Louis XIV.

However the fragility of his position became evident the following year. By unwisely defending his friend Cardinal de Retz he antagonised Cardinal de Mazarin who stood in the way of his becoming coadjutor of Tours. Then came the dramatic and brutal death of Madame de Montbazon

on 28th April. The same evening he left for Veretz, his country house, having decided to change his life because it seemed so futile.

B) On the way to La Trappe (1657 - 1664)

For radical though this conversion was, Rancé did not suddenly change from his worldly life to that of “venerable abbot of the solitaries at La Trappe”. Little by little God led him there, where he did not wish to go.

First step : the pious withdrawal of a man

From the month of May 1657 he began a life of withdrawal at Veretz. There he realised that he had led an unworthy priestly life and was full of remorse. He immersed himself in reading the “Fathers of the Desert” which Andilly had just translated. He visited Mère Louise Rogier at the Visitation convent in Tours and through her the Oratorians, thus a rather Jansenistic and austere milieu. But despite short stays at the houses of Port-Royal he never became involved in the Jansenist party. A plan to live a secluded life at Chambord with Gaston d’Orléans, a recent convert, was cut short with Gaston’s death in 1660.

Second Step : the dispossessing

Still undecided about his future, in the summer of 1660 Rancé went to ask advice from the bishops. Monseigneur de Pamiers persuaded him to keep just one ecclesiastical benefice and to give its proceeds for the use of the episcopate. Monseigneur de Comminges suggested the monastic life, but Rancé refused outright, “me, become a monk, never!” Despite the opposition of his family he gave away all his goods, until finally by 1663 he had only kept La Trappe. At first his only thought was to restore order to this community, which was in a terrible state: “The abbey is in ruins and the six monks are living like savages.” Rancé began the work needed and sent to Perseigne for six monks of the Strict Observance. He wanted to incorporate La Trappe into the Strict Observance. (17 August 1662)

Rancé planned on the commendatory abbot staying, but living a holy, withdrawn life and assuming his responsibilities with regard to the monks. Rancé had an abbatial apartment fitted out. But after some months of contact with fervent monks, and no doubt following an interior grace received during the office of Sext on 17th April 1663, he was finally conquered and wanted to become a true monk, a genuine abbot.

Third step : the novitiate

He obtained permission from Dom Jouaud, the abbot of Prières and vicar general of the Reformers, to become the legitimate abbot. King Louis XIV accepted this change in May 1663. Rancé announced his decision to the conventual chapter of La Trappe and began a canonical novitiate at Perseigne, where he took the habit on 13th June. He made his novitiate in a spirit of fervour and repentance, but it was interspersed with absences for illness or for assignments confided to him on behalf of the Order. He made his vows on 26th June 1664. On 13th July, he received the abbatial blessing and on 14th July took up his duties at La Trappe. He already found that the reformed observance was too timorous and he wanted to introduce a more penitential regime at La Trappe.

C) An abbot committed to the defence of the Strict Observance (1664 - 1675)

From the 1st September 1664, despite his reluctance, Rancé was appointed as one of the ambassadors of the Strict Observance who were sent to Pope Alexander VII to decide on the outcome of this reform, which was contested by some in the Order including the abbot of Cîteaux, Dom Vaussin. This long ambassadorial rôle took two years and Rancé found it very penitential, it was also by way of a setback. The papal letter *In Suprema* of 19th April 1666 did not respond to the expectations of the reformers. However it was not time wasted for Rancé because it forced him get to know the Rule, the Cistercian Usages and the relationship between the origins of the Order and the differing rules now in use, thus preparing him for his task of abbot-reformer.

After a stormy General Chapter at Cîteaux (1667) the only one in which he participated, “He thought of nothing else but returning to his monastery to re-establish the spirit and practices of the Founders which the monks had endeavoured to throw out.” As, in accordance with Gallican church Law, an appeal against the papal brief was submitted to the king by the reformers, Rancé continued to follow this affair. But when, on 19th April 1675, the king confirmed the brief, Rancé decided not to go out of his monastery any more. He was convinced that the success of the monastic reform lay not in lawsuits and intrigue but in a community life that was penitential, fervent, charitable and peaceful. He remained faithful to this decision.

The abbot and his community

Following his return from Rome in 1666, Rancé progressively introduced into his monastery a more rigorous asceticism than there had been before, according to his understanding of the Rule of St. Benedict and St. Bernard, which he re-read in the light of St. Basil, the Fathers of the Desert and especially of St. John Climacus. He also took into account his lived experience. Rancé did not lay down the new Rules of La Trappe in one go or in an authoritarian manner. First of all he shared with his community in some stimulating chapters, his passion for the penitential life of the “Fathers.” Then he shared with the brothers some similar projects for reform.

They, like him, wanted to “follow steadfastly the example of those who had gone before them.” In his *Description ... of La Trappe*, 1671, Félibien wrote, “They are not timid and cowardly slaves, led by a gallant captain, they are free and generous people, who follow their leader, who obey him with the greatest love.”

From 1670 Rancé was led to write in defence of his reform and the austerity of his penances against those who criticised them. Notably: on the practice of “intentional humiliations” imposed by the abbot on his monks, on the possible lack of prudence in asceticism which led to the early death of several of his monks, on the question of his refusal to allow them to follow a course of studies. However, it must be noted that those who criticised were always from outside. By contrast, the “visiting cards” of the regular visitors, for example in 1676, 1678, 1685, were loud in their praise of the loving relationships between the abbot and his monks, for the exceptional unity, the love, the peace and the sincere fervour of the monks.

The *Relations de la mort de quelques religieux de l'abbaye de La Trappe*, [Account of the death of some religious of the abbey of La Trappe] published after 1677 witness to the heroic and saintly deaths of these religious in the presence of their abbot. They also witness to the meaning of their life of penitence. Like Rancé, they had come to seek salvation at La Trappe. Salvation was a major concern in the XVII century. Conscious of their sins, of the futility of their past lives, the monks were there to atone for them and to be saved. Not to do extraordinary penance, but to live in humble, daily fidelity to the precepts of the Rule and the Usages. Thus a penitential life, embraced courageously for love of eternal life, for which this life must be a preparation.

Even if Rancé spoke a lot about penance, he did not make it the be-all and end-all of monastic life, its objective was the perfection of charity. Penance had to lead to charity, because, as

Rancé wrote, “Penance is only the conformity of our heart to that of God.” It has no value except in so far as it identifies with the Divine Will, which is charity. Moreover, for Rancé it is self-will, not the body, which is the real enemy. He aimed at renunciation of self through humility and obedience, but with the pessimistic viewpoint about human nature characteristic of converts of his century, from whence the rigorousness with which he can be reproached.

Rancé thought that he had found in the cenobitic way lived according to the Fathers, an efficacious remedy for the disastrous consequences of a life of illusory pleasure in the sinful world. He offered this possibility of a cure to his sons [monks]. Confident of the mercy of God who saves the sinner who chooses to repent in monastic life, Rancé did not promise an immediate happiness, but he was sure of leading his monks to the lasting joys of heaven. This certainty which was shared by all, manifested itself in their joyful living as brothers this way of life which, though demanding, was freely chosen.

D) The writer

In 1683, at the request of Bossuet, Rancé published “*Sainteté et Devoirs de la vie monastique*” [*Holiness and Duties of the Monastic Life*], where in twenty three conferences, based on his teaching to his monks, he set out his understanding of monastic life. This major work was very successful. It also attracted criticism from some religious who perceived themselves to be accused of declining standards. In particular it provoked a long polemic with the Benedictine monks of Saint-Maur especially Dom Mabillon on the place of studies in the monastic life. A polemic which, following the publication of several contradictory works, suddenly concluded when the two protagonists met at La Trappe, held each other in high esteem and recognised the value of both points of view. In 1689 the translation and commentary on the RSB appeared. In 1690 the publication of *Règlements de l'Abbaye de Notre Dame de La Trappe*. [*Rule of the Abbey of Our Lady of La Trappe*]. We have already spoken above of the “*Account of the death of several religious*” which ran to several editions. Added to these more directly monastic works were some works of piety and spiritual direction and numerous collections of letters.

All these texts spread the Rancéen concept of Cistercian life and made La Trappe well known, but because their style is often polemical, apart from the letters where the tone is more nuanced, they have only served to add strength to the image of Rancé and his reform.

E) The last years

Becoming more and more infirm, Rancé resigned as abbot in May 1695. In order to safeguard the reform and as an exceptional favour, King Louis XIV accepted the nomination of a regular abbot: Dom Zozime (28 December 1695). However, he died soon afterwards (March 1696). Dom Gervaise was named (18 October 1696) but criticised by certain close friends of Rancé he had to resign in December 1698. Dom Jacques de la Cour was named (5 April 1699). Rancé, despite his illness, lived peacefully and fervently, for another year.

After one day in the throes of death, he died a holy death on 27 October 1700, laid on sackcloth and ashes in the presence of the bishop of Séz. His last words were, “Do not delay, my God, hasten to come to me.”

3. The influence of Rancé and of his reform at La Trappe

Rancé had never wished to separate La Trappe from the Cistercian Order, even though he had put into place a Rule that differed from the Strict Observance and had not attended a meeting of

the abbots after 1675. The proof of this can be found in his welcome for the regular visitors. Neither was he the leader of an organised movement nor did he found any daughter-houses. However for many, Rancé by his return to the sources of monastic asceticism and his refusal to allow laxity, so real in his time, shows his belief in and attraction for Cistercian life. Hence there was a real influence through meetings at La Trappe, letters and the books of this “new St. Bernard.” (Bossuet) At the request of their abbots, he contributed at first hand to the reform of several Cistercian abbeys. Thus: in 1666 Dom Eustache de Beaufort (1636-1709) abbot of Sept-Fons in 1656, in 1669 Dom Charles de Bentzeradt (1635-1707) abbot of Orval in 1668, in 1677 Dom Jean Antoine de la Forêt de Somont (1645-1701) abbot of Tamié in 1665, all met with Rancé, asked his advice and help for the reform of their abbeys and adopted observances similar to those of La Trappe. Rancé agreed to form some of their monks at La Trappe, or else sent some of his monks to help with the reform of these monasteries.

As for the nuns, Rancé was in close correspondence with several abbesses for example: Louise-Hollandine of Bavaria (1622-1709) of the royal abbey of Maubuisson. The abbess of Clairets, Mère Françoise-Angélique d’Etampes de Valençay, even persuaded Rancé to make the canonical visitations to her monastery from 1690 to 1692 and with his help introduced the Strict Observance there.

Furthermore, after the death of Rancé, La Trappe kept the observances and spirit of their reformer, but that is the subject of another paper...

4. Conclusion

Was it out of pride or ignorance that Rancé wanted to deviate from the interpretation of the Rule and the early documents of Cîteaux, which were common at the time? Despite his faults, which are only too well known, we have to deny this. It was rather his ardent desire for a radical and authentic life, consecrated to God in the monastery. As a young man, out of duty to his family, he had to become a priest without having any real vocation. This generous and impassioned man found himself obliged to live a life of compromise and false pretences. At thirty-one years old (1657) he could not carry on any longer. But how could he live authentically in a society riddled with worldly compromises? It was then that the discovery of St. John Climacus and the other “solitaries” showed him men who truly lived what they believed. Rancé was a doer, for him to love was to imitate. He burned with desire to follow these earlier monks and in this way to escape from his own internal discord. He searched for five years (1658 – 1662). During his stay at La Trappe, the monks who had come from Perseigne showed him that he too, following St. Bernard, could return to the ideal of the great solitaries of Egypt, and consequently away from the lax standards of his times. His study of the Rule in the light of the Fathers of the East called him to go even further in search of authentic living, as he understood it, and it was in order to live in this way that he reformed La Trappe. This concern for truth turned him away from external penance, which was not founded in love for God. In his commentaries on the Rule, he wrote: “The monastic life, however austere it is, is nothing but pure Judaism (behaviour purely for show and therefore worthless) if the interior preparation of the heart is not in accord with the external behaviour.”

Behind his search for perfection in a penitential monastic life, despite his excesses and intolerance, Rancé was seeking christian authenticity. With his whole being, he wanted to conform to the will of God loved above all else and in this, man of the 17th century though he was, he was certainly a son of St. Bernard.

Questions for reflection

1. Where, in your monastic life today, do you come across the same sort of experiences as Rancé ?
2. How, as Rancé suggests, does penance lead to charity ?
3. The Fathers of the Desert inspired Rancé. Do you see this inspiration in monastic life today ?

Text :

I would not fulfil my obligation to God nor my obligation to you, my Brothers, nor my obligation to myself if, in my leadership, I neglected anything which could make you worthy of eternity. I make certain that you give me an account of your thoughts, your desires and your actions; and you could justifiably complain about me, if I did not do all that I could to help you by my exhortations and advice.

It seems to me that there is nothing more important for a superior than to preserve peace among the Brothers, which is the only foundation of holiness in monasteries. Nothing is so capable of destroying this peace as a lack of consideration in the way they live and treat each other. I believe, Brothers, that I must add to the things I have forbidden that you never use harsh signs, which can show impatience, discontent, or displeasure, and a specific order that you abstain from all authoritative manner, gestures or words (...)

Charity and peace are the main purpose of all the Rules and all the practices that we have brought back (...) There is not one which is not concerned with the preservation or growth of these virtues.

Règlements généraux pour l'Abbaye de La Trappe, by Dom Armand Jean Bouthillier de Rancé, Paris, 1701

Annexe No. 1 Port-Royal and Rancé :

Mère Marie-Ange Picon, La Grâce-Dieu.

In looking through the letters of Rancé it is noticeable that a good number of them (146) are written to people close to Port-Royal, either to "solitaries" or to the people who gravitated towards them at the abbey of Port-Royal des Champs, or in Paris. Notably, there are five letters from Rancé to Antoine Arnauld, known as the Great Arnauld, and fifty one letters to Robert Arnauld d'Andilly. The tone is always respectful and friendly, for example in this letter to Antoine Arnauld (*Letter 720419*) "I pray to God with my whole heart that having enlightened and sanctified the Church by your holiness and your doctrine, he will reward in heaven a minister who has such a holy and happy disposition."

Faithful in friendship Rancé continued this correspondence even when royal persecution struck Port-Royal. Thus he wrote in his last letter to Arnauld d'Andilly a few months before the death of the "solitary", "I do not have to tell you, Sir, all that my heart feels about all the kindness with which you honour me for I am sure that your own heart tells you for me." (*Letter 730702*). However, Rancé kept his distance from a Port-Royal suspected of Jansenism. For example in 1671 he dissuaded his niece Mother Louise-Henriette d'Albon from leaving her Visitation convent to enter at Port-Royal. He wrote to her, "What seems the most austere to us is not necessarily the most holy, holiness consists in knowing the will of God and following it..." (*Letter 71120*) Later in 1674, Rancé would not accept a postulant sent by Antoine Arnauld (*Letter 741023*)

Certainly Rancé had a lot of respect for the reforming work of the Arnauld family and their friends. It is possible that their example had influenced the reform of the abbot of La Trappe, but Rancé did not wish to link up with them in any way and his friendly respect never became too close a contact.

Annexe No. 2 : 17th century France and life at La Trappe

1) La Trappe in the social context of the times

For the kingdom of France the second half of the 17th century was a period of political stability and economic prosperity. Under the authority of the minister Colbert (1619-1683) modern forms of commerce and industry began to be put into place, with a growth in production and resources. A hard-working and thrifty middle class developed and became rich. The bourgeoisie became more and more of a dynamic element in society. However this prosperity was often damaged by the numerous wars led by King Louis XIV, and above all it was very unequally divided. Thus the peasants who made up about three-quarters of the population did not yet benefit from the technological progress in farming of the XVIII century and their quality of life was precarious. Their output was poor and in the case of a bad harvest, because of lack of reserves and means of trade, there was very quickly a food shortage in the whole region. There are many accounts of these famines in the country whilst the royal court lived in luxury. For example this passage from a sermon of Bossuet (1627-1704) to the Court: "Is it possible that you might hear the listless voice of the poor who tremble before you? ... They are dying of hunger, yes, Sirs, they are dying of hunger on your land... at the doors of your chateaux."

This lack of security for a large part of the population must not be forgotten when one wishes to judge the way of life at La Trappe. If it is surprising compared with the bourgeois habits common among the religious of the time, it was nevertheless in conformity with the standard of living of many of their contemporaries. Hence the pertinent remark of Professor Krailsheimer (edition 200, page 115): "After his visit to La Trappe in 1693, the Duke of Orléans, duly edified by what he had seen... took back to Versailles with him a sample of the bread served in the monastery, and the replete, well-fed courtiers passed it from hand to hand with appropriate exclamations. It would be interesting to know how they would have reacted to a similar exhibition of the daily menu of a common peasant in this time of food shortage in the countryside. Clearly, one represented the voluntary choice of a noble abbot, the other was the inevitable consequence of the inequality and extravagance on which the life at Court was based." It is, certainly, the freedom of this choice of a life of poverty which showed that Rancé was serious in his desire for an authentic monasticism.

2) The way of life at La Trappe

From 1662, with the arrival of the monks of Perseigne, La Trappe followed the Usages of the Strict Observance. After he returned from Rome (1666) it took Rancé only a few years to emphasise the penitential aspect of observances especially the following:

- The diet: As well as abstaining from meat, they abstained from fish, eggs, butter, seasonings and sweet things. They had a rigorous observance of fasting and did not have milk during Advent or Lent.
- Silence: He established constant silence and suppressed recreation, but on a Sunday afternoon held a community conference along the lines of the gatherings in the desert of Egypt.
- Separation from the world: A strict enclosure with no going out, even for reasons of health. The monks did not receive visits or letters or any news from the outside world.
- Manual work: All had to do three hours of hard work in the fields or in the workshops.
- Choral Office: Sung in its entirety, and including the time of private prayer, lasted about eight hours on working days and more than ten hours on Sundays and feast days.

- Vigils: They went to bed at eight o'clock in the evening and slept on a hard mattress fully clothed including a cowl. They rose at two in the morning on workdays. They rose at one on Sundays and at midnight on feast days, but had a siesta of about an hour.

- The situation of the sick: The relief of pain or treatment needed by the sick was only given when really essential and even then at the judgement of the superior. A monk went to the infirmary to prepare for a good death in a fervent asceticism rather than to be cured or to stay there and obtain relief from his sickness.

Conclusion

To conclude, an extract from the *"Description de l' Abbaye de La Trappe"* by Félibien des Avaux, which expresses well the asceticism which was lived there and the spirit in which it was lived. "Here then is the way of life of these solitaires... I do not doubt that it seems ghastly (to the men of the world) when you learn of the renouncing of all pleasure, this mortification and austerity in food and drink; this almost continual fasting and so great that from one meal to the next.... for the greater part of the year the body survives 24 hours taking nothing but two pears or two apples with a very small piece of bread, even though the monks work for more than three hours and they spend more than eight hours singing the divine office; the silence so meticulously observed that no matter where they are... they never talk to each other without the permission of the Superior.... This uniformity of life where nature finds no relaxation or any solace in change itself or in the changing of the austerity or work. However it does not appear to cause any pain to these good religious. The love of God makes all things sweet to them and however burdensome the cross they carry, they find it too light. You never sees them complaining, nor shirking their work, each one hastens to it with a delight and extraordinary joy and they have respect and a real brotherly love for each other."

Third part

18th-19^h century

Growing diversity in an often heroic fidelity

Cistercian Life in the Century of the Enlightenment (18th century)

Unit prepared by Dom Marie-Gerard Dubois, La Trappe.

Apart from some abbeys which followed a more austere reform, such as La Trappe, Sept-Fons or Orval, it could be said that in the monasteries manual work played a very small part and was reduced to gardening or raising farmyard animals. Having more time to spare the monks either lost their religious spirit and occupied themselves as best they could or gave themselves to more spiritual work. Proportionately the number of writers of the 17th and eighteenth centuries surpassed that of the golden age of Cîteaux. But it was no longer just a matter of spiritual treatises; we meet many scholarly works of science indeed of literature.

The spirit of the times drove them on: it was the century of "Enlightenment", the century when one believed that science, more than Revelation, had the last word on everything. It was the century of *The Encyclopaedia or the detailed Dictionary of sciences, arts and trades*, published in 1765 under the direction of Diderot. He turned the way of thinking upside down: it was no longer a matter of leaving it up to God, human reason was "powerful enough to find a remedy for its own evils and to embark alone along the way of progress."

1. Central and Eastern Europe

Peace in Westphalia in 1648 put an end to a destructive century of wars of religion and the spirit of catholic renewal was able to express itself openly in the whole of central and eastern Europe. Thus the congregation of High Germany, instituted at the beginning of the XVII century after the devastating Lutheran reform, had been able to flourish. The monasteries in Hungary had been in a state of lethargy for two centuries, victims of the Turkish occupation after the defeat of the Mohacs in 1526, which had changed the country into one big battlefield. The "awakening" took place at the beginning of the XVIII century with the repossession of Paszto (1702) and of Pilis (1712) by monks who had been brought from Moravia, then of Zirc by Henrykow. Zirc was destined to become a great centre of renewal of the Cistercian life. Heiligenkreuz re-introduced Cistercian life at Szentgotthard, which was completely rebuilt.

This religious peace gave rise to what is called the Baroque period, principally in Austria. This period was characterised by an intense quest for splendour and magnificence, for majesty and glory: it created works of art, as much in architecture as in music; in the monasteries too, where the liturgical life found fulfilment in elaborate liturgies with polyphonic choirs and even orchestras. Sometimes it was necessary to counteract certain extremes: in certain places they asked for nothing more in a postulant than that he have knowledge of music! It became necessary to hold a national chapter at Salem in 1733 in order to give some instruction concerning moderation. Many abbeys were re-built according to the spirit of the times and became centres of art and science. But, at the same time, they received a good number of new members, which helped the possibility of return to a strict monastic discipline.

At first sight this mix of Cistercian traditions and baroque mentality seem to be full of contradictions. But the contradiction between poverty and the magnificence of the place and collections of works of art, between strict discipline and freedom of thought and mind, in reality lived in harmony it would seem, as was noted by Père Barthélemy Sedlak, secretary of the abbot of Henrykow and visitor to Salem in 1768. He marvelled at all the works of art he had seen and at the ceremonial of the abbey, he added: "Here I noticed such a meticulous regular discipline that I had the impression that I was seeing Clairvaux at the time of our Father, St. Bernard and this was a great joy for me. There are seventy monks in the monastery; however, although we went back and forth through the cloisters several times, we never met a single monk. It is not by chance [...] that the monks are deeply devoted to their studies and the habit of solitude is so deeply ingrained that it seems to be part of their nature. Although the monastery is rich, it is surprising to see the poverty of the monks. The material of their habit is poor, they do not wear garments of linen but their

undergarments are of wool. In monastic discipline they follow to the letter the reform of their Constitutions approved by Alexander VII."

However, the clouds were gathering. Firstly from the side of the intellectuals, marked by *illuminism*, which wanted to judge the past in the light of its social usefulness. Few monks adhered to this philosophical doctrine which arose in this century. The example of the Bavarian abbey of Kaishem was significant. One of the monks of this abbey, professor of a new generation, wrote to one of his friends: "I am happy to be a monk because I believe that such a profession commits me to serve the ideals of christian philosophy. A man who lives in solitude and silence, who is exempt from family demands, who is surrounded by cultural friends, is always a philanthropist, rich in virtues: so he can contribute to the happiness of all!" But in his own community he met more and more opposition, until, in 1785, he had to leave the abbey. The reaction of conservatives was alive in the heart of the Bavarian monasteries to the point that the monks were called "White Jesuits."

But disaster happened when, through his policies, Emperor Joseph II gave a political dimension to illuminism. In 1782 and 1783 with one stroke of the pen, he suppressed all the contemplative monasteries which, according to him, were no longer useful to society. In the part of the empire more directly subject to the Habsbourg, Austria-Hungary and Bavaria, the numerous monasteries experienced with the full force of the whip the lay politics of the emperor-sacristan. Those who wished to escape from this imperial will, had to take on the running of parishes or schools as some had already done, Ruda for example, in 1743. In Bohemia-Moravia two monasteries remained; seven in Austria survived, thanks to the apostolate which they took on. These abbeys are: Neukloster, Rein, Wilhering, Schlierbach, Zwettl, Heiligenkreuz and Lilienfeld. Stams was restored when the Tyrol was returned to Austria in 1814.

In Hungary only Zirc survived, but only by adopting two colleges which had been run until then by Jesuits, henceforth banished from the empire; at the same time Zirc amalgamated with Pilis and Paszto. Some thirty-five priests took on the pastoral work or the teaching. At Zirc only the novices were left, together with the staff necessary to run the place. Only the day hours of the Divine Office were said. The other ten monasteries of Bohemia or Austria lived much the same thing having a good number of priests, but practically no lay brothers.

The policies of Joseph II extended to the monasteries of the Austrian Low Countries who, in 1781, by imperial command, had to resign themselves to forming one independent congregation because Joseph II wished to cut all links with foreign lands. But this congregation was never canonically erected. Even this concession to the imperial command did not prevent the closure of several communities, but the death of the emperor in 1790 spared the fourteen monasteries of monks and the thirty-nine of nuns in the territory of Belgium itself. The French invasion sapped the foundations of all that remained in 1793-1795. No convent was spared. Soleilmont and La Byloque were re-occupied in 1802, while the Bernardines of Oudenaarde were reduced to the rank of humble servants in their hospital.

The monasteries situated in the western and northern part of the empire which corresponds more or less to the Germany of today (which made up the majority of the congregation of High Germany) escaped the politics of the House of Austria, but at the hands of Napoleon suffered other disasters which were even more drastic. (Cf. The unit on the XIX century Common Observance).

2. In France

As in central Europe, France was affected by the ideas of the century. Re-building in a grandiose style was not lacking, even though these buildings were inspired by classical designs, very different from the Baroque style. Just think of the imposing facades of Cîteaux and Clairvaux. Sometimes one wonders if certain abbeys were not tempted to transform their abbeys into "copies of Versailles." Some abbeys, however, steered clear of all this, either they were too poor, or the abbot had other concerns.

Renowned because of the legacy of Abbot de Rancé, La Trappe distinguished itself in the century of Enlightenment, but not by its buildings. It provided the material for novels, short stories and other literary works. In Paris, the numerous series of prints sold by merchants on the rue St-Jacques witness to the popularity of the abbey. The monks of La Trappe were always depicted smiling and peaceful whether they were singing in choir or leaving for work, their spades under their arms, or whether they were listening to a conference given by their Father Abbot. But the community also attracted criticism from those who considered themselves the good thinkers of the time.

Through lack of understanding of the Trappist way of life, literary writers looked for extraordinary reasons for the choice of life as a monk: exuberance of spirit, intense passions frustrated, disappointed ambitions, crossed in love, the inevitable remorse after serious crimes etc. These are the dominant themes in the *Comte de Comminge* by the Countess de Tencin and in the *Novice of La Trappe* by Florian. In a *Letter from Abbot de Rancé to a friend*, Nicolas-Thomas Barthe represents Rancé as a lover in despair not wanting to possess anything but God having lost the object of an illicit love. Diderot's encyclopaedia of 1765 presents La Trappe as follows: "Those who have committed some secret crime and are haunted by remorse retire to La Trappe; those who are tormented by religious and melancholy delusions, those who have forgotten that God is the most merciful of fathers and who see him only as the most cruel tyrant; those who have reduced to nothing the suffering, passion and death of Jesus Christ, and who see religion only as terrible and frightening. These are the things which give rise to the cries of the monks and these are the reasons for their austere penances which shorten their life span and insult the divinity."

For their part the philosophers put the blame on the way of life of the monks of Perche. La Harpe, in a reply in verse to Barthe, accuses Rancé of having made his religious carry the weight of his misdeeds. He presented a solitary at La Trappe protesting against this yoke which he has not deserved. Voltaire wrote the preface for this diatribe. In his correspondence, the philosopher attacked this fanatical abbot de Rancé and his stupid monks, "The Book of La Harpe" he maintained, "is one of the best works that I have seen. It must be put into the hands of all novices. There will be no more professed monks; never has a better picture been painted of the horror of the life of a monk."

1) The diversity of the monasteries

In fact the situation was very different according to the monasteries. Some, put under the Commendatory system again, had difficulty maintaining a good regular life. The commendatory system divided the revenues of the monastery into three parts: one part to ensure the subsistence of the monks, the second for the upkeep of the monastery and the third to the commendatory. The temptation he had was to restrict the recruitment of the community and the upkeep of the monastery in order to increase his share, sometimes without any respect for the contracts that determined the division. Some monasteries, damaged by some disaster, were not repaired and the living conditions were such that they did not encourage vocations. Many monasteries saw their strength diminish more and more. In 1765, of 228 houses in 106 dioceses, about fifty had been depopulated, more than two thirds (175) had less than nine religious; the average was less than eight (some say that the average was as low as five). In these houses they struggled for survival.

On the other hand, some abbeys continued to show great vitality. These were the abbeys that had been vigorously reformed during the previous century, or where the commendatory abbot had seen to the good upkeep of the house, regarding both its buildings and its recruitment. In January 1790 on the eve of the suppression of the religious Orders by the revolution, La Trappe for example counted sixty-three choir monks, forty lay brothers and nine novices (and three '*donnés*' or oblates), the same number of professed as the five oldest abbeys of the Order put together: Cîteaux (sixteen choir monks and five lay brothers but twenty-eight professed from other houses also lived in the community) La Ferté (twelve choir monks and three lay brothers) Pontigny (twelve choir monks and two lay brothers) Clairvaux (twenty choir monks and nine lay brothers) and Morimond (fifteen choir monks and nine lay brothers). La Trappe had more monks than any other French Abbey. Sept-Fons still had thirty-one choir monks and thirty-nine lay brothers, with

eighteen choir monks and twenty-six lay brothers at the Priory of Val-Saint-Lieu (Val-des-Choux was amalgamated with Sept-Fons in 1760). Between them, La Trappe and Sept-Fons (with Val-Saint-Lieu) represented 10% of the French Cistercian world. The figures do not tell the whole story: they were also the most fervent houses. The monks of La Trappe, like those of Sept-Fons, lived an exemplary regular life, in accordance with the Rule of the 17th century that was still practised there. On the other hand, the way of life led by the abbot of Cîteaux for example, however meritorious he might be in his personal life, was that of the grand Lord with his apartments and special servants. This was the way of life of other abbots too. There were hardly any differences between the Common and the Strict Observance, to which a third of the abbeys belonged.

The Commission, known as the Regulars, named by the government of Louis XV in May 1766, was given the task of conducting a survey throughout the whole kingdom on the real state of the communities and of suggesting steps to be taken. The work of this commission is precious to historians for the knowledge it gives of the situation of religious life twenty-five years before the French Revolution of 1789. In the papers of the head of the commission we read: The Cistercians are profoundly decadent with the exception of the two reforms of La Trappe and Sept-Fons and a few other odd houses. Cîteaux is nothing more than a worldly business, very powerful and materially rich, but this wealth itself is in a state of collapse because of the increasing absence of an authentic and profound spiritual life.

About fifty bishops gave their opinion of the houses in their diocese: eighteen are favourable, six abstained and thirty-six are more or less against them. Only thirty-two houses received praise, many were judged useless, seventeen were declared scandalous. But ten of these were situated in two dioceses where the bishops were acknowledged enemies of the monastic life. This gives us a glimpse of the fact that certain Episcopal statements owe more perhaps to the influence of illuminism, (which regarded monastic life as belonging to bye-gone days and considered it useless) than to an impartial perception.

2) The life of the Order in France

To this situation must be added the negative effects of the disputes between the abbot of Cîteaux and the first Fathers, the abbots of the first daughter houses of Cîteaux, which had been going on at least since the Chapters of 1683 and 1686. Furthermore, the State intervened more and more in the religious affairs of the country and the Order of Cîteaux was greatly dependent on royal measures. The appeals that the various factions of one or other Observance had made to the political authorities, during their quarrels of the 17th century, had created a precedent which was, in any case, in the 'gallican' spirit of the France of Louis XIV and his successors.

This opposition between the abbot of Cîteaux and the first Fathers led to a certain paralysis of the General Chapter, whose meetings became less and less frequent. During the first sixty years of the 18th century, it was only held twice. Nicolas Larcher only held one chapter during the ten years of his 'generalate' and that was in 1699. Edmond Perrot, his successor from 1712 to 1727, only called one; he counted on the support of the abbots of Haute-Allemagne in his struggle against 'the old dragon with four heads' as he called it. The Allemands threatened to break away and elect their own abbot general, if the pretentiousness of the first Fathers did not calm down. The King Louis XV was aware of this threat, as Louis XIV had been in the time of the Strict observance. Andoche Pernot was forced to convoke a chapter in 1738, but he tried to manipulate the assembly to such a degree that the hostility of the first Fathers could only grow. They sought to re-gain the advantage by relying on the influential families of society, from which the episcopal sees were filled. They put so many spokes in the wheels of the new abbot of Cîteaux, François Trouvé, that he had difficulty in convoking a general chapter.

On the 14th March 1761 the 'Grand Conseil' of the kingdom, under the influence of the first Fathers, invalidated a certain number of the decisions of 1738 and the administrative measures of Dom Trouvé. Finally, a chapter opened in 1765, in the presence of a representative of the French government. Sixty or so abbots had the right to vote; on the whole the French supported the proto-abbots and the Germans, the

abbot of Cîteaux. All turned to the parliament of Dijon, which supported Dom Trouvé and the others appealed to the 'Grand Conseil'. But the commission of 'Reguliers' was not going to delay in proposing reform in the religious communities of the kingdom. The solution that they suggested to the Cistercians was the redaction of new constitutions, which would be in favour of a more democratic government in the Order. Various plans were studied, without success, at the Chapters of 1768 and 1771, which was a pitiful assembly, both because of pressure exerted by the civil authority and because of internal divisions among the abbots. But with the disappearance, after 1782, of several monasteries of central Europe following the policy of Joseph II, the abbot of Cîteaux lost his principal supporters. Hardly anyone other than the French abbots attended the two chapters of 1783 and 1786. The governmental plan was finally accepted, despite the resistance of Dom Trouvé but certain requests were addressed to the king, against issues that were not to their liking. There was no royal response and the French Revolution changed the situation even before these constitutions were approved by the Pope and the king. They were, then, never applied. A new page in the history of the Order was about to begin. Before it was written, the abbot of Cîteaux made one final appeal, in 1782, that the Rule should be observed more faithfully, a Rule which the monks seemed to have somewhat forgotten.

3) The destruction of the French Revolution

The storming of the Bastille on 14th July 1789, marked the official beginning of the French Revolution. The financial crisis, which spread over the whole state, wrestling with foreign wars, brought about the offer of Talleyrand, on 2nd November 1789, to put all ecclesiastical goods, including those of the monasteries, at the disposition of the nation.

On 12th February 1790, at the National Assembly, a deputy proclaimed: "The Religious Orders are incompatible with the social order and the public good; you must destroy them all without exception." The next day, the assembly decreed the suppression of the Orders and Congregations that took solemn vows, and made no allowance for them to be re-established in the future. This measure had already been planned since the end of 1789. The religious found themselves offered pensions. If they refused to accept this, they had permission to take refuge in specific houses offered to them, but they were not allowed to receive novices. Little by little the houses were emptied of their members, either they retired voluntarily to avoid a worse fate, or they were expelled.

At the end of 1792, the some two hundred and thirty monasteries of Cistercian monks in France were no longer in existence, nor the good hundred, if not more, of monasteries of nuns, without mentioning the Bernardines of Mère de Ballon, a good thirty houses. Some communities, especially female ones dispersed and survived, on the whole, in secret. The others who did not wish to be subjected to civil law went into exile or were persecuted. Many monks and nuns died as martyrs.

In Switzerland the era of Dom Augustin de Lestrange, master of novices of the abbey of La Trappe, was beginning...

Text :

The exhortation of Dom François Trouvé in 1782 addressed to the members of the Order

It is with the deepest sorrow that we are obliged to remind you of your obligation to observe the Rule and laws, which although acknowledged, adopted, confirmed and strictly recommended by our General Chapters, have nevertheless fallen into disuse in a deplorable manner.

For a long time we have been content with complaining about it, always hoping that the good example which some of our houses still give, would serve to bring everyone back to the practice of the duties of our state and to a general good order. We were also convinced that the holding of a general chapter, which we had expected to happen before now, would find a solution to all these things by wise and well

contrived rules. Until now we have put off using the remedies which are within our power to use, in order to bring about the re-establishment of this good order and the observation of these laws, for which we are responsible. But we can no longer conceal the urgency of this matter, or wait for the right moment to remedy the abuses which have been introduced, which increase daily, and which will inevitably become the main reason for the negligence of our essential [duty], the divine office. This will not be celebrated with as much solemnity, fervour and unanimity as it should be, particularly if we do not put a stop to overly frequent absences and unruly external behaviour. Finally, repeated remarks made to us by the most distinguished people, who have not disguised their surprise at how little consideration we have for public opinion (which, sadly, we acknowledge) have brought home to us the fact that we cannot postpone the making of this ruling any longer, convinced that it will serve to bring back order and the propriety which befits the Religious State.

For this reason we have ordained the following: [there follows five prescriptions]

The first concerns the presence of all, in a recollected manner and wearing the cowl, at the Office both day and night, unless the express permission of the superior has been obtained.

The second obliges the abbot, prior and all monks to wear a long habit and the other signs characteristic of their state in the monasteries and towns where they are staying. The habit for travelling is that prescribed in the order and supplied by the clothing room of the monastery.

The third forbids superiors to allow a monk, unless he is in charge of monastery business to go out of the monastery alone, except for reasons of illness or another important reason. If the absence is longer than eight days, it needs the authorisation of the vicar general, and if this is not possible, of the Father Immediate.

The fourth stipulates that those who call in or stay in the colleges of Toulouse or Paris make themselves known to the Procurator General of the Order if he resides there, or to the principals of the said colleges. They must show them the written permission of their superiors, which will have made clear the place of residence and the reason for the authorisation. It also stipulates that regular visits should be carried out each year with an account of them given to the General Chapter, to the abbot of Cîteaux and to the Fathers Immediate.

The fifth is written as follows : Finally, in cases where it has already happened or could happen that there are differences of opinion or disputes, relating to the content of our Constitutions, we ordain that in the interim, whilst waiting for the judgement and decision of the Council of the King or to the holding of our next general chapter, all is brought before our vicars general who will be obliged to give us their opinion, when they have become acquainted with the situation, so that it can be sorted out more effectively on the spot and to fulfil the hierarchy of jurisdiction established in the order which are from vicar general to Father Immediate, from Father Immediate to the abbot of Cîteaux and from him to the General Chapter.

This present ruling will be read and published in our college of St. Bernard at Paris and brought to the attention of our Procurator General and our vicars general, all abbots, priors, superiors and religious. We enjoin that all of them are bound by it, in virtue of the obedience which they owe to us, or undergo the reprimand and punishment as laid down by the statutes of our Order.

Given at our abbey of Cîteaux, under our own hand, and that of our secretary, with the impress of our great seal, this eleventh day of September seventeen hundred and eighty-two.

Signed : F. François, Abbot General of Cîteaux.

Questions for reflection

1. In the 17th and 18th centuries the Cistercian monasteries became aware of baroque art. What form does our critique of this fact take? Do we judge it with the artistic sensitivity of our age or with our concern for Cistercian simplicity?

Bearing in mind that baroque art wanted to express and transmit the faith, in the context of the culture of the time, what today are the artistic means of expressing and transmitting the faith and how do they comply with Cistercian simplicity? How, for example, do we deal with the whole area of pictures, the audio-visual?

2. This unit speaks of monks who lived poverty in a lavish setting. Are there situations where the monastery offers an environment that is better than that of the neighbouring people? How do we live poorly and freely in these situations?

3. At the end of this century monks and nuns paid for their fidelity to Christ with their lives; others accepted with reticence to be “freed” from their vows by the civil authority.

French Monasticism during the Revolution

The saga of Dom Augustine de Lestrangle

Unit prepared by Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois, La Trappe.

La Valsainte from 1791-1798

After the death of the Abbot on February 7th, 1790, the Prior of La Trappe, Dom Gervais Brunel, hoped to obtain concessions from the Committee for Ecclesiastical Affairs, of the National Assembly. His hopes were based on the regularity of the community, as well as on the social service it was rendering in the region by feeding and caring for the poor who came to the monastery. In this he had the practically unanimous support of the community. An inquiry was held at La Trappe, which showed that the monks were very devoted to their vocation, and were determined to live it out to the end. In January 1790 the community consisted of 103 persons, of whom 40 were lay brothers, 6 novices and 7 oblates. The Novice Master, Dom Augustine de Lestrangle, however, did not share this confidence of his confrères. He regarded it as being naive. He had reached his own decision, which he explained at length in a talk he gave to the community on the Feast of St. Benedict, March 21, 1790. This was his decision: The spirit of La Trappe was to be kept alive by establishing a monastery outside France. In addition he told his listeners that they should avail of the situation providentially created by the Revolution, to complete the reform begun by de Rancé. In his mind all this was linked up.

That daring initiative proposed by the Novice Master met with indifference, and even hostility, on the part of his confrères. This opposition lasted until February 1791, when the community was informed that

the petition made the previous year had been rejected out of hand. La Trappe was designated a 'Maison Commune' for the department of Orne. Under those circumstances, Dom Augustine got permission from the Abbots of Cîteaux and Clairvaux to establish a new community.

On May 1st 1791, twenty-two Trappists set out in large covered wagons under the of the former Novice Master. They were setting out for Valsainte in Switzerland. There they intended to lead with renewed fervour the life of prayer they had freely chosen. They were not fugitives or emigrants: they were simply taking the necessary means to continue living their monastic life in the circumstances in which they found themselves. " Dom Augustine and his followers were not motivated by the desire to salvage something of monastic life from the total collapse of monasticism in France. Their aim was to renew and perfect the spirit of de Rancé by making the best use of the present situation [...] Some referred to the undertaking as a sad departure or flight, but Dom Augustine spoke of a new Cîteaux, a re-birth of monasticism, a return to the sources." In fact the account of the beginning of the foundation, given in the regulations of 1794 was regarded as written somewhat on the lines of the Exordium of Cîteaux in the 12th century.

A) The monastic life at Valsainte

On their arrival at Valsainte the monks set about examining their lifestyle in the light of the Rule of St. Benedict, precisely as the monks from Molesmes had done when founding Cîteaux. There were differences, however. Valsainte was influenced by an obsession with what was considered the laxity of monastic life, and the need for mortification. This arose from a pessimistic view of human nature, and inevitably led to a spirit of fear and rigorism. Likewise the step taken by Dom de Lestrange was influenced by the exalted idea of God, so characteristic of his time: His Omnipotence, His Rights and His Will. This resulted in giving the Abbot an authority that was absolute and sovereign.

The thousand-page account of the regulations of the Valsainte reforming movement was completed in 1795. It was intended to follow the regulations of Abbot de Rancé, but in fact it revised them and added to them. "Everything had to be weighed, measured and counted: the thickness of the soles of shoes, the size of the handkerchiefs" the size of the pillows, and the manner in which the night-vessels had to be washed (sic!)...All that may make one smile. This was the thinking behind it. To ensure that one was doing the Will of God, nothing should be done according to one's own will. Everything had first to be codified and submitted to authority. Today we have a different outlook on the connexion between obedience and personal initiative. In the 19th century the emphasis was on respect for the law in order to be certain of doing God's Will. Because the human will was regarded as being necessarily evil, there was no scope for personal enterprise. In addition, all uncertainty about what one should do was removed, and so there was no occasion for singularity or disunity among the brethren: all were cast in the same mould.

Life in community was lived to the full. Silence was absolute, and the community was cut off from all external contacts. The slightest violation of a rule, such as shaping the words with one's lips in order to make oneself understood when using the sign language, was severely punished.

The burden of penitential practices was the worst aspect of the regulations. De Rancé's reform was severe enough, but Lestrange added to it. He was of the opinion that de Rancé, because of circumstances, was unable to achieve his aim of observing the Rule of St. Benedict literally. This was especially true with regard to the common dormitory and the hours of meals. This was considered feasible at Valsainte. There was a common dormitory. In winter, i.e. from Sept.14th there was one meal at 14h.30 and in Lent at 16h.15. Even Christmas Day was a day of fasting, unless it happened to fall on a Sunday. Abbot de Rancé excluded meat, fish and eggs. Dom Augustine went further and excluded butter, sugar, honey and spices as well. Frequently during the meal, at a signal from the superior, the reading was interrupted in order to afford the monks an opportunity to master their natural desire for food. This desire should spring from hunger alone. St. Bernard held that hunger, together with salt, was the best appetizer!

A considerable amount of time was assigned to prayer. Numerous of exercises of devotion were added to the liturgy, which prolonged it and made it burdensome. This was particularly true of Sundays when the rosary and the litany of the Blessed Virgin were recited. They were recited daily from Septuagesima to Easter. On the greater feast days Vigils lasted four hours. On such days the monks spent as many as eleven hours in choir.

Obviously manual labour was very important and necessary, and involved stonework, carpentry, the making of items urgently needed, and in general whatever was necessary for the running of the monastery. Ordinarily eleven hours a day were allotted to work, and occasionally as many as fourteen hours. Needless to say, the workload in the infirmary was heavy too! There were regularly from eight to ten patients to be taken care of. In 1795 the average number of deaths was one a month, according to Père Dargnies who was in Valsainte from the beginning. Between 1791-1798 thirty members of the community died. The same witness maintains that one-third of those could be attributed to outbreaks of scurvy "brought about by a rough diet, partaken of too fully after a prolonged fast."

B) The development of Valsainte

Individual monks from France, fleeing the persecution joined the exiled Trappists at Valsainte, as did some priests. It was time to think of making new foundations. 'Trappists' were to be found in Spain in 1796 and at Westmalle in Flanders in 1794. The latter were obliged to withdraw to Darfeld in Westphalia before advancing French troops. In addition, there were 'Trappists' in England and in Piedmont, Italy. Some foundations failed because they were made without adequate preparation. Dom Augustine began thinking of making foundations in America. In 1796, some nuns established themselves at Sembrancher, near Valsainte. In 1794 Dom Augustine was recognized as Abbot of Valsainte by the Holy See, 'Of the Order of Cîteaux and of the Congregation of La Trappe', as the pontifical text expressed it. He regarded his authority as extending to all the foundations. Later, in 1796, this authority extended to the nuns also, who followed the same regulations as the monks.

The 'Congregation' of La Trappe was 'virtually' established, though not in proper and canonical form, one should rather speak of the observance of La Trappe than of a congregation. All those foundations meant that Dom Augustine had to travel a good deal. In 1795 he was criticized by some for being too involved in his various enterprises. To complete the picture, reference must be made to the third order, which consisted of children and those in charge of them. They lived in the monastery, and were treated with all the consideration prescribed in the Rule of St. Benedict for children. This initiative, which meant a lot to the Abbot of Valsainte, was less acceptable to others...

2. An incredible monastic odyssey 1798-1803

From the beginning of January 1798, Switzerland was no longer a safe refuge for the French emigrés. Taking advantage of the presence of the Princess de Condé among the nuns who had established themselves at Sembrancher in 1796, a foundation Dom Augustine had taken under his control, he decided to send everybody to Russia, monks, nuns and children, two hundred and fifty-four people in all. Several groups set out eastwards between January 17th and February 10th, 1798. They went by different routes and had arranged rallying-points. It was an exhausting experience, and all the more so because Dom Augustine wanted all the monastic regulations observed as faithfully as possible. Apart from the very young, they often took only one meal each day, in the evening, after the sun had set. It is estimated that forty died during the duration of the odyssey; some also left.

Several groups when they reached Austria lost contact with Dom Augustine for some time and were settling down there. On his return Dom Augustine found that they could not receive novices in Austria, so he directed everybody to continue on the way to Russia. The first group arrived at Orscha, on the Dnieper, on September 20 1798. The last group did not get there until July 1799. Soon Dom Augustine had other plans in mind. He did not consider that there was enough room to manoeuvre in Russia, not enough freedom. He set his sights on America. In 1800 he was expelled by the Tsar. By now quite worn out, the monks did not wholeheartedly follow their abbot's ideas. Only thirty-six crossed to America in 1803. Those who did not settle in Westphalia went to Westmalle or to Valsainte. The Trappistines settled at Riedera, having failed to regain possession of Sembrancher.

3. The connection is maintained between the adventure of Dom Augustine and the La Trappe of Perche

From the foundation in Fribourg in 1791 to the Concordat of 1801, three factors contributed to maintaining the connection with the Abbey of La Trappe du Perche. Firstly, there was the authority of the founders with the charismatic Dom Augustine at their head. The monks formed at La Trappe before 1791 were logically the nucleus of the new Trappist foundations. At a time of political and social upheaval, their legitimacy was reinforced by their connection with an 'ancient regime', which had survived. Between 1791-1792 additional monks from among those left behind after the departure in May 1791, rejoined their confrères in Switzerland. In so doing they recognized that Valsainte had its roots in La Trappe and de Rancé.

The second element that ensured continuity with La Trappe was the systematic use of the name 'Trappist' instead of 'Cistercian'. The name 'Trappist' was in common use during the 18th century. Thanks to the Revolution and of the Empire, its use became practically exclusive. The monks who made use of the name could not fail to be reminded of the Cistercian monastery from which they sprang. The monks continued to live under the influence of de Rancé, and his project of reform. This was the third element ensuring continuity with La Trappe. The departure of a colony of monks for Valsainte in 1791, the reform undertaken on arrival there, and codified and printed in two thick volumes of Regulations, are incomprehensible unless we assume a great desire to follow de Rancé in order to recover the spirit of St. Bernard and of the Fathers of the Desert.

From the Concordat of 1801 to the Proscription of 1811, reference to the ancient Abbey of La Trappe became even more explicit, thanks to the tolerance shown to the monks of Dom Augustine. The time seemed ripe for the restoration of Cistercian life in France. Some monks and nuns settled, more or less openly, around Paris (Grosbois and Valenton). Napoleon himself had accepted the fact that the former Abbot of Tamié, Dom Gabet, with six former monks of his community, had been in charge of the hospice of Mont-Cenis since 1801. With Napoleon's approval, monks even established themselves at Mont Genève, in 1805. This was most unusual. Napoleon, who had suppressed the monasteries throughout the Empire, seemed to be favourably disposed towards the Trappists. He hesitated as regards their purpose in the reorganization of the Church in France, in consideration of certain compromises made by Dom Augustine.

In 1810, Napoleon envisaged going beyond giving concessions to certain monasteries, by setting up an Imperial Project to study the Organization of Monastic Life. Without understanding how it could be so, the Emperor was prepared to accept that there could be melancholic and unhappy people who wanted to get away from society, either because they found it troublesome or because it reminded them of past faults or wasted opportunities for which they could find no relief. "For such people, La Trappe seems to be the most favourable place. The name, the place, the memories attached to it clearly indicate what one wishes to do when joining." However, there were to be strict limitations. The Emperor forbade the setting up of 'Congregations' of monasteries. One house alone should suffice: "An establishment that could accommodate two hundred persons was to be the maximum that could be demanded from the forty million people in the

Empire. Should this prove to be a miscalculation, then there could be a second house. He added the pithy conclusion: "Hence the first article of the decree shall be: 'The house of La Trappe is re-established.'" A new draft of the decree was drawn up after this. Napoleon signed it, but afterwards erased his signature.

But all those arrangements came to nothing, thanks to the stand taken by Dom Augustine following the arrest of Pope Pius VII and his transfer to Savone. Dom Augustine demanded that the monks of Piedmont should retract their oath of allegiance to Napoleon. It was a dangerous move. Napoleon was furious and retaliated by ordering the suppression of all the Trappist houses throughout the Empire. It was only after the collapse of the Empire that the Trappists were able to return to France.

4. The beginning of two Trappist Observances

Dom Augustine allowed little autonomy to his foundations. The decree erecting Valsainte into an abbey gave him the powers of a Father Immediate. Soon, however, he was acting as direct superior of each foundation. He could never accept that they should become autonomous, and so become abbeys. On the point of setting sail for America in 1812, at the insistence of the Emperor, he nominated Dom Anthony de Beauregard as Abbot of Lulworth.

But in 1806 the monks of Darfeld, with the Bishop's approval, proceeded with the abbatial election of their Superior, Dom Eugène Bonhomme de la Prade. They did so deliberately in order to deliver themselves from Dom Augustine's enterprises, which seemed to be injuring them, even financially. Dom Augustine was displeased and appealed to Rome. The response from Rome was not in his favour. He was relieved of his duties as Father Immediate, at least temporarily, whilst Rome confirmed the election, and erected Darfeld into an Abbey. Dom Eugene had learnt his lesson. He gradually distanced himself from the Regulations of Valsainte, and finally abandoned them completely. This he did by order of Pius VII whom he met at Fontainebleau during his captivity. The Pope regarded the reform of de Lestrangé as excessive. Dom Eugene returned to the regulations of Abbot de Rancé, and justified his decision in a document he wrote in 1814. The nuns of Rosenthal, near Darfeld, followed in the steps of their Father Immediate, and separated themselves from those in Switzerland.

Consequently, Valsainte and Darfeld represented two different Observances. It was under those Observances that Cistercian- Trappist monasticism was introduced once again in France from 1815.

The Cistercians in Britain and Ireland

Cistercian monasticism found itself isolated and cut off at an early stage from its continental roots. From the third quarter of the 12th. century, Ireland was experiencing the repercussions of having been overrun by England. To put it mildly, contact between Irish and English Abbeys was non-existent. Eventually the General Chapter lost all contact with those abbeys, which had abandoned the Cistercian practices. Mellifont Abbey (founded in 1142) and St. Mary's Abbey in Dublin, were the only two which continued to follow the regular observance.

On the continent, the struggles between the royal families of France and England, which began in 1337, lasted, intermittently, for more than a century. Known as 'The 100 years War', it cut off the English houses from the rest of the Order. The General Chapter was powerless. The English government prevented

the abbots from attending the General Chapter, and on the other hand, the French Fathers Immediate were not acceptable. The General Chapter appointed some of the English abbots to make regular visitations as a means of ensuring they were carried out in the country. The abbeys were left defenceless against a political greed which taxed them heavily.

There were no reforming movements such as sprang from the formation of Congregations in Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, and in Germany. In the aftermath of Henry VIII's rupture with Rome, monasticism had to endure many hardships; a falling-off in recruitment, economic ruin, relaxed discipline, the hostility of the general public. Some abbeys, such as Fountains under Abbot Marmaduke Huby (1494-1526), succeeded in maintaining a good standard of living. It proved difficult to oppose the Protestant Reformation, an issue that was both religious and political. In 1534 the king imposed 'The Act of Supremacy'.

In 1536, Henry VIII issued a Decree suppressing all the houses of less than twelve monks and an income of less than 200 pounds sterling. This prescription affected twenty-two Cistercian houses. Shortly afterwards the larger Abbeys were suppressed. There was no uniform resistance on the part of the monks. A considerable number died as martyrs for their catholic faith. Most of the Abbots, however, yielded to the demands of Thomas Cromwell and handed over their property to the State. They hoped that by so doing they might have been able to salvage something. From the year 1539 monastic life disappeared. Three centuries were to elapse before it was restored. There followed the systematic destruction of churches and cloisters with a view to preventing the revival of monasticism in the event of a change in the political scenario, such as happened during the brief reign of Mary Tudor. Some monks joined the secular clergy, whilst others dispersed and were given a very small pension, provided they did not oppose the royal decrees. Those who were opposed to them received nothing. The closure of the monasteries in Scotland followed a few decades later.

Unfortunately, in Ireland, Mellifont and St. Mary's, the only houses to observe regular discipline, were situated in that part of the country around Dublin under the control of England. They suffered the same fate as their sister-houses in Britain. The remainder of the houses in Ireland survived more or less up to the massacres brought about by the invasion by Oliver Cromwell in 1650.

It was necessary to wait for the Trappist foundation at Valsainte to see monastic life restored in England. In 1794 Dom Augustine de Lestrangé intended to send some monks to Canada. They succeeded only in getting as far as England, where they settled at Lulworth in Dorset and were joined by several French priests who were refugees. The monks remained at Lulworth for twenty years. Difficulties were not lacking, as when Dom Augustine, in 1813, forbade them to pray for the King of England because he was to be regarded as a heretic. Finally, after the Restoration, the group returned to France and occupied Melleray in 1817. In the wake of accusations made by political figures in 1832, the English and Irish members of the community founded Mount Melleray in Ireland. Two years later some returned to England and established the monastery of Mount St Bernard. In 1878 Mount Melleray founded Roscrea. It was not until 1938 that Mellifont was founded on a site not far from the ruins of the original monastery.

In 1801, on returning from Russia, some nuns under Mother de Chabannes, crossed over to England on instructions from Dom Augustine. This was meant to be the first stage of the journey to Canada. They settled at Steephill, later to be known as Stapehill, some fifty kilometres from Lulworth. In view of the number of deaths among the younger nuns, brought about by the austere asceticism of the Regulations of Valsainte, the local Vicar Apostolic, Monsignor Collingbridge, became alarmed, and succeeded in withdrawing the community from the jurisdiction of Dom Augustine and put them under his own. It was not until 1915 that the community was reunited with the Order.

Spiritual Text

How the Rule of Valsainte was drawn up with the brothers and what it represented for Dom Augustine.

On July 15th 1791 the vigil of the Feast of St. Stephen Harding, the religious who had recently come to Valsainte, reflected on the suffering and hardship St. Stephen had to endure in his effort to ensure the exact observance of the Holy Rule of St. Benedict at Clairvaux. They regarded their own observance of the Rule as imperfect, and wished to observe it more perfectly. They unanimously petitioned the abbot to favour this proposal. He was delighted to find them moved by such edifying dispositions. He thanked God and told them to do likewise for having inspired this idea, which flesh and blood could not reveal. He assured them that it was, without any doubt, from the Holy Spirit, the only source of every good desire. To realize this project in a solid and permanent way, they should take careful note of those points in the Rule which were not being observed at all, or at least not as well as they might be. Then the matter should be examined in Chapter, in order to practise those that could be practised in present circumstances, and to assess the spirit behind those that could not be observed without great inconvenience. Since all this was a holy undertaking, there was need for much care, light and reflection. Above all, they should petition God with fervent prayer. Accordingly, a sung High Mass, in honour of the Holy Spirit was offered with all possible solemnity. The lay brothers attended the Mass and strove to renew their zeal for the literal observance of the Rule, as did the choir monks [...]

The Chapter to examine how the Rule was being observed began on July 19th 1791. The abbot outlined the order to be followed at each session. A chapter of the Rule was to be read in its entirety. Then, on bended knees, for approximately the duration of a *Miserere*, light was sought from the Holy Spirit before giving an opinion. This practice was to be inviolably observed whenever there was question of giving an opinion on any subject whatsoever. The abbot then impressed on the religious the importance of what they were undertaking. It was important for them, in so far as it would make them more exact observers of the Rule and more faithful to their vows. It was important also for those who would come after them, since what they were about to decide would have the force of a constitution and an inviolable rule [...] In so far as their successors were concerned, a consideration that should lend great weight to the Statutes was the fact that they were the outcome of what many had said. They were, in effect, the consensus of a community of religious who loved their state of life so much that they left their homeland for a foreign country and exposed themselves to all kind of hardships to preserve it. This has not been said to praise such religious, but to let those who would join see what confidence they could have in them [...]

(When all the chapters of the Rule had been examined, and the decisions taken, the following was the conclusion)

The Regulations contain the final decisions. Here we will just refer to the prudence and mature deliberation, the discretion, accompanied by zeal, shown by the first religious of Valsainte in observing the Rule and in the full discharge of their duties, in drawing up those statutes. All the other constitutions, which presented certain difficulties, are not included here, but only in the Regulations. They have, nevertheless, been treated and examined with the same care. It is just that those Regulations have not been considered for several months, as had been intended, and had appeared a possibility at the time. There was never any question of drawing up new Regulations. The sole purpose of the project was to add to the Regulations of Mr. (sic) de Rancé, their venerable Reformer, those practices which he himself could not undertake, practices outlined by St. Bernard and our early Fathers in their constitutions. This undertaking at Valsainte has lasted some three years. Some points have come up for discussion more than once.

As a result of what has just been said, may those who are to enter in the future, realize the obligation that is on them to be faithful in their observance! May they realize also, how wrong it would be for them, and how culpable they would be in the sight of God, if they were to have the temerity even to think of

changing them, without obvious and unavoidable necessity. Considering the care given to examining each article, even to wish to tamper with them, would be the equivalent of wanting to cancel them. Whoever should dare to mention such a course of action should be regarded as the enemy most to be feared in the monastery. He would do more harm than even those miserable patriots, those impious and cruel tyrants of our homeland -strong language, but true - have been able to do to us. This would be so, because, in spite of all their rage, malice, deceit, and their infernal plans, they were not able to remove from our hearts our love for our holy state. By the grace of God, they did not succeed in depriving us of the means of observing the obligations and rules of our profession. In addition, whoever desires to change the Regulations should be looked upon as a plague sent to destroy the Lord's flock. Finally, he should be regarded as the murderer of all his brethren, and even more than a murderer, in so far as he would appear to deprive them not merely of bodily life but also of the life of the soul. This he would do by depriving them of the means of salvation necessary for them, which the mercy of God had led them to discover.

A legal document

The decree erecting Valsainte into an abbey, by the Papal Nuncio, Pierre Gravina, December 8th 1794, by virtue of a brief of Pope Pius VI, September 30th 1794

At a time when the French Nation, once so flourishing, allowed itself to be poisoned by the maxims of an impious philosophy, and was declaring war on the priesthood and the Empire, there was a group of monks of the Order of Cîteaux, of the Congregation of La Trappe, whom nothing could divide and no impious contagion take hold of. We are convinced that it was not without a special intervention of Divine Providence that they escaped innumerable real and potential dangers, and with God's help reached the French frontiers. Having shaken the dust from their feet, they found a home and place of refuge in the mountains of Switzerland, in the canton of Fribourg. It would seem as if God had made this gift to Fribourg in return for services rendered to the Church. What we have been told of the long and difficult journey of the monks, the pain and tribulation they endured, their arrival and the reception given them by the people of Fribourg is truly something to be marvelled at. Those events could not have escaped the notice of Our Holy Father, Pope Pius VI. As an expression of his pastoral concern and of his generosity towards the French exiles and the intrepid defenders of the Catholic Faith, he wishes highly to praise and to endow with favours this chosen band, this family worthy of St. Bernard. In this he is but following in the footsteps of his glorious predecessors, Pascal II, Callistus II, Eugene III, Innocent III, Honorius III, Urban IV, Innocent IV, Clement IV, Benedict XII, Eugene IV, Nicholas V and Innocent VIII.

The greatest gift of all is the Apostolic Brief given on September 30th this year, 1794. We received it recently when we were in Rome on matters connected with the Nunciature. This Brief gives us the widest faculties, enabling us to erect their new home into an Abbey of the same Order and Congregation.

In compliance with the reverence due to the wishes of Our Holy Father, Pope Pius VI, and by the apostolic authority conferred on us by the aforementioned Brief, we erect and establish into an Abbey of the Order and Congregation of La Trappe the newly acquired property of the monks of Valsainte, situated in the canton of Fribourg in the diocese of Lausanne. This property which formerly belonged to the Carthusians, was closed by apostolic authority. It now belongs to the Order and Congregation of La Trappe who receive honourable mention in this decree. This has been accomplished with the consent of and by arrangement with the Civil Authorities. We declare that it is now established and erected into an abbey, with all the rights, privileges, graces and indulgences enjoyed by the other abbeys of the aforementioned Order and Congregation.

We hold as ratified and confirm and approve the election legitimately held according to law, which resulted in the unanimous election of Most Reverend Dom Augustine de Lestrangé, as is clear from the acts and the ratification of the celebration. That election was held on November 27th of the current year. It was presided over in our name, by the Most Reverend and Illustrious Monsignor, the Bishop of Lausanne, whom we had delegated by letter dated November 18th this year, to act in our name. He in turn delegated Very

Reverend Joseph de Schaller, Vicar General, and Canon of St. Nicholas. To the person elected we grant all the faculties and authority legitimately connected with his office, according to the Constitution of the Order and Congregation already mentioned.

It is our wish that the authority of the new abbot should be exercised not only over the Abbey of la Valsainte, but also over all the groups which spring from this monastery, no matter in what part of the world they may be established, in such a way that as Abbot of la Valsainte he is Father Immediate of those groups or monks. He has the faculties granted by the constitutions of the Cistercian Order to Fathers Immediate to enable them to govern in a holy manner.

Finally, under holy obedience, we prescribe and ordain that each and every one of the monks of the new abbey, as well as those who come after them, should maintain the primitive fervour of the holy Order, walking in the glorious footsteps of their predecessors, drawing ever more closely together the bonds of charity which exist at present, thereby transmitting to posterity, by their good example, this remarkable style of monasticism.

We paternally exhort you, who live in this monastery, by the grace of God to walk worthily of the vocation to which you have been called, by conforming to the instructions of your well-loved father and abbot. Ensure your salvation by the exact observance of your constitutions.

Do not allow yourselves to be led astray by the foolish partisans of this wicked world. They regard your lifestyle as unhealthy and lacking in any worthwhile purpose, under the pretext that your rule is too rigorous, whereas you yourselves know from experience that the yoke is easy and the burden light. Your letters have assured us that such is the case. Persevere in the good beginning you have already made, until after the momentary and light tribulations of this life, you may deserve to be numbered among the sons of God. Through the infinite mercy of God we are confident that such will be the case, and we gladly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

Questions for reflection

1. Augustine de Lestrange was anxious to do *the Holy Will of God* : to do so he multiplied minute prescriptions of the rule. Are we today moved by the same desire? Where do we look to discern the will of God?
2. We might look for the foundation of such a search in the Gospel, in the Rule, in the teaching of St. Bernard. We might question ourselves on the meaning attached to 'will' at different periods.
3. At that time, and already in the texts of the 17th and 18th centuries, the concern for 'saving one's soul' was emphasised, the mortality rate was high and the prospect of a premature, early or sudden death was common.
What is our present situation with regard to such realities? What place do these concerns have in mentality of the people around us?
Does this have repercussions for our spiritual life, or in our prayer?
4. Are we living in the perspective of the Gospel? What witness can we give with regard to these matters?
What lessons can we learn from this?

Bernardines of Esquermes

Cistercians : a continuity that was clearly intended.

Unit prepared by Sr. Mary-Colette, Hyning

Today the Bernardines of Esquermes live in accordance with the spiritual heritage of three abbeys from the provinces of Flanders and Artois. This heritage was constantly reviewed and given new life throughout the hazards and uncertainties of their history. These ups and downs forced them to be continually discerning how the Spirit was calling them to be faithful in the incessant renewal and deprivation imposed on them by political events.

1. Three abbeys of Flanders and Artois

- Notre-Dame d'ANNAY, at La Brayelle. In 1196 Hugues, abbot of St. Pierre of Gand, acknowledged the gift made by Dame Ade, Connetable of Flanders, for the foundation of an abbey. Thirty religious made this foundation from Blandecques (founded in 1182) under the authority of the abbot of Vaucelles representing the Father Immediate, the abbot of Cîteaux.

- Notre-Dame des PRÉS at Douai. In 1212 (or 1186) three sisters, Sainte, Rose and Foukeut de la Halle founded a beguinage, 'Champ Fleuri'. Two others soon joined them: Frescendre and Marie la Francke. They were attracted to the Cistercian ideal and the abbess of La Brayelle supported them in their desire. The abbot of Clairvaux, Raoul, gave his permission for them to become Cistercians, and named Robert, the abbot of Vaucelles, as their guide. In June 1221 a Bull of Honorius III "promised the monastery the protection of the Holy See; withdrew them from the jurisdiction of the secular clergy and accorded them the right to elect their abbess." Honorius III himself named their first abbess: Dame Ellisandre Dassonville, Prioress of Annay.

- Notre-Dame du Désert or de LA WOESTINE, in the region of St. Omer. In 1217 a group of nuns who, in all likelihood, came from Annay occupied buildings which had once belonged to some Canons. They were placed under the authority of the abbot of Clairmarais, of the filiation of Clairvaux.

Everyday life was similar to that led in all the abbeys of the Low Countries at this time, where Cistercians were called 'Bernardines'. All three abbeys had a farm. Annay and les Prés had a brewery. Whereas Annay owned land that brought in revenues, the abbey of les Prés had a windmill. These two abbeys also had a school and boarders. It is possible that La Woestine had too. The three abbeys became French at the time of the conquest of Louis XIV.

Some dates during the French Revolution

2nd November 1789 : The National Assembly confiscated all ecclesiastical goods and put them at the disposition of the nation.

13th-19th February 1790 : Laws were passed which suppressed solemn vows and abolished religious Orders and congregations.

17th August 1792: A decree ordered that all ecclesiastical goods were to be sold before the 1st October. All the religious were dispersed from these three abbeys, as from all other abbeys during the month of September. Exile.

2. Our three 'foundresses' at the time of the French Revolution

- From the abbey of ANNAY: Dame Hombeline Lecouvreur: 1750-1829, made profession 27-8-1769. She fled with her Prioress, Dame Marie-Ghislaine Defontaine, who was 72 years old, in the direction of

Magdendaele stopping a short while at Oudenaarde. Driven out by the advance of the French armies, they ended up at the Bernardine monastery of Himmelpforten, in Westphalia.

- From the abbey of LES PRÉS: Dame Hippolyte Lecouvreur: 1747-1828, made profession 25-8-1766. Madame Henriette de Maes, the abbess, went to Belgium initially and from there to London where several of her community joined her, one of whom was Dame Hippolyte. They opened a boarding school at Pentonville for the daughters of French expatriates.

- From the abbey of LA WOESTINE: Dame Hyacinthe Dewismes: 1760-1840, made profession 18-10-1778. She journeyed on her own in the direction of Belgium, where she first found refuge with Les Soeurs Grises at Hal, then at Bree with the Augustinians, finally arriving at the abbey of Rothem where she was able to live as one of the community for eighteen months. She was then forced to flee again from the advancing French army. In this way she too arrived at the monastery of the Bernardines at Himmelpforten where she met up with the two professed from Annay.

1796: Dame Marie-Ghislaine wanted to move nearer to France so that they could return as soon as it became possible. So these three sisters managed to get to Tilburg in Holland where they opened a school of manual instruction.

1797: urged on by the Prioress of Annay, they left Tilburg for France and set up house near Douai where they opened a small boarding school. Dame Hombeline sent word to her sister Dame Hippolyte asking her to join them and the four of them revived community life. 'Invited', together with their pupils, to participate in a ceremony praising the revolution, they chose instead to move again.

1799: the sisters, together with 12 pupils, arrived at Grimaretz, a run-down chateau, which had been offered to them, at Esquermes on the outskirts of Lille. In April Dame Marie-Ghislaine died.

3. The main steps taken in order to gain official recognition

Bonaparte effectively had power from 1800 and wanted to re-establish internal order.

1804 : The number of pupils had grown to around sixty and the chateau was now too small, besides which the owner had also returned from exile. The intention of the sisters had never faltered: to erect a monastery as soon as they were able. Their one aim: to be faithful to their vows and their past heritage, at the same time alert and obedient to the guidance of the Spirit speaking in the new situations brought about by the revolution and its consequences. At this time the boarding school provided the necessary means of subsistence for both the community and the pupils.

1805 : Six adjoining houses and an inn were bought and demolished. On the 1st August 1805 the foundation stone of the future monastery was laid. The purpose for which the buildings were intended was clearly visible in the layout of their construction. The letter which the 'foundresses' sent to Mgr. Belmas affirms their intentions: "... a large Church and a spacious house, built on the said hectare with several courtyards or enclosed spaces, surrounded by buildings and quite high walls. These buildings would contain cells, a dormitory, a refectory, a chapter room, a 'chauffoir' and other regular places...."

The Church was constructed as a monastic Church right from the beginning.

1805 : A letter was sent to Cardinal Caprara (legate 'a latere' in France) from "Three professed nuns of the Order of St. Bernard...[who] given the situation, humbly beseech Your Eminence, to obtain a dispensation from the vow of religious poverty in order to be able to own their buildings and their contents and acquire more in the future, either by inheritance or any other way, and to be able to pass them on in the event of their deaths." This personal ownership was necessary because, for want of a law, no legal recognition as a

community was possible. The goods thus acquired in their own names were legally given to the monastery on 6th July 1827 immediately after its official erection.

In the following years, the three 'foundresses' were joined by other sisters from their former monasteries, and also by past pupils.

1820 : On the 28th April a letter was sent to the Duchess of Angoulême (daughter of Louis XVI) asking for "her support and protection for the success of their undertaking and the future stability that they desired."

1820 : On 30th September they sent draft Statutes for their future monastery to Mgr. Belmas, Bishop of Cambrai. They called themselves, "religious of the Order of Cîteaux" and named the filiation of their abbeys: one from Cîteaux and two from Clairvaux.

As yet there was no law in France allowing the re-establishment of religious communities so their request was refused. Such a law was promulgated in May 1825.

1825 : In June a request was sent by the three 'foundresses' to Mgr. D'Hermopolis, Minister of State for Ecclesiastical Affairs. In their effort towards recognition they tried to counterbalance their request for the monastery with an insistence on the usefulness of their school to religion and the state.

*"The undersigned Nuns... have the honour of explaining to Your Excellency,
[that] Since God has given them the grace of remaining faithful to their Vows, for twenty-five years they have been doing their utmost to re-group as a community in order that they might carry out their religious duties in the best possible way and also give a good Christian education to young girls.*

This ... according to the conditions detailed below:

The religious, who having made profession elsewhere in the past and who want to be admitted to the said convent, or the novices who will make their vows there in the future, will observe the rule of St. Benedict, qualified however, and modified according to the Usages of the Bernardine Monasteries which existed in the last century in the former Provinces of Flanders and Artois."

Mgr. D'Hermopolis' reply informed them that they must apply directly to 'Mgr. the Bishop of Cambrai'. The 'foundresses' turned to Dom Ernest Roussel a monk of Signy. He had studied at the college of St. Bernard, had a doctorate from the Sorbonne and occupied the chair of theology at Clairvaux from 1779 to 1785. In 1786 he was prior at La Valroy. He had to go into exile at the time of the Revolution and on his return to France he assisted the secular clergy. He was made Dean of Roubaix in 1821. He was invaluable in helping the 'foundresses' to draw up the Statutes asked for by the Bishop in such a way that they were truly in accordance with Cistercian tradition and yet adapted to the needs of their present situation. Dom Roussel also had the added advantage of being on excellent terms with Mgr. Belmas!

The Bishop demanded a number of amendments, which were taken into account by the nuns, but a year (and much correspondence) later he was still refusing give his approbation.

1826: On 13th June the foundresses replied to a letter from Mgr. Belmas: "The Rule that Your Grace asks from us...effectively exists in the US of Cîteaux: an admirable book... though we do not have a copy of it at present." *[There follows ten lines quoting verbatim from the preface of the US of 1715.]*

"...However, we think that our current circumstances will not permit us to follow, in its entirety, all that is written there. Nevertheless, we believe that the exceptions would pertain to just a few articles. We think it necessary to allow experience to clarify these matters for us, at least for a few months, in order to discern as a whole what will suit our present situation."

They also asked for Dom Roussel as their superior and guide. The first draft of the Statutes drawn up in 1826 and thus expressing the deepest desire of the Bernardines was expressed as follows:

“The ‘Dames Bernardines of Esquermes’ form a distinctive community, under the name of Our Lady of La Plaine.

They follow the Rule of St. Benedict, which has been modified to reflect both their former authorised Usages and to take account of their present circumstances.”

The definitive version that they received as authorised by the Bishop read:

“The ‘Dames Bernardines of Esquermes have as their main purpose [!!] the instruction of poor children (free of charge) and the education of young ladies.”

Dame Hippolyte categorically refused to sign such a statement, which was so opposed to her deepest desire. It took all the diplomacy of the chaplain and other friends to get her to sign, assuring her that she would be able to retain all that she adhered to in an ‘Interior Rule’. Finally and very reluctantly she signed the Statutes given, but only for the sake of the urgent need to obtain legal status, and thus ensure the future of the monastery.

1827: On 7th April the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs approved the Statutes. On 22nd April Charles X authorised the erection of a Cistercian Monastery with a boarding school for young girls and a free school for the poor children of Esquermes. On 9th May the foundresses sent their ‘Interior Rule’ to the Bishop.

Article 1: The ‘Dames Bernardines of Esquermes’ follow the Rule of St. Benedict. They make a detailed study of it in order to understand its spirit and observe it in their way of living.

Article 2: In all that they do, for all their religious ceremonies and the celebration of the Office in Church, their Rule and guide is the Usages of Cîteaux as found in the French Ritual for Cistercian Nuns.

The bishop approved this Rule on 17th May and so on 28th May 1827 Dom Roussel, at the request of the bishop, presided at the erection of the Monastery of Our Lady of La Plaine at Esquermes.

Five sisters, including the ‘foundresses’ were able to wear their Cistercian habit again and a year later, in June 1828, seven others made profession.

1827: 15th July: juridical recognition was impossible because the Revolution had suppressed Cîteaux and the General Chapter. Nevertheless the sisters immediately made contact with the nearest Cistericans. They approached the Father Abbot of Le Gard, Dom Germain, and asked for ‘spiritual association’ between his abbey, le Mont des Cats, and the Monastery of Esquermes. The Act of Association was signed by Dom Germain and Père Bernard, Prior of Mont des Cats and sent to Esquermes on 17th July 1827.

4. Significant dates

1832 : Mr. Martin was welcomed at Esquermes as chaplain. Dame Hyacinthe accorded him the title of ‘Mr. le Directeur’, as this was the custom in her former abbey of La Woestine.

1838 : Dame Gérarde, aged 27, became Prioress, an office she would hold three times from 1838-1850 ; 1858-1870 and 1874-1876.

1842 : Mgr. Giraud, the new Archbishop of Cambrai, gave Mr. Martin the responsibility of drawing up a Rule for the Community. Mr. Martin had been considering this for a long while.

1850 : Provisional Rule approved by Mgr. Giraud shortly before his death.

1853 : ‘Definitive’ Rule in use until 1903. Mgr. Régnier, the new archbishop of Cambrai, asked Mr. Martin to have another look at the text and to shorten it somewhat. It was “received with pain and sorrow” and the nuns were so strongly against it that Mgr. Régnier came to Cambrai in person to try and settle the

differences of opinion. Mgr. listened to the community who slipped into the text, albeit without actually quoting it, everything that they could of the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict. On 1st June 1853, Mgr. Régnier himself gave the Rule to the community assembled in Chapter. Although the Preface (which he wrote) mentioned the Cistercian origins of the Community, there was no mention within the text itself of the Rule of St. Benedict or the Usages of Cîteaux. In the absence of any Cistercian authority, the nuns had no choice but to accept a Rule that deliberately sought to establish the structures of a new congregation adapted to the world and to the devotions of the time.

5. Two significant people

Mr. MARTIN

He was born in 1804 and ordained priest in 1829. He had delicate health and asked for a post that was light enough in its duties to take this into account. He arrived at Esquermes on the eve of All Saints 1832 and died there on 1st November 1879. From the moment of his arrival he sought to create something new, whereas the community remained deeply attached to their Cistercian roots and their monastic vocation. The contention of the Bernardines with him was over this one fact. For them it was the essence of their community life that was called into question. Apart from this, the Bernardines were grateful for his unbounded devotion and his value on a spiritual level. Mr. Martin never understood the desired way of life of our 'foundresses'. He was convinced that "the spiritual basis of the religious life was much more important than the form it took and that it was necessary above all, to cling to a religious spirit and apply oneself to the practices of solid virtue without being too preoccupied with the filiation of Cîteaux." Providing a new Rule for the community became, in his eyes, an absolute duty, his particular mission in life. In spite of his deep attachment to the community and to the pupils and the fact that he worked tirelessly for them, the gulf between his ideal of religious life and theirs was enormous.

On the death of the last foundress (1840) and of Mgr. Belmas (1841) Mr. Martin believed "that the moment had come to draw up something definitive by way of a rule" and so he asked the new Archbishop for permission to proceed with his plans for what he saw as an up-to-date Rule.

Dame GÉRARDE

Meanwhile in the decade 1840-1850 and during her extensive time as Prioress Dame Gérarde had to carry the burden of knowing that the essential charism of her Community was misunderstood by the chaplain, and through him, by the Archbishop of Cambrai. She could not openly oppose all the opinions of the Director, whose authority was recognised and respected everywhere, and so she sought, in every way that she could to safeguard the spirit of Cîteaux in the life of the Community.

Who was Dame Gérarde? She was born on 2nd December 1811 and was a boarder at Esquermes from 1826-1827. She entered the novitiate in January 1832 and made profession on 17th July 1833. She was an extraordinary person, very broad-minded and with a natural authority. She was also endowed with the gifts of organisation and of warm concern for each one and these gifts were enriched by her deep spiritual life. Her 26 years as Prioress and her duty as 'Maîtresse de confiance' from 1850 to 1858 gave her the opportunity of exerting a profound influence on the sisters of the community and on the pupils, some of who entered the novitiate. In her way of living and in her guidance she passed on the Cistercian heritage not in written form, but by example.

The two polarities can be summarised in this way :

On the one hand, Mr. Martin : The essential element for him: to safeguard the requirements of teaching and education. As he saw it, the Rule of St. Benedict and the Usages could only be followed in so far as they were compatible with these demands.

On the other hand, the Bernardines : The essential element for them was to safeguard the integrity and the principles of the Rule of St. Benedict and the Usages of Cîteaux. This was paramount, but at the same time they realised that force of circumstance meant that they had to accept certain adaptations in practice.

Extract from a letter of Mr. Martin to Chanoine Robert, chaplain to the Bernardines of Belley 1855

“From the time of my ordination God has condemned me to the galleys. That is to say, to spend my priestly life among a group of women whose ideas I have continually had to fight against. In fact, looking back at my own experience of the past twenty-five years and the difficulties that I have encountered, I think it will be very difficult for you to accomplish your own holy desires. An unfortunate dilemma probably faces you, which has no obvious solution: the impossibility of combining the observances of Cîteaux with the work and overwhelming cares of education. It is impossible to convince nuns who are so attached to their order, that it is in their interest to change, to break away from their honourable antiquity and give up some of these traditions which they seem to think are essential.

Do not perceive anything in my words except the warning of an old sailor who has been shipwrecked.”

Words of Dame Gérard

“You must become a soul of prayer in constant communication with God. You must pray much, that is true prayer; the more one prays, the more one loves to pray... Oh! Prayer! Who can tell me what it can obtain, or rather anything it is unable to obtain!”

“The more we desire to love the Good God, the more occasions we find for pleasing Him, for doing things for Him. A heart which loves and which wants to grow in love is clever at finding ways to do so.”

“Loving God is everything and desiring to love is already loving. So too feeling that one does not love enough is already loving.”

“To love in God is to have charity; to seek to make oneself loveable for God is to serve charity.”

On 6th May 1883 in the infirmary of Esquermes, she spoke to the young professed :

“My children, be holy religious, unstinting, without limits. Be holy in all things : everything can help to make you holy...a door opened quietly and politely for another sister is a meritorious action, if at the same time you lift your heart to God, if you see in your sister a beloved creature of God, a spouse of Jesus in whom He lives and loves.

Be always full of respect, of consideration, of kindness for one another, be loving by virtue if you are not by nature.

Courtesy is the form of love; the form guards the interior, Reverend Mother (Dame Hyacinthe) often used to say.

In Church be totally recollected, not only interiorly, but also exteriorly. Avoid undue haste or sudden movements; when you are singing, reflect that you are fulfilling the office of the angels.”

6. Final return to our roots

In the 1890's Dom Sebastien Wyart visited Esquermes on a number of occasions. In October 1895 he suggested that the community be reunited to the Order and outlined the steps that would need to be taken for this to happen. On 13th February 1897 the Decree of Affiliation to the Order was signed in Rome and the following year Dom Sebastien again met with the community to say that the Affiliation was recognised, all that remained was to have our Constitutions (i.e. the Rule of 1853) approved in the light of this. On 14th March 1900 another revision annulled this Affiliation to the Order !

Why? Because the rule of Mr. Martin claimed that 'the objective is education' whereas the objective of the monastic life is the search for God, and the rule of 1853 had nothing of a monastic rule in it: as its author had intended it was the rule of a modern congregation.

1900-1903 : once again the way forward for the Bernardines of Esquermes was to be inextricably linked with the political unrest of the time.

Since 1883, anticlericalism had led Esquermes to found 'shelters' first in Belgium and then in England. Knowing nothing of the origins of Esquermes, seeing only the Rule of 1853 and the recent foundations, unsurprisingly the Bernardines were classed as a Congregation of Sisters with simple vows.

These were dangerous times and once again, to safeguard unity (with the houses which had been opened as places of safety) there was only one solution: to ask for approval from Rome even though this meant accepting certain conditions... The Constitutions of 1903 were therefore promulgated, and definitively approved in 1909. The order of expulsion, which came in 1904, suddenly splintered the heretofore strong concentration around Esquermes. Unity would have to be safeguarded by centralisation and by the Spirit of the Charter of Charity.

Questions for reflection

1. The nuns who transmitted Cistercian life to Esquermes challenge us by their example in getting through a grave crisis and beginning again without the support of traditional structures, by their ability to communicate values which had been profoundly assimilated before the crisis. Would we be able to do the same?
2. In the context of crisis how do we discern what is absolutely essential in our observances and must be kept from what is secondary ?

The Cistercian Congregations in Italy

Unit prepared by Sr. Anna Maria Caneva, Vitorchiano.

Before dealing with the Cistercian congregations in Italy in particular, we need to refer albeit briefly and simply to the Cistercian presence in Italy from the start. The lack of information on these early foundations is certainly a loss for the history of the Order.

The Cistercians arrived in Italy shortly after the beginnings of the Order, and spread rapidly throughout the peninsula. The great number of men's and women's monasteries and the influence of these fervent and hardworking communities on the surrounding people left its mark. By the end of the Middle Ages, there were about eighty-five men's houses and one presumes there were even more of women.

The Cistercian congregations in Italy came into being at the end of the XV century. It is no longer adequate nowadays to say "the Cistercian congregations arose in response to the formation of the new national states in the history of the land." Such a statement is only relevant if it is developed a little more.

By 1870, Italy had practically achieved its national unity after prolonged domination by the more powerful European nations. It would be more exact to say that the birth of the Congregations responded to the concrete needs of this new situation - whether ecclesiastical and religious, or political - by the links they developed with the leading noble families where these held sway. As far as relationships with the Church were concerned, certainly the Avignon period (1378-1417) was also disastrous for Italy. This was because the nomination or confirmation of Abbots, being now the prerogative of the Pope, brought with it heavy taxes and weighed considerably on the finances of houses, which were sometimes already poor. The Schism of the Church in Europe also broke down the cohesion of the different European countries and isolated Cîteaux and France, who supported the Avignon Pope, from the rest of the Order. Within the religious orders, new situations seemed to be developing. All that, along with a strong movement of renewal, was at the origin of the congregations in Italy.

The Formation of the Congregations

The first Congregation within the Cistercian order was that of Castile, in Spain, in 1425. This Congregation took its inspiration from the monastery of St Justine in the Diocese of Padua, with Ludovico Barbo as its reformer. In the midst of great vicissitudes, the Congregation of St Bernard in Italy arose from the reform undertaken by Gomez, a disciple of Barbo, in the monastery of Badia in Settimo. When the Congregation of St. Bernard appeared in Italy, it would have the spirit, the motivations and the juridical structure of the Congregation of St. Justine.

So it was this monastery of Settimo, near Florence, which gave rise to the Cistercian renaissance in Italy. Urged on by Eugene IV and the commendatory Cardinal, Domenico Capranica, Settimo was reformed between 1430-1440 with the help of the reformers of St. Justine. Some monks were sent from Settimo to reform the Benedictine monastery of San Bartolo di Ferrara (1464) and the Monastery of Chiaravalle in Milan (1446). Settimo and Chiaravalle grew to have enormous importance, and at the end of 1484, Innocent VIII formed a Congregation of St. Bernard in Tuscany, and in 1489, another in Lombardy.

It is easy to see that the Médicis and the Sforza were very active in all this, but there is more: the son of Francesco Sforza, Ascania Maria, who had already been commendatory Abbot of Chiaravalle at the age of ten, in 1429 acquired the Abbey of San Ambrogio of Milan at the request of his father. He introduced the reform into in abbey by bringing monks from Chiaravalle. San Ambrogio became, as it were, the zone of influence of the Sforza in opposition to the Charterhouse of Pavia, which belonged to the Visconti.

The Congregation of Saint Bernard in Italy

In 1497, Alexander VI approved the new Congregation of Saint Bernard in Italy. This was in response to the explicit request of the Lombard monks represented by the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza. Eight monasteries of the Province of Lombardy formed this group, along with seven from the Tuscany Province. Counting foundations and requests for aggregation, the Congregation grew to number fifty monasteries in the eighteenth century. The annual General Chapter was comprised of the prelates (abbots), superiors of the monasteries, with a delegate elected by the community: all had the right to choose the Definitors.

The Bull of approbation set out the basic outlines for government. At the opening of the Chapter, the President dismissed the all the Abbots and Visitors and then offered his own resignation. New Definitors were then elected, and out of their number the President was elected. The full authority of the congregation resided in this body for the duration of the Chapter. They dealt with the affairs of the Congregation. They could transfer monks from one community to another: the vow of stability was in fact pronounced to the Congregation, not to the individual monastery. They were authorised to deal with the different problems of the monasteries and of the congregation, they elected prelates, visitors, and the senior officials of the Congregation. The Superior could be elected for a further three years, after which he could be sent to another monastery, and could then return to his own monastery after a year. The same ruling held for confessors to the nuns.

Cîteaux reacted very violently, to the extent of securing the annulment of the Bull in 1501. The victory was short-lived, since Jules II restored the Congregation. The constitutional framework remained essentially the same as in the first Bull. The Chapter had to be held turn by turn in the two Provinces, and not in the Province of the Superior currently in office. From each Province there were to be seven Definitors and two visitors, a *major* and a *minor* who were to accompany each other in turn around the Provinces. In commendatory monasteries, the prior had active as well as passive participation in the Chapter, and a delegate elected by the community accompanied him.

In the pontifical documents, the head of the Congregation was called President or President General. This new institutional status was the fruit of the times, and represented the meeting of several interests. As we said earlier it had its positive results, for it enabled the re-establishment of regular observance, as well as

mutual help among the monasteries. As well as this, the loosening of links between these monasteries and the centre of the Order made the local monasteries more acceptable to the local princes. Of course, it must be said, they were still a long way from the statutes and the fervour of the beginnings of Cîteaux.

Unfortunately, in all the religious Orders of the XVI century, the inadequacy of the solutions to the internal problems of the houses became increasingly more serious. More than ever, it was evident that reforming action had to come from above. The Council of Trent issued a new statute for the regular Orders, but its intervention was necessarily minimal, and for the whole of the XVII century, it would fall to the initiative of the papacy to guide and assist the renewal of religious life.

Despite all that, the Order did not cease to be a place of sanctification for many monks and nuns, as the Cistercian menology clearly attests.

The other congregations in Italy

After so many difficulties and so much opposition, the general Chapter of Cîteaux began to see for itself the benefits coming from the union of the congregations, promoting and welcoming into the order the Congregation of Calabria and Lucania. This Congregation came into being in 1605 as a means of uniting the monasteries of the south. It was united with the Order through its Abbot-President. It consisted of seven monasteries, and the monasteries that at one time had been linked to the Congregation of Fiore would later join these. Two of their delegates could participate in the General Chapter of Cîteaux and they paid the taxes levied by the Order. A degree of autonomy was acknowledged for the provincial Chapter, which met every three years, under the leadership of the President of the Congregation. This Congregation was never very strong. In 1672, the General chapter of Cîteaux condemned the custom, which had grown up in certain monasteries of omitting the vow of stability. In 1686, it was necessary for the Procurator General of the Order to carry out a visitation for the entire reform of the Congregation.

In 1613, the general Chapter was itself at the origins of the Cistercian Roman congregation. This consisted of those monasteries situated within the Vatican State and some of those within the Kingdom of Naples. The notion of the unity of the Order was maintained in the confirmation of the authority of the Abbot General and the Chapter over the Congregation. So the president of the Congregation and his council did not strictly speaking hold final authority, but had to submit their actions to the general chapter. The Abbots were elected for four years at a time; the General Chapters therefore took place every four years. Its extreme poverty, both temporal and in vocations necessitated the aggregation of the Congregation of St Bernard to the Province of Tuscany in Italy. On 5th March 1660, Alexander VII approved the aggregation by the Bull *Pastoralis officio*, with the obligation of observing the constitutions of that Province. It is not difficult to imagine that this incorporation brought with it many difficulties. As late as 1762, for reasons unknown to us, the monasteries, which had once belonged to the Roman congregation, were separated from the Province of Tuscany to form the Roman Province.

When the Archduke of Tuscany, Pietro Leopoldo, suppressed the monasteries of his lands in 1783, and the Cisalpine Republic also closed its monasteries in Lombardy, only the Roman Province survived.

The Congregation of Fiore had been created by Joachim de Fiore (1130-1202), and was approved by Celestine III on 25th August 1196: although there had been about sixty monasteries in the Congregation, it had all but died out by 1570, so Pius V approved the union of the surviving monasteries with the Cistercians.

The Congregation of Corpus Christi, founded in 1328 by Blessed Andrea di Paolo, a Cistercian monk of Monte Subasio, later left the Order. Gregory XI approved it in 1377. It was never under the jurisdiction of the Order, any more than the Congregations of Fiore and the Feuillants. On 11th March 1582, Gregory XIII aggregated the surviving monasteries into the Olivetan Congregation.

Jean-Baptiste de la Barrière founded the Congregation of the Feuillants at the time of the reform of the Monastery of les Feuillants near Toulouse in 1577. He left the Order to live a particularly austere life. The Italian Congregation of the Feuillants was divided into two Provinces: Piedmont-Savoie and the Roman Province, which included all the others. Those monks who survived the repression of the Revolutionary regime and Napoleon entered Cistercian Monasteries.

The congregation of the Strict Observance, set up in France by Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, apostolic visitor, had only two monasteries in Italy: Buonsollazzo near Florence, which joined the Trappist observance in 1705, and Casamari en Ciociaria, aggregated to the Trappist observance in 1717.

After Trent

“Just a little glimmer of improvement,” wrote Charles Borromeo in a letter in 1584, referring to Chiaravalle di Milano. We know that the conflicts with the Cistercian monks only died down after many years. St Charles had little time for this monastic community. Perhaps territorial and economic interests did not improve relations between the monastery and the archbishop, remember for example the question of the management of San Ambrogio. In fact, since its creation at the beginning of the century, the Congregation of St Bernard in Italy had done well on the whole, basing itself uniquely on the legislation contained in the two Bulls of erection. It had spread throughout the whole of Northern Italy. Vocations increased the size of the communities, but the Congregation did not escape a certain laxity, and even the houses in Tuscany, who had instigated the Reform suffered a noticeable breakdown in discipline.

There is nothing to surprise us here. The great decadence throughout the Church as a whole, led to a drop in observance. The need for Reform was felt throughout the Church, and it came with the Council of Trent. This reform, which was speedily welcomed in Italy, brought with it certain aspects, which militated against the monastic balance of the ancient Cistercian tradition. It tended to force religious orders into moulds, and there was a movement to ever-broader clericalisation. In the case of the men’s monasteries, the imbalance took place on the pastoral front: teaching, parishes, preaching and scientific research. The Congregations grew in importance, accentuated the orientation towards the priesthood and the pastoral commitment of monks, and a precise programme of study was set up.

Women’s monasteries too needed reform because of so many scandalous situations, which had come about where the youngest daughters of noble families had been forced into monasteries. The Council brought about a remedy by imposing the laws of enclosure and submitting these monasteries to the authority of the local ordinary.

Around this time, Cardinal Morone, the Cardinal Protector of the whole Order, suggested the promulgation of a Bull changing certain points of legislation, which were proving difficult in practice. With this Bull, the mandates of office were changed to three years, consequently the General Chapter was celebrated every three years, and new arrangements were made for its elections.

Finally, the General Chapter held at Tre Fontane Rome in 1580, approved the *Ordinationes et Statuta Congregationis Sancti Bernardi in Italia*, which were definitively approved by Sixtus V on 25th September 1585, and published in Milan in 1589, with an introductory Bull. It must be pointed out immediately that by a Bull of 6th September 1591, Gregory XIV declared that the Italian Congregation of St Bernard enjoyed all the privileges accorded to the Order, including those regarding the Abbot General and the first four monasteries founded by Cîteaux. Thus the Italian Congregation was not excluded from the Order; but its superiors and monks were fully part of it.

Serious tensions had preceded and accompanied the drafting of the new legislation for the Congregation. This legislation follows the current schema for monastic constitutions, containing 102 chapters, under six headings. The most important points of renewal are: confirmation of a triennial General

Chapter, which can become the veritable driving-force of the Congregation, and the election for life of the Abbot. The last addition did not concern the government of the monastery, but did underline the fact that the Abbots were Prelates, and as such, were above the Rule. The Rule on the contrary, saw in the Abbot the Father of the Monastery and associated him very closely with its spiritual and material running.

Some fifty years later, Urban VIII acquiesced to the request of the Congregation to restructure and bring up to date its own legislation, and he approved the Constitutions in 1641. Not only was the presentation of the material restructured, stress was laid on the importance of the discipline of a rigorous life and a solid cultural preparation. Five Chapters (88-92) were consecrated to Study, and the Monastery of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome was designated as a college *pro litterarum studiis*. Ten professed monks of the Lombard Province and four from Tuscany were welcomed at the college. It should be added that by a brief of 15th September 1668, the delegates representing the communities at the General Chapter were abolished.

Since other changes had been brought about by Alexander VII, Clement IX, Clement XIII, and by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the definitive text of the constitutions was published in 1766, in Rome and Milan. In this text, the mandates and the celebration of General Chapters were fixed at five yearly intervals.

The Laws of Suppression in the XVIII Century

For all the Council of Trent had acted radically in raising new institutes of the active life, as far as the ancient monastic orders go it had caused serious problems for adapting to the new conditions of the age. It also weakened "the clear consciousness of the monastic being and lifestyle within the ecclesial community", to quote Dom Penco. The fact that the Council absorbed all religious [into its reform] in order to exercise its influence globally, brought about a veritable levelling of the monastic Orders from within, something that had already begun at the time of the reform of Saint Justina.

Secondly, the Council strongly stressed the importance of diocesan structures, which provoked friction and difficulties between the bishops and the monastic Orders with parishes.

Thirdly, monasticism had to confront a new cultural situation, with its demands for pastoral renewal and the struggle against Protestantism. Now begins the time of new congregations of active life, who were not drawn by a purely contemplative ideal of religious life, and were not held to overly strict forms of government. A little at a time the primacy of contemplative life began to dry up, the mixed life spread, and at the beginning of the XVIII century, it was even stated that "spiritual ministries practised for the salvation of one's brethren must be more pleasing to God than even very fervent contemplation." The merit of contemplatives was attributed to their spiritual merits and the example of their austere life.

In the face of this conflict, many monastic congregations accepted to take on pastoral obligations, and to undertake or renew their commitment to study. The Cistercian congregations in Italy were among these, and were helped by their legislation, which for some time had been open to studies. These new responsibilities had important consequences for the internal organisation of the communities, and inevitably on their monastic identity.

With the cultural transformation which had come about in Europe between the end of XVII and the beginning of XVIII centuries, and more specifically in the Enlightenment, this problem of monastic identity will move from the ecclesial domain to that of the state. Increasingly, efficacy, the social good, and the fidelity of the religious institutes and orders to the State and her laws upstaged spiritual and theological values.

In Italy, discussion of the situation of Religious intensified at three key moments : the activity of the Regular Commission since 1765, the suppressions carried out in the Empire in 1780 and the abolition of the religious orders by the French Revolution.

Under Marie-Thérèse of Austria, and then Joseph II, and later in Tuscany under the Archduke Pietro-Leopoldo, monarchs considered themselves to be defenders of the Catholic faith, and at the same time responsible for the happiness and wellbeing, material and spiritual of their subjects. They totally incarnated the ideal of absolutism of the Enlightenment. In this period, the politics of Marie-Thérèse were more kindly disposed to the monasteries out of respect for the nobility. The youngest sons of the nobility, who were not able to contract a marriage of the same calibre as their older brothers were destined for the cloister. Not all of them went into the army or civil office; the monastery thus served as a refuge. And many were notable for their piety and their doctrine.

All the same, even in this period, monasteries were suppressed, especially small houses in the countryside. The reasons were highly honourable: to reduce the expenses of superiors who were too wasteful, and to win back the monks to a spirit of recollection and observance of the Rule by bringing them into the large monasteries in the town. We see how, in 1769 under the Hapsburgs in Lombardy, there was an agreement between the political and ecclesiastical authorities on the precise canonical laws issued by these latter authorities at this time.

According to the Curia, there were two kinds of conditions which could justify suppression: very serious necessities outside religious life, such as for example in other years, the necessity of financing the defence of Christian territory against the Turks, or else situations within, such as the impossibility of reform or incorrigible debauchery. Effectively, "if reform is possible, even if the situation is very grave, it is not legitimate to suppress; otherwise sooner or later all the Orders would have to be suppressed." It was for this reason, that the Curia vigorously resisted notable change of policy, which began in 1771.

Under Joseph II, the political strictures were much more severe. In what concerns us in this vast movement of reform, monks could be useful to the state on the economic level because of their wealth, and on the cultural level on account of their advanced studies. We are obviously not talking of a merely internal revival. "Our first intention, and the goal of our vigilant solicitude... is to make provision for the stable and comfortable upkeep of the clergy both regular and secular, and to make sure these serve the nation and society, not just by their virtues...but still more by their concerted effort to work for the formation of the people and to contribute to the preservation of culture in the useful sciences." Among other things, by studying, the monks would have combated the greatly detested monastic vice of idleness. In the controversy, which erupted around this question, monks were described as "individuals given over to vice, to wastefulness and to laziness."

The influence of the thought of Ludovico Muratori concerning this socio-cultural orientation was very important and widespread during the period of the Hapsburgs. It was at this time that, among others, the monastery of Morimond came about, "these monks are of little or no spiritual advantage to the people, and are sometimes even a cause of scandal because of the laziness of the majority of the religious." The monastery of San Ambrogio, which had been suppressed as a result of the Napoleonic laws, would refer to its excellence in the field of research into items of archival interest, diplomatic or other, in the hope of securing its re-establishment.

In all this moral and cultural renewal, Vienna and Milan were very attentive to what was going on in the other Italian states, particularly Vienna, which had already taken several steps along this road. Always out of a spirit of opportunism, the minister Firmian from Venice wanted to leave the Benedictines of the Congregation of Monte-Cassino, the Cistercian congregation, and the Olivetans in peace, suggesting they maintain their independence of Rome.

Suppression was not the only political means of diminishing the number of religious. "The principal means were...fixing the age of clothing and profession... discreetly bringing about the reduction and suppression of small houses and congregations, refusing permission to receive new subjects, and finally insisting on independence from foreign superiors." This arrangement, as well as being efficacious, would also cure the "malady of many regulars who believed their importance lay in the number of their monasteries."

As we pointed out earlier, the restrictions of Josephism would be much more stringent, but in ten years, the situation changed completely. The important families in fact, changed their methods of providing for their children, new ways of thinking and acting were abroad, and all these factors brought about a noticeable drop in vocations, particularly to monasteries, whose major source of recruitment had been the nobility.

The third means adopted to diminish the number of religious, that is to say independence from foreign superiors, was decreed by the Edict of 1781. "Religious houses will be directed and governed by their own superiors... under the control and direction of the Archbishop and the Bishop of the Diocese to whom his Majesty commends their pastoral care... and under the authority and control of the government in power."

Let us read what was written by Prince Kaunitz, a minister of Joseph II to his colleague Firmian of the Republic of Venice: "Your Excellency will notice that the suppression regards principally the institutes of contemplative life, who, given their rigorous separation from society, do not contribute visibly to the good of their neighbour and society at large. As for religious, Carthusians, Camaldolese and all solitaries living as hermits, they are included without exception in the suppression. The majority of nuns are in the same category, that is to say those who because of the particular circumstances of their Rule cannot and do not want to undertake the education of young girls and run schools for the education of these latter. I foresee the rumpus that will be caused by the execution of this sovereign order of 6th December 1781. I also foresee what difficulties it will come up against, particularly with regard to the nuns, because of the great number of these monasteries, also because of the noble birth of many cloistered religious...the nuns will cause us much more trouble than the monasteries of monks."

That was in fact the case: there were indeed great difficulties, but from then on public opinion favoured the 'liberation' of nuns from their enclosure, in order to give them a normal life-style. In general the women's monasteries had a good religious spirit and sometimes great spiritual depth; the pastoral care of the bishops was accepted without difficulty. Certainly abuse was also rife, as we see from the reports of the pastoral visits. These abuses were above all of the kind associated with the style of life of many high born women, nuns against their will, persuaded by parents and friends to engage in entertainment aimed at easing the austerities of their lives.

Under Joseph II, whom someone wanted to call the 'crowned revolutionary', the prudence and caution at work in the politics of his mother Marie-Therese disappeared. The attitudes of the sovereign had drastic and unfortunate effects, which continued and developed with the revolution and under Napoleon.

We have looked in some detail at this period because it marked a definitive change in the life of religious orders, had an indelible influence on other European governments, and truly represented the end of an era.

Towards extinction

As we said earlier, the Lombard province of the Congregation of Saint Bernard was among those the government wished to leave alone. That is the best proof that a good number of the monastic communities of this Congregation were of a sufficient number, and were rich and useful enough to society to survive this repressive regime. In 1784-1785, San Ambrogio had thirty priests, four professed and ten laybrothers; Chiaravalle di Milano had twenty-five priests and ten laybrothers, Chiaravalle della Colomba had ten priests and two laybrothers; San Martino de Bocci had nineteen priests and seven laybrothers. In the other communities, the numbers varied between ten and fourteen members.

The smallest monasteries had been suppressed during the Hapsburg period, none of the others survived 1799, except of course those monasteries situated in Parma, and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome, which were suppressed in 1810.

The province of Tuscany had to endure the period of government of the Grand Duke Pietro-Leopoldo (1765-1790), who followed the example of the territories which had been occupied by the Hapsburgs in Northern Italy. Initially well disposed, he finally undertook the total suppression of the houses, in order to reorganise them for the good of society. He managed to involve himself in the government of the monasteries, male and female alike, promulgating new statutes even for the internal running of the houses. Cistercian numbers dropped considerably from the twenty houses in Tuscany in the 17th century, and not all the abbeys were able to maintain a sufficient number of religious. The situation had been very different at the beginning of this century. Cestello de Florence had always had a good number of monks, the other communities had always had more than twelve monks. Buonsollazzo presents the most striking example, with one hundred and nine profession notices (sixty-seven monks and forty-two lay brothers) between 1710 and 1769, in the Trappist period. The register of deaths at Casamari, another monastery of the Trappist observance, noted one hundred and five entries between 1717 and the end of the century.

On this subject, it is interesting to note the discovery of Goffredo Viti in the archives at Casamari: Pius XII, in the brief *Alias pro parte* of 30th June 1775, instituted ten years of simple profession between the novitiate and solemn profession. The motives for this concession are not clear, and certainly the registers record abundant mentions of departures.

In 1782 and 1783, all the monasteries of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany were suppressed. Those situated in Emilie-Romagne entered the Roman province to which they belonged. The Roman province took on new life on 12th February 1762 when Clement XIII separated the monasteries from the ancient Roman congregation of the Province of Tuscany. The original nine monasteries rose to twenty-two in 1803, after the incorporation of the monasteries of Parma and Plaisance, les Marches, Umbria and the kingdom of Naples. The Congregation retained the Constitutions of the Congregation of Saint Bernard, which had been approved in 1641.

Unfortunately we have little historical information on the Congregation of Calabria-Lucania, which had been constituted on 12th April 1633; all we can say is that its seven monasteries were all suppressed between 1780 and 1809. In all, fifty-five Cistercian abbeys certainly existed in the XVIII century.

According to Goffredo Viti, it was proving difficult to maintain a certain level of spiritual life and fidelity in the monasteries. Many were reprovved and some monasteries were frequently called to order. Among those most seriously reprimanded were San Salvatore del Monte Amiata, Sagittario, Morimondo, etc. Countless monks were transferred, less out of necessity than by way of punishment. One can well understand why the Constitutions of 1641 required the construction of prisons in each monastery. The General Chapter of 1738 had to devote itself entirely to the Congregation of Calabria-Lucania, taking thirteen decisions on its account.

With regard to the five Sicilian monasteries, to date we know of only three letters that pointed to any difficulties. The first is the communication by the Abbot of Santa Maria della Ferraria, Ferdinando

Diotallevi, about a journey he had to undertake to visit the monasteries of Sicily; the second refers to measures taken with regard to the immoral behaviour of a monk in the Province of Sicily and the third is a circular to warn all the abbots about a monk who had escaped from the prison of their Monastery of Noto in Sicily where he had been received as a guest.

With regard to the two monasteries belonging to the Monastery of La Trappe, the information seems to be more precise and the evidence points to a high degree of fervour, at least in the first decades at Buonsollazzo, where there were two remarkable monks: Dom Malachia Garneyrin and Brother Colombano Demiannay. As we noted earlier, this Abbey reverted in 1762 to the observance of the monasteries of the Province of Tuscany. Casamari, on the other hand, persevered in the Trappist observance, with some mitigations, until 1929, when it received autonomous status. At Casamari, at the beginning of XVIII century, several monks died in the odour of sanctity, and on 13th May 1799 six monks were murdered by revolutionaries, while protecting the Blessed Sacrament.

Dom Penco's reflections are a great help in completing the notes on this century, "An epoch is closing which is unequalled in the history of monasticism. The Monastic congregations had reached their highest level of vitality, especially with regard to their influence on the social and religious life of the peninsula." The ordinary people express great sorrow at the disappearance of so many monastic communities; these had played a large part in forming the very fabric of their spiritual life, their culture and their economic development.

From now on the suppressions, the project of the Enlightenment philosophy, will be helped by choices of a juridical and institutional nature which are increasingly worldly.

The XIX Century : The Era of Napoleon

This very sad period opens with very sad news: the loss of Chiaravalle in Milan, the best monastery of the Congregation and the seat of the President. General Bonaparte made a "gift" of it to his-son-in-law. Some two years after, in 1799, the Director of Paris invaded Rome and deported Pius VI to France. The 'Repubblica Tiberina' was proclaimed in Rome. The Pope died in exile and Pius VII was elected at the Council of Venice. The Cisalpine Republic had suppressed the monasteries of Lombardy and the Monastery of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, seat of the Procurator of this province, was leaderless. On 23rd April 1801, Pius VII aggregated it to the Roman province.

With the occupation of Rome by Napoleon in 1809 and the deportation of the Pope to Fontainebleau, life became even more difficult for the Church. The ensuing suppression of all the religious orders stunned the country. The religious dispersed completely and many, for diverse reasons failed to return to the cloister when called back. Many Cistercian monasteries were lost once and for all. In Rome, San Sebastiano and the monastery of Tre Fontane alla Acque Salvie were handed over to the Friars Minor by Leo XII. Later, in 1868, Pius IX touched by the neglected state of Tre Fontane ordered that it be given to the Trappists. Casamari, which had belonged to the Roman Congregation since it had passed over to the Trappist observance under the authorisation of Clement XI, was suppressed between 1811 and 1814.

After the return of Pius VII and the fall of Napoleon, the Cistercians in Italy also tried to reconstruct their monastic family. The operation encountered many setbacks. Monks from some of the monasteries had survived, but not the buildings; in other cases, there were only empty buildings. For these reasons, buildings belonging to other monasteries, as well as monasteries that had never belonged to the Congregation, were occupied. This was the case in Piedmont for the Feuillants, which Pius VII had not aggregated in 1802. All five of them were suppressed, some after the Battle of Marengo, others by the 1855 anticlerical laws of Piedmont, or after regular visitations. Santa Maria di Roccamadore, the only monastery to survive out of Sicily, and Hautecombe, Savoy, were also aggregated. Such is the information gleaned from the first General Chapter of the restored Congregation, celebrated in 1820.

The Renaissance

On 21st July 1801, in the letter *Cisterciensium Ordinem*, Pius VII called the Abbot-President of the Roman congregation, Amedeo Piermartini "Abbot President General." This could give the impression that in Rome he was being considered as General of the entire Order. In point of fact, with the suppression of Cîteaux along with all the monasteries in France, the Order had lost its structure. None of the twelve or so remaining monasteries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was in any position to become leader of the Order; the only one at all with the courage to do so, Dom Augustin de Lestrang, was criticised and ill-judged by Rome. The last Abbot of Cîteaux, Dom François Trouvé, who had been forced to abandon his Abbey on 1st April 1792, had delegated his powers to the abbot of the imperial abbey of Salem, head of the Congregation of Upper Germany. But Salem could not undertake this office, so he in turn delegated his powers to the Procurator of the Order, residing in Rome, Dom Alano Bagatti, abbot of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.

When the Chapter of the Congregation met in 1806, relations between the Papacy and Napoleon were again once again critical. The Chapter took place at Montelabate. Some interesting information has come down to us from this very reduced meeting: apart from the economy, which was on the verge of bankruptcy, the religious had to have resort to a special 'reserved sum' for current needs. It also emerged from the Acts of the Chapter of the Congregation, that the recruitment of members depended on the permission of the Congregation for Regular Discipline. In the five years that followed, it accorded permission to give the habit to twenty-four choir religious and sixteen lay brothers. Presumably this number corresponded to the number of persons considered necessary to running the place with the means available.

The deportation of the Pope to Fontainebleau and the suppression carried out under Napoleon was once again a heavy blow to the Congregation, which no longer seemed able unaided, to find the energy to revive. So it was the Pope who on his return to Rome in 1814, who took the initiative. He immediately set up the Sacred Congregation of the Reform to restore the religious orders. With the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, it chose the Generals of the Orders. In the same year, it re-established Casamari. Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and San Bernardo alle Terme were re-opened in 1817.

Events made it seem reasonable to the Holy See to consider the President of the Congregation of Saint Bernard in Italy, Raimondo Giovanni as General of the Order. The monasteries outside Italy probably shared this opinion. In fact, the pontifical brief for the erection of the Monastery of Port du Salut as an Abbey makes mention of the President general of the Order of Cîteaux, residing in Rome. From now on, all Abbots must, immediately after their election, seek confirmation of their office from him. This was the only power of the President General recognised outside Italy. Effectively every congregation was governed by a Vicar General. As well as this, when the revolution of 1831 closed Poblet in Spain, the monks who managed to escape took refuge in Rome in the Italian Congregation and were welcomed at San Bernardo alle Terme.

It was only in 1820 that the first General Chapter was celebrated at San Bernardo. Abbot Sisto Benigni was elected as President general for a five-year term of office, residing at San Bernardo. The Constitutions were revised and were approved in 1831. In 1825, the Chapter was held here once more at San Bernardo. Along with two other houses which had belonged to the Congregation of the Feuillants in Piedmont, the monastery of San Nicola participated as well as Roccamadore di Sicilia. The abbots of San Nicola and Consolata de Turin were established as Procurators to the king of Naples and Sardinia respectively.

The 1830 Chapter made important decisions, among which was the choice of the year 1831 for the publication of new Constitutions. As well as this, a financial reserve was created for the congregation of Roccamadore for the needs of Lower Italy and another at la Consolata de Turin for the Piedmont houses. This obviously showed a great act of confidence in the future development of the Order. However, the social and

political mood in Italy was taking a very sombre turn. According to the Acts, fourteen houses were represented, and the total number of monks had risen to one hundred and ninety five, of whom eighty-eight were priests, forty-five were clerics, two were novices, thirty-nine were lay brothers and twenty-one were *familiars* and oblates. There were twenty-one abbots. This abnormal number takes into account the perpetuity of the abbatial dignity.

Subsequent chapters would come back on the question of the common life and individual incomes, among others; individual incomes could be an obstacle to the practice of the vow of poverty, even if it was allowed by the Code of Canon Law,

The 1845 Chapter showed its satisfaction once more. There were real signs of hope for the future. Unfortunately, the events of the first war of independence, 1849-49, the proclamation of the Roman republic, and Pius IX's escape to Gaète, dealt a fresh blow to the Congregation. On 4th May 1849, the monks were violently expelled from Santa Croce, but they quickly returned. As the Chapter of 1850 could obviously not be held, it was the Pope who decided to choose the *Reggimento* for the following five years. Only the capitular Congregation met in 1850, a meeting which lasted into 1851 because so many of the participants were ill.

The following chapter took place therefore in 1856 and elected Dom Teobaldo Cesari as General. The eight monasteries of the Pontifical state and Roccamadore, near Messina had members at this chapter. Unfortunately, the year before, 1855, the subalpine parliament had dissolved the religious Orders. Despite long cherished illusions, the Piedmontese monasteries were lost forever. The Chapter did not convene in 1860, and Pius IX elected abbot Cesari as President, along with the other Abbots of the *Reggimento*, basing his decision on the result of the ballot that had been sent to the voters. The Fathers of the *Reggimento* met at Santa Croce, as the monastery of San Bernardo was almost completely occupied by the French troops.

Alas, with the events of 1860-1861, the progress of the Revolution risked destroying the Congregation completely; the decree of suppression promulgated five years previously at Piedmont applied to the whole of Italy, and of the nine monasteries which formed the Congregation, only San Bernardo alle Terme and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme remained. We know however from the Acts of the Chapter of the *Reggimento* of 1865, that there were monks here and there from the communities that had been dissolved.

In this tragic situation, Dom Cesari and the other Abbots of the *Reggimento*, hoping against hope asked the Holy Father's permission to hold the Chapter of 1865 in the same way as the 1860 Chapter. This exceptional meeting included the Abbot of Bornem (Belgium) and Father Barnouin founder of the Congregation of Sénanque, whom the President General had put under the jurisdiction of the Italian Congregation. Another result of the Acts was that Dom Cesari was designated Postulator for the cause of the beatification of Eugène III.

We also learn from the Acts, that there were thirty-seven members in the communities of San Bernardo and Santa Croce, which formed the Congregation. In 1867, Dom Teobaldo Cesari visited the two Belgian monasteries at their request, as well as most of those in the Congregation of Austria and Hungary.

The Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars later extended the jurisdiction of the President General to these monasteries, and from then on, he was called the Abbot General of the Order. It was made clear that the monasteries in France, ruled by the special statute of 1663 and 1667 and pronouncing simple vows, were also under the direction of the Abbot President General residing in Rome and it requested that a general chapter be convoked. At that point a letter of convocation was sent to all the abbots of the Order, but not to the Trappist abbots.

The General Chapter, which was the first one of the Order reconstituted as a centralised body, was held at San Bernardo alle Terme from 6-16 April 1869. It established that any Abbot of the Order could be

elected General; thus the privilege of the Italian abbots was suppressed, but in any case, the Trappist Abbots were excluded.

In 1870, there was no chapter: effectively, the state of war meant that the future of the two Roman monasteries was unknown. On 20 September 1870, with the breach of Porta Pia and the entry of the French soldiers into Rome, the state capital became the national capital. Once again, the monks of Santa Croce and San Bernardo were expelled. But the basilicas of the two monasteries could not be closed, for the former was one of the seven Constantinian basilicas and the latter was a parish church. And that was the tiny seed from which the Order would once again flower.

There was a slight lessening of anti-clerical feeling, which left a little breathing space. The Fathers of the Reggimento considered reopening the novitiate. Dom Angelo Testa founded a monastery at Cortone, which he managed to acquire in 1875, and which he turned into the new novitiate of the Order. The General Chapter of the Reggimento could not be held until 1891. The superiors of the Austrian monasteries, of Belgium and Cortone and the two in Rome had all asked the Holy See in 1886 to prolong the mandates of the abbots already in charge for a further six years, given the gravity of the situation. That permission was given, however all the major superiors died within a short time of each other, the first being the Abbot General himself, who died suddenly on 26 March 1890. From every side, surviving monks arrived to help out in this acute need: Dom Gerardo Sizia cellarer came from Mondovi, Piedmont; the prior came from Roccamadore in Sicily, and from Messina Dom Gaetano de Marzo who assumed the presidency in the interim. The chapter of Reggimento was held at San Bernardo in 1891: there were fifteen capitulants. Dom Bernardo dell'Uomo became the new Abbot General. It was agreed that during the coming term of five years, twenty novices and ten lay brothers would be accepted.

So it was that at the close of this century in Italy, which has been described as “a mixture of English parliamentarianism, French centralisation and Prussian militarism” the Church stood as the solid rock on which the hopes of the future could be built. This was thanks to the prophetic action of its great pontiffs who gave a new lease of life to religious Orders, which had been devastated by both liberalism and anticlerical repression, and at the same time opened new horizons for all the people, by their social action.

With regard to the Order, a new scenario had been developing in France in the past years. The Trappist Congregations were enjoying a steady growth, and that along with concomitant elements, gave ever-growing hope that their juridical situation would also see changes.

The Union of the Trappist Congregations

The Trappists were divided into three congregations at the time. They had barely emerged from a very humiliating situation that had lasted nearly thirty years. We refer to the legislation regarding the vows. Like all Cistercians, the Trappists had always pronounced Solemn vows, until the Decree of 1837 which had suppressed this right. The General Chapters of the Congregations of the Strict Observance had repeatedly returned to this question, expressing the desire to have solemn Vows restored. As a result of two years' correspondence with the Holy See, between 1866-1867, a positive response was received on 12 March 1868: after two years novitiate and three years simple vows, the Trappists could pronounce Solemn Vows.

Certainly, it is surprising that the Trappists were never cited in the official Acts of the Chapters of 1869 or 1888, all the more so that, as we have said, there was no longer any difference with regard to vows, and they were under the jurisdiction of the same abbot General. In the years 1878-1879, the Trappists had taken steps to hold their own General Chapter, but it was not followed through, any more than was the question of the unification of the Trappist congregations. After many vicissitudes, often painful, it was Pope Leo XIII, who, in 1892 called the representatives of the four Trappist observances: Casamari, Westmalle,

Sept-Fons and Melleray to Rome: for various reasons the Pope seemed to want the unification of these congregations.

The General Chapter opened at the French Seminary of Santa Chiara, Rome, under the presidency of Cardinal Mazzella. The representatives of Casamari did not wish to participate in the vote and maintained their independence. The other Congregations voted for the unification. An Abbot General was elected in the person of Dom Sebastian Wyart. The Decree of Unification was published on 8 December 1892.

The Trappists in Italy

In Italy, Trappist monasteries already existed; the monastery of Tre Fontane, which had been restored to the Trappists in 1868, and the Congregation of Casamari, which followed the Trappist observance with certain mitigations. Two other Trappist monasteries were founded in XIX century, the first founded by a group of nuns from the monastery of Vaise at St Vito near Turin in 1875. They were led by Sœur Thérèse Astoin, Oblate, who made her profession at San Vito and became its superior. The monastery was called Our Lady of Cîteaux. This monastery experienced many difficulties often referred to in the General Chapters of the Congregation of La Trappe to which it belonged. Right from the first visitation cards found in the historical archives of the Monastery, two points in particular are highlighted: the extreme poverty of the foundation and at the same time the great generosity of the sisters, all of very humble birth. The unrelieved precariousness of the situation led the superiors of the Order to ask for the community to be transferred to a setting nearer Rome. The summer residence of the monastery of Les Catacombes of Saint-Calixte, situated at Grottaferrata, on the Alban hills, was offered to the sisters. The transfer took place in 1898. The community is now situated at Vitorchiano (Viterbe).

The other Trappist monastery was founded at Les Catacombes de Saint-Calixte. At the beginning of November 1883, Cardinal Monaco la Valletta suggested to the Procurator General of the Congregation of Sept-Fons the possibility of a foundation at the Catacombs of Saint-Calixte, Rome. The request was transmitted to Dom Sebastian, Abbot of Mont-des- Cats. After many difficulties, Dom Sebastian accepted and the 1884 General Chapter of the Congregation of Sept-Fons asked him to remain in Rome to oversee more effectively the beginnings of this foundation. In the documents preserved in the historical archives of the community, today at Frattochie, near Marino, great emphasis is laid on the esteem Pope Leo XIII had for the Trappists. This is why he wished to entrust to them the care of the Catacombs of Saint-Calixte. In 1891, the general chapter of the congregation of Sept-Fons was held at the new monastery of the Catacombs.

Questions for reflection

1. How do we and should we react in difficult situations: political, social or economic?
2. How do we and should we react when the legislation of our country is going to have an impact on or repercussions for life in the community?

Cistercian Congregations in the 19th Century

Unit prepared by Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois, La Trappe.

Congregations in the Iberian Peninsula

In 1815, the three existing Congregations still had monks: the Congregation of Alcobaça in Portugal, which was still very fervent during the 18th century, numbered at least fifteen monasteries of monks and thirteen of nuns; the Congregation of Castile numbered a thousand monks in forty-seven monasteries in 1793. It was the oldest and the most autonomous of the congregations; for many years, the General Chapter of Cîteaux had accepted it with difficulty. Abstinence was no longer observed in the congregation. The Congregation of Aragon was perhaps even more relaxed, and had eighteen houses of men

Valsainte had founded Santa Susana in 1796, not without resistance from the indigenous Cistercians who eventually more or less integrated it. Dom G  rasime took the oath of obedience to the Vicar General of the Congregation of Aragon, at the same time maintaining his specificity. The military Order of Calatrava still had about fifty residences, if they could be considered as Cistercian.

As a result of the French occupation, these monasteries of monks suffered some damage. For a time some were abandoned, victims of Joseph Bonaparte's decree of suppression (1809) in Spain. Santa Susanna moved to Majorca until 1813, but the majority of houses were still surviving in 1815, at the time of

Ferdinand VII. However this was not to be so for long. In 1820, a liberal regime with anticlerical policies took over. The houses were all definitively suppressed in 1834 in Portugal, and in 1835-1836 in Spain, apart from a few house of Calatrava. The only ones continuing, as far as they could, were the nuns, at least in Spain, because in Portugal they were forbidden to recruit; the last nun was to die 50 years later. This explains the still significant number of Spanish monasteries of Cistercian nuns that have known no break in their continuity. It was to be the Trappists who re-established masculine monasticism in Spain, but not until the end of the 19th century, with San Isidoro in 1891; Viaceli followed in 1908.

It is difficult to know the number of Spanish monasteries of nuns existing at the beginning of the 19th century. The Ecclesiastical Guide (*Guia ecclesiastica*) of 1854 indicates that there were fifty-four which had six hundred and eight nuns between them. But there must have been more monasteries – about seventy. The Congregation of Aragon had nine monasteries of nuns. Castile had only eight fully integrated into the congregation, one of which was Las Huelgas, but it exercised influence over the fourteen dependant houses of Las Huelgas, and also over the fourteen houses of Récolettes. It is to be noted that in the Congregation of Castile, the nuns continued as far as they could to use the ancient Cistercian rite which the congregation had kept; in the end, this was only for the breviary, since from 1836, there were no longer any monks to celebrate Mass. About thirty other monasteries depended on the local bishop, including the houses of the order of Calatrava. In 1891, the statistics of Father Gaillemine noted fifty-six monasteries, but the author recognised in the 1894 that there were others of which he had not been aware. These houses were influenced by the passing trends of society. A certain number had primary schools for girls.

In the territories of the Holy Romano-Germanic Empire

A) The situation during the first half of the 19th Century

The disastrous policies of Joseph II at the end of the 18th century meant that very few monasteries survived in the part of the empire that depended the most directly on him. On the other hand, the monasteries situated in the western and northern parts of the empire, corresponding more or less to what is now Germany, were virtually spared the policy of the House of Austria. The Congregation of Upper Germany still numbered forty-six monasteries of men and eighty-three of women at the time of the death of the Emperor in 1790. But the Alsatian houses were to perish in 1790 at the hands of French revolutionary troops. As to the others, they were the victims of the greed of the German princes when Napoleon imposed the Peace of Luneville on them in 1801; their goods and their churches were ceded to these princes, to compensate for French acquisitions on the left bank of the Rhine. The communities were victims of the law of secularisation in 1803. The Congregation of Upper-Germany disappeared in 1806 when the three remaining Swiss abbeys of Wettingen, Saint-Urbain and Hauterive, were formed into an independent congregation. Out of the fourteen Swiss abbeys these were the only ones to escape the Protestant reform of the 16th century. They only existed for another three decades after the treaty of Vienna in 1815, and disappeared in their turn in 1841 and 1848.

The nuns had more luck, at least in Switzerland ; seven monasteries emerged more or less unscathed from this troubled period: Frauenthal, Magdenau, Wurmsbach, La Maigrange, La Fille-Dieu, Eschenbach and the Bernardines of Collombey, the only surviving house of the Bernardines of Mère de Ballon. In the German regions, on the other hand, only four monasteries of nuns still existed in 1815. At least forty had disappeared.

In the north east, certain monasteries of Prussia, Poland and Lithuania, which formed their own Province had escaped the destruction of the Napoleonic period. Austrian Poland saved its two monasteries, Mogila and Szczyrzyc, but those in the part annexed by Russia, as with the four in Lithuania, including one of nuns, disappeared, either in 1798, or at the moment of the insurrection in 1830-1831, or a little later.

B) The Restoration of the Congregations in the German Speaking Countries

1) In Austria-Hungary

The possibility of creating an Austrian Congregation had been in the air since 1852. Until then, the political situation had prevented this type of collaboration between the abbeys, and above all the possibility of maintaining their relationship with the President General of the Order in Italy. The Concordat signed in 1855 after the revolution of 1848-1849 put an end to Josephism. This changed the situation and allowed the erection of the Congregation at the Chapter that was finally held in Prague in 1859. At the start, the Austrian-Hungarian congregation numbered 14 houses of monks – thirteen of them surviving abbeys, and that of Mehrerau which was re-occupied in 1854 by the exiled survivors of Wettingen, - and two monasteries of nuns. The congregation included the two surviving monasteries of Bohemia, as well as two others coming from the former Austrian Poland. In 1859, constitutions were drawn up, the “Statutes of Prague”, after an apostolic visit to all the monasteries by Cardinal Schwarzenberg. He observed that the austerity of the discipline which had characterised the Order of St. Bernard in former times and which is still adhered to by the Strict Observance of Trappists was no longer found in the Austrian monasteries and could not be re-established given the monks and circumstances of that time.

In effect, all these houses had to continue to prove their social usefulness by taking on pastoral works. Stams, for example, had the care of eighteen parishes, nearly all of which had elementary schools. Five abbeys had secondary schools; others had a hospice. This situation had repercussions on observance. Before 1859, the Divine Office was only fully recited in common in five monasteries: Stams, Rein, Osek and the two Polish ones. For reasons unknown to us, the “Statutes of Prague” were never ratified in Rome and this reduced their efficacy. In 1874, a law inspired by new liberal ideas replaced the Concordat of 1855, and almost threw everything back into question. Happily, the Emperor, who knew several abbeys, did not confirm it. Finally, let us note that the statistics of 1891 indicate that there were five hundred and seventy three monks living in twelve abbeys, including one hundred and thirty four at Zirc. Mehrerau had in effect just formed its own congregation and Neukloster had been reunited with Heiligenkreuz. Therefore the Congregation had hardly expanded during the 19th century, apart from Mehrerau and Zirc.

2) In Germany

The re-opening by Mehrerau in 1888 of a second German monastery, Marienstatt, allowed the possibility of the canonical erection of a Germano-Swiss Congregation, said to be of Mehrerau. It was seventy-four strong, rising to one hundred and twenty-four seven years later and was ratified by the General Chapter of 1891.

C) The creation of a Belgian Congregation

In Belgium, now an independent state, two former abbeys of the eighteen that were suppressed came back to life. Lieu-Saint-Bernard, situated at Bornem was restarted in 1836 by about ten young monks who had received their formation at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, and in 1844, Le Val-Dieu which was repurchased in 1840 by the last surviving monk of the suppressed community. These two abbeys

served several parishes, and were recognised as a vicariate or a Congregation in 1846. The monks of Colen, founded in 1822, were integrated into it.

D) The Recognition of an Observance : The Cistercian Congregation of the Immaculate Conception (1854 – 1892)

Presentation by Father Jean-Marie GERVAIS, Sénanque.

From Hermitage to Abbey

In 1854, Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. In the spring of this same year, a group of brother hermits, with Fr. Marie-Bernard Barnouin at their head, arrived at Sénanque. These fifteen brothers, who came from a place called “The Cavalry” in the North of the Department of Vaucluse (France), arrived to restore the ancient Abbey of Notre-Dame de Sénanque. They were attracted by a life of prayer and solitude; their new location would give them the possibility of realising this desire.

The Abbey of Notre-Dame de Sénanque had been founded in 1148 by the monks of Mazan in Vivarais. The Abbey at Mazan was affiliated to the Cistercian Order in 1121 by becoming a daughter house of Bonnevaux. The latter was the seventh daughter of Cîteaux, founded in 1119 near Vienne in the Dauphin. It was on the initiative of the Bishop of Cavaillon, Alfant, together with the generosity of the feudal lords of Simiane, suzerains of Gordes that the foundation of Sénanque came about.

Sénanque and the Cistercian way of life

Thus Sénanque was a Cistercian abbey. For Fr. Barnouin this new sign of providence oriented his small community towards the Cistercian way of life. His monastic family was already living under the Rule of St. Benedict; henceforth the Rule would be understood and lived according to the Cistercian tradition. They were going to become Cistercians, more precisely, Bernardines, the name given to Cistercians in France before the French Revolution. And since at “The Cavalry”, they were under the protection of the Immaculate Conception, they would be called Bernardines of the Immaculate Conception.

Dom Barnouin, the founder

All the new inhabitants at Sénanque had to learn the Cistercian way of monastic life, beginning with the superior himself. Fr Barnouin was originally from the Isle-sur-Sorgues, a village of Provence in the Diocese of Avignon, where he was born on the 18th October 1815 and where he spent his youth. He was attracted to religious life during his adolescence, but had to give up the idea. He became a seminarian, and was ordained priest in 1843. Named Vicar of Lapalud, the young priest did not feel that he was made for the life of a secular priest. His desire for religious life and his attraction towards a life of contemplation pulled him elsewhere; moreover, his state of health and difficulties in the parish were also important questions.

It was in this climate of uncertainty that he heard of the Hermitage of Our Lady of the Cavalry. Situated not far from Manosque, this hermitage took its name from the knights Templar who had had a residence there, the chapel of which still existed. In this country, dear to the writer Giono, Fr. Barnouin began to live religious life with a few companions, who became more numerous as time passed. His spiritual intuition grew, and he discovered the Rule of St. Benedict. At this time, significantly, he took the name Fr

Marie-Benoit which he would change, in a way no less significant, to Fr. Marie-Bernard when he arrived at Sénanque. Fr. Barnouin was unable to obtain the domain of The Cavalry from its owners, and so it was providential that he discovered the Sénancole valley.

A New Cistercian Observance

Restoring monastic life at Sénanque was demanding. Material poverty was harshly felt; the monastery had to be restored, and above all, the members of the community had to be formed in the monastic way of life. The founder wished to be attached to the Order of Cîteaux. In 1858, the new family was affiliated to the Congregation of Saint-Bernard in Italy, and by this fact, to the Order. The Abbot President of this congregation was also the Abbot General of the Order of Cîteaux.

However, the superior of Sénanque clearly had the intention of keeping to one of his principal intuitions:

“To establish a way of life which neither discourages the weak, nor attracts the cowardly. One finds in the Constitutions no mention of austerities which repulse human nature: neither fasting nor vigils, nor perpetual abstinence, nor the instruments of penance. Nor does one find anything that panders this same human nature: neither relaxation, nor gentleness, nor sensual enjoyment. ... If I had established the austerities and penitence of our holy Rule, our life would have been that of La Trappe, and not that of our own particular institution. If I had established a rule which was comfortable and relaxed, without any penitence, it would not be religious life, would not conform to the evangelical counsels.” (Preface of the text of the Constitutions presented to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1857 and 1861.)

Fr Barnouin desired to follow “The Rule of glorious Father Benedict, the book of Usages of Cîteaux, the Charter of Charity of St Stephen Harding; in a word, all the practices of the Order.” And more: “We claim to stay faithful to the essential spirit of Cîteaux and, following her example, to practise the great religious virtues, such as silence, obedience, poverty, separation from the world, a spirit of mortification and of prayer.”

In another document concerning the Observance of Sénanque, the founder declared:

“Just as the monks of the Congregation are held to attend to manual labour, to study, to choir, and to other sacred exercises, they will maintain authentic solitude, They will not assume any parish work, nor preaching, nor direction of nuns and sisters, even those of their own congregation. They will regularly devote their mornings to sacred study, and their afternoons to manual work.” (Letter of the Prior of Fontfroide to the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation, 7th January 1873.)

On the 24th August 1867, the family of Sénanque, which already numbered several houses, was erected as a congregation.

On 27th October 1869, to the joy of all, monastic life was restored to the ancient Abbey of Lérins ; three years later, Fr Barnouin transferred the seat of the Congregation to the Isle of Saints.

Sénanque developed rapidly with the arrival of numerous vocations, which allowed new foundations to be envisaged. Firstly, the reopening of the Abbey of Fontfroide in the Diocese of Carcassonne, followed by the reopening of Hautecombe in 1864. Also in 1864, Ségriès, near Riez in Haute Provence, was opened. In 1863, Fr Barnouin had sent monks to repopulate the monastery of la Garde-Dieu in the Diocese of Montauban, but in January 1865, the monks were expelled.

Despite reservations at the beginning, nuns were welcomed. The first foundation was Salagon in 1865. The following year, as the sisters grew in number, they decided to open another house, Reillane. In 1872, the two communities were re-united at this Priory of nuns.

However, important differences remained between the new foundation and the Congregation of St Bernard in Italy. A letter of the Prior of Fontfroide, Fr. Jean, shows this : “We are an Observance apart, and in fact, distinct from the Italian one. Our petition does not aim to make us evade this dependence, but to save our Observance.” The intention of the founder had been to “revive the mitigated observance of the former French Cistercians before the Revolution, which was compatible with average health and was without the austerities of the reform of de Rancé, which were exaggerated even more at the time of the Revolution by Abbé Lestrangé.” He had been supported and encouraged in his steps by the Archbishop of Avignon, Monsieur Debelay, and by Dom Orsise, then by Dom Bonaventure, Abbots of Aiguebelle.

Dom Barnouin died the 8th June 1888. He had given and put into practice the principal axes of the monastic way of life such as he felt them: prayer, solitude, work. The contemplative orientation was first and exclusive priority. The Eucharist and prayer for the Holy Souls had a dominant place in the life of the Congregation.

On the 12th March 1892, a decree by Pope Leo XIII accorded the Congregation of Sénanque definitive approbation of its Constitutions.

The Restoration of the Cistercian Order

Until the French Revolution, the supreme authority of the Order resided in the General Chapter, which took place at Cîteaux under the presidency of the Abbot of this Mother House of the Order. When Dom Francois Trouvé died in 1797, still living with his nephew, no one succeeded him, for the simple reason that the community was no longer in existence. In the meantime he had delegated his powers to certain regions, but on the 15th September 1797, the Holy See temporarily delegated his faculties to the presidents of the Congregations and to the vicars of the various provinces. These congregations or provinces thus found themselves dislocated members of the old Order, with no juridical relationship between them.

From 1814, Pius VII, who for his part was trying to put the Order back on its feet in Italy, had decided to restore the broken links, and gave the Order a President General. He named the president of the Italian Congregation, the abbot of Santa Croce in Rome, to this post, but without however giving him any particular powers of jurisdiction other than the right to confirm abbatial elections in the Order. In fact, when the Holy See was called to pronounce on the situation of the Trappists at the time of their restoration in France and to settle the question between the followers of Lestrangé and those of de Rancé, the President General was asked to study the requests of Dom Augustine and to give a report. His opinion was to prevail.

It has to be remembered that before the Revolution, the Abbot of Cîteaux did not enjoy particular juridical powers over the monasteries. He only had the powers confided to him by the General Chapter. It was not even up to him to confirm the abbatial elections; this would be taking over the right of the Father Immediate. All the same, from 1433, he could make enquiries, in the name of the Chapter, as to whether the one elected fulfilled the necessary criteria. The title ‘Abbot General’, which appeared in the middle of the 15th century, was only a title. However, it did mean that the Abbey was exempted from the commendatory system, even if the Abbot of Cîteaux never had, at least from the time of the death of Stephen Harding, a genuine authority over the Order. God knows if the abbots of the first four abbeys, and in particular, the Abbot of Clairvaux, were watching over Cîteaux. However, considering that the General

Chapters were held less and less frequently “only six between 1562 and 1601, and five between 1699 and 1787,” the Abbot of Cîteaux, helped by the first Fathers and Definitors of the Order, did assume a certain role of animation in the Order.

The role of President General without any particular jurisdiction, instituted by Pius VII, followed this tradition, except that he was not the Abbot of Cîteaux, Mother House of the Order, but an abbot with a three year mandate, whose jurisdiction extended only to his own house and his small Congregation

Questions were asked about the legitimacy of the Cistercian liturgy. To uphold its legitimacy, it was advisable that all Cistercians responded to the Holy See in a united way. The President General of that time, Dom Teobaldo Cesari, seized the opportunity to propose the convocation of an extraordinary General Chapter, which would be the first of the whole Order since the disappearance of Cîteaux in 1792. In 1863 he approached all the superiors of the Order about this. Only the response of the Trappists is known; they reacted negatively, saying that it was not possible even to think of uniting the different congregations into one single Order, when they did not have the same basic concept of separation from the world, of apostolic life, of cenobitic life, and diverged so much on the level of observances. But it seems that the Austrians were hardly more enthusiastic than the Trappists.

The Holy See convoked a first inter-congregational chapter in 1869. The Trappists were not invited, taking into account, perhaps, their reactions in 1864, but also because the agenda only had bearing on the relationships between the non-trappist congregations over which the President General had received jurisdiction from the Holy See in 1868. However, it was at this chapter that the title of Abbot General was given to the Superior General, who could, henceforth, be elected for life from amongst the professed of any congregation. He was to reside in Rome.

The decisions of this chapter were not to be ratified by the Holy See, undoubtedly because Dom Cesari did not wish to stay in his position for life. The political situation worsened with the fall of Rome to the Piedmontese in 1870, and the laws of secularisation in 1871. The situation of the Italian congregation became very precarious. It lost all its properties in Rome and was no longer able to hold general chapters to elect its president. The Holy See prolonged the term of office of the president each year, but in March 1879, it left Dom Cesari in his role as Superior General of the Order, and named Dom Bartolini as president of the Italian Congregation, after consulting the Italian religious. However, Dom Cesari died a few days later, and Dom Bartolini was named interim President General.

The question of the Abbot General was to be sorted out at a common Chapter in 1880. Where should it take place? In principle, in Rome, but the Austrians managed to have it in Vienna. The Trappists were excluded. They only submitted to the authority of the President General for the confirmation of their abbatial elections and had their own procurators and their own cardinal protector. Anyway, had they not expressed the wish to have their own Abbot General in 1878? The other abbots were not very enthusiastic about having them in their midst, because, representing 60% of the houses and the abbots as they did, they would have dominated the chapter. In truth, the separation into two orders was in fitting with the logic of things since the 17th century. Everything pointed to it. In congratulating the newly elected, the capitulants of the congregation of La Trappe, meeting at Aiguebelle in August 1881, showed no surprise nor issued any protestation about not being invited to participate in his election; it was none of their business.

The chapter met painfully in two sessions, on the 29th and 30th April 1880, with only fifteen superiors present and the Procurator General, Dom Smeulders. Twelve others had sent their vote and their excuses. The votes of five superiors of the Congregation of S  nanque were not taken into account, because they were still in simple vows, and moreover, they were still only affiliated to the Cistercian Order. Dom

Bartolini was elected, but this was only confirmed for six years, a term that was prolonged for the same length of time by Leo XIII in 1886. He died before the end of his second term on the 26th July 1890.

The death of Dom Bartolini gave rise to a new General Chapter in 1891. Because of the laws of secularisation, the Italian Congregation was too reduced and in too a bad way to be in the position to propose their own president as a candidate. The eighty-one year old Vicar of the Austro-Hungarian Congregation, Dom Leopold Wackarz, Abbot of Hohenfurt, today Vyssi Brod, was elected for six years. He obtained the authorisation not to live in Rome. His mandate was extended for two years at the chapter of 1897.

Text legal :

The Rule for the Monks of Wettingen at the time of their installation at Mehrerau in 1854 (Complete Latin text to be found in *Analecta Cisterciensia* 43 [1986] p.175-178).

1. On the Divine Office

The small number of religious resuming monastic life and the particular circumstances of our family make it impossible to maintain the same hours and manners of celebrating the Divine Office as in our Mother House of *Maris Stella* [Wettingen] ; so we have decided on the following modifications :

On ferial days, Matins will begin at 3.45 a.m.; on Sundays and feast days at 3.30 a.m. Masses follow, celebrated according to the Ordo, or according to the direction of the Abbot.

At 6 a.m., meditation in the Oratory until 6.30 a.m. - all will participate unless prevented from doing so by a legitimate reason.

At 6.30 a.m. Prime begins with the *Pretiosa* and the antiphon '*Sub Tuum Praesidium*' sung with the prayer, *Pietate*. Then the conventual Mass will follow. After Mass, Terce will be said, and at 1.00 p.m. Sext and None.

On Sundays and Feastdays, Terce is sung at 8.30 a.m., followed by a High Mass or a Solemn Mass, the latter being followed by Sext and None.

At 3.00 p.m. Vespers is said, at the end of which, the prayer, *Domine Jesu* for the preservation of the place.

At 7.00 p.m. a signal is given for the collation which is followed as quickly as possible by Compline at the end of which the *Salve Regina* is solemnly chanted. Then a short moment of evening recollection, and the Blessing.

2. On Enclosure and on Silence

The south and the east wings of the house are in the enclosure. The western side is outside the enclosure. Strangers, above all seculars, are not allowed to enter the enclosure without necessity and the permission of the superior. It is strictly forbidden for women to enter the enclosure or the kitchen. Within the enclosure, silence is observed, but if it is necessary to speak, a low voice is used.

There should be no music at all between Prime and Compline. During recreations, walking in the enclosure and good conversation without shouting or too much noise is permitted.

3. On Recreation

The daily hours for recreation are from lunch to 1.00 p.m. and from dinner to Compline. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, this can be prolonged until 3.00 p.m. Given that the gardens do not provide adequate breathing space, permission is given to walk in the fields of the monastery and beside the Lake during recreation. Extraordinary days of recreation occur before the beginning of Advent and Lent, on the

feast day of the superior, on the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, and on the Feast of St. Benedict. On these days, Compline, with the Salve Regina, is sung after Vespers.

4. On the Regular Table and that of the Guests

Lunch is taken at 11.00 a.m. and the evening meal at 5.30 p.m. Unless there is a dispensation from the superior, there is always reading; at lunch, a chapter of holy Scripture, then Church or civil history which can instruct and edify the listeners; a spiritual and ascetic reading always ends the reading. In the evening, first of all, the martyrology of the following day is read. As to the measure of food and drink, we think that it suffices daily to serve the community with two plates of meat with vegetables, in addition to soup; in the evening just one plate with vegetables. At each meal the monks may have a quarter of a pint of wine. On festive days, religious feasts and days of recreation, the superior can, in addition, give a good wine.

Once Mass has finished, or after the conventual mass, each one is allowed to have breakfast in the refectory and even, if he wishes, because of human fragility and the advanced age of us all, to warm himself up with some wine or coffee in the afternoon or just before Vespers.

The Abbot should always eat with the guests, and is accompanied by another religious according to rank or suitability. Guests who are priests, above all friends, can also take their place at the table of the community.

5. Of Personal Money and Allowances

Our Constitutions consider that to have personal finances does not conform to the vow of poverty, and we, brothers, agreed at the meeting of Wurmsbach on the 16th May 1854, to resume monastic life according to the Rule of St. Benedict. This is why personal allowances are suppressed, and the religious or the lay brothers, whoever they are, will receive from the Abbot or his delegates all that is necessary for food, clothing, the arts, study, travel, and anything else that he must use. As a consequence of this, the religious give to the Abbot for use in common all they have as money or property and make an inventory of their financial situation.

The confreres who stayed in Switzerland will also make a list, before Palm Sunday, of their assets and liabilities and of their wealth. From all of this, a description or inventory of the accounts of our house will be drawn up.

The Abbot will draw the money, administer it and render account annually to the community.

All gifts received will be given to the superior of the Community, who can keep them or spend them on common needs.

Financial documents will be signed by the superior and those which arrive will be handed over to him.

6. On Lay Brothers

According to the convention established at Wurmsbach, those received into the novitiate will be mainly choir monks. Lay brothers are only admitted if they know a trade useful to the monastery; they are received as oblates with simple vows determined for a specific number of years, at the end of which the profession is renewed for a further determined number of years or for life. By their profession, they are committed to manual work, to the service of the monks, to the care of the sick, and to carrying out other domestic services required by their superiors. Moreover, they will show obedience to their Master and respect for the choir monks. They participate each day in meditation and in Mass, as well as in the Salve after Compline. On Feast days, they go to Terce and Vespers. They have a lesson or instruction with their Master at a set time.

Questions for reflection

1. In the first part of this unit, it seems that the issue of observances has several aspects: the role of penitence is important, the monasteries believed that they were in some way obliged to prove their social utility (schools, clearing and draining of land etc.)
What would be our opinion concerning these same issues? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?
2. In the light of the spiritual journey of Dom Barnouin, we can ask ourselves what we can do to stimulate in each member of our community the call to seek God who has put each one of us on the Cistercian path.
3. Dom Barnouin wanted to have a way of Cistercian life that was accessible to those with less robust health. What questions does this pose today for us? How can we respond with fidelity and realism?
4. Dom Barnouin was able to re-establish monastic life at prestigious sites. What is the spiritual heritage of the place where we live? What can we do to make it a fruitful place?

The Trappist-Cistercians during the 19th Century

Unit prepared by Dom Marie-Gérard Dubois, La Trappe.

1. The heritage of Dom de Lestrange after the end of the Napoleonic Empire

The last monks of Valsainte reoccupied La Trappe on 6th December 1815 and Aiguebelle at the beginning of 1816. Those of Darfeld were divided into four groups: as well as Westmalle, which was reoccupied definitively in 1814, they went to Port-du-Salut next to Entrammes in February 1815, and to Gard in 1817, which was later to be transferred to Sept-Fons in 1845. Those of German origin stayed first in Westphalie, and then went to Oelenberg in Alsace in 1825. Dom de la Prade, Abbot of Darfeld, died in 1816, before being able to settle in France. During this time, Dom Augustine returned from America with his followers; one group rejoined La Trappe, and the other, led by Dom Urbain Guillet, a former professed monk of La Trappe, settled at Bellefontaine at the beginning of 1816. The monks of Lulworth in England reopened the abbey of Melleray in August 1817. The sixty strong community, led by Dom Antoine Beauregard, was impressive amongst the reviving monasteries, most of which were living in rather precarious conditions. It followed the observances of Valsainte.

The nuns in Switzerland followed the monks who returned to La Trappe and settled several kilometres away, before going to rejoin those who had settled at Gardes, near Bellefontaine. After several detours, another group ended up at Vaise near Lyon. The French nuns who were dependent on Darfeld settled near Port-du-Salut at Laval, whilst the German nuns accompanied the monks to Oelenberg in 1825. The community established at Westmalle stayed there, putting themselves under Episcopal jurisdiction, following the decree of King William I of 16th September 1815, which stipulated that all links with France should be cut.

Having returned to La Trappe, Dom Augustin wished to continue governing all the monks and nuns that had been with him, as he had done since Valsainte, without convoking a general chapter. He would have preferred that there were only simple superiors in the houses, dismissible at any moment. But he clashed with two titular abbots. The Abbot of Melleray, whilst remaining under obedience to Dom Augustin, wished to bring him round to resume the regulations of De Rancé, in order to bring about the unity of the Order. Could he go back on what he had said by abandoning what he had declared untouchable? For his part, Dom Bernard de Girmont of Port-du-Salut, who had been recognised as abbot by Rome and was a follower of de Rancé, sought to unify the monasteries in France under the direct control of the President General of the whole Order. It was he whom he asked for confirmation of his election.

Dom Augustine knew well that union could only be effected to the detriment of his own views; so he opposed it. But his centralism, his stipulations about collections of money to be taken, his absences, the havoc that was wreaked by the rigours of asceticism, and finally, his disagreements with the bishops, starting with that of Sées, rebounded on him, and led to proceedings being launched against him. Resolved to defend himself, in 1823 he decided to go to Rome, and did so in 1825. It is known that he received no satisfaction, and that he died on the way back at Vaise, in July 1827.

2. Two Congregations : One in France (1834-1847) and one in Belgium (1836-1892)

Rome thus named the abbot of Melleray, Dom Antoine de Beauregard, as the successor of Dom Lestrange, with the responsibility of visiting the eighteen monasteries in France. Eight monasteries of monks and nuns followed the Regulations of Valsainte: La Trappe, Melleray, Bellefontaine, Aiguebelle, la Sainte-Baume, (which closed in 1835), Les Gardes, Lyon-Vaise, Mondaye. Eight others followed the Regulations of de Rancé: Port-du-Salut, Le Gard, Mont-des-Olives (nuns and monks), Mont-des-Cats, Bricquebec, Laval, and Saint Aubin, which moved to follow de Rancé's observance in 1825, and closed in 1828.

Dom Antoine was also given the responsibility of making propositions, in prospect of a unification of the observances. He proposed that they went over to the Regulations of de Rancé. If the Holy See had pronounced on this immediately, this would probably have happened. But, delayed by the deaths of Leo XII and Pius VIII, the Roman decisions could not be made before the Revolution in France in 1830. The abbot of Melleray was politically compromised, and his community was expelled in 1831. Thus it was no longer a question of this abbey being at the head of the Order. A first decree in 1834 erected the monasteries of France into one single congregation, under the authority of the abbot of La Trappe as the Vicar general. He had the right to visit all the monasteries, and had to convoke a general chapter each year. Elsewhere, the Trappists were entrusted to the care of the Bishops, in their capacity as delegates of the Holy See: although the principle of exemption was still in force, in practice it was not adhered to. The same principle did not exist for the nuns; the monks were only given responsibility for their spiritual direction. A second decree, promulgated on 22nd April 1836, grouped the monastery of Westmalle, erected as an Abbey and Sainte-Sixte into one congregation. Their future foundations would be attached to this congregation. From 1850 to 1883 this congregation numbered only four houses: Westmalle and Sainte-Sixte (founded in 1831) Achel (1839) and Scourmont (1850). From 1883, Echt, Diepenveen, Tegelen (1884) and Rochefort (1887) would also be included.

This last decree which instituted the abbots of Westmalle as Vicar Generals of the Congregation is less precise about the holding of general chapters. The first meeting of Belgian superiors did not take place until 1886. The monks were committed to the Rule of St. Benedict, to the Regulations of de Rancé and to the Constitutions of the Order, otherwise called the Charter of Charity.

The observance of the French Trappists was regulated by these same ancient documents, which, theoretically, put a definitive end to the Regulations of Valsainte. However, the time of manual work was extended, compared with the Regulations of de Rancé. With respect to fasting, prayer and the Chant of the Divine Office, it was detailed that these would be practised as in the Rule, or as in the Regulations of de Rancé, "according to the usages of each monastery." It might as well be said that unity was only a facade. Those who referred to the Regulations of Valsainte did mitigate their regime, certainly, but they did not go as far as adopting the Regulations of de Rancé. They stated that they only followed the Rule of St Benedict and the usages of Cîteaux. This was borne out on the level of observance, and notably on the times of meals, but the spirit remained that of Dom Augustin.

During the first general chapters of the French Congregation, detailed Regulations were prepared with difficulty. The followers of de Rancé did not see the point, but they had to cede, faced with the stubbornness of the Vicar, Dom Joseph-Marie Hercelin. In 1837 the Regulations were published for both the Choir monks and the lay brothers. Those of the nuns were approved in 1836. These Regulations do not

indicate any timetable, and with reason, since the practices diverged so fundamentally on the times of meals.

3. The Division of the French Trappists into two Congregations (1847-1892)

Although charity was the principal aim of monastic life, in an age where the detail of observance was paramount, the lack of uniformity prevented the unity of the order from becoming a concrete reality, even though reciprocal good will was not lacking. Very quickly in France, the followers of de Rancé questioned whether the Vicar of the new Congregation sufficiently respected their rights, and wondered if he was surreptitiously seeking to eradicate all influences of de Rancé from the Order. He did not hide his low regard for the mitigations that the Regulations of de Rancé represented in his opinion. Did he not have the tendency to insist upon his opinion? Did his regular visits respect the proper autonomy of the community? Did he not preach too much about the austerity proper to La Trappe? In brief, the followers of de Rancé felt themselves submitted to too much pressure from the Vicar General who belonged to the other Observance. His authoritarian manner displeased them. It must be acknowledged that the decree of 1834 contained several ambiguities about his real powers, since it did not define the power of the General Chapter, and did not mention Fathers Immediate.

An incident sparked off a crisis and pushed the community of Port-du-Salut to complain to the court in Rome in a long report of 11th July 1844; it demanded a visitor from their own observance so as to protect them from the “persecutions” of the followers of Lestrange. The division, which initially seemed catastrophic, and which was opposed, little by little became inescapable and desirable. After all it allowed each camp to pursue its own desires to their limits, without having to make concessions to the other. The Holy See resolved the situation by the decree, *Licet Monachi* signed by the new Pope Pius IX and published on 25th February 1847. The branch originating from Darfeld was to follow the Regulations of de Rancé, taking the name “Old Reform” (antiquior Reformatio). It comprised five monasteries of men following Sept-Fons, to which the Community at Gard had just transferred, and three of nuns: Port-du-Salut, Oelenberg, (monks and nuns) Mont-des-Cats, Val-Sainte-Marie, (now at Tamié)), Laval, Ubexy. The other monasteries—seven of monks and four of nuns, with La Trappe as the leader: Melleray, Bellefontaine, Aiguebelle, Bricquebec, Timadeuc, Staouëli Les Gardes, Maubec, Vaise, La Cour-Pétral (now Clairefontaine) – adhered closely to the Rule of St Benedict, and to the primitive Constitutions of Cîteaux, and formed the “New Reform” (recentior Reformatio). In practice, this entitled itself “The Primitive Observance” on its own initiative. For everything else, the decree reiterated that of 1834.

The two congregations developed, the second more than the first, because of new foundations during the 19th century. Some were even outside of France: Bosnia, Prussia (of the Rhin), Holland, Italy, Palestine for the former, and Ireland, England, North America, Algeria, Italy, Spain, Syria for the latter. The nuns developed similarly, but only in France, with the exception of San Vito, now Vitorchiano.

The Old Reform gave great importance to the heritage of de Rancé. His name was written in the menology which is read after the Rule of St. Benedict on 14th July, the anniversary of the beginning of the reform. In 1846, a slightly rearranged new edition of his master work, “On the Holiness and Duties of the Monastic Life” (*De la Sainteté et des devoirs de la vie monastique*) appeared. Veneration for the Constitutions of de Rancé did not prevent them being edited with a different ordering of the paragraphs.

On the other hand, the other Congregation, that of La Trappe, judged in one of its first decisions at the Chapter of May 1847 that “it was necessary in our regulations to put a distance between all that comes from Abbot de Rancé” and a commission was created to effect this work. The introduction of new Usages, which appeared in 1852, was significant. It stated that de Rancé, in spite of his intentions, had fallen short of the Rule because of the circumstances, concerning the length of work, cells and fasts. Lestrange had let himself be carried beyond the Rule, again because of circumstances. La Trappe now wished to stick to the Rule, to the whole Rule. These usages, it was said, wished to “make the 19th century similar to the 6th and 7th century.” Was it possible to go back to the past? Was the spirit of the 19th century that of the Rule? One can judge by considering the spiritual directory which was printed in 1869 and distributed to the abbots of the three Congregations at the time of the common Chapter in July 1869 at Sept-Fons. Whatever the protagonists said about returning to the Rule, the directory owed much to the spirit of de Rancé and to Augustine Lestrange, which, in itself is not a fault....

The Directory gives good advice, some of which is still relevant to today; it points out that all observance must be inspired by charity, which makes the yoke light to bear and brings grace. Trappists are joyful people. But love is too quickly made the equivalent of sacrifice. One of the particular purposes of a Trappist is to become a public penitent. From the moment of receiving the habit, the novice “must consider himself as a victim already separated from the world and ready to be stripped and immolated.” This is even truer, it is said, for the lay brothers, for whom the colour of the habit expresses that they are “exclusively penitent men.”

Later, called to revise them, Dom Lehodey acknowledged that an excess of severity marred the work, and that its biggest fault was that the spirit was too exclusively penitential. Already some people had felt this; inevitably, it did not please everyone, and it ended up being rather neglected, which made its revision desirable after the re-union of the Trappist congregations in 1892.

4. Towards the amalgamation into one autonomous Order in 1892

Apart from meal times, the differences between the new and old reforms were minimal, even if an indult of 1873 did speak of a different rule and different spirit, to the point that it was necessary to have two procurators in Rome, at least at certain moments. Some people regretted this separation and wanted a single supreme authority for the two. Furthermore, the President General of the Italian Congregation of St. Bernard was also propounding the question of the unity of the whole Cistercian Order. Since the pontifical decision of 1814, he exercised the powers of Abbot General, though in truth, these were limited to the confirmation of abbatial elections. In 1863, Dom Teobaldo Cesari had consulted all the superiors on the possibility of holding an extraordinary General Chapter, the first of the entire Order since the disappearance of Cîteaux in 1792. The opportunity arose when the Holy See made certain requests concerning the Cistercian Liturgy, the legitimacy of which was doubted by some. But Cesari had to give up this project in the face of the scant enthusiasm that he met with, notably from the Trappist abbots, who judged it unrealistic and not really desirable, because of the divergence of observance. For them, the unity of the Order, required a certain uniformity and supposed the same basic views with regard to separation from the world, the apostolate, cenobitic life, as well as similar observances. They did not envisage that distinct congregations could co-exist in the same Order. However, they themselves formed several congregations, but with similar observances.

In 1869, the Trappists were not invited by Rome to the first inter-congregational chapter, which only concerned the Congregations of Belgium and the countries within the area of the Austro-Hungarian

monarchy. All the same, they considered the question of the Abbot General who, it was decided, should have this title and could be chosen from any congregation, but not from among the Trappists. In fact his powers over the latter amounted to the confirmation of their abbatial elections. Moreover, the numerical superiority of the Trappists made their participation in an election of an Abbot General for the Cistercian Order a delicate matter. Anyway, relations between the French Trappists and other Cistercians were not good.

The Holy See did not approve these decisions, but perhaps they at least gave a decisive impetus to some Trappists who desired unity amongst themselves. On the 20th August 1878, ten abbots prepared a plan for the unification of the diverse Trappist congregations into a single order. This was the wish of the Pope. This question was at odds with the one posed before in 1872, about having an Abbot General at the head of each congregation. They next wondered if it would not be enough to have one Abbot General for all the Trappists, without giving too much detail about how the observances would be unified. For this reason, the plan which, was submitted to Rome in December 1878 seemed dangerous to Dom Timothée of La Trappe. He wrote to the Pope asking him not to follow it up, because he feared that the union would be made on the basis of the lowest common denominator. The Chapter over which he presided in 1879 took the same view. In the other congregations, some feared that, on the contrary, La Trappe wished to impose its stricter observance on them. The Belgian Congregation resisted right to the end, fearing that it obliged them to stricter observance. Thus the plan failed. Moreover, a Roman Consultor, Father Bianchi denounced the separation with the Cistercian Order that this move implied. At that time, this issue was not foremost in the thoughts of the abbots, as proved in the letters addressed to the President General by two of the Vicars General in 1884 and 1889. In January 1892 Dom Wyart, in the name of his congregation, expressed the wish to stay united to the President General of the Cistercians even if this wish did not seem to be shared by the other Congregation. The Chapter of 1892 which was to amalgamate the two branches would have to settle this question which still arose - should the link be broken or maintained with the Abbot General of the Cistercians?

As in 1869, the Trappists were not invited to the general chapter of 1880 in Vienna, which proceeded to the election of the successor of Dom Cesari as Abbot General. They did not take offence, because in their eyes, it was still a case of electing the President General of the Italian Congregation, who would, at the same time, be Abbot General. It is thus that the capitulants, gathered at Aiguebelle in August 1881, sent their congratulations to the newly elected, without complaining in the least. Anyway, the political situation of their country would not have allowed them to go to Vienna; they were threatened by governmental decrees of March 1880, and in fact, several monasteries were subject to expulsion in the following November.

But they took the occasion of the death of the Abbot General, Gregorio Bartolini, on 26th July 1890, and the steps taken by the Austro-Hungarian congregation, to ask the Holy See, with the support of their Cardinal Protector, for the favour of having their own Superior general who came from their own ranks. The procurator of the Cistercians, Dom Smeulders, saw in this the Trappists' intention to cut all links with the Cistercians, and gave a negative opinion when consulted by the Holy See. Later he admitted that taking everything into account, he would prefer that the Trappists elect a general and rule their own affairs together, rather than to see them participate, dominating in number as they did, in the Chapter of the Order. In fact, what they were asking was that the Trappists stay in the Order but have neither active nor

passive votes in the general chapters! After his election in 1891, the Abbot General, Dom Léopold Wackarz, shared the same point of view. It was in the nature of things that they were going towards a separation, the roots of which went back to the 17th century and the reform of Abbot de Rancé.

None of the Cistercian abbots were present on the occasion of the eighth centenary of the birth of St. Bernard at Dijon in June 1891. All had to attend their Chapter in Vienna, which was intentionally programmed to coincide with this date in order to avoid all contact between the two Observances. This chapter elected a new abbot General, a German-speaking Czech, Dom Léopold Wackarz, aged 81. The festivities in Dijon allowed the Trappist abbots to get to know one another better, and made them see very clearly the distance there was between themselves and the other Cistercians. It was on this occasion that they drew up a new request for a merger between the two congregations, and autonomy from the other Cistercians. Leo XIII, at this time of political difficulty, was eager for all that strengthened the religious orders, and put the process into action. At a special chapter convoked by the Pope which took place in Rome in 1892, and which proceeded under the presidency of Cardinal Mazzella, the merger was accepted by forty-seven votes to five, and the autonomy of the Order by forty-four votes to seven. It was promulgated by a pontifical decree, dated the 8th December 1892, which sealed the separation of the Cistercians into two independent orders.

The Chapter of the Trappists in 1896 proposed the re-unification of the Order to the other Cistercians. The united order would have autonomous congregations, each with their own observances, but under one abbot general elected by a gathering of all the abbots. The Cistercians, notably at their General Chapter of 1897, were astonished by this turnaround in the Trappists' views, and feared that the Trappists had no intention of reversing their stance to their own detriment, from all points of view, including financial ones. They vigorously opposed what they called the 'machinations' of the Trappists, and applied to the Holy See, which was already caught up in the affair. Nothing further happened.

5. The Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance

The union of the Trappists was based on the Rule and on the Usages of Cîteaux "always adapting them to circumstances." Reports from the communities indicate that twenty-eight were in favour of the Rule with some modifications; six wished to keep it in all its rigour, twelve preferred to keep the Regulations of de Rancé; four put it in the hands of the Holy See. Mitigations occurred on the timing of meals; for some monasteries, this was a crucial question. It seemed impossible for the Observance of de Rancé to take back the timetable of the Rule, with only one meal a day from September 14th until Easter. Others took the opposite view, fearing mitigations. The Cardinal feared that this question would destroy the still fragile union, and they came to the arrangement that the Chapter would let the Holy See decide this question. However, the Holy See referred it back to the Order, and it was debated at the chapter of 1893, at which they had the task of drawing up new constitutions. After many ups and downs, and a rather muddled voting procedure, the timetable said to be of "de Rancé" was accepted by thirty-one votes to thirteen.

There is irony in this outcome; whereas in the 17th century, the Regulations of de Rancé seemed to be the height of austerity, in 1893 they were considered as modification - that is to say mitigation in the face of the Rule which some advocated in the name of tradition. It was the last time that these Regulations

appeared in the legislation of the Order. But the acceptance of new arrangements took some time to take effect everywhere. The spirit of penitence was ingrained.

Little by little however, the Order oriented itself differently. This was already shown in the fact that the title 'Cistercian' was preferred to Trappist for the Order. In truth, this was nothing new but it was emphasised by Fr Gaillemain, monk of the other Observance, after the Chapter of 1892: "they have abandoned the last vestiges of the distinctive spirit, which made them distance themselves more and more from the Order of Cîteaux. This misled society to see them as a extraordinary newly constituted Order, created in the 17th century under the name of La Trappe." This would become even truer when the order repurchased the abbey of Cîteaux in 1898 and then the reference to the abbey of La Trappe would no longer be necessary. In July 1899, the Order obtained permission from the Holy See to be called simply "The Order of Reformed Cistercians". "We owe to the reform of La Trappe, commented the Abbot General, what we are, and that we have taken up again and conserved the Observances of the first Cistercians, and that we have come through the various different stages which have led us to this position of stability. Having reached its conclusion, we can no longer be called travellers." This demarcation in relation to the reform of de Rancé appeared explicitly, according to Dom Wyart, in the choice of Rome and not La Trappe as the seat of the Abbot general.

In fact, the de Rancé episode would still take a certain time to reach its end. This episode meant a very strong accentuation on penitence and work, with a certain distrust of study, as also an exaggerated importance given to a multiplicity of observances that they wished to be uniform. These mentalities would not be changed overnight. One of the first measures would be the revision of the Directory of 1869, entrusted by the General Chapter of 1901 to the Abbot of Bricquebec, Dom Vital Lehodey, so that he could change the spirit of it.

Spiritual Text

Extracts from: *"Directoire spirituel à l'usage des cisterciens réformés."* Paris 1869.

Pages 30-32 :

"Our Order is abjection, humility, voluntary poverty" (St. Bernard). These virtues belong to all religious orders, since without them, there is not even Christian living; but one might say that at La Trappe, they can all be observed. Abjection is already necessary to enter, because the world considers La Trappe as the most austere of orders and imagines that it is only terrible remorse or some aberration of spirit which could drive one there. [...]. It is thus necessary to be abject to enter La Trappe. It is also necessary to be abject to live there: riches, birth, giftedness, which might elsewhere earn one esteem and respect, are useless at La Trappe, without glamour, and even systematically ignored, buried, humiliated. Life there is essentially obscure, poor and abject, and destitute beyond what one can describe, where there are only renunciations, without any kind of compensation for nature and the senses: La Trappe is a tomb. But in this tomb, in this death to oneself, there is peace. St. Bernard is eager to point out that this peace that the world does not know goes hand in hand with Cistercian austerity. "Our order is abjection, humility, voluntary poverty, he says, but even more, and because of this, it is joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit." And in effect, there is no voluntary mortification without peace; those who embrace sacrifices resolutely and whole-heartedly receive as their first reward a great detachment of spirit from this world, rest for the soul,

and even a cheerfulness and a modest gaiety, which they spread about them. Is this not what strangers often notice first at la Trappe, being extremely surprised to find joy there, instead of the sadness that they believe to be the obligatory companion of her austerities?"

Pages 34-35:

"Here too is one of the special goals of the Trappist : his vocation is to be a penitent religious, a public penitent. If he embraces a poor and abject life, if he sticks to observing punctiliously an austere rule, which mortifies his own likings and makes of his life a martyr; in a word, if he makes himself, by all the means that his state provides him with, conformed to the Jesus Christ crucified, it is not with the aim of earning merit uniquely for himself ; the charity of Christ urges him on; he wishes to suffer with Christ for the sins of men. It is for this that he goes out with Him from the town, bearing the weight of his shame and his humiliations, so that he can co-operate according to his vocation in the salvation of his brothers: his spirit is a spirit of sacrifice for others, of perfection for himself.

This is, no doubt, a spirit common to all religious orders, who find all the ways and means they need to carefully safeguard this spirit and put it into practice in their Rule, written according to the aims of their institute. But this spirit is particularly that of the contemplative orders, amongst which, people seem to think, it is even more particularly fitting for La Trappe, where all is arranged to offer the opportunity to put it into practice continually. La Trappe does not have external ministries of zeal, but all the exercises of its contemplative life make it an Order that is essentially penitential. It conflicts with nature in all things, so as to accord to nature only what is strictly necessary and provides the opportunity for sacrifice right down to the most basic level of need. Good will is kept alive so that everything can be made an occasion for merit. This good will raises its renunciations to the level of the spirit and to perfection. Saint Bernard takes great care to tell us this, and puts this point above all the others; the sacrifices of our state would be of little worth if the spirit of sacrifice did not prompt them. A life of humility and voluntary abjection, of obedience to Superiors and to the Rule: a great zeal for silence, vigils, manual labour, fasts; all that is good, and even indispensable to our vocation. But all that is not enough if it is practised in an ordinary way, and on an exterior level: we must add zeal for progress in fervour and in love, that which St Bernard calls following the way of perfection and of charity and walking in this way without stopping until the last day. Charity and perfection are the same thing; it is the goal that St Bernard also points us to when he says that the heart expands as it advances; that one continues by love that which was begun through fear, and that finally one runs ahead in the way of God's commandments, persevering until death.

Legislative Document : The Decree *Licet Monachi* of 25th February 1847.

The decree begins with a long historical section, indicating that the two observances arose from Dom de Lestrange; that it had been judged good to unite them into one congregation in 1834, but that his measure had not been put into practice, because the followers of the observance of de Rancé considered that it did not serve their needs. They had come to desire a division into two observances, and this was decided by the following measures:

1. All monasteries of the Trappists in France will form two congregations, one of which will be called "The Ancient Reform of Notre Dame de La Trappe" and the other, the "new reform of Notre Dame de la Trappe." Each one will be a congregation of Cistercian monks, but the most ancient will observe the

Regulations of de Rancé, and the more recent, not the constitutions of L'Abbé de Lestrange, which were abandoned in 1834, but the Rule of St Benedict with the primitive constitutions of Cîteaux, approved by the Holy See, taking care to safeguard the prescriptions in this present decree.

2. The Moderator general of the Order of Cistercians will have precedence in each congregation and will confirm each Abbot.

3. Each congregation will have its own Vicar General in France, who will have the necessary powers to be able to guide it in a fitting manner.

4. In the congregation of the New Reform, this responsibility will be linked perpetually to the abbatial title of the former monastery of Notre-Dame de La Trappe, in such a way that each abbot of this monastery who is canonically elected will at the same time receive the responsibility of being Vicar General. But nothing is decided here about the perpetuity of this abbot in his responsibility. When the present abbot dies, the Holy See will rule on what it considers the best before the Lord; as a result, in consequence from the first moment of vacancy of this seat, the abbatial election will be suspended and the Holy See informed. It is paramount that its judgement be awaited. In the congregation of the Old Reform, the Vicar General will be elected for five years by the chapter, from amongst the abbots of this same observance.

5. Each year, the two Vicars will hold a general chapter to which the abbots and priors of his observance will be invited. They will also visit each monastery either by themselves, or represented by another abbot. The three abbots of Melleray, Bellefontaine and Aiguebelle will visit the monastery of Notre Dame de La Trappe. Two abbots elected for this purpose by the general chapter will visit the monastery from which the Vicar general of the other observance is taken.

6. Matters concerning vows have been sufficiently foreseen by the decree of the Holy See of 1st March 1837.

7. They will conform to the decree of 10th April 1822 of the Congregation of Rites, indicating which missal, breviary and martyrology they must use.

8. Manual work will not normally exceed six hours in summer and four and a half hours the rest of the year. As to fasting, prayers and psalmody, the usages established in each monastery will be followed, whether according to the Rule of St. Benedict or the Constitutions of Abbot de Rancé.

9. The arrangements in article 8 could be modified and mitigated by the superiors of the monasteries for monks whom they consider to merit some indulgence because of age, state of health or for another just reason.

10. Although monasteries of Trappists are exempt from the jurisdiction of the bishops, however, for individual reasons and until it is decided otherwise they will submit to the jurisdiction of the bishops who act as delegates of the Holy See.

11. Although Trappists monks cannot beg from door to door by themselves, this does not forbid all collections, on condition that they are carried out by monks.

12. Trappist nuns in France which belong to these congregations, and their monasteries are not exempt from episcopal jurisdiction. However, the spiritual care of each monastery of nuns will be confided to one or other monk of the nearest monastery. May the bishops choose and approve monks that they judge suitable for this ministry; they can also assign extraordinary confessors chosen from amongst the secular clergy.

13. The Constitutions that the nuns will have to observe in the future will be submitted to the judgment of the Holy See.

Questions for reflection :

1. At this time, the concept of monastic life was very marked by the notion of penitence. Why? Compare this with what we are living today. What are the differences? Why?
2. What was the European political context behind the events that resulted in the establishing of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance? How does this help us to understand what happened?
3. What factors contributed to the distancing of communities from each other: mistrust, communication difficulties, different conditions of life ...etc. Can this sad episode perhaps teach us something about our own relations in the heart of our own community – and with other communities?
4. How does our present day mentality, characterised in the Church by a sense of unity and of communion perceive this moment of history ?

Cistercian Foundations outside Europe in the 19th Century

Unit prepared by Fr. Etienne Goutagny of Les Dombes.

Our Lady of Staouëli (Algeria)

Staouëli is a locality 17 km to the west of Algiers on the common land of Sidi-Ferruch, not far from the bay of Sidi-Ferruch, where the French troops landed in 1830 when they were sent to conquer Algeria. The plain of Staouëli consisted of marshy swamps; a few green patches were overrun with brushwood and dwarf palm trees, the only produce of this dry and barren soil, which was still covered with shrapnel, charred tree trunks and olive trees that had been half burnt during the fighting.

In 1843, after many negotiations between the French State and Dom Joseph Hercelin, Abbot of La Trappe and Vicar General of his Observance, a vast plot of land was conceded to the monks but under very costly conditions.

Fr. François-Régis of Martrin-Donos, landed there with thirteen religious, three choir monks and ten lay brothers. He confronted all the difficulties: heat, fevers, epidemics, distrust, poverty. Twenty-five religious died in the prime of life. He succeeded in a very important task that had immense repercussions at that time.

Staouëli became the centre of an energetic life : 425 hectares of vines and 30 hectares planted with geraniums soon provided work for 120 day labourers and at least 100 monks. Material property made possible not only generous hospitality and abundant almsgiving but also the endowment of churches and schools in the villages that grew up around the abbey. The monks were highly esteemed by the Muslim population. Thus the monastery with its model farm and its industries served both the spiritual and the material needs of this developing country.

When in 1854, Dom François-Régis left for Rome to be Procurator, he was replaced by Dom Augustin (1856-1893) then by Dom Louis de Gonzague (1893-1898) and by Dom Louis de Gonzague II (1898-1904). The latter, in order to forestall the possibility of expulsion and confiscation, transferred his community to Maguzzano in Northern Italy.

Our Lady of the Isles (New Caledonia and Australia)

In 1876, at the request of the Vicar Apostolic, the Marist Fathers offered the Abbot of Sept-Fons, Dom Jehen de Durat, an establishment in New Caledonia. He accepted it. Before setting out, Dom Ambrose Jenny was blessed as Abbot of the foundation, which took the name of 'Our Lady of the Isles' a title given to it by Pope Pius IX. In 1879 the General Chapter of the Congregation authorised the transfer of the community to Australia, but this did not take place. In 1888, the same Chapter proposed, but in vain, to send the monks of Our Lady of the Isles to Palestine, where a foundation was envisaged. The monks returned to France in 1890.

They had only just returned when, at the request of Pope Leo XIII and the Cardinal-prefect for the Propagation of the Faith, Dom Ambrose and a few monks set out again in 1892 to found a monastery at Beagle Bay in Kimberley, an immense territory in the North-west of Australia. In a way this was a transfer from the Monastery of New Caledonia. In 1898, the Abbot had to resign for reasons of health, and two years later the monks left and came back to Sept-Fons exhausted.

Marianhill (South Africa)

Near Banja Luka, in Bosnia, at Marija Zvijezda (in German : Mariastern), Dom Franz Pfanner had presided from 1869 to 1879 over the destiny of what was more like a small town than a monastery. At the General Chapter of 1879, the monastery was established as an Abbey. The day after this decision, Dom Franz agreed to go and make a foundation in South Africa. He settled in Natal, in the midst of the brown mountains a few kilometres from Durban. The name Marianhill, in Dutch, contains a double homage to Our Lady and to St. Anne.

As soon as they found a suitable place, Dom Franz and thirty-one monks from Bosnia set to work. The climate was excellent and the fertile soil soon produced an abundance of coffee, sugar cane, pineapples, bananas and vegetables. The monastery was speedily built. In addition to the workshops, which are essential to the smooth running of a monastery, there was a printing-press, schools, and very soon the monks became missionaries, not only in Zwaziland, Lesotho and Botswana but also in East Africa, which was a German colony at the time.

Each mission outpost had the appearance of a mini-monastery, composed of several priests and half a dozen lay brothers. Adjoining them would be a small community of sisters belonging to a new Congregation founded by Dom Franz to teach in their schools, which were becoming more and more numerous.

The Order was soon to become anxious about this state of affairs. Dom Franz resigned in 1892 and retired to a mission post named 'Emmaus' and lived as a hermit until he died in 1909 at the age of 84. By that date, Marianhill had been separated from the Order since 1904 and formed a new independent missionary Congregation.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart of Akbès (Syria)

This monastery situated at Cheikhlé, near Akbès, in Syria, was to be the refuge of Our Lady of the Snows at the time of the expulsions, about 1880. Dom Polycarp Marthoud, abbot of Our Lady of the Snows, looked for a refuge in the Near East. Having visited Egypt and Lebanon, he arrived in Syria, and, in June 1881, bought a property at Cheikhlé.

Twenty-five monks arrived in 1882. 154 hectares of land were cultivated. The General Chapter of 1883 approved the foundation. There was a lack of vocations, because manual work and above all work on the land was only good for poor 'fellahs' (peasants). Charles de Foucauld who had come as a novice from Our Lady of the Snows, lived for seven years in this community, and made his simple profession there in 1892.

The monastery was threatened by Muslim Turks in 1893 and 1895, then in 1909 and 1915 the date of the Armenian genocide. The monastery was occupied in 1900, abandoned in 1915 and destroyed in 1920. In 1894 there had been a change of filiation, the monastery had passed to the jurisdiction of Staouëli; the Abbots of Our Lady of the Snows and Staouëli were blood brothers.

Our Lady of Consolation (China)

In 1870, Bishop Delaplace, Vicar Apostolic of Peking was in Rome, taking part in the First Vatican Council. There, the Countess of Stolberg gave him money for a foundation in China. He appealed first to different Carmels; the Carmel of Bayonne accepted, but the nuns remained behind on the quay at Marseilles. So the bishop turned to the Trappists. In 1882, he sent a missionary to France to look for some monks for China.

The Abbot of Sept-Fons, Dom Jérôme Guénat, asked Dom Ephrem Seignol, prior of Tamié, to take charge of this foundation. Dom Ephrem set sail for China in 1882, and with the help of a few brothers and two fathers, laid the foundations of Our Lady of Consolation in a deserted valley behind the Great Wall, in the north of China.

In 1886, Dom Ephrem sent Father Bernard Favre to the General Chapter of the Congregation. At the Chapter the new monastery was raised to the rank of a Priory. Father Bernard was named Prior, and returned to China. Dom Ephrem spent the last months of his life humbly, and died in 1887.

Dom Bernard Favre was born in Thoissey (Ain) entered the abbey of Grâce-Dieu at the age of 14 on the 4th September 1868 and made his Solemn Profession in 1876. At the time of the expulsions, his community went to Austria, but he did not go with them and we lose trace of him for several years. On the 14th December 1883, he arrived in Yang- Kia-Ping, Our Lady of Consolation, where he re-joined Dom Ephrem, who had been there since the spring. The region chosen for the foundation was desolate and inaccessible: from Peking it took five days walking across stones, streams and wild ravines to get to the place chosen for the new monastery. The inauguration of the first conventual buildings took place on 16th June 1884.

Little by little this new Trappist monastery received Chinese novices and it became necessary to find some monks to help this community. When Dom Bernard Favre died in 1900, the Abbey of Our Lady of Consolation had more than 70 members.

Our Lady of Latroun (Israel)

Coming from the Abbey of Sept-Fons, under the leadership of a secular priest, Father Cléophas Vialet, the monks settled in Palestine at the end of the year 1890 and founded the monastery of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows at Latroun. The purpose of this foundation was to create a monastery of the Order in the Holy Places and to prepare a possible refuge in case of expulsion. The pioneers of this foundation were all valiant men, ready to face the troubles and the work involved in all foundations. They suffered a great deal

from malaria, and the Muslim population around them was suspicious and sometimes hostile. The monks had chosen a plot of land that was not very fertile, but little by little the desert began to blossom and visitors admired the beautiful and vast property.

Our Lady of the Lighthouse (Japan)

When the monastery of Consolation was raised to the rank of Abbey on the 8th May 1891, in response to earnest requests for foundations, the first abbot, Dom Bernard Favre, visited Korea, Indo-china and Japan. Japan was chosen. In the scrubland of Hakodate on the island of Hokkaido, on the edge of the ocean, a vast plain was offered to him to be cleared for cultivation. To break the ground, he needed monks from Europe so Dom Bernard visited the monasteries of France, Belgium and Holland, and returned to Japan with eight monks.

The beginnings of the foundation of Our Lady of the Lighthouse were very heavy going: one monk died, another left the Order, but Dom Bernard stood firm. In the spring of 1896, a monk came from France with the title of Prior, which renewed the courage of the group of founders; this monk came from Our Lady of Bricquebec: Dom Gérard Peullier (1897 - 1925).

The abbey of Bricquebec and its abbot, Dom Vital Lehodey, were assuming responsibility for the foundation. Three men were the official founders of the monastery (21st November 1896) :

- Mgr. Berlioz, Bishop of Hakodate
- Dom Bernard Favre, Abbot of Our Lady of Consolation in China
- Dom Vital Lehodey who sent Fr. Gérard Peullier and who became the Father Immediate of the Lighthouse.

Dom Gérard was named Prior on the 1st March 1898. The founders were French, Belgian, Dutch and Italian; the second group (1898) was made up of French and German monks. They all made their vow of stability on the 4th December 1898. Dom Vital Lehodey made the first regular visit, which took place in the spring of 1900. Dom Gérard Peullier took Japanese nationality and from then on was known as Okada Furie. In 1902, a third group arrived: two French and one Dutch: one Priest and two brothers.

Our Lady of the Angels (Japan)

At the invitation of Mgr. Berlioz, Bishop of Hakodate, and thanks to his help and that of Dom Vital Lahodey, Abbot of Briquebec, Tenshien, under the name of Our Lady of the Angels, was founded as a monastery of nuns in 1898 by eight sisters from Ubexy. Their adaptation was difficult because of the climate. Two of them had to return to France but in 1902, three sisters from Ubexy, two from Laval and two from Macon came as reinforcements.

Our Lady of St. Joseph (Congo)

At the request of Leopold II, who had been King of Belgium since 1881, with the authority of Pope Leo XIII which he gave in 1892, and with the agreement of the General Chapter of 1893, the Abbey of Westmalle made a foundation in the former Belgian Congo.

The monks from Belgium settled in Boma on the 2nd May 1894. But the main house was built at Bokuma a day's journey by steamship from Coquilhatville. Three other houses were built six days' journey away from Coquilhatville : Bornania, Bokoté and Wafania.

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