

1ST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF THE CIB, Rome, September 2002 (revised version)

WITH HEARTS OVERFLOWING WITH THE INEXPRESSIBLE DELIGHT OF LOVE. THE GOOD ZEAL AS LOVE

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INTRODUCTION

An image.

A sculpture of St Scholastica stands in the front garden, just inside the gates at our motherhouse in Glebe Point, Sydney.

The bronze figurative work is unambiguously female. The figure steps out moving forward; the text held closely and firmly to the heart. A woman of wisdom and strength, Scholastica engages the viewer with a steadfast gaze. Identification with the poor is indicated by the bare feet that touch the earth lightly. Strength and vulnerability are evident in the scale of the work and the medium employed by the artist.

The head is turned, attentive to the possibility of the moment. The God of the gentle breeze moves her hair. Her left hand is behind her back. The gesture is one of authority; the hand tips the wing of the brolga, the sacred bird of the Indigenous people of Australia, and at the same time makes a link with the sacred crane of Japan and the dove of the story Benedict and Scholastica.

Scholastica is depicted as a woman for all ages and stands firmly in this place of Benedictine women.

And of this woman Scholastica we know, in the words of St Gregory, Benedict experienced a miracle ... coming from a woman's heart, a miracle of love. "God is Love, and by an altogether fair judgment, she was able to do more because she loved more." ¹

The key questions I will be asking in this paper are: *How does the monastic grow towards love through relationships along her monastic journey?* What distinctive wisdom can we gain from our Benedictine sources? and, *What can consecrated celibacy offer our world?*

LOVE & RELATIONSHIPS: THE WISDOM OF BENEDICT

The Rule of Benedict, summarised in Ch 72, is relational in nature. What Benedict proposes is a new society with a new pattern of relationships, a way of life, a seeking of God and service of neighbour characterised above all else by love. The accent is on the inner dynamic of the way of life - LOVE.

Love is the fullest form of Good Zeal. It is expressed in a triad of mutual relationships of love - love of God, love of one another in community, love of the prioress.

In English there is just one term for the word 'love' which can have a whole range of meanings. Latin, with its several terms can more easily express the desired nuances. In Chapter 72, Benedict expands on his call to good zeal when he speaks of love expressly in the following verses.

v3. exercise zeal with FERVENT/ WARMEST/ BURNING **love**. (Latin AMOR)

v8 **love** with purity (Latin CARITAS)

v9 fear God **Lovingly/ loving** fear/ reverent **love** (Latin AMOR)

v10 Cherish prioress/ true/ unfeigned & humble **love** (Latin CARITAS)

The chapter concludes with the motto 'let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ' and then with the all inclusive prayer 'and may Christ bring us all together to life everlasting' in v12.

Here, Benedict outlines a down-to-earth mysticism. His teaching about love is grounded in reality - the person, the place, the time - always seeking and being sought by the God of Reality, the God who is Love.

Love for one another in Community

Benedict introduces the cenobitic life in Ch 1:2 of the Rule, where he says 'First there are the cenobites... those who belong to a monastery where they serve under a rule and a prioress.' After dismissing the other kinds of monastics, Benedict proceeds in v13. 'Let us draw up a plan for the strong kind, the cenobites.' Even when Benedict addresses us as individuals, it is always in the context of community.

In summary in RB72, Benedict, with echoes of Romans 12:3-21, teaches that for one another in the monastic life will be expressed in mutual obedience, service, holding all things in common, bearing one another's burdens, supporting, encouraging. Each is to give herself for the others ... to be 'other-directed'. If we could all take these injunctions seriously what world shattering miracles would happen in our communities! There would be no need for any one of us to focus energy and attention on self.

Love costs and is demonstrated in all the apparently little things of daily life. Love demands that we make relationships a priority in our lives. Love demands that we share our gifts and ideas with others. There is no ideal community waiting for any one of us. The God of reality reminds us about obedience to the situation. Love demands that we collaborate in building community in our time and place.

Love of God: To God loving fear (RB72:9)

The good zeal leads to God and everlasting life. The way is through, with and in Christ. It is relationship with Christ that must take priority. On that depends the strength of community life. In RB4.21 Benedict has already reminded us of this - we are to place the love of Christ before all else. And then in RB 72:11 Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ. And, as Cyprian comments - 'We are to prefer nothing whatever to Christ for he has preferred nothing to us.'

The monastic is reminded that we are able to make a response in love because God has first loved us. Basil the Great says 'Love towards God cannot be taught. We possess an inborn power of loving.' The proof of this is not external but anyone can learn it from herself and within herself. For by nature we desire beautiful things... We have affection towards those near and dear to us ... ' 2

If RB 31:10 we read that we are to have reverence even for the tools of the monastery then how much more is that to be shown to people? The daily task is to see and respond to Christ in the other person - 'All guests are to be welcomed as Christ' RB53:1. St Paul expresses this mystery of unity in Christ when he says to the people of Corinth, 'You are a letter of Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.' 2 Cor 3: 2-3

Perfect love will drive out fear, Benedict reminds us RB7:67. A scriptural door to this passage, 1 John 4: 18-19 speaks of the transformative effect of love. 'There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God has first loved us.'

Love and the prioress

In RB72 Benedict speaks of the way in which the community is to love the prioress, with a love that is 'unfeigned and humble'. Throughout the Rule we find instructions to the prioress about how she is to love all members of the community. First and foremost she is to be Christ - an icon of Christ - for every member without exception. She can never replace Christ. Christ is to be welcomed in the other.

64.15 The prioress must strive to be loved rather than to be feared

2.17; 2.22 The prioress is to show equal love to all.

64.11 She must hate the faults and love the sisters.

64.14 She must prune away faults with prudence and love as she sees best for the individual

27.4 The Prioress must affirm the monastic in love when she is excluded (ie when she has erred)

21 She will show challenging and 'tough love' for those at odds with the community

The work of leadership in the monastery is to animate, to include, to teach, to unify, to heal, to steward. It is to develop not just smooth and efficiently working systems but in fact to create frameworks in which love, purposeful compassion, good zeal, can flourish.

The prioress is to be a person with a great love of the community - for the real group of women just as they are. She is to see them as women, not problems; women who are gifted and graced; women who sometimes have bad days and heavy crosses to bear. She is to believe in them when they cannot believe in themselves. This is the good zeal.

The prioress, and in fact all monastics are called to be lovers of the place. All are to be attuned to reading not only the signs of the times but as well the signs of the place. The founders of Citeaux were given the title - amator loci - lovers of the place. 'By place we mean the community, the Abbey, the whole environment surrounding it with its God given characteristics. It is a maxim in life that what is loved lives and grows and in turn becomes life giving, even if it is seemingly inanimate. 'Love of place' spills over into the rest of life.'³

Loving Service in the Monastery

Benedict describes several other roles in the monastery in terms of loving service, eg. 66.4 The porter is to respond to calls with the warmth of love. 36.7 'The sick are to be served by one who is loving. 63.10 'The seniors are to love their juniors'. The service of love is a shared responsibility.

Loving Signs

A key sign of love in our way of life is celibacy is not chosen for itself but for the sake of the Reign of God. How do we live that lofty reality? In the words of 1Pet 3:15, we need to find more effective ways 'to give reasons for the hope in our hearts' while acknowledging along with Thomas More that 'finally it is not a matter of reason but a matter of love.' Celibacy does not witness to anything but celibate people do. 'The committed celibate serves humankind as a sign of contradiction, forcing us to confront the deeper issues of human existence and meaning that are so easily masked in our culture's obsession with sex.'⁴

We must acknowledge that all too often when people look to the Church today for guidance concerning their sexuality they do not see clear signs of love, generosity or joy.

One group of young women interviewed as part of an extensive research project conducted by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, entitled *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus* expressed their frustrations in these words:⁵

Most importantly, some [young women] felt offended by the Church's position on issues of great importance to them such as sexuality, contraception, divorce, social justice and the environment. No one speaks to young women and the Church's position on certain issues shows a lack of understanding of the realities facing young women today.....They have been forced to find their own positions on issues such as those listed above. This is because when they seek a position from the Church it is unreal and the Church is not open to the complexities of all these issues. As one participant stated, the church is not meeting people where they are at.

The theological interpretation of celibacy will become more believable for people when it engages with them in their life journey, meets them where they are at.

Celibacy is a convincing witness in those who freely and courageously choose to commit themselves to the seeking of God and the service of neighbour in this monastic way of life.

THE CONTEXT OF LOVE

As Benedictines we have a rich tradition on which to draw. The life lived shows us the countless people who have experienced celibacy as grace and have been inspirational to others in their life journey. The Rule offers no escape but incentive and ways to deal with the pressures and challenges. It does not provide us with answers but with values, qualities and practical wisdom to ponder and apply.

Loving relationships and good zeal are certainly in demand. The human race and the earth on which we depend for survival have never been so threatened and so diminished. Violence is rampant. Abuses of our planet leave us, in the early years of the new millennium a deeply shamed and far from spiritual people.

The credibility of the church in matters of celibacy and sexuality has come under severe scrutiny in recent times. Highly disturbing reports about the abuse of Catholic nuns by clergy have been discussed in the public forum.

The reports mainly concern Africa but refer in total to 23 countries in which similar abuse is known to have occurred. They paint a picture of a church where clergy take advantage of the status that accrues to them through education and ignore the obligations of chastity which their celibacy imposes.

Sr Marie McDonald of the Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa and one of the Report writers, cites eight factors she believes give rise to the problem:⁶

- The fact that celibacy and/or chastity are not values in some countries.
- The inferior position of women in society and the church. In some circumstances a sister has been educated to regard herself as an inferior, to be subservient and to obey.

The use of false theological arguments. One goes like this. "We are both consecrated celibates. That means that we have promised not to marry. However, we can have sex together without breaking our vows."

- The AIDS pandemic that means that 'sisters' are more likely to be seen as safe.
- Financial dependence created by low stipends for sisters labouring in their home countries or inadequate support for sisters sent abroad for studies. The problem is most common in diocesan religious congregations with little money and no network of international support.
- A poor understanding of consecrated life, both by the sisters and also by the clergy, bishops and lay people.
- Recruitment of candidates by congregations that lack adequate knowledge of the culture.
- Sisters sent abroad to study are often too young and immature, lack language skills, preparation and other kinds of support, and frequently turn to seminarians and priests for help, creating the potential for exploitation. (Valerie Saiving points out that as women we can be prone to temptations that spring from a negation of self rather than pride or will to power)⁷
- Silence. Another contributing factor is the 'conspiracy of silence'. Only if we look at it honestly will we be able to find solutions.

RESPONSES TO ABUSE

There have been a number of significant attempts within the Church to address the matter of sexual abuse among clergy and religious and to approach the disillusionment and cynicism with honesty, compassion and justice.

As Benedictines

In Sept 2000 the matter was raised by Sr Esther Fangman osb, President of the Federation of St Scholastica, at the Congress of Abbots here in Rome. The sisters who brought it up were deeply hurt by it and found it very painful to talk about. She decided it needed to be talked about more openly. The frequency and consistency of reports convinced her that the matter needed to be addressed.

Abbot Primate Notker Wolf said - I think the abuse described is happening. How much ... I have no way of knowing but it is a serious matter and we need to discuss it. I pushed this question in our congregation. We need sincerity and justice.⁸

The International Union of Superiors General

At the UISG Plenary held in Rome May 6-10, 2001, a Declaration was issued by the participating Women Religious Leaders, members of the International Union of Superiors General.

We, almost 800 women leaders of one million members of Catholic Religious Institutes throughout the world ... publicly declare our determination to work in solidarity with one another within our own religious communities and in the countries in which we are located to address insistently at every level the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children with particular attention to the trafficking of women which has become a lucrative multi-national business. They recommended that this injustice be addressed from a contemplative stance, as an expression of a fully incarnated feminine spirituality, and in solidarity with women all over the world.⁹

Is there fire in the ashes?

The abused and others in the community 'find the foundation of their faith is shattered'. Love is in peril when trust is broken. Many whose faith has been shattered are from families that look unfavourably on religious vocations and who question why celibacy should be so strongly proclaimed by the same people who are seemingly involved in sexually exploiting others. This is seen as hypocrisy or at least as promoting double standards.

Yet, there are signs among those who have experienced abuse, loss, displacement, suffering, that some are already aware of a new and deeper spirituality that moves within them like a hunger that must be fed. This hunger impels the church community to healing, to wholeness and a deep compassion for all people, for our earth and indeed for all living things. Where is the authentic path of good zeal for us today? Is there fire in these ashes?

MONASTIC PROFESSION

The challenge today in the face of so much cynicism and disillusionment is not to abandon celibacy but rather to re-examine how we as Benedictine women can better understand this aspect of our lives and explore what gift it can hold for our world. Let us celebrate the many women and men from different times and cultures who are shining examples of the vitality of consecrated celibacy.

Christian faith proclaims its deepest truth in paradoxes. Celibacy is one of the paradoxes of our faith. That celibacy can be lifegiving often provokes surprise and disbelief. Like all paradoxes, it gives us pause... it puzzles us. Like all paradoxes it is hard to describe. We know more than we are able to put into words. Our experience pulls ahead of our language. Trends, movements, shifts can only be identified and named in retrospect.

After Vatican Council II and the publication of *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965) the winds of change swept through our communities of Benedictine women. New understandings are symbolised in the words we used.

As the research conducted by the CABP published in 2000 shows, there was little evidence of consistency of practice in regard to the use of 'promise' or 'vow' language to describe the act of commitment. Great diversity was discovered, too, in reference to the monastic triad - stability, conversatio and obedience - and the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. It was discovered that although stability, conversatio and obedience

are often named as three distinct vows, they are quite similar and related in description. All three are clearly inter-connected aspects of an integrated way of life.¹⁰

According to RB 58:17 'the monastic comes before the whole community in the oratory and promises stability, fidelity to monastic life and obedience.' Over time these came to be seen as three distinct vows. However, as Casey points out, RB58.17 does not list the promises made by the monastic but rather merely surveys the general area covered by them. There is no question of assuming three distinct and mutually exclusive obligations; what she promises is 'to live the full monastic life as was practised in a particular monastery and defined by a particular rule and prioress. Thus the three items overlap. They are not three distinct responsibilities newly assumed but three aspects of the unitary obligation assumed by the new monastic. The triple form may be taken as solemn declaration and emphasis - 'what is twice repeated can scarcely be attributed to a slip of the tongue.'¹¹

Benedict rarely discusses Chastity explicitly in his Rule. In RB 4:64 to 'Love (amare) chastity is one of the Tools for Good Works. In RB 64:9 the Prioress must be chaste, temperate and merciful. Always putting mercy before judgment. She is to hate the vices but love the sisters. Chastity is used positively in both cases and spoken of in the context of love and relationships.

For Benedict Chastity (and Poverty) were understood as implicit. Chastity, then rather than being seen as yet another promise or vow is instead better seen in relationship to the whole way of life and what it asks of the monastic, and offers as gift.

A result of an integrated wholistic approach to the vows is that the unhealthy prominence given to chastity is reduced. Not that the quality of sexual life does not remain a significant factor in assessing life as a whole, but that things are viewed in proportion.¹²

O'Murchu advocates a change in the language of celibacy. 'We need to abandon the traditional language of celibacy and adopt the phrase *for relatedness*. The vow for relatedness is a call to engage with the emerging issues of psychosexual relating in the contemporary world, to read the unfolding reality with discernment and sensitivity, to unearth the deeper archetypal meanings of this unfolding, to name the unfolding process in a way that is holistic and liberating, to highlight the spiritual implications of this new understanding, and to promote social and political strategies to reintegrate what for so long we have split off in our destructive asexual, disembodied ways of living.'¹³

A Choice of Love

From the start the call to monastic life is expressed as a call to love, life, relationships. 'The Lord seeking workers in a multitude of people calls out, Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days? There is clearly call and room for personal choice and response. If someone hears the call and answers 'I do' the Lord in love shows us the way of life' ... RB Prol 14-20.

The focus in the rite of monastic profession in RB 58 is on what the monastic does, not on what the Church or the community does to the monastic. It is an intentional act of love. It is personal choice. The monastic writes the document in her own hand, places it on the altar herself, sings the Suscipe - receive me Lord, as you have promised, and i shall live; do not disappoint me in my hope. (RB 58: 20-22)

The choice of Celibacy must be a decision FOR love, life, relationships, not AGAINST. Empowerment not repression; Integration rather than division; Passion not possessiveness; Process not event; Opportunity rather than denial; Expansiveness rather than constriction and Engagement rather than avoidance.

THE SCHOOL FOR THE LORD'S SERVICE: LEARNING TO LOVE

Sometimes we encounter people who have the capacity to speak from another time and yet address our time with incredible relevance and significance. Benedict is one such person. Another is Gertrude the Great of Helfta.

Gertrude of Helfta:

Gertrude of Helfta, 13th century monastic, leading woman writer, visionary and mystic calls us through her writings, to a new awareness of God's unconditional love for all creatures.

In RB Prologue 45, Benedict states his intention to 'establish a School for the Lord's service'

Gertrude takes up many of Benedict's images as she speaks of growing in love on her monastic journey. The School for the Lord's service is one image that she incorporates in her prayers and rituals contained in the *Spiritual Exercises*.¹⁴ In this school she sees the goal as a steady growth in love, religion, simplicity and holiness. She adapts the words, calling the school variously 'school of charity' (E 5: 84,86) school of the Holy Spirit (E 2.35) a school of chaste, cherishing-love' (E 5:84).

Her spirituality is markedly feminine, it is serious, mature, authoritative, intensely personal yet definitely relational, directed to the well being of people around her, especially those in her community. Her spirituality is based on the scriptures and the psalms to which she brings the strength and insight of her mystical experiences, the experiences of a woman, often making use of masculine language of the sources yet bringing to it and through it a freshness. While she often will use masculine images, she insists on maintaining her feminine perspective.¹⁵

She allegorises the divine attributes. Love is personified as 'Queen of queens - Charity' (E 5:386). She speaks of the feminine aspect of divinity when she exclaims in the Exercise on the Mystical Union (E 5:75ff) 'How beautiful you are, O God, Charity, and how lovely, how wondrous and how remarkable in delights. ... You Queen are seated first on the divine throne. You wife and spouse of the supreme God, rejoice in always dwelling with him.'

Later in this same chapter on the Mystical Union (E 5), she turns to the seven liturgical hours in order to develop her teaching about love:

At Lauds, pray: that you be taught the art of love (E 5:292)
At Prime, pray: that you be led into the school of love with God as teacher and master (E 5:311)
At Terce, pray: that you learn the alphabet with which the Spirit writes his law of love on your heart (E 5:330)
At Sext, pray: that you learn to know the Lord, not only by syllables but also by theory (E 5:356)
At None, pray: that you be accepted into the militia of love and bound by oath (E 5:377)
At Vespers, pray: that you march in the armour of love and triumph over evil (E 5:401) and
At Compline, pray: that you become oblivious to the world and be consummated in loving union with God (E 5:434)

Benedict speaks of the ultimate purpose of this school for the Lord's service in terms of love - 'As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.' RB Prol:49. With distinctive echoes of Benedict, Gertrude hopes to 'advance and make progress from day to day, from virtue to virtue, daily bearing fruit on the road of cherishing love, in the school for the Lord's service. (E 5:86)

She speaks of her desire for unitive love... 'After that there is the act of consecration ... By the observance of virginity or chastity she commits herself to remain united to her spouse and to keep faith, with a pure heart, a chaste body and a love that draws ever closer...' (E 2:80-85)

With heart set free, she sings a song of jubilation, a song with cosmic dimensions, uniting the entire universe in the joy of the Lord. 'May all the army of your chosen, ... May all the stars of heaven ... May all your miraculous works... be jubilant to you' (E 6: 480-485) For Gertrude not only has her heart expanded but so, too, has the path.

When Evil Masquerades as Good Zeal

As Fr William Johnston sj points out in his article *The Path from Hate to Love*, as we deal with international crises, such as the attack on the Twin Towers on Sept 11 2001, we are inclined to claim that we are good and terrorists are evil. We will have no negotiation, no dialogue, no talking, no mercy.

‘Now the frightening thing is that the Islamic fundamentalists who destroyed the Twin Towers have the same way of thinking. They, too, believe they are pitted against evil. They want to destroy the corrupt western civilisation.’

William Johnston believes that in the distant future the answer, the only answer, lies in dialogue and friendship - love, good zeal, between the religions. A dialogue in which the religions will challenge one another, lead one another to conversion of heart and help one another get away from fanatical fundamentalism. Through these means we will all find our authentic roots in love and compassion. ‘We used to say that dialogue between the religions is necessary for world peace. We now say that dialogue between the religions is necessary for world survival.’¹⁶ The same challenges thread through into community life.

Sociological Challenges in community life

Many sociological challenges arise today in our communities as we strive to live relationally, to engage in compassionate dialogue with one another. Depending on our culture and the particular patterns and spirit of our monastery fresh developments call for rethinking in light of our values. Some of these could be - a new building, central heating, TV, ensuites, computers, the demise of table service, motor cars, increased mobility... mean that it is possible for monastics to live under the same roof and have few real points of contact. Sean Sammon¹⁷ identifies what he calls ‘spirit-numbing elements’ that lie at the heart of busyness that plagues many of us in the western world at this time. It leads to fatigue; to a self-absorbed narcissism; to a pragmatism preoccupied with work, achievement and efficiency and to an unbridled restlessness’. This profile fits the description of the gyrovague of whom Benedict says ‘they are always on the move... drifting... never settling down.’ (RB1:10-11) Without a doubt busyness militates against stability, hospitality and contemplation. The challenge and the grace? To truly achieve that attentive listening, listening with the ear of the heart that Benedict teaches.¹⁸

In RB 42:1 we read that monastics are to ‘diligently cultivate silence at all times’. In the Prologue 15-17, after an exalted invitation to workers ‘Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days?’ those who respond - I do - are warned that the first prerequisite is to ‘keep your tongue free from vicious talk’ In several places in the Rule Benedict speaks out strongly against the vice of murmuring or grumbling in the community. RB 5:14. 34:6. 40:8,9.

The breakdown of loving relationships can overwhelm us. Some behaviour patterns are quite destructive of community life. Silent tolerance that avoids and denies the dysfunctional rather than calls the monastic to be her best self is, at all times, to be rejected.

The Divided Heart

As we struggle to love one another in community, most of us can understand the lament of Paul in his letter to the Romans 7:19. He speaks of a heart and will that is torn apart and divided. .. *the good that I would I do not do*. In shame he experiences himself as ‘unloving’. Struggles, failures, conflicts. These lead us to revisit our own intentions and motivations. They invite us to ponder the questions that can lead us to growth. What is my motivation? Where is my heart? These questions invite us to see our reality at a deeper level, with a ‘wisdom of the heart’ which Joan Chittister speaks of as contemplation ... ‘Contemplation is the ability to see a whole world rather than a partial one. It is the wisdom of the heart that allows us to identify illusions. It is the wisdom that digs deeply.’¹⁹

Evangelical Friendship

Evagrius of Pontus claims that a person cannot be a monastic unless she/he has friends for ‘the monastic is one who is separated from all and who is united to all. Friendship pertains to the integrity of the human person. One

who has no friends is not whole. As Timothy Radcliffe has noted, 'our real concern in community should not be over particular friendships but rather particular enmities.'²⁰ 'If you hear his voice today do not harden your hearts.' RB Prol 10

"The entire history of religious life bears witness to the sense religions have had of the challenge to live as a community of friends. The teaching is often under the heading of charity, common life, fraternal love, a just community ... But when carefully analysed, it is always about the specific and individual love of each member for each other member that takes precedence over all other relationships, even those of natural family."²¹

The Last Supper: Staying at the table.

Jesus gathering the disciples for the Last Supper has a lot to teach us about self-giving love and the true nature of community. He gathers them around the table in the universal symbol of friendship to share a meal, to break bread and to drink wine together. Yet, as we know, the group is far from being of one heart and one mind. Arguments, vying for positions, blind to their capacity for betrayal, caught up with their own self interests.

And what does Jesus do in the midst of all the conflict and discord? He stays at the table. In faith and patience he keeps on keeping on. He witnesses to the fact that trouble, strife, severe unloving, need not be the end. He reminds them of some of his profound teachings. He calls them to a greater depth. 'This is my commandment that you Love one another as I have loved you. I call you friends. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. I no longer call you slaves ... I call you friends ... You are my friends if you do what I command you. You did not choose me but I chose you. John 15:12-16

Dealing with suffering, death, loss calls us to enter into the paschal mystery. Under threat there is always the tendency to act out of fear rather than out of love; to retreat and batten down the hatches and guard what we consider to be diminishing resources - be they money, people, time, energy, buildings, our own affections, love ... That ultimately leads to death. Sometimes all we can do is to wait in the darkness. There is much to learn in darkness. Darkness does not mean waiting till what we want comes our way but rather being so widened in the waiting that it can change our wanting. Openness can lead to transformation in love.

Love, Good Zeal.

Empowered by the Spirit, may we experience that fullness of good Zeal, that transformation of which Benedict speaks - May we 'run on the path of God's commandments with hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love'. RB Prol 49.

Prayer of St Gertrude

St Gertrude prays in her spiritual exercises a prayer, which could well be the prayer of every one of us as we ponder the good zeal:

*Come, O thou gracious sun of dawn and by the anointing of your Holy Spirit, cause me to bloom and flower anew. Turn my whole soul to you with the mighty power of your love, then I shall run the way of your commandments and not grow weary. Enlighten my understanding with the light of your love, Teach me, guide me, and form me in the depths of my heart. That love may be as a seal upon me, Bind me to you with a bond that nothing can weaken or break forevermore. Amen. Alleluia.*²²

QUESTIONS

All participants are asked to bring a copy of the Profession Formula (for perpetual profession) used in their community.

Some of the following questions could be suitable:

- 1.. What insights have you gained about celibate chastity in relation to the theology and spirituality of Benedictine monastic profession?
2. Share with the group the formula for Perpetual Profession currently in use in your community. Note the similarities and differences. What do you learn from this comparison?

3. In what special ways does the Profession formula of your community call you to love?
What aspects of your living of the good zeal as love do you need to change in order to bring practice into line with what you espouse publicly?
4. What can help growth in relationships in the monastic community?
As you reflect on your own community where do you see signs of hope and growth?
5. What can hinder growth in the monastic community? What are particular areas of challenge for me? For my community?
6. How does your community deal with behaviour patterns that are quite destructive of community life? What have you tried that works well?
7. What wisdom of Jesus, St Benedict, the saints, members of my own community gives me most encouragement to live a healthy, spirited life?
8. Over the past few years a significant change in my understanding of myself as a Benedictine woman seeking God and committed to living a cenobitic life in my particular monastery is ...

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- ⁶ National Catholic Reporter, 16 March 2001.
- ⁷ Saiving, Valerie. "The Human Situation". in Carol Christ & Judith Plaskow, Womanspirit Rising. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. pp 37 & 38.
'For the temptations of woman as woman are not the same as the temptations of man as man, and the specifically 'feminine forms of sin - feminine not because they are confined to women or because women are incapable of sinning in other ways but because they are outgrowths of the basic feminine character structure - have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as pride and will to power. They are better suggested by such items as triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lacking of an organising centre or focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason - in short underdevelopment or negation of the self.'
- ⁸ National Catholic Reporter, 16 March 2001.
- ⁹ UISG Rome, May 6-10, 2001.
- ¹⁰ Hollermann, osb E. (ed) Monastic Profession: Commitment to a Way of Life. USA. January 2000.
- ¹¹ Casey, Michael. "The Benedictine Promises" , Tjurunga. No. 24/1983. pp 17-34.
- ¹² Casey, M. op cit
- ¹³ O'Murchu, D. Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience. Crossroads Publication. New York. 1999.

p. 49.

- ¹⁴ Lewis, G.J. & J. Gertrud The Great of Helfta. Spiritual Exercises. Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo. 1989.
- ¹⁵ Lewis, G.J. & J. Gertrud The Great of Helfta. Spiritual Exercises. Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo. 1989.
- ¹⁶ Johnston, sj W. “The Path from Hate to Love.” The Tablet. 5 January 2002. pp 9-10.
- ¹⁷ Sammon, Sean. “Celibate Chastity: An Affair of the Heart.” In Priests & People. April 2001. pp 134-139.
- ¹⁸ Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman, an Aboriginal artist, writer, mother, and Principal of St Francis Xavier School, Daly River, NT. Australia, explains their practice of *didirri* which seems close to Benedict’s concept of ‘attending with the ear of the heart’. (RB Prol 1). It is inner deep listening and quiet still awareness. When I experience *dadirri* I am made whole again. I can sit by the river bank or walk through the trees; even if someone close to me has passed away I can find my peace in this silent awareness. There is no need of words. A big part of *dadirri* is listening. Through the years we have listened to our stories. They are told and sung, over and over, as the seasons go by. Today we still gather around the campfires and together we hear our sacred stories ... The contemplative way of *didirri* spreads over our whole life. It renews us and brings us peace. It makes us feel whole again.’
Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman, “Dadirri.” in Joan Hendriks and Gerry Hefferan (eds) Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Apostolate, Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, 1993, pp. 34-6.
- ¹⁹ Chittister, Joan. Womanstrength. 1990. New York: Sheed and Ward pp 52 and 57.
- ²⁰ Radcliffe op, Timothy “The Affective Life.” Religious Life Review. July/August 1998. pp 194-212. p.197
- ²¹ Schneiders, Sandra “Religious Life in a New Millennium.” Vol II. Selling All. New York: Paulist, 2001. p 297.
- ²² Gertrude of Helfta, as adapted by Ruth Fox osb, from Exercises of St Gertrude, VII

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