



"TO DESCEND TO THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD"¹

(Justice, Peace, Care for Creation and Monastic Oblation)

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"Are you seeking the highest? Do you want to reach the most elevated? Lower your sights because high things are found in the lowliest places" (Lao Tse). It is good to know that these words were spoken to monastics. Christian tradition recounts that, in the fourth century, Saint Athanasius asked Saint Pachomius: "Does the holy community of monks continue to yield good fruit?" Pachomius answered: "The entire Church yields good fruit. We are barely lay persons, without importance"³.

This happened at the beginning of Christian monasticism. Since then "a lot of water has passed under the bridge". Today it would be very difficult to give the same answer to this question. Over the course of the centuries monasteries have been seen as places of high spiritual specialization. Today, many men's monasteries of the Benedictine Confederation wish to return to the original lay character of the monastic vocation, but oblates are more the ones to represent this less institutional line of monasticism, freer and "lighter", without, however, renouncing the radical nature of the consecrated vocation. Obviously, what I propose here is only possible from the starting point of a post-Vatican Council II ecclesiology. Prior to that, the mentality in vigor in the Church was that of the institutes of "perfection". In the period of transition from this mentality, the Conciliar Decree dealing with the Religious Life was still called *Perfectae Caritatis*. When I entered the monastery, the Council had barely begun (1962) and at that time this theology was still in vogue. All the baptized are called to the commandments. The Religious are the ones who, beyond the commandments, have for their vocation living "the evangelical counsels". Thus, there were in effect two classes of Christians: the "simple Christians", lay persons who follow a rudimentary and basic Christianity, and Religious and monastics who constitute something like a specialized category, as though they were more Christian than the common Christians. At least in Brazil this is still the image of many Catholics.

This type of theology and spirituality corresponds to an ecclesiology of Church-Christendom that separated the Church from the world, the secular from the regular (that is, those one who follow a religious Rule), the profane from the sacred⁴. The lay person (from a Greek term that originally meant to be one of the consecrated people - *laos*) came to mean someone who is outside of, or not an expert in, a particular field. Vatican Council II, in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, overcame this type of theology, defining the



Church as the "people of God". It re-established the dignity and importance of baptism and insisted on the royal and common priesthood of all the baptized. Today, I think, no serious theologian or exegete speaks about "institutes of perfection" or differentiates between commandments and evangelical counsels, as though there were two different classes of Christians. Certainly even today much ambiguity of still language exists and it is understandable that this process toward a change in the vision of life is slow. Such a model cannot be changed as easily as changing clothes.

In the encyclical *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental concept in the documents of the Council" (Cf. n. 19). The Roman Synod of 1985 stated that in the second millennium the Catholic Church did not sufficiently value this *ecclesiology of communion*. We can say the same also about monasticism that, like the entire Church, lived its vocation in the cultural context of Christendom. If the understanding that we have of the Church and of the faith is that of Christendom, our monasticism will be of the classic type of the Middle Ages and of the Modern age. In practice, an immense difference will continue to exist between monastics and oblates and between ordained monks and non-ordained monks, as well as between monks (the more important monastics) and sisters (subordinated to the male monastics). If the operative ecclesial model is that of Vatican Council II, based on the ecclesiology of the local Church as sacrament and manifestation of the universal Church, then monks and lay persons will have to redefine their consecrated vocation in a more dialogical and complementary way. Aware that this vision has not yet been put into practice in a totally visible way, I invite all to think about the vocation of oblates starting with this ecclesiology and to deepen the common mission of monastics and oblates from the point of view of the conciliar proposal of justice, peace and care for creation.

1. Conciliar and ecumenical proposal

Already in 1933, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran pastor and martyr to Nazism, had proposed a Council that would re-unite pastors and Christians of all the Christian Churches with this objective of consecrating the Churches to the cause of peace, justice and care for creation. In 1983, the World Council of Churches returned to this project and began to speak about a conciliar process, a way of dialogue and commitment that would involve the Churches and communities to the point of arriving at the possibility of a Council or of a truly ecumenical gathering that would bring the Churches together for this common mission.



The international reality now shows on its own the urgency of a new order in the world that guarantees peace, justice and a different relationship between humanity and nature. The question is why this should be a priority mission for the Christian Churches? All faithful followers of Jesus are in agreement in asserting that we cannot remain indifferent to the fact that the current reality of the world depends in great part on the influence of the Christian Churches and especially on the Catholic Church. When George Bush declared war on Iraq, many North American Christians asserted that if all the Christian Churches would have said clearly that that war had nothing to do with Christian faith, then it would have been more difficult for the president to justify it to the population.

Latin Americans and Africans cannot forget that the Catholic Church arrived on their continents with the conquerors. In Latin America, every time persons of color or Indians came to be imprisoned and enslaved they were marked with a branding iron bearing the initial of their owner and, at their side a priest baptized them.

We cannot remain indifferent to that which Giuseppe Saramago wrote to the participants of Third World Social Forum: "We will always die of something, but we have long since lost count of the human beings who died in the worst situations that human beings have been able to invent. One of those situations, the most criminal, the one which most offends simple reason, is that which from the beginning of time and of civilizations has given the mandate to kill in the name of God"⁵.

Since the 1950s, various European and North American scientists have criticized the fact that, in the last centuries, the Church has developed a type of theology that has reinforced the vision of human persons as rulers of the universe, with the right to make of nature whatever appeals to them most. Following this line of thought, the ecological crisis that the world is currently facing would have as one of its causes the biblical-Christian concept that speaks about human beings as rulers of the universe and gives them power to dominate the earth, exploring it and destroying it, instead of relating to it lovingly⁶.

Obviously, no serious biblical exegesis interprets biblical texts like Genesis 1, 26-28, in this line but we cannot deny that, with the passing of the centuries, we Christians have been mistaken not to pay the necessary attention to creation, unlike other religious cultures that have known how to teach love and respect for all living beings to their own faithful.



In the 1990s, a group of university professors of the University of San Paolo conducted research on the warring attitude of religions. This research indicated that, over the course of human history, the religion that has most engaged in wars in the world has been the Christian religion. I know that many Catholics and even bishops did not agree with what John Paul II called the "purification of the memory". During the Fourth Conference of the Latin American Episcopacy (CELAM) which took place at Saint Domingo (1992), some bishops proposed that the final document should specifically acknowledge the fact that the Church had been negligent and even complicit regarding slavery and colonialism in colonial times. Various bishops with decision-making authority did not approve the idea that the Episcopate should acknowledge that the Church had made any type of mistake in Latin America's colonial past. They were surprised when the Pope arrived to celebrate the Eucharist that commemorated the past 500 years (1492-1992) and on his own initiative, in the name of the Church, asked forgiveness of the blacks and Indians of the continent. When, at the age of 18 years, I entered the Monastery of Olinda, one of the things that most impressed me was the old chapter house of the Monastery. In its center there is a stone on which the monks, every Thursday evening, knelt down and asked forgiveness for their minor mistakes and failings. On the stone was written a verse from the book of Proverbs in the Vulgate version: "The just are those who first accuse themselves". I understood then that to acknowledge our own mistakes and, as it is written in chapter seven of the Rule, "to walk in the way of humility" is the best way to live the vow of conversion of life. Today, this acknowledgment of responsibility makes the Churches understand the commitment to Peace, Justice and Care of Creation as an important Christian debt toward humanity .

2. Conciliar Commitment and Monastic Spirituality

In the fourth century, Christian monasticism emerged as a reaction to the world of the Empire, but also to the Church of Christendom, during the age in which this began consolidating. In the course of history, for a certain time, monasteries represented a prophetic instance that helped the Churches to remember their evangelical vocation. Little by little, the Church of Christendom clericalized monasticism, but the monasteries were always able to maintain something of their original spirituality. Also in the period when the Church provoked the crusades and the Inquisition condemned heretics, monastics had a minor participation in this history compared to the other religious orders. Many monasteries tried always to be places of peace and of justice.



Among the instruments of good works with which monastics must labor in the workshop of the Monastery, chapter four of the Benedictine Rule proposes loving peace and seeking peace with all human beings. In fact, the word most frequently found at the entrance of monasteries is *Pax*. And one of the invocations of the consecratory prayer that the superior chants after receiving the final vows of monastics is to ask God that they be rooted in peace.

Despite that, however, I think we can say that, for several reasons, our monasteries did not develop during the course of history a deep spirituality of the peace, especially if we understand peace as the fruit of justice and of solidarity. This is understandable because, even within the Church, a deeper and more spiritual theology of peace only appeared after 1963 with the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, of John XXIII. At that time the Pax Christi movement was born and inter-religious dialogue brought us a new and deeper familiarity with the message of the Mahatma Gandhi and, within Christianity itself, with Doctor Martin Luther King. I myself, who for eight years worked with Don Helder Camara in the archdiocesan secretariat for ecumenism in Recife, have seen how this prophet of peace incorporated in his personal and ecclesial spirituality the proposal of Peace, Justice and Care for Creation.

I have the impression that monasteries began to welcome this spiritual way along with the ecumenical option. At least here in Europe, various monasteries have a history of ecumenical connection and of openness toward Christians from other churches. Since 1925, the Monastery of Chevetogne has committed itself in particular to dialogue with the Eastern Churches. Other monasteries are centers for the meetings of commissions of the World Council of Churches or are models of dialogue and communion with Christians of the Anglican Communion and other confessions. In the decade of the 1960s, a number of European monks like Bede Griffith, Henri le Saux, Cornelius Tollens and others, engaged in profound experiences of connectedness with Hinduism. In Brazil, between the years 1960 and 1970, Don Timoteo Amoroso Anastasio, then-abbot of the Monastery of Baia, deepened a relationship of friendship and spiritual connectedness with the communities of the Candomblè, an Afro-Brazilian religion that he defined as deeply monastic. I do not know to what point this journey involved the participation of oblates. Perhaps we monks have not known how to open in profound and effective ways the spiritual riches that we live to the brothers and sisters who accompany us as lay persons.



3. Monasticism and the challenges of today's world

In 1973 Woody Allen made a film called "Sleeper". It tells the story of a man who suffers from an incurable mental illness. He is frozen and on the glass case in which he hibernates there is a small sign that reads, "When humanity finds a cure for this disease, wake him up". In the twenty-third century, scientists thaw the man and cure him. The man awakens and is frightened to see the world that he finds because he thinks he has only slept for eight hours. I do not mean to say that this is happening to our monasticism, but I know some cases of young people who searched for monasteries but felt that they had entered Walt Disney's time machine. A nun friend of mine, after living thirty years inside a monastery without ever going outside, went to live in a house among the people. She did not know how to use money because she had no criteria for comparing prices. This does not happen to oblates who are rightly the members of the Benedictine family in the world. But, inserted in the world, you can be of help to your brother monks and sister nuns to live the monastic vocation in dialogue with humanity.

Those who know our monasteries know that, in general, the communities of monks and nuns today a new *kairos*, a new era of the grace of God, in order to return to the essential faith and to the fundamental nucleus of our vocation. It is important to hear anew what the Angel of the Apocalypse says to the church of Ephesus, very observant and well organized, but which lost "the fervor of its first love": "Remember from where you have fallen and be converted (...) Whoever has ears, hear what the spirit says to the Church" (Revelation 2, 5).

In its origins, Christian monasticism arose as a prophetic movement at the cutting edge of a Church that had become accommodating. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, monasticism must not give to the world and the Church the testimony of being an ecclesiastical rearguard, of bringing together in the monasteries all that is most conservative and most accommodating in the Church and the world at this moment of history. For monasticism to return to the intuition of its prophetic origins, I believe that some points are necessary, some measures that have always belonged to monastic life, but that today have become even more necessary:

- living Monasticism as a vocation common to every person who seeks God and desires intimacy with God. In the Middle Ages, the abbot Saint Stephen of Muret said, "Every person who seeks interior unity is a monk or nun"⁷. Raimond Panikkar rediscovers this dimension of monastic consecration, present in every being that seeks interior unification and simplicity⁸. In this sense oblation and monastic consecration are joined in the same nature of renewal of baptism and provides for the Church to be at the service of peace and of justice.



- An essential line for Benedictine monasteries must be that of "evangelism", or the "evangelization" that should be visible to all and easily identifiable on the part of any person who seeks us out. Once I asked a doctor who had become an oblate in a monastery why he had chosen that monastery. He replied to me: "Because in this community I felt that the brothers are normal human persons with our common problems and defects, like everyone in the world. I did not want to ask if the others, from the other monasteries that he had known, were not. But I interpreted this proposal of evangelization as a way of human simplicity.

I am convinced that this word of the Gospel also applies to us: "Whoever saves his life, will lose it. Whoever, for the sake of my love, accepts risking the loss of his own life, will save it" (Mark 8, 35). A monastery closed in upon itself for fear of losing its traditional values could end up turning itself into a beautiful museum. People visit it, find it beautiful, are curious to know what happens behind its gates, but nobody lives in a museum. The only way out for monasticism in the twenty-first century will be an evangelical monasticism not centered on itself but centered on the service of others, acting in such a way that our monasteries may clearly be "schools of the Lord's service" for all of humanity today.

In a Church evangelically oriented toward others, a monasticism that understands the word of the Rule, "All must be done inside the precincts of the monastery itself" as an attitude of self-sufficiency and egocentrism is senseless. In the manner of praying, in the daily organization of life, in work, as well as in the formation of the members, all must be done from a concern for others and not from a concern for ourselves. This is the way to live the spirit of the seventh chapter of the Rule and to follow Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant of God. This makes us value the monastic dimension inherent in every human person. In a monasticism that is self-referring and centered on itself, the monks or sisters believe that nothing has anything to do with what happens in the world. They are strangers to the problems and the sufferings of others. Issues like human rights, peace and justice are little dealt with and totally extraneous to such monasteries.

- the brother-like / sister-like and gratuitous participation in a local Church, not as a part of the clergy or as pastoral agents but as a Christian community that forms part of the Church, participating in the local Church and being able to exercise a spiritual promise in relation to this Church. Now in all this oblates can supply a most important assistance. And they do so if they deepen an ecclesial "mystic" of this process of peace, justice and care for creation.



4. The ecumenical roots of oblation

In the encyclical *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* that convened Catholics to the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, the Pope [John Paul II] reflected: "Among the sins that demand a greater commitment to penance and conversion, there must absolutely be included those that endanger the unity willed by God for his people" (TMA n. 34).

In the twentieth century, the popes made frequent requests to monks and sisters to deepen the ecumenical dimension of their vocation. During the penultimate Congress of Abbots, John Paul II dedicated a good part of his allocution to the abbots and women superiors asking that monasteries assume even more this ecumenical vocation. This does not have to do with a fortuitous or isolated request. It comes from a deeper understanding of the monastic vocation as a way that must be essentially ecumenical. In fact, the term "monk" comes from the Greek *monos*. It means "one", but also: the only one, the re-united one. Roger Schutz, prior of Taizé, said that whoever is Christian cannot attain a true interior unification without deepening his spirituality of communion. If monastics live a cenobitic life (*koinos/bios*) it is precisely for this. It is not by chance that this *Koinonia* is so present in the catechesis of the first cenobitic monasticism, that of Saint Pachomius. The cenobitic monastic is the monk or nun for communion⁹.

The tradition of the Benedictine order has a beautiful history of ecumenical vocation. To be a monastic is to seek the unification of one's own self. However, interior unity is essentially tied to a search for inter-ecclesial and human communion. This does not have to do with transforming monasteries into centers of ecumenical pastoral ministry but into places where the ecumenical dimension of the faith is deepened as a spiritual and monastic way. This is the base of the conciliar process, founded upon reflection and upon the commitment to Peace, Justice and Care for Creation.

In the first place, this does not mean a program of external activity, but a way to believe and to live the way of conversion and of seeking intimacy with God. Since oblates are brothers and sisters who live the monastic spirituality in the world, in their families and in the work place, they have the special mission of helping monasteries rediscover this ecumenical dimension of the monastic vocation and to live effectively the effort to go beyond divisions and to attain the visible unity of Christians and communion with other religions. This spiritual ecumenism, based on prayer, the humble work of bearing witness and dialogue constitutes what in the 1930s Father Paul Couturier already called an "invisible monastery", made up of a monastic community much wider than the capitular members of a given abbey or priory. It is made up, in the first place,



of oblates who accept the responsibility of caring for the relationship between humanity and the cosmos, who develop in their family and at work, as in all of life, a "mystic" of seeking peace and a spirituality of dialogue and of communion in all that they experience in their prayers, words and actions.

5. Peace as a vow of monastic oblation

All over the world, and in various religions and spiritual ways, the number of faithful who consecrate their lives to a "mystic" of peace is on the increase. They discover peace as a way of encounter with God who, as the Bible says, has among his names that of peace: "The Lord is our Peace" (Jeremiah 23). In the first centuries some Christians gave their life in order not to bear arms, considering that as Christians the practice of violence was not permitted to them. In a world such as ours, more than ever, humanity has need of offerings of peace: persons who consecrate themselves to the cause of peace in the name of God.

Concretely, this offering of peace is a prophetic statement that denounces the culture of individualism and competitive materialism which is destroying peace because it threatens the survival of the poor and the future of the planet. In a neo-liberal culture where all is privatized to attain wealth, groups of Christians seem to want to privatize even the Christian faith itself. It is as though they wanted to make the faith become a "soft" creed, detached from responsibility toward other people. In this context, the Benedictine vocation, lived by monks and nuns as well as by oblates, must be lived more and more as a promise of communion. This means making our communities simpler and better able to bear witness to a truly brother-like / sister-like openness; establishing in monasteries a culture of brother-like / sister-like simplicity. It is necessary, at all costs, to avoid a way of life that favors competition among the members. It is necessary to reorganize leadership and assignments in the monastery so that they do not seem to be only hierarchical opportunities for power. We must give witness by monasteries that are more cenobitic, assignments that are more charismatic and less administrative, more in the line of service than seeking privileges and acquiring status inside and outside the monastery. In a society that is authoritarian and exclusive, only with our insistence on these things will we succeed in being for the world a prophetic promise of simplicity and of inclusion.

6. Justice as spiritual thirst

The holy Rule insists: "Nothing, absolutely nothing is to be preferred to



the love of Christ". This does not have to do with the love that we experience for Christ but with the love of Jesus Christ himself, and that the Rule invites to us to assume as our own. We are thus called to love precisely with the love of Christ. To love whom and what? Whom and what Jesus loved. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul insists: "You must have within you the same sentiments that Jesus Christ had" (Philippians 2, 5). This means following Jesus, choosing to make ourselves similar to Jesus: we are Christic persons and communities, which have become similar to Jesus. Now, concretely, what does this mean?

Jon Sobrino, the great theologian from San Salvador, personal friend of the martyr Monseñor Oscar Romero, writes: "To be like Jesus means imitating the fundamental structure of his life. It means taking upon oneself the mission and the behavior of Jesus, living like him with mercy toward others as a permanent and structural principle of life, accepting to bear oneself the sin of the world and to receive resurrection from the Father, through the strength of the Spirit"¹⁰.

The Gospels recount that Jesus lived his own relationship with the Father in the same way that he related to people and showed each one his intimacy with God. Thus, he met with a Samaritan woman, a Roman official, a Syro-Phoenician woman, but also Simon, the Pharisee, Nicodemus, the rich young man and all the persons who found themselves in his journey or with those in whose journey he put himself.

To meet Jesus is to open one's heart to solidarity as the expression of the search for the face of God is a characteristic of Biblical spirituality. In the very midst of the suffering of war, Simone Weil wrote: "The pain scattered over the entire earth oppresses me and is like an obsession for me, to the point of canceling my faculties. And I cannot recover them nor rid myself of this obsession if I myself do not have a great participation in suffering and in dangers. This is an indispensable condition for my survival"¹¹.

I do not know, very concretely, how many monks and nuns, or how many Benedictine oblates can say this today. Two years ago, on 15 February 2002, the UN estimated that more than ten million persons, on all the continents and in the most diverse cities and capitals of the world, went into the public squares to demonstrate with their presence that they were not favorable to the war in Iraq. Our whole community in Goias, even Father Pedro who was 80 years old and had chosen to be a hermit monk, decided to be present and to participate as monks. We did the same thing at the Third World Social Forum in Porto Alegre; we went as monks to offer to the participants of the entire world a space for ecumenical prayer and spiritual dialogue. In the United States, Weston Priory in Vermont had shown itself clearly to be against the



war, against the death penalty and in favor of peace. I do not know how many monastic communities and how many oblates thought that this type of manifestation had something to do with our Benedictine vocation, but it certainly shows solidarity to be a spiritual way.

I wrote to a former Abbot President of my Congregation (monks of the Subiaco Congregation) that I had the impression that if some of our chapters had taken place on the Moon or on Mars they would not have been any different than they are. What happens in the world, and the problems of humanity, interest them only as much as they might endanger the economy of the monastery or create security problems for our monastic community. I think that we should apply to our vow of "conversion of life" what Pope John Paul II said several times: "Evangelical conversion consists in passing from individualism to solidarity as a principle of life and a permanent way of being. That not only demands the conversion of persons, but also of structures. It is a structural conversion"¹².

The proposal is to adopt the justice of the kingdom of God like monastics of old sought out quiet, solitude and living "with themselves", as Gregory the Great said, referring to Benedict. It means understanding the concern for justice and solidarity not only as isolated actions of mercy but as the fundamental principle of life, just as Jesus lived it. Solidarity as a principle of spirituality is nurtured by meditation on the Word of God (*lectio divina*) and by prayer, as an experience of life pursued by means of the Word of God and the loving power of the Holy Spirit.

I am convinced that a fundamental element of this justice of the kingdom and of monastic spirituality is overcoming the patriarchal culture that for many centuries has dominated the Church and relationships within our own monasteries. In the world it was patriarchal culture that engendered situations like colonialism, slavery and even war. It was patriarchal culture that had, regarding the exploration of the world, the same type of reasoning that governed the relationship between man and woman. If we want, in fact, to commit ourselves spiritually and as monastics or oblates to peace, justice and the care for creation, we must commit ourselves to overcoming this injustice regarding women. Although little is said about this, the truth is that, in Christendom, monastic life sprang up from its very beginnings in a kind of situation where women had a great importance and a certain priority. In Patrology, the first references to religious life are those about consecrated virgins and widows who adopted a prophetic style of ecclesial life or of radical service to the Kingdom of God. Later, in the fourth century, we know that Saint Augustine wrote his first rule for a community of women and Saint Pachomius wrote a rule for the women's monastery directed by his sister Maria. It is clear



that, today, we note a contradiction in the fact that women must follow rules made by men. And the history of religious life is a little like that. Women live structures developed according to male models. And, many times, are not even aware that they do so.

I touch on this issue by way of a challenge. Some "connected" monastic communities have rediscovered a feminine dimension, a "feminist" dimension, if you will, of spirituality that touches all of us, men and women; that transforms relationships (it is a question of kind) and is a prophetic sign for the whole Church. But it mainly renews the monastic vocation and gives us a new strength in the way we live peace, justice and communion with the universe.

7. Care for creation as an act of divinization

Divinization was the expression that the Fathers of the Eastern Church and some early monastics used to define this process of conversion and of letting oneself be taken over by the word of God. It means allowing the Spirit's indwelling presence within us to grow stronger and express itself. This work has various aspects and takes different forms. One of these is the relationship of love and care toward nature.

Contrary to the interpretation that sees that the Bible commanded human beings to "subjugate" or to dominate nature in an oppressive way like a tyrant, the original word and the context of the verse from Genesis could be understood in another sense: "Grow and multiply and be divine beings for the sake of the earth". In other words: be for the earth what God is for you. We are representatives of the God-who-is-love for the universe.

In fact, the Bible is very serious about the relationship between human beings and creation because it arose in societies that divinized nature even at the cost of human sacrifices. It was necessary to free human beings and to reveal their unique dignity. But in no way should liberation lead to an oppression by human beings over nature but rather to a relationship of communion and among brothers and sisters. Still on this point, the relationship between Christianity and the other religions can be useful because some Eastern religions, and aboriginal and African religions, have a relationship with nature marked by respect and reverence, without, otherwise, oppressing human beings.

We have just said how faith is translated into an option for justice and solidarity. This justice and solidarity cannot regard only the people of today. We must live "God's today" without forgetting our responsibility toward future



generations. In a difficult moment for his people, an Iroquois tribal leader said: "We are responsible for our people. We must make decisions that take into account the life and well-being of the seventh generation that will come after us. Every time that we make a decision, we must ask ourselves: 'Will the decision that we are now making benefit ours descendants unto the seventh generation?' May this be our rule of conduct"¹³.

Each of us, in every attitude or decision that we make today, has a responsibility not only toward our current sisters and brothers, but toward future generations. This is what in today's world is called "sustainable growth". We prefer to call it simply "sustainability", which is not synonymous with "supportability" in the sense of seeing to what point the earth and living beings can be punished without them dying or putting at risk the very life of the planet. Sustainability is the way for the earth and living beings together to live out justice and care. We must apply to all living beings, to the earth and to water, that which the Rule says when it commands us to use all the objects of the monastery like sacred vessels of the altar. It is good to view all creation as elements of the cosmic monastery of God. We must all consider ourselves to be oblates of this divine monastery.

"Show me those who love and they will feel what I am saying. Find me those who desire, who walk in this desert, those who are thirsty and sigh for the fount of life. Show me these persons and they will know what I mean" (Saint Augustine)¹⁴.



End Notes:

1 *Bajar al encuentro de Dios* is the title of a most beautiful book by Father Gonzales Baeta on religious life lived among the poor. I ask to borrow this title (inspired by the Letter to the Hebrews 13, 13) because for me it points out well the challenge that monastic communities and Benedictine oblates must face today in order to be able to live a spirituality that is renewed and inspired by the Benedictine Rule.

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3 E. Bianchi, *Siamo laici senza importanza* in "Il Regno-attualità" 16, 15/09/1994, p. 499

4 We can call a "Church of Christendom" a Church that seeks to reduce society to itself. Instead of assuming the Kingdom as the fundamental reference point, it seeks to assert itself in a absolute and exclusive way. Its manner of being present in the world is to guarantee privileges, impose its own culture, occupy spaces and imagine itself to be the only valid human experience (Mario Carabelli, from a conference in the Monastery).

5 Quoted by FAUSTINO TEIXEIRA, *Diálogo Inter-religioso: o desafio da acolhida da diferença*, in "Perspectivas Teológicas", July-August, 2002.

6 Cf. LYNN WHITE: "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis", in "Science" 115, March 1967, pp. 1203-1207. M. HORKHEIMER, "Ecclisse della ragione", Torino, Einaudi, 1969, p. 93. quoted by A. RIZZI, in "Teologia ed Ecologia", Roma, Ed. Ave, 1992, p. 46.

7 ST. ÉTIENNE DE MURET, *Livre de la Doctrine*, quoted in "Connaissance des Pères de l'Église", nn. 19-20, p. 50 (on the back of the cover).

8 RAIMON PANIKKAR, *L'Éloge du Simple*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1989.

9 Cf. the most beautiful book by a Trappist nun from France: MONIQUE SIMON, *La Vie Monastique*, Lieu Oécumenique, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1997, mainly see p. 19. (She is a Trappist nun from the Mosteiro de Nossa Senhora da Paz-Deus, a Cistercian priory founded in 1970 in the Cévenne).

10 JON SOBRINO, *El Principio Misericordia*, Salamanca, Ed. Sal Terrae, 1992, Translation: Vozes, p. 31.

11 S. WEIL, *Écrits de Londres*, Gallimand, Paris, 1957, p. 13.

12 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical on the social concern of the Church: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* 38.

13 Quoted by J. RIFKIN, *Guerras del tempo*, Milan, 1987, p. 76.

14 SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Treatise on the Gospel of John* 26, 4. Quoted by "Connaissance des Pères de l'Église" 32, December 1988 (on the cover).