

CHRISTIAN HUMANISM AND FORMATION

Outline

1. Why are we talking about Christian humanism?
2. What overcomes fragmentation?
3. What is Christian humanism? The "FORM"
4. Challenges to Christian Monasticism
5. Ways to initial and ongoing formation

1. Why are we talking about Christian humanism?

Reflecting on the theme "Christian humanism and formation" leads us to ask ourselves: "What is Christian humanism?"

This question finds many answers in Tradition, so we should have received a clear vision of man and of ourselves as our faith and vocation mature, and yet it seems that the question about man is one of the signs of our time.

Last month we lived two important events with the Church, the Synod on the Amazon and the canonization of J. H Newman.

The first leads us to consider the themes of hospitality and of the new evangelization. Dom Bernardo Olivera introduced us to the new evangelization by speaking in his first circular letters of the *Schola Caritatis* as the good news in the context of the new evangelization; fundamentally a rediscovery of the contemplative monastic identity intended to renew not only our monasteries, but also the culture in which we live through the spirituality of communion. We can link to this first sign, also a sign that more closely affects our Order the celebration of the "Charter of Charity" its founding document.

Recently in Las Huelgas Dom Eamon reminded us that "The constitution was called a Charter of Charity and, over time, Cistercian writers (such as Bernard and Aelred, who were the protagonists) spoke of the monastery as a "school of love" and wrote a lot about the central place of love in Christian and monastic life... The real challenge is to love our brothers and

sisters in monastic life, as they are. He takes as an example the martyrs of Thiberine who, through a process of dialogue, came to choose to remain in Algeria: "But throughout this process, it was the prospect of death that focused their discussion and also helped them to begin to listen to each other and learn to love each other. And together they grew in love and became able to persevere until the arrival of their hour and were (so we can say now) *led to God*. I think their testimony has much to tell us today about how we should live charity in our communities."

With the canonization of J.H. Newman, the Pope, I believe, invites us to look at modernity and post-modernity through the eyes of this great theologian, perceived as a prophet, as the "Father of Vatican II", who gave us a key to read the signs of the times by initiating a dialogue between Catholic thought and the Enlightenment. A lover of truth, also reflected in his motto "from shadows and images to truth" and with his concept of conscience Newman reopens the way to an objective path to knowledge closer to our Cistercian Fathers and to all the medieval tradition that depends on intuition and faith. His thought bridges the patristic and monastic synthesis with the theology of *ressourcement*, by deeply influencing the great theologians of the twentieth century such as Congar, Danielou, De Lubac, Von Balthasar, Ratzinger and many others who have identified the problem of contemporary thought in relativism as a false perception of "truth" or rather of the relationship between truth and freedom.

By acting as a bridge between the Fathers and the thought of his time, Newman gives us a glimpse of the way to rediscover the Christian humanism swept away by modern culture.

The signs point to true love in truth to live a new Christian humanism.

The lie of the modern educational project is to say that "I am my own project" so the satisfaction of my desire becomes my right: every person has the right to pursue his/her desire and no one can interfere with this plan, if he/she does not want to be branded as a tyrant. It is clear that if the truth imposed from outside (authority, family, church, society...) hinders my desire, the truth is perceived as oppressive and therefore not corresponding to me, to my conscience.

From 1968 onwards, society cut its ties with everything that preceded it, with all the values that were appreciated until then, under the illusion of “rebuilding the world” by fighting authority, introducing divorce and then abortion... imposing euthanasia and even distorting the concept of the family. So it left young people at the mercy of their desires, not only that, but supported and manipulated them with the media and fashions, collecting a fruit of death in the artificial paradises of drugs, sex, alcohol and entertainment.

The elimination of authority is the abolition of the principle of growth, of the transmission of an experience, of the possibility of receiving an inheritance and confronting it in order to build in turn the good that we want to pass on.

The “self-made” project results in the choice of not trusting and in the fear of being deceived and therefore in a great insecurity and immaturity.

We, then, lost the way to our true humanity by excluding faith from the process of knowing so essential in human experience. The second lie of the modern and post-modern educational project is the reduction of knowledge to science and technology.

Science and technology dictate the shape of our future. In the process, despite all the excitement of modern life, we begin to notice that we are becoming less than human ourselves. We are reduced to being producers and consumers, producing merely in order to consume. We have gained much, more and more stuff, but we have lost our way... the world seems less substantial and our souls too. The whole process of knowledge seems to be moving further and further away from wisdom because areas of knowledge such as the family and companionship of friends are profoundly compromised by the power of technology that encourages wild individualism. No one really wants to be known for what he is. We tend to assume a virtual identity (avatar) that makes us accepted by others without having to go through the pain of looking at the truth in the face.

The very process of knowledge stimulated by a constantly changing technology forces us to be flexible and ductile to survive in all circumstances. Catholic thinker Stratford Caldecott states: “There is a structural flaw in our education that we need to overcome. It is related to a profound malaise in our civilisation, which by progressive stages has

slipped into a way of thinking and living that is dualistic in character. The divisions between art and sciences, between faith and reason, between nature and grace, have a common root. In particular, our struggle to reconcile religious faith with modern science is symptomatic of a failure to understand the full scope of human reason and its true grandeur.”

Classical Christian education sought harmony between faith and reason and combined art and science; now education appears divided, fragmented and trivialized. The English poet T. S. Eliot says that we must retrace our steps to find “the wisdom that we have lost in knowledge.”

We must return to the wisdom that integrates faith and reason, art and science, in a word the wisdom of the unity of the three transcendentals: the true, the beautiful and the good.

The word wisdom is certainly not popular in our culture or even in the church. Yet Vatican II had encouraged a "return to the sources": a rediscovery of tradition and charism in order to give birth to a culture that appreciates life and wisdom.

Benedict XVI in his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy* says that faith cannot be opposed to reason if it is placed in the second Person of the Trinity, who is the Word, the Logos, in whom “the archetypes of the world’s order are contained.”

The Pope's vision is that of a human existence fundamentally “liturgical.” And not only of the Pope, but of the Fathers, and especially of Saint Augustine in the "City of God" where he affirms that we become like those we adore and society will be ordered around what we adore.

If we worship the "Logos", the Word, the Meaning, the Speech, the Thought, the Design, that is, the second person of the Most Holy Trinity, Jesus of Nazareth, everything is held together: liturgy, mathematics, art, music, science and adoration.

Caldecott continues: “Western civilisation has long since lost its sense that cosmic order has to be rooted in a ‘Logos’. It is not coincidence that it lost its faith in God at the same time. If God is not connected with the universe by some kind of mediation, then he floats off into abstract space and faith

starts to seem meaningless. Scientists, especially, have no use for such a God, and rightly so.”

Cardinal Scola formulated the problem as follows: “The question of meaning which Comte forbade us to ask re-surfaces inexorably, like those little clumps of grass that push through in the spring, even in the most desolate places. There is no point in avoiding the question of the primordial relationship between God and the human person, but we do need to formulate it in realistic terms. This involves the re-thinking of the mutual interrelationship between the world and the human person, so as to recover the lost wisdom of the world. Cosmo-centrism and anthropocentrism can no longer go their separate ways, still less can they be posed as alternatives, if we want to do justice in our thinking to the original relationship between God and the human person.”

The question of meaning or order or harmony, to use a more oriental term, constitutes the human person. As we seek this "lost wisdom of the world," we will continue to return to a rather significant datum. As our eyes reveal every day, the universe is beautiful.

Beauty can reconcile fragmentation.

If this is obvious in the Christian tradition of the West, from Benedict XVI, von Balthasar up to Boethius and Augustine, and the Greek philosophers; we can say that in the Eastern tradition (Buddha), form and void are like the two halves of a broken coin finally united together. The splendour inherent in the beauty of form attracts and at the same time leads to the question of meaning.

Paul VI believed that the purpose of Vatican II was the “consecratio mundi”.

Our openness to the world should result in a consecration of reality, not into further alienation.

Questions:

In a world in which the concept of beauty has become so far from any moral or ethical consideration, degraded and philosophically reduced to objectification and merchandise, how can we find the way back?

If contemporary education and culture tend toward the elimination of meaning except in the sense of meaning that we impose by force upon the world, how are we countercultural?

If the key to meaning are (and always have been) form, beauty, interiority, relationship, radiance, and purpose, how do we educate to the perception of the form, the re-enchantment that opens the eyes to the meaning of beauty of the cosmos and consequently of the human person?

If this is obvious in the western and eastern Christian tradition, from Benedict XVI, von Balthasar up via Boethius and Augustine to Plato and Socrates, we can say that form and emptiness, as Zen tradition says, are like the matching halves of a broken coin joined together at last. The meaning inherent in the beauty of the form attracts and at the same time purifies the eyes of the spirit.

Does the form of our life awaken in people the sense of praise (of beauty), of service (of goodness), of contemplation (of truth) that are essential to express our full humanity?

Does our way of life shows the sacrality of the cosmos in which the sacramental liturgy and our personal liturgy are connected?

2. What overcomes fragmentation?

Young people are still sensitive to charity and truth.

Despite this scenario, the hearts of young people desire fulfilment: that is, a project that fulfils their desire, and fulfils it forever, a true proposal that makes them experience something beautiful, that makes them hope. Something real that gives meaning. They want this from us adults, even if they cannot express it or are not able to trust: they want to meet real, authoritative people.

The Cistercian charism is deeply rooted in the truth, so clearly that Saint Bernard summed up the twelve steps of humility in the four degrees of truth. In Cistercian spirituality, the restoration of divine likeness takes the form of a journey from the misery of self-knowledge to being received back into the hands of Mercy (community and God).

How can we pass on this charism to the new generations who perhaps no longer even know the terms we are using to describe it?

By bringing out the positive, the true, the good, the beautiful that is in the heart of each one.

I would like now to refer to my experience: I can say that what has brought to profound unity my person was the experience of the truth transmitted in all its breadth of goodness (welcome and mercy) and beauty (fullness of life and love) in the community of Vitorchiano.

The confusion and fragmentation, the lack of direction of our lives were welcomed and channeled into a living history of salvation in which we immediately had a mission and a responsibility. From the way the liturgy was prayed, from the way the tradition was transmitted (Rule, customs, Constitutions), from the way the work was done, the fullness of humanity of this community was easy to perceive. Beauty radiated from the community life, from sufferings and joys, from humiliation and failure accepted, and from the sacrifice and service chosen: in short, a life in faith, hope and charity that deeply struck and satisfied the thirst for truth that I had always carried within me since my first crisis of faith.

Mother Cristiana understood monastic renewal not on the level of external changes but in terms of spiritual and profound conversion, and

implemented it through her intuition of the relationship existing between the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II and that of our Cistercian Fathers. Both allowed the understanding of the monastery as a monastic church founded on the unity of charity and friendship. To identify this chain of correspondences through the centuries is already to have identified the horizon of the journey, to have intuited the direction that the Holy Spirit wants to impart to his Church in this stretch of history. To see these correspondences also means to give the key to true knowledge that is not theoretical, but the transmission of wisdom through the encounter of our present life with the eternal form of the charism. This transmission of life makes us links in a chain of holiness in which the fullness of life in Christ shines through in our daily lives.

Sr. Alba, the junior mistress of Vitorchiano, writes: "Link with Tradition is not simply a living memory of a past, it is the object of comparison and a criterion of inspiration for today, it is an invitation to welcome reality as the place of the Incarnation of Christ, it is a response to the provocation that life and relationships always demand. It is involvement with the life of the community, it is cordial belonging to all the members who make it up and above all it is close collaboration with those who specifically share the educational task: the Mistress of Novices, the heads of work departments, the sisters who collaborate in the intellectual formation of the young and give courses. Above all, I would like to underline the positive aspect of this collaboration: it is beautiful and consoling to know that we have people to count on and share responsibility with."

The transmission of life in a united and welcoming community is precisely what contrasts with the educational failure of our time.

3) What is Christian humanism? A living-charism

The Centrality of Christ

The question of the "Form" is not of minor importance because Christian humanism is the vision of the form of Christ.

First of all Christian humanism is a Person: the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, born, dead and risen, the icon of the Father. Especially the

mysteries of resurrection and ascension unfold the full scope of this new man: Christ, the only mediator between God and men, the new man to whom those who want to give fulfilment to their human existence must conform.

The “icon” of the new man is therefore not an image achieved by philosophical research, but is an image revealed from heaven so that we can find the fulfilment we long for.

The Christian does not speak only of “creation in the image and likeness”, even if this is a theme that necessarily runs through Christian theology and spirituality, but he speaks even more of “living in Christ”, who is the true form of man, the true image and likeness.

Like a monstrance whose rays point from inside to outside and vice versa, the person of Christ radiates meaning over the entire economy of salvation, that is, over human history, from creation to fulfilment.

To be conformed, to walk in the "form" of Christ, transforms our way of seeing and thinking. We ourselves and the world become "sacraments" of eternal realities. In Christ we find the sense of ourselves as a "sacrament", that is, as signs of truth and divine goodness.

“Already by virtue of nature, the individual man is an image modeled on Christ (and through him on the triune God), and for this reason (as Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4), he cannot understand or see himself merely in relation to himself; rather, only by looking to Christ can he become who he is, and only in Christ can he interpret and comprehend himself.”¹

Looking to Christ we find our true dignity: if we want to help young people to get out of their systems of defence and lies, we must seek -together with them- their true dignity.

Only in the new Adam do we find, thanks to redemption, our place in creation as children, priests, prophets, kings and spouses. We also find in prayer the greatest act of human self-realization, which is not something that man affirms and practices primarily for himself, but rather in

¹ Introduction to “Light and Images: Elements of Contemplation” by H.U. von Balthasar

obedience to God, who desires and needs human beings as disciples and followers of Christ.

The Father created us with the help of the Son and the Holy Spirit to guide us together with the rest of creation to the Son. Christ is the way to our humanity.

If Christ is the "form" of true humanity, it is this form that we indicate to those who knock on our monasteries, as we point out to an icon.

In this we follow Constitution 45 that says: "Formation to Cistercian life has for its purpose the restoration of the divine likeness in the sisters through the working of the Holy Spirit."

A "form" is not a project, but something that can be seen, that appears. It can only be a proposal that comes from a precise vision of reality that the community lives out.

In concrete terms, how does this "Christological form" appear in the community?

- From the faithful and joyful celebration of the liturgy. And as a consequence, from the way in which the sisters entrust their lives to the will of the Father, from the joy and freedom of their obedience, from their fidelity to superiors, from cordiality with all, from the choice to forgive always, from gratitude for being part of the Body of the Lord.
- From conceiving oneself as a Church, and from the will to live in communion, even if it is not easy, reading the history of the community and of each one as a history of salvation.
- From being open to today's vocations and working so that every person who comes, despite the difficulties she presents, can live and free herself from the need to appear, to power, to revenge and to indifference. Not to give on the fragility of people but give them time so that they can rediscover their identity and believe that the wounds they carry in their hearts can be healed by forgiveness and gratuitous love. It is this perception of a gratuitousness of love that gives substance and unity to oneself.

- From the seriousness of its work, of earning a living and at the same time learning to serve, developing creativity and collaboration so that work does not become an opportunity to assert oneself, but always remains the means to show mutual support, to live in peace and help the poor.
- From the courage (openness) of its fraternal dialogue, seeking together the will of God on the topic proposed. This search requires personal involvement but also patient listening to the opinion of others, and a confrontation with one's own experience so it could lead to a fruitful change. The goal is to arrive at a consensus that each one can then support with her own personal choice.
- From the collaboration of all with the ongoing formation by creating seminars in order to give each one the opportunity to grow in developing one's own thinking and in internalizing the teaching of the Fathers and of the Church.
- From the way it celebrates its feasts and anniversaries.

4. Challenges to Christian Monasticism

I would say that the greatest challenge to human identity resulting from the current sexual confusion is the disappearance from the common vocabulary of the word "Chastity".

A deliberate confusion caused by all kinds of means, often at the expense of children and the weak, which leads to the construction of the gender and the elimination of the relationship with the other as different.

This undermines the conception of man in the image and likeness of God, the Trinity and communion and closes the individual in the dialectic between matter and spirit. Man is no longer a relationship "with and for", but an evolution that, freeing himself from matter, results in a spiritual state devoid of any conditioning.

Transhumanism is the current ideology that more radically questions the metaphysical essence of the human subject and, therefore, it is like the taillight of the Nietzsche/Freudian ideology of the "self-made man" of

which we spoke earlier. It claims to modify, or better, to recreate the human being through the techno-sciences.

The choice of one's gender, abortion, artificial fertilization, surrogate mothers, eugenics, the use of sex dolls, the choice to have one's body preserved by hibernation and drugs are its manifestations.

It is a movement of thought of scientific and technological research that feeds and promotes the practices and means mentioned above and that receives funding of many millions of dollars.

It is the new version of the Promethean myth by which one can achieve happiness with one's own strengths. It envisages the transcendence of almost all human limits, cognitive defectiveness, physical fragility, disease, ageing and even death, acting on the subject's memory (mind-uploading) through indestructible computer supports.

As new as this ideology may seem, it is in fact the last expression of that ancient ideology that we call GNOSIS, its main characteristic being the contempt for the body.

Gnosticism has three fundamental theses that reappear in Transhumanism:

- The human condition is a disease, particularly because of the body. Therefore, in order to save oneself, one must redo the human being.
- There is a salvific knowledge, a doctrine for privileged spirits.
- Thanks to this knowledge man is able to eliminate the limit and create the new and perfect man. The body is totally manipulable because what counts is the spirit.

According to the transhumanistic doctrine, happiness will consist of an unlimited summation of pleasures, obtained through the micro-mechanical or pharmacological stimulation of the brain centers of pleasure. Consequently, the existence of other human beings will become superfluous because happiness will be produced by stimulating the mind.

In this sense it will also be a total overcoming of the gender in auto-erotism and an overcoming of the body that will have to be eliminated. The pleasures that are connected with the body and the brain, through a process of mind uploading, will be disconnected from the body and the brain and the mind-memory will be transferred to informatic supports and

receive from them solicitations capable of producing the maximum pleasure.

These are the means proposed by the transhumanists:

- The choice of one's gender (sexual-gender)
- Abortion and in vitro fertilization (elimination of defective humans)
- A surrogate mother that satisfies the desire for a child without the need to generate it.
- Drugs and pornography and sex dolls to avoid inconvenient relationships with others
- Hibernation of the body in the hope that the techno-sciences will be able to raise it up again in the future.

What's the way out?

We must offer a way out because obviously this way of knowledge does not lead to knowing what is properly human. The absolutization of the technicality that affirms the coincidence of the true with the feasible, with what is technically possible, with the pleasant, with a meaning always produced by us, results in nihilism. In this horizon man is nothing. How can we escape from this imaginary freedom as Cardinal Caffarra calls it, from this "virtual form" that opposes the true "form of Christ"?

By deepening the proposal of the Christian way that reveals the essence of man as communion. This was the tireless teaching of the Pope St. John Paul II who in *Redemptor Hominis* says that Christ the Redeemer is the possibility of the impossible, because in the redemptive act of Christ man is again "expressed". In the redeemed act of Christ, man sees the truth about himself revealed.

Man does not discover himself if he does not discover love, being for another.

The redemptive act of Christ discloses man to himself because it reveals love to him; the way by which man reaches himself is the appropriation of the redemptive act of Christ. This doctrine is rooted in the Magisterium of Vatican II, which teaches that man "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" [Pastoral Constitution 24,3; EV 1/1395]. (Cf. Cardinal Caffarra, Opening address to the International Congress "Verso Cristo" , 2009)

In Christ's redemptive act that reveals to man his value (he gave his life for me), man not only knows the truth of himself (the true Gnosis), but he also realizes his desire for happiness, that is, for the fullness of his being, in love (against purely selfish pleasure). The way of the Incarnation, as the Cistercian Fathers would say, is the way to the fullness of happiness.

Now this way of internalizing the redemptive act of Christ cannot remain something theoretical, but must become our personal experience, inform our reflection and conscience.

It must become a concrete experience of being loved, of being communion and that communion is the true way to interiority, in the sense that my interior life is communion. In this sense, the vow of chastity frees us from selfishness and opens us up to others for an authentic friendship centered on our common destiny to eternal life and to the life of union with God.

The whole form of the common life, centred on the daily Eucharist, if lived with this awareness of living for Christ as a response to his infinite act of love, becomes a visible witness to this love. A communal, familial and fraternal environment that overcomes the culture of death.

As Rod Dreher observed in his book: *The Benedictine Option*: "It takes a village to raise a child." We could then translate this African proverb: "It takes a community to educate to the monastic charism." It takes a real commitment to love as in a family. We are fathers and mothers to one another and this does not imply any "affective sticking each other", but a true selfless love that is always spent for the true good of the other.

It is about offering a love in which no one believes anymore, a pure love that manifests the way in which relationships are lived in heaven, a generous openness to the other never considered as an obstacle, but always as a joy.

I would add that as the Constitution 45 suggests, devotion to Mary is a great sign of a community's desire to live in communion, being she the model for being mothers and sisters in Christ in a virginal way.

Questions:

How does all this become part of my personal identity?

How do I verify this in the life of my community?

5. Ways to initial and ongoing formation

A. Initial formation

A community that shows what it is like to live in communion can help the young (and not so young, given the many vocations of older people who knock on our doors) who enter the monastery to learn how to live together, since many of them were used to living alone, and are consequently immersed in an individualistic and competitive mentality, or because, discouraged by the conflicts experienced in their families, they tend to avoid direct relationships and avoid conflicts.

Moreover, their needs and problems make a narcissistic attitude appear that closes them in on themselves and makes them unable not only to relate to others, but also simply to be aware that "there are" others. Consequences of this bending over themselves are an inability to reflect, a lack of taste in formulating a thought, to cultivate the mind with good readings and interests, an incapacity for sacrifice and a tenacious will since they lack an ideal in which to believe in. Everything must work immediately and be comfortable, otherwise they eliminate it!

For them to meet and love Jesus Christ ever more deeply, adhering to him and to reality with the criteria of faith, continually converting their worldly criteria it is important to have a formation in **discernment**.

For this reason, it is important by posing questions to help them to consider and reflect on their behaviour and reactions:

For example:

- Is the reality I live (these feelings, these reactions, these humiliations...) a sign of something else?
- What does the Lord want to tell me through this particular situation?
- How can I and should I respond to the challenge I am currently facing without letting myself be determined by a superficial appearance?

- Do I want to let myself be transformed and formed? Do I want the other, who is a sign of the OTHER, to enter my life and change it? In other words, do I want to embrace the cross and be converted?
- Am I aware that I am called to live my life according to a vision of faith, as vocation and mission and not according to my whims and sensitivity?
- How do I relate with Mother/Father, with the mistress/master of novices, with the community? Do I choose a filial relationship of trust? Do I belong to this house?

We cannot take these questions for granted, but challenge people to confront themselves with them until they are able to discern by themselves.

If these questions are part of their awareness of themselves, little by little, Christ can become a Presence in what they live because they help to clarify the link between their vocation and their personal relationship with Christ in their concrete life, and to live reality with the eyes of faith.

The most frequent temptation is to escape from suffering and the cross and, lately, from love. Consequently, every little problem can become a pretext for questioning one's vocation, especially when the vocation is perceived as a career and "performance" and not as a gift of self. For this, they need to embrace the truth in their hearts. When they begin to see the ambiguity and inconsistency that dwell in them, they can encounter the mercy that saves them.

For this reason, weekly dialogues, in the novitiate and juniorate, are very important for them to learn how to become true, how to get rid of appearance, how to reflect on one's own experience, the real experience where we learn to discern the will of God. Learning the art of respectful dialogue was the purpose of university education for St. John H. Newman, because it forms the character of the person and spurs him on to virtue and also to exercise a critical spirit.

Dialogue helps to be an active recipient of the formation. It prepares one to participate actively in community life and community dialogues. It also educates people to mutual acceptance of their own and others' limitations and weaknesses.

I think it is also important to emphasize the relationship of openness and trust of people with the mistress/master of the novices and the abbess/

abbot. I would not immediately resort to psychology to help people dealing with their immaturity. Psychology can help to understand the reason for some inability to face life, but it does not give the key to come out of oneself. Only faith can really restore the dignity of a person and the strength to overcome trauma. Psychological diagnosis is different from spiritual discernment.

B. Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation must support the action of the Spirit of God in the community and encourage the internalization of the *conversatio* for personal and community growth so that the various aspects of the Cistercian *conversatio* “such as obedience, humility, asceticism, solitude and silence, lead, each in its own way, to the interior freedom through which purity of heart and an abiding attention to God are attained (Ratio 6).”

It must therefore lead to a faithful practice of Lectio Divina and to an active participation in the Liturgy and in the daily Eucharist that makes us understand and deepen our vocation and the communion with our sisters and brothers.

A common vision of the content of these values should be encouraged by the superior and the pastoral council through various means.

The most important are the already mentioned community dialogue and the celebrations linked to the history of the community.

We can also choose a program to deepen together the knowledge of the Scriptures and of the Cistercian fathers; listen together to the presentation of our sisters and to online courses; study the same book or topic together and share our reflections; form a common judgment to face the challenges of contemporary culture.

Finally, I would like to talk about work as an educational field. To create work departments in which creativity and gifts are lived out as a gift to the community; to learn to collaborate and to carry out a responsibility and to reflect on whether a work helps to foster the monastic *conversatio* or risks being activism; to exercise mutual forgiveness and whether it allows us to live out the vow of poverty or not.

Conclusion

Many other things can be said in this regard and on this subject.

I have only taken care to reaffirm that the whole of the Cistercian spirituality is a response to the problem of man and to contemporary ideologies about man.

We are called to become men and women by becoming monks and nuns following in the footsteps of Saint Benedict as our Founding Fathers did in their time.

The Cistercian Fathers knew that, by defining the monastery a “school of charity,” they were bringing forth the “anagogic” meaning of the monastic life as the pattern of the final and eternal reality in which history is fulfilled, as a practice of the celestial things, as an icon, as it were, of the last fulfilment.

It is therefore in this school that we discover our human dignity as the image and likeness of the Creator and as an icon of the Word, who gives his life for us and reveals to us who we truly are: a kingdom of priests, a communion. We are truly human in Christ and as a communion.

"When I met Christ I discovered myself a man," said the Roman Rector Marius Victorinus.

May we too, persevering in the school of charity, be able to repeat what he said with the same conviction.