Gregorian Foundations

Revised 2021

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Building a Context for the Apostolic Life in the Postulancy of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory

The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory

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Contents

1. First Steps

> …the sheep find the Lord's pastures; for anyone who follows him with an undivided heart is nourished in a pasture which is forever green. What are the pastures of the sheep if they are not the deepest joys of paradise? Dear brothers, let us seek these pastures and there join in the joy and the celebrations of so many citizens of heaven. Let their happiness and rejoicing be an invitation to us. Let us warm our hearts, brothers, let us rekindle our faith, let us kindle our desires for heavenly things; for love like this sets us on the way. — *Gregory the Great, Gospel Homily 14*

Warm hearts, rekindled faith, heavenly desires — these set our feet "on the pilgrim's way" that we call "religious life." While many share these motivations without taking vows, it is impossible to live the vowed life without them. Rules, constitutions, customaries, formation and education programs, the vows themselves, financial commitments, crosses, habits, and prayer books are all road signs on the pilgrimage, but they are not the goal of our quest. Gregory himself warned of the danger of transforming "supplies for the journey into hindrances to arrival at the journey's end." (Pastoral Rule 3.26)

Still, we need supplies, signposts, and stepping stones to make a pilgrimage. Religious life, in all its forms (which we will explore later) has high regard for these outward and visible signs as *means* to a grace-filled end — not ends in themselves. They are the supplies and tools we make use of without allowing them to dominate our lives as ends in themselves. We cannot do without them, but they are not the goal of the journey.

That journey "begins with a single step" and you have just taken that step: You have entered the postulancy of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. The succeeding steps of your postulancy will help you to learn *about* the Gregorian way of life, but more importantly will bring you *into* that life. You will walk through the joys and sorrows, and experience the insights and challenges of embracing this way of life faithfully. As with entry into the church itself, this is not merely a matter of learning the ropes, but of being adopted into a new family. It is not about fitting in

but becoming who God intends you to be in relationship with brothers who share your pilgrimage, and your goal: unity with God.

We embrace community as twofold gift: we receive from it and contribute to it. This dual exchange begins from our first day and continues until our last, for community, like the church of which it is part, is a living body. As our founder Richard Thomas says, "Everyone who comes to us changes us." We welcome you to this interchange and, as we offer you companionship, we give thanks for yours.

This book is an introduction to central aspects of the Gregorian Way, for your study, reflection, and response. What follows are initial stepping stones or signposts on your journey of self- and other-discovery, or as the foundation upon which you will build. Whether you picture travel or architecture, you are not alone in the enterprise. You will journey or build in conjunction with other members of the community; your brothers-by-adoption will be partners with whom, God willing, you will spend the rest of your life.

There will be times when things come naturally, other times when things may seem strange and disorienting. This is to be expected in any truly deep exploration, for the unexpected and the hoped-for often stand side by side. As poet W. H. Auden (*Hymnal 1982* 463) put it:

> He is the Way.
> Follow him through the Land of Unlikeness;
> you will see rare beasts and have unique adventures.
> He is the Truth.
> Seek him in the Kingdom of Anxiety:
> you will come to a great city that has expected your
> return for years.
> He is the Life.
> Love him in the World of the Flesh:
> and at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.

Using this book

Each chapter of this volume draws upon both classical and contemporary writers, in order to show that although the Gregorian Way emerged in the last half of the twentieth century, it is in harmony with the wisdom of Christians through the ages. Still, this handbook is not exhaustive concerning either the Brotherhood or the Christian faith. It is a guide to help you get your footing and make your way, in this time of testing and exploration — which is the root meaning of *postulancy*.

Postulancy is your opportunity to test out the Gregorian Way, for you to try it out, even as members of the community give you additional hints and guidance. You are not alone in this: You will have a professed brother as a mentor, a dedicated guide and companion on your journey. Your mentor is chosen with regard both to your needs and for the mentors' skills, and the prospect of a sympathetic (but challenging) interplay of ideas and feelings. Should you or your mentor encounter difficulties, you will talk about this between yourselves. If the two of you cannot work out any perceived difficulty, contact the Director of Postulants and Novices.

Finding the right balance of sensitivity and honesty is part of community life, and is called for in working out potential stresses in relations between Christians. The Biblical principle of first trying to work out difficulties directly between the parties involved, and then, if necessary, bringing in a third party, is an essential starting point. (Matthew 18:15ff)

Your mentor will be in regular contact with you, in response to your assignments, and as a resource to assist you in your experience of Gregorian life. He is a companion on the journey, a fellow pilgrim who knows which are stepping stones and which are puddles, one who will come to know you well enough to speak for you, as needed, with the pastoral leadership of our community.

During postulancy, you should plan on working on one assignment from this book each month. In preparing your reflections, remember that this in not an academic exercise. The reflection questions usually lack right or wrong answers.

Although postulancy is a time to have some of your questions about the community answered, *Gregorian Foundations* is less an answer book than a way to help you frame your questions. We hope to see you make useful connections, or to spot discontinuities, between the reflection material and your own personal history and journey, your growth in religious life, the ministries in which you are engaged, and the contemporary life of the church. It is *always* appropriate to draw upon Holy Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer in your reflections and responses. While you should address all the reflection questions ask, you are not limited to these topics in your responses. When in doubt, ask!

The length of your response, and whether you communicate via letter or e-mail, is up to you and your mentor. Depth is more important than length, as is honesty and openness. Don't be afraid to share your understanding and feelings about the subject matter — including being open about what you don't understand or find difficult. Your mentor will want to see you demonstrate what each topic does (or does not) have to do with your life as a Christian and a brother, and that is best discovered in conversation, back and forth.

This conversation is not limited to you and your mentor. Talk to others in the community, fellow postulants and novices, pastoral leaders (especially your Minister Provincial), and other members of the community. We enter into community in part in order to have access to such a network of support, experience, understanding, reflection, and challenge.

Finally, we hope that you understand this program, and your work in it, as a process of ongoing growth into Christ. Completing assignments is not about jumping through hoops. It is one stage of the journey in your lifelong relationship with God, and with other Christians, including your brothers in this community. It is one more way for you to engage with the commandment to love God and your neighbor. As Gregory said, "to love like this is to be on the way."

A glimpse of the path ahead

In the postulancy you will explore the relationship between vowed life and Christian life — which includes the life of Christ, of individual Christians, and of the church as the Body of Christ. You will engage with Scripture as source of comfort and challenge. You will explore the concepts of covenant and commitment reflected in the vows, as well as the specific character of the vows as we in the Brotherhood live them out. You will learn about the place the Gregorian Way takes among the many historical forms of commitment summed up in "the religious life." Underlying these engagement and explorations are fundamental themes, which have been at the heart of this way of life for centuries.

In a workshop presented to the Brotherhood in 1997, Dr. R. William Franklin (then on the faculty of the General Theological Seminary, later elected bishop in Western New York) outlined some "Gregorian themes" for religious life, drawn from Gregory's reflections on the Rule of Saint Benedict. While some of these seem dated, on the whole they continue to be relevant as signposts on the path on which you have embarked. To give you a foretaste of the journey, here is the list Dr. Franklin presented.

1. Religious life is rooted in and deeply engaged with reality, with *what is*.

2. Religious dedication is borne in a tradition that has been handed down over centuries.

3. Holiness leads to miracles.

4. There are dangers in the use of spiritual gifts.

5. Community life offers a corrective to the misuse of those gifts.

6. Spiritual gifts serve the church and wider society of which the church is a part.

7. The community's leadership plays a key role in developing holiness.

8. The vowed community reveals and expresses aspects of the

kingdom of God.

9. The community welcomes those not part of it to experience that kingdom.

10. The community provides a balanced and moderate spiritual discipline.

11. Conversion of life allows our human talents to grow.

12. Conversion of life humanizes and civilizes our animal instincts: it domesticates us for God's household.

13. The spiritual leader is followed as one who guides to freedom, which is key to conversion.

14. The community nourishes and values the full variety of spiritual gifts.

15. The community emphasizes the importance of learning the tradition of holiness from other persons.

16. The Scripture is at the heart of community life, not merely heard or read, but inwardly digested and meditated upon.

17. Silence and solitude provide a counterpoint to life in community, and provide space for reflection.

18. Holiness warrants the vowed person's presence and stability in the church and in society.

19. Vowed communities are necessary to the world as schools of holiness.

20. The church has a duty to propagate such communities as the matrix in which the Christian life may be realized by those called to the vowed life.

Not all of these points have the same weight today that they did in the sixth century, but most of them are important to life in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, both your own life in this community, and that of the community as a whole. In the following chapters we will explore many of these foundational principles, the stepping stones for your pilgrimage in faith. This

is a glimpse of what lies ahead. Welcome, pilgrim, and Godspeed on your journey!

Reflection Questions (1)

1. Reread the quote from Saint Gregory in the introduction. What "pasture" are you seeking, and what do you hope to find there?

2. Do you find the metaphors of pilgrimage or architecture helpful? Why or why not? How would you describe what you expect from life in community in the coming years?

3. Which of Franklin's Gregorian Principles speak most powerfully to you in your present situation? Which seem less relevant?

2. God in Christ

> No one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. — *1 Corinthians 3:11*
>
> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. — *Philippians 3:14*
>
> It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. — *Galatians 2:20*

The first of Franklin's Gregorian Themes is, "Religious life is rooted in and deeply engaged with reality, with *what is*." As Christians we believe that Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God, who is, as different theologians have put it, the One Who Is, the Ground of Being, the Actual Entity whose Primordial Nature grasps all possibilities. Whatever they call the ultimate behind all creation, Christians believe that Jesus puts us into contact with that Ultimate. Jesus shows us the love of God — who *is* Love.

Jesus Christ is at the center of the Christian life; he is both the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega, the foundation and the goal. As the quotation from Galatians shows, there is also a powerful sense in which Christ both indwells and enlivens the individual Christian while at the same time the Christian lives in Christ, though faith. This is expressed most clearly in the image of the church as the Body of Christ, which we will explore in the next chapter. To begin with, however, we want to look to Christ as the first foundation stone without which all the rest of the building will fall. As the Psalmist put it, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builder builds in vain." (Psalm 127) This verse captures the "withinness" of God for those who love God: the human builder of the house, by participation in and with God, comes to understand that God is the *real* builder who enables and empowers the human response to God's will.

In Christian tradition, Jesus forms the focal point for this coming together of God and humanity. He both *counsels* a holy way of

life and at the same time serves as the perfect *example* of that holy life. In the tradition of religious life, Jesus was understood in this double aspect of counselling and living out the evangelical counsels: the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. We will explore this aspect of Christ's counsel in later chapters, not only as the Gregorian Way has adapted them, but by examining the traditions of the various communities, all of whom have made their own adaptations.

In this chapter, however, we want to look more closely at how Christ himself, in his own acts and words, serves as the model for Christian living, in particular Christian life in community. In recent years, the slogan "What Would Jesus Do?" has expressed this principle; but religious life embraced the notion long before it appeared on a wristband. One early reflection of this is in the justly famous work of Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, which begins with these words:

> "He who follows me, walks not in darkness," says the Lord. (John 8:12) By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate his life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ.

In later chapters we will consider Christ's chastity (about much more than his marital status), poverty (beyond his lack of a property and possessions), and obedience (which while perfected in the cross is not limited by it). Here we want to think about another aspect of Jesus Christ's life, an important part of our life in him. This is summed up in a verse from Psalm 85: "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

Truth with Mercy

Jesus Christ is the visible "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) who is the source of all creation. Truth and truthfulness — a deep engagement with *what is* — are expressed in every aspect of his life. In his encounters with others, he remains true to himself and who he is, and this truthfulness liberates him from the need to conform to others' expectations. As Christian disciples, seeking to follow him, we are challenged to engage with this reality: the truth of God's sovereignty, and honest awareness of our own simultaneous blessedness and limitations. As Luther put it, "We are simultaneously justified and sinners." Being truthful with ourselves about ourselves — both the good and the bad — can liberate us for life in community.

Truth, in this sense, is not simply a static collection of facts, but an emerging reality, a growing grasp of God's revelation of Who God Is, and growing awareness of "who we are" to ourselves and to those with whom we share a common life. In John's Gospel, Jesus confronts some who have begun to believe in him with the challenge to remain in the Way of his word, and he promises that by doing so they will participate in the truth that will make them free. Their response is to deny their need for freedom, which they believe they already have as children of Abraham. (John 8:31ff) They do not see the truth as a living Way, but as an objective possession, an inheritance. But truth is not something you inherit: it must be realized each moment, and this process can be challenging, as it proceeds step by step. Put another way, the more one understands — oneself, and others — the more new questions will arise as we are led step by step *into* the Truth that is beyond our complete grasp.

Truth, in the sense of personal integrity and authenticity, is liberating and challenging. But it can be difficult, particularly in a community setting, always to be truthful. The goal is for the members of a healthy community to learn to "speak the truth in love" with each other, and find in that openness the kind of authenticity that characterized Jesus.

Jesus' counsel about removing the beam from one's own eye before helping your brother with the speck in his is vital to experiencing truth in community. We need to grow in self-

knowledge, awareness of our own faults and limitations, before pretending to mend another's ways. So the "flip side" of truthfulness is mercy, and here too Jesus sets the pattern for us. As the incident of the woman caught in the act of adultery teaches us, though Jesus is the only one without sin, even he does not condemn. Throughout the gospel accounts, Jesus perceives and names the reality before him, sometimes with a stern warning, but always without condemnation. He discerns without judging, and commends us to do the same.

An incident from John's Gospel is characteristic of Jesus' open truthfulness and mercy: his meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well. (John 4) He "sees right through her" and as she reports to the townsfolk, he "tells her everything she ever did" and yet he does so without a hint of condemnation. This is the spirit of Truth combined with Mercy that the Christian pilgrim in religious life is called upon to emulate, both in his own life, and for the life of the community.

Righteousness and Peace

> The Voice of Christ: My child, I must be your supreme and last end, if you truly desire to be blessed. With this intention, your affections, too often perversely inclined to self and to creatures, will be purified. For if you seek yourself in anything, you immediately fail inwardly and become dry of heart. Refer all things principally to me, therefore, for it is I who have given them all. Consider each thing as flowing from me as the highest good; then all things will return to me, as to their highest source. — *Thomas a Kempis, Imitation III.9*

The righteousness of God does not consist solely in God's doing, but in God's being; so the righteousness towards which the Christian disciple strives is not simply "doing what is right" but having a right attitude. Just as God's love is the source of the creation and redemption of the world, the disciple will cultivate a right and loving attitude as the ground out of which right and loving actions will proceed. The Summary of the Law shows us this process at work: it is out of love for God and neighbor that the works of love are born.

At the same time, it is good for us to remember that, unlike Christ — whose righteousness stems completely from his own being, his own divine nature — our righteousness is derivative: Christ is the only-begotten Son of God, while we are adopted into him.

The disciple will always want to guard against the temptations either to self-righteousness or perfectionism; to remember that it is in and through Christ that we find righteousness and peace. Communities can be divided when self-righteousness or perfectionism become ends or goals in themselves, divorced from the overarching rule of Christ above and in all. In such a situation, what Bonhoeffer called the "spirit of the Pharisee" displaces the loving spirit of Christ. Instead of a loving band of brothers who work together for the good of all, each one seeks his own betterment, defined primarily by the criterion of "I'm better than *him*."

Rather than creating such comparisons and divisions, the Christian community seeks unity *in* Christ, and righteousness in *him*, who "is our peace, breaking down the dividing wall" that would otherwise separate the "in crowd" from those outsider. (Eph 2:14) It is in this way that truth and mercy, righteousness and peace, not only coexist but build upon each other. "Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Eph 4:15-16)

The passage from Thomas a Kempis opening this section reflects an old rabbinic tradition: that the chief work of the righteous is to restore the world (*tikkun olam*). But as the citation from Ephesians shows us, the works of truth and righteousness do not take place in a vacuum, but in the body of the Christian community. This sense of the *mission* of truth and mercy, righteousness and peace, which is the mission of the church, is also summarized in the Catechism: "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." (BCP, 855) It is to consideration of the church, that "wonderful and sacred mystery," that we will turn in our next chapter.

Reflection Questions (2)

1. Choose an incident from the Gospel where you feel Christ presents a model for your own behavior. What are some ways or situations in which you can act as he did?

2. Have you ever been in a situation in which you experienced the tension between truthfulness and mercy? How did you address that tension; through action or inaction? What about the tension between selfishness and communion, the “way of the Pharisee” and the “way of Christ”?

3. Jesus described himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In what ways have you encountered him, in terms of Journey, Authenticity, and Vitality?

3. The Church

> As the main body of the sea being one, yet within divers precincts hath divers names; so the Catholic Church is in like sort divided into a number of distinct Societies, every of which is termed a Church within itself. In this sense the Church is always a visible society of men; not an assembly, but a Society.... Men are assembled for performance of public actions; which actions being ended, the assembly dissolveth itself and is no longer in being, whereas the Church which was assembled doth no less continue afterwards than before. — *Hooker, Laws III.I.14*

> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. — *1 Corinthians 12:27*

Who are you? This is among the first questions many catechisms of the past asked. It is one we often ask ourselves in the course of our lives, in particular in times of discernment. As Socrates once observed, "The unexamined life is not worth living" — not a casual observation, but one he affirmed as he stood on trial for his life.

Who are you? Philosophers have wrestled with this question before and since Socrates stood before his judges. So I ask it in all seriousness. Who are you? We've all said, "I'm not what I was ten years ago." And that is literally true: the matter that makes up your body is constantly changing as you eat and breathe. So there is far more to *you* than the matter that makes up your body at any given moment. So who, or what, *are* you? It seems that what you "are" is the moment by moment interrelationship of many particles and waves, a kind of energized matter, unified by some sense of self that endures over time, emerging from an actual past and pointed towards a potential future, out of which, moment by moment, in each instant a present reality comes into existence. In short, *you* are a process, as much a *doing* as a *being*.

Moreover, the relationship you bear with your surroundings doesn't have a hard edge. As Donne put it, "No man is an island." At a subatomic level level there is a constant interchange

between “you” and your surroundings, and both your influence and what influences you extends far beyond the limits of your skin. We are all, as Donne would say, “promontories” extended beyond the apparent limits of our bodily selves. As you read these words, chemicals are being released in your brain, ideas are forming; whether it is six months, a year, or decades after these words were written, they are changing you *now*. You will never be the same again — that possibility has perished as a many new ones (based on the new you) emerge. Everything we do or experience has a similar effect upon the world around us. As Teilhard de Chardin put it,

> My own body is not *these* cells or *those* cells that belong *exclusively* to me: it is what, in these cells and in the rest of the world feels my influence and reacts against me. My matter is not a *part* of the universe that I possess *in total,* it is the *totality* of the Universe possessed by me *in part*.” (*Science and Christ* 13)

And if this is true of each of us as individuals, how much more so of that Body we call the church? As Hooker noted, the church is not just an assembly, although that is the root of the word *ecclesiastical*. It may be that since the apostles believed themselves to be living in the last days, thought the church was being assembled for a one-time rapture that would take place in their lifetimes. But experience that life, and the church, continued, the church came to a better understanding of itself as a *society* that endures even with the change in its membership over time — as do all living things.

The church, as Saint Paul pointed out, is the body of which we are individually members. As he also affirmed, we have gifts that differ, much as the cells and organs of a living body differ. But just as your own body — which changes over time — is in some not fully understood way the vehicle for your own sense of self, so too the church — whose members are admitted through baptism, nourished by the eucharist, exercise the work of ministry, and then depart to join the church triumphant — is unified and inbreathed by the Spirit of God, given its sense of identity and unity not simply through the external disciplines of creeds and customs, but by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This may be the only way we can reconcile the simultaneous affirmation of the Oneness of the church, with the acknowledged evidence of the division of that very church into many parts, some of which refuse to recognize each other as parts either of the one Body of Christ, or of each other.

This is where Anglicanism has some distinct advantages over other traditions. Anglicans do not claim to be the "only" church, while yet claiming to *be* the church. As the XIX Article of Religion put it, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." This represents a kind of Anglican minimalism, over against the maximal claims of the Roman tradition, and on the other hand Reformers' claims that limited membership in the church only to the elect. As theologian Owen Thomas notes,

> The church of which the NT authors speak and which is affirmed in the creeds is a visible community, a society of specific human beings, and not an invisible group of the elect known only to God... This conclusion derives from the fact that Israel was always understood as a visible community. The same applies to the church, even as Jesus was a particular human being. Thus a doctrine of the true church as invisible is analogous to docetism in Christology [i.e., the doctrine the Jesus Christ only *appeared* to be human]. [Leslie] Newbigin concludes, "This actual visible community, a company of men and women with ascertainable names and addresses, is the Church of God." (Household of God, 21)... This means that derogatory references to the "institutional church" in contrast to some other church are misleading... This does not mean that the church does not have an inner, invisible, spiritual life, but that it cannot have this in a vacuum without or apart from an outward institutional life, even as a Christian cannot have an inner spiritual life apart from an outward bodily life. (Thomas 238f)

The breadth of this Anglican understanding is difficult to sustain. At times in Anglican history, trends towards a more limited understanding of the "true" church have emerged, sometimes even dominating the headlines. Some Anglicans appear at times

to be haunted by a sense that their "institutional church" is less "real" than some of those with more rigidly defined boundaries, or grander claims to universality. As Dom Gregory Dix wrote to an anxious friend in the middle of the last century,

> If you are only clinging to Anglicanism for the sake of the lovely and gracious things in its past, you are likely to be disillusioned before long. We are in for a difficult and muddling time. Unless you can believe in the Church of England for the sake of what it *is* in itself and for the sake of its place in God's intention for his Church, I don't think you can possibly ever be either very happy or very secure as an Anglican in the next few years... Unless we are "Catholics" inasmusch as and *because* we are "Anglicans," then we are not being "Catholics." Unless you believe that an Anglican is *as such* a fully living "member" of the "Body of Christ" — unless you believe that, not only emotionally but rationally, for intelligent and intelligible reasons, I don't think a man of your intelligence and awareness will be able to "live to God" *as* an Anglican for very long. (Dix 9)

As a postulant, you are now in the process of seeking an even deeper engagement with the institutional church than you have had in the past. You will use your intellect, and trust your feelings, in this process. But it is important to be clear at this point that your vows to the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, should this be the path your pilgrimage takes, will bind you to the institutional structures of a very real and visible church, an institution with a historic and present reality, with faults and failings, but also with virtues and strengths to accomplish great things. This is how the church works, how the Spirit of God enlivens and empowers the Body of Christ to do the work of God in the world. Just as a trellis supports a climbing rose, in the process of which the rose does not become a trellis, but a better rose: so we grow up into Christ through the church of which we are members, and to which we vow our obedience and support and devotion, to the glory of God alone.

Reflection Questions (3)

1. In what ways have you changed over the years, while remaining "you"? Where do you see yourself five years from now? What will have changed?

2. What, if anything, upsets or bothers you about the institutional church (Episcopal Church or other church in communion with it) of which you are a part? How do you reconcile this tension?

3. What most excites your imagination or offers you hope in your present life in the church?

4. Gregorians and the Sacred Scriptures

> I feel there are especially necessary for me in this life two things without which its miseries would be unbearable. Confined here in this prison of the body I confess I need these two, food and light. Therefore, You have given me in my weakness Your sacred Flesh to refresh my soul and body, and You have set Your word as the guiding light for my feet. Without them I could not live aright, for the word of God is the light of my soul and Your Sacrament is the Bread of Life. (Thomas a Kempis, Imitation IV.11)

Christians are a "people of the Book" who find echoes of their own communal and individual stories in the context of the stories of God's relationship with the Hebrew people, of the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus of Nazareth, of the initial spread of the Gospel, and the development of the primitive church. Because the Bible records how God has reached out to peoples and individuals, and of human responses to God's love, we are able to identify themes that reflect our own personal response to God, as Christians, as members of a community, and as members of the church who gave those scriptures their form.

For example, the early monastics sought guidance from the Bible, especially from the psalms and the gospels. They found justification for their disciplined ascetic lives in gospel passages that seemed to point to the rigorous demands of following Jesus into the desert. Saints Pachomius and Basil, in their rules, made wide use of Scripture to answer questions about the ordering of common life and spirituality, as did Saint Benedict and others who wrote rules of life for common observance. In the Middle Ages, Saint Francis of Assisi actually began his rule with the words, "The rule and life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." These venerable ancestors in the faith attest to the centrality of Scripture in forming their Ways of life.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann calls the process of forming a relationship with Scripture "historical imagination." In this process the present reader "owns" the rich images from the saving story — they are not simply records of past events (history) but come alive with new relevance in the imagination of the individual and the community of which one forms a part. Brueggemann shows that this process was at work within the historical world attested in Scripture: the historical events recorded in Exodus (the deliverance at the Red Sea, the miraculous feeding in the wilderness) were recalled again and again by the people of Israel, and by the church of the New Testament, through historical imagination. In this way, the saving story is not simply told, but appropriated by the individual in the context of the community.

This is how the Scripture *lives*. Events from saving history are not merely appreciated as as facts (or indeed, legends), but appropriated for the saving message they bear in the present. The past events and images serve as templates for present experience and reflection. Thus the story of Exodus nourished the Jews of the Babylonian captivity; the early Christians "owned" the crossing of the Red Sea and participation in the Passover as windows into Baptism and Eucharist; and in later centuries this same story gave comfort to the slaves of the American plantations, and the Jews who suffered the horrors of the Holocaust. The Scripture resonates with the imaginative values with which each generation, culture, and individual imbue it.

More than can be asked or imagined

There is more, however, to our reading of Scripture than the fruits of this imaginative exercise. The Scripture not only draws us into its story, but works upon us in making salvation present to us. We become new chapters in the story, moving from reading about salvation to being saved.

As Anglicans, we understand the Scriptures to contain "all things necessary to salvation." In other words, this is what the Scripture is *for:* salvation; and Scripture contains *all* that is necessary in that task. But at the same time, Anglicans hold that Scripture contains a good deal else as well; at the Reformation Anglicans

joined with the humanist scholars of the Renaissance in noting that the Bible is not a single composition, but a collection of texts from various times and places, with various purposes and intents. The position between these two extremes is summarized by Richard Hooker:

> Two opinions therefore there are concerning sufficiency of Holy Scripture, each extremely opposite unto the other, and both repugnant unto truth. The schools of Rome teach Scripture to be so unsufficient, as if, except traditions were added, it did not contain all revealed and supernatural truth, which absolutely is necessary for the children of men in this life to know that they may in the next be saved. Others justly condemning this opinion grow likewise unto a dangerous extremity, as if Scripture did not only contain all things in that kind necessary, but all things simply, and in such sort that to do any thing according to any other law were not only unnecessary but even opposite unto salvation, unlawful and sinful… It is no more disgrace for Scripture to have left a number of things free to be ordered at the discretion of the Church, than for nature to have left it unto the wit of man to devise his own attire. (Hooker, Laws II.8; III.4.1)

This meant that Reason — the "wit of man" — was essential to the task of engaging the Scripture. As Hooker would affirm, "Unto the word of God… we do not add reason as a supplement of any maim or defect therein, but as a necessary instrument, without which we could not reap by the Scripture's perfection that fruit and benefit which it yieldeth." (Laws III.8.10)

Note that Hooker uses that telling phrase, "the word of God" to describe the Scriptures. In doing so, he is not claiming the text to be identical to Jesus Christ, but that it is *through* the "written Word of God" that we may be shown all that is necessary to come into relationship with the "living Word of God," Jesus Christ, God's saving self-revelation to humanity. As the VII Article of Religion puts it,

> …for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man.

Now, of course, there is more to the Scripture than simply the testimony it offers to lead us to salvation. The rich treasury of Scripture contains many other instructive and reflective truths to ponder beyond those elements essential to salvation.

Drawing on the Treasury

Since the time of the Reformation, Anglican worship has offered many opportunities to hear the Scriptures read aloud, to pray and sing them in psalms, and to pray them, as Scriptural images and themes are woven into the collects and prayers. The Church of England placed great emphasis on the Daily Office and a structured lectionary with lessons from both Testaments. For many years, even among those who could not attend the daily services in the local church, college, or cathedral, the lectionary of the Prayer Book provided a schedule for daily reading and devotion in the home. The liturgical *use* of the Scriptures is an important expression of the Anglican *doctrine* of the Scriptures, as expressed in our catechism:

> We understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit, who guides *the Church* in the true interpretation of the Scriptures. (BCP 853f)

Authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures is the work of the Christian community, drawing on the insights of the individual members, tempered and tested by how those insights are received and shared in the community of faith. This is the context in which the holy writings were first written, later assembled into what we now call "the Bible," and this is how — through communal study — they best yield up their wisdom and guidance.

> The inspiration of Scripture is not to be understood as a once-for-all accomplished event. When Scripture is read in the church, the Holy Spirit uses it ever anew to proclaim the living word of salvation. This proclamation requires the response of faith, and that too is the work of the Holy Spirit…The work of the Holy Spirit is not confined to the original writing which produced the authoritative witness. That witness has constantly to be rekindled in the community of the faithful, particularly in the context of the liturgy. The word of God is not a

> static, dead document: it constantly recurs as event, and has to be apprehended through the Spirit. (Fuller 81f)

In this, we differ substantially from those Christians who assign an independent inerrant role to the Bible, or an inerrant Spirit-inspired authority in interpretation to each individual. As Anglicans, we understand the Holy Spirit to be the inspirer of the authors and editors, the readers, and the community of faith that is the context of God's interaction with humanity. This is not to say that God does not speak to individuals through their reading and reflection on the Scriptures. Each of us, as we "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the Scriptures, experiences a personal encounter with the living Word through the written Word. But we are never alone in this: we are also given access to an encounter with those who have gone before us in faith. Our personal encounter should always be tested and grounded in the context of our corporate encounter: Does it accord with the creeds of the church? Does it build up our fellow Christians in love and faith, or does it isolate us from them? What do tradition and reason have to say in relationship to our understanding of Scripture?

The Anglican understanding of the Scriptures sets the pattern for understanding them in relation to the vowed life. Rather than searching the Scriptures for isolated proof texts or exact blueprints, we seek to be steeped in them, formed in our faith and spirituality by the overarching themes that may be found there. By God's grace, this happens in a number of ways: as we encounter the Scriptures in the Daily Office and the Holy Eucharist, as we fulfill the precept of our Rule that we *set aside two hours or more in each week for the study of Holy Scripture or other material on the spiritual life,* as we share with other Christians in Bible study, and as we hear each other preach and share reflections during our times of retreat or Convocation. It is to this pattern of engagement with Scripture that this formation program calls you. It will not give you a list of what Scripture has to say to us as Gregorians, but it will set out themes upon which you will reflect both on your own and in concert with other members of the community.

Our Gregorian Rule gives special honor to the study of Scripture;

remember to give the Scriptures first place in your study and reflection. When you can, make use of commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, interlinear translations, and multiple English versions, in order to draw as close as you are able to the original sense of the text. But above all, read prayerfully, openly, and expectantly, trusting that "God is speaking to his people…and his words are words of wisdom."

Receive the Scriptures as a constant companion. With the psalmist, may you come to feel that God's *word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path* and his *decrees are my inheritance for ever; truly they are the joy of my heart.*

Reflection Questions (4)

1. What biblical story or image most nourishes your historical imagination.

2. What does it mean to you to live a gospel life? Can you give an example of this from your own experience?

3. Can you share a time when something "clicked" for you as you prayed the psalms or read or heard the lessons in the Daily Office or at the Holy Eucharist? Did you take any action or make any changes in your life because of this experience?

4. As you pray and worship with the Book of Common Prayer, be aware of phrases that are biblical in origin or inspiration. Can you think of any examples? Did their use seem appropriate to the context of the prayer and the original passage?

5. *Soli Deo Gloria*

> Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your Name give glory;
> because of your love and because of your faithfulness. —
> *Psalm 115*

As you continue on this journey, you have likely noticed that the stepping stones you've followed are those common to every follower of Christ. This present stepping-stone, however, marks a border into a territory with specifically Gregorian scenery. The sign at the crossroads bears a Latin motto, *Soli Deo Gloria*; it points in the direction we are to take together: for this signpost marks the direction taken by a subset of all of those Christians, the first steps on what is truly "The Gregorian Way." The three words of this Latin motto are carved on the front of the profession cross which — you, the community, and God willing — will one day hang by a chain around your neck, a physical reminder of our common commitment to this way of life.

The motto, translated into English as "To God Alone the Glory," is not a quote from Scripture, though the sentiment runs through it, from the First Commandment through the visions of Revelation. This motto reminds of the purpose of our common vowed life, a still small voice that says to *each* of us, "It isn't about you," while reminding *all* of us of the one to whom glory is due.

Soli Deo Gloria has been the motto of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory since its foundation in 1969, but it is not original to our community. At its foundation, the Brotherhood was intended as an ecumenical community for the spiritual nurture of church musicians. It is no secret that church musicians are often treated more like convenient appliances than worshiping members of the church, and Brother Richard Thomas' goal was to found a community in support of the devoted work of these faithful servants. Saint Gregory himself was chosen as patron due to his traditional connection with the church music that still bears his name, Gregorian chant. When it came to choosing a motto, Brother Richard Thomas adopted the motto of the American Guild of Organists, of which he was a member. The motto was not original with the AGO, of course; it was the personal motto of

organist and composer Johann Sebastian Bach, who gave thanks to God, ascribing his talent and skill to the one from whom it came, by inscribing this phrase on each of his compositions. However glorious his music, the glory was due to God alone.

The melody lingers on… in a new key

> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" (Luke 2:13-14)

Most people think of this Nativity passage in a musical context, and in Scripture glorifying God is often connected with music and song. A number of Gregorians reflect the founding ethos of the community, and are active in music ministries, as singers, instrumentalists, composers, and choral directors. Giving glory to God through music remains an important part of Gregorian life, especially when we gather together in Convocation.

However, within the first decade following the foundation of the Brotherhood, it became clear that the founder's purpose was not to be the whole story, or even the major theme. Three of the four original members — all church musicians — moved on to pursue other interests. New members came to the community who gave glory to God through means other than music, and the Gregorian Way adjusted its course in harmony with the *second* half of the angelic anthem, *on earth peace among those he favors*. The brothers came to understand devotion to God not only in giving praise through music, but through devotion to God in *every* aspect of living, working, and worshiping, calling all people to serve God through the daily consecration of whatever their employment (musical or not). Thus *Soli Deo Gloria* came to point towards the deeper purposes of God for the Gregorian Way within the Episcopal Church — not just for church musicians, but for every member of the body in all its gifts. In this, the Brotherhood seeks to embody one of the key principles of religious life, as Dr. Franklin put it: "Vowed communities are necessary to the world as schools of holiness." For the first learning of holiness is the attribution of all glory to God alone, as the Gloria says, "for only you are holy, you only are the Lord."

Created glory

> Ascribe to the LORD, you gods,
> ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his Name;
> worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. (Psalm 29)

Harking back to some ideas raised in an earlier chapter, God calls us to direct all of our *being* and all of our *doing* towards God. Psalm 19 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork." The heavens and the whole creation declare the glory of God simply by *existing*, by nature; simply by *being* they point beyond themselves to the One who caused them to *be*. Human beings in their natural state, in common with creation, also show this glory of God simply and without thought. As Richard Hooker noted,

> By that which we work naturally, as when we breathe, sleep, move, we set forth the glory of God as natural agents do, albeit we have no express purpose to make that our end, nor any advised determination therein to follow a law, but do that we do (for the most part) not as much as thinking thereon. In reasonable and moral actions another law taketh place; a law by the observation whereof we glorify God in such sort, as no creature else under man is able to do; because other creatures have not judgment to examine the quality of that which is done by them, and therefore in that they do they neither can accuse nor approve themselves. (Hooker, Laws I.16.5)

Humanity alone gives *voluntary* glory to God — through the exercise of the will. However, humans are also free to seek to co-opt this glory for themselves, distracted from God in fascination with and in service of their own needs, desires, and wants. Human beings seek the credit for what is due to God alone. Scripture portrays the choice to exalt oneself, or accept the adulation of others without giving proper honor and glory to God, nowhere so clearly as in Acts 12:20-23. In an effort to placate their overlord Herod Agrippa, the people of Tyre and Sidon employ flattery, and Herod soaks it all in — to his loss.

> The people kept shouting, "The voice of a god, and not

> of a mortal!" And immediately, because he had not given the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

This perilous choice to accept what belongs to God — from the start, to "become like gods" — is the recurrent failing that originated in Eden, and leads to exile and death. The call of life in God, in particular in religious life, the call you are now exploring, is the human quest back to God, to hear the voice and message of God through the Scriptures and the community of the faithful, the call to refocus upon God's glory, God's provident ordering of creation, and our place in that creation.

Human beings thus can (and all too prone to) turn from God, but also, through the mystery of God's grace and mercy, are capable of return to God through repentance and redemption. This is made possible in the mystery of the Incarnation, when the one to whom all glory is due stripped himself of that glory, emptying himself in reaching out to us. We had filled our stomachs with prideful food that could not satisfy, and earned our exile, ashamed even of our nakedness. Nowhere is this God's grace and mercy more clear than in the gospels, which call us to the Way of Jesus, who *entered not into glory before he was crucified*. Unlike our forebears in Eden, Jesus sought no shortcuts to glory.

Jesus, by abdicating his own glory for a time, by seeking the glory of his heavenly Father, restored the glory that humanity had reflected back to God before the disaster in the garden, but lost when it turned the mirror of the will away from the source of light. All that Jesus taught, all that he did, was for us — even while we were cloaked in the darkness which resulted from turning from the divine glory to admire ourselves.

> For it is the same God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)

> It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. (Heb 2:10-11a)

The great paradox is that in seeking the glory of God instead of trying to maximize our own, we become heirs of the true glory we could ever gain for ourselves. By faith, we come to share in the glory that the Father bestowed upon Jesus in response to his obedience. It is no accident that *Soli Deo Gloria* is inscribed upon the Brotherhood's *cross*. Gregory the Great ruminated on the marvelous paradoxes inherent in the Good News, that by giving glory to God we ultimately find our own true glory, and the unexpected good of the world.

> *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will* (Luke ii. 14); because a grain of wheat, falling into the earth, has died, that it might not reign in heaven alone; even He by whose death we live, by whose weakness we are made strong, by whose suffering we are rescued from suffering, through whose love we seek in Britain for brethren whom we knew not, by whose gift we find those whom without knowing them we sought. But who can describe what great joy sprung up here in the hearts of all the faithful, for that the nation of the Angli through the operation of the grace of Almighty God and the labour of thy Fraternity has cast away the darkness of error, and been suffused with the light of holy faith. (Gregory, Ep. 28 to Augustine of the Angli)

Naturally, this reflects a deeply Scriptural notion developed by Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, and later incorporated into the rule of the Franciscan Third Order.

> To those who by patiently doing good work for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who do not obey the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. (Romans 2:7-8)

In that love which is in God (1 Jn 4:16) all the brothers and sisters, whether they are engaged in prayer, or in announcing the word of God, or in serving, or in doing manual labor should strive to be humble in everything. They should not seek glory, or be self-satisfied, or interiorly proud because of a good work or word God does or speaks in or through them. Rather in every place and circumstance let them acknowledge that all good belongs to the most high Lord and Ruler of all things. Let them

always give thanks to him from whom we receive all good. (TOR IX.31)

We glorify God when our lives point beyond themselves to the Author of life. Our mirrors shine only when directed towards his light. As our Rule puts it:

> A brother must endeavor to witness to our Redeemer's love with quietness, patience, humility, charity, courage and prayer, knowing that it is not he who shall finally bring the light, but only that he shall become a messenger for the One who is the light.

This is not a question of false humility. Rather, it is living out of the reality of God's healing, redeeming, loving presence within us, in constant communion with the source of our light and life, the One *in whom we live and move and have our being*. This communion is no abstract concept, but a vibrant relationship between our human reality and God's indwelling presence.

> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6:19-20)

> *The five foolish [virgins] took no oil with them, but the wise ones took oil in their flasks with their lamps.* The brightness of glory is signified by the oil, and the small containers are our hearts, in which we carry all that we think. The wise virgins have oil in their flasks, because they keep the brightness of glory within their consciences. So Paul testified when he said, *Our glory is this, the witness of our conscience* (2 Cor 1:12). But the five foolish virgins took no oil with them, because when they seek glory from the mouths of their neighbors they do not have it within their consciences. We must note that they all have lamps, but not all have oil. (Gregory, Homily 10)

We are called to be transparently grace-full, icons of the love of God at work in human persons. In so doing, we shall carry in our hearts a greater glory than could otherwise be comprehended. Always and everywhere, therefore,

let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

In Jesus of Nazareth
one person shows
how completely we can belong to God;
how much freedom and humanity,
how much courage and self-forgetfulness
one can possess
when one has been found by God
and has surrendered to Him.
In Jesus there is also a future for you
as you go by His road through sin and death
towards fellowship and love,
unfailing glory and life. (van der Looy 19)

Reflection Questions (5)

1. Reflect on the three following quotes. Do they seem consistent with the Scriptures?
"The glory of God is the human person fully alive." (Irenaeus of Lyons)
"The glory of all things is that wherein their highest perfection doth consist." (Hooker, Laws V.42)
"No man can do anything for God's glory but what will tend also to his own." (Simon Beveridge)

2. How does what you have said relate to our motto, *Soli Deo Gloria?*

3. Have you ever taken up a task or ministry in which your work was by necessity anonymous — so that all credit for success was attributed to someone else? How did that feel? Or have you ever reached a point in a task or ministry when you felt you were no longer able to do your best work, and willingly passed the work along to someone else?

4. In connection with that last thought, how do you pass on a ministry to another? How do you prepare for this transition — and how do you resist the desire (in yourself and as urged by

others) to continue in a ministry, or to continue to influence it even after having let go?

6. *Servus Servorum Dei*

> After Jesus had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." — John 13:12-17

As our journey takes us round the next turn, we face another signpost, another Latin tag: *Servus servorum Dei* — Servant of the servants of God. Unlike *Soli Deo Gloria*, Johann Sebastian Bach's sign-off credit to God, this motto comes from Saint Gregory himself. When the Archbishop of Constantinople adopted the title Ecumenical Patriarch, Gregory, who considered that to be presumptuous, responded in an act of "onedowns-manship" by adding to the long list of titles held by the Bishop of Rome. This list already included the lofty terms Supreme Pontiff and Vicar of Christ, so to counteract such exaltation, Gregory emphasized his identity with the foot-washing Christ of John's Gospel, with the motto, "Servant of the servants of God."

Service, of course, is not uniquely Gregorian, nor even uniquely Christian. The idea of service to others is a universal ethical principle grounded in the movement from self-interest (the life force that drives the preservation both of self and species) to the human characteristics of love and self-giving for the sake of others. Such service is a gift, and involves the capacity and freedom to serve the good of others at the expense of oneself. Given the model that Christ presents — the Servant *par excellence,* who gives not only his service but him*self* — the concept takes a place of honor for Christians.

Within this church we speak of *liturgy* — the root of which means "service on behalf of the people," or "public works" — and some speak of a liturgy as "a service." The Greek and Latin roots behind the words *deacon* and *minister* both hark back to titles of domestic servants — the deacon who "goes through the dust" as a

footman, and the minister who attends to *the little things* while the master attends to the greater; and both words were used for the waiters and stewards who attended the table of their lord. It might also be helpful to think of ourselves as *custodians*: those charged with a particular ministry of care. We will return to this later in the journey as we explore the content of the vows as forms of care-taking.

Whom do you serve?

For now, though, we the Rule's focus on the ministry of service to the church. The catechism says that the *ministers* of the are "lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons." (BCP 855) You will notice who comes first. While every Christian is called to share in the service and ministry of Christ, Gregorians take up the theme of service in many ways, from full-time ministry to volunteer service, conscious of our service to and with the *other* "Servants of God" within the community of faith, the household of God. We are bound, in the spirit of obedience, to serve the church and its members within the Anglican Communion, seeking to build it up, strengthen its witness, and grow with it in faithfulness.

All people serve something or someone, directing their efforts towards a goal, even if only vaguely defined. It may be themselves, it may be a loved one, and it may be a noble or ignoble cause. Joshua addressed the people of Israel, after subduing the land of Canaan, asking them to *choose this day whom you will serve,* assuring them of his own household's choice to *serve the Lord.* In our baptism we face the same basic question about whom we will serve. In the Baptismal Covenant, we reject the service of the forces of wickedness and rebellion, and promise to *seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.* In this we make a covenant transition from self-interest to other-interest, from autonomy to altruism, from living *no longer for ourselves alone* but for the sake of others. In this we become more fully human even as we turn towards, and seek more perfectly to reflect and embody, the divine image, which takes its human form in the capacity for self-giving love perfectly embodied in Jesus Christ.

When we don Christ's towel of service, ready to wash each others' feet in obedience to his command, we make a free response to

God, who in Christ has sought and served us. Service of God and service of neighbor are inseparable from faith in Jesus Christ. What is this service and to whom is it directed?

> Gathered at the Passover feast, the disciples were keenly aware that someone needed to wash the others' feet. The problem was that the only people who washed feet were the least. So there they sat, feet caked with dirt…then Jesus took a towel and a basin and redefined greatness. (Foster 126)

> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. (John 13:3-5)

How could Jesus do something so low and dirty? The beginning of the gospel passage gives us the explanation: Jesus *knew* who he was in relationship to God. This *knowledge* is key to how one can serve others in a Christian context, in a culture or society in which service is often seen as oppression and degradation. This cultural notion of the proper pecking order is demonstrated in Peter's reaction, as the passage continues.

> Simon Peter… said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." (John 13:6-8)

Peter is shocked that Jesus would stoop so low, and tries to insist that Jesus get back to what Peter regards as his proper level. But Jesus makes it clear that Peter must let go of his ideas of what is beneath Jesus (and by implication, beneath himself). So it is with us. If we cannot accept what it means to Jesus to be Teacher and Lord and yet stoop to the task of service, we can have no share in his ministry — his service.

Jesus never denies that he has authority among the gathered disciples. Even as he affirms his authority, however, he is calling the disciples to a new understanding of what authority is.

> Jesus declares, *You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you.* He totally and completely rejected the pecking- order systems of his day. How then was it to be among them? *Whoever would be great among you must be your servant…even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve* (Mt. 20:25,28). Therefore the spiritual authority of Jesus is an authority not found in a position or a title, but in a towel. (Foster 126)

This is a hard concept for those who live in a culture where authority consists of telling others what to do, of being served by them, of a life evaluated by the number of subservient workers one supervises. Our culture valued power over others, and so we find it difficult to embrace notions of subordination, humility, service, and labor. However, as the Rule reminds us, "All labor is equal in glory, honor and importance and the work of a brother should bear these qualities." One's attitude towards work lies at the heart of one's ability to serve. Much even of Christian culture tends to see work as the result of Adam's fall — the sweat of one's brow being the daily reminder of primeval failure. At the same time, a different attitude runs through Christian history, an ascetical impulse that sees work as good, especially work done for others, while lifting up concepts of human freedom and liberty: the freedom to choose the work one is to do, and to make use of the gifts and talents one has received.

The key difference, then, between slavery and service lies in choosing out of love, rather than submitting to domination by an external power. It is the gift of the self "once offered" that is truly free, most especially when our work and ministry is directed towards the one "whose service is perfect freedom."

> O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom: Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in your

> defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries;
> through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. (BCP 99)

There is no hint of oppression or coercion in this, and the choice remains ours to make moment to moment, and day by day. It is our trust that God will be with us and defend us that enables us to surrender our frantic efforts to justify and defend ourselves, thereby opening ourselves to live under the constraint of love's demands.

What does God demand?

> Jesus answered, "The first [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Luke 22:27)

In Baptism, we have promised to follow and obey Jesus as our Lord, and this means modeling our service on the kind of service he embraced himself, and presented as an example to his followers, including us. *Who is greater, the one who is at table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one at table? But I am among you as one who serves*. We are challenged to accept a definition of service, a definition of greatness, that runs counter to the world around us. The way is as clear as it is difficult. As William Law wrote in his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, echoing Saint Gregory's motto, "Be a servant of servants, and condescend to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind."

Often we want our service to be rather more grand, less mundane. But we are called to begin small, to learn the right spirit of humility that will blossom when we are faced with the big sacrifice, the heroic ministry. All of us can serve, according to the grace God gives us. Nobody in the community, regardless of education, social position, financial standing, or anything else, is giftless. Nor should anyone feel intimidated because others may seem to have more. As Saint Gregory advised,

> No one should say, "I am unable to give counsel, I am not qualified to encourage anyone." Do as much as you

> can, lest you be tormented for having badly kept what you received. He who was given only one talent was more eager to hide it than to distribute it (Mt. 25:18). We know that in God's tabernacle not only bowls, but ladles too, were made at the Lord's bidding (Ex. 37:16). The bowls signify a more than sufficient teaching, the ladles a small and limited knowledge. A person full of true teaching fills the minds of his hearers and in this way provides a bowl by what he says; another cannot expound what he perceives, but because he proclaims it as best he can he truly offers a ladleful to taste. You who are in God's tabernacle, in his holy Church, if you cannot fill bowls with the wisdom of your teaching, give to your neighbors ladles filled with a good word, as much as you have from the divine bounty. Draw others as far as you consider you have advanced; desire to have comrades on your way toward God. (Homily 5 on Matthew 11:2-10)

Saint Gregory's motto emphasizes service to fellow servants in the Christian fellowship. We have a particularly close relationship and responsibility to fellow believers, growing out of our common faith, our new birth in the waters of Baptism, and our sharing in the Eucharist. Scripture calls us to give this relationship priority.

> Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother. (Mark 3:31-35)

> So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. (Gal 6:10)

However, the family of faith exists not only for its own good and pleasure, but in order to nurture and strengthen its members to reach out in love to those outside its present circle. As Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple put it, "The Church is the

only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members." By serving those who are not yet part of the family, we extend that family in the ministry of reconciliation. By living *no longer for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us,* we cooperate in the work of *the Holy Spirit, his own first gift to those who believe, to complete his work in the world, and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.* What we have, we have for others, as we are often reminded in the Noonday Office: *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*

This ministry of reconciliation, given us by Christ, summons us to service wherever there is brokenness or division in need of healing, as Jesus taught when he was challenged by the lawyer, *And who is my neighbor?* Anyone in need is our neighbor; anyone who reaches out to us is our neighbor. Such ministry may or may not involve speaking the words of faith. It may involve doing acts of love that silently affirm the faith that inspires them. Each opportunity for service offers an opportunity, in prayer, to seek whatever role, words, or actions the will of God empowers. If we dwell faithfully in God's word, we can be confident that end results will rest there too.

> For as rain and snow fall from the heavens
> and return not again, but tare the earth,
> Bringing forth life and giving growth,
> seed for sowing and bread for eating,
> So is my word that goes forth from my mouth;
> it will not return to me empty;
> But it will accomplish that which I have purposed,
> and prosper in that for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)

In light of the demanding ethic of service set out in this chapter, it is probably important to sound a cautionary note. There is much need in our world, in our church. No one of us can possibly provide for all the needs we face. This is why it is important to seek guidance of God in prayer and in consultation with fellow pilgrims, especially those in positions of pastoral leadership among us. A parish priest once said, "Not every need is a ministry." Faithful servants serve when, where, and how the

Master pleases. To take on too much may set us on a fast road to burnout, if we lose sight of our limitations and our dependence, as servants, upon a divine Master.

> A brother must endeavor to witness to our Redeemer's love… knowing that it is not he who shall finally bring the light, but only that he shall become a messenger for the One who is the light. (The Rule)

Remember too, that you will receive, as well as to give. The time for prayer, worship, and study as a Gregorian is no less important to those you serve than the time you spend engaged in direct works of service. Follow in the way of our Lord and Savior, who withdrew to quiet places to renew himself and remain focused on the will of the Father. Your prayer and study feed not only you, or those you serve, but also your fellow Gregorians. As the Rule says, *The strength of the Brotherhood is dependent on the prayer life of each Brother*.

Lastly, do not refuse those who seek to serve and assist you. You do them a gracious service by allowing them to minister to Christ in you. We are called to be open and vulnerable, to risk being loved and served, no less than to love and serve others. As Archbishop Temple wrote in his commentary on John's Gospel,

> Those who are doing their share of the world's work should have no hesitation in receiving what the love or generosity or pity of others may offer. The desire "not to be beholden to anybody" is completely unchristian… But it is the service of God which we must above all be ready to accept… Our first thought must never be, "What can I do for God?" The answer to that is, Nothing. The first thought must always be, "What would God do for me?"

Reflection Questions (6)

1. What do you see as characteristics of Christian service? of Christian servants? Where do you find these characteristics in your own life and ministry?

2. Describe someone you know who seems to exemplify the characteristics you have identified.

3. Can the need to be seen as a valued servant — the “need to serve” or the “need to be needed” — become an end in itself? What safeguards would you see in your own life and ministry to avoid such a situation?

4. In what ways do you see yourself as of service to the community and the church? What gift of yourself do you feel most comfortable in giving?

5. In what ways does the church serve you?

7. Stewards of Creation

Poverty as Responsible Custody of the World

> Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. — *1 Corinthians 4:1-2*

Our last chapter concerned servanthood, the work of servant, caretaker, or custodian. In this and the next two chapters we will look at how we live out the vows as custodians responsible for all that God has committed to our care.

Let's start with a return to the old, old story that tells us how God committed creation into human care. Both creation accounts in Genesis show God charging humanity with this responsibility of service:

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." Genesis 1:26

> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it (*l'avdah* = to work, from the same root as *eved* = servant or slave) and keep it. Genesis 2:15

The first chapter's emphasis on dominion and the second's on service, taken together, describe a balanced kind of responsible custody. Human dominion is not arbitrary or self-serving, and human work, while physical, is a source of joy (until the curse that comes later renders the soil unproductive — there is considerable difference between tending a rich garden and toiling in an unproductive field.)

The fact is that we live in a relationship with the physical world around us. In an earlier chapter we considered Teilhard de Chardin's observation that our *being* doesn't end at the surface of our skins — that we are not that part of the world we totally control, but the whole of creation we influence in part. This

human influence over creation can be for good or ill: from wise stewardship to the reckless destruction; and we and those who will come after us live with the results in either case. Stewardship is a ministry to be taken seriously, for the consequences of poor stewardship are not only personal but global. What we do extends far beyond the limits of our skins!

Stewardship, as responsible custody of all that is in our care, is at the heart of the Gregorian understanding of the vow of poverty. We affirm that the Creator is sovereign over creation; that everything comes from God and is owed to God.

> The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
> the world and all who dwell therein.
> For it is he who founded it upon the seas
> and made it firm upon the rivers of the deep. (Psalm 24)

This created world is given into the care of humanity because of its unique relationship to God as created in God's image. In this context, poverty is not renunciation of God's good world, but an affirmation of our call to be stewards, caretakers, and custodians of all that God has made, as it comes under our care.

Two aspects of this *servant dominion* are essential to understanding of our role as stewards. First, our dominion is derived from God's, and is rightly exercised in obedience to God. Second, God's dominion over creation is for the good of creation, and for our good as part of that creation; hence, the essence of our stewardship is the use and care of creation for the wellbeing of that creation, rather than its exploitation.

Getting a handle on the world

Because human influence extends beyond the limit of our skin to the edges of creation, we are challenged to remain aware of the law of unintended consequences, that a small act in one place might have a large effect in another. At the same time, we cannot conceive of all remote possibilities or we would never act. Clearly we are called to get some kind of handle on our lives, to take responsibility and deal with life within the limits of our skill. A primary purpose of the vows is to allow us to focus our intent and action on the part of the world around us, under our immediate

care and custody. Our degree of responsibility is proportional to our influence. For example, I am more responsible for the amount of electricity I use than I am for the disposition of the wasteful byproducts that supply my current; but limiting the former will have *some* influence on the latter, even on that global scale.

The portion of the world's resources under our direct control usually comes in the form of our personal possessions and income. Gregorians keep responsible custody of what we possess by means of the vow of poverty.

> A brother makes the vow of poverty by dedicating a major portion of the fruit of his labor to the Church and to the Brotherhood.

Relinquishing control over a portion of our income, giving it away to the service of the church and the collective work of the community, helps us sanctify and become more conscious of what remains under our disposition.

This may seem counterintuitive at first, gaining custody by letting go, but it lies at the heart of the Christian mystery: whoever loses his life will save it. This paradox begins with the creation of humanity, and God's gift of the freedom to choose: in creating humanity in the divine image, God relinquished control over a portion of the universe, the portion endowed with freedom. Human beings find their true likeness to God not only in the capacity to control, but in the capacity to relinquish control. This voluntary limitation lies at the heart of the vows, and we will see how it applies to the other vows in subsequent chapters. In relation to poverty, this principle recognizes that all we have, including our lives, are in our care and keeping, but do not truly *belong* to us in any permanent sense.

> We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. (Romans 14:7-8)

We belong to God, and yet God gives us the freedom to act in with or against God's will; the vows, beginning with poverty,

remind us of our relationship with God by the free choice to relinquish control over some *personal* portion or aspect of our resources in returning it to the *communal* use of God's church.

Our understanding of poverty as a commitment to dedicating a major portion of the fruit of our labor to the church and the community grows out of our call to live the vowed life *fully in the secular world* as "people who have a worldly profession without having a worldly heart." (Gregory the Great, Homily 36)

Throughout the religious tradition of which our faith forms a part, the concept of the *tithe* as the dedicated proportion of one's resources has formed a relatively constant element. It epitomizes the notion that by dedicating a *part* we consecrate the *whole,* and that by giving up control over a portion, we have consecrated the rest for use according to our needs.

Gregorians embrace poverty in three ways, which draw upon some of the tithing requirements of the Old Covenant: the tithe of holiness, the tithe of community, and the tithe of charity.

> All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord…And all the tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the Lord. (Leviticus 27:30-32)
>
> You shall tithe all the yield of your seed, which comes forth from the field year by year. And before the Lord your God, in the place which he will choose, … you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herd and flock… And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to bring the tithe… then you shall turn it into money… and go to the place which the Lord your god chooses, and spend the money for whatever you desire, oxen, or sheep, or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves; and you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household. (Deuteronomy 14:22-26)
>
> At the end of every three years you shall bring forth all the tithe of your produce in the same year… and the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow,

> who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

The Brotherhood joins the Episcopal Church in affirming the biblical tithe (ten percent) as the *minimum standard of Christian giving*. We put this into action in three ways, reflecting the three aspects of the biblical tithe:

1. In the spirit of the *tithe of holiness*, at least five percent of a brother's adjusted gross income is dedicated to support the church through the parish, diocese, or province.

2. In the spirit of the *tithe of community*, at least five percent of a brother's adjusted gross income is dedicated to the Brotherhood, to support the corporate work and meet community expenses. This allows us to gather locally and at Convocation for worship, fellowship, and ministry development. The norm is to contribute to the community on a monthly basis, reflecting the dedication of the "first fruits" of their labor as they are "harvested." Some brothers contribute from each regular source of income as they receive it; a few who have irregular income sources (freelancers, farmers, artists, and so on) contribute as income comes under their control.

3. In the spirit of the *tithe of charity*, at least one-half of one percent of a professed brother's adjusted gross income is dedicated to providing for each other in time of need. This is done through the Brotherhood Benevolent Trust, a fund established to offer support to brothers experiencing financial difficulties. It is the consistent witness of scripture that the age-old question, Am I my brother's keeper? must be answered in the affirmative. (For those who itemize income taxes, note that contributions to this Trust are not tax-deductible.)

The tithe is a form of *proportional giving;* it is not a fixed amount, like a "pledge"; rather it is that proportion of your income that you dedicate as an offering beyond your own control. An increase or decrease in income will be reflected in

what you give to the church and the community, but the *proportion* ought to remain the same.

The Brotherhood joins the church in considering the tithe to be "the minimum standard of Christian giving" — with the implication that contributing more is welcome, from those able to do so. You may already have embraced or exceeded this minimum standard.

We also recognize that many members of the church have not yet embraced this minimum as part of their own Christian discipline. If you fall into this category, this will be a growing edge for you, as it forms part of the vow as we understand it. You are now engaged in *postulancy* — a time of "trying things out" — and there is no better way to develop habits of stewardship than by practicing them. You are expected to have reached the goal of five percent by the time you enter the novitiate, at which point you will move from "trying on" to "wearing" — though not yet "owning" — the Gregorian outfit. Tithing by the time you enter novitiate is an important indication of your growing understanding of the nature of the vow of poverty: giving up control over a certain portion of your income, in dedicating it to purposes beyond your own needs, desires, and control.

This aspect of postulancy is intended to help you get a feel for the tensions and responsibilities the vow of poverty entails. It is important to learn early on the humility and self-knowledge that allows you to articulate any difficulty you may have in this process. A major part of the postulancy is determining if you are capable of living the vows that you may one day make, and the more fully you can embrace the requirements of the vows — without actually being under the moral requirement the vows entail — the more natural your transition will be into the novitiate and the vowed life. Of course, if you already tithe, this is an opportunity to stretch your stewardship muscles further!

Practicalities

We all recognize that the transition to the tithe can be challenging if one is not already tithing, and more stressful for some than for others. If that is your situation, some reorganization of your finances will be needed to provide the budgetary space necessary to begin to support the Brotherhood at the minimum five percent, while also supporting your parish at the same level — or more.

Each postulant comes to the Brotherhood with an array of personal responsibilities, and this always includes the financial aspects of the Christian life. Some will quickly recognize that what is expected of them at the end of the year of postulancy varies a great deal from how they lived at the beginning of this new journey. An active life of prayer means dedicating a significant portion of time from one's daily routines, and increasing one's ministry with one's parish may also require adjusting preferences, and how you manage time — which will also include Brotherhood events.

One of the blessings of the year of postulancy is that it provides time to take whatever steps you need in order to adjust your budget to allow for this new discipline. Whatever individual steps you need to take will be taken during this time of postulancy. For most working toward a given goal, it is much easier if the steps are spread out in a logical way over time — in this case, a year. You could approach this by breaking down the goal into monthly or quarterly increments, gradually increasing the amount provided to both the parish and the Brotherhood over time; some postulants have done this with great success.

A final comment here: "How should one pay his tithe?" Each brother is free to fulfill his commitment to both parish and community as seems best for him; some find it easier to keep up with their commitment to the parish on a weekly basis, utilizing each of those Pledge Envelopes they receive at the beginning of each year, while others choose to pay their tithe in the same way they receive their income — perhaps twice monthly or once a month. Either choice is fine with the Brotherhood, as well. Some contribute their tithe at the beginning of each month, even if they haven't yet received their full income by that time. Your goal

should be to set a realistic schedule for yourself, and the monthly basis seems to meet most people's needs, aware that going to a longer time-frame can be less manageable, transformed from joyful giving of first fruits to having to rush to catch up with this commitment; and that is not a good place to find oneself. Remember that giving ten percent leaves ninety percent in your control, to use for other needs, responsibilities, and enjoyments. One function of the tithe it to help one maintain attention to real priorities while meeting the requirements of a well-balanced life — financially as well as spiritually. In the end, we strive to make sure that our finances present an accurate picture of the things we value in life.

Beyond control

As noted, a crucial principle of stewardship is the dedication of a portion of what *is* under one's control. Often due to circumstances *beyond* one's control — responsibilities to family or household, or unforeseen medical expenses — one is simply unable to maintain the level of giving required by this understanding of poverty. The principle to bear in mind is the distinction between *obligatory* expenses that are beyond your control, and *discretionary* expenses that are within your capacity to choose to do without. If you are aware of such difficulties, speak with your mentor or the Director of Postulants and Novices, and to your Minister Provincial, rather than waiting for them to come to you and ask what is wrong. In this way, you will grow in the kind of mutual responsibility that should mark all of Gregorian life. The financial contribution to the community — as with all of the call to religious life — is based on engagement with reality. And in the case of a financial hardship due to illness or other responsibility, dispensation can be made, in conversation with your Minister Provincial, who works with the brother to find a way to adjust expectations and realities, and who has the authority to dispense requirements when the situation warrants. Remember, the point is that you can only be responsible for what is under your control: and if an illness or family situation requires more of your resources, you will have less to draw upon. Of course, as a postulant, you have no need of a dispensation since you are not yet under the vow — but your Minister Provincial, mentor, and Director of Postulants and Novices

should be made aware of the situation to avoid any possible misunderstanding of your situation.

One reason we look at these limiting factors lies in our understanding that we want to engage with their reality, rather than simply ignoring them. Income, in our society, is so much seen as a sign of personal worth or value that people often forget that the goal of the religious vow is to remind us that we are *worth more than many sparrows* and that *life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions*. (Luke 12:15) The humility to acknowledge limitation and lack is an important part of the vow of poverty. It is not the goal of the community to contribute to financial hardship for its members, but to help us understand times of limitation and need as part of the flow of life.

Proportion in all things

> The Kingdom of God has no assessment put on it, but it is worth everything you have. To Zacchaeus it was worth half his goods, because he kept the other half to restore fourfold what he had taken unjustly (Lk 19:8); to Peter and Andrew it was worth giving up the source of their livelihood: the nets and boat they gave up; to the widow it was worth two small coins, which was all she had to give, but also all she had to live on (Mk 12:42); to another person it was worth a cup of cold water (Mt 10:42). The kingdom of God is *worth* everything you have: it is that pearl of great price for which you will trade all of your possessions. In the sight of God no hand is ever empty of a gift if the ark of the heart is filled with good will. (Gregory the Great, Homily 2)

One's giving is acceptable according to what one has — not according to what one does not have, and what is given away is proportional to the whole of what is under one's disposition. This reminds us of our participation in that Body of which we are members, the church, which like the universe we "influence in part." In that light, Christian stewardship of our goods cannot be divorced from the larger responsibilities to do justice and love mercy:

> Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? … Will you strive for justice and

> peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? (BCP 305)
>
> He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)
>
> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? (James 2:15-16)

It is clear that the words of John the Baptist troubled his hearers' hearts: *And the crowds asked him, What then shall we do?* Those who asked for advice had been struck with terror. He answered them, *He who has two tunics should share with one who has none, and he who has food should do likewise.* It is written, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Lv 19:18, Mt 22:39). A person who does not divide with his needy neighbor what is necessary to him proves that he loves him less than himself. (Gregory the Great, Homily 6)

We do well to remember that our stewardship is based on gratitude for the self-giving of God. We give because we are conscious of having received. We rejoice in our possessions by dedicating from them to the service of others, not hoarding them in bigger barns, but putting them to use in a spirit of generosity, a thanksgiving for and with abundance. Above all, we come through this to know where our true treasure, and consequently our hearts, abide.

> For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich… (2 Cor 8:9)
>
> Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. (James 1:17f)

In living into the vow of poverty we are living into a central aspect of Christ's life, from his Incarnation onward: himself once offered for the good of all, the One for the many — the Divine Proportion that sanctifies the whole.

Reflection Questions (7)

1. Make an inventory of some of the good gifts you have received from God. Then make an inventory of the things you believe you need, but do not have. Compare them. Share your reflections on them. (Share the actual lists if you wish.)

2. What kind of steward are you of yourself? of your time? of your relationships?

3. What are some of the challenges of the vow of poverty as it is understood and practiced in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory? What concerns, issues, or perhaps even fears do you experience with regard to this commitment? What are your hopes?

4. Where do you stand at this point, about half-way on this stage of your pilgrimage in postulancy, on your understanding of poverty in light of this chapter?

8. Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Chastity as Loving Custody of the Heart

> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
> — *Matthew 5:8-9*

The last chapter ended with the reminder that where your treasure is, there your heart will be. But what of the heart itself, and its dispositions? What of this aspect of our human being, that innermost personal *self*. Surely human hearts become attached to things besides possessions; don't they sometimes seek to lay claim even to other persons *as* possessions? This desire to possess or control others was given a name by St. Augustine — the *libido dominandi,* the desire to control.

The Rule of the Brotherhood confronts that desire directly; it defines chastity in this way:

> Chastity is the decision to live with all in love, with respect for each person's integrity. It is not a denial of one's sexuality and capacity for love, but a dedication of the whole self to God: free from indecency or offensiveness and restrained from all excess, in order to be free to love others without trying to possess or control.

The freedom to love is coupled with freedom from the need to control the beloved: one can not be free by holding others captive; one can only truly *be* loved by one who offers that love as a gift and not in response to a demand. This is why the focus of our vow is upon respect and dedication as opposed to possession and control. This is a vision of the kingdom of God in which the pure of heart share in a fellowship of mutual service and love; where there is no lording it one over another, but rather the true freedom and liberty of the children of God. This is why the pure in heart are blessed, and why they see God: for they have learned to recognize God — who is Love — in and through each other.

To be pure in heart and see God, and to be a peacemaker and be called a child of God, are worthy goals; so what does it mean to

have a pure and peacemaking heart? Recognizing that the *heart* is a metaphor for our *self* it is prudent to recall that this figurative heart — like our physical heart — is subject to disease, both acute and chronic. Scripture reminds us that what we do or say reflects the condition of our hearts.

> All deeds are right in the sight of the doer,
> but the Lord weighs the heart.
> To do righteousness and justice
> is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.
> Haughty eyes and a proud heart —
> the lamp of the wicked — are sin. (Proverbs 21:2-4)

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. (Matthew 12:34-35)

Because the heart is the treasure-house not only of what is good and true and peaceable, but of what is evil and false and possessive, it is important to welcome God into the heart, exposing all that is there to the scrutiny of the One who *tests the heart* (Proverbs 17:3). This requires faith that God will help us face all that is less than pure and peaceable within ourselves. God will work through our own conscience, and through the guidance of a loving community, to help us search our hearts. When we have acknowledged the heart-tugs that pull us towards control and possession, away from peace and charity, from fidelity towards unfaithfulness, we can set aside the need for domination and accept the free love of our brothers in community as equals called to a love beyond ourselves. This spiritual open-heart surgery can be painful, but it is essential to growth in the spiritual life.

> Not that I have already…reached the goal…I press on toward the goal for the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. (Philippians 3:12a,14-16)

When we dedicate our hearts to God, calming the urge to possess and control with the word of "Peace" that stills the storms of

desire, then all we do and say can flow out of a deep and abiding communion with God, whom we will find present with us, comfortable enough in our sometimes stormy hearts even to sleep. (Luke 8:23-25) We will at those times feel the need to call upon him:

> Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; knit my heart to you that I may fear your Name. (Psalm 86:11)

The double edge of love

> It is written that *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Mk 12:30-31). We should note that a measure is given for the love of our neighbor when we are told, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself;* but no measure binds the love of God: *You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*. We are not given a measure of love, but told how we are to love: *with all* we are. That person truly loves God who retains nothing of himself for himself. (Gregory the Great, Homily 38)

When we invite God into our hearts, so that Truth dwells and Love reigns there, we may experience something of the cleansing of the Temple — as God purifies our hearts from selfishness (manifest as the desire to control others to our own ends) and embrace God's will towards the double-love of God and neighbor.

> Blest are the pure in heart
> For they shall see our God;
> The secret of the Lord is theirs,
> Their soul is Christ's abode…
>
> Lord we thy presence seek;
> May ours this blessing be;
> Give us a pure and lowly heart
> A temple fit for thee. (John Keble, Hymn 656, Hymnal 1982)

The purity of chastity — as understood in the Gregorian Rule — is neither ritual nor legal as in the Law of Moses or in later Christian codes and canons. It is about the freedom of being a child of God, at peace with one's neighbors, receiving and giving love not as exacting payment for a debt, but as a free gift. This understanding of chastity reflects the love God showed for us, a love we return as an offering to God, and our neighbors, just as — and because — Christ offered himself for us. (Ephesians 5:2, 1 John 4:10-11) Most importantly, we cannot claim to love God if we do not love our neighbors. (1 John 4:20) As Saint Gregory so wisely observed:

> Neither neglect contemplation of God in favor of your neighbor, nor cling to contemplation of God by rejecting love for your neighbor. Everyone living among others must long for the One he desires without deserting the one he runs with; he must help his companion without losing interest in the One toward whom he is hurrying. We should be aware that the love of our neighbor is divided into two commandments, since a certain wise man says, *See that you do not do to another anything you hate having done to you* (Tobit 4:16), and Truth himself preaches, *What you wish that people would do to you, do you also the same to them* (Mt 7:12). If we impart to others what we properly want to have accorded us, and if we avoid doing to others what we do not wish to have done to us, we shall be keeping the rights of love unharmed. (Gregory the Great, Homily 38)

This is the purity which allows us to *see God* in the faces of those we encounter. It is when we *love our neighbors as ourselves* and *love the Lord with all our heart and mind and soul and strength* that we truly pay respect to the divine image in humanity. This is the purity that enables us to understand how freedom from the Law leads to the free and obedient servanthood in Christ, *whose service is perfect freedom*.

Since chastity in the Gregorian Rule does not require celibacy, your most intimate *neighbor* may be a spouse or partner. In these cases, your new life in the Brotherhood will, God willing, be integrated into your old life, and will transform it, and enrich it.

If, on the contrary, your life in the community appears to be a source of conflict or tension — we are called to peace, remember — this is something you should feel free to talk about with your mentor and other spiritual guides in the community.

This is also true for those who are committed to a single life, or those who are in the process of seeking a stable relationship. The community is here for you to help guide you in the whole of Christian life, which sanctifies all aspects of the *self*: heart and mind, body and soul.

The ministry of reconciliation

> To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. (Titus 1:12,16)

> Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Peter 1:22,23)

Choosing to live in relationship with others in a pure and loving way enables us to take our place in the ministry of reconciliation committed to us by Christ, summoning others to share in the *peace of God, which surpasses all understanding*. In this sense, we are true peacemakers only as we are truly pure of heart, possessed of that undivided heart that is at peace in itself, free from the desire to possess or control.

Perhaps the greatest test of purity lies in how we treat those at enmity with us, those the *libido dominandi* is most likely to seek to control, those with whom we must be reconciled if we are to be at peace. The greatest challenge of love is to love when love is not returned, or when it is met with hatred or rejection.

> If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same…But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in

> return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:32,33,35,36)
>
> If we begin to hate our enemy, our loss is of something internal. When then we suffer something external from a neighbor, we must be on our guard against a hidden ravager within. This one is never better overcome than when we love the one who ravages us from without. The unique, the highest proof of love is this, to love the person who is against us. This is why Truth himself bore the suffering of the cross and yet bestowed his love on his persecutors, saying, *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34). (Gregory the Great, Homily 27)

Only a pure and humble heart, a heart that does not demand love in return (one of the ways of possession or control), can provide grounding secure enough for such forgiveness, such peace-making, such reconciliation.

We continually pray for the grace and courage to be peace-makers, persons who are free enough from fear and hate to take the first step towards peace where there has been enmity, setting aside our pride and hurt feelings, our desires to possess or control others towards the outcomes we expect or desire, out of love for the God to whom we pray: *when our disobedience took us far from you, did not abandon us to the power of death,* but *came to our help, so that in seeking you we might find you.* (BCP 373)

Facing reconciliation, particular with those who may continue to despise us in spite of our efforts to be reconciled, is a challenge.

> We fear being despised by our neighbors; we are too proud to bear verbal abuse; and if a quarrel arises with a neighbor we are ashamed to be the first to give in. An unspiritual heart rejects humility while seeking glory. Often a person who is angry with an opponent wants to be reconciled to him, but is ashamed to be the first to go and give in. Let us reflect on what Truth did.... If we are the members of so great a Head, we should imitate the one to whom we are joined. What example does Paul,

> the great preacher, give us for our instruction? *We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God* (2 Co 5:20). You know that we created dissension between ourselves and God by sinning. Yet God first sent ambassadors to us, so that we, the ones who sinned, have been invited to come to his peace. Let human pride be ashamed; let one who has not been the first to give in to his neighbor be confounded, when even God, whom we offended, entreats us through his ambassadors to be reconciled to him. (Gregory the Great, Homily 32)

In this is chastity: the purity and peaceableness of heart that *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* and above all *never ends.* (1 Corinthians 13:7,8)

All shall be revealed

> For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light. — Luke 8:17

We mentioned the role of the community in discernment and in supporting loving relationships. This is an area which our culture tends to wall off under a veil of *privacy*. For the Christian, especially those called to the disciplines of religious life, the notion of a *private life* separate from the authentic and integrated life to which one is called by Christ, has no place. One of the key aspects of religious life is bringing one's whole self to light — not keeping bits and pieces of it hidden, as if we did not entirely belong to God, who pierces the inmost part of our heart and mind. The pure heart must be entirely open to the One who is invited into it.

> Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

The community plays a major role in this, as a resource for discernment and direction. Our vows are not made in private, but in a public profession, among the one's brothers and in the presence of visitors. We are not a secret society of individuals

each in pursuit of his own betterment and advantage, but a Christian community dedicated to a common life of service.

So, when a brother experiences difficulties in his relationship with a spouse or partner, or in the tensions and temptations of living alone, or in the ups and downs of seeking a relationship, the community is a resource to draw upon for support, guidance, and sometimes even correction. The heart is, after all, self-serving: *The heart is devious above all else* (Jeremiah 17:9). It is very easy in matters of the heart to be blind to one's own share of responsibility for the difficulty in a relationship, or in any of the ways in which the heart can be misled to seek to possess or control.

Because such "heart problems" can remain hidden, they can also fester and lead to serious spiritual difficulties in other aspects of life. So open-heartedness is a way towards healing, as difficult as it might be to focus the will towards God when the "devices and desires" of the heart are pulling us in another direction.

> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:21-25)

And where do we find Jesus Christ our Lord? Chiefly in the community of faith, the body of Christ on earth, reflected for us in the church, and in the church within the Brotherhood. We are here as neighbors and brothers to help each other. For when we enter the community, we enter a whole new kind of neighborhood.

Reflection Questions (8)

1. Are there areas of your heart that you have held back from God? If so, why do you think this is the case? (Try to be frank about this; on this topic that touches the heart it matters that you spend time honestly reflecting upon this and seeking God's loving help.)

2. This chapter links purity with peacemaking, and love with freedom. How do you feel about these connections?

3. Where do you find the pressure points towards control or possession in your own life and relationships?

4. How do you experience the love of God and love of neighbor working in harmony? in tension?

9. Your Will Be Done

Obedience as Humble Custody of the Will

> In the roll of the book it is written concerning me:
> "I love to do your will, O my God; your law is deep in my heart." *Psalm 40*

Jesus both *counsels* a holy way of life and at the same time *serves* as the perfect *example* of that holy life." It is in his *obedience* to the will of God that we find the perfect model of self-dedication: *Father, … not my will but yours be done.* (Luke 22:42)

Perhaps no saying of Jesus is more difficult to embrace than this. He had an absolute clarity in understanding the Father's will; but how do we presume or expect to know God's will? Or if our will is conformed to God's or not? These are the profound questions which you will explore for the rest of your Christian pilgrimage — most especially as your journey continues as part of a community under a vow *to obey*.

In such a community, subordination of the will through conversion of life is one of its hallmarks, as Dr. Franklin cited: "Conversion of life humanizes and civilizes our animal instincts: it domesticates us for God's household." Distinguishing between our drives (which we share with the animals), our desires, and our wills, is no easy task; and we cannot make these distinctions on our own. Although the ability freely to make choices is an intrinsic part of what it means to be human, we become most truly human by subordinating our free will do God's will. For religious brothers and sisters, that will is discerned and expressed through the community. This is the process of *obedience,* in which our free will is freely and humbly entrusted to the custody of a loving and caring community.

Obedience has three parts: to hear the word of God, to assent to its call, and to act in response to that call. These three activities require three corresponding virtues: discernment, humility, and fortitude, and all three find their realization in community.

Hearing

> Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days.... Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ... The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:1-10)

The root of the word *obedience* is *audire* — to hear. No one can follow a command that has not been heard, and so it is with *hearing* that obedience begins. But nor can one obey if there no command has been issued. A speaker and a hearer are both required, and this places a responsibility on both of them for clarity of expression and willing attentiveness to hear and undersand. Obedience is not a vow that can be pursued in a vacuum: it is ultimately relational, and like chastity is focused upon the relationships one has with others: both others in community, and the ultimate other, God.

The Community as the Mediator of God's Will

> Abba Poemen said, "Life in the monastery demands three things: the first is humility, the next is obedience, and the third — which sets them in motion — is the work of the monastery." (Ward 181)

How do we hear the commandment of God in order to begin the process of obedience? Obviously obedience is not simply a matter of following one's own conscience. Conscience can

sometimes be little more than one's own self-will. Community exists to incarnate the values of discernment, assent, and action, checking the inward conscience against the experience and counsel of others.

Thomas à Kempis offered some sage advice along these lines.

> Everyone, it is true, wishes to do as he pleases and is attracted to those who agree with him. But if God be among us, we must at times give up our opinions for the blessings of peace. Furthermore, who is so wise that he can have full knowledge of everything? Do not trust too much in your own opinions, but be willing to listen to those of others.... I have often heard that it is safer to listen to advice and take it than to give it. It may happen, too, that while one's own opinion may be good, refusal to agree with others when reason and occasion demand it, is a sign of pride and obstinacy. (Imitation 1.9)

Our trust is that God speaks through the community, whose members share that common vow of obedience in humility. Community offers different modes for *hearing* God's voice: through the life of prayer and practice in community, through spiritual direction, participation in a discernment group, and in relationship with those who bear the responsibility of pastoral oversight. Most of us benefit from a combination of these, and this combination is reflected in the Rule's description of the obedience.

> A brother makes the vow of obedience to Jesus Christ as his only Lord as Savior, to the discipline of the Episcopal Church, the provisions of the Rule of the Brotherhood, and to the Minister General and other pastoral officials as appropriate.

Our understanding of obedience begins with Jesus as Lord. But since we do not have direct access to his will we look for guidance in discernment to the church, as the body responsible for continued engagement with the will of God expressed in Scripture, and in the ongoing inspiration the Spirit provides. We seek God's will within the context of the life we have freely embraced; and we seek and accept the guidance of those who, having demonstrated their own maturity and faithfulness, have

been chosen as guides within the community — who are themselves, by their own vow of obedience, constantly submitting their discernment to the test of communal wisdom. All of the speakers are listeners, too.

The Household of Faith

To know God's will in our individual lives, and in the corporate life of our community, we place our discernment within the context of God's overall purpose — what theologians of the early church called the divine *economy,* or household plan. The language of the household is common in the Pauline writings to the early churches, for example, as in this passage from Ephesians:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places…With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will. (1:3,8b-11)

The will of God is made known through the household of faith to all of its members. This will is ultimately that all things be brought to wholeness in Christ. For Jesus himself this meant accepting the cup of sacrifice which knowledge of God's purposes set before him. Likewise, what it means for us to *take up* our *cross daily* can only be discerned within an awareness of the overall divine economy. When we seek to discern if something is in accord with God's will, we start with the question, Is it consistent with what God has revealed in Jesus Christ? Does it make for wholeness, for salvation, for building up (what used to be called "edification") — or not? Only what is consistent with God's will in general may be seen as God's will in particular. God always uses moral means to moral ends: and there is no sense in which a good end can sanctify unworthy means. The moral end to which the moral means lead us is always centered in

community: the gathering of the people of God in the household of God — which is holy because God is holy.

As with all institutions, the community is fallible: failures in discernment happen at many levels. It is one of the cornerstones of Anglican ecclesiology that since the church is made up of fallible individuals, no assembly of them will somehow become infallible. (See Article XXI of the Articles of Religion.) We will address this matter at greater length below, when we look at the times when choosing *not* to do what is commanded may be the truest obedience to God's ultimate will. For now, let's turn to the next step of the normal process of obedience: assent.

Assent

Having discerned God's will through inner reflection and the outward guidance of the community, our next step is to align our will with God's. We see this step in Christ's prayer in Gethsemane: the Yes to God. It is in the act of humble assent that self-will is either set aside or perfectly conformed to the will of God that one has discerned. This calls for resolve, the choice to deny oneself to take up the cross of obedience.

> We abandon ourselves, we deny ourselves, when we escape what we were in our old state and strive toward what we are called to be in our new one. Let us consider how Paul, who said *It is no longer I who live* (Gal 2:20), had denied himself. The cruel persecutor had been destroyed and the holy preacher had begun to live. If he had remained himself, he would not have been holy. But let the one who denied that he was alive tell us how it came about that he proclaimed holy words through the teaching of the Truth. Immediately after saying, *It is no longer I who live,* he added, *but Christ lives in me.* It is as if he were saying, "I have indeed been destroyed by myself since I no longer live unspiritually; but according to my essential being I am not dead since I am spiritually alive in Christ. Paul is saying what Christ says. *The person who wants to come after me must deny himself.* Unless a person forsakes himself he does not draw near to the one who is above himself. He cannot take hold of what is beyond himself if he does not know how to sacrifice himself. The seedlings of a plant are transplanted that they may grow; we can say

> that they are uprooted in order that they may increase. The seeds of things disappear when they are mixed with earth,... They receive the ability to manifest what they were not yet, by appearing to have lost what they are. (Gregory the Great, Homily 32)

Gregory is picking up on the imagery of John 12:24, *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit*. The assent of obedience can be like that little death that opens the way to new transformed life — and it can be painful, as it is an inner setting-aside of the will. It becomes a humble offering made with the trust that Christ, who is the source of our knowledge of God's will, and the perfect example of assent to that will, strengthens us through grace to say our Yes. Without this inner assent, we are not dealing with obedience, but mere compulsion. As Saint Benedict observed,

> Obedience... will be acceptable to God and agreeable to men only if what is commanded is done without hesitation, delay, lukewarmness, grumbling or complaint, because the obedience which is rendered to superiors is rendered to God. For he himself hath said: *He that heareth you heareth me* (Lk 10:16). And it must be rendered by the disciples with a good will, *for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver* (2 Cor 9:7). For if the disciple obeys with an ill will, and murmurs, not only with lips but also in his heart, even though he might fulfil the command, yet it will not be acceptable to God, who regards the heart of the murmurer. And for such an action he acquires no reward, rather the penalty of murmurers... (Rule 5)

Action

> Jesus said, "A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even

> after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him." (Matthew 21:28-32)

One might say that neither son was *perfectly* obedient; but the first son, who took longer to conform his will, eventually made the appropriate response: action. Discerning and assenting to God's will — getting our instructions and then making up our mind to agree with them — are barren unless action is brought to birth. Only in this way is *the word made flesh*: the commandment heard and assented to leads to an actual change in the world, an incarnate *work*. Discernment and assent are the seed, but action is the fruitful harvest. And it is good to remember that *God gives the growth*. (1 Cor 3:7) Left to ourselves, we cannot do God's will even if we have discerned it and assented to it; only in Spirit-filled communion with Jesus, do we receive the power to do God's will.

> O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (BCP, 233)

Saint Benedict wrote of the virtue of obedience in this way:

> Such as these ... follow up, with the ready step of obedience, the work of command with deeds; and thus, as if in the same moment, both matters — the master's command and the disciple's finished work — are, in the swiftness of the fear of God, speedily finished together... Not living according to their own desires and pleasures but walking according to the judgment and will of another... truly live up to the maxim of the Lord in which he saith: *I came not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.* (Jn 6:38). (Rule 5)

Note that we cited the incarnational aspect of this practice: the Word becomes flesh — an actual performance, not a mere inward assent — and that flesh is nailed to the cross. It is not the work of the mind alone, the mind that discerns and assents, but of the body that acts — obedience is a humble harmony of the whole self, offered to the will of God.

Putting it all together

When, God willing, you take up the life of a novice you will make only one promise:

Minister General Will you promise to obey those who are appointed over you?

Candidate God being my helper, I do so promise.

Those pastors and guides are themselves under vows of obedience. Moreover, all of the members of the community order their lives and ministries within the greater church, with its own structures of oversight, its own rules and governance. The corporate obedience of the community to the church reflects how all Christians have a call upon each other, "brothers keepers" with a mutual responsibility for the good order of the church.

> One of the most important of Fr. Benson's insights was to see how vital it is for a religious community, while being true to its own specific style of life, to be part of a larger and more embracing unity, the Catholic Church. (Smith 139)

Our Rule requires obedience to *itself* as the most immediate incarnation of the responsibility we undertake as brothers and as a community. You might ask, as you move towards making a novice's promise of obedience, Why keep a rule of life? Why prescribe a written regimen which all agree to understand, accept and practice in common? The image of the trellis upon which the climbing plant grows is a venerable simile for religious life: without the trellis, the plant would not be able to achieve its true beauty and bear the flowers and fruit it is capable of bearing. Still, some might see this as undue restraint. Especially in the American culture — going back to the spirit of colonialism and expansionism at its roots — many prefer the possibilities of the wilderness to the order of the garden, and view rules as restrictions of God-given freedom rather as than agreed-upon terms for shared freedom. Within Christian community, both of the church and of a religious community, a rule is a formalized acceptance of Saint Paul's often misunderstood, but nevertheless essential, teaching on mutual submission.

> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God…Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ…Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:1,21; 6:23)

Paul is saying that peace within the community is a fruit of members willing to *be subject to one another,* according to the pattern of Christ. While some of the culturally bound ways in which Paul applies this idea — submission of wives to husbands, and slaves to masters — are not applicable to our culture, we who live in the nested levels of rule and order (the Brotherhood within The Episcopal Church within the whole Body of Christ) are invited to connect Christ's loving submission with our own. As Christ's spirit of obedience to the Father dwells in us, and we in him, we are prepared to receive the *love with faith* which comes from God.

> Don't be afraid then
> that your obedience to the Gospel,
> your listening to others,
> will impoverish your personality
> or decrease your responsibility.
> It summons you rather
> to live out your responsibility
> in your encounter with others...
>
> For the full development of
> each one's potentialities
> a flexible yet definite structure is needed
> to maintain the space
> for living together.
> You can't have a body without a skeleton,
> or a river without banks to guide its stream.Keep
> wholeheartedly to the arrangements that
> have been agreed:
> then people will never rely on you in vain
> and you will be able to put all your trust in others. (Van der Looy 42-44)

Our common life is not based on geography but on our shared rule and observances. Such a dispersed common life requires structure and shape if it is to foster and sustain unity of purpose and community of spirit — perhaps even more so — than the daily regimen of a residential monastery. Those who live an apostolic life are called to cultivate their commonality all the more. The matrix or trellis which supports the Gregorian body is based on action and practice rather than material structures or physical connections. It is in the living of the Rule, through the

living acts of each member, that the threefold incarnation of obedience takes place.

The obedience that takes shape through earing, assent and action in response is dynamic: the community is not just a top-down system like the military chain of command. God himself, after all, in the person of Christ, *became obedient unto death, even death on the cross*. So the obedient community is not a hierarchy, but an intricate web of relationships of mutual submission. We see this reflected in the Gospel story of the foot-washing. Peter's obedience, in allowing his master to serve him, represents the paradox of the obedient community: a community based on mutual love rather than the desire to control. Obedience, ultimately, sums up the other vows: it is setting aside self-will in a kind poverty of the Spirit, and chastity in refraining from control over others. A story of such mutual submission is told of Basil the Great:

> When Saint Basil came to the monastery one day, he said to the abbot, ... "Have you a brother here who is obedient?" The other replied, "They are all your servants, master, and strive for their salvation." But he repeated, "Have you a brother who is really obedient?" Then the abbot led a brother to him and Saint Basil used him to serve during the meal. When the meal was ended, the brother brought him some water for rinsing his hands and Saint Basil said to him, "Come here, so that I also may offer *you* water." The brother allowed the bishop to pour the water for him. Then Saint Basil said to him, "When I enter the sanctuary, come, and I will ordain you deacon." (Ward 39-40)

Daring to Say "No"

So is obedience blind? By no means! We began with young Samuel's gradually clarifying understanding of God's call: obedience begins with discernment, leads to assent, and is fulfilled by action. But what it what is heard cannot be assented to or acted on? Is it ever permissible to say "No."

It is sometimes hard to accept the instructions and directions of the church's and the community's pastoral leaders. They are, after all, only human, and hence fallible — as already noted, Anglicanism admits no infallibility at any level of the church.

Pastoral officials *can* be wrong; and blind obedience will not be the best response if you sense there is something wrong in a direction or instruction. So how do you address such a situation?

First, it is good to trust that our spiritual guides are being, in their turn, as faithful as they can be to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and are acting out of their own prayerful union with God as well as their own vantage point as persons charged with oversight.

> In the community there will be someone
> who exercises the service of authority.
> The leader's first task is to foster community among you
> and make the community grow
> in faithfulness to its vocation.
> The leader's authority builds up the community,
> but at the same time this authority holds
> only in so far as you are ready to obey.
> (van der Looy 43-44)

Legitimate authority deserves our respect and obedience. However, if in all good conscience you believe a decision is wrong, you should speak *the truth in love,* as a mature person. Part of *discernment* and *hearing* involves clarifying the matter at issue; perhaps there has been a misunderstanding on your part and you are not being instructed to do what you think you heard.

If the matter is not clarified in this way, and you find it difficult to give your assent to the instruction, it is also important to remember the difference between "This is something I would rather not do" and "This is something that I *ought* not do." Commands that fall into the first category do not rise to the level of conscientious objection. Doing things you would rather not do is the real test of obedience, after all.

But what if the order is wrong; what if you are asked to do something objectively wrong? This is why where conscientious objection comes in, and it is a form of higher obedience: the refusal of a soldier to follow an illegal order, or of an accountant to cook the books at his employer's urging — or of a brother to do something contrary to the Rule or law of the church (or the state). Taking responsibility to object to such a command is a vitally important part of the life of a mature Christian in the household of God. Should such a situation arise, a brother should

inform the pastoral official that he is unable to comply, with an explanation of why he feels so; if the command is not withdrawn, the brother should report his objection to one of the other pastoral officials of the community, preferably one of the more senior officials. All of this should ideally be recorded in writing.

We pray that such things will never happen, but even in the best of households — including the household of God — there can be presumption and abuse among the servants.

> If the slave in charge of the household says to himself, "My master is delayed in coming," and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful. That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. (Luke 12:44-48)

We truly have been given much. How better to pay back what is demanded than by discerning God's will, saying Yes to God, and doing the work we have been assigned, to the glory of God alone?

Reflection Questions (9)

1. What process or persons do you use to discern God's will for you? Have you found these means to be adequate? How do you see that changing through commitment to the Brotherhood?

2. What do you think it will mean in your life to submit yourself to the discipline of the church? to the Rule? to pastoral officials? to your brothers?

3. Where have you experienced tensions in obedience in the church in the past? Have you ever, in the church or elsewhere, been faced with the need to disobey an improper order — one that would have required you to do wrong? If so, how did you react? If not, how might you have reacted?

4. How does obedience reflect the love and joy of God in your life?

Interlude

Thinking About the End

> A postulant shall deliver a sealed copy of his burial instructions to the Minister General and Minister Provincial no later than two months before his reception into the novitiate.... No article of the burial instructions or Will may place a financial burden or other responsibility upon the Community or any of its members unless adequate provision has been made for its execution. — *Customary of the Brotherhood, Of Wills*

Facing one's own mortality is perhaps one of the most difficult encounters with which a human being can engage. In this moment people come face-to-face with what many feel to be the ultimate limit to their own existence. As Christians, however, we believe that this is not ultimate: we are not such "as have no hope." (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

One way to make a concrete reaction to that hope is for each of us — before we reach the point at which we are no longer able, and definitely before the time of our death — to prepare instructions to those who will address the hard reality of our death once it has taken place. These instructions concern the immediate aspect of what is to be done concerning our burial or other disposition of our mortal remains (our burial instructions), and the legal issues surrounding the disposition of our estate (our last will and testament).

A long-standing trick question is, "Where does the Book of Common Prayer remind us of the duty to make a will?" People will often respond, "Is it part of the Burial of the Dead?" The answer, of course, is that is leaving it too late! The reminder might have been better placed as part of the liturgy for Baptism (reflecting the theme of death to the old life in turning to the new); but it appears in the BCP (page 445) in the rubric at the close of the liturgy for Thanksgiving for a the Birth or Adoption of a Child. Unfortunately, not all members of the church are exposed to this liturgy as part of their worship life, and although the burden for making this reminder falls on the leading minister of the congregation, it is a responsibility that is sometimes neglected.

Mindful of these realities — and the possibility that you (like many members of the church) may not have made up either burial instructions or a will — the Brotherhood has made this important duty part of its own formation program, requiring the completion and filing of burial instructions prior to entering the novitiate, and creation and filing of a will prior to first profession of vows.

This interlude is an invitation for your to put your burial instructions into a document (if you have not already done so) and to file it with the Minister Provincial and Minister General — not neglecting your loved ones and your parish. Preparing this document will save your loved ones and the leaders of your congregation a good deal of unnecessary delay and confusion. It will also provide you with an opportunity to face your mortality in a concrete way.

As a guide to this process, the following pages include a form that you are free to use (as is) or to adapt (taking as little or as much from it as you desire). When you have prepared your own burial instructions, send them to the Ministers responsible, and let your Mentor and the Director of Postulants and Novices know you have completed this necessary requirement of postulancy.

God bless you as you engage with what you choose to be said to mourn your death and celebrate your life.

My Burial Instructions

Name *(print)*

These are my wishes for my funeral and the disposition of my remains. I realize it may not be possible to do everything I would like, but I trust you to do all you can within reason and as circumstances permit. This instruction supercedes any previous instructions I may have made.
I direct that — in accordance with the Rule and Customary of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory — my BSG profession cross (and life profession ring if applicable) be returned to the Community.

Signed *Date:*

Preferred Funeral Home *name*

address *phone:*

□ I want a viewing at the Funeral Home.

□ I want a viewing at the Church prior to the liturgy.

The Funeral Liturgy

□ I wish a memorial with no body present

□ I desire a funeral with my body present

□ At Church □ Funeral Home or □ other location

Place

Officiant

Readers *(for the lessons prior to the Gospel, or the Psalms)*

Others I would like to take part, and what I would like them to do

I prefer the liturgy to be

□ Rite One or □ Rite Two

Scripture Readings and Psalms ***Circle one in each section***

From the Old Testament:

Isaiah 25:6-9 (Victory over death)

Isaiah 61:1-3 (To comfort all that mourn)

Lamentations 3:22-26,31-33 (The Lord is good to them that wait)

Wisdom 3:1-5,9 (The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God)

Job 19:21-27a (I know that my Redeemer lives)

Followed by (circle one)

Psalm 42, 46, 90, 121, 130, 139 or a hymn (see suggestions on page 3) :

_____

_____

From the New Testament:

Romans 8:14-19, 34-35, 37-39 (The glory that shall be revealed)

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 35-38, 42-44, 53-58 (Raised incorruptible)

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9 (Things which are not seen are eternal)

1 John 3:1-2 (We shall be like him)

Revelation 7:9-17 (God shall wipe away all tears)

Revelation 21:2-7 (Behold, I make all things new)

Followed by (circle one)

Psalm 23, 23 (KJV), 27, 106, 116 or a hymn (see suggestions on page 3) :

_____

_____

From the Gospel according to John:

one of these is always *included; the Gospel is read by a deacon or priest*

John 5:24-27 (He that believeth hath everlasting life)

John 6:37-40 (All that the Father giveth me shall come to me)

John 10:11-16 (The good shepherd)

John 11:21-27 (Resurrection and the life)

John 14:1-6 (In my Father's house are many mansions)

Other Hymns / anthems I would like to have sung *(see list of suggestions below)*

_____

_____

_____

□ I wish the Eucharist to be celebrated as part of my funeral

□ I wish to have a graveside liturgy

Some suggested hymns

Hymn 208 The strife is o'er

Hymn 335 I am the bread of life (especially appropriate at Communion)

Hymn 358 Christ the Victorious (especially appropriate at the Commendation)

Hymn 473 Lift high the Cross

Hymn 620 Jerusalem, my happy home

Hymn 646 The King of love my shepherd is

Hymn 657 Love divine, all loves excelling

Hymn 660 O Master, let me walk with thee

Hymn 662 Abide with me

Hymn 671 Amazing Grace

Hymn 685 Rock of Ages

Hymn 690 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

Hymn 693 Just as I am

Hymn 699 Jesus, lover of my soul

Hymn 707 Take my life, and let it be

Hymn 711 Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

Hymn LEVAS 20 Sing the wondrous love

Hymn LEVAS 30 At the Cross

Hymn LEVAS 38 The Old Rugged Cross

Hymn LEVAS 54 Nearer, my God, to thee

Hymn LEVAS 101 Softly and tenderly

Hymn LEVAS 106 Precious Lord

Hymn LEVAS 109 What a friend we have in Jesus

Hymn LEVAS 144 Where He Leads Me

Hymn LEVAS 184 Blessed Assurance

Hymn LEVAS 188 It is well with my soul

Hymn LEVAS 196 The Everlasting Arms

Other preferences ***(use an additional sheet if necessary)***

The disposition of my body

Cremation

□ I direct cremation with the following disposition of the ashes:

□ No ashes to remain *or*

□ Ashes to be dealt with as follows:

Location of Columbarium if applicable:

Interment
Place of burial (cemetery, crypt, plot):

Where my cemetery deed or columbarium contract can be found:

□ Please check here if you have made provision for medical use of your body, or organ donation, and briefly describe here:
(**note: this is for information only and is not sufficient as a legal designation**)

Memorial Gifts

☐ I request that gifts (in lieu of flowers) be given to the following

---

This Document

Copies of this document will be filed with the following (name and address)

These burial instructions are not a substitute for a Will, which concerns the disposition of your personal property after your death. Making a Will and filing copies with the Minister Provincial and Minister General is required prior to making first profession of vows.
It is "the duty… of all persons to make wills, while they are in health, arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods, not neglecting, if they are able, to leave bequests for religious and charitable uses." — The Book of Common Prayer, page 445

10. The Religious Life: a Model for Beginnings and Developments

> O Lord Jesus Christ, you became poor for our sake, that we might be made rich through your poverty: Guide and sanctify, we pray, those whom you call to follow you under the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, that by their prayer and service they may enrich your Church, and by their life and worship may glorify your Name; for you reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*. — The Book of Common Prayer, 819

It should come as no surprise that many Episcopalians are unaware that religious communities exist in their church. Others know religious life exists, but know little about it. Few in positions to do so encourage vocations to the religious life — clergy, bishops, or religious communities themselves. Ignorance leads to few applicants; lack of applicants leads to dwindling communities; and dwindling communities do not commend themselves as viable options for a life of service and ministry — even to the well-informed.

This last part of the postulancy program will inform you about some of this less-than-well-known history, and our place within it, and to equip you — whether or not you continue your journey with us as a novice and professed brother — to be an agent for spreading the word and witnessing to the presence of religious life in our church.

In the Episcopal Church today there are dozens of religious communities, many monastic in character, some not; some large, some small; some thriving, some moribund. Given their relatively small number in relation to the total membership of the Episcopal Church, it is no surprise that many Episcopalians are either ignorant of or bemused by this tiny minority. How did this come about, and how can it be changed?

What is the religious life, anyway?

You might find it odd to ask this question at this point in your journey — but it is an appropriate review at any time. Most simply stated, the religious life is lived in voluntary compliance with a *rule of life*, which commonly includes (in the Christian tradition — noting that many other religious traditions also have forms of religious dedication) solemn promises or vows to observe the *evangelical counsels*: poverty, chastity and obedience. The root of *religion* is *ligare*, "to bind": religious are *bound* by their rule. This rule might be observed in common with others, by an individual under spiritual guidance, or — rarely — by an experienced soul living alone. The common factor is dedication to something larger than the self, a giving up of the self to God.

The word *religious* has two meanings as an adjective [or noun]:

- [one] committed, dedicated, or consecrated to the service of God
- [one] bound by monastic vows.

Whether it is useful to refer to the Brotherhood as a "religious community" will depend in large part upon the context — someone who thinks solely in terms of monasticism will misunderstand this application. You may encounter this confusion any number of times in your pilgrimage, so it is good to be aware of it.

This confusion over meaning has a long history: *religious* was narrowly synonymous with *monastic* in Roman Catholic law until the papal decree *Normæ* (1901) declared that non-cloistered women in the sisters' orders were to be considered *religious* in the canonical sense. Prior to then, the founders of the sisters' orders had intentionally evaded the required cloister — in order to allow the sisters the ability to exercise ministries of nursing and teaching — precisely by calling them "sisters" instead of "nuns" and refusing the term *religious*. Meanwhile — and this is where some of the confusion comes in — Saint Francis, in his Rule for the Third Order, addressed married and single people as "religious living in the world."

For our purposes, *religious* is taken to mean "committed, dedicated or consecrated to the service of God and the people of God in Christ," whether by vow or solemn promise. The *character* of the vow or promise is that it confirms, effects or sanctions the commitment, dedication, or consecration.

Being religious does not necessarily involve the authority structures of the church, or life in community — the desert fathers and mothers had neither church sanction nor community validation for their self-dedication.

> The first manifestation of religious life in the church involved a public commitment on the part of individuals, to the ... demands of the gospel. It was a commitment on the part of individuals, sometimes very cantankerous individuals, who originally had very little idea of forming a community but who were rather interested in gathering as individuals around a teacher on the way to perfection. (Fleming, Padberg 5f).

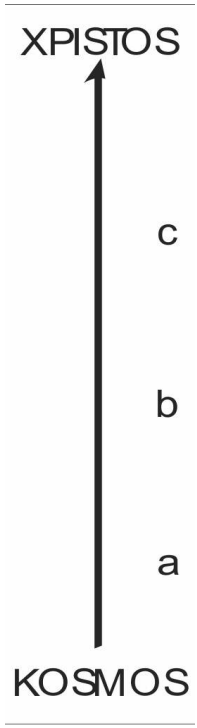
The evangelical counsels, the traditional triad of *poverty*, *chastity*, *obedience* (the *content* of the vows), have been given various interpretations through the centuries. Poverty, for example, could mean either *no goods at all* or *all goods in common*, depending upon whether one was Franciscan or Augustinian. There is wide variation in the understanding of the vows from one community to another. And this is only natural, since the vows are not the *goal* of religious life, but the *means*; and means should be adapted to meet the needs of the individuals and the world in which they live, in reaching their true goals.

A model for diversity

In practice, any Christian journey can follow a path ranging from *negation through transformation*. The Outline of the Faith says, "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."(BCP 855) The religious life is one of the structures by which this unification is sought, by means of the vows.

Repentance is essential to the idea of redemption: the recognition that we are fallen and need to return to Christ, whose

salvific act in becoming one with us enables us to become one with God. One form of repentance involves our attitude towards what has been called "the world" — including possessions, sexuality and power. In this ascetic view there is a progression from "the world" (indicated by *Kosmos*) to Christ (*Xristos*).



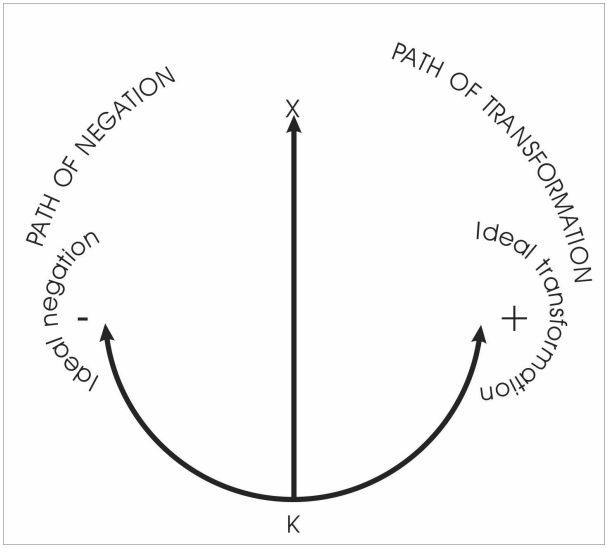
On this "ladder of perfection" the religious life was long assumed to be superior and more mature than secular Christian life. In the 16th century the Council of Trent taught that consecrated virginity was inherently better and holier than the married state. By the mid-20th century the Council of Vatican II taught that religious life was no more perfect than Christian life in general. (Cada 49.)

Thus, by the middle of the last century, the Roman Catholic Church began to recognize what many had perceived at the Reformation: that there is no *escape* from "the world." All life is *in* the world, and figurative "flight from the world" was not removal from the world, but an attitude towards it; one telling phrase is, "contempt for the world."

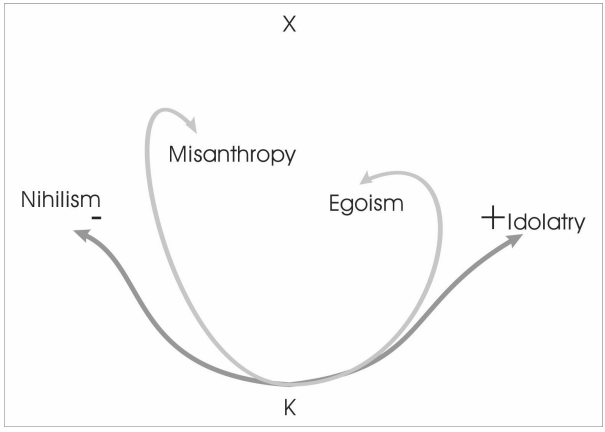
But there is more than one way of dealing with repentance in the world. In addition to the way of negation, there is the way of transformation. The two approaches may be portrayed as Mary and Martha. They represent different attitudes toward reality, but their differences should not obscure the fact that *Mary and Martha are sisters*. The way of negation involves transcendence, detachment, and contemplation. The way of transformation entails immanence, involvement, and action.

For example, sexuality may be dealt with as celibacy or fidelity. In the path of negation one has *no* physical relationship with *anyone*; in the path of transformation one has a *faithful* physical relationship with *someone*. Similar paths exist for wealth, power, and all other worldly matters, with a wide range of possible

choices. The Christian may turn away from the world in rejection, or turn the world itself around in transformation.



While the opening trajectory is towards an ideal of negation or transformation, one who seeks Christ must eventually turn away from these ideals, transforming or rejecting even them, after they have served their purpose on the way. (Remember what we said earlier about how a rose growing on a trellis doesn't do so to become a trellis!) The goal is to "grow up into Christ" (Eph 4:15) Failure to center on Christ may lead one to idolatry or egoism, to deny the inherent goodness of God's creation or become so entangled in it that rather than transforming it one is conformed to it. Through careful discernment, the corrective of healthy community, and the grace of God, both paths, followed with faith, can bring one to a realized life in Christ. Only with Christ as the companion on the way can one reach him as the goal towards which one strives; and on this pilgrimage, the closer to others one grows, as all approach the One who is above all. Christians find that diversity of direction, if followed faithfully, avoiding the extremes which fall off the path on either side, leads them to and



with the source of life, in union with God and each other. The ultimate test of any Christian pilgrimage lies in how the pilgrims treat each other.

The essence of the religious life, then, is the Christian quest writ — not large — but writ a certain way: it is the quest for union with God and neighbor.

Some historical context

Knowing something about the history of life under vows will help you in your own journey, and allow you to see both how the Brotherhood forms a part of that history, and how you fit within the Brotherhood.

Lawrence Cada and his colleagues described crucial turning points in the history of religious life at which new models emerged to meet the needs of the day. These paradigm shifts were usually instituted through charismatic founders. As James Clifton puts it,

> The history of religious life has seen the rise of a succession of integrating images which have been the source of self-understanding, of theological reflection, of apostolic commitment, and of attractive power across the centuries. Thus the religious has been seen successively as desert father, monk in a large feudal monastic community, mendicant friar, counter-reformation soldier of Christ, and anti-secularist institution builder. Each of these images has had its positive side and its day of overwhelming success in the history of the church. Each has also had it shadow side, with its excesses, and containing seeds of decay which eventually led to periods of decline. (Fleming, Clifton 30)

The Five Ages of the Religious Life			
The Time	**The Place**	**The People**	**The Orders**
200-	The Desert	Antony, Pachomius	Hermits (*lone-livers*) of Egypt, develop into skete = "abba" and disciples
500-	The Monastery	Aidan, Columba, Basil, Benedict	Iona, Lindisfarne, Jarrow; Benedictinism with its own reforms: The 4 C's: Cluniac, Camaldolese, Carthusian, Cistercian
1100-	The Field	Francis, Dominic, Teresa of Avila	Mendicants: Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites; Military Orders: Templars, Hospitalers
1500-	The Missions	Ignatius Loyola, Angela Merici, de Sales and de Chantal	Apostolic Orders: Jesuits, Ursulines; failed attempt at apostolic life by Order of the Visitation
1800-	The Schools and Hospitals	Vincent de Paul, Jean Baptist de la Salle	Teaching Congregations: School Sisters of Notre Dame, Christian Brothers, Salesians; Nursing: Sisters of Charity, of Mercy

At each turning point, religious communities born (or reborn) in each period served as icons of their age and as sources of renewal for the church. As Cada notes, "Historically, in its renascent phase, religious life plays a strong prophetic role for the entire church." (Cada 8)

The table shows the five major stages in the history of religious life, and the communities which typify the dominant image in each period. Though communities die out, once a form of religious life is established (indicated by the starting date in the first column) it continues to find people called to it, though perhaps in decreasing numbers. Thus, at present there are hermits, monastics, and nursing and teaching communities; only

the military orders seem to have dropped from the scene, though even they survive in honorific form.

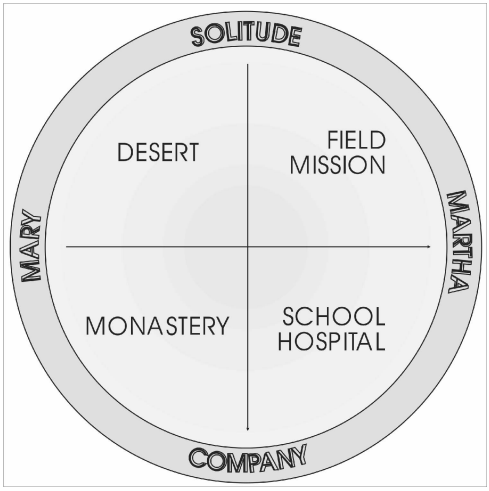
Note that this is an over-simplified way of looking at the history. Some orders, to meet emergent needs in society, anticipated developments that would not become typical of religious life for centuries — the medieval Hospital of Saint John long preceded the nursing sisters that flourished in the nineteenth century, but arose to meet a similar need: care for the sick.

However, new communities that come into being or flourish at the turn of an age tend to typify the age's concerns, and often possess an extra element of vitality and staying power. So too, being newcomers who have to prove the need for their coming into being, they often incorporate a certain degree of *attitude* as part of their initial charism. (This will be discussed below, in the section on Renewal.)

The community spectrum

There has long been an oscillation between communities focused inwardly and those focused outwardly. The history of religious life appears to

> offer a spectrum of possibilities: from the purely apostolic group, whose primary gaze is outward and looks to community life only as a necessary support for its work, to the monastic community which finds its first reference point in its inner religious life and only looks secondarily to whatever kind of outreach flows from the group. (Fleming, Clifton 33)



As with Mary-to-Martha, this range can also be described as a continuum: Solitude-to-Company. If one combines the two continua, one can place the spirit of a given community at an appropriate point on a two-dimensional graph.

For example, Franciscans place less stress upon local community, more upon radical poverty, than do the Benedictines. An anchorite is different from that a community which operates a school or hospital. This chart can be useful in placing each community within the circle of fidelity to the gospel mandate as it is perceived and acted upon by each community — as well as where one finds one's own spirituality.

The function of religious life

Religious life flows from the individual response to a call from God to live in a certain way. It can include a recognition that the way of life to which one is called is the same as that to which others are called: this leads to the development of common rules and community life.

The Tao of religious life

One still sometimes hears the religious life referred to as a "fuller commitment" to the Christian life. There was a time when Roman Catholic teaching held the religious estate to be inherently superior to the lay. However, the Second Vatican Council softened this doctrine to a large extent, bringing it into line with the concept of baptismal dignity, and avoiding the accusations of supererogation leveled since the Reformation. Anglicans had long rejected concepts of *supererogation* — accomplishing *more* than the common duty of all Christians.

Yet, back in the 1980s, an Episcopal monastic critiqued the Brotherhood, saying, "They only take the vows all Christians take at Baptism." Examining the baptismal vows indicates a commitment to worship, penance, witness, service and justice (BCP 304-5). It is *from* the baptismal covenant that any Christian pilgrimage begins. To imply, as this monastic did, that one has fulfilled the baptismal covenant and is ready for more suggests an insufficient awareness of human limitation. The reaffirmation of baptismal dignity was also incorporated in the revision of The Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer in 1979, expressed in the Baptismal Covenant. Both the Episcopal and Roman theologians affirmed that all commitment to Christ grows out of baptismal initiation, and that religious life is "a life

fundamentally based on the sacraments of initiation." (McDonough 23)

Religious follow their rules in order to respond to God's call *for themselves*. The religious life is the response to a call from God to walk in a certain way; to keep certain company, and to do certain things: it is not the only way, or company, or activity — but it is the way to which the individual is called, ratified by some external recognition (through the community and the church), and stabilized by the explicit making of a vow to do certain things. God calls each and every Christian by his or her own special name, that no one knows but them and God. (Rev. 2:17)

The rule is a means, a direction, an aid to the desired end; it is nothing more in itself. As we've noted throughout, religious life is a road, not a destination. In fact, religious life is many roads, with *one* destination — Christ. At heaven's gate we must shed all our habits; and even a cincture is too wide to go through the eye of a needle.

The uses of religious life

The religious life often served as a source of cheap skilled labor for the church,. and while this may be one of its *uses*, it is not its purpose. The good that consecrated religious have done in service to the church, and to civilization, is a *by-product* of their consecration. Even for the Brotherhood, in which service to the church is part of the founding ethos, service flows *from* the commitment to God, but does not constitute it.

Nor is the religious life a vicarious source of prayer for the church. Merton condemns this attitude in his later writings, as the "prayer wheel" mentality, in which religious churn out spiritual graces for the benefit of those too busy to pray, working "a 'dynamo of prayer' in which the monks are generating spiritual power for the workers in the active ministry. If the active apostolate does not proceed from the apostle's own union with God, the lack cannot be supplied by somebody else." (Contemplation 145) Grace by its very nature is freely offered, and the ability to pray is a participation in grace, not its cause —

God is not a spiritual vending machine who produces grace in response to the coin of prayer.

Witness and with-ness

What is the religious life then? It is two things: for the individual and for the community. For the individual it is a pattern for Christian life. For the church it is an example of peaceable community. Religious are persons of faith who can show others the way to cultivate their own faith, fellow pilgrims on the journey. They are willing servants who do what they can to help all Christians make the best use of their gifts. A religious brother or sister, monk, friar or nun, "should be a sign of freedom, a sign of truth, a witness to that inner liberty of the sons of God with which Christ has come to endow us."(Contemplation 244) The religious are not pioneers or scouts in some misty forefront of advance against the powers of darkness; they are walking alongside their fellow Christians, helping to bear the burdens on the Way. (Gal. 6:2) They are not fathers and teachers but brothers and sisters. (Matt. 23:8-9) The major function of the consecrated life is to *witness* to, *proclaim,* and *empower* the Christian life.

Reflection Questions

1. One of the strengths of the Brotherhood is our refusal to adopt a single model of spirituality for all of our members. Where do you see yourself and your spirituality on the "graph" between Solitude/Company and Mary/Martha?

2. What relationships do you draw between the Baptismal Covenant and your own life and ministry? How do you see the Brotherhood as assisting you in meeting these challenges?

3. What are some ways you see the functions of *witness, proclamation,* and *empowerment* in the Brotherhood? in your own ministry?

11. The Religious Life: Where the Brotherhood Fits

The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory did not emerge from or into a vacuum. To understand how and why the Brotherhood came to be and continues to develop — which will involve you as you become a part of its culture and history — a look at the context into which the Brotherhood emerged in the early second half of the twentieth century is in order.

The Episcopal Church of the 19th century was — to put it mildly — corporately ill at ease with the religious life, and prior to that devoid of it. The most the General Convention did, in 1889, was to authorize *deaconesses* to provide some form of support and recognition a few devoted single women exercising largely apostolic and missionary work. (C&C 949f.) It is clear that the church had no wish to deal with sisterhoods or brotherhoods at that point.

Lack of official authorization did not forestall religious life, however. By the mid–19th century orders, societies, and communities began to appear, most of them as part of the Anglo-Catholic movement. Some were founded by English communities seeking to broaden their ministry to the New World. Two essential things to note are:

- these communities were almost all apostolic — teaching, preaching, nursing, and working among the poor in the inner cities and slums — in keeping with the prevailing model for Roman Catholic religious communities at this period, but
- unlike the Roman Catholic orders, they were not recognized or supported by the church, which lacked (and resisted) such recognition.

In spite of suspicion of anything "papist," some Episcopalians were won over by the good work these communities did, often operating under the care of individual bishops. Several were set up as societies of priests engaged in the restoration or founding

of parishes; most of the women's communities were engaged in teaching, nursing, or in work among the marginalized.

Meanwhile, in 1907, General Convention introduced a canon to permit ministers of other, largely Protestant, churches to preach on invitation of a rector — the "Open Pulpit" amendment. (C&C 918-27) Some Anglo-Catholics found this too much, and departed for Rome. Among them were Paul Wattson, founder of the Society of the Atonement at Graymoor, along with his whole community: another friar, five sisters, and ten tertiaries. This would not have caused much more than a shrug in the larger church, were it not for the related property scandal. The two friars retained possession of the real estate on which their modest dwellings were built, as Wattson had not vested the property in the bishop of the diocese, though he claimed this had been his intent, so that "absolute poverty would not be an idle profession." (Gannon 169) However, since he had not done so, the property remained his.

The Atonement Sisters, however, were property donated expressly for founding a sisterhood in The Episcopal Church. When the Sisters left, the donors asked that the property be returned. The Sisters refused, and the matter went to court. The issue was finally settled in the donors' favor, and the sisters departed the property in a dramatic mid-winter procession across the road to the foot of Fr Paul's property.

In response, the General Convention of 1913 decided that something had to be done to provide canonical regulation of religious communities. The canon required that:

- the community be recognized by the bishop of the diocese in which it resided, and that he approve any change in its rule or constitution;
- the community recognize the church as supreme authority in matters of doctrine, discipline and worship;
- a community have episcopal permission to open branch houses in other dioceses;
- priest-chaplains be licensed by and responsible to the diocesan;

- the Book of Common Prayer be used for administration of the sacraments;
- real estate and endowments be held in trust for the community as a body in communion with the church;
- clerical members be subject to all canons governing the clergy; and
- provision be made for appointment of a bishop visitor, either the diocesan himself or by his permission, to hear appeals and rule on the dismissal or release.

The section on real estate was fruit of the property scandal, and those on authority and the Book of Common Prayer were aimed at curtailing the use of unauthorized eucharistic liturgies popular among the catholic party.

Through this canon, the religious communities were given the opportunity to submit to a higher authority in exchange for recognition. None chose to do so. The General Convention addressed one objection, and added (in 1919): "It shall not be within the power of a succeeding bishop to withdraw the official recognition that has been given to a religious community, provided, that the conditions laid down in this canon are observed." It did not, however, encourage any communities to seek recognition. By the 1950s, not a single community had come under the canons of the church. It was at that time that the Society of Saint Paul and the Community of the Holy Spirit were founded; and their founders insisted that they comply with the canonical requirements.

Then came BSG

> A priest from a monastic community once observed,
> "There's more to the religious life than wearing a habit."

The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory was founded in 1969; in accordance with the canon, its rule and constitution were approved by Bishop of New York Horace W. B. Donegan. This placed it in the minority among existing communities. Something else was even more revolutionary, and set it apart from the traditional religious life altogether. This was its radical

departure from an understanding of the evangelical counsels which had tended to limit the religious life only to the conventual model.

Such limiting and narrowing has been evident in church history before. The church of the third and fourth centuries "effectively reduced charisms from the rich variety found in the New Testament to a few specific ministries. Even religious life as a charism in the church was so effectively tied to the juridical institution that it almost completely lost its prophetic character." (Cada 171f) So too, new orders fell under the spell of the old. "In the past, new forms of religious life inexorably fell under the influence of forms that had a longer and more prestigious history: Pachomians and Basilians became monks; canons regular and mendicants adopted a monastic or quasi-monastic way of life; apostolic congregations of women imitated cloistered nuns, etc." (Fleming, Lozano 151)

The Brotherhood emerged in response to the limitations which, in the Episcopal Church, had been put in place not by the church, but by the religious communities themselves. Most operated under a model of religious life firmly rooted in 19th-century and earlier norms. As you have been learning, the Brotherhood's Rule was different.

Let's take a moment to review how the Brotherhood's understanding of the vows differs from the monastic or conventual.

Chastity

As we've explored in the previous chapters, and will continue to explore, the Brotherhood does not equate chastity and celibacy. Some say that this places the Brotherhood outside of the religious life altogether, a claim inconsistent with Anglican tradition. The community of Little Gidding was established by Nicholas Ferrar in the 17th century as the first Anglican experiment with religious life and, as *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* puts it in Ferrar's biography, was "an important symbol for many Anglicans when religious orders began to revive." And the community at Little Gidding *included married members*.

The Brotherhood's view of chastity is also in keeping with an older tradition, that of Saint Francis, who founded a religious order with married members: the Order of Penance, or Third Order. In his view, being a "Spouse of Christ" is not for single women alone. In his *Letter to the Faithful*, Francis says that all members of the Order — married and single — can become a Spouse of Christ "when the faithful soul is joined to our Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit." (Ep.fid. 8) In this view,

> the married laity ceased being referred to as "children and weaklings who simply cannot embrace celibacy" (an oft-repeated phrase in early ecclesiastical texts), and were instead spoken of as persons who profess the "common rule," that is, the Gospel. The Third Orders of the thirteenth century owe their existence… to this change. (Fleming, Lozano 150)

Since that time, the Roman Catholic Church narrowed its definition of chastity considerably, to "perfect continence in celibacy." (Code 599) The option for a chaste marriage or relationship is ruled out for religious.

The Brotherhood, however, accepts *chastity* in its older meaning. While all Christians are called to live chastely, the Brotherhood takes this universal call and *stabilizes* and *regulates* it by means of the vow. Some, of course, are called to embrace celibacy. But celibacy is a gift, a charism, and cannot be an arbitrary requirement. As Jesus says, "Let those accept it *who can*." (Mt 19:12) Attempted celibacy without the charism for it can lead to unhappiness. (Just as can marriage without the charism of fidelity!)

Chastity is a matter of personal integrity, custody of the whole person. In this light, chastity governs all emotional aspects of the personality. Anger, impatience, envy, despondency, despair, hatred — as well as lust and vanity — these are the enemies of chastity. As Friar Giles said, "My brother, I tell thee that the diligent custody and continual watching of our bodily and spiritual senses, keeping them pure and spotless before God — that is truly called chastity." (Fioretti 286)

Poverty

The Brotherhood's understanding of poverty follows, in part, the Franciscan notion of property, in that the community owns no corporate real estate. Individually, the members of the community provide for themselves (and their families) from their livelihood, contributing a tithe for the use of the church and the community in its collective works.

In a traditional monastic setting, the renunciation of almost all "personal" possessions comes in exchange for a secure and and often comfortable "community of goods." It is not necessarily true to poverty to be "personally poor but collectively rich." (Holl 53)

The spiritual side of poverty in the Brotherhood manifests itself in a spirit of detachment rather than impoverishment: we each give up control over the disposition of a portion of our goods to common use. Poverty of spirit, in this broader sense, is the ability to give up not only things, but ideas. Poverty is not a bare *lack*, but *giving up*; it leads to freedom to use the things of the world without fear of being possessed *by* them, because they are used with willingness to give up and let go.

Obedience

All religious know that obedience is the "hard one." This is because it directly faces the heart of all sins, pride. Poverty and chastity meet their hardest obstacle in the will — and it is through obedience that the will is governed.

It is only through the obedience of its members that any institution functions, for the institution does not exist apart from its members. Authority and obedience flow among the members in a living exchange. As a statement of *corporate* respect for the church, the Brotherhood "observes the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church as the supreme authority under which it functions in obedience."(BSG Constitution III)

Even so, Christian obedience is not a matter of hierarchical dominance and submission, but of loving service one to another, in Christ. This loving service is *ordered* and structured. What

canon lawyer Daniel Stevick says of the church as a whole applies equally to the Brotherhood:

> We cannot act capriciously; we are under authority.... The self-governing church declares its intention to work creatively and imaginatively for its primary ends, but to work in an orderly, disciplined, law-abiding way. High purposes cannot be served by unrestrained, lawless associations of self-willed people. (Stevick 14)

The nature of community

The Brotherhood further departs from the conventual tradition by not "living in community," by which the tradition means living in at least twos or threes. The root of the word *monastic,* however, means "alone," and so the earliest religious lived. The idea that religious must live in groups under one roof is a later development, and not only goes against the common sense notion, "A house is not a home," but against the history of the religious life, which often involved solitaries and missionaries who did not live in community.

> [In the 1917 Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law, cc. 487, 580, 594, 606] the "commonness" of communal life had two meanings according to the canonists: 1) belonging to the same juridic person governed by the same rule and superior, and 2) actually dwelling in the same lodging and sharing the same facilities with some other members (min. 3) of the same juridic person. Only the first meaning could be considered essential to religious life, because otherwise solitary ascetics could not belong to the category of "religious" and this would be contrary to the entire history and understanding of religious life as such. (McDonough 58)

The missionary activities of the Franciscans were not a denial of community, though the monastics of that era looked with suspicion on this "new thing." But for Francis, the mission was not a denial, but an extension of monasticism. As he said, "Wherever we go or stay we have with us a cell. Brother Body is our cell, and the soul sits in it like a hermit and thinks of God . . . "(Spec.perf. 121)

Community spirit transcends geography, while proximity is no guarantee of a healthy community spirit. The stifling oppression of the "common room" in which old dislikes brood is more like a scene from Sartre than Benedict. As Sr Clare Fitzgerald, SSND, once told a retreat, "They used to tell me, as long as I was in that common room for a certain number of hours a day, I was experiencing community. Well, that *wasn't* community!"

None of this is meant to suggest that there is no need for local community: on the contrary, "No one… can work out his or her own development without reference to solidarity to others. Anyone who persists in trying to evade solidarity will end up psychologically warped or stunted." (Fleming, Lozano 137) Community is vital to the Christian enterprise: to bring all people into unity with Christ and each other.

> The common life of religious, regulated by traditional observances and blessed by the authority of the Church, is obviously a most precious means for sanctification . . . But it is still only a framework. As such, it has its purpose. It must be used. But the scaffolding must never be mistaken for the actual building. (Life 55)

For the Brotherhood, and others living in extended or nonlocal community, new means of maintaining community spirit supplement for the old locality-oriented tools. The Brotherhood seeks to "evolve new forms of community that offer a tangible sense of belonging and a depth of support even though the members may be widely scattered for the sake of mission." (Fleming, Clifton 34)

If the Eucharist teaches us anything, it is that the Body of Christ is not bound by time and space. The dismissal assures us that it is in going forth into the world that we are fulfilling our baptismal — and religious — covenant.

Some more history

The remainder of this chapter is intended to inform you about the role the Brotherhood has played in shaping religious life in the Episcopal Church up to the present. You are bound to be asked questions in your life with BSG for which this chapter will provide a resource.

The Conference on the Religious Life in the Anglican Communion in the United States of America and Canada (CORL) was founded in 1949 with an aim to "spread information about the religious life in the American church, to encourage its growth," provide for "mutual cooperation among religious themselves" and "foster an understanding between the communities and the church at large." (ARC 34).

When the Brotherhood sought membership in and support from CORL, we were told that the Conference constitution did not allow membership, not so much because of the view of celibacy (though that was a concern), but the form of "life in community."

Meanwhile, CORL was active in an effort to amend the canon on religious communities in ways that would make it more acceptable to its members — only two of whom were at the time in conformity with the canon of 1913. General Convention 1976 revised the canon, though The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, at that time governed by this canon, was not consulted or informed of this action.

The revision altered the canon's form and content. The major change allowed the communities to retain full control of their property, exempted from the canon requiring diocesan approval for parochial alienation or encumbrance of real property. Celibacy was required, as was "life in community" — left undefined. Obedience was to the rule and constitution of the community. Recognition was to be granted through a committee of the House of Bishops, rather than the diocesan, and a minimum of six professed members was required.

This canon limited canonical recognition to monastic or conventual communities. Not only was the Brotherhood excluded, but if this canon had been in effect throughout Christian history, the following could not have been recognized under it: Antony of Egypt and Julian of Norwich (and in fact almost all the desert fathers and mothers, and every solitary hermit and anchorite since); the idiorrhythmic monks of Mount Athos, and other religious of the Eastern Orthodox tradition; the earliest Franciscans, and other itinerant missionary preachers and mendicants; the great missionary societies, including the

Jesuits; and, worst of all, Nicholas Ferrar and the community at Little Gidding, the fountainhead of the revival of Anglican religious life.

However, between 1976 and 1982 most CORL communities were recognized under this canon.

Where the Brotherhood stood

The Brotherhood was in an unusual position at this point — it had been recognized under the 1913 canon, but could not be recognized under the 1976 version. The canon would also forestall recognition of any new foundations along the same lines as the Brotherhood.

At this time the Brotherhood became aware of a group of women who, like it, did not see marital status as an impediment to religious life — the Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit. Sr Angela, the founder of the Worker Sisters, and Br Richard Thomas, founder of the Brotherhood, decided not to let matters rest. Angela and Richard Thomas became aware of other communities, not quite like theirs, but similar to the Little Gidding community, or to the Jesuits, some of them having been in existence — but without recognition — for decades. All these communities were now incapable of recognition under the canons of the Episcopal Church.

Angela and Richard Thomas began to think about submitting a further amendment to the canon that would allow for either "traditional" or "contemporary" religious communities. Angela wrote a draft which was submitted to the House of Bishops Standing Committee on Religious Communities. This draft left the current canon essentially unchanged but added a second part echoing the first, but omitting "celibate life in community" and "possessions in common or in trust." Communities recognized under the first section would be called "Traditional Religious Orders" and those under the second part "Contemporary Religious Orders." Since this new canon would not alter the regulations governing CORL communities, Angela and Richard Thomas did not seek to involve them in this revision. Thus, the

Conference was unaware of the amendment until the beginning of the General Convention 1982.

In the corridors of power (?)

However, CORL representatives at the General Convention proved hostile to the revision. Animosity reigned in the hallways of the New Orleans Convention Center. CORL members didn't seem to understand that all the newer communities wanted was to introduce the possibility for canonical oversight. It was not a pleasant time: A sister of a large traditional community advised Angela bluntly, "Why don't you people just go away?" After several days of this, CORL members were prevailed upon by the bishops' committee to meet with Richard Thomas and Angela to discuss their differences. It emerged that what most upset CORL was four words: the non-monastic communities should not call themselves *orders* or *religious*, and they didn't like the terms *traditional* and *contemporary*. It was proposed to rename the two sections for "religious orders" and "other Christian communities." Angela and Richard Thomas agreed, and the canon passed the House of Bishops unanimously, singing the doxology as this was the last order of business to come before them; the matter went to the House of Deputies and became canon law.

The Brotherhood reapplied for recognition under the new canon, and was for the second time canonically compliant. At the same time several of the other already existing Christian communities did the same.

Rough times behind, hope ahead

Relationships between the Brotherhood and CORL (and some of its member communities) were distant for much of the remainder of the 80s, especially following the 1985 publication of an article by CORL's president; this revisionist account of the events of 1982 portrayed CORL as initiating support of the canonical change. It was partly in response to this article that the Brotherhood published a more accurate account, the *Special Report* of August 1985. The primary question posed in this essay

was, “Is CORL actually able to carry out its work of encouraging religious communities?”

By 1985, almost half of the CORL member orders were not canonically recognized or recognizable, as many had fewer than six members, some as few as two. CORL’s track record showed its role of “encouragement” was negligible, and as its constitution forbade involvement in the internal affairs of any of its members, if “tough love” were called for — and many would say it was — there was no way to offer it.

The Brotherhood’s *Special Report,* published prior to the 1985 General Convention at which CORL was to have its triennial meeting, challenged it to consider these changes:

- That membership consist of the senior member (superior, prior, moderator) of every canonically recognized religious order and Christian community, or an appointed delegate.
- That representatives of newly formed or forming groups, or older communities now unable to meet the canonical requirements for recognition, participate in a nonvoting capacity.

A new Pentecost — or a flash in the pan?

The *Special Report* produced a change in the atmosphere at the 1985 General Convention in Anaheim. Several of the representatives of the “old orders” expressed gratitude to the Brotherhood for having had the courage to broach the subject. Others welcomed the challenges to reexamine their own living out of the vows, particularly in the area of property ownership. As one sister said, “You’ve rattled our cages; and we needed it.”

In succeeding years, there have been continued positive developements. CORL changed its name more accurately to reflect its goals: the Conference of Anglican Religious Orders of the Americas (CAROA) and began to host conferences to which representatives of the Brotherhood and other Christian Communities have been invited. At one meeting, the Orders and Communities jointly endorsed a canonical amendment written

by Tobias Stanislas Haller, correcting an error that had crept into the part of the canon governing religious orders, and adding a third section to provide the first canonical oversight of solitaries. This was adopted by General Convention in 1991.

In another development, the Christian Communities themselves, with the Brotherhood taking a leading role, formed a parallel organization, The National Assembly of Episcopal Christian Communities (NÆCC). This development was greeted with strong affirmation from the House of Bishops Committee and CAROA, and in 2006 the respective heads of CAROA and NÆCC attended each others' annual meetings for extended discussion of future work together. Since then such joint meetings have become regular events.

A member of one of the traditional orders once said that the Brotherhood and Worker Sisters were like hockey players trying to join a tennis club and change all the rules. What we actually suggested was that instead of a tennis club, a *sports complex* might better meet the needs of the Episcopal Church. The cooperation between CAROA and NÆCC may be the fruit of this observation.

Part of the fruitfulness of this lies in the Brotherhood having something to offer exactly because it *is* different. What does the Brotherhood have to offer? And and can we become new wineskins for the new wine of the coming age of religious life?

Reflection Questions

1. How do you reflect on the "Franciscan" concept of poverty described in this chapter, in relation to the more pragmatic presentation in chapter seven? How do you reconcile them in your own life?

2. Where do you find the center of "community" in your life? How does this connect with the understandings of community in this chapter?

3. Have you experienced tension, support, or other reactions from members of other communities or church leaders? Describe and reflect on these experiences in the light of this chapter's historical account.

12. The Religious Life: Its Future and Your Future

Renewal: beyond the necessary

Renewal is a key aspect of religious life, as a new creation under God's unfolding guidance, and at its heart is a willingness to be reborn, to change, and to adapt — as you have been doing on this journey through postulancy.

Just as you are exploring change in your life, so too the Brotherhood — and all religious communities — follow a life pattern: they come into being, they grow, change, and sometimes die. The good news is that sometimes they are reborn! In what follows we will take a look at the life cycle of community, with opportunity to reflect on how your own place within a community will bring about change — in you and it.

The life of an institution

The life pattern of a community falls into five basic periods, each marked by a culture.

Foundation / Vision

In the first stage, a person or small group has a vision, a dream, or a yearning, which they begin to live out. The founder(s) may not be a part of the later institution; some orders take different courses than the founder intended, even during the founder's lifetime — as happened with Saint Francis. During this first generation the community grows, as disciples join and share the vision as the central unifying mark of the community culture.

Expansion / Fervor

The expansion phase can occur during the founder's lifetime, but normally comes in later generations. The history and goals of the community begin to be transformed into myth, established through tangible forms: stories, liturgies, written documents, artifacts, and places become makers of the culture.

Stabilization / Complacency

In this phase the community begins to enjoy success, contentment, satisfaction, and accomplishment — "We've got it made." Expressions of the ethos establish themselves firmly, but take on a bit of unreality around the edges. By this point the community is far from the foundation; all who knew the founder(s) are dead. Members have lost the personal touch, and modes of transmitting the charism show signs of wear, but a culture of defensiveness and denial emerges. Questioning the accepted outward forms is seen as an attack upon the ethos itself. "Even the most legitimate changes are rejected, and their proponents are… silenced." (Cada 57)

Breakdown / Doubt

A perception that things are not working in accord with the myth can bring about breakdown. The perception may result from dissatisfaction with the organization, which finds its expression in doubt about the organization itself. Vocations can drop off, or departures increase. Leaders move from problem-solving to excuse-making. While the excuses may be *true*, members of the community begin to doubt their truth. An implied judgment lurks behind every loss: *You* were not right for *me*. The community begins to have doubts about itself.

The four phases of doubt

There are four breakdown stages in a community, each characterized by a form of doubt: Mechanical, Conceptual, Moral, and Total.

Mechanical doubt: Are we doing things the right way?

Mechanical doubt is often the first response: members no longer see the order a vision-inspired community, but as a mechanism that needs adjustment. Changes are superficial: a new habit design, new liturgies. In an organization which does not constantly seek renewal, superficial changes will do little good.

Indeed, the adoption of a "therapeutic" model can be a self-fulfilling prophecy: we must be sick because we are seeking a cure!

Conceptual doubt: Are we doing the right things?

At this stage it isn't the manner of working that comes under doubt, but the work itself. Should we stop teaching? Do we really need to say the Divine Office? These are more fundamental questions that challenge the ethos of the community. A rebound effect can occur at this point, and some members — or the community as a whole — may develop a siege mentality. Any change becomes a fundamental threat not just to the ethos of the community, but to some even larger principle: the Faith, the Nation, the Cause. Such polarization can render productive renewal nearly impossible.

Moral doubt: Am I doing the right thing?

At this level of doubt individual members begin to internalize the misgivings and apprehensions that have troubled the organization. Those who no longer accept the driving myth of the organization, or who have reached a point of cynicism, begin to make accommodations. They begin to wonder whether they personally need to observe the rule with rigor or vigor, and become lax. Other members come to see change and renewal as threats to their personal well-being and identity, with a concomitant decline in self-worth.

Total doubt: Why am I / are we doing this at all?

At this stage personal and communal cynicism, despondency and despair emerge full force, and the doubt shifts almost to an existential level. Organizations which have descended this far into doubt are unlikely to survive; though even here it is possible to rediscover the core ideal which drove the community.

Doubt as a tool for renewal

In spite of the dire maladies just described, there is nothing wrong with doubt itself. Part of renewal means a continued openness to questions. But in a renewal-conscious organization doubt is ongoing, and is focused on real problems, rather than on vague anxieties. It rarely goes beyond the Mechanical or Conceptual level. The more serious phases of Moral and Total doubt can be avoided if there is willingness to deal with problems before they reach such a state.

Renewal

And this is where you come in. Not just you, of course, but every member of the community. As the Brotherhood's Founder has often said, "Each new member changes us." It is in the living members of the community that the vision is carried forward. A renewal-conscious organization will try to maintain as many human, person-based means of handing on the vision as possible, and will always be willing to reexamine them and recast them. "Charisms live in people, not in codes or constitutions or directories — however finely polished and legally sound. The charism of an institute lives in its members, or it does not live at all." (McDonough 40)

As Pope Paul VI noted,

> Let us not forget that every human institution is prone to become set in its ways and is threatened by formalism. It is continually necessary to revitalize external forms with this interior driving force, without which these external forms would very quickly become an excessive burden. (Renewal 12)

The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory is not exempt. One might think such a relatively young community would not need renewal. But the Brotherhood understands that renewal is ongoing; it is more an *attitude* than an *action*. Renewal begins in being open to change, to questions and challenges; to be willing to drop or adapt a custom or tradition when the need for it is no longer present, or has been forgotten. It is also a principle of the

community that the youngest members, even postulants and novices, have a voice, for their new eyes may see problems the old hands have ignored or to which they have become accustomed.

This is not to say that the comments of a novice will always lead to change: often there is a good reason for a custom which may not be apparent to a newcomer. But the community encourages challenges and questions. Just as the Passover *Seder* includes the question of the youngest present, "Why do we do this?" in order to evoke the retelling of the formative story of Judaism, so too the questions of newcomers to the Gregorian Way can serve as means by which the community retells its story, and thereby comes better to understand it, and to be nourished by it. This perpetual renewal of the culture — and each member's place in it — allows each member fully to own the vision, myth, charism, and ethos of the community.

Crisis / Resolution

When a community lacks the tools for ongoing renewal through such tools, it may instead come to a crisis, or turning-point, at any of the levels of doubt; and the sooner the better. While a renewal-conscious organization will recognize the signs of breakdown and work to address them early, if the complacency level is so high that serious problems are ignored until late into the breakdown phase, a turn-around is more difficult. The crisis can lead to three possible resolutions: dissolution, low-grade continuity, or renewal and rebirth.

Dissolution

No one wants to talk about dissolution — that is the biggest problem with it. Experience shows that the vast majority of organizations — including religious communities — cease to exist after a period of time. Death is as natural for organizations as it is for organisms.

The work of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross is helpful in understanding the stages of dealing with death. She outlines the classic

responses to fatal diagnosis as: Denial and isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. These same stages can often be seen in the life and death of an institution.

In the Episcopal Church the identity of the physician and the accuracy of diagnosis is obscured. There is no external authority which can say to a religious community, "You have been in decline for years, and reached the point at which recovery is no longer possible." But in the absence of such authority, or even a formal body which could counsel and advise, it is up to the community to discern its own end, and come to a gracious acceptance of the end of this particular work or ministry — or community.

Low-grade Continuity

Frequently a once-great movement finds itself reduced to a core of true believers who can keep the embers alive long after the glory days are past. To take up a theme raised earlier, numbers are not necessarily a sign of organizational health. Large, popular movements often require little fidelity at the individual level. Some organizations are strengthened rather than weakened by a reduction in numbers, and emerge better able to carry out their original goals.

Sometimes, though, such an organization is suffering a kind of communal paranoia, a joint messianic complex, in which its members see themselves as the "faithful remnant," boldly defending a cause no one else cares about. The church seems especially prone to such developments. When this sort of organization possesses financial reserves, it can maintain a kind of memorial existence that allows the maintenance of external facilities.

Renewal

It is easier to maintain a continual renewal attitude than suddenly to try to renew after a slow descent into breakdown.

But it is possible for renewal to take hold of even the most complacent, cynical, or moribund organization.

Often a radical reform is called for. Sadly, oscillating decay followed by sometimes violent reform seems paradigmatic in the church, rather than the attitude of continued renewal. One would think that the church, believing itself to be filled with the Holy Spirit, would realize that the Spirit cannot be perfectly institutionalized in any external form, and be prepared always to take up the tabernacle and move on. But this is not the case.

Clearly, the church needs renewal. The great reforms of the Benedictine movement (which seemed to come in regular waves), the reforms of Franciscanism through the years, and the Protestant Reformation itself are examples of the striking turn-abouts that renewal can enable, and how much the church needs renewal from time to time.

A possible therapy from Vatican II?

Aware of the need for renewal in the religious life, Vatican II decreed,

> The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time… Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule… Let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions — all of which make up the patrimony of each institute — be faithfully held in honor.… All institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church… (Perf.car. 2)

Reduced to their minimum, there are the three key factors for renewal of the religious life: the Gospel mandate; the roots of the

community charism; and awareness of the needs of the modern world.

The Gospel mandate

Anyone familiar with church history knows that the church often forgets the gospel, and religious often excel at this abandonment. Who, after all, was in charge of the Inquisition! (Mostly Franciscans and Dominicans…)

Even today there are rules in some communities which violate the gospel spirit. Old models of hierarchy and domination persist where service and humility should thrive. The icon of eternal death, the pyramid, with nothing at its heart but an embalmed dead body, comes to replace the icon of eternal life, the Cross bearing one who dies a suffering servant and rises again. This often goes along with a desire to set things in stone, rather than let the Spirit move. As Sr Joan Chittister notes, "Danger occurs when mission and ministry become confused. In that case people absolutize and petrify specific forms of service or witness and make particular works equivalent to the charisms which inspired them." (Chittister 37) Renewal means reform of regulations which do not reflect — or worse, oppose — the gospel.

When religious embrace the gospel they become a force for renewal in the church and in the world. As Sr Clare Fitzgerald says, "Religious are dangerous, because they're gospelized!" Part of the gospel mandate is the prophetic witness to justice. But the religious way of witnessing to justice is not so much to see to it that justice is done but to *be just persons*. The witness is *personal*, not simply *programmatic*.

> Whereas religious life was once viewed as a closed community of the vowed, it is now more readily seen as an intensified form of announcing God's reign, through public witness. . . There is a new insistence that authentic witness must be *incarnational*. (Fleming Kræmer 48)

John Lozano further describes this incarnational model, and how it relates to the gospel vision.

> Real life constitutes a witness, now that neither uniform habits nor characteristic buildings nor special timetables distinguish them from the rest of the citizenry . . . There is a sort of diffuse Franciscanism in our times, representing a desire to connect with the original and fundamental sense of the religious life: a lifestyle that is significant in itself . . . We have passed from a "decalogue" code of observances to a "beatitudes" rule of life, from a minimum we must observe to a maximum toward which we must strive. (Fleming, Lozano 147)

The Founding Charism

Fidelity to a founding charism does not mean fidelity to the original institutional *expression* of that charism. It is easy to confuse a charism with the means by which it is expressed. As Pope Paul VI noted, "Certainly many exterior elements, recommended by founders of orders or religious congregations, are seen today to be outmoded." (Renewal 5) The Brotherhood, for example, was founded as a community for church organists, but it became clear that the original charism was not identical with its institutional expression: the true charism was in the two mottos: *Soli Deo Gloria*, and "servants of the servants of God." And so the community clarified its founding charism as *service to the church*.

Similarly, Saint Francis took his original visionary charge, "Rebuild my church," in a literal sense: he set to work rebuilding ruined churches. Only later did he come to realize that he was not called to historic building preservation, but to reformation of the church itself. The outward form of the charism changed, but the kernel, the spiritual gift, remained.

Circumstances challenge religious communities to distinguish between their charism and its institutionalization. Here is an instructive scenario from secular history:

> Consider the railroad companies at the time of Kitty Hawk. Evidently their understanding of who they were could have been expressed: "We're railroaders!" Hence, the curious tinkerings of the Wright brothers and the

> events of Kitty Hawk were at best amusing. Imagine how differently they would have seen and responded to those events (and how much better off they would be now) had their understanding of themselves led them to the proposition: "We're in the transportation business!" . . . Similarly, some religious orders that defined their mission as teaching or nursing are fast upon hard times as the traditional structures of catholic schools and hospitals falter in the financial crisis. But to have expressed the mission as "education" or "health care" admits of searching out varied methods to fulfill the call. [The community] must continually work at discerning and discovering points of contact of the order's charism and the contemporary needs. (Cada 83)

And it is to contemporary needs that the third aspect of renewal hearkens.

The signs of the times: the coming age

> In 2010 religious communities will be characterized by inclusivity and intentionality. These communities may include persons of different ages, genders, cultures, races, and sexual orientation. They may include persons who are lay or cleric, married or single, as well as vowed and/or unvowed members. They will have a core group and persons with temporary and permanent commitments . . . (Report of the Roman Catholic Leadership Conference of Women Religious / Conference of Major Superiors of Men national meeting, August 19-23, 1989)

In looking at recent history, it appears a new age is upon us. As with each of the previous major turning points in church history, there has been great upheaval in "the world" which has brought about new needs and new opportunities. It is natural to assume that, just as new models of religious life have emerged at turning points in the past, so too the present era calls forth new images for religious life.

> The religious life, which in its varied forms has always tried to respond to the needs of the church, will itself have to undergo a necessary crisis of readjustment . . .

> We must emphasize that the term *crisis* does not have an exclusively negative denotation. In the past, crises in institutions of religious life have always been the crucible in which new forms and new families have taken shape. It will be sufficient to recall what happened in the sixth (the Master, Benedict), twelfth (Cistercians, Canons Regular), thirteenth (mendicants) and sixteenth centuries (apostolic institutes). (Fleming, Lozano 134f)

What is the "coming age" bringing? There will be more of a swing to individual, rather than communal ministry. This results in part from economic forces. It has become increasingly difficult, and in most cases impossible, for a religious community to maintain and staff a hospital or school. Communities coming into existence now, like the Brotherhood, have chosen to emphasize individual ministries; not merely as an adaptation to current realities, but as an element in the ethos of the community.

At each of the turning points in the history of the church, new models and forms of religious life have emerged. The Brotherhood has emerged at *this* point. Much of its ethos is not new, and relies on such figures as Gregory, Francis of Assisi, Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal, and Nicholas Ferrar. But the changes in the world have now made the coming into being of such new communities, and the adaptation and renewal of old communities, all the more important.

Older "communal" communities are rediscovering the value of allowing individual gifts to flourish, rather than cramming each member into the mold of "the good religious" of whatever community. Many communities who thirty years ago said religious couldn't work in "the world" now have members doing 9-to-5 jobs — not only to raise money for the community, but as new ways to adapt their ethos to the needs of a changing world.

As these ministries, skills and interests are explored, however, it is important that the primary purpose and function of the religious life not be lost in the shuffle. It is important that the changes and adaptations reflect the primary call of Christian life: bringing people together, and bringing them to God. "In our

efforts to assure that the faith be *enculturated* — placed genuinely in the heart of our culture — we must always face the danger that the faith may be *acculturated* — become simply a part of the American way of life." (Fleming, Henriot, 112)

This new focus on individual gifts within a framework of a community of faith can be a model for the church. If the vision of this new age is refused — this vision which is in fact a gospel vision that can inspire people in Latin America, the Philippines, in South Africa, in American inner cities, and other places where religious are on the forefront for change in church and society — if this vision is refused, the religious life will die; and it will deserve to die — for it will have ceased to be a source of life.

You are the turning point

You, dear brother, are at a turning point on your spiritual path. You are on the verge of continuing a pilgrimage with the Brotherhood as a novice — to pick up an earlier analogy, you've had opportunity as a postulant to try on the outfit, and novitiate will be a time to wear it on approval — if you choose to, and the community consents: we are, after all, better than a mirror, and will be able to see how well the new outfit fits and moves with you in it!

This is an exciting journey to be part of: engrafting your own personal renewal with that of the community and the church, for the good of the world.

God bless you every step of the way.

Reflection Questions

1. What sorts of renewal have you seen in your own parish or diocese? What areas of resistance have you encountered?

2. How do you relate your own gifts to the charism of the Brotherhood? Where do you feel a good fit, or a need for alterations? As you think about the Brotherhood's charism and

your fit with it, reflect on how it jibes with the Gospel mandate and the needs of the present time.

3. If you could change one thing about the Brotherhood, what would it be, and why? How would you seek to accomplish this change?

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