

STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF BENEDICTINES IN THE POLARIZED WORLD

Strengths:

- 1) Bearing witness to the transcendental life: “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Matt 19:21). They have built up their strength and go from the battle line in the ranks of their brothers to the single combat of the desert. Selfreliant now, without the support of another, they are ready with God’s help to grapple singlehanded with the vices of body and mind” (1:3-6).

- 2) Christian perfection through love: life in Common and stability to the community, our hospitality to everyone, our prayer life and members involvement in all aspects of the monastic life. Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved” (Acts 2:42-47). The RB represents human efforts to become perfect disciples of Jesus. Before being anybody else, the Benedictines are Christians by their love for one another. The life of fellowship with one another, sharing everything in common, gains added momentum for the Benedictines.

- 3) Benedictine Education through the hostels, schools, Campus ministry.

- 4) Benedictine caring through the hospitals and old age homes.

- 5) Manual work: Their life should reflect what the RB refers to their work. “When they live by the labour of their hands, as our fathers and the apostles did, then they are really monks” (48:8).

- 6) Benedictine Liturgy: There is no ambiguity in the *RB* as to the principal task of the monk: liturgical prayer: - “*opus Dei*: “On hearing the signal for an hour of the divine office, the monk will immediately set aside what he has in hand and go with utmost speed yet with gravity and without giving occasion for frivolity. Indeed, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God” (43:1-3).

Opportunities:

1. Active Contemplation

The main role of the Benedictines today is no different from that at the time of its inception in the 6th century, namely, contemplation. This has been praised and reiterated by the Second Vatican Council, highlighting this pivotal role of monastic/contemplative life in the Church. For this the monastics “occupy themselves with God alone ... retain at all times ... an honourable place in the Mystical Body of Christ.” (PC 7) Ours is a life of seeking God and pleasing Him alone and to be alone with God. This life of contemplation need to be seen in different light, as a “force that drives us into the heart of God” and then back to the world. History tells us that a truly contemplative is active too.

2. Sharing the Fruits of Contemplation

All our activities should be seen as sharing the fruits of our contemplation. The first of the fruits that likely to emerge from our life is ideas, thoughts or reflection. Our silence and solitude, prayer and *lectio* all produce thoughts – thoughts about God and thoughts about his people. People come to the monastery mainly to know about God and in the light of God, themselves. And this is truly spiritual direction or spiritual accompaniment. So we must create enough ways and means and space to share the fruits of contemplation of our monastics. Our life is contemplation in action. Some of the spaces are our retreat centres, guesthouses, schools and colleges, hotels and hospice, hospitals and homes for the aged.

3. To be the Conscience of the Society

Monks are the descendants of the prophets. As the prophets functioned as the conscience of the society so also our monasteries should function in the present world. This too is a consequence of being contemplatives or simply monastics. Our monastic communities should stand for the values of the Kingdom and when the world goes against any such values we must reproach it. To every event in the world that is around us we must have a monastic response. In this way we would be serving as light to very many good meaning people and believers.

4. Monastic Ministries

Monastic history tells us that monks cared for the travellers, invented hospice for the pilgrims and those on the road and welcomed strangers and served them. Monasteries must be places of service to the human. Service does not mean only our monastic products of beer and wine or any other farm products. It is doing what is needed. Benedictines do not have a particular charism in terms of work to be undertaken. That leaves us free to what is needed for the people at that time. It may be offering a meal for the poor and refugees or opening a school for the children, or offering counselling or legal aid etc. etc.

5. Mission – Evangelization

Mission is not to be taken as preaching the Good News to the ‘pagan’ world. Mission originates in the mind of God and is revealed to the contemplative who is close to the mind of God than anyone else and again it is not to the ‘pagan’ world but to a world that God has so loved (Jn 3:16). Extending our human presence to other human beings is also evangelization and mission. The Gospel is the good news of liberation to the oppressed and salvation is the restoration the divine image. In this sense any action, against the forces that pushes people to oppression like ‘famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty and injustices’ (*Evangelium Nuntiandi* 30) and against anything that mars the image of God in a person like institutional sins, is missionary.

6. Inter-religious Dialogue

Dialogue and mission are not the opposites. Mission with love and respect is dialogue. We have achieved something in this regard. But should do more. What about temporary life-in experience with monastics of other religions?

7. Ecumenism

Our dialogue with the brethren of other denominations.

8. Inculturation

Especially meaningful for Asia and Africa. It is the only way of planting Benedictinism in the local soil. A lot has been done and a lot to be done too. The Rule offers a lot of freedom and this must be used wisely.⁰

9. Contribution to the World Peace

Living the Rule of Benedict and not to speak of Peace can be less monastic in witnessing. And how far the Benedictine principles of peace are of any value for the contribution of the world peace?

10. Ecology

St. Benedict offers the best principles of ecology: The earth belongs neither to the individual nor to the state but to God and we are all care-takers or stewards.