

Beyond Our Borders

Our Cistercian monastic life may be considered a charism, that is to say, a gift of the Spirit for the Church of God. This gift was given at a precise historical moment, within a given culture, as a way of responding to special challenges, and perhaps also in reaction to particular situations. There is no doubt about any of this.

However, time has had a two-fold effect on the charism, both shedding light on it and clouding it over. Time clouds over the charism because it arose within a local context at a given moment. Time sheds light on the charism precisely because the passing years free it from the bonds of the particular circumstances in which it arose.

The historicity of our charism makes it necessary and imperative to bring it up to date (aggiornamento) and inculturate it. Inculturation is concerned with more than just geographical placement or placement in time. It also has to do with gender (masculine and feminine), generations (youth, adults, seniors), different societal groups (country or city dwellers, laborers, professionals...), and with states of life (clerical, consecrated, lay...).

The renewal brought on by the Second Vatican Council was a privileged moment in this process of aggiornamento and inculturation. The post-conciliar period brought yet another new thing: groups of lay men and women who want to share our charism in the world, in the midst of human affairs and activities. This means, in other words, a new kind of inculturation of the Cistercian charism.

But careful! We do not need you to be "copies" of the monastic version of Cistercians. Rather, we need you to embody the charism, to speak about it in different language, to discover new ways of living it out, to re-inculturate it. And you have no need to ask our permission to do this. The charism is a gift that we have received and embodied in history, but we are not the exclusive owners. I invite you to continue to take the risk of going beyond our borders.

In reality, however, I am not the one inviting you. It is the Spirit speaking in your hearts that has invited you to re-create our Cistercian charism and to give it a new form. Questions such as these come to mind:

- What would be the basic criteria for discerning a Lay Cistercian vocation at its beginning and in the various stages of its growth?
- What are the exercitia corporalia et spiritualia proper to Lay Cistercian conversatio that is meant to be lived out in the world while not being of the world?
- What fundamental elements would be needed to draw up a program of formation that would help give shape to Cistercian values in the lives of lay men and women Cistercians?
- What sort of relationships and services are needed among members of a Lay Cistercian group to enable its life to grow and spread?
- By what kind of commitment should Lay Cistercians bind themselves to the Lord, to the other members of the group, to the host monastery, to the Order?
- What kind of union or association might there be among groups in the same region or among the various regions themselves?
- What is expected of the host monastery and of the Order as a whole?

Many of you have already answered many of these questions. In some cases, the answers have withstood the test of time, have proved to be of lasting value and have been compiled as statutes. Today we are in a position to share and compare our discoveries in order to carry on seeking and finding. May the Lord help us with his creative Spirit. Amen.

Dom Bernardo Olivera