

STATIO CONFERENCE

OBEDIENCE - COMMITMENT TO LISTENING AND ACTION

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Introduction

Ever since the Lord Jesus appeared on the scene with his invitation to “Come and follow Me, the disciples who formed the community around him lived his teaching. And this teaching was in its length and depth and height *counter-cultural*. It means one goes against the values of the pervading culture. We are immersed in the culture of our age – scientific, technological, tri-media (print, audio and video), value free, individualistic, consumerist and --- avowedly secular. Every click of a page on Yahoo’s screen displays this self-referential culture. This morning the first thing that met my eye when I scrolled for news from the Inquirer was a flash of footwear ads — shoes and pumps and boots for the season. Fair enough, since the ad world makes the internet tick. But then you would think that the world of goods - good looks, good bargains, and good food - makes up in the final analysis the culture of the person, his spirit, his heroism and his impossible dreams. There followed a line of items “trending” news about people who dazzled in beauty or crime: Kim Kardashian, Kate and Philip of Cambridge, Taylor Swift, the troubles of Wal-Mart, a shooting victim- just to name a few. We are a media generation, “formed by media, with media values and lifestyles.”

But then, what could run more counter to this culture than the gospel message of hope in the promises of the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are the meek...”. Or the injunction: “Love your enemies.” Or the mandate: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Or the evangelical counsel: “If anyone wishes to follow me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me”? In this logic of a counter culture, we shall look at obedience in depth as a Gospel imperative and a hallmark of Benedictine education.

There are those, then, who turn their backs on the flat faces of the computer screens and dream of another world like one Benedict dreamed for himself and his followers. Thus, we have Benedict’s little Rule for life in a society awash with the human being’s drive to fabricate for himself a life that is purely “self-referential”, to quote Pope Francis. Benedict looks upon life as a journey from self-reference to God-reference, indeed a counter-culture of the first order. In this life the human person is defined as *obedience*, a creature with the capacity to listen to his Creator, to obey, and thus, to serve the other.

The human person is defined as “obedience.” This harks back to K. Rahner who said that “to hear the Word” is the “condition for existence” (Bedingung der Moeglichkeit) of a creature endowed with will and reason. Thus, obedience is not merely a “commitment to listening and action” as our title puts it. Even before committing ourselves to obey, we are, before all else, beings created “to listen to the message of God.” In our nature is the imperative to obey. Differently put, we have been created as hearers of the Word – beings attuned to listen, to obey, and to act in the dynamics of the Call. Only in a subsequent step of reflection, do we realize that we are to commit ourselves to listen and to act as the response . This is the same thing as to say

that we are to commit ourselves to being obedient, if we are to live out our vocation. This is also the basis of our dignity and responsibility. In a countercultural existence we live not according to media values and lifestyles but according to the WORD of GOD.

Obedience - a vibrant tradition of counterculture

How is this? Let me borrow the story of W. Bausch, SVD, in one of his sermons.

This is the story of Sandy Koufax. Over thirty-five years ago, Sandy Koufax, a Jew who was a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers, announced that he would not pitch on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish Year – even though this game was the first game of the 1965 World Series. The management was aghast. They coaxed him, pleaded with him, told him to pitch just a few of his fabulous pitches and then he could go to all the synagogues in Los Angeles to his heart's content. Koufax refused. It was the Sabbath day, and his religion came first. So Don Drysdale took his place and lost the game. Koufax pitched the second game and lost. But as you may remember, the Dodgers won the 1965 series 4-3. And Koufax pitched a shut out in games five and seven... To pass up starting a World Series game for a matter of faith? Would you do that?" (W. Bausch, "More Seasonal Homilies, CT 2005 " p. 24.)

This counter-culture is a line that runs from the ancient history of God-seekers, as well as the history of the "following of Christ" to modern Christian spiritual tradition. It is not only true of those who profess to publicly follow Christ in the consecrated life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. It is basically true of the Christian - the Christian parent, the Christian worker, the Christian educator. Indeed, it defines the identity of a Christian as a being of counter-cultural choices.

Here is another piece of reflection from W. Bausch: *"Consider the story of this young priest whose early years were filled with death and sorrow. His mother died in his childhood; his father and elder brother, in his youth. Later on he wrote "At twenty I had already lost all the people I loved, and even those I might have loved, like my older sister who, they said, died six years before I was born." Despite all this, and amid great turmoil in his country, he eventually became a priest and served well enough to be called in by his superior and told that his appointment as a new bishop was pending....*

Half an hour after this conversation he arrived at the convent of the Grey Ursuline sisters. He asked the nun who opened the door where the chapel was and entered it without saying a word. He strode quickly toward the altar and sank to his knees in the front pew... When the nuns went to bed, he was still in the chapel. He continued praying for eight hours. The priest's name is Karol Wojtyla, and we know him, of course now as St. John Paul II. This account of his earlier years does not come from biographers who are determined to say only good things about a hero. It is from Carl Bernstein, one of the famous pair who exposed the Watergate crime." (W. Bausch, "More Seasonal Homilies, CT 2005, 15). To pass up hours in praying instead of planning for a position of prestige and privilege, would you do that?

* What does this say to our world and Church – **monastics, educators, parents, workers, professionals, students, and faithful today?**

* A life of counterculture in our Christian faith is the challenge to choose the path of simplicity and poverty as against the "idolatry of money" which shows up very vividly in the corruption bedeviling our country. How do you see this counterculture gaining a foothold in our efforts as Church and country so that we are transformed from self-seekers to God-seekers in obedience to our divine call?

* How do I propose to make this happen in my own personal life now? On a scale of 1-10 where do my choices fall? Do my comfort, career and class biases come before the cause of God's Kingdom of justice and holiness?

In our days when the Christian formation of young people is at the crossroads, Benedictines look again to their heritage of Gospel living in the spirit of Benedict.

For us Missionary Benedictine sisters this Statio on obedience is but a review of what is already enshrined in the first four lines of the Prologue of the Rule. We might re-focus by yet another essay on the meaning of obedience, but we could also do this by using Sr. Aquinata's tool of semantics to make obedience luminous once again. The first four lines of the Prologue open us to the central *locus* of "obedience" in the entire conception of the Rule.

The Daunting Image of Obedience as a "Way", a "Journey"

PROLOGUE 1-4

1. "Listen, O daughter, *to the precepts of the Master*
and incline the ear of your heart
willingly receive, *to the admonition of a kind father,*
and effectively carry it out

→ 2 so that through the labor of obedience

you may return

to the one,

- 3 Therefore, to you *now my word is addressed,*
whoever you may be,
renouncing your own wills,
ready to fight *for the Lord Christ,*
the true King
you take the very strong and bright weapons
of obedience. (cf Eph 6:11-18).

- 4 First of all,
whatever good you begin to do
with most insistent prayer beg
that *by him it may be*
(cf Phil 1:6; Lk 18:1-8; 11:8f) *brought to perfection.*

The central position of obedience in these first four lines is a key to its understanding:

**2 so that through the labor of obedience you may return
to the one, (cf Lk 15; Mt. 11:29; Rom 5: 19) from whom
by the inertia of disobedience you had departed.**

It is the vision of Benedictine life as a way, a journey to be taken, a movement which strains towards a goal. Benedict uses other terms further on to portray this way as a to return to God. Notice then that the whole life of a monk / sister revolves around an obedient life, not around

asceticism. Quoting A. Boeckmann, *“Obedience is the chief virtue of coenobites. For the coenobite does not follow Christ by difficult individual asceticism and harsh external penances but by obedience.”* (A. Boeckmann, Perspectives... 19-20). An interesting footnote to this point says: *“...you must prefer obedience to asceticism. The latter teaches pride, the former humility.”* (# 24 p. 30.)

“To return to God is to journey on the road of obedience.” To miss the road is to miss the goal. The image of the way that one must tread to return to God is a daunting one. It describes what we monastics call “conversion”. However, this is more than just a matter for monastics. It is for all Christians as well. It is the sine qua non of Gospel living. Here is a story to illustrate it, taken not from monastic sources but from the cinema world.

“Let me mention Marilyn Monroe... not just to get your attention, but because she figures here. As you know, she has become a kind of an icon, a symbol of the empty sexuality of our time. In his autobiography Timebends, playwright Arthur Miller, one of Monroe’s husbands, mentions that he watched Marilyn descend into the depths of depression and despair during the filming of the movie The Misfits. He feared for her life, as he watched their growing estrangement, her paranoia, and her growing dependence on barbiturates.

One evening after the doctor had been persuaded to give Monroe yet another shot, she finally fell asleep. Miller stood watching her, reflecting. He wrote: “I found myself straining to imagine miracles. What if she were to wake and I were able to say, ‘God loves you, darling,’ and she were able to believe it. How I wish I still had my religion and she hers.” How sad that Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe, a couple of society’s favourites, did not know that God stood at the end of their road to meet them. (W. Bausch, The Word, in season and out of Season, 37)

Obedience as a call story – the listening to a vocation

Here I lean heavily on A. Boeckmann because of the richness of her insights. Harken again to the Prologue’s call:

“Listen, my Son /Daughter, to the precepts of your master
and incline the ear of your heart:
willingly receive the admonition of the loving father
and put it into practice.”

The two protagonists in this “call” drama are the Master (God) who issues a personal invitation to the “Son/Daughter” to adhere to his precepts in three intense action verbs, namely,

- | | |
|---|--|
| - Listen... incline the ear of your heart | <i>Obsculta... et inclina aurem cordis tui</i> |
| - Willingly receive | <i>Libenter excipe</i> |
| - Put into practice | <i>Efficaciter comple</i> |

All of these intense actions already contain “obedience.” All are biblical in the fullest sense. All refer to an integral attitude in which the one invited is confronted with the Word of God to which he/she listens-inclines-receives- then fulfils. To listen and to fulfil is one act of being obedient which breathes out of the faith of the Bible in the God who calls us forth to being. One listens with the heart, from the core of the person... We recall Abraham, David, Jeremiah,

Joseph, and finally Mary who encounter the God of the Bible and his plan of salvation in which they had a role to play and to embrace in utter trust.

As A. Boeckmann says: “The Word of God addresses us. The life of every person is a special realization of a personal divine call. The person is shown as someone whose essence it is to be called. This is our dignity and also our obligation.” (Perspectives, 16)

The presence of the biblical God reaches back to patriarchal times, to the time of the prophets and the kings of Israel. His voice reverberates in the sacred writings of his people as he calls them to return to him.

Prov. 4:20: “My son, to my words pay attention, to my sayings incline your ear.”

Ps. 44:11: Listen daughter,... incline your ear, forget... The King desires your beauty.”

Ps. 94: 8: “Today, when you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

Jer 7:23: “Listen O Israel. Listen to my call. I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk on the way which I enjoin on you so that you may prosper.”

The call to an obedient life has a dynamism of its own, sounding out to God-seekers in the desert in past centuries, still mightily reaching us in our vocation as monastics today. Nothing is more luminous than the vocation story of our own founder, Fr. Andreas Amrhein. He recalled how he in his life obeyed a “charism” which led through tortuous paths before he could see the light of his call – to bring “the light to millions of others who stumble in the darkness.” (Cf Sr. Sister Mary Bellarmine Bernas, OSB (Summarized from Sustained by God’s Faithfulness by Sister Bernita ito.ssc.edu.ph/priory/pdf).

“One Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 1867, Josef Amrhein was awakened by a loud call that clearly said: “Leave everything!” He did not know for sure whether the experience was a mere “dream, hallucination, or just chance”. However, “after this Pentecost experience Amrhein was sure of his priestly calling.” (PDF, 1.)

.... The following Pentecost (1970) he went for a three-day retreat in Beuron. He was very impressed by the solemn liturgy of Beuron and before he left the monastery he decided to join the monks. “Without doubt it was chiefly his generous heart, ever ready to follow a call, which prompted Amrhein’s quick decision.” (PDF, 2)

In his autobiographical sketch (1883) Amrhein refers to this seemingly hasty decision as a “mystery of God’s wise, loving providence” which prepared him for the particular foundation that he would eventually make. “I was destined to receive a monastic training which has produced so many holy missionaries who went forth to convert peoples and lands.” (PDF, 3) While in Beuron Father Andreas was in constant inner conflict, “for the ideal of combining monastic life with apostolic activity beckoned to him with steady and increasing urgency, yet there was no prospect of any kind of apostolic work for him.” Because of this, he wanted to leave before his profession but the abbot dissuaded him. “Abbot Maurus evidently thought Brother Andreas’ monastic calling was genuine, but not his apostolic vocation.” For many years, Father Andreas’ desire for apostolic service remained unabated. His writings give us an insight into the prayerful discernment process that must have occupied him during those difficult years. “Were I less determined to do God’s will, even to desist from my most cherished desire for his sake, I might consider this call as a temptation. Were I less convinced, despite my submission to God’s will, of my missionary vocation, I might see it as a source of disquiet, as sheer temptation.”

“In November 1880 Father Amrhein wrote down the fruit of his years of reflection in Maredsous. His missionary strategy would not rely on individual missionaries, but center around a monastic community. The monastery would be a home for children and would train young natives in workshops directed by the

brothers. Its lands were not only to sustain the community but also to teach the people agriculture and animal husbandry to make them settle down. The beauty of the liturgical celebration was to be a significant attraction in missionary work. These fundamental principles animated Father Amrhein's endeavors in succeeding years." (PDF, 4-5).....

From this obscure beginning the new missionary Benedictine congregation would slowly grow from its first site in Reichenbach and then to Emming, later called St. Ottilien. The foundation developed into what we know now as the Congregation of the Benedictine Fathers of St. Ottilien. While still in Reichenbach Father Amrhein would slowly include women in his foundation. (PDF 5-6)

The triple invitation – (the triple promise)

In A.Boeckmann's semantic study we discover obedience anew as a triple invitation and commitment. The triple invitation inherent in God's call is a drama in freedom. Both Master and invitee enter into a dialogue of freedom and action. **“Listen, incline the ear of your heart, willingly receive and faithfully execute...”** Surely the use of this freedom has crucial consequences for both the caller and the called. What is involved in this drama?

Here A. Boeckmann emphasizes that **“listening”** is a human process inherent in the act of obeying. *“The word “listen” characterizes the spirituality of the entire Rule; it indicates that receiving comes before acting... the priority of the word over the image, of listening before seeing... Benedict wants to lead his monastics to such an integral attitude of listening, be it to God and the divine Word, be it to persons and the situation of the times, be it to the written or the spoken word, even to the unarticulated, not yet formulated word.* (Perspectives,16).

It is further enhanced by a biblical image of **“inclining the ear of your heart”**. The deep meaning of the heart in the Bible includes both the good desire of receiving God's Word as a seed and the evil rejection of the message which is sin. In the Prologue, however, it is that attentive attitude of being ready to accept and to respond after meditating on the Word. In short, listening with the ear of the heart is **humility** (cf Perspectives, 16) It is a lowering of the self to a posture of one who depends on Another for life and well-being.

The Divine invitation also includes a **triple promise** expressed in the words *“praecepta – teaching”, “admonitio – admonition”, and “sermo – word”*. They are promised to the newcomer as the object of his/her listening. According to Smaragdus the main substance of these *praecepta* is the love of God and of neighbour, inviting us to already think of RB 72 on the good zeal. At any rate this triple promise of the *praecepta* are “not theoretical words and instructions, but guides to right living, showing the way. Benedict uses all three words for Sacred Scriptures as well as for the teachings of the abbot and the Rule.” (Perspectives, 17) No analysis-paralysis encroaches here but the Word of life from Holy Scripture to those who would listen. Also no controlling behaviour on the part of God is felt, but a gentle drawing to the path of obedience.

The invitation is clearly applicable to the master (teacher, leader, parent). *“ According to the RB, the abbot ought to have integrated all of Sacred Scripture into himself (64.9) and may not teach anything contrary to the Lord's command (2.4). He himself has become a master by listening to the word of God, by obedience, and by fulfilling what he heard.”* (Perspectives, 16).

The triple commitment to action

The triple invitation has its correspondence in a **triple commitment to action** through the same process, namely to

- listen and incline the ear of the heart - *obsculta et inclina aurem cordis tui*
- willingly receive - *libenter excipe*
- put into practice - *efficaciter comple*

Once again, the countercultural point in the process is evident. In a culture of speed, of the will to achieve, of instant results, “listening with the ear of the heart” seems an utterance from a foreign tongue. We moderns are not made up for humble stances, much less for inroads into our autonomy. Our stance is that of the superhero James Bond who has the power to push a button or pull out a gun, symbols of our age that we can make things happen. He has no need of anyone else to teach him to think or do anything. This is indeed disconcerting for a monastic of the James Bond mould to depend on a wisdom that comes from elsewhere.

Likewise, in a culture that glorifies autonomy, the injunction to “receive willingly” some truth or judgment from another as in the Prologue goes against our grain. Yet, Benedict uses this expression three times so as to impress on his monks that “receiving willingly” is intrinsic to listening. It is when we don’t really listen that we also aren’t able to accept the divine message with a glad disposition. We listen to many other voices that drown the sharp edge of God’s summons.

Says A. Boeckmann: “*Again the human person is confronted by the word of God. It is typical of Benedict to emphasize openness three times before mentioning action. But opening oneself requires an effort, for God’s voice is not always heard in thunder (Prol 8), nor is it obtrusive like advertising, but it is often very soft and unobtrusive and needs to be listened to with love and in recollection.*” (*Perspectives*, 18).

When we speak of obedience as a capacity to listen to Sacred Scripture, we think in terms of an attitude that is the **virtue of a leader, be he /she an abbot/abbess or a teacher in the classroom or a parent or a politician or a workman who wields power over others.**

- * As leaders do we have the Word of God in our life? Is it the source of our wisdom and our norm for action? Says Pope Francis: “reform always begins with spiritual... before structural changes.”
- * Do we listen to the biblical God of our faith in our concrete circumstances and embrace with an open heart what we see as his will for us— in the home, in the classroom, in politics, in the media, in the Church, in our dealings with government and in society ?
- * As a monastic, do I carry in myself the faith in a biblical God who gives me my vocation as a personal trust and enjoins me to contribute my share in his total plan of salvation - in big ways and small, in health and in sickness, in easy or intractable paths?
- * As a Missionary Benedictine sister what should I change in my life in order to be the “obedient daughter of St. Benedict” that I am called to be?

Intrinsic to the attitude of listening is the will to carry out the message from God that we have heard. This is a commitment to action and service that follows as night follows day. Although listening comes before the deed, the Word of God has to be put into practice. The word

“efficaciter” in the phrase “efficaciter comple” contains, according to Sr. Aquinata the characteristic of “energy” – **put into action - “not half-heartedly, not sluggishly but quickly, perseveringly, with strength.”**

The whole process is a description of lectio divina, detailing our attitude towards the Word of God. “According to the old monastics it means just this: making room for the Word, bending the ear to Scriptures, taking the Word into the heart, treasuring it there and letting it bear fruits, so that it may permeate all the veins and become flesh in daily life.” (Perspectives, 18).

Prologue 5-7 is a further step along the path of obedience.

A → 5 So that he who has already graciously counted us as his sons,
(cf 1 Jn 3:2)

B should never be saddened by our evil actions. (cf Eph 4:30;
Rom 8:15-17)

C 6 For we must at all times obey him with the good things he has given us.

B' that he may never like an angry father, disinherit his sons,
7 nor like a fear-inspiring Lord be infuriated by our sins

A' and give us over to everlasting punishment as wicked servants
(cf Mt 18:32; Lk 19:22)

who did not wish to follow him to glory. (cf 1 Pt 5:10)

V. 6 – the nucleus is our response:

we are to obey him with all the good things he has given us.

Goods in our world engulf us – whether we have them or desire them. The whole commercial world is at our doorstep. Like it or not, our energies are drawn to them, in acquiring, possessing and enjoying them. It is, therefore, not easy to be enthusiastic about the “good things” being used for others other than ourselves.

For Benedict this response is our whole life in community. We have been given all the qualities, gifts and skills necessary in order to be able to serve God and one another in community. This service is primarily through obedience.

I never thought that obedience could mean this way – putting “time”, “talents” and “treasures” at the service of the Lord and of our brothers and sisters. It is not so much the little commands and tasks that we should focus on, but the radicality and direction of putting all that we have and we are for the good of the others. Obedience is much bigger and greater and broader. We do not ape the Fathers of the Desert, some of whom measured obedience in literal and blind obedience – to plant a tree upside down, to weave baskets and unweave them, to remain dumb until one is spoken to, etc. One desert father, Simeon the Stylite, even remained

seated on a style for 37 years, neither taking a bath nor a rest, so that the lice collected on his body in such numbers that they fell off and crawled back again.

Being unresponsive means that we can reckon in v 7 with the grief of the Father who can also respond in two ways: 1) he can disinherit us or 2) or give us over to everlasting punishment.

Why? Because the invitation is not a trivial affair. It means all or nothing. It means our salvation. Our inactivity will make us slide back = taking the status of being “wicked servants”. It is said that the way to God is an inclined plane where we can slide back if we don’t keep walking ahead.

In Mt 18:32 the Master calls his servant a “wicked servant” whose debt was forgiven for the latter did not imitate his Master’s humane behavior towards a fellow servant. In Lk 19:22 the Master calls his servant a “wicked servant” who buried his talents in the ground. However, in 1 Pet 5:10 Peter tells his community that the glory is promised to those of them who suffer patiently in this world because the God who called them to eternal glory in Christ will strengthen them. So God’s invitation can very well mean “painful obedience.”

This painful obedience does happen not only to Church people but also to those who are people of good will in our world.

In 1961 a man, an ordinary man, a lawyer, is reading the morning newspaper. His eye catches news item from Portugal about two students who had just been sentenced to seven years imprisonment for what was called a crime against the state. And what was that crime They had raised their glasses in a toast to freedom. The lawyer’s name was Peter Benenson, was familiar with the fights of political prisoners. He had defended some of them in countries like South Africa, Spain, and Hungary. Somehow this item sparked something different in him. He decided then and there to form an organization of citizens who would unite their efforts on behalf of political prisoners throughout the world.

Benenson announced his intent in an article that appeared in hundreds of newspapers in both London and Paris. Within a month, he received a thousand offers to help. Thus began the organization now known throughout the world as Amnesty International. In 1977, the group was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Today it has over 250,000 members in 134 countries.... Peter read his newspaper that morning and made the decision. As you might imagine, his decision caused a lot of division, especially among oppressive governments.”

- * Obedience according to the Rule is obedience to Christ, obedience to the Word of God, obedience to the brethren. It means listening in all directions, because it is not self-referential, but other directed. How do we translate this in our role as **leaders, teachers, and co-workers**?
- * In our contemporary settings this translates into humility, an attitude of making space for people in order to show them innate respect, to listen to their counsel, to offer them support and encouragement in their journey to the same God. Do we believe in sharing information, sharing power, sharing decisions accepting constructive criticism and empowering persons, especially the women and the poor? How do we going about this?
- * In community obedience is the single weapon for combat along the journey. “Obedience is definitely first. This is the fight of the coenobite, not a one-sided asceticism, silence, bodily mortification, battle against evil spirits.” How do we serve our community through obedience in our daily prayer, mission, relationships and common life?
- * What good things – resources, skills, institutions – do I have with which to obey God in the community and in the ministry that he has given me to fulfil?

A culture of prayer and service in the coenobium

Finally, a culture of obedience is a culture of prayer and of community service. For a Missionary Benedictine Sister this translates into a will not to achievement but to a will to constancy in the demands of coenobitic life. I might be talented or average, healthy or sick, strong or weak, book learned or simple, my profession of obedience asks me to be there where the community and our mission needs me. Let me end with a simple Benedictine sister of the Daegu Priory who lived her vocation as just that – obedient to the call of the hour in her community and service.

Sr. Columba Park was born of the rural nobility in Sunan in 1908. As a member of the Wonsan Priory in North Korea, she saw how the Russian communists overrun her province which later fell in the hands of the Korean communists. She saw how the priory was sequestered by them and how Mother Gertrud and 20 other sisters were taken into captivity. She herself succeeded in fleeing south to Seoul and to Pusan and were rejoined by the 19 others who were left behind. How did Sr. Columba fare after this tumultuous events in the country, in the priory and in her life? Her biographical sketch is entitled: “Missionary to the Poor.”

“In 1962 she was called to the priory house at Sin-amdong in Taegu where she cared for the needy at the clinic. She devoted herself to the poorest and visited them in their huts, checking whether they had food, clothing, and other necessities. After referring the sick to the hospital, she would make sure they received appropriate treatment.

From 1965 until 1971 Sr. Columba was the subprioress of Taegu, much loved and appreciated by the sisters. She was a deeply pious, peaceable, tactful and realistic sister. Thus, she could mediate when tensions arose and promote harmony in the quickly growing community. She rarely lost her composure... She was a person who inspired confidence... In Kyeong-san she cared for the farm, the vineyard, the orchard of peach trees. She was a loving, provident superior who cared well for everyone. She readily did any manual work, cleaning, gardening, and tending the animals...

On June 13, cancer of the bile duct was diagnosed... She wished to die quickly and faced death with acceptance. She asked for a very simple funeral, like that of poor people, and fitting for a poor religious.

Three days before her death Sr. Columba pleaded with all the sisters who visited her: “Love each other sincerely! Show reverence and patience towards each other!... She remained conscious and mentally clear until the end. In pain she kept crying, “Jesus, save me. Jesus, I love you. Jesus, free me from temptation.” During her final two hours, she only could say, “Jesus! Jesus!” Sister Columba Park died on July 19, 1983.” (M. Handel, Living Benedictine Values, 51-53).

Conclusion

There are myriads of ways of journeying back to God. Benedict enjoins the “way of obedience” for his monastics. In the little Rule of life that he left behind he describes this way – a journey – as a form of life that prioritizes the Word of God in Scriptures, the openness of the heart to listen to it and the will to serve the community in response. The road is not primarily one of combat against external foes, the devil or vices, but rather “the personal relationship with Christ who unites the monastics as a community and makes them one without class distinctions,” serving the community in obedience, under a Rule and an abbot. (cf Perspectives, 25)