

FORMATION

For the spoonful of honey,

Honey bees gather large amounts of flower nectar and pollen. **Nectar is a sugary fluid secreted by flowers, collected by bees to make into honey.**

Here are few nectars I've gathered:

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881- 1955) A French Jesuit, theologian and philosopher, especially known for his theory that man is evolving , mentally and spiritually, toward a final spiritual unity.

Teilhardian nectar For him, man is not the center of the universe but rather the upward arrow of the great biological synthesis.

From Teilhard, let us keep this nectar of ongoing research that challenges us to articulate science and reason at the heart of human current affairs. Let's simply remember these breathtaking words: *Christ has not finished forming himself. He has not brought back to Himself the last folds of His Robe of flesh and love that His faithful are forming for Him.*

We are thus folds of his Robe of flesh and love on the returning path to Christ. This is a good reason to believe in the need for ongoing formation; a good reason to love being part of this movement towards completion, and to respond to it; a good reason to invite our contemporaries to bring their folds of flesh and love for the one Wedding Robe!

The nectar of the Bible!

Three words: to form, form (noun) and formation. Let's keep the two main ones: form and to form.

Form:

Num 12:8: "Moses contemplates the form of God".

Is 44, 13: "The sculptor gives him human form".

And Luke 3, 22: " And the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (synoptics)

To form:

Gen 2, 7: The Lord formed man out of the clay of his hands.

Job 10, 8: Your hands formed me and fashioned me.

Ps 118, 73: Your hands formed me and fashioned me; give me insight to learn your commands.

Wis 9, 2: By your wisdom you formed man...

Sir 17, 1: God formed man in his own image.

Is 42, 6: I took you by the hand and formed you... or Is 44, 2 : The Lord formed you from the womb.

1 Ti 2, 13: Adam was the first to be formed.

God forms man with his hands, in his image according to his wisdom, so that he may learn his will.

We can quickly grasp **the force of this biblical nectar**: God forms the universe and all that it contains, he forms man in his image and he gives man the Spirit so that he forms the living Christ in man. Paul unfolds the image and says: "You are one Body", and he gives us the program of formation by the Master Formator: the Spirit. The Father desires for us this stature of perfect man, the Spirit is sent to give us a share in his life. What exhortation do we hear? Let the Word of Christ dwell in you

Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and how, through psalms, praise, songs... So, what does the training lead to? To praise God at all times, in everything, to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus and to offer honour, glory and praise to the Father through Christ.

An appeal: to have a Bible, to have a psalter. Have them with you... and open them.

Patristic nectar: The Second Century bishop of Lyon, France, Saint Irenaeus.

The question posed by Irenaeus in Book IV of *Adversus Hæreses*, "Could not God have made man perfect from the beginning?"

Irenaeus is opposed to the Gnostics, who set out to "weave ropes out of sand" (I, 8, 1). To do this, he chooses to give "in all simplicity, truth and candour" (I, Pr), the seeds to refute their doctrines and weave the ropes that keep the mast upright, strong and resistant to the various attacks: "Jesus Christ our Lord, who because of his superabundant Love, made himself what we are, in order to

make us what he is" (V, Pr). In 'Adversus Hæreses', Irenaeus explicitly develops the question of human progression. Progression means formation.

Like this Adam-child, the newly born human being is called to attain the perfect charity poured into his heart by the Spirit and thus, by participation in this same Spirit, to become "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5,) by acquiring the power of the Uncreated.

Enlightened faith: this is indeed the way to progress, to become "con-corporeal" with God, participating in his divine nature, to respond to our vocation as men, to become free with the freedom of the children of God.

Then there is the vocabulary that indicates an action or a passage. This becoming is oriented towards the individuation of time: ascent (e.g.: III, 17, 2), to grow, to increase, to become (e.g. II, 34, 2), to get accustomed, to exercise, to seek and to find, (a couple which emphasise the search).

Finally, the vocabulary that indicates a state. It highlights the nature in question: to be, existence, to exist; seed, unfinished; child, adult; completion, to complete; maturity, fruit; perfection (*perficere*), to make perfect (e.g.: III, 12, 5).

Enlightened faith is therefore enlightened by and in this time of becoming...

The images chosen by Irenaeus are developed in two registers throughout his work, intersecting and responding to each other, mutually enriching each other:

- vital images: plant: seed, growth, fructification and animal: child, maturity, adult
- musical images: rhythm, melody, symphony, polyphony, tuning.

Some of the tasty nuggets that give a special flavour to our spoonful of honey.

Three of them stand out in my mind: enlightened faith; the work of representing and creating the chosen images; and the capacity of every human being to bring to fruition and share the seeds of the Word.

Benedictine nectar - Five elements:

Listen, School, Disciple; Study, Return to the Father.

Five words like five flowers planted in the heart of God. This gives a very special pollen for the spoonful of honey: **a school for every disciple who wants to return to the Father, by listening**

and studying. Perhaps a vision for the 21st century of what the Spirit can give us to see and live in the manner of our Father St Benedict, who saw the world as a luminous point!

In the Prologue:

"We have therefore to establish a school of the Lord's service, in the institution of which we hope we are going to establish nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. But if, prompted by the desire to attain to equity, anything be set forth somewhat strictly for the correction of vice or the preservation of charity, do not therefore in fear and terror flee back from the way of salvation of which the beginning cannot but be a narrow entrance.

For it is by progressing in the life of conversion and faith that, with heart enlarged and in ineffable sweetness of love, one runs in the way of God's commandments, so that never deserting His discipleship but persevering until death in His doctrine within the monastery, we may partake by patience in the suffering of Christ and become worthy inheritors of His kingdom. Amen.

The school is a place not only for correcting one's vices and safeguarding charity, but also for advancing and progressing along the path of the commandments in order to share in the reign of love. Progression and advancement are thus proposed as a way of realizing the Father's plan of love in a perspective of continual learning. To found this school is to commit oneself to it forever through stability. There are many topical perspectives in our changing, unstable world, with no reference points other than those we choose for ourselves. A school that teaches the doctrine of faith, as a return to the Father for life and happiness, and at the same time a path of participation through patience in the sufferings of Christ.

Saint Benedict speaks of **reading**, the tools of the spiritual art, and of **study**. I read the second very short passage that I have retained:

RB 8, 3: "For the time that remains after the Office of the night, they shall use it to learn the Psalms and the Lessons they need."

Some translations speak of study: the study of the psalms. Verse to be compared with verse 5 of chapter 58: "He will spend in the novices' dwelling where they meditate, eat and sleep." Study, read and meditate on the Scriptures, the psalms and the books of the Catholic fathers "which teach the right way to reach our Creator". (RB 73, 4)

Let's remember this insistence on teaching, on asking people to study, to meditate, to read, and to show the way to the Father, the Creator. Ascending to reach the heights, the summits of love

through the practice of good works. An unvarnished coherence outlines the monk's life, a coherence between listening and practice, disciple and master, brother and community, *noviter veniens et perveniens*. The emphasis is clearly on a journey of growth, through conversion, praise and service.

Saint Benedict undoubtedly gives us a precious experience, the search for varied nectars with the scents of **conversion**, **praise** and **service** drawn from the well of the Scriptures, through meditation, study and rest in God, which is presented first and foremost as patient participation in the sufferings of Christ.

There would be many other nectars to pick out, but these four categories are enough for today.

The bee still collects pollen with its legs, before returning to the hive and working to produce a variety of products: wax, propolis, royal jelly, honey and even venom. Let's take a look at a few pollens before entering the hive.

POLLEN: a fine powdery substance produced by plants. Bees collect pollen and bring it back to the hive to feed the community

Anthropological pollen

Man is in search of himself: "What is man that makes you think of him? This is nothing new. As Ecclesiastes says: "Nothing new under the sun". What is new is the acceleration of science, which has profoundly altered our anthropological reference points and even turned them upside down. We cannot ignore the major ethical questions and the dizziness caused by the lack of solid reflection. One question leads to another: from augmented human beings to artificial intelligence, there are many ebbs and flows that networks amplify and explode, to the point of causing real existential tsunamis. What kind of men and women are we? Which men and women are we addressing? What kind of men and women are we becoming? Far from the barbarians St Benedict addresses in the Prologue. But are we so sure? This man, this enhanced woman, endowed with artificial intelligence, with an omnipotent will, a desire for immortality, a pronounced taste for individual well-being without suffering, a frightening appetite for consumption, don't they have some things in common with biblical man? Fear, mistrust, desire, thirst for happiness, the ability to beget, love, tenderness, forgiveness, gratitude, wonder, growth, words.

So, I see **the relationship between man and the word as the foundation of the culture of dialogue** that Pope Francis is trying to foster in the Church and the world. Yes, the primacy of the word, the primacy of dialogue because of the primacy of mystery.

Philosophical pollen

Let's continue our pollen harvest and turn to a contemporary German philosopher, Hartmut Rosa. "The cultural driving force behind this form of life we call modern is the idea, the wish and the desire to make the world available. But vitality, contact and real experience are born of the encounter with the unavailable. A world that is completely known, planned and dominated is a dead world."

There are two unavoidable words: availability and unavailability, which structure Rosa's research, starting with the acceleration of the world, which seems to him impossible to slow down. If we can't slow things down, what can we do? Return to the earth its unavailable part so that it can resonate with what is received, taken in and assimilated. In fact, to simplify things, our relationship with the world can be understood as consumption on every level. Consumption of everything that is available, all the time, everywhere, by everyone. From harvesting to extracting precious minerals, to the quest for renewable energy, we operate under this mode of consumption, to such an extent that we have established a day of excess, a day of the year, between the end of July and the beginning of August, when our annual consumption of the earth exceeds what it produces in the year. We are devouring the earth exponentially. This is true in all areas, and this consumption, which is never satisfied, leads to frustration, anger and despair, which in turn leads to violence and creates a culture of death. Leaving the world its unavailable part means integrating what has been given, allowing it to make its way and thus to resonate and respond, by producing, through a fertile gap, a fertile space for life, dialogue and exchange, the seeds of a culture of sobriety, dialogue and fraternity.

Not inconsiderate pessimism, but a serious call to look at our inconsistencies, our paradoxes, our contradictions, to discern our resonances and look at our places of availability and unavailability. We need to take a closer look at the frustrations and angers that are expressed in our personal lives, in our communities and in society. Then we will perhaps be able to better discover what will open up and become available by consenting not to what is forbidden or refused to us, but simply lost, because we had it as dominators.

Sociological pollen

A brief look at this societal flower, which is particularly specific to each country and continent. Our bee's legs are already full of this pollen, based on our anthropological and philosophical approach.

Pollen brings a particular nuance to our thinking, linked to hyper-consumption approached from a sociological point of view. It's an appeal to consume differently, an apprenticeship that starts with education: family and school. Initial training is certainly needed to reverse a state of affairs, but is the gigantic scale of the appeal realistic? How far are we going to saturate consumption before we can hope to stop and do things differently? The covid crisis is still fresh in our minds: a before and an after. Right? I doubt it... A question for us all!

Theological / ecclesial pollen

A final outing for our industrious bee: heading for the XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission" with the *Instrumentum laboris*. This document was first sent to the participants so that they could work on it. A document that is accessible to us. It's up to us to pick out what is useful, good and necessary for us today. I have retained point A2: Chapter 1 is entitled "For a Synodal Church: An Integral Experience".

A1: The characteristic signs of a synodal Church and

A2: A way forward for the synodal Church: conversation in the Spirit

This dynamic, born of the Church and given by the Church, reaches out to us today and touches us. Here we are, called together to make our own way, to let ourselves be carried along by this happy Pentecost Wind. The WYD has already borne fruit, and the Instrumentum is still in its infancy. It's up to us to see what this way of living encourages, calls for and generates in terms of change. We are one big family, living under the same Rule, stemming from the same intuition, that of the Spirit who immobilised the man of God, Benedict, in order to teach him to remain under God's gaze, in a tireless search for his Peace, and therefore for his Face, discovered in each person we meet.

The Spirit invites us to this "*habitare secum*" to dare the frontiers of fraternity, by listening to the Word, meditating on it, celebrating it, putting it into practice, not alone in one's corner, but in community. A place of stability, a crest line, a tipping point, a rock buried in the inner cave from which the publican cries out: "Have mercy on me, a sinner".

As Benedictines, we will really have to study how to make this new ecclesial dynamism our own: how can we journey together to discern in the Spirit what he is saying to the Churches? The

proposed outline seems clear to me, with the different phases presented, which are quite familiar to us when we practise lectio and group lectio.

A revolution for our Church today that Pope Francis is sowing like good grain. What is this good grain falling on now? I've chosen one single issue as the formative pollen, issue 42:

"Bearing in mind the significance of conversation in the Spirit to animate the lived experience of the synodal Church, formation in this method, and in particular of facilitators capable of accompanying communities in practising it, is perceived as a priority at all levels of ecclesial life and for all the Baptised, starting with ordained Ministers in a spirit of co-responsibility and openness to different ecclesial vocations. Formation for conversation in the Spirit is formation to be a synodal Church."

Let us also learn that this synodal Church must above all be a "listening Church" and that, consequently, it "desires to be humble, and knows that it must ask forgiveness and has much to learn". Isn't that what St Benedict proposes as the path to life and happiness?

It "unceasingly nourishes itself at the source of the mystery it celebrates in the liturgy", during which it "experiences radical unity, expressed in the same prayer", but in the "diversity" of languages and rites. Isn't this what St Benedict proposes as the path of conversion that leads to the Father?

It is a Church "of discernment, in the wealth of meanings that this term takes on within the different spiritual traditions". A1. Isn't this what St Benedict proposes as a path of conformity to Christ, using the tools of spiritual art?

We are at a favorable time, albeit a laborious and painful one, in the midst of the Church's renewal, which is affecting all sectors. The preparatory document specifies some of these, such as the need for "integral, initial and ongoing formation" for all; the "effort" to renew the language of liturgy, homilies, catechesis, the sacred arts and all forms of communication. In Lisbon, the Pope drove a nail in the coffin with young university students: "Be pilgrims of knowledge..." Isn't that what St Benedict proposes as a way of seeking God, by listening to the Word, put into practice in fraternal life and praise?

Nectar and pollen are not placed side by side, preciously guarded by the foraging bee; they are pooled and transformed by an alchemy unique to the hive to produce its fruits, including

honey. Is this not what St Benedict proposes as a path of disappropriation to found the stability of the community?

Our spoonful of honey today:

Conformity to Christ: the aim of formation

Formation is therefore a process that is not just a matter of content, duration and concepts to be learned. It is an inner readiness that is gradually being formed and transformed, and is destined to acquire a profound stability. Growth, progression. Nectar of Irénée de Lyon.

Formation by **imitation**: we copy a model, the most remarkable of which is Christ, himself the perfect image of the Father. A grace and a danger: the grace of the relational context, the master/disciple relationship, well known to the desert fathers. Danger: the imitation that computer technology transforms into a copy/paste that replaces the other, takes its place and therefore eliminates it. It's a danger that René Girard has highlighted throughout his ethnological research. Imitation leads to violence and chaos.

Formation by **following** in the footsteps of Christ, the sequela Christi: we follow a Master, Christ, in the best of cases, on a path to journey with him. This is a process that imparts an effective change of direction, absolute trust, and a personal, and therefore emotional, commitment.

The danger is that the following is very external to the self, with no commitment of the heart, of the feelings, no integration of the road as if driving in GPS mode... fidelity of behavior, blind obedience, without taking into account the person who is walking.

Formation by **identification**, as Saint Paul exhorted the Philippians: "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus ". (Phil 2, 5) Diving from the outside in, from following, imitating to integrating, no longer consuming but integrating the feelings that accompany words and gestures. Biblical and philosophical nectar) It's about taming the inner vibrations of life, feeling, experiencing compassion, seeing life according to the etymology of *phronein* that St Paul uses.

"Christ therefore becomes the form of the person who is being formed, not just the norm of his actions and the trace that his footsteps follow", according to Cenini (p. 24).

In fact, formation transforms us so that Christ is formed in us and we become members of Christ, concorporeal with Christ (Irenaeus). This journey goes right down to the depths of the heart, to

the most existential instinctive powers, with its resources and weaknesses, to engender us as new men, molded according to the sentiments of Christ.

In the final analysis, formation is the passage from image to likeness, a total and profound identification with the Son, through a slow process of conformation and assimilation to the sentiments of the Only Son, the obedient Son, the suffering Servant, the innocent Lamb, offered in sacrifice.

Is it not this slow process of growth that Saint Benedict proposes when he founds a school of the Lord's service, "we may partake by patience in the suffering of Christ and become worthy inheritors of His kingdom."?

3.2 Fusion of the constituent elements

How does this slow process of forming the new man, called, loved and saved by Christ, take place? How can we welcome and participate in this new begetting, the gestation of the Son in us through the work of the Father and the power of the Spirit? How can we respond with a global, integral commitment of our whole being, whether human, psychological, emotional or spiritual? The whole man in every man... by all men!

Everything is material for God's creative, shaping and transforming action. It's up to us to provide this material, these sometimes minute details of life, like a glass of fresh water, a cushion in the boat or a patch of green grass. It's up to us to nourish ourselves, wisely: not too much, not too little, balanced, varied, sometimes indigestible but necessary food, leaving a bitter taste or too little to return to; nectar, pollen from the ordinary path, but also exceptional, extraordinary nectar and pollen like this Congress, WYD, the Synod, a retreat, a training session. Our capacity to integrate - without hyperconsumption - will gradually grow and open up, not to give answers to everything, to dominate everything, to know everything, but on the contrary to give meaning to life, to limits, to suffering, to death. That's what it's all about, conforming to the Son, the lofty heights of love.

Everything can then be welcomed, gathered up to be offered, in this privileged place that is the liturgy.

Pope Francis, a shepherd attentive to all, teaches. His Apostolic Letter, *Desiderio desideravi* (DD, 29 June 2022) offers some food for thought to help us contemplate the truth and beauty of the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. The key appears in the title itself, "I longed for the desire". God desires us. Let's be clear: "God desires us with a great desire". "God, through the new fact

of the Incarnation ... goes so far as to desire to be eaten by us. (DD24) The source, the heart of God, the act of love of Christ who gives his life to return us to the Father. Let us draw from this source abundantly to desire to open ourselves to the love with which we are thus loved. Our desire is indeed a response to God's primary desire. The free and unique resonance of each person as a member of the Body of Christ, resonance because it is the integration and symphony of salvation as a mission.

The liturgy plunges us into the furnace of God's love (DD56) to become beings of desire. Training in the liturgy involves the art of celebrating. *Ars celebrandi* "is one of the ways of caring for the symbols of the liturgy and growing in a vital understanding of them". This art is passed on, evolving, with rules, knowledge and learning that "is done for the liturgy and through the liturgy", since, in part, it is by doing that we learn. The sapiential dynamic of practice as pedagogy.

“Ah, what art are we summoned to learn for the proclamation of the Word, for the hearing of it, for letting it inspire our prayer, for making it become our very life? All of this is worthy of utmost attention — not formal or merely exterior, but living and interior — so that every gesture and every word of the celebration, expressed with “art,” forms the Christian personality of each individual and of the community.” (DD 53)

Here we are, nourished and equipped with a powerful word that opens up our horizons as Oblates of the 21st century: through the celebration of the Paschal Mystery we become what we receive, the One we receive, through and in a real adaptation of the art of celebrating.

3.3 Pedagogy of doubt, dissatisfaction, fear and suffering: Easter spirituality.

We are now integrating all that we have gathered along the way, to understand that we are yes, in exodus, in change, in outwards movement, in transformation, starting from the Cross of Christ, from his Salvation on Easter morning: "Mary", "Rabboni". St Paul forcefully preaches **the folly of Christ's Cross** (1 Co, Ep, Ph), our way, our life, our joy. From "all is accomplished" to "not yet finished", the dynamic of the provisional, the dynamic of the Spirit, provokes believers to doubt and frustration. Jesus has opened and continues to open passages: from fear to love, from suffering and death to life. He opens them in us, through docility and availability to the power of his resurrection, which does its work, that of growth. "The alternative to growth is not the status quo but regression".

Saint Benedict writes down his response and invites us to follow him, to run with our eyes

open to the light that recognizes the divine, with our hearts attentive to the Word, with an army of brothers to resist the devil... the service of the Lord, the service of our brothers, the service of faith lived out and doubts assumed, "by participating through patience in the sufferings of Christ to deserve a share in his kingdom". (RB Pr 50)

Participation at every moment, by every means, in every place, at every time... through the bond of faith, which becomes the patience of the future, the patience of love, the passion of love.]

Participation is therefore **formation** for St Benedict. \

In contemporary terms, formation can be defined as: "active and constant availability to learn the life of life (*docibilitas*) which is expressed in a set of ordinary but also extraordinary activities, vigilance and discernment, asceticism and prayer, study and apostolate, personal and community verification which help to mature daily in the believing identity and in the creative fidelity of one's vocation, the different circumstances and phases of life."

By way of CONCLUSION, an image and an appeal

The image: pollination

Every bee that passes from one flower to another, carries something of itself with it. When it lands, it leaves something of itself behind, transforming the world microcosmically through the phenomenon of pollination. Wouldn't we be called to invent this new art of evangelizing by pollination, integrating the support of our oblation, of our links with our oblate monasteries, still depositing this taste for formation as incorporation into the totality of Christ? Wouldn't the oblate thus be a messenger of peace and freedom through praise and fraternal life in relation to his or her oblate monastery? If we are truly bearers of the living Christ, then with his Spirit, we will know how, as the Hands of the Father, to encourage new paths of formation for a happy humanisation, divinisation and thus communion in the image of the Trinitarian life from which we come and to which we are going.