

BENEDICTINE EDUCATION

“WHAT WE HAVE RECEIVED WE PASS ON TO YOU:
OUR PAST AND OUR FUTURE IN THE ‘TODAY’ OF BENEDICTINE EDUCATION.”

1. Introduction: wisdom as a way of life

Both as a topic and as a concept, education is central within the tradition of St Benedict. As the monk, G. Penco, pointed out, the word ‘schola’, which St Benedict used only once in his Rule, and then in a passage copied from another rule, resists the norms of present-day interpretation. You might think this word seems of little interest to St Benedict (after all, he mentions it just the once, and then only in something he copied), but on the other hand, it is a reference to one of the most far-reaching ideas because of its impact on the world of western monasteries as schools dedicated to education. ‘This shows us,’ Penco goes on, ‘that a reality, like a tree, can be recognised not just by its roots (modern interpretation), but also by its stem and by its fruits.’

Education is the link that connects generations, committing itself to passing on the faith. To educate is to give life; just think of how the apostle Paul formed and guided the individual churches. He always knew that to teach someone was to give them life, not just handing on a message. And when he gave his life in Rome, he knew that, in this way, not only would his word go on living in his disciples, he himself would, too. We received life from our predecessors, and we will pass it on to those who come after. We are not passing on information. If we believe that all we have received is ‘training’, then content is all we will pass on. If we recognize that we have received life, then we will give our lives so that the next generation may live.

However, if St Benedict intended to found a school in the heart of the Roman world, already laden with educational riches (Pope Gregory himself attended the Roman schools), it must have been with a definite motive, and a particular intention. St Gregory, in the opening of his Life of Saint Benedict, says:

Born into a free Family in the region of Nurcia, he was sent to Rome to study the humanities. But seeing how, during such study, many allowed themselves to be led astray into vices, he withdrew his foot which he had almost set upon the threshold of the world, afraid that gaining a little of their knowledge would mean falling, like them, all the way into a bottomless pit. He therefore abandoned his studies in literature, left his father's house and wealth, and, desiring to please God alone, sought to observe a holy life (Deo placere desiderans, sanctae conversationis). So he withdrew, skilfully ignorant and wisely unlearned.

What Pope Gregory is saying in this account is fundamental: true formation of the young, or '*paideia*', is not a process of acquiring knowledge, since knowledge can be at a remove from how we actually live. In any educational process, even if it is only concerned with technical training, a certain way of life is always being passed on, for better or worse, independently of the content. Formation comes with a whole way of living. It also means that the life of an institution, or of a teacher, forms attitudes in their students, beyond the studied texts, which will allow their disciples to go on growing in wisdom because they have incorporated into their lives the 'tools' they received from their *paideia* in a way of life. All of us, can still remember some great teacher we had, and not always because their course was interesting or because they were the best, but just because they were great people. It follows that the heart of the process of formation is found first in the teacher and his life, in his maturity as a human being and in Christ, and then in the one being formed – the child, the adolescent.

Formation is the handing on of something one *is*, not just something one *knows*. This applies not only to institutes of education but to monasteries too. A monastery may go on offering the wrong kind of *paidea* to its monks, even engaging in the business of studies to a laudable degree, but in a way that leads to living in two parallel realities: on one side, an excellent education, but on the other, an absence of what is specifically Christian and Benedictine in their training. The monk, the formator, takes on the role of a mere functionary, a specialist in communicating stuff, nothing more.

This explains St Benedict's concern for the newcomer's formation, starting with what happens in the Porter's lodge where he wants there to be 'a wise monk who fears God...', as well as what he should find in the noviciate, where there must be someone (a *senior*) who knows how to 'win souls'. In the formation process, in the Benedictine *paideia*, the first impressions of the institution are the most important. This also shows us that it is only those who are already well-advanced along the path of formation themselves – and who persevere in it – who are able to teach others.

Education, formation, is handed on as part of an entire way of life. A way of life, like a book, (as the scholar Pierre Hadot¹ notes) demands of us some kind of ‘spiritual exercise’, even if we don’t realise it. Our daily reading of any newspaper teaches us a particular way of seeing life. Reading a book, following a course of studies or a teacher, brings about the spiritual exercise of seeing through someone else’s eyes. This spiritual process embeds itself more deeply in us than mere ideas.

This means that, according to St Benedict, the richest kind of education and formation (*paideia*) is received through lived experience. St Bernard insists on the same thing when commenting on the Degrees of Humility and Pride; it means it is something real. The kind of formation derived from books, which deal in abstractions and generalizations, comes to an end after a few years. By contrast, learning to read life, learning to know oneself and Christ from the experience of real life (as St Bernard says), rather than from books, involves a schooling in life which can only be passed on by those who already possess it. This is, perhaps, the primary and fundamental characteristic of *paideia* in the Monastery: formation is a matter of real experience, and acquiring it is a question of adopting a method, a way of living and seeing, which allows us to read the presence and working of Christ in our lives at every step, in every moment in a very real way, as shown us by the Scriptures. This will be an asset throughout life, and something we can pass on to others. In this regard, R Guardini said:

A second way (to come to know God) might be one’s own personal life. The poverty of our religious culture may become alarmingly clear to us when we consider how little we have tried to reach an understanding of God from our own life, a life, that is, which is guided by him. Christian existence should also mean that we are sustained not merely by theoretical conviction, but by the vivid awareness that he is guiding our lives. Then every event will contain some self-manifestation of God and, thereby, knowledge of ourselves too. On this basis we could say: I was brought into being the way I am, and my life has a set course. We can therefore say something of what God is like, must be like, if realities like me and my existence are to be possible at all. This gives rise to the question: ‘so, who is God and what is he like?’ Clearly, this question demands considerable circumspection, a watchful honesty, a sincere humility and a feeling of genuine repentance. I need, then, to be constantly aware of that element which

¹ P. HADOT, “Ejercicios espirituales y filosofía antigua”, Madrid 2006, 23 ss.

continually intrudes, causing confusion and obscuring God's providence, namely, my own wickedness. Nevertheless, the question is well-aimed and necessary, since through it we come to an understanding of God out of human self-understanding, and vice-versa.². (cf. 'Attende tibi ipsi', St Basil the Great)

As Guardini says, when paideia allows us to read the presence of Christ in our own histories, our own lives and in the present moment, we come to know not just ourselves, but Christ and God also. Studying the manuals on spirituality or theology are secondary, mere aids for reaching this primary goal which Guardini identifies. If this is not so, then the formation is more concerned with things, than with people.

Here we find a crucial truth: family. Family forms people through a way of life. However, for various reasons (crises, absences, lack of interest, etc) parents don't often undertake family life as a means of formation. It's usually the opposite: the family is the setting for problems, conflicts, crises which not even the parents can sort out or help their children cope with. Therefore, the answers, for better or worse, need to come from outside. It is the school's job to help in this process, if it is genuinely interested in doing so. School is where children seek what they cannot find in the family, in their mother and father... or brothers and sisters. Good formators should be able to intuit this and know how to deal with it. In this field, their training needs to be continuous, starting with knowing themselves and their own lived experience. It's not just about providing a good religious education. The Benedictine school teaches how to 'live' the central truths of life, rather than simply filling the child or young person with information. However, in the light of the gospel, we need to identify these fundamental truths which imply a way of life. One of the most important among them, perhaps, is prayer. This is usually absent in family life. However, in the Benedictine tradition, it's not so much about teaching them how to pray, as about understanding how to unite prayer with life and see how the realities of the world take on a new light through prayer.

A characteristic example of the 'Benedictine school' is how people eat together. In schools where meals are shared, this can be a crucial time for discovering the eucharistic significance which St Benedict, following the gospels, gives them. They happen not just in the context of prayer (in a basic kind of way) but in the eucharistic context of 'service'. Christ

² R. Guardini: "La aceptación de sí mismo", Madrid 1968. Anexo final. St Basil the Great teaches the same thing in his famous and lengthy homily, 'Attende tibi ipse.'

washes his disciples' feet (Jn 13) and serves at table (Lk 22). These eucharistic gestures, which for Christ signify 'giving life through food', are not always accompanied by intentional attitudes: it's not the parents, or the teachers, or the College officials who serve at table, but paid employees or those who are made to because they have misbehaved. We see how the whole evangelical and Benedictine approach has been turned on its head: serving is something degrading, the one who serves is of lower status and, from another perspective, we have lost the sense how those who are seated – the children and young people – are the ones the school is serving, the ones who matter, who are valued. Nowadays, we've got the evangelical and Benedictine message of this life situation back to front, and this is what we are teaching our young people!

As they like to say these days: the ideas behind these 'lifestyles', which lodge in the student's consciousness, are fundamental. And this goes for other situations where habits of seeing and living are embedded. It's impressive to see how ecological studies in school have led to children 'teaching' their parents how to act properly, showing them how to dispose of waste, to be careful in their use of water etc.

The same is true for ways of living in a Christian and Benedictine way. But we need to identify these and find a way. Educating someone in the faith does not mean teaching new content in addition to what is presented in the classroom. It means teaching them how to lived these truths every day, at every moment, in a Christian way.³

Benedictine spirituality does not seek to stamp the presence of Christ on the world and on life. Benedictine spirituality and its paideia teach how to uncover Christ's presence in everything and highlight it. This was one of the principal beliefs of the monks: everything is filled with Christ. His presence needs to be recognized and one of the signs by which he is recognised is the Cross.

We may end this first point by noting a methodological principle of monastic wisdom: 'learning to read' requires us to recognise that whenever we read a book, whether it be Harry Potter or Sacred Scripture, or a cookbook, we are engaged, right from the start, in a 'spiritual exercise' in which our lives are being remodelled and restructured. It is not merely ideas that are being taken in, but a style and manner of living and of reading reality.

³ As a practical exercise, it would be worth picking out from the Rule and the Benedictine tradition, those 'practices' which generate life-long attitudes. It has been said that ch. 4 of RB is a collection of 'exercises', each of which shape Benedictine life. The list would need to be practical and concise, applicable to the life of an institution, of a country or region, to customs... It is believed that this project died around 600AD.

And one detail which may be of use in this formation process is a literary genre, identified by J. Leclercq as characteristic of Benedictine *paideia*: biography and the lives of the saints and suchlike. God, always revealing himself in the real world, as we can see in the Scriptures, touches people and situations. Therefore, both the Scriptures and the lives of the saints present a complete unity between theology and life by means of ‘examples’ which bring home the message of the gospels. These ‘examples’ whether read or something lived and seen in school, are the most important thing one generation passes on to the next.

When Christ washed his disciples’ feet, he ended by saying: ‘I have done this as an example for you to follow, that you also should wash one another’s feet,’ (Jn 13:4ff). Christ’s life continues to be present among those who copy his example – the received tradition.

Furthermore, as Pope Francis insists, in these examples we see the flesh of Christ coming into play. The Christian faith, as a set of ideas, beliefs and dogmas can be handed on in book form, and turn into a new Gnosticism (Ev. Gaud. 94; Gaud. et Exsul. 36-46). The kind of formation we need today is not theoretical but practical, and life-giving.

2. St Benedict and the new monastic ‘paideia’

So, then, what does this new Christian *paideia*, as taken up by the monks, consist of? Unquestionably, it is none other than that of Christ. However, as with all the truths which underlie the faith, fundamental though they are, they need to be continually reconsidered in faith. I point this out because the great master of ‘Christian *paideia*’ is still Werner Jaeger, who has misled many generations of formators. In one spring course he gave at Harvard, in 1960, he said that the new Christian *paideia* was the early Christians’ attempt to create a universal system based on a Christian worldview, a project bringing together faith and reason in a Christian synthesis, the way the great Greek and Latin cultures did originally⁴. To support this, he searched in the Church Fathers for texts where they quoted from pagan masters of *paideia* to see how they ‘Christianized’ them. In other words, Christian *paideia* was no more than a baptized pagan pedagogical model, which, in a way, is still the case today. In this sense, the new Christian *paideia* was intended by the Church to give the baptized a culture under the

⁴ W. JAEGER, “Cristianismo primitivo y paideia griega”, México 1985.

name of Christ⁵, which had previously been provided under the patronage of non-Christian gods.

However, the thing Jaeger forgot was that the Church Fathers' main source for discovering what *paideia* is, was the Scriptures, especially in the Greek version, where we find a surprising abundance of uses of the noun '*paideia*', and the verb '*paideuo*', together with their cognate forms. So, the first thing that needs to be said is that the early Christians saw a perfect consonance between the etymology of the Greek word '*paideia*' (from which we get 'pedagogy') and what the Scriptures tell us: *paideia* is the process by which God, as Father, trains his sons just as he trained Christ, his beloved Son made man. It's not so much that he teaches one son, but that he forms the image of a son in everyone. For evidence of that, one only has to read the gospels.

And, as Pierre Riché⁶ points out, in the gospels the monks encounter Christ as a child: 'whoever welcomes one of these, welcomes me,' (Mt 18:1ff.) So, in the heart of pagan society, which held childhood in low esteem, believing *paideia* was for forming adults only, and discarding children who were unlikely to thrive, 'the monks re-discover the child', rescuing it from contempt, especially if the child happens to be female. In this way, the monks understood that by receiving children into the Monastery, they were receiving Christ himself, continually challenging them, and so renewing the very life of the whole monastic community. Pope Gregory tells us this is the spirit in which St Benedict welcomes the boys Maurus and Placid, not with a plan to train them and turn them into productive adults and future abbots who will govern the monastery, but rather to form them as true 'children in Christ'. In them, Pope Gregory sees a model of monasticism not easily found in the older monks, especially when it comes to Christ-like obedience founded on complete filial trust in the Father.

VII. How a disciple walked on water.

One day as venerable Benedict was in his cell, the aforesaid young Placidus, a monk of the holy man, went out to the lake to get water and, letting down the bucket to take up water, by chance fell in himself after it and was immediately carried away by the stream. This accident was, in the same instant, revealed to the man of God in his cell. He

⁵ It is important to know that Cassiodorus, a contemporary of St Benedict, founded a monastery in Calabria called 'Vivarium', whose principal work was studying and copying manuscripts. Clearly, he did not share St Benedict's understanding of *paideia*.

⁶ 'P. RICÉ, "Éducation et culture dans l'Occident barbare -VI- VIII siècle", Paris 1962-1995

quickly called Maurus, saying, "Run, Brother Maurus, for the child who went to get water has fallen into the lake, and the current has carried him some distance off."

But - a wonder, unheard of since the days of Peter the Apostle!⁷ - Maurus, having asked and received a blessing, went out quickly at the command of his superior, and reaching the place where the stream had carried the boy, thinking he was still on dry land, ran across the water, took him by the hair of his head and returned quickly. No sooner had he set foot upon dry ground than he came to himself and, realizing that he had run across the water, was astonished and was shocked to see that he had achieved something he would never dare attempt.

So, returning to his superior, he told him what had happened, but the venerable man Benedict ascribed it to Maurus' prompt obedience, rather than to his own merits; Maurus, on the other hand, maintained it was due entirely to his command, and claimed no part in the miracle, because which he had been unaware of at the time. This humble and kindly dispute was settled by the aforementioned Placid, the boy who was saved. He said, "When I was being drawn out of the water, I saw the abbot's cowl over my head and supposed it was he who had pulled me out."

What not even the apostle Peter had done, Maurus achieved through his childlike faith and obedience and so the 'pais' becomes a role-model for every monk.

From its origins, monastic life was identified with the fullness of baptismal life. When the Church took on infant baptism it was because she saw before her the image of the Christ-child. Forming the son, the child, is one of St Benedict's goals because it is the baptismal life. And, as baptismal life, the image of the son and of the child is no one's possession, not even that of the monk or the formator. For this reason, regarding a Benedictine formation, and a Benedictine *paideia* it is not possible to complain about the lack of monks in the monasteries capable of taking it on, nor to argue for the need for specialist knowledge (whether spiritual or pedagogical). The only requirement is living the authentic baptismal life as a child oneself and to see how Saint Benedict sought to live it to the full, as divine sonship. If we maintain a formation plan in which the formator already knows the 'thing' which needs to be passed on to the child, who knows nothing, then we've lost sight of the horizon. The primary subject of *paideia* should be the formator, not the one being taught. If he himself is neither obedient nor

⁷ Mt 14:28ff

open to living the process of *paideia* which he is teaching and presenting to the child through his life, it will be impossible for him to be a formator, that is, someone who, with maturity, knows how to go on growing in divine sonship and can see it in the child in order to develop it. The learning plan of the teacher sitting behind his desk, or of the professor who already knows everything the children need to be taught, is the opposite of Pope Francis' current call for 'shepherds who bear the smell of the sheep', for bishops who will come out from behind their desks. It is formators 'who bear the smell of the child' who will preserve the Benedictine *paideia*, not large numbers of monks or grand teachers with all kinds of doctorates. It is what the Pope calls, 'a church which goes forth'. (Ev. Gaud. 46).

If the formator is not, himself, disposed to be a child, but considers himself to be the one who should be teaching Christian *paideia*, we put ourselves in danger of a scheme which in recent decades has led to all kinds of 'abuse'. 'I impose on the other something he neither knows nor is.' He knows nothing! I am the one who can tell him what he should be, what he should do... Abuses of all kinds... That's all wrong. Being a child is not something imposed, nor is it alien to what I must become. Therefore, the chief task in *paideia* is listening, not imposing ideas or any of the other things I want the child to do.

St Benedict asks us to hear the young every time there is something important to discuss. Even boys contribute in matters concerning the running of the monastery (although the abbot decides). And these boys, as St Benedict says in ch. 63, are Samuel and Daniel. Paradoxically, those two boys, when they managed to be heard by the adults who undervalued them, judged the elders of Israel! But to be able to 'hear' God's voice in a child also requires the faith of a child in the listener, desiring to receive something, maybe not from the child, but from the God who speaks through him.

So we might say, using a gospel image, that what is characteristic of Benedictine *paideia* is not what is given, in content often imposed by the state, but the 'way' it is lived. This 'way' is what gives specific meaning to Benedictine *paideia*. The Lord put it like this: 'You are the salt of the earth... but if the salt loses its flavour...' (Mt 5:13). The world is what it is. But he who is like a child knows how to live in it with this salt which comes from the Christ-child.

3. Paideia as filial relationship

Clement of Alexandria who, according to Jaeger, was the great teacher who sought to put together the new Christian *paideia* as a culture, nevertheless shows us the true meaning of this *paideia* when, based on Scripture, he says in his famous book, named *Protreptichus*:

*I could cite countless texts of Scripture, from which ‘not one stroke shall pass away’ until it is fulfilled, since ‘it is the mouth of the Lord’, the Holy Spirit, ‘who has uttered them. ‘So, my son, do not despise the instruction (“paideia”) of the Lord, nor be discouraged when he corrects you’ (Prov. 3,11; Heb 12,5). Oh, what great love for mankind! It is not like a teacher correcting his students, nor a master his servants, nor the way a god corrects men – but ‘like a loving father’ (Odyssey II, 47) who rebukes his sons! Moses said, ‘I was in fear and trembling’ when I heard the “Logos” speaking’, and do you listen to the divine “Logos” himself without fear?... Come, come, my young friends, for, as Scripture says, “unless you become like little children (paidiai), and are born again” (cf. Mt 18:2), it may happen that you neither find him who is your Father, nor “enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”. How, in fact, could he grant entry to a foreigner? I do think, however, that once he is registered and received as a citizen, and provided with a father, he will enter to take possession of his father’s estate (cf Lk 2:49), and be judged worthy of his inheritance, partaking of the father’s kingdom with the beloved Son himself (cf Mt 3:17). This is, then, the Church of the new-born, enrolled in heaven, keeping festival with the ‘millions of angels’. We are new-born infants of God and true friends of the ‘firstborn Son’.*⁸

It is interesting that Church Fathers like Basil say that baptism makes us sons of the Father because it has made us friends and brothers of Christ. The more we are conformed to Christ in his obedience to the Father, the more we become sons of the Father. Clearly, once we see *paideia* through these evangelical and patristic eyes, we are a long way from any ‘Christian culture of excellence’. This is different. This ‘*paideia*’, as a process of forming a son, diverges in several ways from what is called ‘pagan *paideia*’:

- A. Christian *paideia*, as given us by Christ, is not like the formation given to a son, but rather the formation of a true son within the person of the child, of the adult, the formator, the apostle and the martyr - and it begins with baptism. It’s not so much the content, the curriculum, but rather the way these truths are experienced.

⁸ “Protréptico” IX, 1-2.

- B. To simplify a little, while pagan *paideia* was oriented to the intellect, Christian *paideia* is directed towards the will, the affections and basic emotions, intending to engender a filial disposition rather than dogmatic conviction.
- C. Also, whereas pagan *paideia* seeks to move as quickly as possible from the status of ‘*pais*’ (son, child) onto that of ‘adult’, independent of one’s father, turning the ‘*pais*’ into a productive and socially integrated adult, the Christians intended that the Christian and the monk, should form in the depths of their being the image of a son who, we might add, is not merely a son, but a child, an infant before God, as Christ was, as he is presented by the latest Doctor of the Church, Therese of Lisieux. And all this because Christ himself identified with children and lived out his Paschal mystery as the affirmation and fulness of his being a little child standing before his Father. In his course mentioned earlier, Jaeger says that when Origen died a martyr’s death, he left unfinished his great work in Christian *paideia*, bringing together the old, Graeco-Roman culture and the new Christian one⁹. But, in fact, Christians believed that Origen, through his martyrdom, pointed the way to an authentic Christian *paideia* by putting his life in the hands of his Father, being ‘born’ definitively into the full life of sonship with the Father in martyrdom.
- D. This objective of forming the child does not mean simply returning to natural childhood as, for example, in Rousseau’s ‘Emile or On Education’. It’s about forming the child in the gospel sense and, amongst other things, instead of giving him an adult Christian formation, teaching him to live as the son reborn in Baptism, who will mature as a son through all the difficulties of life.
- E. This child-figure was formed at Baptism and, according to the first letter of St Peter, the primary characteristic of this child is life without guile or insincerity, as we sing in the famous baptismal text, ‘Quasimodo’, on the first Sunday of Easter: ‘Like newborn children without guile, long for spiritual milk’ (1Pe 2:2), i.e. be ourselves, in complete simplicity before the Father. Or, to put it another way, to be the way the Father sees us: like little children.
- F. This image of the child as the object of Benedictine *paideia* encompasses the teacher as well as the young person. No one is excluded from this evangelical undertaking within the Benedictine school. Only someone who has first received it

⁹ Id. pag 69.

can pass it on. For St Benedict and the whole monastic tradition, the father – the Abbot – while forming others to be sons, also has to learn to be son, himself.

- G. Christian *paideia* is not something one receives and possesses. It is a relationship which is learnt and formed, to be developed one's whole life long. It manifests itself in that school of prayer, the Psalms, in the sharing of goods, in total trust (*pleroforia*) and in communion.

So yes, the one adopting the role of formator/father is himself also being formed as a child in Christ. St Gregory shows us this in the Life of St Benedict, but it is even more conspicuous in his contemporary, Dorotheus of Gaza. His writings begin with the Life of the young Dositheus, in whom we see 'the child in Christ' coming to fulfilment. Then we have the 17 Conferences of Dorotheus and his letters. What no one seems to see, however, is that the Conferences are the development of what Dorotheus learnt from Dositheus throughout his life, like a spiritual childhood, which he says explicitly in Conference 1¹⁰. The teacher, Dorotheus, learnt from the disciple and achieved holiness, because he also was willing to live the *paideia* of God. Dorotheus's holiness consisted in his readiness to learn from the young Dositheus¹¹. Knowing how to learn from Dositheus, Maurus and Placid involves recognizing through faith, first of all, a privileged presence of Christ in these children. Secondly, entering into dialogue with this Christ to discover what he requires, beyond academic study.

In essence, we can say that monastic *paideia* is the same process which Christ lived out as the Son of the eternal Father. We can see the OT texts which prophesy Christ and present his life as that of a child; for example, the famous Suffering Servant songs:

Like a little child (pais), like a shoot I grew before Him (Yahweh) (Is. 53,2 LXX).

He has been wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our faults; he bore the correction (paideia) which brings us peace. (Is 53,5)

In the Easter Psalm (117:18) it says:

I was disciplined, disciplined by the Lord (paidéuon epáideuse me Kyrios)

¹⁰ Conference 1, 21.

¹¹ All 17 Conferences by Dorotheus can be read in the key of a filial disposition in all aspects of life. Moreover, all what Dositheus speaks to monks can be fully applied to lay people.

But not delivered up to death.

Proverbs 3:11:

My son, do not despise a father's instruction (paideuo) ...because he corrects (paideuo) the one he loves, whom he acknowledges as his son.

The process of filiation, in summary, is the Paschal Mystery or, to put it another way, the Paschal Mystery is the process by which a son is begotten through a Father-Son relationship which in Greek is called '*paideia*', and in Latin, '*correctio*'. This is how the apostle Paul himself presents it when he refers to the resurrection in terms of begetting a son: (cf. Acts 13:33; Ps 2:6):

God has raised him from the dead, saying: You are my son, today I have begotten you!

The concept of *paideia* as a relationship touches on a crucial issue in education today: the multiplication of so-called virtual communication technologies. We can approach it like this: there is a profound desire to be related to others. But the new forms of social media do not necessarily hinder real relationships, but they have shown us how children may be at home without having any kind of dialogue with their parents or siblings. It's the same in schools: teachers and pupils may be together, but the only way they relate to one another is by the transmission of content and by testing them to see if they are learning it well. But Benedictine *paideia*, as we have already said, is centred on the desire to listen to the authentic experience of the other, and furthermore to have and to look for a word that will genuinely touch the other's heart. This kind of relationship is not defined by how much time is spent on it, but by a genuine interest in the other and by knowing that the bond which creates a *paideia* relationship is not merely *useful*; it is what constitutes us in our very being as children, brothers and sisters, parents. Today, more than ever, the rise in virtual relationships is generating a profound appreciation for real-world relationships, if we are ready and willing to have them.

And the way is 'the word'. The direct word is picked up on by St Benedict and in recent years has been rediscovered by the Church, particularly through biblical and liturgical studies. It is by the Word that the Father begets and gives life to his Son and it is therefore not

surprising that it is difficult to utter this word. I am not referring to the ‘*many words*’, which St Benedict hates (cf RB ch 6), but ‘*the word*’ which authentically expresses the truth about one’s being and one’s life. That word needs to be laid hold of every day, and the formator will only be able to teach it if he knows how to live it out and recognize it. It is not an easy task and that is why it is a source of life; it begets children. The word is the primary, foundational and life-giving relationship. It shapes the child and in doing so constitutes the father, also. Finding the right word to say at the right time in a relationship engenders life in the other, making him a son. For St Benedict, it is the cry of the sons that makes an abbot, a father (RB 2:1f), not his titles nor his canonical privileges.

4. *Paideia* and correction

If we had to define *paideia* in RB, we could say it is way the monk, or any of the baptized, lives out the process of being corrected by God. Correction occupies a very special place in RB. In the Rule of the Master, we find no more than three chapters dealing with correction. There are 47 in RB. Why is this? It is undoubtedly due to the influence of the Rule of St Basil and, indirectly, that of the Letter to the Hebrews. This important text of the New Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews, says:

Have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not despise the correction (paideia) of the Lord; and do not be disheartened by his rebuke. For those whom the Lord loves, he corrects (paidéuô); and he chastises all those he acknowledges as his sons (Prov 3:11-13 LXX). You endure this because of your sonship (paideia) (In some translations: ‘You suffer for correction’ - paideia). God is treating us as sons, and what son is not corrected (paidéuô) by his father? But if you are left without correction, which everyone experiences, it shows you are illegitimate, and not sons. What’s more, we had our earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we looked up to them. Why should we not submit, all the more, to the Father of Spirits and live. They only disciplined us for a while, as they saw fit, but he does it for our good, that we may be partakers in his holiness. Of course, at the time, all correction (paideia) is painful rather than pleasant; but later it produces the acceptable fruit of justice in those who are trained by it. (Heb 12:5-11).

As we can see, whenever the Latin bible finds the Greek noun, 'paideia' and the verb 'paideuo' it translates them as 'correctio'. However, the word 'correctio' quickly lost its Christian value, taking on a more basic, everyday meaning. We can see how much this matters, when we remember that St Augustine called his last book 'Correction and Grace'. We may summarize its contents by saying grace transforms us by correcting us, but here 'correcting' means turning us into sons. Therefore, the simplest way to translate it would be 'conversion', if by that we mean conversion into the image of a son, something to which we are all called. However, let's recap: whether it is the Greek 'paideia' or the Latin 'correctio', the essence of this process is Christ's relationship with the Father. But we need to make a clarification here: the Letter to the Hebrews is talking about correcting adults! What adult nowadays would put up with being corrected like a child?

The biblical texts we have cited, all tell us that correction or instruction is the process of being formed into God's son, standing as a child before his Father. From a secular viewpoint, children are corrected so that they behave like adults. But from the point of view of the new, Christian *paideia*, the child is corrected in order that within him, there may be formed a son, a son of the Father. Correction, from an evangelical point of view, brings forth a filial relationship. Its purpose is not to make sure no more mistakes are ever made.

Correction begets the child inasmuch as it constitutes him as a person, holding him responsible for his actions, recognising him as a sovereign agent, acquiring freedom over himself, giving things their names, and making him recognise, in turn, who it is who spoke the word to him, releasing him from silence. Through correction, one generation begets and gives life to the other, each regenerating the other: through correction the teacher begets the son; by accepting correction the son gives filial life to the father.

Let's look at some texts of St Basil, which pre-date the Rule of St Benedict.

Question 161 (Greek Rule).

Question: How can we be converted and become like children (paidiai)?

Answer: **1** The same gospel Reading (Mt 18:2) teaches us everything we need to know about this; it shows us that we should not seek pride or vainglory, but rather acknowledge our natural equality and follow those who seem inferior. **2** After all, it is normal for children to regard themselves as equals with their companions, not according to nobility, but by age; until

by the passage of time, and the wickedness of those who teach them, they are corrupted by the poison of pride.

Question 163 (Greek Rule)

Question: How are we to receive the Kingdom of God like little children?

Answer: 1 By heeding the teaching of the Lord like children still learning. 2 by not contradicting our teachers, nor resisting them by offering contrary arguments and opinions; but, instead, trustfully receiving what they teach, obeying respectfully, willingly.

Question 15 (Latin Rule): From what age should they be permitted to give themselves in this way; or at what age may the profession of virginity be regarded as binding and valid?

Answer: The Lord says: 'Let the little children (paidia) come to me' (Mk 10:14), and Paul the apostle gave thanks that from his childhood he had learned the sacred texts, and also commanded that children should be educated in doctrine and the instruction ('ad corrigendum' – 'paideia') of the Lord (2Tim 3:16); therefore, let us consider that every time is a good time, even from our earliest days, for learning the fear the Lord and his teaching.

Question 50 (Greek Rule): How should the superior correct (paideuo) and explain?

Answer: The superior should not correct with an agitated spirit, since answering the brother with anger or indignation does not absolve him from sin, but makes him inflexible, as it is written: 'Correct (paideuonta) those who rebel with gentleness.' (1 Tm 2,25)

Question 24 (Latin Rule)

Question: With what kind of disposition should one receive correction?

Answer: With the disposition of a sick son towards his father and physician who care for his life. Even if the remedy involves something painful or bitter, the child should know that his father would never neglect his child's health in any way, nor his physician make mistakes.

Question 191 (Latin rule)

Question: What are the signs that show someone is correcting a brother out of affection for him?

Answer: 1 In the first place, most importantly: if he corrects with compassion and feels what the apostle describes: 'If one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it' (1Cor 12:26). And again: 'Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn within?' (2Cor 11:29). 2 Secondly, if he grieves and is saddened in the same way, whatever the sin and whoever the sinner is, and mourns and weeps in the same way whether someone sins against him or against another. 3 And if, when correcting, he observes the rule given us by the Lord, to do so privately with him, or calling one or two others (Mt 18:15f). 4 And, above all, if he keeps in mind what the apostle says: '...with all patience' (2Tim 4:.2)

It is clear that, according to Basil, we cannot receive the Kingdom except as children (*paidiai*), and it is the child who is the object of '*paideia*-correction'. To become like children means to ask questions, to know what we need from others, to trust others.

This concept of '*paideia*-correction' can be expressed in positive terms: it teaches the child that he can make mistakes, both as a child and as an adult. Living in fear of making mistakes is something adults do. The child is free to make mistakes, without thinking about it; it's natural.

5. '*Paideia*' and the ecclesial soul of the Christian

What the child starts off with, as distinct from what is acquired later, is the belief that he or she belongs to a communion of people, to a family. The life of relationship, in the Christian faith, is not something added on, nor is it a goal. It is life itself. The Christian, in baptism, 'is made alive by entering into communion', the communion of the Church. He or she enters the mother's womb of the Church and is conformed to her. Ever since Origen (210 AD, Alexandria) it has been said that within the baptised person there is formed an ecclesial soul (*anima ecclesiastica – vir ecclesiasticus*) which sees itself as a member of a family, and recognizes this family, the Church, in those around it. An ecclesial soul is the fruit of baptism: someone who realises that his brothers, sisters and companions are part of himself. This is how St Paul saw the Gentile church communities and how Christ presented the Church, as Vine and branches.

Ecclesial life is a gift to be looked after and nurtured, not something to be seized or acquired. It is part of everyone's being, not something to be achieved. One of St Benedict's

intentions in founding ‘a school of the Lord’s service’ was to allow its members to experience ‘Church’. Both in St Benedict’s day and in ours, the Church was somehow reduced to something ethereal, abstract, generalized, embracing everything and nothing and therefore engaging no one. This ecclesial soul allows the child to see in each community a reflection of that communion which Christ recreated in his Body which is the Church, and through it receives life. We only need to see the reverse of this: the all too familiar bullying a schoolchild may endure, stripping them of their ecclesial being, even driving them to suicide.

More positively, we can also observe the bonds of communion which are formed between young people during their school career, which are strong enough to make them inseparable their whole life long, bonds that can be renewed at any time of life. These may be even stronger than the bonds of communion related to marriage, or the world of work or political affiliation, etc.

During the Second Vatican Council, cardinal de Lubac, with his in-depth study of church history, clearly showed how the early Christians faithfully followed the apostolic teaching when they spoke of ‘the church in Corinth’, ‘the church in Laodicea’, ‘the church in Smyrna’, ‘the church in Ephesus’. The Church exists and comes to birth when it celebrates and lives the Eucharist as the sacrament which causes us to participate, in charity, in the one Body, the Body of Christ. The Church is the particular church, born out of the Eucharist and sustained by common prayer, by the common life and by sharing. The Church is found wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord (cf Mt 18:21). A monastery, a parish, a school is a particular church; the universal Church is formed from the unity of these particular churches, and can never be reduced to a faceless, formless entity.

On the other hand, de Lubac notes¹² that the particular church, each monastery, each Christian community, like a school, assumes the role of ‘mother’. The Church is, first and foremost, a ‘mother’, and fulfils this role in three dimensions and for all her members:

- a. She brings forth children by baptism.
- b. She forms and teaches her children by the action of the Holy Spirit (chrism).
- c. She teaches her children to live in communion, through the Eucharist.
- d. One final function of a mother is that she shows her child the image of the Father.

¹² H. DE LUBAC, “Meditation on the church”, Madrid 1958, c. VII.

The big difference, says de Lubac, between natural motherhood and that of the Church, is that the Church doesn't give birth by bringing them forth from her womb, but gives life by keeping them always within her womb through stability and communion.

a. Mother. A community, as Church, whether it be a monastery or a school, is always conceiving children. And, just as happens in baptism, she conceives by dying and rising again, as Paul the Apostle says to the Galatians: *Dear children, for whom I suffer birth pangs all over again until Christ is formed in you (Gal 4:19).*

There is no sonship, no begetting, unless the image of Christ is made present in a formator who is prepared, like St Paul, to experience those birth-pangs which are an essential part of it. And in this same process, the formator is conformed to Christ the Father, a distinctive feature of the Rule of St Benedict¹³.

b. The Church as Mother is also a sacramental instrument in the *paideia* of the Holy Spirit. It is the mother who teaches. However, what she is shaping is the image of her sons as we see in the Scriptures and in the whole of salvation history, as also with St Benedict, according to Pope Gregory:

PETER: What you related is remarkable and completely amazing. The water that flowed from the stone reminds us of Moses (cf Num 20:7ff), the iron that returned from the depths of the water, of Elisha (cf 2K 6:5ff), the walking on water, of Peter (cf Mt 14:28f), the raven's obedience, of Elijah (cf 1K 17:4ff), and weeping over the death of his enemy, is like David (cf 2Sam 1:11f). From what I see, this man was filled with the spirit of all the righteous.

GREGORY: Peter, the man of the Lord, Benedict, had the spirit of the One who, by the grace of redemption, filled to overflowing the hearts of all the elect. (2 Dialogues 8)

¹³ The image of Christ as 'father' has been much discussed, but it relates to the sacramental transparency of the image of the Son in the Father, a basic principle of Trinitarian theology. It is interesting to note that a parish priest is called Father, because he makes Christ present among his people, but this apparent contradiction doesn't seem to bother anyone. He should be called 'brother' or Christ, but not Father. However, the '*sensum fidelium*' has called him 'Father' for many centuries now.

The Spirit who forms his sons in the Church, never moves them by interior promptings except to bring them to experience the same things the biblical characters did, whereby it may be seen how the Spirit works and goes on working.

And, as we can see, diversity is the central element of his way of working, not only in biblical events but in today's Church, also. This is why the Church, as formator, teaches us how to discover the bible character we most identify with.

c. Thirdly, the church is a Mother who teaches her sons to live in the communion of charity, through the Eucharist. This, in Benedictine tradition, and as presented in the Rule, brings us into the community of the Acts of the Apostles, where the disciples saw themselves as one body in Christ:

'All those who believed were united, and held everything in common; 45 they sold their property and their goods, and distributed the proceeds to each one according to their needs.. 46 And persevering with one accord every day in the temple, and breaking bread in their houses, they ate together with joy and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God, and enjoying the favour of the whole people. And every day, the Lord added to the church those who were to be saved. (Acts 2:42)

Eucharistic communion is brought about by sharing important experiences where one person needs to give something up to benefit someone else in the form of help, goods, charitable work... Without such practical realities, into which the formandi are invited, the understanding of the Church will remain abstract and imaginary, with nothing of that sense of reality which the particular church always has, in which is shared more than just spirituality.

d. And, finally, the Church is the mother who shows the son who his father is. Knowing that we live with the figure of a Father who guides us through *paideia* is something that will last throughout our life. However, as we find in the monastery and in the Rule, the image of the Father is mediated through human figures all around us. It can come about as Philip experienced, when he asked Christ for the heavenly Father, and Christ replied: *have I been with you all this time and you still don't know me? Whoever sees me sees the Father.* It's clear that Christ did not fulfil all the apostles' expectations, but that's the reality of the

incarnation. And, once again, the formators need to be aware that by their lives and their actions they are making present, or not, the Father whom every child is looking for, not making themselves the end of his search, but leading him on, always, to the one true Father, the father who cares about him.

Now, in the Benedictine tradition, as we find in the Rule of St Benedict, ch 7, filiation within the Church as ‘mother’ can only be lived through humility. Humility is more than a virtue, it is a life of filial relationship with a mother:

1 Brothers, divine Scripture cries out to us, saying: ‘Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted’ (Lk 14:11). 2 By saying this it shows us that every exaltation is a form of pride. 3 The Prophet shows he has kept himself from this, saying: ‘Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes lifted up: I have not gone after great things nor marvels beyond me.’ 4 And why? ‘If I did not have a humble spirit, and if my soul were puffed up, you would treat me like a weaned child on its mother’s lap (Ps 130:1f).

However, the son, the little child, wants to show his independence, and that was the aim of pagan *paideia*. Christ’s greater revelation is that he himself is totally dependent on the Father, and desires to live out this human filiation with his mother, Mary, who continued to form him right up to the Cross.

Lastly, as Pope Francis insists, when we live according to this experience of Church, the heart expands, opening out to the horizons of the Church’s full extent, living in each of her suffering members as in our own, like a brother. The child excludes no one and is always open to everyone who comes along, especially if they come with a childlike spirit. The child is always ‘going forth’ from himself, as the Pope says (Evang. Gaud. 20-24), but he needs to see this in the example set by his elders.

6. *Paideia* and the sacramentality of the Faith

All the same, to be able to put all this into practice (a child-like spirit, an ecclesial life, communion with one’s fellows, etc.) we need to recognize the great principle of Christian life which Cardinal Newman identified in the 19th century, namely, sacramentality. According to Newman, this is how the Benedictine monk might live always as a child. In the Benedictine school, both the teacher and the disciple live by this principle. In the ‘Mission of the Benedictine Order’, and once more taking childhood as the age when the truths of the faith are most easily perceived, Newman says:

We are told to be like little children; and where shall we find a more striking instance than is here afforded us of that union of simplicity and reverence, that clear perception of the unseen, yet recognition of the mysterious, which is the characteristic of the first years of human existence? To the monk heaven was next door; he formed no plans, he had no cares; the ravens of his father Benedict were ever at his side. He "went forth" in his youth "to his work and to his labour" until the evening of life; if he lived a day longer, he did a day's work more; whether he lived many days or few, he laboured on to the end of them. He had no wish to see further in advance of his journey than where he was to make his next stage. He ploughed and sowed, he prayed, he meditated, he studied, he wrote, he taught, and then he died and went to heaven.¹⁴

As Newman points out, sacramentality prevents the division, so vehemently denounced by Cardinal de Lubac, according to which there are two worlds: one based on the realities of this world and the other on the truths of the faith. Through sacramentality the child in Christ sees God in his daddy, and sees the Church, which takes good care of everything, in his mum and in his friends, and in nature he sees the continuing Providence of the Father looking after everything, even his cat and his laptop. As for the saints, he sees them in all the images found at home or in church; and with far more clarity than the grown-up monk, he sees what St Benedict speaks of in the first step of humility, concerning the angels:

13 He considers that God always sees him from heaven, and that wherever he is, the gaze of the Godhead is upon his actions, and that at every hour the angels tell of them. (RB 7:13).

This is why he behaves well, not because of Kant's categorical imperative, but because the angels see everything... The Sermon on the Mount (on which St Benedict patterned his Prologue) is the natural sphere of the 'paidós' of God. Sacramentality, in every context, allows one to see the truths of the faith really present, not superimposed on ordinary life but right there, within it. It is in the Benedictine school that they experience the Kingdom of Heaven in our midst.

Pope Gregory says something similar about young Maurus:

¹⁴ The Mission of St Benedict, from the *Atlantis* of January, 1858

IV. A distracted monk back on track.

In one of the monasteries which he had built nearby, there was a certain monk who could not stay put during prayer, but as soon as his brethren knelt and gave themselves to prayer, he would go out and there give his wandering thoughts to worldly and transitory things. For which, having been often admonished by his abbot, he was brought before the man of God, who also sharply reprimanded him for his folly. Returning to his monastery, he barely remembered for two days what the man of God had said to him, for on the third day he fell to his old ways, and at the time of prayer went out again.

When the servant of God was informed, he said, 'I will go and correct him myself.' And when he got to the monastery, the brethren, at the set time after the conclusion of the psalms, betook themselves to prayer. Then he perceived a little devil, by the hem of his habit, dragging away this monk who could not remain at his prayers. He told this secretly to Pompeianus, the abbot of the monastery, and to Maurus, 'Can't you see who is dragging this monk off?' They answered, 'No.' 'Let us pray,' he said, "that you too may see who this monk is following." Having prayed for two days, Maurus the monk saw, but Pompeianus the abbot of the monastery couldn't see anything.

Once more, childhood wins out over the simple wisdom of age, as possessed by the abbot of the monastery. And, through this sacramentality, Maurus 'sees' what the adult simply 'believes'.

It is thanks to this, also, as Romano Guardini notes, that the boy's outlook simplifies the more involved, less straightforward, adult outlook. For example, the liturgy is, as Guardini says, a kind of playing - a 'divine game' perhaps, but play all the same. But so often the 'adult monk' turns it into a ritual closed in on itself, paying more attention to what he can get out of it (grace, salvation, justification), by 'participating correctly'. Guardini says:

In another passage, Eternal Wisdom speaks, saying: 'I was by His side constantly, attentively ordering all things, delighting him day after day, at play (ludens, cf Pr 8:30) in his presence in every instant, at play over the whole world.' This is the definitive word! The eternal Father takes pleasure in Wisdom, his Son, the absolute fullness of all truth, displaying before him, in indescribable beauty, this infinite content with no 'objective' at all – what should I 'aim

for', anyway? – and this is the life of the highest beings, of the Angels: they, with no purpose in mind, following the impulses of the Spirit, moving before God in a mysterious way, are a living game and song. Even in the sphere of earthly things, there are two phenomena which hint at the same tendency: children's play, and the creativity of the artist. In play, the child intends nothing, has no end in view. In play, the child aspires to nothing, to nothing more than developing his youthful strength, to unfold his life in a way that takes no account of movements, words and actions, and so he grows, becoming all the time more perfectly himself. This young life has no objective, yet is full of profound significance; and the significance is simply this: that it manifest itself unencumbered with thoughts, words, actions, and takes possession of its being, simply existing. And as it claims nothing in particular, it displays itself so spontaneously, without coercion, and precisely because of this his expression is also harmonious, his form pure and evocative: his gestures are transformed into rhythm and image, into rhyme, melody and song. This is play: the free blossoming of life, which master of its own fulness, and full of meaning even in its mere existing, and is beautiful when left to itself, when no self-serving intentions, or murky precepts and pedagogy are foisted upon it, rendering it unnatural.¹⁵

The adult often fails to find time to go to Mass on a Sunday, but the children want to go. The adult has useful things to do, which he puts before things that are less useful, things they have no time for. But the child always finds time to play. Play is gratuitous, but fundamental. It is precisely how the eternal Son lives in the presence of his Father. Unless the liturgy leads to seeing as the child sees, as someone created to live playfully before his father, the transparency of liturgy's true self will be lost, even if it is all dressed up in those solemn rituals by which the adult believes he will be saved.

This sacramentality is what allows the child to recognise the fatherly care of God in those who look after him, the Father's providence in being given his daily bread, with no thought of tomorrow. He is the one taking care of him, so he can relax. But, as far as the adult is concerned, everything depends on himself; he feels lonely and abandoned, with nobody to walk with him through his daily difficulties. This is why, in the realm of *paideia*, fatherhood needs to be given the greatest emphasis. It is the central element, playing the sacramental role of Christ as 'father', the one who truly bears on his shoulders the whole of salvation history, the whole of the work of *paideia*. One of the most important texts for helping us get to grips

¹⁵ R. GUARDINI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Freiburg 1918, London 1930, 34.

with this sacramental sense of fatherhood, is the Introduction to the Life of Dositheus, which says:

4. ~When abbot (Sderido) summoned blessed Dorotheus to speak with [Dositheus], he examined him carefully, but the young man would say only, 'I want to be saved.' So he returned and told the abbot, 'Don't be afraid to take him in. There is nothing bad in him'. The abbot said to him: 'Do me the kindness of taking him with you, for his salvation, because I wouldn't want him to be with the brethren.'

Dorotheus excused himself at length, saying: 'Accepting this charge is beyond my ability, I am not up to it'. The abbot replied: 'I bear your burden and his; don't worry'. Then Dorotheus said: 'Since you love him so much, consult the Elder.' And he replied: 'Very well, I will speak to him.' He went to tell all this to the Great Elder and this is what was revealed concerning Dorotheus: 'Take him in; for your sake the Lord will save him.' So, he took him in with joy and kept him with him in the infirmary. His name was Dositheus.

It is clear that the weight of this dimension of *paideia* falls on the formators. If the formator does not possess this sacramental outlook, the weight of his responsibility will become frustrating or, worse, something unbearable. The message their charges will pick up is that in life we are all alone and each of us has to struggle on as if abandoned by the Father.

However, this is not theoretical knowledge, but a reality of faith which either we possess and live by, or we don't. If formators are to strive towards ongoing formation, they will need to examine their own lives, and their attitude to faith and everything they live by, and their readiness to go out to meet the young. Both chapters on the abbot in RB (chs 2 & 64) should be, as monks like to say, 'a mirror held up to their lives' in which they see reflected, not just themselves but, round about them, the sons they are walking with towards eternal life.¹⁶

Sacramentality also means that the formator, like a father, takes on himself the lives of his sons. So, over and above the formator's practical role, his work is clearly not reducible to 'educational activities' or to an academic timetable. You may as well say, in another context, that a priest simply 'hears confessions'. What Christ does is take on himself our life and beget us as sons of his Father; he doesn't just 'hear' the confession of our sins. This takes

¹⁶ Within the Benedictine world, another text would be the less well-known 'Pastoral Rule' of Pope St Gregory the Great, who in large part based his pastoral life as Pope on what he learned from St Benedict.

us into the very heart of monastic *paideia* as fatherhood. Taking the place of Christ, means putting our lives in his place. Only, he is the one who bears the burden and does all the work. This is the first lesson of *paideia*, both for the disciple and for the formator. Without the clear light of sacramentality we run the risk of what Pope Francis calls ‘self-referentiality’: believing that we ourselves bring about the Work of God. And, as we have said, the one who acts as formator must be the first to live out *paideia*. This is no small matter! As the Dorotheus text says, the formator, like a father, takes on himself the lives of his disciples. We need to take this to heart! This is what makes it a true reflection of the fatherhood of God.

This means that the formator, as someone also undergoing *paideia*, must understand the hearts of his sons, must know what is going on in the heart of a 9yo boy, or in a young man of 17, from his own experience of life, then and now.

This may require him to read their behaviour more than their words. Perhaps the primary condition of the ‘pais’ is having no idea what’s happening. A formator in *paideia*, who has lived through the same thing himself, should know what is going on inside the other person and may be able, at least, to offer the comfort of God’s companionship. Being alongside us in our loneliness is the first thing the Lord does for us. Presence and fellowship are the first sacramental expression of God in the midst of his own.

7. *Paideia and curiositas*

The university was born centuries after St Benedict, from the 10th century onwards, and especially in the 12th, when studies took on an ever more abstract and compartmentalized character, remote from the very process of personal development. This had not been the case when teaching happened in monasteries. St Bernard said that the great enemy of the monk wanting to study at university was ‘*curiositas*’, meaning the almost infinite desire to get involved in matters beyond himself, while knowing neither himself nor God, and seeking only a dialectical relationship with his teacher. ‘*Curiositas*’, and the ‘need to see’, are the two human instincts which the ‘media’ and the new communication technology are built on. We want to see and know every last thing. This is why self-restraint is so hard, especially when images and news come at us from all sides, through our eyes, our ears and our memory.

St Bernard deals with *curiositas* in his commentary on ch 7 of RB and identifies it with pride. Pride and arrogance are nothing more than the inability to look inwards at oneself. What’s interesting is the reason he gives for *why* we cannot turn to face ourselves. This is what he says in his great commentary on the Song of Songs: since we are unused to being in

touch with the beauty of our inner world and the presence of the Lord, we feel compelled to go outside ourselves, to distract ourselves. Perhaps the problem is how we, nowadays, pass on the monastic *paideia* which began back in the 4th century. The person, the child, is home to eight capital vices to which are added every sort of inner impulse, like our complexes and our wounds. The Rule of St Benedict is to be read as an antidote to all the monk's vices, especially to self-will, which encapsulates them all! Everything is evil and harmful in our inner world. Entering in there is frightening; it's better to get out of it. St Benedict speaking of the monk as someone who is born in Christ through baptism, a baptism renewed every year at the Paschal Vigil, describes him, in his 49th chapter, as someone who lives in 'the joy of the Holy Spirit', with a generous self-will, capable of giving not just his possessions, but his own self as a way of consecrating himself to God, being filled, ultimately, with spiritual desire. This is St Benedict's idea of a baptized person. If there must be struggle against 'vices and sins', it is because these threaten to mask the goodness of the human person in his true nature. Vices and sins are unnatural, but holiness is natural to the baptized person; the whole armour of spiritual combat is designed to strip away those false additions which are not really us. Nevertheless, we acknowledge our talents and our native gifts, which make each of us this member of Christ's body, rather than a different one. Is it possible to help someone else to discover their true self so that, gazing into their interior mirror, they may see reflected there the face of Christ?

Self-knowledge, as conceived of these days, is both external to the person and something abstract. We are not good at knowing one another as persons, and the more ideals of life we hold, the more complicated it all gets. J. Leclercq, commenting on St Bernard's letters, said that in one letter, written to Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny, in August 1110, he says that Cluny is a disgrace and the ruination of the Church, and so on. One month later he writes another letter, saying Cluny is a model and lighthouse of the Church in the 12th century... 'What's going on?' asks Leclercq. Was Bernard unstable or unbalanced? No, says Leclercq. These were 'primal' people. A primal person feels and experiences one thing at a time, processing it and making sense of it, the way a child does. We, says Leclercq, are not primal; we are complicated. Complicated adults. When we experience emotions like these, the first to come out is anger: 'I must condemn it, say something, make it public!' But then, straight after: 'But I am a Christian; I mustn't give way to anger...! And after that another voice pops up: 'But if I don't say something, it will be bad for the Church!' And then another voice which says... 'and so on, endlessly. We are not primal beings; we are complicated. We are adults and, instead of feeling what we feel, says Bernard, we have high aspirations to be

‘the way we ought to be’ as Christians in this world. We know only what we want to become, not what we truly are. We believe we are what we dream of being, not what we actually are. Those primal men, like children, would experience something, acknowledge it, say it out loud, accept the reply, the correction, and so resolved the issue and got through the crisis. The child hides nothing, nor hides from anything the way adults do.

St Bernard, commenting on St Benedict’s chapter on humility, is attempting to summarize his *paideia* to help his monks, who, it seems, felt a bit lost. What St Bernard says is that, for St Benedict, and his ladder of humility, the most important thing is not being told what we ought to be, but recognising our own condition as children, transparent and beautiful. We all think, when we read the Scriptures or the Rule or anything else written about the faith, that the most important thing is to discover what I have to do, or ‘what I ought to be’ i.e. how to change! St Bernard says this is not what St Benedict intended. Benedictine *paideia*, before all else, is meant to bring us to knowledge of ourselves as we really are, the way God and Christ know us: as a special and irreplaceable member of the Body of Christ.

In this way, what Augustine prayed for mysteriously comes true: ‘That I may know you, and know myself. This is my prayer.’¹⁷. In this way, the Benedictine *paideia* opens the doors to a richer knowledge of God by a different path than the one proposed by the universities.

8. Conclusion

To conclude this presentation with a summary, highlighting a few points.

- a. Benedictine formation is offered, first and foremost, through a way of living. It’s not so much about delivering content (often mandated by the curriculum), but about a way of life. What one generation gives to another is life. Pope Francis emphasises that what we really need is not books, studies or ideas, but lives lived according to the gospel.
- b. Benedictine formation is practical and manifested in practical ‘examples’ of the gospel and the Rule. Any child who sees his teacher serving the pupils at table, like Christ, or who is called in by those in charge, not for a telling off but to be asked how he thinks the classes, sports, activities etc are going, won’t ever forget it! He will

¹⁷ Soliloquies II, 1.

understand that he is valued. Any teacher who does this will see that he, too, is the subject of this kind of formation.

- c. The new Benedictine and evangelical *paideia* consists in promoting the development of the image of a son, a child in the faith - as the etymology of the word suggests. The child is a figure Christ identified with, and both St Benedict and St Gregory present children as true models for community life. The child ceases to be a passive subject of formation and becomes the true paradigm and model for life, both through his behaviour, and through the sort of things he says.
- d. Childhood in Christ, on the one hand, is a present reality; on the other, it is a dynamic to be developed in the formators. Discovering the meaning of this is something as complex as understanding the gospels and the true image of Christ. It requires a process of continuous reflection, which is not study, necessarily, but sincere reflection on how the filial life is to be lived.
- e. In *paideia*, paradoxically, it is the child who does the forming. The first person to undergo formation in *paideia*, is the formator himself. The teaching model where 'the teacher knows it all and the child knows nothing,' has led to a world of abuses which don't just cause scandal, but make us lose sight of the proper horizon of *paideia*.
- f. Filiation is a relationship strengthened by the timely word, appropriate correction, forgiveness and the service of others.
- g. Moreover, it only becomes possible when we recover a sacramental understanding of the realities of this life. A sacramental outlook is something that comes naturally to a child; in the Benedictine tradition, is it a way of seeing, of performing miracles, as shown by the young Maurus and Placid. In this too, we teachers need to learn from them.
- h. This same sacramentality makes it possible to find, in a Benedictine school, a real experience of the Church as a mother teaching us how to live in eucharistic communion, recognising the other as part of oneself, each of us members of one another, not some casual association of people. One of the most wonderful things about a child, is that he can integrate the other into his own world, to the point where he never forgets those with whom he spends the earliest years of his life. This will become the basis for his married life, his family life, his work life and his life as a missionary for the authentic life of a child in Christ.