

Since the letter you received on the Liturgy appeared as Part One, you have been expecting a Part Two. In fact, this second letter was originally part of the first, but I thought it was too long and I also feared that your attention would be brought to bear too quickly on the concrete applications. I purposely chose then, to separate the two letters so that the first would be discussed and assimilated before we launched into the practical aspects. Thus the first letter treated the liturgy and its meaning, its grandeur and importance, its role in our Assumption charism. This second letter proposes to discuss the Liturgy, namely the Divine Office, in the concrete situations of our various communities and churches today,—as I have come to know them during my visits.

The Assumption is an apostolic congregation, but claims to be a contemplative congregation also. To favor and sustain the contemplative experience, Marie Eugénie gave us a distinctive life style or form of life; that is, a **contemplative form**<sup>1</sup> like that of the monastic orders. (She also gave us the motto "God alone" which comes from the Carthusians!<sup>2</sup>) The celebration of the Hours is an essential element in that form of life, for us as for most contemplative religious. The contemplative ideal is to obey the biblical injunction to "pray always" and to make of one's life a continual prayer. The monastic office has throughout the centuries, been an important part of a life of unceasing prayer. It is a continual dialogue with the Trinity through the Word of God: receiving the inspired Word and responding, being nourished and transformed by the Word, offering prayer to God in Jesus. Besides occupying and "sanctifying the hours" of the day, the Divine Office celebrated at regular intervals is a means or a help to interiorization—to our living in the presence of God, to referring all things to God, to doing the work of God—throughout the entire day. For us, Religious of the Assumption, the return to the choir periodically in the midst of our activities, is a way of coming back to our source, to nourishing our minds and hearts at the fount of our existence and to establishing ourselves, as it were, in the deepest level of our being. As a result, we should also return to our work more

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<sup>1</sup> Included in this contemplative form are silence and solitude, austerity and mortification, personal prayer and spiritual reading, as well as the celebration of the liturgy—the Eucharist and the Divine Office.

<sup>2</sup> "To live for God alone, to live with God alone, to live on God alone." (*Prologue of the Carthusian Statutes*). "

serene and more giving. In short, the Office roots our lives and contemplative experience in the mystery of Christ and the Church.

For this reason, when we consider the place of the Office in our daily schedules, we have to think not just of "fitting the hours into" a busy workday. We have to think of the contemplative flow of our day and of the contemplative (Christ-like) quality of our apostolate.

It is possible to come to the contemplative experience and to live it in various forms or without a specific form of life. On one hand, God calls and gives the gift of contemplation freely and as He wishes; on the other hand, persons can find different ways of living the "God alone" or absolute of God in their lives. But there is a contemplative style of life, in which, as Chapter One of our Rule says, the material organization of daily life as well as the personal choices are oriented towards seeking God in all things, encountering Him and being in continual communion with Him. The choral celebration of the Office is a fundamental part of our contemplative life-style. (The Jesuits, the Franciscans, the Carmelites and Benedictines... have other spiritualities with different styles of life and different means.)

Some sisters say that one can find God at every moment and in all occupations, that one can be united to Him and be aware of His presence in all the various activities of the day. This is true, "one can," but the ones are few and they arrive at this contemplation—unless miraculously endowed—by taking means. We chose a congregation, with a spirituality and a rule that would help us become contemplative. (In the final analysis, religious life is just a school.) The Assumption, by its rule and form of life, offers us particular means; and a very important means to help us arrive at this continual communion with God and the accomplishment of his work, is devotion to the Office and the faithful praying of the Office. We have few devotions at the Assumption, but devotion to the Divine Office, Marie-Eugénie tells us,<sup>1</sup> ought to be a characteristic trait of our Congregation..

The contemplative form of our life means that a great deal of time is spent in various forms of prayer. Liturgy has always taken a good part of our time. It has also always left us a good part of time for our apostolate and not too much for our lazy or egoistic selves! We have always had to "arrange" our activities in function of the Office. While the innovation of St. Ignatius for the Jesuits was to suppress Office in choir in the name of the apostolate, the innovation of Marie Eugénie for the Assumption was to insist on combining the recitation of the Office in choir with the apostolate. It is an illusion to believe that we don't have enough time for our work. We have the time God wants us to have

<sup>1</sup> Chapter X in the series on the *Spiriti of the Assumption*. 12th May. 1878.

and we have to accept that it may be less time than some others have to spend in their apostolate or work. Maybe this is one of the reasons why the Benedictines call the Office the *Opus Dei* or "work of God." We need, perhaps, to include the Office in our concept of our work. Indeed, it has a profound influence, as I explained in Letter I, on our work.

Time is a great reality of human life and of our life. Each one of us and each community must come to terms with time. It is part of the maturing process. Life today is quite different from that of our ancestors but we, like they, have to deal with the same twenty-four hours in a day—no more, no less. In those same need to earn our living. We need to sharpen our prospects so that our work is well-defined, that is, limited; and above all, we need to put limits on ourselves. We have to accept that we are ordinary human beings, that we do not have to do everything that is to be done nor do we have to do everything at once.

It would be a great error, I believe, to think that our times or culture are so different that we need less time for formal prayer and more time for activity than those who went before us. Life has become accelerated in this our era and we have the sensation sometimes of having less time and more to do. (A greater variety of things that can consume our time.) The world needs our work but it also needs our silence and calm. Since the pace of our life is so much more accelerated, we may well need more time to be still! The Office can help us to slow down, to separate the accessory from the essential, the urgent from the necessary. In saying this, I do not want to imply that contemplative life is assured by the sheer multiplication of hours of prayer!

Today, at any rate, we do not need to cut the Office down in the sense of the times or the length of the various hours of the Office. The Second Vatican Council modified the hours and the present Breviary is much shorter than its predecessor. Three monastic "hours": Prime, Tierce and None, have been dropped from the Breviary and two nocturns have been cut from the Office of Readings. The psalter which used to be distributed over the interval of a week, has been spread over a month since the Council. These changes have made the Breviary less wordy and also less monastic in its schedule. (It remains monastic, as we shall see.)

I have insisted on **earning our living** as an aspect of lives that cannot be ignored or left out of the vital synthesis we must make in our concrete living of the charism. I am also aware of the kind of workday existing in many of our cultures, as of the conditions and the difficulties involved in finding a job. Undoubtedly, these conditions and conditioning must be accepted—to a degree. In our apostolic planning we must have the daring to foresee ways either to

create jobs or to find jobs that can be combined with a contemplative life-style. One of the major obstacles today is not just finding work, but finding work near the house. It is impossible for us to maintain a full-time job, to have time for prayer and, at the same time, be obliged to spend a great deal of time in travel.

The liturgy is for us at the heart of the call to *inculturation* and the invitation to re-founding the congregation in and for our times which has been reiterated so many times these past few years. During the last General Plenary Council we saw liturgy as a focus point not only for inculturation of the faith, but also for inculturation of our Assumption charism. We saw it, moreover, as the center of the synthesis of the diverse elements which make up our charism.

The call to inculturation is a call to enter deeply into the mystery of Christ in the life of the Church as it takes form in the mind and soul of our people. Each people will have its particular way of understanding and living out that mystery. The liturgy, if it expresses that way adequately, will be worship that embodies the deepest and most dear concepts and sentiments of the faithful of a particular culture. It will express its specific character and way of being, its psychology and ethos. It will draw on the poetry and music of the culture, its rhythms and gestures, its language and literary forms. It may even give birth to literary and musical forms which further enrich the culture. Our liturgy, our Office, should be a manifestation of the soul of the culture which we bear in ourselves and that of our people. There is clearly a call for us here,—to reflect, to study, to create. Our epoch, one of incessant and rapid change, is also a time of amazing creativity.

We are called to enter into the *way of our people*, to participate in their history, their experiences and their expressions, for without the people and their life, the word *liturgy* has no meaning. At the same time, we are talking about their history understood as Sacred History, as participating in and enlivening the mystery of Christ today. In our countries, there are many popular expressions of faith and devotions which contain little of the Christian mystery. It follows that not every popular prayer is liturgy and many a popular devotion needs to be evangelized. To become liturgy a prayer form should be assumed by the community, and should also be recognized, at least tacitly, by authority (those charged with fidelity to the apostolic tradition). For the people the Liturgy should be a school of the faith which introduces the faithful into the mystery of salvation in a vital way. I would say it is the first teacher for the child as for the adult, primarily of how to live, but also of what to believe.

With regard to the Liturgy of the Hours, much and little has been done. Much, in that communities have been building up repertoires and many experiments have been going on in religious communities and even some parishes; little, in that few countries or local churches offer a platform for sharing and there is not

a sufficiently educated or interested public—among either laity or religious and clergy. Within the Assumption, inculturation of the liturgy is in its beginnings in some provinces, in others it is well advanced. Little has been done systematically. Let us look more closely at what inculturation and a call to creativity means for us.

At this point, only one complete Breviary following the rhythm of the hours of the day and the seasons of the year is available in our Church. Whatever may be our reservations, we are fortunate to have it. This Office is given to us by the Church. It is recognized by the Church as her official prayer. This is not an empty word. While we can be legalistic and scrupulous, we can also be thoughtless and careless. The "official" prayer of the Church which we have in the Breviary is not just a prayer invented by some officials in the Vatican. It is a carefully constructed liturgy that introduces us into a dialogue with God and into the mystery of Christ following the liturgical year. It is a resumé of the prayer of the Christians who have gone before us and a treasure that is part of our heritage. Along with the Scriptures many of the texts have stood the test of time and we hold them in common in various forms with the ancient and modern churches of Latin, orthodox, and oriental Catholics as well as with Anglicans and Protestants.

The prayer of the Hours dates back to the time of Jesus and the synagogue and we can say that the Breviary traces its origins back to the prayer of the earliest Christian communities. Our ancestors in the faith felt the obligation to go to morning and evening prayer long before anyone thought up the idea of daily attendance at Mass. The practice of daily public prayer passed from Christian communities<sup>1</sup> to parish and cathedral worship, to monastic communities and back to the Christian community; and the various prayers as well as the way of praying have been handed down from generation to generation. Gradually developed a "liturgical" prayer of the Hours consisting of psalms, biblical readings, hymns and gestures. The idea of a breviary came into the Latin Church only during the Middle Ages (XIII century) at a moment when the prayer of the Hours became quite clericalized. There have been many different breviaries. They have been lengthened and shortened, pruned and reformed<sup>2</sup> over the centuries; prayers have been added and subtracted, according to the devotions and needs of the times. We should see the Breviary as a living book that has changed and will continue to change; and at the same time, we should respect it as the book that maintains a basic identity and assures a fundamental

<sup>1</sup> See this common prayer in the Acts of the Apostles: 2:42, 6:4, 4:24-30, 12:5.

<sup>2</sup> The most frequent abuses are the tendency to develop the sanctoral at the expense of the liturgical year and the tendency to add on extra prayers and hymns that end up outweighing the importance of the Word of God.

unity.<sup>1</sup> The present Breviary is a collection of texts not only from the Bible but from a rich store collected from various ages and parts of the world. Each word in the prayers has its history and its theological weight. There is beauty and poetry. All this belongs to the people of God for the praise of God as well as for the joy and edification of the Church.

In the Church's prayer the given of which I speak concerns both content and structure. We want to inculturate this prayer of the Church and indeed, as Religious of the Assumption, I think it is our duty to collaborate in this task. To do so we need to appreciate and respect the breviary that we receive from the Church. I mean the Breviary that we have in our hands now and also the prayerbook that our local churches will compose based on the present Breviary, and which they will recognize as their liturgical prayer. We need to be creative without seeking to be original. We do not want to stick slavishly to what is written, but that we should treat the Breviary as a sort of basic text.

The content of the Breviary is largely and very especially the Word of God, considered by Christians not only as an inspired text, but also as a presence of God speaking and acting in our midst. The psalms, with other Old Testament and New Testament readings, are the essential matter of our common prayer. The Gospels also have their place, although the Gospel, "the sun in the universe of our liturgical prayer," is somewhat reserved for the Eucharist. Elements of our culture, its poetry and forms, its music and rhythms can be (and should be) present, but the place of the canonical Scriptures remains central and primordial. No other, even sacred, writings can replace the biblical prayers and readings. Other writings may be full of truth and beauty and passages can be incorporated into the office, but they cannot be used as substitutes for our Scriptures.

Many of the prayers, antiphons and responses are ancient, dating back centuries and part of our faith treasury, as I said above. We have lost most of the beautiful Latin hymns and a lot of very fine religious music with the change to the vernacular, but the majority of the breviaries edited in the vernacular contain some of the best religious hymns from our cultures. The intercessions are universal extending our care to humanity throughout the world and to the situations of the most basic importance and need. The formulation of many of the intercessory prayers comes from ancient sources and forms part of that

<sup>1</sup> You will recall that it was an important and disputed decision of Marie-Eugénie to take the Roman Breviary in Latin. While we can regret the uniformization and legalism that came with the Roman Breviary, I believe there is something gained in unity that we should not lose. By respecting the basic content and structure, we can hope to hope to achieve a satisfactory diversity in the Congregation while maintaining a necessary unity.

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heritage which is both a part of our identity and a source of communion. None of this should be slighted.

Lastly, silence and gestures also are to be included in the content we want to safeguard. Their use will depend very much on the culture and on the particular assembly.

Other elements can be and should be introduced so that the prayer will truly be that of the local Church and take up the concerns and situations of the people who are praying it. In the Office, God speaks through the Scriptures today and his people enter into dialogue with God. It would be a shame, however, to totally lose contact with our past as a people by failing to assure the continuity of our tradition. Young people are not insensitive to the past if this dimension is explained and properly dosed. The Taizé office which is very attractive to youth, is an example of a happy combination of ancient and new, of Latin and vernacular.

Respecting the old does not exempt us from of revitalizing the Hours with new language and new formulations, with responses to the Word, with hymns, prayers and symbols that express the life and heart of the community. I firmly believe that our charism invites us in our communities as well as in our work of evangelization to actualize the Breviary. At the same time, we want to keep present both the universal dimension of prayer and the links with the past.

What I am saying about the Church's treasury of prayer applies to the many different traditions and rites, past and present, that make up the great and wealthy Tradition (that which has been handed down) of the Catholic Church. Although I speak from the Latin tradition and of the Roman Breviary, I think we should not hesitate to delve into the riches of the other traditions. Today we are very aware of the theological and spiritual riches East and West have to share. The same can be applied to liturgical prayer; we can borrow with profit.<sup>1</sup>

In the Roman Breviary, the structure has not changed significantly since the time of St. Benedict. It is simple according to the Hour; the psalms, readings and responses are the body. The biblical reading is the culminating point. These basic structures have perdured through the different generations because of their fundamental logic. (There are other structures, in other rites, that follow their own logic.) The hymn, in our times at the beginning of a given Hour, gives the color and tone (natural time of day, feast or theme) of a particular Hour. Antiphons help in the same sense. The *Our Father* has a place of honor at Lauds and Vespers. The concluding prayer habitually praises the glory of God and asks grace for the praying community, through Jesus Christ...

<sup>1</sup> For instance, our Indian sisters can borrow from the Syro Malabar rite.

Lauds and Vespers include bidding prayers but they need not be restricted to these Hours. (I have heard them at the Midday Hour also.) During the course of the day, we use the three evangelical hymns that recall God's fidelity and covenant with us.

The basic structure of each Hour is easily learned and serves as a framework allowing, even not very talented people, to construct rather easily and quickly a respectable office which will be recognized by others as an office. It is a positive help to creativity allowing great space for liberty yet guaranteeing a certain form, order and length. For us, as contemplatives, a healthy monotony and a stable structure are pacifying and favor interiorization. The structure as the content, is also a bulwark against an excess of subjectivity, from falling into particular devotions and exaggerations. Readings and Compline have their special structures serving the purpose of the two Hours: deepening our knowledge and understanding of the Word of God in Readings, and closing the day with Compline. Silence after the Word of God has an important role in the structure of the Office.

To summarize all that I have said above concerning the Roman Breviary:

It has been given to us as the official prayer of the Church; we receive it with faith and gratitude as a basic text. Any process of inculturation or adaptation will respect the essential content and structure of the Office as we have received it. At the same time, flexibility is the rule. We can feel free to adapt the liturgy of the Hours in function of the culture, the events and the assembly.

A **problem**, especially for us in the Assumption, stems from the fact that the Council Fathers, when discussing the reform of the liturgy of the Hours, clearly came down on the side of a Breviary primarily for clergy and religious, and composed mainly in view of private recitation. Many regret the lack of historical sense in this decision. On one hand, the popular origins of the Liturgy of the Hours were completely neglected (or unknown) and on the other, the experts limited themselves too strictly to the late Latin tradition (after the Middle Ages.) The voices raised in favor of the more popular "cathedral"<sup>1</sup> and parish tradition went unheard. There are places where the laity willingly

<sup>1</sup> "During the 4th century, peace for the Church favors liturgical life, thanks to the construction of churches, pilgrimages and the rise of asceticism. The prayer of the Hours becomes communitarian and is organized almost everywhere in two forms that the work of Anton Baumstark have the merit of distinguishing: the prayer of the Christian people gathered around the bishop and his priests (that Baumstark calls the *cathedral office*),—the prayer of the ascetics and monks (the *monastic office*)." A.G. Martimort, *L'Église en Prière*, p. 187.

participate in the Office, but in general the present Breviary requires a certain degree of formation and experience not found in most lay people.

We find ourselves caught in the middle. The present Breviary somewhat satisfies our monastic and contemplative leanings—and, at this point, we must admit that we are for the most part alone when we celebrate the Office—but we know that the Breviary is not adapted to the needs of most of the laity. Because we are very sensitive to the tastes and needs of the Christian communities, we are often ill at ease with our Office and desirous of having something more suitable for the people. Today, moreover, the only local church that I know of that has produced a popular common prayerbook is the church of Brazil.

I do not have a ready solution to offer. This is a situation which we shall have to live with and live with our local churches. Each community and province will have to find its own way in its particular circumstances: finding as needed a prayer adapted to the people and keeping what is proper to a contemplative prayer. It may be of some consolation to know that the problem is not really new: monastic and popular liturgies existed side by side in the past, (as early as the fourth century). People considered them, not as opposed, but as complementary. As a result, often, the monastic or ascetic was just added on to the official liturgy of the Christian assembly.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge is for each community to find its own style of liturgy. This will require an intense effort of creation in the specific genius of the culture, an adaptation to the milieu and also to the resources of the community. This means also participation in the way in which a community celebrates and lives its relationship with God in Jesus Christ. It is the way the Spirit moves our spirit and the way we make a rite come alive from the interior. There are cultures that are wont to use fewer words and more silence; that will reveal the more formal or, on the contrary, the more spontaneous; that will reveal a gift in the use of the symbolic. Each culture will have its own music and rhythms, poetry, and bodily gestures. The way the various elements are put together harmoniously will result in a unique style.

Liturgy and life are intimately related. The celebration of the Liturgy is a celebration of our life in Jesus Christ. This implies that in, the power of the Spirit, we are, before coming to the liturgy, already living life in and with our Lord, receiving everything from our Father and Creator and responding to grace

<sup>1</sup> "It is this harmonious meeting between two expressions and two rhythms in the prayer of the Hours which constitutes in the Churches of the East and West, the traditional patrimony of the Divine Office." A.G. Martimort, op. cit. p. 191.

in the events and circumstances of daily life. If our life is dull, our liturgies will probably be dull. And a brilliant liturgy detached from a vibrant interior life will probably be only a momentary substitute for life—a show or a performance. On the contrary, a very ordinary existence lived in depth can animate fully a liturgy that is poor in terms of artistic resources.

These ideas concerning the celebration of the Divine Office, which I have expressed above, are the result of my study and reflexion in the light of what I have seen and experienced in local churches throughout the world and in our communities. I thought it would be useful to share them with you and to repeat some basic notions which may have become obscured over the past years of change and experimentation. I have tried to be brief—perhaps too brief—with the historical material, much of which is the result of recent research that is not everywhere available.

I am aware of speaking with a certain authority. On one hand, I am only invoking the authority of the Church, as I understand it; on the other hand, I have presumed to give some directives, because of my privileged position which allows me to see what the Spirit is inspiring in the whole of the Congregation joined to my responsibility, between General Chapters, to discern what this means for the charism and the unity among us. My desire is that these pages help to guide you in this time of re-founding and of preparation for the General Chapter of 1994.

Our Assumption life is beautiful and I hope that our liturgies will reflect that beauty. Today, the world is tired of explanations and arguments; and reasoning can be false. Beauty speaks directly to the heart and both convinces and rejoices in a way that surpasses reason. May our liturgies be a source of joy and consolation for us and for our people.

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*St. Paul*

ALTEUIL, 29 June 1992

## LETTER on the LITURGY

### Part III

The Invitatory is the very first prayer of the day. We come into the presence of God, to praise Him and listen to Him. It is an invitation to prayer for the assembly and offers a good opportunity to mention the feast, the theme of the day or the hour of prayer we are going to pray. Traditionally, Psalm 94 opens the day's prayer, but the Breviary suggests also psalms 23, 99 and 64 on account of their "inviting" content.

*The use of a psalm is not obligatory; it is the invitation that counts. A prayer as simple as the "O, Lord, open my lips!" repeated three times will do. Or an introduction in the form of a prayer or an explanation concerning the office that follows.*

*It is a good idea to use an invitatory antiphon which allows the Assembly to participate and helps the people to enter into the presence of God and into prayer.*

*The invitatory can be suppressed, but we should not forget its meaning nor omit it systematically.*

The HYMN has an important role at the beginning of an Office. It underscores the day's theme or the meaning of the Hour. It is a popular element and, since it is sung, it helps adaptation or inculturation by the music as well as by the words.

*The content and melody (and their "marriage") deserve attention. The content should be substantial theologically and the music of a certain quality. Sometimes, we are obliged to sacrifice good music so that the assembly can join in the singing; at the same time, we should not underestimate the talent of the people.*

The ANTIPIHON helps the congregation to pray the psalm that follows. Often, it consists in a verse drawn from the psalm that puts the accent on the feast or the theme of the Office. Sometimes, the antiphon simply suggests the spirit in which to pray the psalm: in the same psalm, there will often be a possible choice between verses expressing anguish or trust, joy or sadness, supplication or thanksgiving. Or a verse may just be worthy of special attention. The antiphons can be recited or sung.

*For certain feasts, the Breviary uses the antiphons to give more information concerning the mystery or the life of the saint. An antiphon can be used to stress an idea or theme and be repeated several times during the same Hour—for*

*example, before each psalm. The antiphon can be omitted; the title of the psalm or the biblical citation, as those given in the Breviary, can be used alone.*

The PSALMS constitute an essential part of each Hour. The Office is principally a prayer of the psalms. There are psalms indicated by the Breviary for each Hour; often according to the "temporal" sense of the Hour: mention of the evening or morning in the psalm. At the same time, the "best" psalms (the most important, the messianic, the most meaningful for the people) appear in the morning and evening Hours because these are the most often and easily prayed by both religious and lay. Praying the psalms is sometimes difficult for certain people who find them disconcerting or far from their daily life and its preoccupations. They are, however, a good means of initiation to the prayer of thanksgiving, to meditation on the divine perfections, to a prayer which expresses the human condition with its miseries.

The Evangelists and Fathers of the Church "christified" the psalms and today the biblical quotation before each psalm helps us to see Christ in the psalms and to pray them with and in Christ.

The regular distribution of the 150 psalms over a period of time—a day (!), a week...—is a monastic invention. After the Vatican Council, the Benedictines chose a distribution of the psalter over a two-week span.

*The psalms are poems and possess a musical quality. It is normal, then, that in their execution the musical character be respected. The type of psalmody used should be adapted to the genre of each psalm. Singing and recitation can be mixed, but we should pay attention to the content: sing a joyful psalm of thanksgiving; read a psalm of complaint. A psalm such as Psalm 68, in the first person, can be read prayerfully and effectively by a single person. Popular versions of the psalms should be used sparingly.*

*As for the distribution of the psalms, there is nothing, as far as I can see, that should keep a community from making its own distribution in accordance with its own way of joining Office of Readings to another Hour. We should take into account the present distribution. in the Breviary and use our intelligence.*

The BIBLICAL CANTICLES from the Old Testament are of ancient origin and have their place in almost all the ancient liturgies. They appear in Vigils and Morning Prayer. The place accorded the New Testament canticles—the Gospel canticles apart—is a happy innovation of Vatican II. They consist in the heavenly acclamations of the Apocalypse and the Christological hymns from the Epistles.

The GOSPEL CANTICLES—the canticles of Zachary, Mary and Simeon—have a special place as Gospel texts. They are sung standing and we make a sign of the Cross as signal marks of respect. The Beattitudes can be added to their number, but strictly speaking, they are not a canticle or designed to be sung.

*On account of our respect and our love for these texts, it is preferable to sing them. On rare occasions, they can be omitted or sung in popular versions. Despite what has been said above, the Beattitudes can be sung and, in point of fact, are regularly sung in the Syrian and Byzantine liturgies.*

The RESPONSES, TROPES, REFRAINS and ANTIPHONS for the Canticles etc., are short and freestyle pieces which develop the meaning of a psalm or a canticle, of a feast or the time. They give color and substance to the prayer. They give the people a chance to respond in their words to the Word of God.

*Our communities should make up a repertoire; the compilation will take time, but in the end, time will be saved.*

*In the Oriental rites, there are fewer psalms and more canticles in the offices. There are a multitude of litanies and prayers; some very beautiful ones could enhance our liturgies. The Trope genre has been very effectively revived in France, but I have not seen them elsewhere.*

The UNIVERSAL PRAYER is an occasion to include the life of the faithful present in the congregation and their concerns. The intentions should remain universal; we pray for the entire world. Ancient litanies and prayers of praise can also be used. They are included in some versions of the Breviary.

*We should accustom ourselves to using universal formulas: "Let us pray for the sick, especially for Rosa...." "Let us pray for peace in the world, especially in such and such a country...." We can employ bidding prayers in all of the Hours; for instance, at the Midday Office, especially if lay people are present.*

The PRAYER or COLLECT, joined to the great prayer of prayers, the OUR FATHER, marks the end of an Office. On Sundays and feasts days, the prayer of the Eucharist for the day is used. The ordinary prayers of the Little Hours mention the "Christological" significance assigned to each Hour: Pentecost and the sending of the Spirit at Terce, the Crucifixion at Sext, the Death of our Lord at None.

In the Breviary, figure many prayers that are centuries old and very beautiful. The collects of the Roman Liturgy have a set structure: 1) the praise of God, 2) the

petition, masked through Jesus Christ. Each word has its history and theological weight.

*There is certainly room for spontaneous prayers as well as for more carefully crafted prayers created for a special occasion.*

The BIBLICAL READINGS are arranged in cycles—rather unsuccessfully. The aim of the cycles is to have us read the Bible in a continuous fashion.

*It seems to me that we could better arrange the readings, planning them by book of the Bible and by week (taking into account the interruptions caused by feasts etc.). It is a good idea to use for the second reading a Patristic or contemporary commentary on the biblical text of the first reading.*

The "SECOND" READINGS. The Patristic readings date back to St. Benedict and are part of our Christian patrimony. The Liturgy of the Hours of 1971 has enlarged the anthology of second readings and it is no longer limited to the Fathers of the Church. It gives us some of the best spiritual pages of Christian writers of all the ages. Reading the works of these witnesses of the universal tradition of the Church helps us to enter into "that meditation of the Word of God carried on through the centuries, through which the Bride of the Word Incarnate, the Church, remaining faithful to the plan and the spirit of her Spouse, strives to acquire each day a deeper intelligence of the Scriptures."<sup>1</sup>

*Sometimes, we find the Patristic readings quite long and complicated; the exegesis of the Fathers is quite different from that of our times. It would be better to abridge and arrange them rather than to suppress them altogether in favor of contemporary authors. Good contemporary readings have their place, however, especially when they throw light on the biblical reading.*

RESPONSES to the Readings: "...this reponsorial aims at casting light on the reading which might help us to penetrate the meaning more fully, to situate it in salvation history, or to make the passage from Old to New Testaments. It can turn a reading into prayer and contemplation, or, through its poetic beauty, obtain a pleasing variety."<sup>2</sup>

*In the Office of Readings, be careful to safeguard the prayerful character despite the importance of the readings. In this Office, we can take great liberty*

<sup>1</sup> General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours, 1971, No 164  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid. No 169.

*in adapting it to the needs of the community provided that we respect its principal purpose.*

NIGHT VIGILS have always had a privileged place in Christian spirituality. They express and encourage our wait for the Lord who has come, who is risen and who will come again. Besides the all-night vigils like the Paschal Vigil, the "cathedral" vigil for Sunday is our model. This office is an extended Office of Readings having, in addition to the psalms, three canticles from the Old Testament. The daily vigil or nocturns is a monastic invention.

For the closing of the Saturday night Vigil, according to an ancient tradition, a Gospel of the Resurrection is read. For the other feasts, (and in many of our communities for Sundays), the Gospel of the feast or of the following day can be read.

The Final BLESSING should be considered as the dismissal of the assembly.

Moments of SILENCE when we meditate and assimilate what has been read or sung, are as important as the prayer times. Silence is also an expression of admiration, of adoration, of awe before God. The best moments for silence are after a psalm or after a reading.

In our communities, we have to establish a common pattern of silence; otherwise, the assembly does not know what to expect or what to do with the silence when it comes. The way we use times of silence (frequency and length) will be part of the particular style I spoke of above.

SYMBOLS, like rites and gestures, not only add intensity to the word, but also arouse and express the deeper feelings of the heart. Most liturgical symbols are inscribed in Nature and in our human nature. They are, moreover, biblical symbols which go back to the Old Testament and which have shaped the Jewish and Christian collective imagination.

In the Liturgy of the Hours, the symbols should be centered mainly on the Word of God, the presence of Christ and the community gathered together. Incense symbolizes prayer, the sacrifice of praise. Light is a symbol of the sun and of Christ, while lamps symbolize prayer and joy in the presence of the sacred. They are also used as an escort in processions.

BODILY POSITIONS—seated, standing, body or head bowed—deepen the interior sentiment or provoke an interior attitude. They express the union of hearts at least as much as the singing does.



*Communities should reflect on their use of bodily gestures and find the appropriate ones. In the small oratories, we prefer not to move around too much, but certain gestures still have their place.*

#### SOME QUESTIONS:

When we are obliged to **combine two Hours of the Office**, that is, pray Readings with another Hour, we should take pains to avoid an overload. The best combination is with Midday Prayer. Lauds and Vespers lend themselves less easily to being linked to another Hour because they have very marked characteristics of the hour of the day: sunrise and sunset.

Some communities have a daily schedule that does not allow them to gather for Midday prayer. This is regrettable. Even if there are only two sisters in the house, it is not too few to say the Office together. In any case, **the hour of midday** remains a key moment in the day for all. It is the moment when we pause: to look back over the morning to see how we have spent it, and forward to see how we want to spend the rest of the day. It is not too late...Each sister, even if she is far from the community or a church and has no time to pray the Office, should be responsible to find a moment at Midday for her examen. This pause for prayer at noon goes back to our ancestors in the faith and the examen is a special means for "contemplatives in action."

The absence of the sisters from the house at noon, means that several communities habitually join Readings to Morning or Evening Prayer, with the unfortunate result of overcharging the Hour and destroying its unity. It also overcharges the sisters! I wonder if some of these communities could not have a Night Office or Vigil—at least a few times a week. Many communities could easily do this. Obviously, this solution has consequences with regard to television, entertaining, going out...

From time to time, I am asked if we are obliged to "**take back the office**" that we may have missed. First of all, we have to abandon a mentality of obligation because I hardly see myself imposing such an obligation. Secondly, we should distinguish between different situations: 1) an Office habitually missed because a sister's workschedule keeps her away; 2) an Hour of the Office missed because of unforeseen circumstances or once in a while on account of a particular circumstance. In the first case, it would be normal for the sister to place on her schedule the moment when she plans to pray the Hour that she knows she will miss. In the second case, taking back the Office or not will depend on the circumstances of the rest of the day—whether or not there is a moment free. It will also depend on the sister's esteem for the Office and on her desire.