

**INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS FORMATION**

**TANGAZA COLLEGE  
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CONGREGATION OF THE  
MISSIONARY BENEDICTINE SISTERS IN THE LIGHT OF  
MARY'S DISCIPLESHIP IN LUKE-ACTS**

**SR. PAULA N. WANYAMA, OSB**

Moderator  
**Rev. Fr. Vincent Wiseman, OP**

*This is a long essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
diploma in Religious Formation.*

**APRIL 2005**

*WAN  
2005*



I dedicate this Long Essay to my Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of  
Tutzing and more especially to my sisters in the Nairobi Priory - Kenya.  
With much love and dedication.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To write an essay paper like this, one needs assistance from many people. I would like to take this opportunity to thank God who has been a great support, a guide and a source of inspiration in this work. I am greatly indebted to my moderator Fr. Vincent Wiseman, OP. I sincerely appreciate his willingness to assist, advice and correct me during the period when I was compiling this work.

I am grateful to Fr. Barry Moriaity for his support and inspiration. He has been so kind to create time for reading and correcting my English in this essay. I am grateful to Fr. Gary Mueller for accepting to go through my paper and for his contribution by making good suggestions.

I am grateful to my Prioress, Sr. Elisabeth Busbach, OSB, and community for allowing me to study at Tangaza. I am grateful for all the support, understanding and encouragement I got from my Prioress and for deloading me from formation work to enable me finish my work.

I also want to thank Sr. Placida, OSB and Sr. Valeriana, OSB for their tireless time to read through my work. All that I have received will be for the good of the Priory and the Church.

I thank the Director of the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation, Sr. Loretta Brennan, CSB, for her support, understanding and encouragement during my two years in Tangaza. I also thank all my classmates especially Sr. Jacinta N'kubithu, Br. Bai, and Br. Kallon, for all their support and encouragement. Lastly I thank the staff members and the entire Tangaza for contributing to my growth as person. I will live to be grateful for all I have gained in this Institute. Thanks to all of you, who in one way or another, contributed to this achievement. May God's blessings be upon you forever.

# CONTENTS

Student' Declaration.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgement.....	iii
GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter I.....	3
The Idea of Discipleship in the Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters.....	3
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Life of the Founder.....	4
2.1 <i>Beginning of the Congregation</i> .....	6
3. The Founder's Understanding of Discipleship and His Experiences.....	8
4. The Charism of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters.....	10
4.1 <i>The Challenges of Living the Charism today</i> .....	11
5. Conclusion.....	15
 Chapter II.....	 17
The Characteristics of Mary's Discipleship in Luke-Acts.....	17
1. Introduction.....	17
2. Life of Mary According to St. Luke's Gospel.....	17
2.1 <i>Annunciation</i> .....	18
2.2 <i>Mary's call to Discipleship in Luke-Acts</i> .....	20
3. Portraits of Mary.....	24
3.1 <i>Woman of Faith</i> .....	24
3.2 <i>Woman of Prayer</i> .....	28
3.3 <i>Woman of Service</i> .....	33
4. Conclusion.....	35
 Chapter III.....	 36
Evaluation of Discipleship of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the Light of Mary's Discipleship.....	36
1. Introduction.....	36
2. Discipleship in the Missionary Benedictine Congregation.....	37
3. Formation Program of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the Light of Mary's Discipleship.....	40
4. How Mary's Discipleship Affirms the Missionary Benedictine Sister's Way of Life.....	44
5. How Mary's Discipleship Challenges the Missionary Benedictine Sister's Way of Life.....	49
6. Conclusion.....	53
GENERAL ONCLUSION.....	55
ABBREVIATION.....	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	58
APPENDIX I:.....	60
APPENDIX 2:.....	61
APPENDIX 3:.....	62
APPENDIX 4:.....	63
APPENDIX 5:.....	64
APPENDIX 6:.....	65

## GENERAL – INTRODUCTION

It has been a great pleasure for me to write this paper concerning discipleship as Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the light of Mary's discipleship. Society looks up to us to see prophetic and genuine disciples of Jesus who bring hope to the people. Through our community life we give witness to Christianity genuinely lived. Mary is a model for us on this journey of faith and discipleship.

This long essay is divided into three chapters. The first chapter explains briefly the life of the founder and the beginnings of the congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters and the understanding of discipleship that the founder had at that time. Finally, this paper treats the charism of the congregation and the challenges of living that charism today.

The second chapter introduces Mary's discipleship. The main insights of her vocation to discipleship are taken from the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. The main focus will be Mary as a woman of faith, prayer, and service. The aim is to see what in her discipleship can enrich our own discipleship as a congregation.

The third chapter pictures how the Missionary Benedictine Sisters are striving to live out their discipleship in the light of Mary's own discipleship. Furthermore I will

look at the elements of Mary's discipleship that can be integrated in our formation programme. Finally, I will reflect on how Mary's discipleship affirms and challenges our own discipleship today. The nature of this long essay is descriptive and the materials used are from reliable sources, from the rich mines of the Holy Scripture, from the Benedictine spirituality and from my own personal reflections.

## Chapter I

### The Idea of Discipleship in the Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters

#### 1. Introduction

To start off, I would like to acknowledge Pope John Paul II's words that, "The consecrated life is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. In every age there have been men and women, who obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ in order to devote themselves to him with an 'undivided' heart".<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is primarily concerned with the life of our founder, Fr. Andreas Amrhein. I want to examine how his experience shaped and nurtured his vocation as a monastic as well as a missionary. Secondly, I will look at the beginnings of our congregation and all the difficulties that the founder experienced in realizing the dream of monasticism and mission in his community. This knowledge will help us discover our roots and to appreciate our identity as Missionary Benedictine Sisters. Thirdly, I will look at the understanding of discipleship that Fr. Andreas Amrhein had after having lived and nurtured his vision for 14 years as a monk in the Abbey of

---

<sup>1</sup> J. PAUL II, *The Consecrated Life. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata of the Holy Father John Paul II.* no.1, 7.

Beuron in Germany. His understanding of discipleship inspired him to look for certain qualities, motivations and virtues in those who entered as candidates for missionary apostolate. Fourthly, I will look closely at our charism which is the gift to the Church and which summarizes our identity as Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing. Finally, I will examine the challenges that we are facing in living our charism today. I will end with some conclusions.

## **2. Life of the Founder**

Josef George Amrhein was born on February 4, 1844 in Switzerland, in the diocese of Basel, and he was a sickly child of ailing parents. He lost his father at an early age. In 1850 he started primary school. Josef's mother died when he was only 15 years old, and a premature independence made him feel homeless. He described himself as a "youth without friends or parents [...]"<sup>2</sup>

Because of his fragile health, Amrhein left school before his final exams and moved to Florence where he attended courses in drawing, painting and architecture and graduated in September 1864. In 1867, Amrhein decided to become priest for missionary service. The following year he began to study theology at the renowned University of Tübingen in Germany. Through church history, he became acquainted with the Benedictine mission of the Middle Ages, which inflamed him with a desire for monastic life. Often the sermons given at a parish mission reinforced Amrhein's desire to dedicate himself to the salvation of others.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> B. WALTER, *Sustained by God's Faithfulness*, I, 12.

<sup>3</sup> B. WALTER, *Sustained by God's Faithfulness*, I, 13.

He felt inspired to lead a more intense spiritual life, as he had already reflected seriously during his frequent visits to the Art Gallery in Paris. The works of art fascinated him. He thought, “how beautiful these works of art, how marvelous the creative genius to produce such noble work! Yet, how much greater than any painting is the value and beauty of the human soul, God’s creation!”<sup>4</sup> More and more his contemplation of art challenged him to make a personal decision, which had lain dormant or was put aside.

On one Sunday morning the desire could no longer be ignored. He confided in a letter to a friend: “When I knelt in the church of St. Sulpice, I heard deep within myself this question, ‘don’t you want to become a priest?’”<sup>5</sup> Twelve years earlier, his grandfather had asked this question and the ten-year-old boy had given the clear reply: “I don’t want to be a chaplain or a canon. But I would like to be a missionary among pagans”.<sup>6</sup> After intensely engaging in the arts, the student was once again confronted by an apostolic vocation. Perhaps art was to serve as the start on the way to priesthood. With time his priestly vocation became the focus of his thinking. In 1870 Josef Amrhein visited Beuron Abbey for a few days of spiritual recollection. He was deeply moved by the solemn liturgy and this experience determined Josef Amrhein’s future. Before returning to the university he had resolved to enter Beuron.

On July 10<sup>th</sup> 1870, he entered the novitiate of Beuron Abbey after being given hope of becoming both monk and missionary. He received the name Andreas. He had

---

<sup>4</sup> B. WALTER, *Sustained by God’s Faithfulness*, I, 13

<sup>5</sup> B. WALTER, *Sustained by God’s Faithfulness*, I, 13.

<sup>6</sup> B. WALTER, *Sustained by God’s Faithfulness*, I, 13.

the conviction that to be an effective missionary one had to be religious. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century when there “arose an impetus for mission in the church, he joined this impetus by founding the congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Fathers of St. Otilien and the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing.”<sup>7</sup>

### ***2.1 Beginnings of the Congregation***

In March 1883 Fr. Andreas Amrhein “submitted the petition to the Propaganda Fide for approval of the new foundation. This petition showed his deep, ardent desire to labor for the salvation of others, especially those who do not know their savior because no one has proclaimed him to them. In June 29, 1884, Pope Leo XIII gave his approval to Fr. Amrhein’s plans.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1884 Fr. Andreas Amrhein installed the first community of monks in Reichenbach, “a dilapidated 13<sup>th</sup> century abbey that was confiscated by the state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and sold at a public auction. As early as September 24, 1885, four young ladies expressed their desire to serve the new foundation. They joined the young community in Reichenbach as the first Missionary Benedictine Sisters.”<sup>9</sup>

By the time they moved to St. Otilien the number of the sisters had increased to ten. Soon their number began to swell to fifty and a real convent house had then to be built. On account of great poverty the sisters, novices and postulants had to help construct the first convent called “St. Katharina”.

In 1887 the first missionaries were sent to East Africa. In the same year the Mother House had its first branch: the convent of Maria Hilf in Tutzing. Fr. Andreas

---

<sup>7</sup> I. DABALUS, *Benedictines for Mission – The Story of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing 1885 – 1985*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> B. WALTER, *Sustained by God’s Faithfulness*, I, 32.

<sup>9</sup> I. DABALUS, *Benedictines for Mission – The Story of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing 1885 – 1985*, 4.

devoted his energies to the solid monastic formation of his candidates. The biggest event of November 1887 was the missioning to East Africa of the first ten monks and four sisters from St. Ottilien in Germany. In February the next year a first missionary monastery was founded in Pugu, near Dar-es-Salaam.

One year after the arrival of the first missionaries, the monastery was destroyed by rebels and one sister and two brothers were killed. Their bodies were burned in the flames of the mission. Two brothers escaped and three were taken captives. However, the surviving missionaries made friends with the natives by caring for freed slaves and orphans, teaching young people, visiting the sick in their homes, instructing the dying in the faith and baptizing them.

Far from discouraging the enthusiasm and courage of the community, the events of Pugu brought more spirited candidates to the motherhouse. However, malaria, fevers and numerous other tropical diseases, such as typhus and dysentery, weakened them. The “murderous climate” of East Africa as Fr. Andreas called it, claimed young lives at an alarming rate.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> M. HANDL, *Cherishing our Tradition*, 3.

### 3. The Founder's Understanding of Discipleship and His Experiences

Looking at Fr. Andrea's zeal for missionary service shows that his predecessors in missionary work edified him. This comes out clearly as Matilda Handl puts it, "He thought and taught like his contemporaries, such as Liberman and Lavigerie".<sup>11</sup> These were men who had already experienced missionary life. He took literally the verse from Mark's Gospel that says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned" Mk 16:16. And he was convinced that outside the church there was no salvation.

Animated by the conviction that God had sent them to snatch the poor pagans from Satan and eternal damnation, our pioneers spared no effort to bring the grace of baptism to as many African people as they could reach. There is no record that the numbers at the motherhouse shrank from a mission assignment, though this meant early death for many, showing that their understanding of discipleship was radical.

Fr. Andreas Amrhein viewed the mission of a disciple and missionary as a "divine task",<sup>12</sup> and so he said "the task which a missionary to the pagans has to accomplish was laid down by Jesus himself in the words by which he called St. Paul to the apostolate".<sup>13</sup> The mission of St. Paul was articulated in these words 'I now send you to the pagans to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may obtain forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been consecrated by faith in me' Acts. 26.18.

---

<sup>11</sup> M. HANDL, *Cherishing our Tradition*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> A. AMRHEIN, *Excrepts from the Prospectus*, 39.

<sup>13</sup> A. AMRHEIN, *Excerpts from the Prospectus*, 39.

Being aware of this great task, Fr. Andreas made sure that the moment the candidates were accepted in his monastery, the monastic rhythm of prayer and work shaped daily life in the mission house. The day's labor was to be supported and permeated by prayer. Charity above all, was to take root in the candidates; and the altar and tabernacle were the spiritual center of the mission house.

Thus, a lack of charity was evidence for a candidate's lack of a vocation for the community. There were aspects that were to be tested during the probation period. Some of these aspects were "First the virtues for the vocation, second was the mental endowment necessary and third was the physical fitness".<sup>14</sup> All three requirements for vocation of a missionary to the pagans were to be carefully discerned in the mission house. When all these were present then followed the invitation "then come and follow me" (Lk 18:22).

For a proclaimer of the message of salvation whose word and example conveyed the graces of conversion to the Christian faith and Christian living, a higher degree of perfection and a righteous living by faith are indispensable.<sup>15</sup> And thus it is clear that the words above apply to the messengers of Christ, the missionaries.

According to Fr. Amrhein renunciation was the second hallmark of the missionary vocation. Detachment of the heart fosters God's undivided love for this reason,

Poverty was explained whereby on arrival each one handed in all his belongings -- money, books, clothing, etc. The superior let him keep what he needed; the rest was kept in a common store. No one was to possess any money. No one could give or receive anything without permission. However, the father of the house cared for all that was needed.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> A. AMRHEIN, *Excerpts from the Prospectus*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> A. AMRHEIN, *Excerpts from the Prospectus*, 53.

<sup>16</sup> A. AMRHEIN, *Excerpts from the Prospectus*, 54.

Obedience and humility are Benedictine virtues that were introduced to candidates. The candidates had to devote themselves to these fundamental virtues right from the beginning of their probation time with full determination. They needed to place themselves simply as Benedict puts it in his rule, "under the guidance of the superior and have no secrets from him."<sup>17</sup> And finally, there was love of the cross. Whoever had a true missionary vocation, would from the beginning equip himself to bear sufferings. To suffer for Christ and with Christ belonged to the marks of a true apostolic vocation.

#### **4. The Charism Of The Missionary Benedictine Sisters**

Catholic tradition holds that the Holy Spirit is the source of every authentic Charism. The Spirit often uses human means as its instrument of its work. Father Amrhein's special charism as has been described as laying in the,

Unshakable conviction that just as the Benedictine missionaries in the past christianized and civilized Europe, their modern members should be able to render the same services to the non-European World. Following the traditional Missionary Benedictine methods he regarded the coenobitical Benedictine cloister as the center out of which the good news of Jesus Christ should radiate to the outside world. He envisioned the life of worship of the community to be the fountain of grace, which should flow out to the people of the far and near countries.<sup>18</sup>

We experience our charism as a manifestation of God's love in the world through our participation in the mission of the Church by our work of evangelization. In accordance with the tradition of our congregation, we commit ourselves to proclaiming the Gospel among people who do not know Christ and where Christ is not sufficiently known. We serve where the Church is in need. In this way we are "challenged to awaken the sense for God in our contemporary society and to make

---

<sup>17</sup> A. PARRY – E. DE WAAL, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> I. DABALUS, *Benedictines for Mission - the Story of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing 1885 - 1985*, 5.

others aware of the integral salvation of the world offered by God in Jesus Christ".<sup>19</sup> We are also open to every kind of activity consonant with our Benedictine community life and prayer.

At this point we can pause and ask how is this charism in line with Amrhein's dream for the congregation? Looking at our life, we can say that our charism is still very much in line with our founder's dream for the congregation. Although we have to acknowledge that at the moment we are not directly dealing with first evangelization, but since we are called to serve where the Church is in need, I can say we are involved in most of the apostolic commitments about which our Founder dreamt.

#### ***4.1. The Challenges of Living the Charism Today***

Called to serve where the church is in need and especially to proclaim the kingdom of God among those peoples who have not yet heard the gospel and where Christ is not sufficiently known, we are also challenged to awaken the desire for God in our contemporary society. Looking at the task that our charism poses to us today, I am forced to recall an image that would explain the challenge of living and sharing our charism today with others. Imagine someone trying to carry water in his/her hands. How much can one hold? How long will it stay in the cup of a person's hands? If one wants to transfer it to another location, how much of it reaches its destination? That image of carrying water came from my childhood experience. We used to play at the river and as children tried to bring the river in our hands to our primitive mud

---

<sup>19</sup> *Constitution of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing, Second Edition, 2.*

sculptures. I liken this image to our charism. How do we transmit it and how much do we bring across to others?

In this new era, there are forces threatening our monastic ideals. We are a product of this culture. We live in these times. What characterizes our age? Nowadays, wants are equivalent with needs in our minds. We demand for what our heart desires whether it is a need or a want it does not matter. Comfort and wealth are taken for granted. We don't question much about the comfort of individuals and amassing of goods. Deprivation is not to be tolerated, let alone sought. Individualism is rife in our communities. Technology allows more communication, but it makes possible a life lived in alienation and isolation. We need to be open to the signs of the time and be ready to change but how much? The great question today is how can we fulfill the task given us by our founder and entrusted to us by the Mother Church as monastics as well as missionaries in this era?

We firmly believe that if monasticism is to mean anything and to speak to our age, the monastery needs to be a place where people can come and learn how to seek God. Said more clearly, the monastery needs to be a place where they experience God and can be holy. This is why we exist. Our places of work as well as the people whom we work with have to feel through our coming together with them that we seek God. To be able to realize if we are living out our Charism, we feel as a community challenged to go back to our sources, to touch into the founding vision. Benedict wrote his Rule to provide the environment, the practices and the structure within which a monastic could be serious about being a contemplative. That is our reason for being. People look for holy women, spiritual guides, to help them find God.

There are three characteristics of life without which one cannot claim to be a follower of Benedict. According to Sr. Aquinata Bockman, “they are prayer, obedience and community.”<sup>20</sup> She sheds more light on these aspects by saying: “They are not optional and they are not negotiable. They are an integrated whole”.<sup>21</sup> When we declare ourselves to be Missionary Benedictine Sisters, we are saying that our seeking God involves all three - prayer, obedience and community. It is from these three aspects that our mission flows.

Benedictine prayer is less about techniques; it is about perseverance and attentiveness. Going back to our ancient source we have found the treasure of *Lectio*. This is one of the most important observances of our monastic life. One may ask what is *Lectio*? This is a way of prayer based on sacred reading and it has four steps to it: *Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio*. This practice helps us to know to whom we can go to in moments of joy, pains and confusion. The goal of *Lectio* is contemplation. It is very Benedictine. It occurs as the very natural outflow from the heart of a believer nourished by the Word of God in the scriptures and the liturgy. The entire life of a monastic is a response to God’s call. It is to live continually in God’s presence. The Hours of the *Opus Dei* or the work of God are community anchors in our shared journey. It is there that we gain new strength as Bockman explains, “However this communal prayer requires that we personally stand before God faithfully each day in utter stillness and availability. Only with both communal and personal prayer can we

---

<sup>20</sup> A. BOCKMAN, *Conference on the Rule of St. Benedict 2*.

<sup>21</sup> A. BOCKMAN, *Conference on the Rule of St. Benedict 2*.

develop that radical faith by which we can give the Church and the world our monastic gift of life lived for God alone".<sup>22</sup>

Obedience in coenobitic life extends beyond the superior to the Rule and practices and *horarium* or timetable that a community has adopted. We have clear expectations of each other in community. We often disappoint each other. The hard work of obedience is reflected in the details of returning car keys on time, signing out and leaving a phone number. In accepting assigned obedience, such as bells, dishwashing, cleaning, in turning in budgets and balancing checkbooks as requested. As Bockman puts it: "only with faith is there spiritual significance in having to ask permission, but in itself it reminds us of the commitment we made. We can become quite mystical in talking about obedience, but it is the little things that provide the real test of our authenticity as monastics living under a rule and a prioress in our search for God".<sup>23</sup>

St. Benedict gave great importance to community. He uses words such as reverence and honor. Benedict wanted our community relations to be characterized by a mutual love, respect and concern. He asks us "to outdo one another in showing honor to one another".<sup>24</sup> So as Bockman writes to have an "authentic, intentional community, in our day can be a real countersign to a perverted individualism rampant in our culture."<sup>25</sup> A common roof does not make community of the individuals living under it.

---

<sup>22</sup> A. BOCKMAN, *Conference on the Rule of St. Benedict* 2.

<sup>23</sup> A. BOCKMAN, *Conference on the Rule of St. Benedict* 3.

<sup>24</sup> A. PARRY – E. DE WAAL, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 116.

<sup>25</sup> A. BOCKMAN, *Conference the Rule of St. Benedict* 3.

As we look at our community we feel that we still have a lot to do. Without good relationships with one another we can't do much. We need to move beyond tribalism, status quo, education, nationality, racial background and so forth. We need to structure a life together in which all are held to be gifted by the Spirit, and in which all are called to participation, in which all are seen as equal. Then, convinced of our own integrity and worth through God's grace and communal bonding, we can empower others to maintain or reclaim their own sense of dignity and live out their lives according to the Gospel principles of love and justice. Then we will be proclaiming what the kingdom is all about, love and justice.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion I attest that our identity as members of the local church community is probably best expressed by our willingness to share with the universal church the insights and rewards that come from community life in a rich tradition. If our community is wholeheartedly committed to the monastic way of life, if we believe that we are dwelling in God's house, if reverence marks our exchanges with others, then we will make a difference and the tradition will live. Will it take effort? Yes.

It is the equivalent of trying to carry water in your hands - it is so easy to lose concentration and let your fingers separate and allow the water to slip through. We will then find when we arrive at the end that we have nothing. Nonetheless if we are faithful to prayer, take time to ponder over scripture in our *Lectio*, and build up and

receive the support of community we will as Benedict assures us acquire that good zeal. Only then will we as Parry writes, “run the way with expanded hearts”.<sup>26</sup>

Looking at where our congregation has come from and what has shaped it until now we can gratefully say we owe our existence to Fr. Andreas Amrhein, who is a gift to us and to the whole Church. He burned with zeal to bring salvation to others and because of this desire no suffering could dim his vision and dream.

The needs of our time call us to find new ways of living our charism in a creative manner that speaks and touches the lives of the people. Faithful to the frontier spirit of our founder, Fr. Andreas Amrhein, we forge ahead in response to new challenges and open ourselves to new ministries such as work with HIV/AIDS patients and working with the environment.

---

<sup>26</sup> A. PARRY – E. DE WAAL, *The Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue*, 4.

## Chapter II

### The Characteristics of Mary's Discipleship in Luke-Acts

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter draws upon biblical resources exploring the characteristics of Mary's discipleship as presented in the Gospel of Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles. There will be two major sections in the chapter. The first will consider the call of Mary to discipleship and this will include her vocation, mission and cost of her discipleship. The second will reflect on the three portraits of Mary as a woman of faith, prayer and service.

#### 2. Life of Mary According to St. Luke's Gospel

According to William McLoughlin we read that Mary was born in Jerusalem, probably in the year 23 B.C. It is only by the tradition that we know the name of her parents, Joachim and Anne. The name they gave their newborn daughter was Miriam, a name quite common among Jewish girls of the time, and which we translate as Mary.<sup>27</sup> The Jews frequently named their children according to some circumstance of their birth just as the African people do. In the African societies the name(s) given to

---

<sup>27</sup> W.A. MCLOUGHLIN, *Holy Years of Mary*, 9.

a child always had a meaning. According to John Mbiti, name(s) could be reflecting the feelings of the parents, relating to the time of birth, showing religious feelings of the parents or names, which describe the child or its background.<sup>28</sup> I think we have much to share with the Jewish people in regard to naming.

Looking at the name of “Mary” and its origin we find that a lot has been written about its meaning and its origin but the most probable belief seems to be that the name “is derived from the Aramaic word ‘Mar meaning Lord or Master.’ Miriam would be the feminine form of the name ‘Mar’ and would be equivalent to ‘Lady’ among us”.<sup>29</sup>

Although Mary had her own plans in life, God had other plans for her. He wanted her to be the Mother of the Savior. The community chose Joseph as Mary’s future husband. So Mary and Joseph were betrothed, and while she was waiting for the day of the actual marriage ceremony to take place, a special event occurred in her life. The angel Gabriel visited her.

### ***2.1 Annunciation***

The annunciation was the turning point in Mary’s life. At this moment she was ready to say, “Yes” to God’s plan by allowing her Master and Lord to find a home in her womb. The angel appeared to her and told her that “she had been chosen by God to be the Mother of the long promised Messiah, and that her son was to be, in fact, the Divine Son of God.”<sup>30</sup> She must have noticed at once that this was an angel and not a human being because of how the angel addressed her, “Rejoice, you who enjoy God’s favor! The Lord is with you,” (Lk 1:28). His greeting, in other words means

---

<sup>28</sup> J.S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*. 93.

<sup>29</sup> W.A. MCLOUGHLIN, *Holy Years of Mary*. 10.

<sup>30</sup> W.A. MCLOUGHLIN, *Holy Years of Mary*. 18.

“full of grace.” Grace is the gift of God, “the divine favor shining upon the soul and makes it nearer to his heart’s desire.”<sup>31</sup> It is striking to note that the angel greets Mary as “full of grace”; he calls her thus as if it were her real name. He does not call by her proper earthly name: Miryam, but by this new name: “full of grace”.<sup>32</sup> We know from scripture some significant figures who received new names at a certain point in their lives and Mary is one of them. A particular mission that they had to accomplish accompanied the new names.

Although it was not easy for Mary, we are meant to believe that the grace that she received was proportionate to the work to which she was called to embrace, that is being the Mother of God. This grace was enough for her to fulfill God’s plan. Sometimes we wonder why the angel greeted her as “full of grace”, but indeed Mary was full of grace because God graced her from the beginning of her life. Reflecting on Mary’s reaction at the annunciation we can say with McLoughlin, “In her, faith in God, hope in Him, love of Him had reached an abundance of fullness, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit were in constant operation, opening her favored soul to still higher reaches of holiness. Indeed, the Lord was with her in an extraordinary manner.”<sup>33</sup>

In the Gospel of Luke we read that when Mary heard the greeting of the angel “she was deeply disturbed”. Why? I think it is because Mary was aware of her simple state as a village girl and so she did not see herself deserving such a greeting. Like many other holy people Mary was not conscious that she was holy.

---

<sup>31</sup> W.A. MCLOUGHLIN, *Holy Years of Mary*. 18.

<sup>32</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater (The Mother of the Redeemer)*. 17.

<sup>33</sup> W.A. MCLOUGHLIN, *Holy Years of Mary*. 18.

As Pope John Paul tells us, Mary's disturbance calms down when "she receives from the angel the confirmation and explanation of the proceeding words. Gabriel says to her: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God'"<sup>34</sup> (Lk 1:35). In this account of annunciation we can say that even if God had chosen Mary to be the Mother of the Savior, "Mary was a free agent, free to co-operate with or resist the plans of God in her regard, just as we are free in our choices."<sup>35</sup> Thus she freely consented to God's will which she gave in those beautiful words of submission: "You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said" (Lk 1:38). Leon-Dufour points out the faithfulness of Mary in God's plan, through what Luke says about her:

The reaction of Mary in the face of divine revelations, her consternation (Lk 1:29), her difficulty (Lk 1,34), her lack of understanding at the word of Jesus in the temple (Lk 2,50). Faced with a mystery, which goes beyond her understanding, she reflects on the message (Lk 1,29, 2,33); she comes back again and again to the events in which she has taken part.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.2 *Mary's Call to Discipleship in Luke-Acts*

Who is a disciple? The English word "disciple" comes from the Latin *discipulus*, or "pupil."<sup>37</sup> In general, the term refers to a person who follows a master or one who knows better so that the student may acquire the same knowledge. In fact as Michael Downey writes, "the term disciple, occurs about 250 times in the N.T. most of these occurrence refer to the disciple of Jesus."<sup>38</sup> The call to discipleship is a gift, which is costly as Bonhoeffer has said "such grace is costly because it calls us to

---

<sup>34</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater (The Mother of the Redeemer)*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> W.A. MCLOUGHLIN, *Holy Years of Mary*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> X. LEON-DUFOUR, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 340.

<sup>37</sup> M. DOWNEY, *The New Dictionary of the Catholic Spirituality*, 281.

<sup>38</sup> L.F. HERTMAN, *Encyclopedia - Dictionary of the Bible*, 1469.

follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is a grace because it gives a man the only true life."<sup>39</sup> We see this clearly in the life of Mary.

We are aware that Luke in his Gospel pays much attention to the presence and contribution of women to the mission of Jesus. Among those who followed Jesus were women disciples, as we find in Lk 8:1-3. Although Mary is not mentioned in the number of women who followed Jesus, she is depicted as one of the faithful and perfect disciples of Jesus. Since being a disciple of Jesus one has to be prepared to embrace the demands that comes with the call, it would be valuable to ask: What is indispensable to a life of a disciple? In answering this question, I will single out three portraits of Mary that qualified her as a disciple of Jesus.

The three portraits of Mary are: a woman of faith, a woman of prayer and a woman of service. These three elements among many others are very important to our Christian life and especially in our following of Christ as religious people. Knowing her contribution to the Church and to our personal lives will enable us to desire to know more about her role as a mother and a disciple. In this way we shall be able to pass on our love and knowledge of Mary to our young members who join our congregation.

Looking at the role of Mary in the life of Jesus, it is much easier to see her as a mother and not a disciple. But on reflecting more closely on her life and relationship with her Son, there are many aspects that clearly show how Mary went beyond her motherhood to being a faithful disciple of Jesus. It is also important to

---

<sup>39</sup> D. BONHOEFFER, *The Cost of Discipleship*. 47.

note how the church looks at Mary. The Church sees in her a model of discipleship and proposes Mary as one who can be imitated by the faithful believers. Buby, quoting Pope Paul VI – Christ’s vicar and representative of the church – puts it more clearly:

Rather she is held up as an example to the faithful for the way in which in her own particular life she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God, because she heard the word of God and did it, and because charity and spirit of service were the driving force of her actions. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and most perfect of Christ’s disciple.<sup>40</sup>

Mary indeed was open to God’s will through her proper interior disposition to welcome the Word. In accepting to be the Mother of Jesus, Mary was nourished by the word of God within her.

In the gospel of Luke, Mary is presented as the first faithful disciple of Jesus. She is with him from his conception (Lk 1:32-38). She is with Jesus as she goes to announce the Word to Elizabeth (Lk 1: 39 – 45). We see her present as mother at his birth (Lk 2:6-7) as his mother and the spouse of Joseph. We see Mary with him at the presentation in the temple fulfilling all that was required of parents by the law (Lk 2:22-23). With Joseph, Mary finds the boy Jesus among the learned doctors, listening to them and asking them questions (Lk 2:46). She is with Jesus all the time of the hidden life and even when Joseph dies. The role of Mary is made clear later on in the public life of Jesus when ‘a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.”’ (Lk 11:27), Jesus replied, “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and

---

<sup>40</sup> B. BUBY, *Mary – the Faithful Disciple*. 8. A quote from pope Paul VI’s *Marian Document, devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 26.

observe it (Lk 11:28). Jesus was referring this to Mary for indeed she exemplified in hearing the word and keeping it.<sup>41</sup>

There are specific aspects in Mary's discipleship that we can identify ourselves with. For example she is a human being like us, a very simple village girl who was open to God's plan through her faith and obedience at the annunciation. She is not someone who is too high for us to reach, but rather a believing woman and a disciple of Jesus who invites us to emulate her example. Gary Mueller affirms this simplicity of Mary in his notes when he says, "her life as a mother, a refugee, a poor villager, a woman of profound faith — all of these things help people of every age believe that she belongs to them in a way that is personal and profound. She really understands our needs, our joys and our sorrows."<sup>42</sup> Just as faith develops, changes and matures so we see Mary developing as a believing disciple who is growing into a strong person of faith based on her pondering over the word of God in her heart.

Her limitations as a person who followed Jesus of Nazareth can help us to identify ourselves as disciples in the experiences of our life commitments. In our lives there are many things that God allows to come our way that we are not able to fathom at the moment and this is true of Mary too. Mary shows us the way of the true Christian life. Following the example of her faith, poverty of spirit and attentiveness to the Lord, we endeavor to reflect to those around us Mary's warmth of welcome to God and others. We are told by Bertrand Buby, "Both her faith and her discipleship precedes her motherhood; in fact, because of her faith is her motherhood possible".<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> B. BUBY, *Mary – the Faithful Disciple*, 9 - 10.

<sup>42</sup> G. MUELLER, *Notes on the Five Faces of Mary in the New Testament*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> B. BUBY, *Mary – the Faithful Disciple*, 13.

St. Augustine also affirmed this when he said “she first conceived Christ through faith before conceiving him in the flesh”.<sup>44</sup>

Mary is the first disciple and the example of following Christ the Lord. She assimilated all that she saw and heard from the teaching and deeds of Jesus. She assimilated them in a wise and very personal way, by keeping and reflecting in her heart. There is something that strikes me very much when I reflect on the discipleship of Mary. She is a faithful and perfect disciple as Luke presents her and yet she does not talk much, she is more of a listening disciple. Mueller affirms this when he says,

When the word of God breaks into the life of Mary, she listens—attentively. Mary listens attentively to Gabriel concerning the extraordinary child that she will bear, Mary says nothing when she greets Elizabeth—but simply listens to her speak about her blessedness among women and her belief that the Lord’s word would be fulfilled in her; she says nothing during the birth but listens to the shepherds who believe the news of angels that the Christ has been born; she says nothing but listens in astonishment to Simeon and Anna predict the child’s Messianic future. Besides the Magnificat, she remains silent after she utters the word “Fiat” – Let it be! Mary’s wisdom is that of Elijah who understood that God is not found in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire—but in a tiny whispering sound (1Kgs 19:12). Listening is attentiveness in our lives— it is the first and perhaps the most important portrait of Mary. Without silent listening the word goes unheard; the insight goes unperceived; the love of God, which seeks to capture our heart, goes unnoticed. Listening is the first thing that the Virgin Mary does. She listens attentively.<sup>45</sup>

### **3. Portrait of Mary**

#### **3.1 Woman of Faith**

Reflecting on the faith of Mary, sometimes we might be tempted to think that since she was graced to be the Mother of the Son of God, everything was easy, her faith was untroubled. I think it is not true and that is why we need to be sensitive to the fact that Mary lived and walked through special situations for which she was without preceding models. If one asks what Mary did to conceive Jesus, the answer is

---

<sup>44</sup> B. BUBY, *Mary: the Faithful Disciple*, 13.

<sup>45</sup> G. MUELLER, *Notes on the Five Faces of Mary in the New Testament*, 2.

simply: “she made an act of faith”.<sup>46</sup> Mary’s faith as a disciple was the reason for her motherhood. She heard the word of God and responded to it, kept it, and pondered over it in her heart (Lk 2:19, 51). She was told the child would be called Jesus. He will be the Son of the most high; the Son of David, the King of Israel.<sup>47</sup>

Mary gives us hope as a young woman who is receptive to God’s invitation at the annunciation. She hears from Gabriel that nothing is impossible to God; and she responds in faith “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me” (Lk 1:38). Her discipleship is beginning on this grace-filled occasion but it will continue to grow as she learns the cost of discipleship. She is confronted by the challenge of it as her Son “becomes hated and persecuted, and perfected as he dies upon the cross”<sup>48</sup>. This was a tough moment when her faith was really put to the test but as Bigotto writes “Mary too like her Son, grows in wisdom, age, and grace as the years pass. Her discipleship, like ours, is a normal, dynamic growth in the coming to know, love and follow her Son. She is a woman of faith who can be emulated.”<sup>49</sup>

The different situations that Mary went through starting with the annunciation onwards were not easy. There is no doubt that Mary was encouraged and guided by what the angel told her, “for nothing is impossible to God” (Lk 1:38), who was she to doubt God’s promise? We too hear the same words addressed to us whenever we find ourselves walking in darkness of faith. But do we have the disposition to believe as Mary did? Many times we doubt and fail even to trust that God will see us through. There are many times in our lives when things do happen that

---

<sup>46</sup> B. BUBY, *Mary – the Faithful Disciple*, 23.

<sup>47</sup> X. LEON-DUFOUR, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 340.

<sup>48</sup> G. BIGOTTO, *Mary – the Mother of Jesus*, 23.

<sup>49</sup> G. BIGOTTO, *Mary – the Mother of Jesus*, 23.

we don't understand what God is saying to us, but when we sit with these events in moments of solitude and prayer God does shed some light for us to understand. We may not understand some at all but even in such situations God still invites us to trust in Him.

There was light, confirmation and explanation at the annunciation, but the different events that Mary went through in life, were characterized by darkness of faith. She had only to continue trusting that 'nothing is impossible to God' (Lk 1: 38). At the annunciation, Mary was told what kind of a child she was going to bear. However, all the titles about the child did not make it easier for her to know what will become of that child. She needed, as many mothers do as Bigotto explains "All her life, all her time to reflect and ponder words, events, scriptures from the annunciation through the hidden life of Jesus, his ministry, passion, death, resurrection, Pentecost and the first years of the early church, to offer us the clear fruit of her faith, that Jesus is great, King for ever, Holy, Son of God".<sup>50</sup> Each of these events was a moment of insight and enlightenment. Mary grew in faith, wisdom and understanding as she pondered on each situation.

At the end of her life, Mary's faith embraced totally and clearly what Gabriel announced to her on the day of the annunciation. Mary is worthy of praise because of her faith because in saying her "*fiat*" or yes, she was risking the possibility of losing Joseph as she did not know how he was going to react to it, of being rejected by the society by being stoned to death, and of finding herself alone. So Elizabeth praised

---

<sup>50</sup> G. BIGOTTO, *Mary - the Mother of Jesus*. 108.

Mary of her faith, as Carlo Carretto puts it, “It was easier for Mary to conceive Jesus in her womb than to conceive him in her faith”.<sup>51</sup>

Faith is not easy. It has to be tested in fire as gold. Faith is not just knowledge it goes beyond this. It involves an experiential relationship. In faith one must trust and obey. Mary did exactly that and that is why she is called as Haring writes “The Mother of the Church and above all as a model of faith. Faith is joyous, grateful and humble acceptance of him who is the way, the truth and the life. Her faith response, ‘Here I am, the Lord’s servant’, is faith filled with trust and hope. Her faith is total surrender and trust in God.”<sup>52</sup> Mary’s faith was surrounded with joy as we hear it clearly in the Magnificat. She was also a humble servant and open to know the will of God. Mary had a grateful heart because she knew she did not deserve the gift that God gave her as the Mother of the Savior. We need to learn from Mary to be grateful people for everything that God does in our lives. We need to ask for the grace to learn from Mary’s humility and that of the disciples who asked the Lord to increase their faith.

To ponder, to reflect and pray, trying to understand, are some of the best aspects of faith, and Mary has no equal in this regard. The answer of Jesus to the parents was difficult to understand and so without questioning the parents needed to keep all these things in their hearts, and to ponder them (Lk 2: 51). From this incident at the temple Mary realized as Bigotto tells us “The freedom of Jesus from that moment he was found in the temple was to grow and Mary had to enter into discipleship. Jesus had to lead the way and the mother follows.”<sup>53</sup> It is what *Lumen*

---

<sup>51</sup> G. BIGOTTO, *Mary - the Mother of Jesus*, 108. A quote from Carlo Carretto. *Beata te che hai creduto*.

<sup>52</sup> B. HARING, *Mary and Your Everyday Life*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> G. BIGOTTO, *Mary - the Mother of Jesus*, 109.

*Gentium* refers to when it calls Mary “a pilgrim of faith”.<sup>54</sup> And it seems that the Gospel stresses moments when Mary is growing in faith. For example we watch as she listened to detailed prophesy of Simeon (Lk 2:33). This challenged Mary’s vocation as a mother to know the role her Son was going to play in the history of salvation.

Mary’s faith knew moments of light and times of darkness but she learned to embrace all the experiences. In light and darkness, Mary continued to stand by the Son. She welcomed, loved, suffered with him, and remained a faithful disciple. Faith produces tangible actions, as we hear from the letter of St. James ‘faith: if good deeds do not go with it, it is quite dead’ (James 2: 17).

A life of genuine faith in Christ will automatically produce fruits that will serve as witness to others. I tend to believe that our faith grows and deepens through the daily happenings as we hear from Leon-Dufour that “The faith of Mary is the very same as that of the people of God, humble faith which is constantly deepened through obscurities and trials. It is because of this faith, careful to preserve the word of God”,<sup>55</sup> that Jesus proclaimed her blessed who bore Him in her womb (Lk 11:27ff).

### ***3.2 Woman of Prayer***

Precedent of any prayer is faith in the special being to whom the prayer or intention is directed. These two aspects of faith and prayer are clearly shown in her response to the angel, “You see before you the Lord’s servant, let it happen to me as

---

<sup>54</sup> G. BIGOTTO, *Mary: the Mother of Jesus*. 109.

<sup>55</sup> X. LEON-DUFOUR, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. 341.

you have said” (Lk 1:38). Again at the visitation Elizabeth exclaims ‘Yes blessed is she who believed that the promise made by the Lord would be fulfilled’ (Lk 1:45).

At the visitation, as Haring writes “The biblical text makes us consciously aware that Mary’s greetings was a most powerful prayer and blessing”.<sup>56</sup> Mary did not only help in the household but also to helped Elizabeth to understand the mystery of what was happening. For example, at the moment this greeting reached Elizabeth’s ear the baby within her stirred up with joy. Elizabeth herself in return felt blessed by the greeting and the visit of Mary. Her response is a blessing and a grateful affirmation of what God has done in Mary’s life.

This encounter of the two mothers is enriching and inspiring in the sense that both shared faith and prayer as we read in Lk 1:39ff. Both were aware of how God had been gracious to them and expressed their gratitude to God. This experience needs to be the experience of every Christian and more especially of our religious communities. Our communities need to be places of prayer and homes where people can experience joy and peace in a shared prayer and faith growth.

In simplicity Mary bursts into a song of praise to God in her Magnificat. We learn from Mary that in singing the Magnificat as Kilgallen tells us “Mary represents both herself and that Israel which has been lowly, despised, poor at the hands of the proud of heart who are rich, cruel, and princely.”<sup>57</sup> Haring states that this song of Mary “Is the word and prayer displayed so lavishly by the totality of her life, thoughts, desires and actions. In the hours of joy and in the moments of suffering, and even under the cross. Mary’s life will sing the song of the servant. Mary is the Magnificat.”

---

<sup>55</sup> B. HARING, *Mary and Your Everyday Life*, 23.

<sup>57</sup> J.J. KILGALLEN, *A Brief Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 44.

<sup>58</sup> When praying with the Magnificat at times one might be tempted to think that Mary was boasting. In reality she was simply acknowledging, owning and articulating the goodness of God to her and to the people of Israel. When one has a deep experience of God, we find that the person desires to share this inner experience with others. Mary was doing exactly that. Haring affirms this when he says “The Magnificat expresses more than just the personal faith of the virgin and her most intimate union with God. It is the life song of the one whom we rightly honor as our model and as a Mother of the Church.”<sup>59</sup>

In her response to the song of the angels and the message of the shepherds: “She treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). In her discipleship we see Mary as one who was ever open to the word of God, listened and responded to it even when she did not understand by pondering over it in her heart. At Cana where Mary was present at the wedding feast, in her attentiveness and concern she realizes that the people have no wine. She brings the issue before Jesus, she does not tell him what to do but only presents the need. Here we see that as Haring writes “Her prayer was courageous and at the same time humble. This is the model of prayer”<sup>60</sup> Her prayer was when she told the servants “do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

This is a wonderful challenge and inspiration for us. Many times in our prayer we are tempted to tell God what we want him to do for us. Instead of just placing our concerns and needs before him and then ask for the grace that his will may be done.

---

<sup>58</sup> B. HARING, *Mary and Your Everyday Life*. 31.

<sup>59</sup> B. HARING, *Mary and Your Everyday Life*. 31.

<sup>60</sup> B. HARING, *Mary and Your Everyday Life*. 93.

Borrowing from St. John's Gospel, Mary's words to the servants "do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5) are loaded with meaning. In her prayer there is hope and trust and surrender. This statement shows that Mary believes and trusts that Jesus will do something. Mary is hopeful and she waits in prayer for something to be done for the guests. I tend to think that Mary tells us the same words for she desires that we too may pay attention to Jesus and obey him.

One of the characteristics of a disciple is that the person desires to be close to Jesus and to follow Him more closely. Mary as a woman of prayer qualifies her as a disciple. This closeness is brought about especially through a prayerful attitude and union with the Lord. As we hear it from the Gospel of Lk 11:1, the disciples saw Jesus praying and asked him to teach them to pray. They desired to imitate their master and to grow in union with the Father. So Jesus taught them the prayer of Our Father. This lesson of prayer needs to help us to understand the person of the evangelist Luke. He is aware and that is why he emphasizes that prayer is at the heart of the discipleship to which we are called. To be able to respond to the demands of discipleship in Luke one needs to have the ability and love for prayer. This calls a disciple to be a person of unceasing prayer. That is why Luke shows us Mary as a woman of prayer, a model for followers of Christ who also prayed before embarking on any major decision. The image Luke has of Mary as a disciple is precisely because she prays. She is a witness of prayer within the Gospel just as Jesus himself is an example of prayer for us in the Gospels.

Finally we see Mary again at prayer as she waits the promise of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in the upper room with the disciples. She is at "prayer within and for

a community as found in Acts 1:14. All these joined in continuous prayer together with several women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus and his brothers.”<sup>61</sup> Mary’s presence in the upper room is important because as Kilgallen puts it, “Among all the names mentioned in Acts 1:13, she is the person who actually has given witness to a prayer life modeled on the psalms and to a personal reflective prayer.”<sup>62</sup> Looking at her disposition in the upper room we can see her as Muellers states,

Again, she says nothing but her presence says everything. She sits as a quiet wordless presence among the disciples. They pray together for the coming of the Spirit. She understands that she has lost the physical presence of her Son Jesus on the cross as the Woman clothed in faith and wisdom she knows that she is giving birth to Jesus in a new transformed way.<sup>63</sup>

Inner silence is an aspect that cannot be ignored in prayer. Mary’s disposition in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts shows that she must have valued silence in her life. That is why Ignacio Larranaga when speaking of silence in reference to Mary, “Is thinking of her availability and receptivity and he evokes words like depth, fullness, fecundity, ideas like fortitude, self-mastery, human maturity, but especially the words fidelity and humility”.<sup>64</sup> Mary had all these qualities; they are qualities we can also acquire through prayer and openness to the Spirit. As much as God is beckoning us each day, we need to be open to his grace and to co-operate with it in order to grow in our intimacy, receptivity and prayer.

Mary as we can see in her life was as Larranaga puts it, “A contemplative woman and as all contemplatives she possessed a great maturity. Mary being an authentic contemplative has this interior strength”.<sup>65</sup> This inner strength comes about

---

<sup>61</sup> G. BIGOTTO, *Mary the Mother of Jesus*, 111.

<sup>62</sup> J.J. KILGALLEN, *A Brief Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 101.

<sup>63</sup> G. MUELLER, *Notes on the Five Faces of Mary in the New Testament*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> I. LARRANAGA, *The Silence of Mary*, 108.

<sup>65</sup> I. LARRANAGA, *The Silence of Mary*, 125 -125.

when we religious people grow in our faith in Christ, Scriptures, Church and its teaching and Missionary Benedictine Sisters' charism leading us into integrated persons.

### *3.3 Woman of Service*

The life of faith and prayer extends itself to service. Faith reaches out to others and expands itself in mission, taking the treasure to others. When Mary said "Yes see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said" (Lk 1:38) she meant that her service will be extended not only to God but also to her neighbor. Mary is a woman on the way, who moved by the Spirit, goes in haste to the house of Zechariah to bring Christ and the good news of salvation (Lk 1: 39 - 45). She is thus an image of that missionary in which Christ's disciples, at the Spirit's urging (Acts 2:14), going out to announce the Gospel to the whole world (Mt 28:19). As Bigotto states,

In fact we have here the first Christian mission, for what the Virgin Mary brings to her cousin Elizabeth and to John the precursor is the Messiah, her Son Jesus. Mary hastens, but with her baby in her faith, love, womb. Mary hastens, already whispering the magnificat. Mary begins the great movement of the Good News. All missionaries can look at Mary as a model.<sup>66</sup>

Mary's visit and readiness to stay surprises Elizabeth. She feels unworthy that the Mother of her Lord should help her in house work for three months. It is true when we say our ministry needs to flow out of a God experience; a good example is that of Mary. We see Mary's service to her Son at the presentation of Jesus to the Lord in the temple; (Lk 2:22), here Mary manifests her faithfulness and obedience to the Law of Moses. When Jesus was lost in the temple at the age of twelve, she looked for him

---

<sup>66</sup> G. BIGOTTO, *Mary – the Mother of Jesus*, 100.

with concern. Mary must have discovered that her Son was starting to grow in some kind of freedom, which may have caused Mary to question her love and care for her Son. As mother she must have felt that she failed in her service to the Son by not being attentive and careful about his whereabouts.

Although Luke does not consider the service of Mary at Cana, we actually see Mary at Cana also as a Mother in mission. She is present at the wedding but very attentive to the needs of the guests. This would be the case also in the Gospel of Mark (3: 31-35). Mary stood by the side of her poor family where it is said, “Jesus is out of his mind”, and in this case the mission was towards Jesus. She wanted to help her Son, as she did not understand what was going on.

At Cana, we see Mary as Mediatrix as she presents the needs of the guests to Jesus. In reality Mary as Mueller states “Simply trusts that Jesus will remedy the situation and HE DOES. We put faith in his word and we become co-creators. How do we do this? We look and see the needs of others and we present them to her Son like she did”.<sup>67</sup> Mary manifests her faith in the request she makes to Jesus and this helps the disciples to see the glory of the Son and to believe in him. Mary’s faith awakens the faith of the disciples as she moves out to serve. Mary continues her service to the church through her prayer of intercession for us. Like Mary, we are encouraged as Mueller puts it to, “engage in intercessory prayer for others and become co-creators and cooperators in the realm of grace”.<sup>68</sup> Through Mary’s dedication to the mystery and mission of her Son, she shines as a model of apostolic and ecclesial service.

---

<sup>67</sup> G. MUELLER, *Notes on the Five Faces of Mary in the New Testament*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> G. MUELLER, *Notes on the Five Faces of Mary in the New Testament*, 4.

I tend to think that Mary in the upper room with the disciples was offering the service of presence and prayer (Acts 1: 14). The disciples must have needed her presence as McBride writes of “Mary in the upper room as they awaited the mystery of Pentecost. Mary is firmly in the middle of the community, holding them together until they could be molded into a courageous spiritual force by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>69</sup> The word of God delivers us from self-absorption sending us out to others on a mission of service. In our apostolic work we need to be prophetic and missionary people.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In *Lumen Gentium*, Mary is referred to as a “pilgrim of faith”. This is because faith is a journey that Mary walked through day by day. Her faith matured along this journey because she faithfully persevered in her union with her Son in time of joy and pain. And this is what makes her the perfect disciple of Jesus. We can say that we are privileged to have our Mother Mary as a model of discipleship, faith, prayer and service. As a Church we are confident that she will continue to inspire and intercede for us. Mary teaches in her faith how important it is to be open to God’s word and to trust him who calls us to be his coworkers. Our faith and prayer calls for concrete actions in His vineyard. We are challenged to be active participants in our discipleship. Mary has set an example for us to follow.

---

<sup>69</sup> A. MCBRIDE, *Images of Mary*. 142-3.

## Chapter III

### **Evaluation of Discipleship of The Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the Light of Mary's Discipleship**

#### **1. Introduction**

This chapter will explore the discipleship of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the Light of Mary's own discipleship. Moreover it will also identify elements and qualities in Mary's discipleship that can be integrated in our own formation program. Finally, I will see how Mary's discipleship affirms and challenges our own today.

As a congregation we are conscious that God has called us for a mission. Our constitution affirms this when it says: "sent from the Father by the Risen Lord, the Holy Spirit bestows manifold gifts on the church in order to accomplish Christ's work: the glorification of the Father and the salvation of the world."<sup>70</sup>

We acknowledge that one of the gifts that the Spirit has given us is the vocation of being Missionary Benedictine Sisters. In our religious call we know that this is a particular way of living the Gospel and is rooted in the Rule of our Father Benedict. Fr. Andreas Amrhein, founder of our missionary congregation, had a dream of wanting to renew the idea of mission in the Benedictine tradition and to establish

---

<sup>70</sup> *Constitution of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, Second Edition* 1.

a community that would proclaim the Kingdom of God among those people who had not yet heard the gospel. With the help of God, his dream was realized and that is why we exist in the church today. Our participation in the mission of the Church by our work of evangelization enables us to proclaim the gospel among those who do not know Christ and where Christ is not sufficiently known. We serve where the Church is in need.<sup>71</sup>

## **2. Discipleship in the Missionary Benedictine Congregation**

Like Mary and the other women disciples in Luke's Gospel, we the Benedictine women, are called to discipleship. From Mary we learn to do God's will with love and strong faith. We strive always to be ready to make Jesus known and loved among his people as our charism calls us to. We try to be available, and we are conscious like Mary that obedience requires a solid faith. Thus it does not diminish our dignity as persons but rather gives us the freedom of the children of God. We exercise our evangelical vow of obedience because we love Jesus and his mission. Our discipleship is lived by our daily obedience to the superior, to the rule, to the constitution and to one another in community as expression of God's will.

We do this concretely by seeking God in community under a rule and superior. Our common life finds expression in praying and working together. It is also manifested in sharing our goods, both material and spiritual. Our mutual service, support and encouragement along with the above-mentioned are our ways of living discipleship and practicing our vow of poverty. We strive to discern the will of God

---

<sup>71</sup> *Constitution of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters. Second Edition, 1.*

ever anew in order to respond more fully to our vocation. We consider our internationality as a gift and a task.

In living our discipleship we are aware as Mary Clare Vincent puts it “We have Mary the Virgin Mother of God, as a model. She is the woman of faith who listened with her whole heart and received the word of God. In joys as well as in suffering she gave a believing and loving response and remained the humble handmaid who brought Christ to the world.”<sup>72</sup>

We strive to emulate Mary in her faith by daily listening to the word of God in *Lectio Divina*. *Lectio divina* establishes a relationship that nurtures the body, soul and mind. The purpose of this prayer as Mary Clare Vincent puts it is “For love of God and for the desire to be in union with Christ by ruminating and pondering on what is read. Mary by her daily practice teaches us what, why and how to read like this. Rumination on the word of God, silence, prayer, and the continual search for God are basic disciplines of the monastic life. These we find in Mary’s life”.<sup>73</sup>

As Benedictines we are daily trying to “respond to this call through a life of praise and thanksgiving.”<sup>74</sup> The Eucharist is our highest form of prayer in which we join in the praise of the church, glorifying Christ and through him the Father. The liturgy is the fountain from which our mission flows. The *Opus Dei* or work of God, our common divine praise in the liturgy of the Hours, for which we gather several times a day, bears witness to the priority of rendering glory to God. The *Opus Dei* or

---

<sup>72</sup> *Constitution of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters. Second Edition*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> M. CLARE VINCENT, C.F. *Mary and Monasticism in the Word and Spirit a Monastic Review* X, 83.

<sup>74</sup> *Constitution of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters Second Edition*, 16.

work of God is in itself a proclamation of faith<sup>75</sup>, which Mary learned to say in the Magnificat.

For Benedict, this life of praise and thanksgiving was not meant to be a private process but it was to be done in community with others. That is why our divine office is sung in community. We are called to seek God in community as individuals as well as a group. This aspect is manifested clearly in the life of Mary in the upper room with the disciples as they waited for the birth of the Church at Pentecost.

Every disciple of Jesus is expected to proclaim the Risen Lord. As Missionary Benedictine Sisters, our charism calls us forth to participate in the mission of the church by our work of evangelization. Living our life in community faithfully, we become the living witness and signs of the Risen Lord. As a religious community we are aware that we have been called and sent to live and work in the mission of Jesus Christ, and to continue it.<sup>76</sup> Mary too in her life was constantly on mission, we see her at visitation, out to Egypt in flight, back to Nazareth and in the public life of Jesus.

We are therefore called to be courageous disciples who love and lead the people of God to Jesus. In imitation of Jesus we are called to die for our faith and following the ways of the disciples of Jesus who were faithful to him till the end of their lives. We are called to find Jesus in ordinary things of everyday life and not only in particular or special times. We are called to change of heart, that is, conversion. This conversion as the constitution puts it, “Encompasses our whole life as Missionary Benedictine Sisters; it is the way of following Christ in religious community under the

---

<sup>75</sup> *Constitution of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, Second Edition*, 17.

<sup>76</sup> M. AZEVEDO. *The Consecrated Life Crossroads and Directions*, 73.

guidance of the Gospel”.<sup>77</sup> We are called to be with Jesus always like Mary and the first disciples. We need to be aware of his presence in our lives, prayer, and apostolate for this is essential in our discipleship.

### **3. Formation Program of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the Light of Mary’s Discipleship**

The call to discipleship is not easy but with the grace of the One who calls us it is possible. Arbuckle affirms this when he says, “To follow the radical demands of the Gospel message, one must be prepared to leave father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters yes and his own life too Lk 14:26.”<sup>78</sup>

We Benedictine sisters are aware that formation is a life long process of transformation into Christ. For this reason we need to be patient and considerate in handling and dealing with our formandees. We are aware as the constitutions states, “The religious vocation and its unfolding is, above all, God’s gift. The individual called must embrace it as a personal challenge”.<sup>79</sup> Since we value community living very much, from day one the candidates are inserted in the community.

The various experiences of joy and pain in community can be positive to the candidate, especially when the candidate encounters a zealous and united community, which strives for openness and love. A community, which can accommodate weaknesses and failures, can assist the candidate to become aware of the ideals and challenges of her vocation. Mary’s support and encouragement to the disciples and to

---

<sup>77</sup> *Constitutions of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, second Edition, 5.*

<sup>78</sup> G. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission Refounding Religious Life Formation*, 127.

<sup>79</sup> *Constitution of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, Second Edition, 36.*

the first Christian community is what we need to emulate and offer to our people in formation.

The formator needs to offer the young women this support and encouragement. This is because when they join our communities they are entering into a new culture where they need time to adjust. During this time of transition, which is accompanied by mixed emotions, the formator's and community's understanding of the changes that are happening in the individual's life are paramount.

The formation team has a task of encouraging the new comer to advance with joy in her vocation. They also assist her in becoming more available in her readiness and openness to God, the community and the mission of the congregation. Therefore the formation period is to help candidates deepen their experiences of God and to be able to share these experiences with others.

This time of transition is valuable for the newcomer because she needs to know clearly the movement she is making in life. For this reason as Arbuckle writes, "The separation has to communicate to the candidate that in order to respond to the call of Jesus Christ there needs to be a withdrawal from the world of 'ordinary living', with its roles and interests".<sup>80</sup>

We see this in Mary's readiness to share the Good News at the Visitation. Formandees need to know that faith that is not shared is no faith. Christ has called us to be with him and finally to reach out to others. Mary invested much in deepening her experience and relationship with God and what she received she enriched others by it. The candidates need to be guided gradually to grow in their experience with God.

---

<sup>80</sup> G. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission – Refounding Religious Life Formation*, 127.

Once they have drunk from the source, they will have the courage to go out and share what they have received with others. The content of the sharing is not from books but from what they have felt, touched, seen and heard as St. John puts it in his first letter I Jn 1:3.

Mary spent her lifetime pondering on the word of God and singing God's goodness to her and to her fellow Israelites. Young people need to learn to sing their own magnificat as they reflect on the Lord's power at work in them. Mary was a missionary through her services to those who were far and near. The missionary aspect therefore needs to be emphasized to our young people to help them understand that we as Missionary Benedictine Sisters are called to be sent anywhere and at any time.

St. Benedict was very keen on the kind of people that were to be admitted in the monastery. In one of his longest chapter in the Rule Arbuckle states, "He insists that would-be followers must be thoroughly tested during their formation according to definite criteria: when anyone newly comes to be a monk, let him not be granted an easy admittance but, as the apostle says: 'Test the spirits, to see whether they come from God.'"<sup>81</sup> To watch over them Benedict does not put anybody but a senior monk who is to examine whether the novice truly seeks God, and whether she is zealous for the work of God, for obedience, and for humiliations. They are to be told all the hardship and trials through which we travel to God.

To foster efficient growth during the formation period, the congregation has divided the initial formation into three levels and the candidates are guided to discover

---

<sup>81</sup> G. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission -- Refounding Religious Life Formation*, 14.

their true vocation of being witnesses to Christ in their monastic as well as missionary calling.

The first stage of postulancy aims at discerning with the candidate her fitness for religious life in community. Supplement the candidate's religious knowledge in order to help her towards an intimate relationship with Christ. Another reason is to help her adjust gradually to the new mode of life and to develop human, social-cultural and spiritual maturity.<sup>82</sup>

The second stage is novitiate by which life in the community begins. It aims at integral initiation into the form of life which Jesus embraced and which is proposed to us in the gospel. As the formation program states:

The novice starts the initiation into a profound, ever-deepening and transforming union with Christ, initiation into the paschal mystery, initiation into community life, initiation in the history, charism and mission of our congregation, which helps the novice towards self-surrender to Christ within the framework of our Missionary Benedictine vocation.<sup>83</sup>

The period of the novitiate is meant to assist the novice to discern her religious vocation, experience the community's way of life, become imbued in mind and heart with the spirit of the congregation and to test her resolve and her fitness for religious profession. This stage is very important in the whole life of any religious. For this reason the novice needs to be helped really to discern her vocation as Arbuckle writes:

If the primary task of the novitiate is to be realized, novices require the uncluttered space of secluded site, in order that they may be able to hear the Lord speaking in them. This can't be achieved in noisy environment. In the gospel we see this dramatic break with 'normal living' when Jesus takes his disciples to a lonely place where they can be by themselves Lk 9: 10.<sup>84</sup>

The third stage is the Juniorate. This stage is to enable the young sister to learn how to integrate a life of prayer and work. Help the sister become more deeply rooted

---

<sup>82</sup> *Formation Program of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters*, 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Formation Program of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters*, 9.

<sup>84</sup> G. ARBUCKLE, *From Chaos to Mission - Refounding Religious Life Formation*, 127.

in the community and in the congregation. They receive further training for missionary activity and then prepare for final profession.

The fourth stage is the On-going formation: This is a care structure, which provides final professed sisters continuing encouragement and support. The process of growth that one experiences at this stage is as the constitution states, "Builds upon the foundation prepared during the period of initial formation."<sup>85</sup> This phase helps the sisters to continue to learn and grow throughout their lifetime and seeks to deepen their relationship with the Lord, community and the congregation. This shows that there is no end to formation, growth and conversion. Our formation and growth in the Lord is a life long process. Just as Mary's own discipleship was a life long process from Annunciation to Resurrection.

#### **4. How Mary's Discipleship Affirms the Missionary Benedictine Sister's Way of Life**

As consecrated women, we are affirmed by Mary's consecration to God at the Annunciation. She is for us a model of openness to the gift of God and of acceptance of that gift on her part. She is an example of complete self-giving to God, from whom we need to draw courage and readiness to give ourselves totally to God. She responded to this gift with obedience of faith that accompanied her all her life. Her faith helped her to remain in contact with the mystery of the Son of God, not only at Nazareth, but also in his public ministry and especially at the cross. She was

---

<sup>84</sup> *Constitution of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, Second Edition, 37.*

profoundly united with in suffering and in praising God. For this reason Elizabeth said, “Blessed is she who believed” (Lk 1:45)

We are aware that what Mary heard from the shepherds she “treasured” in her heart and “pondered over” (Lk 2:19). Simeon, in his prophecy, enlightened Mary about the child she was mothering (Lk 2:25 –38). The Spirit of God continued to teach Mary through the humble ones of the earth. Mary affirms us in our practice of *Lectio Divina* where we read the word, listen to it, meditate over it, pray with it and enter into contemplation. From this experience of *Lectio* we forge ahead into the day with the new strength and graces that we have received to sustain us during the whole day.

We find this point of listening to the scriptures very important in our formation house. For this reason we provide a biblical foundation to our young women in formation by exposing them to the liturgy of the word. We provide time for them to meditate on the word before the Eucharist.

Listening to scripture daily trains our ears and hearts to be tuned to hear and recognize God’s voice in the scriptures as Mary did. The rule of Benedict promotes the reading of scriptures as an aid to spiritual maturity. Our tradition of *lectio divina* leads us into transformation.<sup>86</sup>

In Mary, we see the visible action of God how constantly he scatters the proud and raises up the lowly (Lk 1: 51-52). She is the fulfillment of God’s word, “Those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Lk 14:11). Mary was a humble handmaid of the Lord who in life manifested her humble state clearly by depending on God and being at the service of others. Mary affirms us in our living together in humility.

---

<sup>86</sup> J. CHITTISTER, *The Rule of St. Benedict - Insights for the Ages*, 85.

Benedict in his rule has a chapter on humility where he has twelve steps of humility through which monks ascend through humility and descends through pride. The rule calls for the imitation of Jesus who chose to be humble. In his ability to deny himself so that others may live, Jesus shows strength in his compassion, care, and welcoming. Mary did exactly what the Son did by giving herself for others. As followers of the rule, we are to imitate Mary in this kind of self-giving as we respond to God's grace in community. This response is lived out by our service to one another in love, where we take turns to serving each other in the kitchen, laundry, retreat house, dispensary, garden, as a reader, in the infirmary, as a bursar, as the superior of the monastery and also welcoming the guests, strangers, pilgrims and the poor, through commitment to peace.<sup>87</sup>

Mary all her life strove to prefer nothing to the love and will of God. She affirms us in our daily efforts as Benedict exhorts us in his prologue, to “prefer nothing to the love of Christ”.<sup>88</sup> Our monastic life, sustained by a common vision and goals nurtured by fidelity to prayer, study and the spirit of the rule can be a powerful witness to our society today whose secular values all too often produce alienation, injustice, violence and oppression.

Mary, knowing her place in the universe and in God's love, again knowing her humble state, learned to appreciate herself as she was and appreciated others too. In this case she valued others in their uniqueness. She affirms us in our way of life as we try to live out the rule of Benedict where he encourages us to value every individual in the community for their uniqueness and treated with regard for their needs and

---

<sup>87</sup> A. PARRY – E. DE WAAL, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 62.

<sup>88</sup> A. PARRY – E. DE WAAL, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 3.

character. The equality in the rule affirms the personhood of all, regardless of race, status, class or gender.

In formation we try to help the formandees to know how to accept and appreciate themselves and to care for others and themselves. We learn this from Jesus and Mary. Jesus and Mary knew when to speak and when to listen. They both knew when to retreat from the pressures of the care giving and to allow time for renewal. Jesus and Mary helped people to help themselves without becoming dependent on them. As formators we need to learn from Jesus and Mary how to empower the formandees.

Mary's faith overcame every trial without ever giving in or giving up. For every consecrated person Mary teaches unconditional discipleship and diligent service. We need to seek in Mary's faith support for our own faith, in order to proclaim to the people of today "faith working through love". (Gal 5:6)

Mary's obedience to God, affirms our own efforts of living out the vow of obedience. Benedict, in his rule on obedience says, "The first step of humility is prompt obedience. This is fitting for those who hold nothing more dear to them than Christ."<sup>89</sup> The Psalmist says, "No sooner did they hear than they obeyed." (Ps 18:45). Jesus too says "Anyone who listens to you listens to me" (Lk 10:16). Obedience calls us to obey our superior and each other within the community.

Benedict continues to stress that this obedience will be acceptable to God and agreeable to people only when in carrying out the order, one is not doing it sluggishly

---

<sup>89</sup> A. PARRY, - E. DE WAAL, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. 21.

or half hearted, but it needs to be free from any murmuring.<sup>90</sup> Mary's obedience was a joyful one and rooted in faith in God.

Mary's silence affirms our own silence, which as Missionary Benedictine Sisters, we treasure. Benedict esteems it very much and he does not hesitate to hold back permission to speak. For he says, "So important is silence that permission to speak should seldom be granted even to mature disciples, no matter how good or holy or constructive their talk."<sup>91</sup> In proverbs it is written "in a flood of words you will not avoid sin" (Prov 10:19). Again Joan Chittister affirms this when she says, "Silence is a cornerstone of Benedictine life and spiritual development".<sup>92</sup> The aim of silence is not just not to talk but it is out of respect for others and also to create a peaceful atmosphere for prayer.

When we entertain too much talk automatically gossip become the food that nourishes the soul and it becomes so easy to hurt and damage others in community and ministry.<sup>93</sup> Chittister, in her commentary, says, "The ability to listen to another, to sit silently in the presence of God, to give sober heed, and to ponder is the nucleus of Benedictine Spirituality. It may, in fact, be what is most missing in a century saturated with information but short on gospel reflection".<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> A. PARRY – E. DE WAAL, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. 59.

<sup>91</sup> J. CHITTISTER, *The Rule of St. Benedict Insights for the Ages*. 60.

<sup>92</sup> J. CHITTISTER, *The Rule of St. Benedict Insights for the Ages*. 61.

<sup>93</sup> J. CHITTISTER, *The Rule of St. Benedict Insights for the Ages*. 61.

<sup>94</sup> J. CHITTISTER, *The Rule of St. Benedict Insights for the Ages*. 61.

The presence of Mary in the upper room with the apostolic community, waiting for God's event to take place in the church and in the lives of those present, affirms and encourages us in our own living together as a community of believers. When we faithfully live in this community and try to see Christ in every other person we share life with, we are also waiting in hope for God's event to take place in our lives and the church. We value community life and that is why Benedict stresses much about it in his rule. In community we are called to be present to each other, by support, encouragement, seeking God together under a superior and rule. Chittister comments on this by saying: "The four things that sustain the Benedictine monasticism are: the gospel, the teachings of the Abbot, the experiences of the community and the Rule of Benedict itself."<sup>95</sup>

### **5. How Mary's Discipleship Challenges the Missionary Benedictine Sister's Way of Life**

The Spirit that filled the life of Mary at the Annunciation continued to instruct her through the life of her people Israel. Listening to and learning from the poor, by being part of them is an indispensable element in the training of a minister of the word of God. Mary remains a model for the church and its ministers. In this regard of relating and being part of the poor, Mary challenges us very much in our calling as Missionary Benedictine Sisters. Yes our charism calls us to go and proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet heard the Gospel or where Christ is not sufficiently known. But how far have we gone in letting Christ be known sufficiently? How

---

<sup>95</sup> J. CHITTISTER, *The Rule of St. Benedict - Insights for the Ages*. 49.

effective are our apostolate? How do we orient our formandees into this path of Missionary Benedictine Sisters?

When we do this it is always a challenge that we find ourselves confronted with different classes of people, some are very rich and some are very poor. It is true that we work with them and for them, but I am not sure if we have reached the point where we freely feel comfortable to live with them and like them in their situations. And whether we are humble enough to learn and listen from the poor as Mary did is another big challenge for us Missionary Benedictine Sisters.

Mary was a teacher who instructed the child Jesus in the faith of Israel. She is there to teach us how to learn from the poor and how to draw life from the word of God. We, the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, must continually be nourished by this word in our prayers, so that there may be both talking and listening to God in a spirit of conversation.\* Mary's ongoing openness to the action of the Spirit is the challenge she offers us Benedictines. The obedient "yes" that we hear in Lk 1:38 was the fruit of the Spirit. In her we see how we too can open ourselves to the gift of the Spirit to create in us a new heart (Ez 36: 26-27) that comes with conversion.

Mary is a teacher and like every mother, she did her duty of teaching her Son Jesus. Together with Joseph she passed on to him the values of their Jewish culture. Mary, being at the center of the apostolic community in the Acts: 1:14, must have been consulted by the disciples about some information concerning Jesus. In this way she taught them. Formators and superiors in our congregation are challenged by Mary to be teachers who are capable of handing over the customs, charism and the history of

---

\* A. FLANNERY, ed., *Vatican Council II Divine Revelation* No.25, 678.

the congregation. They are to present to the young ones the Gospel values, cultural values and the Benedictine values. Therefore Missionary Benedictine Sisters and the formators are challenged to be people who are well informed, and who have interest to pass on the life of Christ and the spirit of the congregation to the young ones. How informed are we as formators, as Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the situations of our world and how are we involved?

Another challenge is that it is not enough to be a disciple, our faith need to be nourished continually. We can learn this from Mary who loved the word and made a home for it. We can do this by sitting with the word daily as she did. How faithful are we to our divine office, *Lectio Divina* and Holy Eucharist? If we are honest and sincere we can openly admit of how slothful we have been in our commitment to prayer. Mary's faith was tested in the difficulties that accompanied Jesus' infancy and the hidden life of Nazareth. We are challenged to learn from her how to follow Christ radically.

There are many virtues in Mary that we Benedictine women need to strive to emulate for example her holiness, chastity, poverty, humility, obedience, fortitude, contemplation, service, faith and so forth. All these are expressions of Christian perfection and this is what we are called to.

Mary challenges us in her spirit of gratefulness. Like Mary, we need to lead our young members to be grateful people, people who are conscious of God's work in their lives and in the lives of others, and be grateful. Mary rejoiced and thanked God for Elizabeth, and she burst out in a song of praise and thanksgiving for what the Lord had done for her. Therefore we can agree with Mueller when he says, "Gratitude is

important to Christian love. Christians acknowledge everything that God has done for us. Disciples can only open their hands to receive it and say ‘thank you’.<sup>97</sup>

As much as Mary affirms us in our humility still she is a real challenge to us. Benedict, in his, rule quotes scriptures saying ‘for everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up’ (Lk 14:11; 18:14). He has twelve steps of humility through which monks climb to reach perfection. Humility so to say is the foundation for right relationships in life. When we know our place in the universe, we will be free in ourselves and in our relations to others. We will be feeling secure enough to risk and to relate without the fear of losing ourselves. We are still lacking in this, and this becomes the main obstacle of relating and accepting others freely.<sup>98</sup>

Mary, in her way of life, shows us how to be true disciples of the Lord Jesus as McBride states, “She walks with us and before us as we fulfill our calling to create a just and peaceful world. She is the disciple that challenges us to bring justice to the oppressed and love to each individual that is in need.”<sup>99</sup> Her desire to do this is clearly manifested in her Magnificat (Lk 1: 46 – 55).

Mary challenges us in our attentiveness to the word, at times we read the scriptures but our mind is elsewhere or filled with doubts but Mary is, “The attentive woman who received God’s word with faith. At liturgy we are challenged by her to come with the same kind of faithful attentiveness, especially in the liturgy of the word

---

<sup>97</sup> J.J. MUELLER, *Practical Discipleship – A United States Christology*, 62.

<sup>98</sup> J. CHITTISTER, *The Rule of St. Benedict – Insights for the Ages*, 62.

<sup>99</sup> A. MCBRIDE, *Images of Mary*, 143.

whereby God speaks to us and calls us to open our hearts to the sacrament.”<sup>100</sup> As we journey with Mary and get nourished by her example of life, we do not only ask her to intercede for us, we see her as an example for our own prayer life. In this way as McBride puts it, “Mary models prayer for us in the sense that she shows us that our active lives should be supported by daily silence and meditative prayer.”<sup>101</sup>

At times we obey blindly due to fear of superiors but our obedience needs to be creative and responsible. In this case we can say with McBride, “Mary models discipleship in her obedience of faith. Obedience involves two acts listening and doing. Real obedience includes intelligence and responsible freedom. Mary heard the word attentively prayerfully and deeply.”<sup>102</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Our discipleship enables us to experience ourselves as pilgrims on the journey of faith. We are invited to be humble like Mary the Handmaid of the Lord to know that we cannot remain faithful to this call and mission unless we open ourselves to the grace of God.

We need Mary as our model on this journey of faith, for she has manifested to us in a very concrete way in which we can be perfect disciples. She shows us in her life how we can deepen our faith in the Lord and cultivate the spirit of prayer and service within our communities. To grow in God’s ways demands our openness and readiness to learn his ways in our daily *Lectio Divina* and to cooperate with His Spirit in allowing ourselves to be led as Mary did.

---

<sup>100</sup> A. MCBRIDE, *Images of Mary*. 143 - 144.

<sup>101</sup> A. MCBRIDE, *Images of Mary*. 143.

<sup>102</sup> A. MCBRIDE, *Images of Mary*. 150.

Although Mary had never surfaced too much in our congregation's spirituality, after reflecting and praying with the life of Mary and her role in our salvation history, she has become a very clear picture for me to refer to as I teach the Gospel and Benedictine values to those in initial formation.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The journey I have taken in reflecting on Mary's life and discipleship leaves me believing deeply that discipleship is a gift and at the same time a challenge. I have discovered that Mary is the only person who journeyed with Jesus on a deeper level, walking with Him from the cradle to his death and resurrection. Even after his death, Mary kept being vigilant with the disciples until Pentecost. Just as she walked with Jesus and his disciples at that time, she does it today too through her intercession.

In Mary we see a companion for our faith and missionary journey. She is a sister, a disciple and a role model who challenges and affirms our discipleship as Missionary Benedictine Sisters. As she moved with haste to reach out to Elisabeth, her cousin, and to intervene for the stranded host's need at the wedding at Cana, as she stood by the side of Jesus at the foot of the cross and as she waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit, she stands by us in our reaching out to others and helps us in our mission of making Christ loved and known among the people whom we minister to within and outside our communities.

As a woman of faith and prayer who was confident that all that what was said to her by angel would be fulfilled, she challenges us to move forward with the frontier

spirit which was so much the spirit of our founder Fr. Andreas Amrhein who moved and embraced new ways of evangelization without compromising our charism. Our vibrant zeal and commitment will convey the true identity of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters to our formandees and to the people of God.

## ABBREVIATION

HIV/AIDS	Human immune Deficiency virus – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
DBT	Dictionary of Biblical Theology
NDCS	The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality
EDB	Encyclopedia Dictionary of the Bible
OP	Order of Preachers
OSB	Order of St. Benedict
Rev.	Reverend
Fr.	Father (priest)
ed.	Editor
St.	Saint
Sr.	Sister (religious)
N.T	New Testament
Lk	Luke
Mk	Mark
Mtt	Matthew
Jn	John
ff	Following
cf	Confer
Gal	Galatian
Ps	Ps
Prov	Proverbs
Ez	Ezekiel
CSB	Congregation of St. Brigid
1Jn	First letter of St. John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles

## BIBLIOGRAPY

### BOOKS

- ARBUCKLE, G., *From Chaos to Mission: Refounding Religious Life Formation*, London 1996.
- AZEVEDO, M., *The Consecrated Life Crossroads and Directions*, New York 1995.
- BUBY, B., *Mary of Galilee, I, Mary in the New Testament*, New York 1994.
- BUBY, B., *Mary – the Faithful Disciple*, New York 1985.
- BIGOTTO, G., *Mary – the Mother of Jesus, Exegesis and Spirituality*, Nairobi 2000.
- BROWN, E. R., ed., – DONFRIED, K. P., ed., – FITZMYER, A., ed., *Mary in the New Testament. A Collaboration Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*, London 1978.
- BONHOEFFER, D., *The Cost of Discipleship*, New York 1972.
- CHITTISTER, J., *The Rule of Benedict Insights for all Ages*, New York 1999.
- HARING, B., *Mary and Your Everyday Life*, Slough 1977.
- KILGALLEN, J. J., *A Brief Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, New York 1988.
- LARRANAGA, I., *The Silence of Mary*, Ohio 1999.
- LOZANO, J. M., *Discipleship Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, Manila 1980.
- LAVERDIERE, E., *Luke – New Testament Message 5*, Dublin 1980.
- MUELLER, J. J., *Practical discipleship – A United States Christology*, Colledgeville, 1992.
- MCLOUGHLIN, W. A., *Holy Years of Mary*, Winston 1954.
- MBITI, J. S., *Introduction to African Religion*, Nairobi 1975.
- MCBRIDE, A., *Images of Mary*, Ohio 1999.
- PARRY, A., DE WAAL, E., *Rule of Saint Benedict Introduction and commentary*, Wiltshire, 1995.
- VINCENT, M. C., *Mary and Monasticism in the Word and Spirit a Monastic Review, X*, Massachusetts 1988.

<http://www.ssc.edu.ph/mbst/index.htm>

### BIBLE

The New Jerusalem Bible, Standard Edition

African Bible – Biblical Text of the New American Bible

## CHURCH DOCUMENTS

- JOHN PAUL II, *The Consecrated Life, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata*, Nairobi 1996.  
 JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Mater of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana.  
 FLANNERY, A., ed., *Vatican Council II, Divine Revelation*, 18 Nov. 1965.

## MISSIONARY BENEDICTINES DOCUMENTS

- DABALUS, I., *Benedictines of Mission The Story of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing 1885 1985*, Rome 1985.  
 WALTER, B., *Sustained by God's Faithfulness, I, Founding and Early Development of the Congregation, St. Ottilien* 1987.  
*The Constitutions of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, Second Edition*, Rome 2002.  
*The Formation Plan of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters*, Bernried 2004.

## UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS

- AMRHEIN A., *Excerpts from the Prospectus*, Reichenbach 1885.  
 HANDL, M., *Cherishing our Tradition*, Rome 1991.  
 MUELLER, G., *The Five Faces of Mary in New Testament*, Nairobi 2005.  
 BOCKMAN, A., *Conference on the Rule of St. Benedict*, Rome.

## ARTICLES

- DBT LEON-DOFOUR, X., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, New York 1967.  
 NDCS DOWNEY, M., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Bangalore 1995.  
 EDB HERTMAN, L. F., *Encyclopedia Dictionary of the Bible*, New York 1962.

## **APPENDIX 1: TO EXAMINE HOW THE CONCEPT OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE SCRIPTURE IS RELEVANT AND APPLICABLE TO THE AFRICAN SETTING**

We have seen what is discipleship in the scriptures and what is expected of a disciple. Knowing that a disciple is one who follows the master so that he/she may acquire the same knowledge, I would like to examine how this was lived and experienced in the African way of life. In the African traditional setting, an elder, a leader, or a herbalist would set aside a disciple for a special mission in the future. These disciples were usually picked among many in the family or community to be trained to take over the responsibility of the elders in the community.

In the African setting knowledge is power, treated with respect, and often kept secret from all apart from those who are considered worthy to have it. A girl who learns secrets from her grandmother, such as recipes for herbal medicines, is not tapping into a store of general knowledge but receives that because of her relationship. This marks the link between the master and the disciple.

Tests of endurance, courage and skill were things looked for in a disciple. Time was also another element for example in some communities the experts of herbal medicine had the estimate length of time required to complete the apprenticeship program as a minimum of ten to fifteen years. Training begins when the disciple is separated from his/her home initiated into the relevant training and placed under distinct authority. The main herbalist allows the disciple to practice on his own only after his time of work has come to an end.

It is a demanding responsibility since the one who takes over has to attain wisdom, integrity, faithfulness, have the ability to listen to people's problems, to counsel, to guide and having the interests and concerns of the community at heart. They have to imitate the ways of their predecessor in this way continuing their profession and duty in the community.

## APPENDIX 2. ST. BENEDICT FATHER OF MONASTIC VOCATION IN SUBIACO AND MONTE CASSINO IN ITALY



Towards the end of the fifth century, Benedict of Nursia, at the time a young student in Rome, left the decadent city to pursue a goal: TO SEEK GOD. Thinking he would achieve his goal in solitude – like the hermits of the time – he spent a life of prayer and solitude in a cave in Subiaco. God allowed Himself to be "found" by Benedict, but led him to bring Him to many others. The solitary life had to give way to one in community, which was eventually reestablished on Monte Casino, where Benedict set down his way to God in what is now known as the HOLY RULE or the RULE OF BENEDICT. The years and centuries that followed saw Benedictines inspiring peoples of country upon country first in Europe and then, beyond, to pursue the same goal of SEEKING GOD through their life of prayer and work, lived in community with a superior, observing the Holy Rule.



<http://www.ssc.edu.ph/mbst/index.htm>

### APPENDIX 3: FR. ANDREAS AMRHEIN OUR FOUNDER OF MONASTIC AND MISSIONARY VOCATION.



Move forward some fourteen centuries to the 1880s... A Benedictine monk in the Abbey of Beuron in Germany, Fr. Andreas Amrhein, OSB, dreamt of bringing back the missionary dimension to the prevailing practice of Benedictine life at that time – mostly in the confines of a monastery or convent enclosure. In 1884 he founded the Congregation of St. Ottilien, Benedictine monks with a special mission "to bring Christ to those who do not yet know Him." The following year, he formed the first group of women to evangelize together with the monks. On September 24, 1885 the Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing was formally approved by the Holy See. Later years would see the Sisters' congregation separating administratively from that of the monks while maintaining close spiritual and missionary relationships as well as working side by side in a number of missions, especially in African countries.



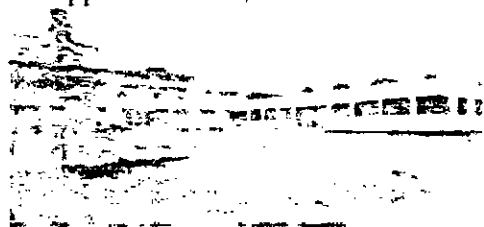
#### The Motherhouse

Tutzing in Bavaria, Germany is the site of the Motherhouse of the Congregation. It was from there that the first sisters were sent to the German colonies of Africa in the later years of the 19th century.

In the first years of the 20th century as more and more young women joined the Congregation, calls for the strengthening of the faith in various countries were answered. Young German sisters were sent to Brazil in South America in 1905, to the Philippines in 1906, and to other lands in the ensuing years – the United States, Bulgaria, Korea, Japan, Australia, Spain, Argentina, China, India.

#### The Generalate

Casa Santo Spirito at via dei Bevilacqua, Rome, is the home.



The above pictures show our Missionary Benedictine roots. Where we see our founder and his dream of founding a missionary congregation. Then we have our motherhouse in Germany with its first experiences of mission sending and finally we have our generalate house which is in Rome.

**APPENDIX 4: OUR FOUNDER'S PRAYER THAT HAS ACCOMPAINED THE  
CONGREGATION FROM THE BEGINNING TILL TODAY.**



The day's labor was to be supported and permeated by prayer. Our founder Fr. Andreas Amrhein recited daily this blessing: "Direct, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our actions by Thy inspiration, and further them by Thy continual help, that every prayer and work of ours may always begin in Thee and through Thee be brought to an end. Through Christ our Lord." The brothers then continued: "Accept, O Lord, the work of this day for the hallowing of Thy name, the spreading of Thy kingdom, the fulfillment of Thy will, the gaining of our daily bread, the forgiveness of our sins, the warding off of temptation, and deliverance from all evil. Grant that is may profit us and others unto eternal salvation, and the faithful departed unto perpetual rest. Through the grace and merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

In the beginning of the congregation the sisters prayed this prayer daily but currently we pray it only at the beginning of every week.

**APPENDIX 5: THE ART OF OUR FOUNDER SHOWING HIS LOVE FOR THE  
MOTHER OF GOD AND THE HOLY FAMILY**



This art served as the start on the way of our founder's vocation to priesthood

<http://www.ssc.edu.ph/mbst/index.htm>

APPENDIX 6: MISSIONARY BENEDICTINE WOMEN DISCIPLES IN THE WORLD.

