



The Benedictine Vow of *Conversatio Morum*

Unlike other members of Religious Orders who take the Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, Benedictine monks and nuns take vows of Obedience, Stability and *Conversatio Morum*. This last Vow, or perhaps what is better understood as the third part of the one Vow, is usually left untranslated from the Latin because it's difficult to find words in English to translate it. It is often translated as *conversion of life* and this gives a flavour of its meaning for it is about a daily turning to God.

Esther de Waal, an Anglican woman who has done much to share the wisdom of St Benedict for ordinary Christians, explains that 'Conversatio means to respond totally and integrally to the word of Christ sent to all of us, 'Come, follow me'. Our desire and the desire of the monastic to follow brings about continual inward and outward change.

The Rev. Jane Tomaine writes that: "While stability calls us to remain, conversatio calls us to change and to grow, to be transformed by the spirit. Conversion of Life is a balance to stability and is made possible by qualities of openness that enables God to bring about a change of heart... Conversatio has an outward aspect - a change of behaviour and attitude - as well as an inward meaning - transformation in the heart where we actually become a different person, a different kind of being. God works with both dimensions. Such change is possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit imparted to us at baptism" *

As a Benedictine Oblate, I don't take Vows but I live in the spirit of the Vows. For me Conversatio is both an encouragement and a challenge. It reminds me that I don't have to be perfect but I do have to strive for perfection. It challenges me that I can never say that I have arrived; I am always being invited to deepen my relationship with God and to be more deeply united with Christ in my everyday life. I love the phrase I was once told, "God loves me as I am but he loves me too much to leave me that way".

For the monk or nun this daily turning to God takes place in community, grounded in the reality of real people warts and all! For those of us who don't live in monasteries it is equally important that our spiritual growth happens in the real world with all its challenges. Being a Companion of the Compassionate Hearts of Jesus and Mary, helps me to live out my Benedictine Conversatio, for it challenges me to pray for those people and situations that I find difficult so that their hearts are converted and in so doing I too will be changed and given the strength to change reliant not on my own strength but on the grace of God that can transform all hearts.

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* *St Benedict's Toolbox* (p 96) Jane Tomaine. Morehouse Publishing New York. 2015