USE OF THESES

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THINGS BOTH OLD AND NEW

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

IN

BENEDICT, POLDING

AND

THREE AUSTRALIAN BENEDICTINE COMMUNITIES

'he must be learned in the Divine Law so he will know how to bring forth things both old and new.' RB 64.9 cf. Matt 13:52.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University,

Canberra.
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## PART 1 THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY IN THE RULE OF BENEDICT

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This thesis is entirely my own original work and has not been submitted for any other degree in any university.

All sources have been duly acknowledged.

Margaret Rose Malone.
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During the course of the writing of the thesis the Sisters of the Good Samaritan were engaged in editing and producing a three volume work of the Letters of Polding. A key person in the collection of these letters was Sister Xavier Compton who also arranged my access to the Sydney Archdiocesan Archives. I have much for which to thank the editorial committee of the letters of Polding. This committee includes Sr M. Xavier Compton sgs, Sr M Peter Damian McKinlay sgs, Br Terence Kavenagh osb, Sr Pam Pullen sgs, Sr Marie Gregory Forster osb, Sr Doreen Dyson sgs, Sr Ursula Trower sgs and Sr Clare Condon sgs. They have been tireless and painstaking in their work and
have produced an invaluable tool for any student of nineteenth century Australia and Polding. Much of my work which used the letters of Polding was done from copies of original texts. However, since the three volume work was published before the thesis was finished, it was decided to include the references as they appear in the published work, as well as including the original location of the material.

Another valuable resource appeared during the course of writing this thesis. It was a new translation and commentary on the Rule of Benedict by Fr. Terrence Kardong, a Benedictine monk and scholar from Richardton, North Dakota in the United States. This translation of the *Rule of Benedict* was the one used. Most of the study had been done before the commentary was available, but it was used to check or clarify my own interpretation.

I received help from Fr. Philip Jebb OSB from Downside Abbey in England in my work on Polding and in making use of the archives of that Abbey. The library at St John's University, Collegeville, USA was a rich resource for material on the Benedictine life; I spent three months there researching this material.

The archivists of the Good Samaritan Community at Glebe Point, Sr Marie Gerard McGlynn and Sr Ursula Trower were ready to help whenever needed.

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The Sisters of the Good Samaritan have provided me with encouragement, resources and time during the writing of this thesis. For this I wish to thank them. For even more than this, I owe them gratitude for a great part of a lifetime lived within this community and for the way in which it has formed me and provided me with so many
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Finally I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and help of my supervisor, Robert Barnes, formerly of the Classics department of Australian National University, and now of the History Department of that University. My debt to Professor John Molony, my adviser, is great. He has contributed to the final production of this thesis in ways far above what would have been expected of one in his role. Throughout the years of my candidature he has carefully read the text as it was written and has provided sound advice and practical help.
ABSTRACT

In both Church and society, nineteenth century Australia was marked by tensions and questioning of authority as white society established itself and began its development. John Bede Polding, an English Benedictine monk, came to Australia in 1835. He later became the first Catholic Archbishop of Sydney. Full of missionary zeal, Polding was fired with a desire to build the Australian Church and to establish it strongly within the Benedictine tradition. One way he saw of doing this was through the establishment of three Benedictine communities; the men's community of St. Mary's, Sydney, the women's community at Subiaco, New South Wales, and a new foundation, the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict.

Much of what he wanted to do was unsuccessful. His vision for an abbey-diocese was unrealistic in the context of the times. The community of St Mary's was eventually suppressed by Polding's successor, Roger Bede Vaughan, also an English Benedictine. This community was torn apart by scandal and, it could be argued, by Polding's inability to adapt and govern it wisely.

The women's community at Subiaco carried on living the Benedictine life in a recognizable, traditional way for women. This community still flourishes and is now resident at Jamberoo in New South Wales. Its beginnings are discussed as part of Polding's vision for Benedictine life in Australia but its development throughout the twentieth century is not within the scope of this thesis.

The new Australian Benedictine Institute, the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict, was established by Polding in 1857 to live a different religious life and to serve different needs. It continues to exist and forms a strong Benedictine presence in Australia. Polding in fact did leave behind him a healthy heritage, even if it were not in ways he had foreseen.
Within these three communities, and in society as a whole, questions regarding authority were central. It is important to place discussions about the communities in their general context which was often one of conflict. Authority and government are central questions for any group and it is through the lens of authority that the communities are viewed. In order to do this, a study has been made of the background of the *Rule of Benedict* by which all these groups in one way or another lived. There is a concentration on the sections of the Rule that have to do with the role of the abbot and those who hold places of special service in the community. This is the context and foundation for the examination of authority and government within the communities.

This thesis will show that the way a community is governed will reflect how the group understands its identity and it emphasises that this identity needs to be clear and coherent. Usually, a community establishes and lives with certain processes of government and only then expresses them in written documents. Careful analysis of these documents and changes therein, tell us much about the community. Adaptations are always being made for the times, the place and the circumstances, and the importance of knowing the history of these changes is paramount.

The focus of this study is the development and adaptation of structures and processes of government, both in documents and practice, that have affected the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict.

A growth in understanding of the vision of Polding and a faithful adherence to it is evident. In many ways, the wheel has come full circle in terms of grasping this original vision, but not as a return to the past. Instead, it will be argued, that old and new work dynamically to create a new future consonant with the times but firmly grounded in a strong and vital Benedictine identity. This identity is clearly expressed in the Congregation's concept of authority and modes of governance as these have evolved in its history. The missionary vision of Polding which grew out of his Benedictine way of life and which informed his new community has borne fruit.
ABBREVIATIONS

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<td>AA</td>
<td>Ampleforth Abbey Archives, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Downside Abbey Archives, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>FJ</td>
<td><em>Freemans Journal</em></td>
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<td>FPA</td>
<td>Fernham Priory Archives, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSA</td>
<td>Good Samaritan Archives, Glebe, N.S.W.</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAA</td>
<td>Jamberoo Abbey Archives, Jamberoo, N.S.W.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>Letters of John Bede Polding, vol.1,2 or 3.</td>
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<td>NNA</td>
<td>New Norcia Archives, New Norcia, W.A.</td>
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<td>PF Acta</td>
<td>Propaganda Fide Archives, Acta 1842-1847, Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>PF CO</td>
<td>Propaganda Fide Archives, Scritture Referite nei Congressi Oceani, Rome.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Rule of Benedict</td>
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<td>RM</td>
<td>Rule of the Master</td>
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<td>RP</td>
<td>Rules of Polding</td>
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<td>Const.</td>
<td>Constitutions.</td>
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<td>SAA</td>
<td>Sydney Archdiocesan Archives, Sydney, N.S.W.</td>
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<td>SPF</td>
<td>Society of the Propagation of the Faith</td>
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INTRODUCTION

When writing of his abbot, one of the things that Benedict notes, is that he must be learned in the scriptures, and then know how to bring forth both the new and the old.¹ The need to undertake this research has arisen out of the desire of a religious community, the sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St. Benedict, to which the writer belongs, to understand more deeply its tradition and sources, to see how both the old and the new blend in a contemporary world. The particular area of concern is the question of authority and government in this community, and how this has developed over approximately the first hundred and forty years of existence of this congregation which was founded in Australia in 1857 by Archbishop John Bede Polding. He was the first Catholic Archbishop of Australia and a Benedictine Monk from St. Gregory's, Downside in England.

Polding wrote a Rule for the sisters of the Good Samaritan and he drew from many sources including other Religious orders which had been founded in the same era. The Rule of Benedict was basic to the text, and he used it sometimes by including whole chapters and sometimes simply by references or allusions. It was obvious that he wanted his ‘new Australian Benedictine Institute’ to live according to the spirit and tradition of the Rule of Benedict.²

However, in order to understand fully what Polding did with this one Benedictine community, it is proposed to examine two other communities for which he was

¹ RB 64.9 cf Matt 13:52. Throughout this work the traditional abbreviations for the Rule of Benedict – RB will be used in references, and the traditional referencing of scripture as in this footnote.
responsible in the same era, and to focus particularly on questions of authority that rose with these communities as well. These are the men's Benedictine community, St Mary's, Sydney, which ceased to exist in 1874, and the community for Benedictine women, Subiaco, which now continues its life at Jamberoo in New South Wales.

By first examining closely the relevant texts dealing with the question of authority in the Rule of Benedict, a deeper understanding of the present will emerge. It is this textual material which forms the basis of the thesis and it is against this material that the content of the rules of the three Benedictine communities will be analysed. After the analysis on the teaching of authority in the Rule of Benedict, the research will situate the beginnings of Benedictine life in Australia within the context of the English Benedictines from which Polding came. Then it will survey the Sydney social and Catholic Church contexts in a general way. All of this will be viewed through the lens of questions and issues regarding authority.

The three communities themselves will then be examined from the same perspective. This will enable a discussion of the rules by which the communities lived, considering their Benedictine connections and origins as reflected in the written rules. In regard to the texts for the three Benedictine communities which Polding in one way or another established, the study will take up the question of how Polding, in his rules, saw the role of authority, in particular how he adapted or used the Rule of Benedict. This will involve a study of texts dealing with authority and government in the different rules that were used for the three communities.

Having examined how Benedict and Polding understood authority in the communities for which they were writing, it will be possible to draw from this study some implications that are relevant for a present day religious community, the sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St. Benedict. This community which lives according

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to the spirit of a sixth century rule, the Rule of Benedict, was founded by an English Benedictine in Australia in the nineteenth century, and it is now attempting to adapt to living in an era close to the beginning of the twenty first century. So an emphasis is placed on the rules, and the understanding and practice of authority in the congregation of the sisters of the Good Samaritan. An issue of even broader relevance, and one that underlies the discussion, is the question of the adaptation of a tradition - what one commentator called, 'the art of applying timeless principles to contemporary realities'.

The relevant chapters of the Rule of Benedict that will be studied are the chapters that deal with the role of the abbot and other chapters that bear on how Benedict sees how authority is to be understood and exercised. The text needs to be scrutinized, and likewise the context and sources need careful analysis, so that the fuller knowledge, the clearer is the vision of how the current situation of a religious community can be influenced by a tradition. However, in doing this, an effort has to be made to try to reach a detailed understanding of the text, without a preoccupation with resolving modern problems, thus avoiding the danger of reading particular meaning into the text. When the context and the text are well known, then it should be possible for that knowledge to shed light on some current issues, not the other way around. The tradition can then be re-thought and re-expressed and thus it will remain alive. It is hoped that through a careful study of the Rule of Benedict, a whole body of wisdom concerning a contemporary way of life can be opened up.

A basic underlying theme of adaptation will link the study of the Rule of Benedict and the Rules that Polding gave to the three communities. The question of adaptation will show what each writer values and wishes to be enshrined in a community's way of life. In terms of the Rules of Polding for the sisters of the Good Samaritan, the question has

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a wider application in terms of practice as well as of theory, because the congregation's practice has been adapted to current situations and affected by current thinking. The ways in which the spirit of Benedict's teaching has informed and affected what has been done, will be explored.

The study will be done from an historical perspective. In questions that concern Polding's three Benedictine communities, it is necessary to discuss the historical context so that the issues can be rightly situated and judged. The Rule of Benedict will be examined as a source of the three communities' Rules, variously called Rules, Constitutions and Declarations. It is useful in any discussion of the Rule of Benedict to look also at the sources Benedict used. In particular, the Rule of the Master is important, and it is also important to note where the Rule of Augustine exerted a particular influence, since this influence is significant, especially in Benedict's teaching on the abbot and on community relationships. However, other important sources will be discussed when necessary.

Over time, other aspects would have modified the role of the abbot – such things as the developments of General Chapters, visitations, monastic associations of monks and nuns, customaries, adaptations of rules, canon law and liturgical expressions. It is not proposed to examine these, as it would involve too broad an historical sweep, and would prevent any work being done in depth.

Further influences on authority structures and practices in the period since 1857 will be examined in relation to their effect on authority and government of the sisters of the Good Samaritan. This is done in the detailed study of that group in Part Three of the thesis. For example, such things as canon law, constitutional developments and current theological understandings are important. In short, political, social and religious elements relating to Benedict, Polding and a present day religious community will be significant in the analysis undertaken in the thesis.
Two points underlie the approach to this work. One is a warning from a well-known interpreter of the Rule of Benedict, Adalbert de Vogüé, on the importance of sources, and of their correct use. He writes:

For lack of knowing this context of patristic thought and primitive monasticism, we are liable to inject our familiar notions into [Benedict's] text and to reduce his discourse to our present day mental categories.\(^5\)

The other point is the value of understanding the importance of history for an adequate present day interpretation:

... a tradition can be understood only genetically, with reference to its origin and evolution. Those ignorant of history are prisoners of the latest cliché, for they have nothing against which to test it... The past is always instructive, but not necessarily normative. What we do today is ruled not by the past but by the adaptation of tradition to the needs of the present. History can only help us decide what the essentials of that tradition are, and the parameters of its adaptation.\(^6\)

Hence the study of sources and the study of historical context and historical development are significant tools for understanding the essentials of the tradition and the parameters of adaptation.

The Appropriation of the Text

The question must then be asked as to how does one understand and appropriate a text, especially one that is many centuries old. In the process of interpretation there are implications from the meaning of the Greek word *hermeneuein*, which means both to interpret and to translate. Therefore, the hermeneutical task has a dual activity of both establishing the meaning of the text and expressing this meaning in a context other

\(^5\) ibid., p.4.

than the original. There is always a dialectical relationship between interpreting and explaining, and the intention is always appropriation or comprehension. It is the task of making ‘one’s own’ what was previously ‘foreign’. To test the authenticity of the interpretation and explanation, Groome proposes three criteria, which aptly apply to appropriation of the text of the Rule of Benedict. These criteria are continuity, consequences and community. Every authentic application of a particular text must be in continuity with the constitutive truths and values of the whole vision of the group, and must ‘conserve the foundational trajectory of beliefs and truths, principles and values’ that are essential to the original vision. The consequences of the appropriation must show evidence of outcomes that are in keeping with the vision and raison d’être of the group, and the community also needs to confirm the validity of the interpretation.

Many writers on the Rule of Benedict have discussed this process of interpretation, the hermeneutical method, following the work of Paul Ricoeur. One of these writers, V.J. Oderman, identifies four moments of the approach of Ricoeur in the interpretation of the Rule of Benedict, which are relevant to this discussion.

First there is the stage of discourse where there is a verbal exchange communicating some meaning in the form of sentences or phrases. The resources of language as a structure are utilized, but the language is actualized as an event in some given moment. The meaning is what is said and transferred to another by a speaker.

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The second stage is when the message is written. Face to face discourse is then radically altered, because there comes into being the potentially enduring relationships of an author to many readers. The reader can then interact with the text in a way that escapes its point of origin, the conditions of its original formulation in its environment, and other limitations of the speaker-hearer setting. The important point is that the text takes on a life of its own once it is written and the author is no longer the owner of it. It has become public property. From here, one can find the author only in the text, in its network of meaning, in the dynamic interplay of literary techniques, images, symbols, rhetorical elements and propositions.

The third stage is the projected world of the text. The first part of this is the actual subject matter or reference. However, the fourth stage is the not so obvious second reference, which is the projected world that is out in front of the text and is never terminated. Ricoeur uses the terms, sense (what a text says), reference (what it talks about), ostensive reference (the subject matter at the point of origin of a text), and non-ostensive reference (the world projected ahead of a text in the new audiences coming to it). This latter point is the important one for the interpretative task that will be undertaken in this study. The world ahead of the text of the Rule of Benedict, and in fact the Rules of Polding, includes a religious community living at the end of the twentieth century.

Understanding of a text takes place when a reader has interlaced the world of the text with her or his own world. The reader appropriates the text and enters into a long line of readers who have had their world shaped by the dynamism of some particular text.9

Related to this is the question of literary genres. This is important in the interpretation of a text, because each genre will disclose a particular experience of reality. The notion that the genre controls the meaning, is an important methodological premise for any

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serious interpreter. How something is said will determine what is said and therefore how the meaning is interpreted.

The Rule of Benedict is indeed a rule (regula) and does contain regulations on many details of how life is to be lived. However, as the opening of the rule shows in the Prologue, the style of writing is also of the nature of Wisdom literature, a style that gives wise teaching on life, such as a father gives a son.\(^\text{10}\) Thus a world is projected that is radically different from that of purely prescriptive discourse. Wisdom literature reflects on the whole range of human experience and enables the reader to find meaning therein.

By understanding the Rule of Benedict in the genre of Wisdom Literature, the reader can approach the text with an imagination which creates ever-new ways of dealing with the realities of present living. The interpreter thus does not stop short with what the words of the text say or mean, or how the text arrived at its present state. What must be elicited from the text is the importance of the insights for a community living today. Nor will the interpretation end once for all at any stage of history. New meanings emerge over the years as life changes in different eras. The history of any community that follows the Rule of Benedict is a series of interpretations and reinterpretations of the basic text. There is an emphasis on life (orthopraxis), not thought (orthodoxy).

A very important point is that the appropriation and application that follows imaginative interpretation puts people into the process of making history. However, it must never be forgotten, that what we are dealing with in order to begin the imaginative interpretation, is the text of the Rule of Benedict. That text is the vehicle that serves as mediation of meaning for the present.\(^\text{11}\)


\(^{11}\) Oderman, op.cit. pp. 42-45.
A further point on the interpretation of a text such as the *Rule of Benedict* needs to be made. Since the rule is concerned with right living rather than right thinking, it is possible that the interpretation can be done best by someone who is living according to the rule. To that degree it can be said that the rule yields its meaning not to readers but to keepers. The meaning and message of the rule is to be found in the process which it initiates, and not merely in the word it uses. An understanding of the rule is the fruit of the living of a communal way of life, not simply the result of abstract beliefs and study. In view of the above discussion, the writer, living within the Benedictine tradition, will endeavour throughout the study to understand the relevant sections of the *Rule of Benedict* thoroughly, and then to interpret their meaning in a living contemporary context, that is in the projected world of the text.

In doing this, more specific criteria for valid interpretation are needed. Reference has already been made to the general tests for authentic interpretation discussed by Groome, continuity, consequences and community. Some criteria which have been applied to scriptural interpretation could be equally useful for questions of interpretation of a document such as the *Rule of Benedict*. While recognizing that multiple interpretations of a text are not only possible, but demanded by the nature of the text as text, there still remains the question of validity.

Two general points need to be made before discussing specific criteria for checking validity of interpretation. These are called global criteria, one negative and one positive. An interpretation has a chance of being valid, if the process meets the standard of using in the process, only that which is appropriate in relation to a particular type of text, and only using methods that are acceptable and appropriate. For

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12 M. Casey, *Orthopraxy and Interpretation. Reflections on RB 73.1* *Regulae Benedicti Studia* 14/15, pp. 165-172.

13 Casey, op.cit.,p.168. See also Oderman, op.cit.,pp.39-40 and Veilleux, op.cit.,p.63

example, if one understands the Rule of Benedict as Wisdom literature, different principles of interpretation must be applied to it.

The second global principle that can be applied is called the principle of fruitfulness. By this is meant that the interpretation must make the text speak, that is, it must exploit the potentiality of the text to illuminate the faith of the community without violating the canons of good exegetical and critical method. The relative adequacy of the interpretation is the concern, not the certitude of the conclusions. If one can judge the relative adequacy of an interpretation, one can decide among possible incompatible interpretations.

Important specific criteria for valid interpretation include that of accounting for the text as it stands, that is, making the interpretation fit the text rather than the other way around. The second point is that a valid interpretation must be consistent, that is, free from internal contradictions. It also should be valid for the whole text and the text as a whole. The third criteria is that the interpretation should be able to explain anomalies. A fourth and very important criteria is that a valid interpretation ought to be compatible with what is known from other sources. The final criterion is that appropriate methods chosen for use must be used responsibly. The theory and methodology being applied must be well understood and used adequately within the context.

The outcome of this on-going dialogue with the text about its subject matter is the fusion of the horizon of the reader with the horizon of the text, and through this the creation of a new reality. It is this process that the thesis will follow, and from the dialogue, an appropriation of meaning for the present era can be made.

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15 Schneiders, op.cit., p.177.

16 M. Casey, Unpublished material - Benedictine Studies Program, 1979. Principles of interpretation specific to interpretation of the Rule of Benedict are raised here. These include amongst others, an understanding that the rule is written for people, not to give details for living; that one must understand cultural and linguistic characteristics; that the previous and subsequent tradition must be understood; that one must understand the
The Question of Authority

It is obvious, even with a minimum knowledge of history, that authority in the Catholic Church has not always operated in the way that acknowledges that authority resides in the community, and must always operate in a spirit of service and for the good of the whole. The word authority is derived from the Latin, auctor, (author, cause, sponsor, promoter, surety), or from augere (to cause to grow, to increase – transitive and intransitive – to enlarge, to enrich). It can then be seen as a moral power that exercises an essential function as a cause of united action, but the united action must always be in the direction of growth or enrichment.

Current approaches to the question of authority have their roots in history, and likewise, to understand the exercise of authority in a particular era, for example that of Benedict or Polding, one must examine the understanding of authority in the Church at the time. It is also possible that society's understanding of the question may have some significance.

Yves Congar distinguishes five successive moments of history, and shows the way authority was understood and practised in each era. The five "moments" are: The New Testament and the Apostles; The Church of the Martyrs and Monastic Catholicism; From Constantine to Gregory VII; The Middle Ages; From the Council of Trent until the present day.

Shifts can be noted from New Testament times where authority is seen as service, with little emphasis on authority and its functions as power or privilege. The shift is towards an exercise of "spiritual" authority, though there is still a strong insistence on authority alternative perspective that is offered. These principles form the background to the interpretation that is made in this thesis.
which presides over a society and regulates its life. In time, authority became more secular and juridical and, as this was happening, it was important that monastic orders were able to maintain an understanding of the role of the community and the importance of service from an earlier period. The *Rule of Benedict* certainly did this, no doubt because of Benedict's strong basis in Scriptural texts.

Gradually, many of these more spiritual aspects were lost as Church and Empire became more connected. The effort to separate the two in the Middle Ages caused the Church to try to strengthen its own power, and a legalistic understanding of authority and power set in. In this era, the relationship of superior to subordinate moved from the notion of being part of a vast system of mutual love and service, to authority that is merely juridical and sociological. It was an authority that would govern rather than serve, and do so often in ways that reflected the imperial court, for example, in vocabulary, insignia, ceremonial, style and ideology.

In the period from the Council of Trent to the present day there was a consolidation of a notion of central authority. This happened strongly in response to the questioning of authority not only in its historical forms, but even as a principle, by the Reformers. The understanding of Church became fixed in a set pattern, with authority in a most dominant role. It was in this era (mid nineteenth century) that Polding wrote his rules for the sisters of the Good Samaritan. It remains to examine later in the thesis to what degree his view of authority was affected by the understanding of authority in the Church at this time. The mystique of authority reached its high point with the definition of papal infallibility in 1870 at the First Vatican Council. The work of this Council was unfinished and the unbalanced view of papal authority remained until the second Vatican Council (and beyond).\(^{17}\)

The outcomes of these shifts were very evident in the Church's exercise of authority. However, in its recent history, the Church has begun to struggle to place tasks and responsibilities over the claiming of privileges, to exercise government in a collegial mode, to believe that authority means service, love and listening. The strong juridical approach of many centuries and the loss of the spiritual dimension, make the shift of emphasis very difficult to achieve, and authority in the church is still a long way from resembling the way it operated in the early church and in many centuries thereafter.

An understanding of authority moves side by side with an understanding of the Church, and its exercise all throughout its history has been a reflection of what theological understanding of Church prevailed at the time.

This leads to some important points about authority on the level of interaction. As a highly organized structure on the universal level becomes more and more entrenched, interactions and social relationships become difficult or non-existent. Ecclesiastical representatives become anonymous in a hectic round of business, and the notion of the Church as a community remains an unrealized (even unrealizable) ideal.

On the individual level, one would hope for an experience of authority as a truth that sets one free, and makes it possible to believe and to live fully. In so far as the Church or any organization does not enable that to happen, it is clear that a faulty theory and practice of authority prevails which will ultimately result in the collapse of the organization.  

The way authority has been exercised in the Church, and the different levels of operation of authority in organizations, have bearing on the theory and practice of authority in Benedictine history and especially as it is applied in the communities under discussion.

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Rules and Authority.

In one way or another, Polding legislated for each of the three Benedictine communities he established in nineteenth century Australia, giving a practical interpretation of the Rule of Benedict by which the communities were expected to live at a particular time and in a particular place. Monasticism has been seen to represent a search for the ideal within the setting of the actual. 19

What the three rules (variously called constitutions, declarations, rules) for the St Mary's community, the Subiaco community and the Good Samaritan community, were doing, was making the ideal of the Rule of Benedict possible within the setting of the actual, mid-nineteenth century Australia. Throughout the history of religious life there has always been a written form of regulations for each religious community. The community may live according to the Rule of Benedict, but the details of that 6th century rule are not always applicable and there is a need for a body of statutes or ordinances by which the rule is defined, declared and applied. Thus the three groups under discussion, all living under the Rule of Benedict, had three different sets of constitutions.

As well as "prescribing" how the group is to live, the constitutions also express the group's way of life, so it is very important to examine what is written, in order to understand the group. In the nineteenth century (in fact from the earliest examples in history until the late twentieth century) such written form of constitutions had a definite legislative and juridical bias. This is different from a current understanding of constitutions, where the Code of Canon Law declares that they are to be faithful to the person of the founder or foundress, to the spirit and character of the institute, its nature, ends, means, – in a word its traditions. 20 Moreover, constitutions must specify the


20 Code of Canon Law, Canons 578, 587.
manner in which the congregation is to be governed, norms of discipline, the manner of incorporation and formation of new members, and the content or proper object of the vows. Hence there is a finely balanced union between spiritual elements of the way of life and the juridical and practical elements.

When discussing laws the distinction can be made that there are different phases in their life. There is the first phase where the laws are conceived, drafted, amended and finally promulgated. It is then that they acquire legal validity. The second phase is when the law is actually received and internalized by the community as its own. At this point the community understands the law and begins to act on it. Then the law has existential validity. 21

The process of reception is crucial. This will be a very important point, especially for the discussion of St Mary's rules, but also, in a lesser degree to Subiaco. One wonders whether the rules for St Mary's, promulgated in 1855, were ever in fact "received". Or was it too late even then for the community to be revived? With regards to Subiaco, there was a different problem. It was rather the concern about what rules were to be lived. For the Good Samaritans, Polding shaped a set of rules, which were available from the beginning.

The texts of the rules that will be examined reflect important understandings of how each community perceived and lived within certain authority structures more or less successfully adapted from Benedict's teaching on authority.

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S. BENEDICTUS REGULAM SCRIBIT
Cod. ms. Vat. lat. 1282, fol. 80' (pars singularis)
Bibliothecae Apost. Vaticanae
PART 1

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY IN THE RULE OF BENEDICT

CHAPTER 1

THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF THE RULE OF BENEDICT

In a study of the Rule of Benedict, it is important to see the rule as the work of a writer who was indeed a copier or a compiler. However, Benedict was more than that. He has absorbed the thought patterns and even the literary style of a number of authors, made the thought his own, used much of their material, but left some of it aside, and moulded it into a spiritual and literary masterpiece.¹

We are also reminded

that Benedictine monasticism did not emanate from the personality of a creator, and it did not arise as the ingenious response to new needs of church and society. Benedict came in the wake of two centuries of cenobitic experience and harvested its fruits. He legislated modestly, without pretension of originality, making the traditional themes and institutions his own.²

In that sense we see Benedict as one at the endpoint of a period of history, though from today’s perspective, those who live the Benedictine way of life would consider his work as a beginning. In this section, the perspective is of the rule as an endpoint, and it will be contextualized by a general discussion of its sources. The importance of this is to see how the effect of Benedict’s sources and the tradition from which he came influenced his teaching on the abbot when he came to write his rule.


² A.de Vogüé, Community and Abbot in the Rule of St.Benedict, Cistercian Studies Series, 5/1, Kalamazoo, p.18.
The mindset that considers a rule as one document containing normative teachings for a way of life certainly did not exist in early monasticism. It is likely that rules emerged only after there was a tradition of oral teachings and lives of desert Fathers. Gradually these oral teachings were collected into sayings of the desert elders called *Apophthegmata*. By about 400 a clearer idea of a rule was being established. Such rules always seemed to bear a relation to the Bible, to earlier monastic and ecclesiastical tradition and the original spirit of the founder or community. They also combined spiritual teaching with practical prescriptions, a way of expressing principles and then concretizing these principles.

It is useful to group rules that are connected by their common aim of regulating the cenobitic life of Christian monks through a number of identical doctrinal principles, and by a network of literary connections. Vogüé calls these groupings different generations. He uses the term broadly, but it is an interesting way to see connections. He speaks of the first generation as including the three mother-rules of Pachomius, Basil and Augustine around the year 400. His second generation is constituted by Cassian and the Rule of the Four Fathers, and he notes the connection of Cassian to Pachomius and to a certain extent to Basil, while the Four Fathers have a somewhat tenuous connection with Augustine, Pachomius and Basil.

Moving through the Second rule of the Fathers he then locates the *Rule of the Master*, one of Benedict's major sources, in a fourth generation, in the first quarter of the sixth century. In the fifth generation he situates the *Rule of Benedict*, written probably

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3 *The Life of Antony* by Athanasius dates from about 350.

4 The word *cenobitic* is derived from the Greek term *koinos bios*, meaning the common life. It is generally used in monastic writings to mean the living of community life, and will be used throughout this thesis with this meaning.


6 The four fathers are Serapion, Paphnutius and the two Macariuses. This rule was probably written in the first half of the fifth century.
between 530 and 560. Though Benedict relied heavily on the Rule of the Master of the previous generation, he enriched it greatly and used more ancient sources such as Pachomius, Basil and especially Augustine. Three more generations are added to these groupings.⁷

At the end of the discussion of these generations and their family resemblances, Vogüé concludes that a monastic rule is not written by a legislator who is doing something personal, but by one who is appropriating the teaching of Scripture and the Fathers to the concrete conditions of a given community. It is from this point of view that Benedict and his sources will be discussed. This same point is also relevant in the later discussion of the adaptations that Polding made in the rules for the three Benedictine communities under discussion.

What follows from this location of the Rule of Benedict within the monastic tradition as a whole, is the question which needs to be asked as to how the Rule of Benedict relates to the variety and complexity of earlier monastic traditions. In general terms, the first issue to discuss is the development of the traditions of monasticism. There are many discussions and debates around this topic.⁸

Some who enter into the debate about the origins of the cenobitic life do not accept that it began with Antony in the desert and developed in a uniform continuum throughout the ages. These would criticize the commentators who accept the idea of a

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⁷ Rules included in these so called generations are Regula Pauli et Stephani of the second half of the sixth century, the first cenobitic rule in Spain of St Isidore, and finally those from Spanish and Gallic-Irish territory, Fructuosus of Braga and the Regula Communis. Especially in this latter period, the influence of Benedict is very apparent.

monolithic tradition beginning with the desert fathers and who presuppose this as a basis for their studies.⁹

In the work of the former group, there is a belief that various forms of monasticism arose almost simultaneously on all sides out of the vitality of each local church, and therefore the cenobitic life has no historical dependence on the eremetic life. It sprang from the simple necessity of communion between members of a local church who were practising an advanced degree of asceticism.

In Cappadocia, the cenobitic life resulted from the steady growth of fraternal communion among the ascetics within the local church. In due time the Basilian community became more organized, and the need for a superior, Proestos, was recognized. The Basilian superior was the product of the very vitality of the community itself, an element of the structure by which the community is able to become united in order to achieve its ideal of Christian asceticism.¹⁰

There is a resemblance between what happened in Syria, and the development of Basilian cenobitic life. However, the work of Pachomius antedates that of Basil, and it is argued that Basil's work was original and not influenced by Pachomius.

Pachomius founded his communion of monks (koinonia) in a similar Judaeo-Christian spiritual context. The fundamental inspiration of both systems is the same - a common endeavour in asceticism and the search for God. The important point to be made is that the Pachomian community is different from the semi-eremetical communities of lower Egypt. The Pachomian community is more like the Basilian concept.¹¹ It is not simply a collection of individuals around a charismatic leader, but it is a community of

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⁹ Wathen, op. cit. p.104. and Veilleux, op. cit. passim, would take this line, and in doing so would criticize many of the presuppositions underlying much of Vogüé's work.

¹⁰ W.K.L. Clarke, St Basil the Great. A Study in Monasticism, Cambridge, 1913, p.56.

brothers. It is a concrete reality where each one places himself at the service of the rest. This influences the role of the superior, where the idea of service also becomes predominant.

Thus it can be seen, that from this point of view, Pachomian cenobitic life is not an attempt at communal organization of the spiritual paternity exercised in the already existing desert tradition, where everything depended on the superior's personal decision. The superior is situated within the community, and on the level of the communion of life, rather than on the level of hierarchical authority. The cenobitic way of life has its own *raison d'être*, without further eremitical implications and this is because of the very reality of the communion of members, which it incarnates and realizes. The abbatial function is then to foster and preserve this communion and it is obviously different from the notion of a hierarchical pastor. 12

Elm is another writer who also notes that Pachomian cenobitic life was arising at the same time as the move to the desert, and that there were elements in common with the ascetic life. However there were the added aspects of hospitality, charity and mutual dependence, which were carried to their logical conclusion in terms of community structures and relationships as well as legislation for these. 13

Some recent writers add to these discussions from different perspectives. 14 Rousseau traces the growth of ascetic society, or what he calls a move from hermit to cenobite. 15 In this move, he notes the growing sense of social dependence and corporate

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15 Rousseau, op.cit., p.33.
responsibility from an earlier emphasis on an individual master whose authority would flow from an inner purity of heart, so that his way of life and his actions, informed the authority of his words. However, he also notes that the ascetic life as illustrated in Antony, and the cenobitic life as developed by Pachomius had many common roots, and those who appeared in the early stages of ascetic history to be either eremetic or semi-eremetic, had many characteristics and customs in common. It is not a matter of noting who came first or last, but who interpreted and expressed the aims and traditions of the ascetic life.

In practice, mobility, together with an increase in numbers, led to greater communication and to the understanding that the ascetic movement was broader than one individual's horizon. Once this developed, there was an increase in formality of structures and arrangements for living, which would reflect the complexity of relationships of those with common goals living together.

The contribution of Elm to the discussion opens up an almost completely neglected area. She notes that the history of monasticism has been essentially the history of its origins, founders and writings. In fact, she notes that as history developed, Benedictine monasticism became the privileged vantage point for all discussions, and everything else came to be defined as liminal. In this process, the aspect that has been ignored, (what she calls being placed in the shadows,) are the models of religious life

16 ibid., p.25 & 33.
18 Elm, p.35.
19 ibid., p.43.
21 Elm, p.8; See also Rousseau, op. cit., p.12.
adopted by women. She notes that there have been no comprehensive studies that attempt to reconstruct these models and no attempt to place the organizational development of female asceticism in its historical context, which would highlight similarities or differences with the institutional development of male monasticism.\(^{22}\)

Her claim is, that assumptions and pre-suppositions which stress dichotomies between asceticism and monasticism, male and female, orthodox and heretical should be put aside and emphasis should be rather on the common factors such as fervour, devotion, and struggle for the perfect life, which were evident in the way all such people lived when they undertook their particular way of life.\(^{23}\)

Elm's study traces the different developments amongst women, from a move to leading an individual life of a dedicated virgin, to the growth of whole families taking up such a life. Some also moved to live with non-related ascetics of both sexes.\(^{24}\) Thus there was a development from there being one virgin daughter in a household to an entire ascetic household, and finally the acceptance of non-related members into a fully-fledged ascetic community. Elm gives emphasis to women's communities that were connected to those for men, and shows how relationships between the communities were then legislated for by such founders as Basil and Pachomius.\(^{25}\) Often, female communities were dependent on male communities for economic support and the male superiors provided spiritual guidance. However, the authority of the female superior in her own right was respected.\(^{26}\) Brown notes the strength of the spiritual companionship that drew male and female ascetics together, but also the many

\(^{22}\) Elm, p.9.

\(^{23}\) ibid., pp.13 & 22.

\(^{24}\) Ruether, op. cit., pp 72-98; Elm, p.59.

\(^{25}\) Elm, pp 68 & 283.

\(^{26}\) Rader, op.cit., pp 80-87.
cautionary writings that resulted from this association, ending in a growing segregation of the sexes in the church.\textsuperscript{27}

The lack of emphasis on the growth of women’s communities in historical and doctrinal writings, means that the aspects of widespread experimentation and diversity in these movements were lost by omission, or else came to be regarded as heretical.\textsuperscript{28} Different structures did develop in women’s communities such as the fact that there were no daughter houses. The highly flexible structures and the independence of these communities were never considered in historical writings. Thus one way only, that of male monasticism was seen as the only way that could be considered possible.\textsuperscript{29} It has never been considered whether or not authority structures that were appropriate for male communities were effective for communities of women.

In the West the two traditions of cenobitic and eremetic were combined, but there was a predominant influence from the eremetic tradition which came from the effect of Athanasius’ \textit{Life of Antony}. Though Augustine’s work was more like that of Basil and Pachomius in its fundamental inspiration, it tended to be seen as a clerical monasticism under the immediate jurisdiction of the bishop. Perhaps because of this, it did not exert the influence on the development of monasticism that it could have done.

With Cassian, there was a fusion of the cenobitic and the eremetic tradition, but the question remains as to whether this was a real fusion resulting in a harmonious synthesis, or simply a juxtaposition of the two traditions. Cassian had lived monastic life in the semi-eremetic environment of lower Egypt. He found in Gaul a monastic situation which was in need of reform. In some ways he may have tried to bring about

\textsuperscript{27} Brown, op. cit., p.266.

\textsuperscript{28} Elm, op. cit., p.383.

this reform by a return to the tradition of the East, which at least in his early writings, he saw as the authentic faith of the ancient fathers.

It is here that we see a transference from the notion of the coenobium as a school of formation to the notion of a desert school within the framework of common life. Therefore the idea of the disciple-master received further emphasis. In this view the superior is not the centre of the community, with the emphasis on the communal dimension, but a teacher whose task is to instruct individual monks. Hence, the role of spiritual father became more reserved to the superior instead of as in the East where any holy person could assume such a role.

Through Cassian, the notion of the relationship between the abbot and the bishop grew up and there was the likening of the monastic hierarchy to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This idea was developed in the Rule of the Master.

A careful study of the influence of Cassian by Rousseau emphasises that the distinctions between the contemplative and the active that are often made about the work of Cassian, as well as those between community and solitude, are by no means as clear as one may imagine. Rousseau notes shifts in Cassian's work, from emphasis on the eremetic life to a more social asceticism, but he also claims that this was not just a necessary resignation to a regrettable need for the cenobitic life. He claims that Cassian did in fact espouse the cause of the cenobitic movement, and he developed an interpretation of spiritual authority that responded to the needs of a cenobitic society. Though he did retain the tradition of the East, which saw the ascetic master as a man of experience, insight and one deeply rooted in scriptures who taught by word and example, he did move to write of the sanctions, ideals and practices that bound

30 Rousseau, op. cit., pp. 175 ff.

He was concerned with the order and development of the cenobitic life and in describing it he contributed to further change.

A recent writer on Cassian describes this even more clearly when he comments that Cassian uses the terms "cenobitic" and "anchoritic" more in allegorical terms, as labels for developmental stages within any form of monastic life. He is really positing a common ideal pursued in different ways, and the terminology is used to describe the experiences of all. The word "anchorite" is his way of describing the inner monk, his contemplative life, and the word "cenobite" is used for the outer monk, the practices that lead to inner purity of heart. There is a wholeness of person implied in this understanding, not a competition or comparison between two different ways of life. Distinctions are left behind.

Rousseau notes that through Cassian we can capture the diverse colours and traditions of the ascetic life and can focus them in a concentrated way on the religious imagination of the West. Thus we can examine the move of the cenobitic tradition of Basil's ascetics or the monks of Pachomius, as they crossed the border into the West and judge whether or not the move was simply a superficial one. But it can be seen, that the influence of such monks as Cassian, did provide a basis for Benedict to make some correctives to the Rule of the Master.

In fact, some who enter the debate on the origins and history of monasticism would believe that the two streams of cenobitic tradition, if that is an accurate way of

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32 Rousseau, p.194.


34 Veilleux, ibid., p.27.

35 Not all would agree that the ideal of communion that the Egyptian cenobites had, was not achieved in the West. e.g. C.Peifer, in RB 1980 op. cit. p.338, simply says that the discontinuity between Pachomius and his immediate successors is not supported by the evidence.
describing them, the eremetic ideal and the cenobitic tradition, have been brought into a harmonious whole in Benedict. However, it is noted that there is a tension between the two approaches, but that the tension is a healthy one. The important thing would be to understand that there are two traditions, and yet that perhaps the differences should not be over emphasised.  

Yet different characteristics do emerge. The emphasis that came from what we call the desert tradition, the semi-cenobitic orientation, would be on individual solitude, strict silence, less common prayer in liturgy, simple work, emphasis on personal poverty, emphasis on vertical relationships with God alone, and obedience to a spiritual father.

In the cenobitic orientation, while these same values are important, the emphasis would be on interpersonal relationships, discussions, openness to the world, more liturgy, all goods held in common, emphasis on horizontal relationships, service of one another and mutual obedience. Very relevant in this context is how the abbot is seen in the semi-cenobitic and the cenobitic tradition. In the semi-cenobitic tradition which flows from the semi-hermits of lower Egypt, through to Cassian and then to the rule of the Master, there is a strong tradition of the abba or spiritual father, expressed in the master-disciple relationship. In the tradition expressed by Pachomius, through St. Basil and St. Augustine, the abba is seen as the ‘eye’ of the community at its very centre.

Some general comments can be made on sources. Both the life experience of the monk who reads the Rule of Benedict, and his own particular study of the sources, influence his understanding of the rule. Since an understanding of the historical development of the rule, is so important to its interpretation, and since the sources are such an important part of the historical understanding, it is crucial how we approach these sources.

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36 Keating, op. cit., also Casey, op. cit., note the strong influence that the eremetical tradition has had on our understanding of monasticism. However, Casey shows how Benedict uses not only the Rule of the Master, but Augustine, Basil, Pachomius, Cyprian, Clement of Rome and Ambrose.
our present historical situation is challenging us with, is that the Rule of Benedict may indeed present a different spirituality than we thought when Evagrius and Cassian dominated our horizons. Did they so dominate Benedict's, or did he take a selective stance in the plurality of monastic traditions, and thus be more astute than we have given him credit for.\footnote{Wathen, op. cit., p.114.}

Another important point is, that when Benedict had a choice of sources, he always chose one that was nearer a scriptural interpretation. There is a final reminder against reading the \textit{Rule of Benedict} in the light of one or other source and thus falling into a simple reductionism.

This discussion raises important points for the interpretation of the \textit{Rule of Benedict} which will be undertaken in this study. A particular way of life, or a particular emphasis will affect how authority is seen and expressed. Was Benedict mainly influenced by the desert tradition which understood the abbot very much as a spiritual father, and the relationship of monk-abbot as that of disciple-master? To what extent did the Basilian concept of the abbot as the eye or centre of the community, influence him? Did he in fact shift ground during the course of the writing of the rule, and in so doing was he trying to modify the teaching of the earlier chapters? Against this preliminary general discussion of an understanding of authority in the church and in the monastic sources, the discussion of the relevant texts will be undertaken.
Christ Embraces the Holy Abbot Menas

Provincial Coptic Icon of the 6th Century
CHAPTER 2

THE ABBOT IN THE RULE OF BENEDICT

Introduction.

Benedict did not consider an abstract entity called authority or government in his arranging of a way of life for cenobites. A very significant part of this way of life is the abbot, but throughout the rule, abbot, community and rule are in constant interaction. Therefore a discussion of the question of authority in the Rule of Benedict centers on the role of the abbot, and this study will examine his role in the whole framework of cenobitic life. However, it is proposed that the discussion also needs to centre on the whole community, and the abbot's relationships with the community. Benedict also set up a system of 'officials' in the monastery who were called to special roles of service, and his teaching on the community members who assumed these roles will be examined.

This section will begin with an examination of the chapters specific to the abbot, chapter 2, The Qualifications of an Abbot, chapters 27 and 28, The Abbot's Preoccupation with the Excommunicated, and Those who Despite Frequent Punishments Refuse to Change, and chapter 64, The Installation of the Abbot. The Abbot's relationship with the community is clearly expressed in chapter 3, On Calling

¹ RB 1.13

² Translation used throughout, is that from T.Kardong, Benedict's Rule, A Translation and Commentary, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1996. The translation may lack some of the poetic qualities of the more widely used and familiar text, RB 1980, but it seems to this writer that it is more accurate.

³ A.de Vogüé uses the term, directories, to indicate the collection of the body of teaching on the Abbot. He calls chapter 2 the first directory and chapter 64 the second directory. (cf Community and Abbot, Vols 1 & 2, Cistercian Publications 1979 and 1988 ) However, this writer has included chapters 27 and 28 as a second directory since it contains a large body of teaching on the Abbot. Therefore chapter 64 would be called the third directory.
the Brothers for Counsel, and material from this chapter will be included. In the discussion, an overview of the content will be given and relevant sources will be examined. Implications will then be drawn from this detailed discussion.

One of the key sources for Benedict's teaching is the Rule of the Master. The well-known commentator on both the Rule of the Master and the Rule of Benedict, Adalbert de Vogüé, was concerned to discuss in detail the arguments both for and against the anteriority of the Rule of the Master. Scholars accept that the Rule of the Master predates the Rule of Benedict and that Benedict relied heavily on the Rule of the Master. It is not proposed to discuss the evidence that Vogüé brought forth on the question and, for the purposes of this study, this is assumed. It should also be noted that neither the Master nor Benedict presented a very original directory of the abbot. The same teaching occurred in the first two centuries of cenobitic experience, for example, the need for humility, adaptation to the needs of the individual, firmness in correction, a sense of responsibility to God, equity in judgement, and distribution of necessities without respect of persons. All who wrote on the nature of the abbacy, drew their theology from concrete situations that occurred in the practice of authority in the community.

It will be noted that the words used, and the sources from which Benedict drew them, keep stressing the key ideas of the abbot's responsibility, his need to deal with all monks of whatever rank in an equal fashion, and the idea of a loving relationship between the abbot and the monk. In the latter section of Part 1, the chapters on those

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4 Throughout the thesis, for the purpose of consistency, the word "chapter" in reference to a text uses a lower case 'c'. Especially later in the thesis, the word "Chapter", a traditional Benedictine term, meaning a gathering of the community, is also used. Here the 'C' will be capitalized. Otherwise the usage is open to confusion.

5 A.de Vogüé, Community and Abbot in the Rule of St Benedict, vol.1, op.cit., pp.25-33. This volume had been published in French in 1961.

6 Further References to the Rule of the Master will be given as RM

7 Vogüé, op.cit., p.89.

The section will conclude with a discussion of how Benedict sees authority and obedience, as is reflected in chapter 5, *Obedience*, and the chapters on fraternal relationships in the monastery—chapter 68, *If a Brother is Told to do Impossible Tasks*, chapter 71, *That they Obey one Another*, and chapter 72, *The Good Zeal that Monks Ought to Have*.

**The Abbot at the Heart of the Community.**

In a study of the *Rule of Benedict*, it becomes readily apparent just how central the abbot is in Benedict's community. Though he is not merely an isolated figure, but operates within a community framework and in relationship with much loved brothers, he does hold a central place. He is a father, guide and healer, he holds ultimate responsibility for the life of the community and he is the maker of the final decisions after he has listened carefully to the wisdom of the brothers.⁸

These ideas emerge strongly from the various chapters on the abbot, and in particular they are evident in chapter 2, which asks what kind of a man should the abbot be. This chapter has been taken almost entirely from the *Rule of the Master*. There are some important omissions and additions, which show what particular emphases Benedict

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⁸ Very detailed studies have been done on these chapters, and references have been used from the following texts.
wished to give his teaching. The chapter does indeed reflect the strong semi-eremetical tradition, with the emphasis on the master-disciple relationship of the abbot to the monk, but later chapters modify the teaching, so that the relationships amongst brothers are then seen to be very significant.

Chapter 2 of the Rule of the Master and the Rule of Benedict.

As an example of the connections between the two rules, and as a way of drawing out some of the important teaching on the abbot, it is proposed to study chapters 2 of both rules in some detail. The introduction and the conclusion of chapter 2 of the Rule of Benedict draw out the consequences of the name that the abbot bears. The texts of both sections clearly correspond. The abbot must be in fact what he is in name, must teach the law of God, must be responsible and must account for his disciples.\(^9\)

The body of the chapter is made up of almost identical treatments of a pair of themes, to the first of which a supplement is added. The first theme is that the abbot must preach by his words, but also by his actions. The supplement includes the comment that the abbot must vary his way of teaching and adapt himself to the character of each.\(^{10}\) The second theme is that the abbot must have equal love for all.\(^{11}\)

In adopting the plan of the Rule of the Master, Benedict makes three additions and three omissions. The first addition is of minor importance. Benedict adds to the passage which recommends that there should be no preferences, a consideration of order and rank in the community, saying that the abbot is free to change this order.

The second addition is another development on the supplementary theme, that is, the recommendation to the abbot to vary his methods. The third addition in the conclusion

\(^{9}\) RB 2.1 & 32; RB 2.4-5 & 37-38; RB 2.6-10 & 33-36, 39-40.

\(^{10}\) RB 2.11-15 & 23-29; RB 2.12b & 23-25

\(^{11}\) RB 2.16-22 & 2.30-31.
of the chapter takes up this supplementary theme again for the fourth time, and adds a new idea – the abbot must concern himself with the direction of souls, before concerning himself with temporal questions.\textsuperscript{12}

The key point that Benedict is trying to make as shown in these additions to the \textit{Rule of the Master} is that the abbot must treat each monk differently, using a variation of method according to the particular need.

The first omission is not significant. It is simply an additional idea that as the elements treat all equally, both the just and sinners, so must the abbot treat all equally. The idea of equal treatment remains the same.\textsuperscript{13}

The second omission is much more significant. Benedict drops altogether a passage that presents the abbot as a model of humility. The Master says that he must be like the child who was set as a model of humility in the gospel, and he must also be like a mother by his equal love of all, and a father by his judicious kindness. Through this omission by Benedict a statement on the need for abbatial gentleness is replaced by a call for swift punishment of vices. The effect is to make this section a much sterner treatise with the omission of the feminine image.\textsuperscript{14}

The third omission is also a very important one. It omits the notion that the brothers can always say they acted under the commands of the abbot.\textsuperscript{15} Benedict did not want to teach that the monks were not responsible and could act as if there were only one will in the community.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{12} RB 2.18-19; RB 2.26-29; RB 2.31-36.
\textsuperscript{13} RB 2.20.
\textsuperscript{14} RM 2.26-31
\textsuperscript{15} RM 2.35-38.
In the discussion that follows, the emphasis is on the nature of the abbatial office, not so much on its duties and tasks. The themes that emerge in chapter 2 of both rules are in answer to the question "What is an abbot?" The concern is to look at the texts noting the role of the abbot, its origin, models, essential elements and ultimate purposes. In the end it can be seen that the theological nature of the abbacy cannot be separated from the concrete situation of the abbot in the monastery. Benedict is writing for a particular situation and showing how a community is to live, by drawing on profound wisdom of experience, scripture and other sources.

When one comes to compare the Rule of Benedict with the Rule of the Master, it becomes obvious that Benedict, coming at the end of two centuries of cenobitic experience, was harvesting the fruits of this. The themes he used were traditional ones and he made no claims for originality. 17

Both rules see the abbot as the enunciator of a tradition, the possessor of accumulated wisdom and experience, and as one steeped in the teaching of Christ. The fundamental precept in chapter 2 of both rules is that of the disciples' absolute obedience to a single master. However, the significance of the opening and closing sections of these chapters must be noted. The abbot must be in fact what he is in name, abbas, father. The word was one that appeared frequently in the early desert and monastic tradition, so it is not surprising to find the word used here in both the Rule of the Master and the Rule of Benedict, to express the fullness of this tradition. 18 This tradition also includes the idea of prophecy and teaching as part of spiritual fatherhood. 19 The significance of the use

17 ibid., p. 18.
19 ibid., p. 355.
of this image is that the abbot is then defined not by his position as the head of a community or institution, but by his relationship to persons.\textsuperscript{20}

**Abbas - a Paradigm for Understanding the Role of the Abbot**

At this point it is to be noted that the idea of the use of images or models, is of importance in the *Rule of Benedict* in drawing out the teaching on the abbot. The use of the image of the abbot as 'Father' is of central importance. A modern theologian, Avery Dulles, presents a very useful discussion of models, which is relevant here.\textsuperscript{21}

For Dulles, the word *models* is a useful word that means more than aspects or dimensions. The reality he wishes to describe through models has the element of mystery, in the sense that it is a reality of which one cannot speak directly.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore we have to draw on analogies provided by our experience, and these analogies provide models. This helps us to grow in an understanding of the concept. He claims that theological models are for religion what theoretical models are for science. They cannot prove the truth of what they suggest, but they can help to generate hypotheses or lead to ways of thinking that can then be tested by recognized criteria.\textsuperscript{23}

Unlike the word *aspects*, it is difficult to draw these different approaches into a single synthesis, and in fact one has to work simultaneously with different models. However, the notion of model is nearer to the meaning of the word *image*. Dulles claims that when an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one's theoretical

\textsuperscript{20} ibid., 355-356.


\textsuperscript{22} ibid., p.14.

\textsuperscript{23} ibid., p.32.
understanding of a reality it becomes a model. However, some models are more abstract and are not images insofar as they cannot be readily imagined.\textsuperscript{24}

Dulles also notes that models, as he uses them in theology, can be either explanatory or exploratory. On the explanatory level, they serve to synthesise what we already know. Models in the exploratory sense have a capacity to lead to new insights.\textsuperscript{25} They can open up issues and alternative viewpoints and approaches.

It is important to note that each model is necessarily inadequate and, if one is pursued alone, it can lead to distortions. However, it is possible that one model can become dominant and form the basis on which can be built a total theology. If this happens, Dulles calls such a model a paradigm.\textsuperscript{26} Generally, each model will have its weaknesses, and the manifold images provided through them will be mutually complementary.

A very important point for the present work is Dulles' view that what is constitutive of models is not the imagery, but the structural relationships represented as obtaining between the revealer, the recipient, and the means of revelation. Thus a model is a basic analogy chosen for thinking about a complex reality. A variety of models may well prove the best route to understanding. One may settle on one model as being the most fruitful, but this will not deny the validity of other models.

The question posed by the rule itself in the title of chapter 2 is \textit{Qualis debeat esse abbas}, and in fact every other reference to the role of the abbot, and even to the officials of the monastery or the relationships within the community, in some way answer this question. This question is asked immediately after the end of chapter 1,

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{24}] ibid., p.25.
\item[\textsuperscript{25}] ibid., p.29.
\item[\textsuperscript{26}] ibid., p.33.
\end{itemize}
where Benedict states that he is proceeding to draw up a plan for cenobites, the strong kind of monks.\textsuperscript{27} The first part of the plan has to do with the abbot.

In Dulles' terms, the first word of chapter 2, \textit{abbas}, can be called a paradigm in the sense that it is indeed a dominant model. All other models that lead to an understanding of the abbot flow from this.

The definition of the abbot as father must be understood in the light of the tradition of spiritual paternity as this meaning developed throughout scripture and the desert and monastic tradition.\textsuperscript{28} In the scriptures and the writings of the early fathers such as Clement, in the work of the Egyptian fathers of the desert, as well as in Egyptian cenobitic life, and in the monasteries of Pachomius and Basil, and through to the Master, and finally in Benedict, there is always a common thread to the understanding of the word. The \textit{abba} himself was one who was experienced, and who knew the life from living it himself. Hence he could be a spiritual father and beget sons in his own image.\textsuperscript{29} The abbot became a spiritual father through a very personal relationship to an individual disciple. He knew that he was the one who could pass on life in the spiritual sense, as a natural father gave life to a son. The life was given through a spiritual word that was spoken, as the disciple received from the spiritual father an understanding of a way of life that was to be lived. It was a handing on of traditional wisdom.

The word \textit{abbas}, used by Benedict one hundred and twenty six times, is not a functional title, indicating what the abbot does, but is a theological term, designed to clarify the meaning rather than the function of the superior's role. It does indeed reflect Benedict's principal conviction about the abbatial office.

\textsuperscript{27} RB 1.13.


\textsuperscript{29} ibid., p.332.
... The abbot is a Christ figure. The abbot's task is simply to convey by words the teaching of Christ to his monks and by his deeds to communicate something of Christ's multi-faceted and redemptive love.  

Casey notes 'that abbas denotes above all, the spiritual character of the abbatial office; it is not organizational or institutional but Christological.' And he says again, 'It is a spiritual, not a political office; all the industry and talent needed for its successful accomplishment will be wasted unless its basic spiritual character is recognized and cultivated.'

In chapter 2, a very important nuance is added to this notion of spiritual fatherhood after the reminder that the abbot must always remember what is implied in his name. 'He is believed to represent Christ in the monastery, for he is called by his name,' reminds us that the abbot is a father as is Christ. The abbot is father, because he takes the place of Christ the real father of the monks. He holds the place of Christ in the monastery, that is, he makes Christ present to the monks. The abbot is not a substitute for the unique father, Christ, but he becomes his most significant evocation. The word creditur could include the element of faith, not just the meaning of accepted as true. If this is the case, the spiritual element of the role is further emphasized.

The same idea is repeated in chapter 63, Community Rank, when the question of what the abbot is to be called is discussed in the context of titles and the order in the

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31 ibid. p.47.
32 ibid.,p.49.
33 RB. 2.2
34 RB 2.2. A.de Vogüé has discussed this idea at length, for example in Community and Abbot, vol.1, op.cit.,pp.110-113, and so does C.Peifer, RB 1980, op.cit.,pp.356-363.
35 Vogüé, Community and Abbot, op.cit., p.110.
community, ‘But the abbot, because we believe that he holds the place of Christ, is to be called "lord" and "abbot", not for any claim of his own, but out of honour and love for Christ. He for his part, must reflect on this, and in his behaviour show himself worthy of such honor.'\(^{37}\) As in chapter 2, the emphasis is on the fact that the abbot has to be worthy of his name, and to act accordingly.

Part of the abbot's role as a spiritual father is to help the monks who are striving to live the Gospel, and to show a vital concern for the welfare of each monk. In profound respect for each, the abbas can then listen to him as he reveals the evil that may be in his heart. After the exhortation in the fifth degree of humility to reveal to the abbot the secrets of his heart, Benedict then gives three scripture quotes to support this exhortation. All show that the revelation to the abbot is in keeping with this connection of the abbot with Christ.\(^{38}\) The same idea about the abbot as a spiritual father is contained in chapter 46 on those who err and in chapter 49 on Lent, where the reason given for making known to the abbot what the monk intends to do during Lent is to receive the abbot's approval and to avoid presumption and vain glory. The father will know what is good for the son.\(^{39}\)

In chapter 2, the word *paterfamilias* is used, and since the idea of the abbot as drawing its meaning from the Roman head of the household could be supported by this usage, it is important to note the discussions on the word.\(^{40}\) Each of the commentators makes the point that Benedict means that the owner of the 'flock' is God to whom the abbot is ultimately responsible. Therefore they believe that Benedict does not consider the abbot as being able to be likened to the *paterfamilias* of the Roman family. They claim that Benedict's teaching on authority may be culture conditioned, but that the

\(^{37}\) RB 63.13-14.

\(^{38}\) RB 7.44. cf. Ps 36:5; Ps 105:1; Ps 117:1.

\(^{39}\) RB 46.5; RB 49.8-10.

conditioning and understanding do not come from profane analogies, but from a religious tradition rooted in the Bible. The tradition of *abba* from the desert and monastic tradition resides in his spiritual fatherhood. Earlier commentators had made a case for using Roman social and political history to help understand Benedict’s abbot.\(^{41}\)

In the light of more recent studies of the Roman family, perhaps there is some possibility that Benedict was influenced by such ideas. Though he uses the word to refer to God, and the reference notes that the abbot is one who takes the place of the real owner of the flock, Christ, it is interesting that he does choose to use the word. It is obvious in the rule that the authority of the abbot does extend to the whole temporal and spiritual existence of the individuals and the group, as does that of the *paterfamilias*.

The idea of the over-strict completely dominant *paterfamilias*, though existing in written law, in practice may not have been so dominant.\(^{42}\) The fact that there was to be no ownership of material goods by monks, that strong boundaries existed around the community, the use of the council, the need for peace and order were all aspects of how the *paterfamilias* operated.\(^{43}\) These must surely have been in the mind of Benedict, the sixth century Roman, even if he has indeed moved so strongly to the idea of the spiritual aspects of the abbot, the father of the monastery.

\(^{41}\) Some of these include Butler, 1901, Chapman, 1929 and Herwegen, 1944.


\(^{43}\) RB 33; RB 58; RB 3; RB 34 & 63.
The spiritual elements of the role, rather than the organizational ones are also evident is the use of the word *praesse – abbas qui praesse dignus est*, (the abbot who is worthy of ruling). Because of the link with *abbas*, and the relational idea represented in that word, this could indicate an emphasis of meaning such as to lead the way, to go before, to give guidance, rather than the idea of dominance in governing. This is how the word is used in the phrase, *praesse discipulis*, (to direct his disciples). 44

Yet it should be noted that the concern for the monk is not only a spiritual one. Indeed the abbot is accountable, and that is a frequent refrain in the rule. He is expected to know that more is demanded from one to whom more is entrusted, 45 and he must give account of the souls whose care he has undertaken. 46 The word *vilicationis* is the word used to translate the Greek term *oitonomia,* which means the management of the household. 47 This would support the fact that Benedict did think of the abbot as a steward, one who holds the responsibility in place of another, one who cared for all aspects of the monks' lives in the place of Christ. The steward does not own things himself.

In fact the important teaching on the abbot in chapter 64 really begins and ends with this idea. The abbot should be set as a worthy steward over the house of God. He will be rewarded if he carries out his responsibility well, and punished if he neglects it. And the chapter ends, 'Then when he has managed his office well, he will hear from the Lord what the good servant heard, who distributed grain to his fellow servants on time. Yes, I tell you, he says, he sets him over his whole estate.' 48

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44 RB 2.11.

45 RB 2.30 cf. Lk 12:48.

46 There are similar ideas of accountability in RB 2.37,38; RB 3.11; RB 63.3; RB 64.7, cf. Lk 16:2.

47 RB 64.7. See C.Peiwer, in RB 1980, op. cit., p.352.

48 RB 64.5-7; RB 64.21-22; cf. Mt 24:47.
In discussions on the abbot as administrator an issue of concern is the role of the abbot in relation to the material goods of the monastery.49 Although he must deal with the temporal administration, it is clear in the very early teaching of the rule that too great concern for the fleeting and temporal things of this world should never cause him to neglect, or treat lightly, the welfare of those entrusted to him. In fact, the physical milieu must be one that is conducive to spiritual growth. The spiritual leader needs to control the material existence of the community, so that a unified goal can be achieved.50 The abbot has to see to it that the practicalities conform to Gospel ideals, and he can only do this if he considers that all aspects of life are spiritually significant. Then there is no dichotomy between material and spiritual responsibilities of which the abbot is the steward. The outcome is an integrated life.

In Benedict’s view, administration is not a profane art. Human skills are not the only things needed to manage the monastery, but faith and a spiritual view of life are also needed. The abbot ‘sets the tone and oversees everything, for he is the father who bears ultimate responsibility, even if he may delegate much of the detail.’51 Thus he may delegate responsibility and share the burdens of his office, but he is indeed responsible for everyone and everything. He is in fact a steward of the monks, the goods, the whole way of life.

The idea that the abbot is also a shepherd emerges in chapter 2. He governs and leads through care for the flock entrusted to him, as any father would do. The opening verse of the chapter carries the phrase meminere debet, ought to remember, and here there are verbal echoes from Cyprian where the phrase meminisse debemus is part of a
discussion of Christ the shepherd of the flock. The abbot then is one who is seen to care and to give life to those for whom he is responsible. The image or "model" of the shepherd is closely linked to that of the abbot as father, and helps to further explore and explain the role of the abbot.

In the monastery, there will be those who are defiant or disobedient or arrogant or murmurers. Then there are those who are opposed to the Holy Rule or who disdain the directions of the seniors. All of these the abbot must seek to save. The image of the shepherd is introduced in chapter 2 in terms of the abbot's accountability. 'And let the abbot know that the shepherd will bear the blame if the owner of the sheep finds them less than profitable.' However Benedict goes on to say that if the shepherd has done all he could and devoted all concern to a restless and disobedient flock, he will be absolved and the stubborn sheep who rejected his care will be punished. Later in chapter 2 the abbot is reminded that if he deals with each according to need, 'tailors his approach to meet each one's character and understanding,' he will suffer no loss to the flock but will even enjoy an increase of a good flock.

The very title of chapter 27 - The Abbot's Preoccupation with the Excommunicated - gives an insight into the approach. So too does the strong scriptural base of the chapter. There are references to the need of the sick for a physician, the need to give help so that the monk is not overwhelmed, the need to be confirmed in love, and finally two good shepherd images. This chapter occurs in a section of the rule known as the disciplinary or penal code, chapters 23-30, which deals with what happens when a brother has erred and is then to be cut off from the community. One would expect an

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52 RB 2.1. cf. Cyprian, De Zelo et Livore, Chapter 12.
53 RB 23.1.
54 RB 2.7-10.
55 RB 2.32.
56 Matt 9:12; 2 Cor.2:7,8; Ezec 34:3-4; Lk 15:5.
emphasis on punishment for faults, but in fact Benedict addresses much of his teaching
to the abbot, and it is obvious that the abbot must seek the lost as does a shepherd.

The image of the good shepherd is used, and the connection is made of the wayward
brother needing the healing of a physician. ‘He (the abbot) should realize that he has
undertaken care of the sick, not tyranny over the healthy.’ The juxtaposition (and
mixing) of the two metaphors – physician and shepherd – reinforces the call to the
abbot to exercise great concern and to act with all speed, discernment and diligence not
to lose anyone under his care. The word sollicitudine (watchful care) is used twice in
the chapter, and in one usage, the word magnopere (greatly) is added, giving strong
emphasis. The word itself has not only the notion of care or solicitude in it, but can
mean also watchful concern, anxious care or attention, painstakingness.

The treatment of the wayward, those who have in fact excluded themselves, is for the
good of the whole community, ‘lest one diseased sheep infect the whole flock.’ The
seriousness of the possible infection of the flock is emphasized by the context of the
sources. Cyprian uses the phrase contagio morbidae putredinis amputantur, and
Augustine the phrase, ne contagione pestifera plurimas perdat. Cyprian states that
one should give thanks when the infected ones are cut off - gratulandum. venenata
contagione.

57 RB 27.6.
58 RB 27.1, 5.
59 RB 28.8.
60 Cyprian, De Mortalitate, 14.
61 Augustine, Epistulae, 211.11.
62 Cyprian, De Ecclesiae Catholica Unitate.
The ideas of the sick sheep and the image of the shepherd are used in Jerome and are picked up by Benedict. This refers us back to the end of chapter 27 where the gospel story of the good shepherd is used. Here Benedict adds significant ideas to Luke's version of the good shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep in the mountains and went in search of the one sheep that had strayed. He says that, out of compassion for the weakness of the lost one, he mercifully carries it back to the flock. The role of the abbot as expressed through the image of the shepherd is indeed one of compassion, non-judgment, active seeking to make the one who has strayed part of the community again. The abbot has the role of facilitating the growth and welfare of the flock, so, like a shepherd, he must heal, care for, nourish, manage, lead, correct, seek out and in fact do anything that ensures the life of the individual and that of the flock. And indeed he must do this with all keenness and energy to prevent any of the sheep in his care being lost.

The abbot as shepherd makes obvious the distinctly personal nature of the exercise of authority in the Rule of Benedict. Authority has been placed in the hands of a wise, discreet and holy person who leads the flock for the owner, Christ. In the exercise of this authority the abbot looks to the good of all and to those with particular needs. Again there is a reminder to the pastor that he is accountable to God for the good of all. He must never disturb the flock entrusted to him. Therefore he must take care that the flock has the proper amount of food and drink, suitable clothing and footwear. Special groups such as the aged and children, the sick, those with particular

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63 Jerome Ep 2.1; Ep 16.1; Ep 130.19. RB 28.6.8.

64 RB 27.8-9.

65 RB 27.5.

66 T.Kardong, Benedictines, Glazier, Wilmington, 1988, p.130.

67 RB 63.2-3.
responsibilities such as the cellarer, the kitchen servers, those who are excommunicated, are to receive whatever care and help they need.\textsuperscript{68}

It is to be noted that the attention and care that is given is not only in what is done for the individual monks but it is also in an attitude of solicitude and care for the growth of the community.\textsuperscript{69} The word \textit{gerere} (to wage) used with the notion of care, shows that the exercise of this care is to be effective. In Casey's words it is a \textit{cool, sensible, energetic, constant and workmanlike} approach to his responsibility in this area.\textsuperscript{70}

Prior to the discussion of provision for the material needs, Benedict has devoted the earlier chapters of the rule to the general good of the monks with prescriptions about obedience, humility, silence, prayer.\textsuperscript{71} By ensuring that the monk has a suitable environment where he can live, placing nothing before the love of Christ, the abbot is fulfilling his role as pastor.\textsuperscript{72} Thus he would have no fear about the future examination that the shepherd would have to undergo about the sheep entrusted to him.\textsuperscript{73}

The shepherd who went to seek the lost one is also a model for the abbot in his care for individuals in need. He will show his solicitude in different ways according to the needs of different individuals. This will include gentleness if appropriate, but likewise sternness, reproof or rebuke if necessary.\textsuperscript{74} This is not only to ensure that the flock entrusted to his care does not dwindle, but in fact that there is an increase of a good

\textsuperscript{68} RB.39, 40, 55, 37, 36, 31, 35, 27, 28.

\textsuperscript{69} Casey,'Leadership in the Benedictine Tradition,' op.cit..p.62.

\textsuperscript{70} ibid.,p.63.

\textsuperscript{71} RB 5, 7, 6, 8-20.

\textsuperscript{72} RB 4.21.

\textsuperscript{73} RB 2.39.

\textsuperscript{74} RB 2.23-29.
flock.75 The same idea is repeated in the discussion on the need for the abbot to be
discerning and moderate, and to be able to provide a situation in which the strong are
challenged and the feeble are not overwhelmed. Benedict quotes from the Book of
Genesis, noting that without discretion the flock may be driven too hard and all will
die in a single day.76

A good pastor will not exercise care only towards those who are weak or in trouble.
Care will be exercised beyond problem solving, and will also be given so that the
monk may grow to a greater level of spiritual vitality.77 Such an approach of an abbot
who acts as a good shepherd, ensures that the whole community has the possibility of
living a life where all who belong to it, can truly seek God.78

The Abbot and the Discipline of the Rule

At the end of the prologue, Benedict writes just before chapter 1, ‘Here begins the text
of the rule. It is called a rule because it regulates the life of those who obey.’ The rule
is in fact the arrangement of a way of life for that most vigorous race, the cenobites,
and it is an arrangement that will lead those who live it to an experience of the
unspeakable sweetness of love.79 The abbot has been seen as a father and life-giver, he
is at the centre of the community as one caring for the strong and the erring, but he too
is subject to the discipline of the rule. He too lives under the rule and is taught and
formed by it.

75 RB 2.31-32.
76 RB 63.19. Gen 33:13
77 Casey, op.cit., p.65-66.
78 RB 58.7.
79 RB 1.13; Prol 49.
Frequently throughout the rule, Benedict reminds the abbot that he must consider his own weaknesses,

And so the reckoning he must give for others makes him concerned about his own condition. The warnings he gives to others for improvement serve to effect the correction of his own vices.80

In fact, his sense of being accountable, and his exercise of discipline is given a particular emphasis by the phrase used, *rationem redditurus est*. It is connected with a phrase from Augustine and is used again in chapter 64 in the context of Augustine's phrase, 'he should strive to be loved rather than feared.'81 Here we have an abbot, who though ultimately responsible and accountable, is also subject to weakness and to the discipline of the rule.

In this company of brothers, all subject to the rule and all being formed by the way of life, the abbot is to treat everyone equally unless a monk distinguishes himself by good actions and obedience or good works and humility.82 There are resonances here of the Prologue, ‘you will return by the labour of obedience to the one from whom you drifted through the inertia of disobedience.’83 The rule and the way of life are teachers but there is a discipline involved. These ideas are also present in the phrase, ‘we bear the same yoke of service.’ The use of the ideas of military service does include the element of difficulty, especially when linked with *baiulamus*, which means carrying a burden or something heavy. It is the same word that Luke uses in the gospel about carrying the cross.84 The idea of service had been also used by Benedict earlier in the rule in the phrase, ‘serve under a rule and an abbot.’85 Here the military imagery also

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80 RB 2.39-40
81 Augustine, *Epistulae* 211.15; RB 64.7.
82 RB 2.16-22.
83 RB. Prol 2-3.
84 RB 2.20. Lk 9:23.
85 RB 1.2
invokes another connection – serving under two banners, the rule and the superior. Sub used in connection with military imagery also means close to or near to, or even under the influence of. This would modify the generally harsher idea of the military imagery as well as the notion of dominance that sub could imply. Instead, the imagery may describe a group of people striving together and making their journey through life in the company of like-minded people, and in this case under the influence of the rule and the superior.

Another section of chapter 2 again picks up the idea of showing no partiality for persons in the monastery, but it adds the nuance of how difficult the task is. The phrase from Cyprian, difficile vel arduum, perhaps makes a connection between the difficulty of martyrdom and being an abbot. There is a reminder that the passing things of this world are not to be considered more important than the care of those entrusted to the abbot. Augustine had used a similar phrase, nolumus de terrenis istis, et vanissimis, et caducae vitae transitoriis, and both texts have some overtones of the letter of John, et mundus transitum. Again here the idea of the prime importance of the spiritual nature of the task is being emphasized. The abbot, like the brothers, must live under the discipline of the rule.

Much of the emphasis in chapter 64, The Installation of the Abbot, is on the qualities of the man elected as abbot, and what is expected of him. Twice during the chapter he is reminded that he is accountable, and there is a clear listing of qualities, both positive that he should possess, and negative that he should avoid. He is to be chaste, temperate and merciful, and always put mercy before judgment so that he himself may obtain the former. He is not to be restless and troubled, not extreme and headstrong, not jealous

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87 RB 2.30-36. Cyprian, Ad Fortunatem (de exhortatione martyrii), C 11.

88 Augustine, Sermones 113.6. 1 Jn 2:17.
and oversuspicious and prudence, moderation and discretion are to be his hallmarks. Such a description places the abbot simply as one with the possible weaknesses and virtues of his brothers.\textsuperscript{89}

The source of Benedict’s prescription that the abbot must make his goal the profit of his monks, not pre-eminence for himself, can be found in three references to Augustine.\textsuperscript{90} The exact words, \textit{praesse} and \textit{prodesse} are used by Augustine where he is reflecting on his own role and burden as a bishop.\textsuperscript{91} In another reference, Augustine comments that the task, not the honour of the position is important, and the purpose of it all is the well-being of the people. The same point is made in a lengthy discussion about Rachel and Leah. Here Augustine says it is never the fact of being a leader, but the usefulness of being thus that is important. The \textit{action and business} must be for the \textit{public benefit}, and indeed many will want to avoid such a laborious life exposed to common vicissitudes.\textsuperscript{92}

There are also three references from Augustine that form a background for Benedict’s teaching that the abbot must hate the faults but love the brothers. In one of Augustine’s letters, he concentrates on the need to correct faults so that the sinner may not perish.\textsuperscript{93} There is a development of this idea in another text, where Augustine notes that no matter how serious the sin, the sinner is never without hope. The passage ends with the phrase, \textit{dilige hominem, oderis vitium}.\textsuperscript{94} However, the reference is even clearer in the \textit{City of God}, where Augustine says that the man who lives by God’s standards, must

\textsuperscript{89} RB 64.7-8; 20-22; 9-10; 15.
\textsuperscript{90} The influence of Augustine is very strong in Chapter 64.
\textsuperscript{91} RB 64.8. Augustine, \textit{Sermones}, 340.1. The sermon was given on the anniversary of his ordination as a bishop.
\textsuperscript{92} Augustine, \textit{civ.},19.19; \textit{c. Faust.},25, 56.
\textsuperscript{93} RB 64.11. Augustine, \textit{epist.}, 211, 11.
\textsuperscript{94} Augustine, \textit{Sermones}. 49,5.
hate what is evil. 'He should not hate the person because of the fault, nor should he
love the fault because of the person. He should hate the fault, but love the man.'

Benedict also refers to Augustine when he notes that the abbot in correcting faults,
should use prudence and not extremes. The reference is rather oblique, but the
emphasis is on Augustine's use of the phrase *ne quid nimis* in his discussion of Psalm
118. Benedict uses the same phrase in discussing the need for moderation in the way
faults are corrected. He adds the image of not rubbing too hard in removing the rust,
lest the vessel be broken. A clever linguistic device is added by Benedict where he
uses the word *frangatur*, which has the idea of shattering into pieces. Then, in
describing the abbot's own frailty immediately afterwards, he uses a word with the
same root, *fragilitatem*. This emphasizes the abbot's own weakness. He, like the vase
is fragile, even easily destroyed.

The sense of the abbot as one with the community, subject to the rule and being
formed by the way of life, is much stronger in chapter 64 than in chapter 2. It would
seem that the strongly cenobitic emphasis of Augustine has indeed been an influence
on Benedict, and the emphasis on the master-disciple relationship in chapter 2 from the
*Rule of the Master* is modified.

If the abbot sees himself as subject to the discipline of the rule, though ultimately
responsible for his brothers, this must surely influence how he deals with those in the
community who show weakness. All the faults listed in the opening of the so-called
penal code chapters are ones to do with resistance to being formed by the way of life.
These include defiance, disobedience, arrogance, murmuring, opposition to the Holy
Rule and disdain for the direction of the seniors, meaning those who have lived the
way of life for a longer time.

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96 RB 64.12,13; Augustine, *psalm*, 118.4,1.

97 RB 23-30; RB 23.1.
A theme of love and service underlies the idea of prudence in correction and care for the monks, and this is an echo of the opening of Augustine's Rule:

Before all else live together in harmony, being of one mind and one heart on the way to God. For it is precisely for this reason that you have come to live together.\textsuperscript{98}

In whatever way that the abbot must ensure that wayward monks are punished, even excluded from the community, it is always simply for the ultimate goal that they may be healed. The phrase which concludes the chapters on the disciplinary code is \textit{ut sanentur}.\textsuperscript{99}

In this context, it is useful to examine the image of the physician or healer that Benedict introduces into chapter 27 and develops strongly in chapter 28. In this chapter the various procedures that the wise physician should follow are described - use of compresses, the ointment of encouragement, the medicine of divine Scripture, the cauterizing iron of excommunication and strokes of the rod, and finally the even better remedy of prayer. All of this is to bring about the health of the sick brother.\textsuperscript{100} The final surgical image is that, if all of the above does not work, 'the abbot must use the knife and amputate.' This final punishment is obviously so serious that it is a last resort - \textit{ad ultimum}, and the strength of the imagery emphasizes the seriousness – \textit{ustionem excommunicationis} with the idea of cauterization, fire, burning and \textit{plagarum virgae} where the use of \textit{plagarum} has the idea of a blow or stroke imparted with some violence.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} Rule of Augustine 1.2

\textsuperscript{99} RB 30.3.

\textsuperscript{100} RB 28.3-5. There is also an echo of RB 27.6.

\textsuperscript{101} RB 28.3.
The practice of cutting off an erring brother from the community by excluding him from places that are central symbols for belonging – the table and the oratory – has come from the ecclesial practices of excommunication of sinners. These practices were used less in the Church by Benedict’s time, but no doubt would have influenced him. However, the source of the practice is of far less significance than what is revealed of Benedict’s spiritual motivation in the way he carried out the excommunication, and the care he showed for those who incurred punishment.

There is an interesting range of descriptions for the brothers who need to be treated with concern throughout chapters 27 and 28. Mention is made of delinquentes fratres, fratrem fluctuantem, and infirmum fratrem. Various words are used for the sickness - infirmarum, debile and infirmati. There is an important change in context in chapter 28 where the brother is not so much considered as sick, in spite of the strong medical imagery for the cure. He is then one who has been frequenter correptus so there is the element of stubbornness.

In all these different circumstances with different causes and different requirements for healing, it is clear that the abbot must play an important role in the attempted cure. In chapter 27 he does not intervene directly but sends mature and wise brothers to help. Yet it is his responsibility to have great concern and act with speed, discernment and diligence. In chapter 28, where there is an element of difficulty implied, the abbot is

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102 RB 24.25. See RB 1980, op.cit., pp.416-419. Also J.Dallen, The Reconciling Community, Pueblo, New York, 1986, pp.56-58. The role of the bishop in ecclesial circles is seen to be similar to that of the abbot, regarding satisfaction and acceptance back into the community.

103 RB 1980, op.cit., p.419.

104 RB 27.1.3; RB 28.5.

105 RB 27.6,7,9.

106 RB 28.1.

107 RB 27.2-3; 5.
to act as the wise physician and carry out the healing procedures. 108 A comment is made at this late stage that prayer by the abbot and the brothers should be tried. 109 This surely makes the point that it is the abbot in the midst of the community, and the whole community together, who are responsible for bringing back the erring one. But it is the abbot himself who must be the one to use the knife and amputate if prayer is not effective. 110 Here there are echoes of the abbot being the one who is believed to represent Christ in the monastery where the abbot can make Christ present through his direct care and concern for the wayward brother. 111 It is the abbot and the community who do all they can to effect the healing and thus Christ is made present. Again the abbot is not alone.

Chapter 44, Satisfaction by the Excommunicated, shows the significant role the abbot plays in allowing the brother to return to the community. The role here is a dominant and sole one. He judges when sufficient satisfaction is made, after which the sinner prostrates himself at the feet of the abbot who may then re-admit him and allot to him whatever rank he decides. The erring brother cannot read or lead a psalm until the abbot permits and he will continue satisfaction until the abbot bids him cease. Those excommunicated for less serious faults likewise depend on the abbot's orders to cease satisfaction. 112 The abbot is mentioned eight times in this short chapter so there is no doubt about the centrality of the abbot's role in relation to the brothers who err and incur the punishment of excommunication.

The responsibility of the abbot in respect of his erring brother reflects the teaching of chapter 2 which sees the abbot as the father of the monastery with ultimate concern for

108 RB 28.2-4.
109 RB 28.4-5
110 RB 28.6.
111 RB 2.2.
112 RB 44.3-8.
the community of brothers and the welfare of each individual. In a kind of reverse way, the value and importance of community is thus emphasized by the teaching on the processes of excommunication and satisfaction. It is clear in these sections how central to the community the table and the oratory are, how much care the abbot has for the whole community, and how serious a fault it is considered, when anything is done that is other than the monk's seeking of God. But above all, it is the role of the abbot to do all he can to ensure that the erring one returns to the community and that the community is made whole again.

The Abbot and Wisdom.

All the monks, including the abbot, are living in the school for the Lord's service that Benedict set up. Whether the *schola* means a place of service or practice, or a group gathered for a common purpose, or a place for life long learning of Christ, there is certainly an element of a growth in wisdom that can happen to all who live the way of life. In fact, the criteria for choice of the abbot is merit of life and wisdom of teaching, even if he hold the last rank in the community. The abbot must live the way of life and be able to teach it to others. He must be learned in the divine law. Like the brothers whom he serves, the wisdom he possesses is the wisdom to seek God.

The very tone of the rule, especially in the prologue, is one that reflects what is called the wisdom literature of scripture. The point is, that although it contains certain theological principles, it is derived primarily from experiences of life and reflects

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113 RB Prol.45-50.

114 See discussion in Kardong, op.cit.,pp 1-32.

115 RB 64.2.

116 RB 64.9.

117 RB 7.27.
these. It is intended to be a guide to wise living in the practical situations of life.\(^{118}\) The opening phrase of the prologue to the rule, is a good example of this genre. ‘Listen, O my son, to the teachings of your master, and turn to them with the ear of your heart. Willingly accept the advice of a devoted father and put it into action.’ The phrase, ‘to the teachings of your master,’ does not appear in the prologue to the *Rule of the Master*.

So the abbot is expected to have wisdom in the way he acts and the way he teaches. Both Benedict and the Master remind the abbot that he must teach by word and example, and this obligation extends to his teaching of everyone, including the receptive and the hard-hearted.\(^{119}\) In both rules the welfare of those entrusted to him is of prime concern. In fact, this essential role flows directly from his role as father. The abbot must be a channel for transmitting the teaching that Christ gave in the Gospel. He must never in fact teach or command anything that would deviate from the Lord's instructions.\(^{120}\)

The image of the abbot as teacher appears early in chapter 2. An interesting word, *conspargatur*, is used. It normally means *sprinkled*, but it is used with the idea of leaven so has the notion of being worked into. The idea of a transformation by teaching that takes a long time to come to fulfillment is inherent in the text.\(^{121}\) *Discipulus* (disciple) is used five times in this text and is related to teaching. . It could mean simply one, who in following, is willing to learn.\(^{122}\)

\(^{118}\) *RB 1980*, op.cit.,p.145.
\(^{119}\) RM and RB 2.11-15.
\(^{120}\) RB 2.4.
\(^{121}\) RB 2.5
\(^{122}\) RB 2.5,6,11,12,13.
The abbot is reminded that he must use different methods of teaching according to circumstances — argument, appeal or reproof. He must threaten and coax by turns, 'now showing the sternness of a taskmaster, and now the tender affection of a father. Thus he should discipline the unruly and restless rather sharply, but entreat the obedient, mild and patient to make more progress.' In short, he must ever be a good teacher, attentive to the individual needs and strengths of those he teaches. In his concern for the brother who has been excommunicated and in his efforts to heal that brother, Benedict stresses the need for wisdom. The abbot has to be a wise physician. The attachment of the adjective sapiens to medicus (wise physician) in both chapters 27 and 28 indicates more than a healing notion. Wisdom is needed by the abbot to discern the treatment needed, just as it is needed to know how to teach.

The teaching is the wisdom of Christ and so

the abbot's teaching role is directed towards the creation and maintenance of a climate of meaning, in which the monks can corporately and severally, come to an appreciation of the significance of the elements of their life.

Though the importance of the teaching role of the abbot and his need for wisdom is clear, one may well ask does all wisdom reside in the abbot? In view of the previous discussion that situates the abbot within the community, and sees him as subject to the way of life and the discipline of the rule, the answer must surely be no. Indeed he is responsible and must have merit of life and wisdom of teaching, but Benedict knows the value of that gift of wisdom in others. The cellarer, who manages the goods of the monastery, is to be a wise person; those responsible for the guests are to be wise, 'so that the house of God should be wisely managed by wise persons;' the porter is to be a wise old monk, and wisdom for him consists in knowing how to listen to people as

123 RB.2.25.
124 RB.27.2 and 28.2.
125 Casey, op.cit., p.53.
well as to speak to them. The monks sent to give support to the excommunicated, the senpectae, are described by Benedict as wise, elderly brothers.

We can see that wisdom is highly prized by Benedict in those who are to share the abbot's burdens. However, it is also clear in chapter 3, On Calling the Brothers for Counsel, that Benedict regards the whole community as people of wisdom. The reason is, that all are to follow the rule as their mistress and no one is to deviate from it in the slightest. Assuming that this is so and that all – abbot and community – are followers of the rule, wise decisions will then be made.

An examination of chapter 3 and of its sources will further illustrate this. The Master introduces the idea of the council of the brothers at the end of the discussion on the abbot. Benedict sets aside a separate chapter to express how he sees the role of the council – chapter 3, Summoning the Brothers for Counsel.

The Master opens the section by giving the reason for calling the council, noting that this should be done in a situation regarding whatever is good for the monastery. He then notes the process – that all are called together for general discussion – and reminds us that this is being done by the abbot's authority. The reason for hearing the brothers speak is that there will be diverse opinions and the best advice for the common good may come from an unexpected source. If no apt counsel is proffered, the abbot will then decide. He closes the chapter reminding us that the goods of the monastery belong to everyone and to no one, everyone in the sense that eventually all

126 RB 31.1; 53.22; 66.1.
127 RB 27.2.
128 RB 3.7.
129 RM 2.41-50.
130 RM 2.41.
131 RM 42.46.
will replace others in positions of responsibility, and to no one because all are under the abbot's authority and have nothing of their own.\textsuperscript{132}

Benedict introduces some significant differences. The first one is that after all are called, the abbot himself explains the business. From the beginning of the chapter it is clear that it is for the abbot to decide after hearing advice, and he must do so not only in cases when there is no apt counsel as the master had stated.\textsuperscript{133} It would seem that Benedict is certain that apt counsel will always be available. The manner of expressing opinions is also emphasized by Benedict – this is to be done with humility and one is not to hold on to one's own will.\textsuperscript{134} Then he again emphasizes the abbot's authority, but reminds him that he too has obligations – after listening he must act with foresight and fairness.\textsuperscript{135} Benedict is more specific about the possible source of the unexpected insight by nominating the younger (in rank).\textsuperscript{136} It seems likely that \textit{junior} designates not so much one who is younger in age as one who is 'inferior' in rank.\textsuperscript{137} Benedict's use of the word \textit{junior} varies in other parts of the rule, particularly in chapter 63, entitled \textit{Community Rank}, where the word at times refers to inferior in rank. \textit{Juniores} and \textit{minores} seem to be used indiscriminately in that chapter.

There is another reminder to both the community and the abbot that all are to follow the rule and that the abbot must be accountable.\textsuperscript{138} A very significant feature of the chapter is the balance between community, abbot and God that is evident. For example

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132} RM 47.50.
\item \textsuperscript{133} RB 3.1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{134} RB 3.4.9.
\item \textsuperscript{135} RB 3.6.
\item \textsuperscript{136} RB 3.3.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Vogüé, \textit{Community and Abbot}, vol.1, op.cit., p.177, Footnote 28.
\item \textsuperscript{138} RB 3.7,11.
\end{itemize}
community and abbot, community and God, community, abbot and God are all used. 139

The last section of Benedict's chapter is a very important addition – that of the council of the seniors which is to be called in matters that are less serious. 140 The idea of the council has a very strong connection with early cenobitic life. 141 It was often connected with the seeking of advice about material goods, though Benedict seems to broaden this to anything of importance. There may be a precedent in Pachomian and Basilian cenobitism for consultation about monastic affairs, but there seems to be no earlier example of seeking the advice of the whole community. 142

However, the fundamental principles of the teaching of the Master and Benedict remain identical, especially in reference to the fact that the abbot must decide. Benedict is far more precise than the Master in discussing the abbatial prerogatives in convening the council, in presenting the question, in deliberating and in reaching decisions. The operation of the council is a pooling of insights for the enlightenment of the superior, who listens, then decides. The whole exercise is a jointly conducted search for the will of God. More supernatural elements are thus introduced by Benedict in his teaching. 143

It should also be noted that the whole exercise is not one of parliamentary democracy. At no stage is the majority view important. There is simply an effort, through careful listening to the wisdom of all, to discern the will of God. The abbot knows that he is not the exclusive mediator of wisdom, and he is open to a variety of possibilities. He listens to all possible sources of wisdom and then carefully discerns where the truth

139 RB 63.1,5,6,9; 3; 11.

140 RB 3.12-13.


lies. On the part of both monks and abbot, political techniques to ensure the acceptance of a viewpoint are not used.\textsuperscript{144}

In fact, Benedict upholds the abbot's absolute sovereignty. Nonetheless the obligations on the abbot to present the business, listen to the counsel given, settle all with foresight and fairness and be subject to the rule and accountable, do in fact introduce a strong modification. It is a clear indication that the brothers of the monastery are expected to make a strong contribution to the way the affairs of the community will be carried out. However, all are subject to the rule, and when the brothers express their opinion it is supported by humility, never immoderately, or without restraint.\textsuperscript{145}

Throughout the chapter, emphasis is given to the points made above, by the language Benedict has chosen to use. The use of words such as \textit{defendere, proterve, contendere}, (to assert, impudently, to argue) seem to indicate that the process of decision making could imply some possibility of tension.\textsuperscript{146} Therefore the process needs real deliberation. The abbot must really listen to the advice being given, and in order to draw out the truth there is effort needed, as indicated in the use of such words as \textit{tractet, iudicaverit, pendat arbitrio}. Only if this care is taken can the outcome be described as having foresight and justice.\textsuperscript{147} The decision is described as the one that will be conducive to a better condition, and the word \textit{salubrius} also includes the idea of what is for the good or the health of the community.\textsuperscript{148} If that is the case, then all may obey. It is obvious that the description of the process of taking counsel and the obligations on both the community and the abbot, do indeed modify the absolute

\textsuperscript{145} RB 3.7,10; 4; 10.
\textsuperscript{146} RB 3.4,9.
\textsuperscript{147} RB 3.2; 5; 6.
\textsuperscript{148} RB 3.5.
nature of the abbot's role, and show how dependent he is on the wisdom of the whole community.

However, what clearly emerges from the teaching in these chapters is that there can be no question about the central role of the abbot in the life of the Benedictine community. He is situated at the centre of the community, he too is subject to the discipline of the rule and his role is to be a giver of life to the community by wise teaching, and above all he is to make Christ present to all.
CHAPTER 3

THE ABBOT AND THOSE WHO HOLD PLACES OF SPECIAL SERVICE IN THE MONASTERY

In Benedict's mind, the abbot holds a most significant and central place in the monastery. This next section will discuss sections of the rule which to some extent modify the absolute position of the abbot, yet show him at the centre of a community living a common way of life and being able to confidently share his burdens with some members of that community. This will be done by a discussion of four chapters:

Chapter 21. *The Deans of the monastery*
Chapter 31. *The Qualities of the Cellarer*
Chapter 65. *The Prior of the Monastery*

In both the *Rule of the Master* and the *Rule of Benedict*, significant attention is given to officials of the monastery. They are given particular areas of responsibility and service in the community and in that way share in the work of the abbot. However, in most cases, it is clear that the abbot appoints people to the position and that these officials are responsible to him. Their very existence is a modification of the abbot's absolute control and it stresses the reciprocal duty of care between abbot and brothers.

**The Deans**

The Master has a much more detailed discussion of the role of the deans, than does Benedict. The significance of the responsibilities of the deans is highlighted both by the content of the chapter and by its position in the text. In the *Rule of the Master*, this

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1 RM.11.
chapter is the first chapter after the "spiritual" chapters of the opening section and appears under a section heading, "Here begins the organization of the monastery: delineation, observance, structure, continuity, supervision and norms." It is here that the teaching on the deans is placed. The chapter clearly states at its opening that the Master sees the appointment of the deans as a help to the abbot in his role of guiding the monks in their spiritual battle. Because the deans will be helping the brothers to purge their vices and sins the abbot can be at ease regarding his accountability for the brothers. The Master sees the role of the deans as that of close supervision and correction and most of the chapter is given to a detailed account of where this is required.

The number of deans – two deans for ten monks – is very clear and specific, and this too is related to the question of supervision. If one dean is absent the other will always be there. The giving of the rod as a symbol of office symbolizes this role.

The personal qualities necessary in order to be chosen are mentioned. Deans are to be 'chosen for their proven gravity, wisdom, moderation, vigilance and humility, as well as the perfection of their ways.' Later in the chapter there is again reference to the qualities of the deans and they are reminded that, while caring for others, they are to be making progress themselves.

The last section of the chapter discusses the role of the deans regarding the clothing and sleeping arrangements of the monks, which Benedict develops in a separate chapter following his chapter on the deans.

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2 RM 11.1-3,14.
3 RM 11.20-90.
5 RM 11.91-93.
6 RB 22. How the Monks should Sleep.
Chapter 21 in the Rule of Benedict is a short chapter and has none of the details of the Master's teaching. Vogüé discusses in detail Benedict's use of the word decani, (deans), instead of praepositi (provosts), and notes that this use of a different word indicates that he sees the function differently. Vogüé comments that the provosts are, in the Master's eyes, rather like assistant masters in a school. These officials always and everywhere extend the educational work of the abbot. Benedict connects the function with the Biblical tradition of Moses in the desert. The praepositi of the Master suggests ecclesial structures, whereas Benedict uses the word praepositi for the prior, and it is probable that Benedict's use of seniores in various places of the rule is used to mean the deans.

Benedict still maintains the abbot's role as a very strong one. Certain aspects of the function of the leader appear more clearly when the subordinate ranks are examined. The coherence of the system emerges through this comparison. 'In all matters they should take care of their deaneries according to the commandments of God and the orders of their abbot.' There is a very clear connection with the abbot, 'Only those should be chosen deans with whom the abbot can confidently share his burdens,' and in the carrying out of the role with their groups of ten, the phrase used suggests that a watchful concern is exercised, sollicitudinem gerant.

This is very different from the operation of the deans in the Rule of the Master where they were given the office of supervision and discipline, symbolized by the giving of

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9 ibid.,p.258.
10 RB 21.2.
11 RB 21.2.
the rod. Here one does not sense the sharing of the burdens of the abbot’s office. The key phrase in Benedict, that only those are to be chosen deans, ‘with whom the abbot can confidently share his burdens’ is placed between the opening statement, ‘of good reputation and holy life,’ and the statement, ‘[t]hey should not be chosen by rank, but for the merit of their lives and the wisdom of their teaching.’ These criteria are the same as those for the selection of the abbot so there is a strong emphasis on the qualities necessary in those who assume this role. The idea of worthiness is emphasized, and the deans are also reminded not to be puffed up with pride. The threefold warning given if this happens, reminds us of the warnings to erring brothers before excommunication. This connection emphasizes the seriousness of a situation where a dean may prove unworthy of his office.

Another difference in Benedict is the reason given for their choice – a fairly general and pragmatic one – ‘if the community is large.’ One senses that in the Master the deans are much more central to the organization. Benedict is not specific about the numbers, unlike the Master with his two for groups of ten, nor does have the same emphasis on supervision. Instead, there is a very general statement about roles and a very specific statement about the relationship to God and the abbot. ‘In all matters they should take care of their deaneries according to commandments of God and the orders of their abbot.’

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12 RM 11.
13 RB 21.1,3,4.
14 RB 64.2.
15 RB 21.1,4,6; 5-7.
16 RB 23,29.
17 RB 21.1.
18 RB 21.2.
A comparison of these two chapters in the Master and in Benedict shows significant adaptation and simplification in Benedict's chapter. The central distinction seems to be in the emphasis given by Benedict in the way the deans share the burdens of the abbot's office. However, at all times the abbot still bears the ultimate responsibility. There is a "humanness" about Benedict's chapter because of the removal of the Master's strong emphasis on supervision.

For Benedict, it seems that the significance of the deans fades throughout the rest of the rule. After giving 'the criteria for choosing them and the ways of deposing them,' very little else is said.

Insistence on the authority and responsibility of the abbot, on the one hand, and on fraternal relations, on the other: this twofold accent seems to have entailed a lessening of the attention previously given to the subordinate officers, the deans. 19

This idea is very significant in the light of the importance of the abbot and his central place within the community.

The Cellarer

Another of the abbot's collaborators is the cellarer and his role is of great significance because of his care for the goods of the monastery. This care is also a very important part of the abbot's role since it is the abbot who is ultimately responsible for all things and for all people in the monastery. This includes being a father, caring for all concerns, spiritual and material, in the 'house of God.' 20

Both Benedict and the Master maintain the abbot's role strongly in the respective chapters on the cellarer. 21 The Master reminds the cellarer that he is to give to all only

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20 RB 31.19.

21 RM 16 and RB 31.
with the permission of the abbot. In the Master’s rule, the cellarer is under the direct care of the abbot since he does not belong to a deanery.

Benedict makes a strong connection of the cellarer with the abbot. He mentions that the cellarer has to care for all, but by the abbot’s orders, and he is told that he has to take care of all that the abbot has entrusted to him, nor is he to presume to do what the abbot has forbidden. This idea is repeated four times in the chapter. A significant development from the Master occurs in the opening listing of qualities of the cellarer. There are echoes here of some of the qualities listed regarding the abbot himself. Some of the words are the same, sapiens, non turbulentus, sobrius. However, other words are used appropriate to the role, non multum edax, non elatus, non iniuriosus, non tardus, non prodigus. The latter word is used again later in the chapter. The same linguistic device is used in listing the qualities as in chapter 64, positive characteristics given first, followed by a list of negative characteristics, emphasized by the use of non. The list concludes with the important phrase - he is to be ‘like a father to the whole community’. This links him closely with the abbot in the characteristics he is expected to have - the abbot a father, the cellarer like a father. The Master merely says that the cellarer is to be faithful and temperate. The cellarer is seen to be responsible for the whole community, unlike the deans with their groups of ten. The connection

22 RM 16.32-37.
23 RB 31.3-5,7,15.
24 RB 31.1,cf 64.2 & 21.4; 64.16; 64.9.
25 RB 31.1; 12.
26 RB 31.1, 64.15.
27 RB 31.1-3. Kardong, op.cit.,p.261, notes that the translation could also be ‘like the father’. This would link the cellarer even more closely with the abbot.
with the abbot is also made regarding the question of accountability, because Benedict uses the same phrase, *rationem redditurus est.*

Chapter 16 of the *Rule of the Master* contains an interesting approach to the material things of the monastery which is not included specifically in Benedict's rule. He develops a "theology" about material things that all are "divine", since everything including food and clothes, are God's gifts. He also develops a discussion on the tools belonging to everyone, 'the goods of the monastery belong to everyone and no one.' Both Benedict and the Master develop practical details about the handling of the tools and the goods in succeeding chapters to that of the cellarer.

Benedict does not give the same reasons for the care of the goods, that is, that they are all divine because they are God's gifts. But he does require the same respect, and introduces the striking phrase about care and reverence, 'He will regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar.' He then adds, further to this attitude, that nothing is to be neglected, and he notes that the cellarer is not to be wasteful and extravagant and is to do all with moderation.

There is a very important development in this chapter of Benedict that is not evident in the Master's chapter. This development is in the teaching of Benedict on relationships among the brothers and it is a significant modification of the abbot's sole responsibility becoming a very important point especially in later chapters of the rule.

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29 RB 31.9, 2.34, 64.7.
30 RM 16.61.
31 RM 17 and RB 32.
32 RB 31.10.
33 RB 31.11-12.
The cellarer is told not to annoy the brothers even if he has to deny an unreasonable request. He is to show every care and concern for the sick, children, guests and the poor, and will be held accountable for this behaviour. Humility and kindness are to be his hallmarks and so important is his relationship with his brothers that he is to be given help when necessary so that peace and harmony can be maintained in the house of God. The brothers asking for something have also a mutual responsibility and must make their requests at the proper time. 34

As the abbot may have deans to help ‘if the community is rather large’, so the cellarer may have help for the same reason. Exactly the same phrase is used but it is interesting that the help is given to the cellarer so that he may calmly perform the duties of his office. 35 The ultimate aim is that all may be at peace. There is balance and consideration about how the cellarer and brothers deal with each other. The abbot, though always responsible, will not deal directly with requests that the cellarer handles. In the end no one will be disquieted or distressed in the house of God. 36

The Prior of the Monastery.

Another official, the prior, is available to carry out what the abbot assigns to him, and in this way the abbot’s role is slightly modified. However, the chapter on the prior consists mainly of the difficulties that having a prior can pose, yet the discussion can also be seen as expressing Benedict’s flexibility in the struggle to find out what is best for the community.

The term praepositi, which Benedict uses for the prior, is used by the Master to refer to the deans, and by Augustine it is used for superiors. Benedict devotes chapter 65 to the prior, whereas the Master includes a lengthy discussion on reasons for not having a

34 RB 31.6-7; 9; 17-19; 18.
35 RB 31.17; 21.1.
36 RB 31.19.
second to himself appointed. The Master also encourages the community to change rank constantly.† Benedict, in discussing the prior, notes that if possible, it is better not to have one.

For the preservation of peace and love we have, therefore, judged it best for the abbot to make all decisions in the conduct of his monastery. If possible, as we have already established, the sole operation of the monastery should be managed through deans under the abbot’s direction.‡

However, he then goes on to say,

But if local conditions call for it, or the community makes a reasonable and humble request, and the abbot judges it best, then let him, with the advice of God-fearing brothers choose the man he wants and himself make him his prior.††

This passage is a key one in that it sets out principles by which the abbot will operate and adapt when necessary. However, again the abbot retains the responsibility and this is developed in the next section of the chapter, where Benedict says that the prior is to carry out respectfully what his abbot assigns to him and do nothing contrary to the abbot’s wishes and arrangements. The idea is repeated positively and negatively, ‘But this prior must respectfully do what is told by his abbot, without acting against the abbot’s will and arrangements.’ The prior can be deposed or even excommunicated if he does not act accordingly. In the case of the prior four warnings are given, whereas in the case of the deans, as in excommunication of members of the community, a threefold warning is given. A No such prescription exists in the chapter on the cellarer and it is as if the abbot expects that the right person will be chosen for the position.

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37 RM 92.
38 RB 65.11-12.
40 RB 65.16.
41 RB 65.18; RB 21,23,29.
This warning to the prior, of punishment to be given for pride, is a repetition of the phrase at the end of the chapter on the deans. Both, if found unworthy, are to be removed from office and replaced by someone worthy. 'We prescribe the same course of action in regard to the prior.'\textsuperscript{42} However once more the focus turns to the abbot who is reminded that he is accountable to God. A strong reason is given and it is that 'the flames of envy and jealousy will not sear his soul.'\textsuperscript{43}

In the case of the prior, it may well be that the existence of the position would modify the role of the abbot, but there are so many cautions and prescriptions around the operation of the role, that the modification would only be a very slight one. However, the chapter does show how Benedict is ready to struggle with finding a suitable way of governing the monastery. After reading this chapter, and seeing the expectation that the abbot must take into account such things as local circumstances, the community's requests, the advice of God-fearing brothers, it would be difficult to hold the belief that Benedict's abbot is an autocrat who may do as he wishes. This unlikely chapter emphasises very clearly and directly what the rest of the rule is also saying about the matter.

The Porter.

Another important official is the porter or gate keeper. The importance of the role lies in the fact that he is the link between the monastery and the outside world. When the details, as Benedict described them, are compared with the Master's view of the specifics of the role, it becomes very clear why Benedict considered the porter so important. The descriptions centre around the type of person the porter is and the quality of his relationships with those who visit the monastery. As with all the special roles in the monastery, it is far from being merely a functional role.

\textsuperscript{42} RB 21.7.

\textsuperscript{43} RB 65.22.
The Master notes early in the chapter that the porters (two of them) are to open and close the gates and to announce the arrivals to the abbot. They are to do whatever manual labour they can, help with the serving as far as they are able, feed the dogs and care for the animals, clean the gate and light the night lamp. They are also to lock the gates and join the community when the time comes for reading and for the Opus Dei.

Presumably, at those times, the gate was unattended.

This is very different to the way that Benedict sees the role. The porter is always to be present to answer the call of those who come. The word *responsum* (or *respondeat*) is used four times in the opening verses. His ability to respond is because he knows how to listen to those who come. His response is one of gratitude or blessing and is made promptly and with love. This must ensure that all who come, including the poor, experience a genuine welcome.

The first quality of one who is the porter is that he be wise, and this is an echo of the qualities required of other officials, the deans, the seniors, the cellarer, the guestmaster and the abbot himself. The quality of wisdom is connected with age and perhaps one can assume that the kind of wisdom meant is a practical wisdom that comes from having lived the monastic way of life for a long time. In contrast, the Master used the term advanced in age (*aetate decrepitis*) with the emphasis on age throughout the chapter and no mention of wisdom.

Benedict also adds the point that help must be given if the porter needs it, and one can assume that as for the cellarer, the kitchen servers, and the guestmaster, this is to

44 RM 95.2, 6-12, 4-5.
45 RB 66.1-4.
46 RB 66.1;3.
47 RB 66.1; 21.4; 27.2; 31.1; 53.22; 28.2; 64.2.
48 RM 95.1.
ensure that the person is not overwhelmed. It is also to ensure that the role is carried out as expected.\textsuperscript{49} One can judge that the first contact visitors have with the monastery was intended to be a happy one.

After the guests have been received by the porter there is a further contrast in The Master's and Benedict's approach towards guests who stay on in the monastery. In Benedict's chapter on The Reception of Guests, the abbot has a notable role, hurrying to meet the guest with every mark of love as soon as the guest is announced. The basic motivation is that the guest has been received as Christ, which is the attitude that informs the porter's welcome response.\textsuperscript{50} The whole community is involved in the ritual welcome of the washing of the feet, an echo of the service of the weekly kitchen servers.\textsuperscript{51} Apart from the two brothers who serve in the kitchen of the guests — ones who can fulfil the role well — the specific mention of those who deal directly with the guests is brief.\textsuperscript{52} The brother who is guestmaster is to be full of the fear of God, a sufficient number of beds is to be made up. Then there is another comment indicating the kind of person that should be assigned to the role: 'And the house of God is to be wisely managed by wise persons.'

The qualities and attitudes stand out markedly in contrast to the Master's approach. Though he sets the motivation as a spiritual one by using the text, '[y]ou should make hospitality your special care,'\textsuperscript{53} there are strong limits to the hospitality offered. After two days of rest is allowed, the guest must then either work or leave.\textsuperscript{54} The guestmaster in the Master is not designated because he is a man of wisdom, but he is

\textsuperscript{49} RB 66.5; 31.7; 35.3-4; 53.18,20.

\textsuperscript{50} RB 53.1, 3.

\textsuperscript{51} RB 53.13; 35.9.

\textsuperscript{52} RB 53.17; 21-22.

\textsuperscript{53} RM 78.17.

\textsuperscript{54} RM 78.4-8.
one who carries out a task of 'precautionary surveillance'. This attitude of suspicion dominates most of the description. If the requirements of charity are being fulfilled by the fact that there is always a brother to accompany the guests wherever they are, the other aspect of this accompaniment is to protect the goods of the monastery from persons who are not trusted, though they are not aware of this.

Two monks are assigned to the task, not for mutual support, but so that the supervision is constant. The stark contrast is summed up unequivocally in the final sentence. 'At any rate they are to be watched by those brothers day and night, every day.' This brief discussion on the continuing care of the guests is included, because it reflects so well the underlying attitudes of Benedict and the Master that appear at the first reception of those who come to the monastery.

**Fraternal Relationships**

This teaching of Benedict is a new development from that of the Master and does provide another dimension, and a most significant one. The preceding discussion on the Council, the Deans, the Cellarer, the Prior and those who deal with the guests has shown some modification of the abbot's role because of their very existence, and the important role they play. However the point has been made that at times this is not a great modification. At all times the abbot's role is primary.

The emphasis on relations in the community is a far more important modification and would lead to an agreement with Vogüé's comments on the deans where he notes that the emphasis on the role of the abbot and on fraternal relations lessens the attention

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55 RM 79.5-22.

56 RM 79.14; 5; 34.
given to the deans.\textsuperscript{57} This could also be true regarding other officials such as the cellarer and the prior.

In later chapters of the rule, chapters 63 and 67-72, the abbot's responsibility is left untouched, but the focus and emphasis is moved to the community.\textsuperscript{58} The relationships of love amongst the brothers and between the abbot and his brothers were very important to Benedict, and his emphasis on this, indicates that he saw the \textit{coenobium} - the relationships in the community - as central to his teaching.

The Master spoke against set ranks in the community, but Benedict is clear that rank, as an expression of order in the community, is important.\textsuperscript{59} In the same way that no one will be distressed in the house of God if the cellarer acts as he should, there is a sense that right order will likewise bring peace in relationships among the monks.\textsuperscript{60} The examples given by Benedict when rank is exercised, are times of ritual or liturgical celebrations, the kiss of peace, Communion, leading the psalms or standing in choir. Rank is to be determined by date of entry, virtue of lives and the decision of the abbot. Here too, the abbot has a strong role and can decide to change this order. However, he is reminded of his accountability and is not to make any unjust arrangements 'as though he had the power to do whatever he wished.'\textsuperscript{61}

Mutual relations between younger monks and older ones are then referred to, and this is a repetition of the idea in the maxim from the early part of the rule, '[respect] the seniors. Love the juniors.' Here the idea is expressed thus, 'The younger monks then must respect their seniors and the seniors must love their juniors'. Their behaviour

\textsuperscript{57} Vogüé, \textit{Spiritual and Doctrinal Commentary}, op.cit., p.173.

\textsuperscript{58} Vogüé, \textit{Community and Abbot}, vol.2, op.cit., Chapter 9. These chapters are discussed in this chapter under the heading, \textit{Fraternal Relations and Care for the Inner Life}.

\textsuperscript{59} RM 92; RB 63.

\textsuperscript{60} RB 31.9; 63.2.

\textsuperscript{61} RB 63.7; 2-3.
towards each other is governed by the scripture passage, which appears towards the end of the chapter, '[they] should each try to be the first to show respect to the other.'

_Honorent_ and _diligent_ are used, and both show strong aspects of mutuality. Respect is required, as well as loving or holding one another dear. Benedict uses the words, _iunior, minor, maior, prior_, apparently indiscriminately, and this shows that the question is not merely one of age, but also of one who has less or more experience in the way of life.

The chapter, having opened with the expression of rank in more formal settings, then leads to a discussion of the way more ordinary interactions between older and younger monks should take place. These have to do with the modes of address, 'brother' for the younger and 'nonnus' or 'venerable father' for the seniors. It is also noted that the younger should ask the senior for a blessing when they meet, and the younger should offer a seat to the older. Benedict is concerned about the way all interact with one another, both formally and informally.

After the opening of the discussion on relationships between senior and junior monks, the question of the abbot's relationships with his monks is again discussed.

But the abbot, because we believe that he holds the place of Christ, is to be called lord and abbot, not for any claim of his own, but out of honour and love for Christ.

This is a profound statement about the abbot's role, and it takes it far beyond any idea of connecting rank to privilege. The words chosen by Benedict are an echo of the Gospel passage where Christ washes the feet of the apostles at the last supper, a powerful symbol of service. As Christ came to serve, so service must characterise the

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62 RB 4.70; 63.10; Rom 12:10; RB 63.17.

63 RB 63.7, 10, 12, 15, 16.

64 RB 63.13.

65 Jn. 13:13-15. The text reads, "'Do you understand' he said, 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord and rightly; so I am. If I then, the Lord and Master, have
abbot’s role. Again he is called to accountability, and in his behaviour he must ‘show himself worthy of such honour.’ The idea is repeated in the exact words that are used earlier in the rule, that we believe that the abbot holds the place of Christ. This must govern the way abbot and community relate with each other.

In chapter 68, Assignment of Impossible tasks to a Brother, it is clear that the abbot’s role is dominant. If the brother is assigned either a task that is ‘heavy’ or ‘impossible’ he must first accept the order. But if he then sees that the weight of the burden is too much, he may speak, albeit with the prescriptions about choosing the appropriate moment, and he must explain his situation patiently, without pride, obstinacy or refusal. The superior, though having to listen to the explanation, may still be determined to hold to the original orders. If this happens, the brother must see this as best, and in love obey. Though in the end the brother may have to accept what is asked of him, there is room for discussion of the situation, and there is a tone of acceptance, respect and understanding of the difficulty a brother may experience, that bespeaks loving relationships. A list of words expresses this, accepting the order ‘with all gentleness and obedience’, speaking ‘patiently.. without pride, obstinacy or refusal.’ The monk is even reminded that, if in the final analysis, the situation is not changed, there should be obedience given in love. The abbot’s role is still dominant, but consideration is certainly given to the brother’s needs.

washed your feet, you should wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.”

66 RB 63.14.
67 RB 63.13; 2.2.
68 RB 68.2-3.
69 RB 68.4-5.
70 RB 68.2-3.
71 RB 68.5.
Likewise at first glance there does not seem to be much emphasis on mutuality in the chapters, *The Presumption of Defending Another in the Monastery*, or *The Presumption of Striking another Monk at Will*. The monk is warned that this is not to be done. However, at least, no one may excommunicate or strike any of his brothers, 'unless he has been given this power by the abbot.' The repetition of *praesumat* and *praesumatur*, shows that one can never take this right for granted. Even family ties are less important than the command of the abbot. Overall, there is the desire that contention will be avoided and that all will be done in a moderate and reasonable way. This is what one would expect of a community where relationships are based on love and respect.

The teaching develops in the chapter, *Mutual Obedience*, where it is clearly stated that the responsibility of the brothers is to be obedient to one another as well as to the abbot. The opening words of the chapter are important, 'the blessing of obedience'. This carries the idea that one of the aspects of obedience, the fact that it is to be shown by all not only to the abbot, but to each other (*invicem*, mutually or reciprocally,) is indeed a boon or blessing or even good news. One can know with certainty, that it is by this way of obedience to each other, that we go to God. This is a very significant point coming towards the end of the rule, and after such earlier emphasis on the role of the abbot.

72 RB 69; 70.
73 RB 70.2.
74 RB 69.1, 3.
75 RB 69.2.
76 RB 69.3; 70.5.
77 RB 71.1-2.
78 RB 71.1-2.
There is a reminder that orders of the abbot, or of the prior appointed by him, are to take precedence. It is stated that the younger are to obey the seniors with love and concern. Here there is an echo of phrases used earlier, but the words used there are *honorent* for the way the younger should relate to the senior, and *diligat* for the way the senior should relate to the junior. However, the junior is now told to obey the seniors ‘with every mark of loving attention’. This is obedience done in love, affection or with esteem, and it is to show anxious care and attention. Benedict considered that the seniors had authority over the juniors, but the context is one that reflects that the obedience is given in consideration of the wisdom of the senior’s experience. It is given always in a climate of affectionate mutuality. *Sollicitudine* (watchful care) is the same word used for the way the abbot deals with the monk who needs special care.

The mention of what has to be done if these loving relationships are not carried out, also has a connection with earlier chapters, and it shows how serious a situation it is if there is not mutual obedience. The final stage will be corporal punishment, or if there is great stubbornness, expulsion. Again, as in the chapters on excommunication, the nature of the punishment shows the importance of fulfilling what is required in Benedict’s teaching. In this case, this is mutual and loving obedience to each other in the monastery. However, before the final and serious punishment is taken, a ritual of reconciliation is suggested. If there is any sense that another is disturbed or perturbed at him, the brother ‘should instantly prostrate on the floor at his feet to make satisfaction and remain there until the disturbance has been healed by a blessing.’ In fact it is stated that only those who refuse to do this will be punished further, implying that if forgiveness is asked for and given mutually in this way, healing of relationships happens. All will be put to rights, and the health of the community restored, through this.

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79 RB 71.3-5; 63.10.
80 RB 71.4; 27.5.
81 RB 71.9; RB 27,28.
82 RB 71.7-9.
The fullness of the teaching on mutuality and loving relationships in the monastery, is contained in chapter 72, *The Good Zeal of Monks*. The chapter reminds the brothers that the way of good zeal must be fostered with fervent love, that they must show each other respect, bear one another's weaknesses with patience, compete in obedience to each other, put the concerns of others before their own. A very important connection is made in a description of the totality of relationships in community, all being interactive and of equal importance. The only mention of the abbot in this chapter is in the context of familiarity and love: ‘To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers, to God loving fear, to their abbot unfeigned and humble love.’

Something of the intensity of the teaching in the chapter is expressed through repetition of ideas and the stress on words. *Zelus* (zeal) is used both positively and negatively, and it expresses passion and intensity, whether used for good or ill. It is linked with *ferventissimo amore*, (most fervent love) which again stresses the ardour and strong desire that should be evident in the monk's quest. The same phrase is used as in an earlier chapter, *honore se invicem praeveniant*, (to show respect to one another) as the motive for the loving relationships that should be sought. Never before in the rule has there been such clear teaching on community interactions as in the verses that follow: ‘They should bear each other's weaknesses of both body and character with the utmost patience.’ There is even to be competition in obedience to each other, and the word *impendant* has the idea included of the sacrifice that is involved, as energy is expended in the effort to achieve this mutuality. This same word is repeated regarding fraternal love.

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83 RB 72.3-7.
84 RB 72.11-12.
85 RB 72.1-3.
86 RB 72.4; 63.17; Rom 12:10.
87 RB 72.5,6,8.
This strong emphasis on mutual love is brought together in a sort of summary at the end of the chapter. *Caritas* is used twice regarding the love of brothers and the love of the abbot; *diligant* is also used, as well as *amore Deum.* Vogüé notes that 'the theme of mutual relations is sublimated in an ideal picture in which all is fervor, spontaneity and love.'

Yet there remains one further idea as the chapter ends. Christ is situated at the centre of this way of life and there is the image of all being brought in oneness to everlasting life. *Omnino* and *nihil* show how important it is that absolutely nothing is to be preferred to Christ, and the use of *pariter* (all together) completes the emphasis on what is the result of living in these mutual relationships of love. This is indeed the final stage for those who have lived, bound together, serving under a rule and an abbot.

These last chapters do indeed show a shift in emphasis from the abbot's role, to relationships amongst members of the community. This has happened as Benedict wrote the rule, as can be seen when changing emphases are traced throughout the text as it develops. These chapters also indicate an extraordinary shift from the almost wholly vertical structuring of relationships in the *Rule of the Master.* This is not to say that the abbot's role becomes secondary. Indeed it is always central for Benedict, but it is clear that another dimension is added – an emphasis on the community relationships.

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88 RB 72.8-10.


90 RB 72.12.

91 RB 1.2.
CHAPTER 4

AUTHORITY, OBEDIENCE AND MUTUAL OBEDIENCE.

The Choice of Scripture Texts

At this point it is possible to draw some conclusions from the above discussion and to summarize how Benedict sees authority, and the other side of the coin, obedience. A strong indicator of how Benedict sees roles, attitudes and responses in relation to authority and obedience, is contained in the texts from scripture that he has chosen in the chapters under discussion. The rule is soundly based on scripture, and Benedict seems to be able to use appropriate texts freely. An examination of these texts show that they are centred around who the abbot is, how he is to act and how the brothers are to respond.

In chapter 2, *The Qualifications of an Abbot*, Benedict immediately approaches the question of who the abbot is by the use of the text, '[you] have received the Spirit of adoption of children, in which we cry: Abba Father!' This is what he is called, *Abba*, and this is what he has to live up to. The way he is to act and the kind of community he is to lead all flow from this.

The scripture texts reveal a great deal about how the abbot, the *Abbas*, is to act. A series of quotations in chapter 2 make a very significant point. At all times the abbot must act in a way befitting what he teaches. He must model in his behaviour the life to which he is calling his monks, 'lest he be found guilty after having preached to others, so that the Lord will not blame him saying, 'Why do you proclaim my just deeds and take my covenant on your lips? For you have hated discipline and thrown my words behind you.' At no time should the abbot be able to be reproached with the words,

1 RB 1-3; Rom 8:15.
'You noticed the speck in your brother's eye, but did not see the plank in your own.'\(^2\) In his treatment of the community, there is to be no distinction based on previous rank, since 'whether slave or free, we are all one in Christ,' and 'with God there is no favoritism.' However, account must be taken of different temperaments in encouraging the monks to live in the way to which they have been called. The advice given is to 'correct, entreat, reproach' as it is appropriate.\(^3\)

So important is the abbot's role in calling the monk to conversion that, if words are not effective, other means are to be employed. 'The fool is not corrected by words.' As a father has to correct a wayward son at times with severity, the advice is given: 'Strike your son with the rod and you will free his soul from death.' This theme is picked up very strongly in the chapters that have to do with faults and correction, because it is 'not the healthy but the sick who need a physician.' Care for the weak is a constant consideration so that the abbot will never be reproached as in this text: 'You took for yourselves what you saw was plump, but the feeble you threw out.' The cellarer too is to be aware of the fate of anyone 'who should scandalize one of these little ones.'\(^4\)

What can seem excessive severity is thoroughly tempered by the bulk of the scripture quotations that Benedict uses in describing how the abbot and officials are to act. When correction has to be given by the abbot he is then to send brothers to console the one who is being punished 'so that he be not devoured by too much sorrow.' At such times, 'let love for him be reaffirmed and let everyone pray for him.' The abbot himself is to seek the lost and carry it back to the flock, having 'placed it on his shoulders.'\(^5\) In his behaviour he is always to 'put mercy before judgment,' and is always to be moderate, knowing that if he makes his 'flock walk too far, they will all

\(^2\) RB 2.13-15; 1 Cor 9:27; Ps 50:16-17; Matt 7:3.

\(^3\) RB 2.20, 23; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:8; Rom 2:11; 2 Tim 4:2.

\(^4\) RB 2.28,29; 27.1.7; 31.16; Prov 29:19,23:14; Matt 9:12; Ezec 34:3-4; Matt 18:6.

\(^5\) RB 27.3,4,9; 2 Cor 2:7,8; Luke 15:5.
die in one day.’ Weakness is to be taken into account so as not to ‘break the bent reed.’ The cellarer is also to act in this way knowing that a good ‘word is better than the best gift.’ 6 Even if serious action has to be taken and someone has to be expelled, it is for the good of the whole community. If this is necessary the abbot has to ‘expel the evil one from your midst,’ and ‘if the unbeliever wishes to depart, let him depart.’

In order to be able to act in this way the abbot will have his priorities right. ‘He will seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things will be added to him,’ and he will deserve the promise: ‘Nothing is lacking to those who fear him.’ Another expectation is that he will be aware that he must seek the advice of the community, ‘do all things with counsel and you will have nothing to regret.’ He will be a wise teacher who will know ‘how to bring forth things both old and new.’ And then when he has to ‘give a reckoning of his stewardship,’ his faithfulness will be rewarded and he will hear said ‘yes I tell you he sets him over his whole estate.’

It is also clear from the scripture texts that Benedict uses, what the response of the members of the community is to be. The pattern is set in the prologue. The attitude must be one of listening, ‘today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts,’ and ‘whoever hears my words and does them I liken to the prudent person who built a house on a rock. The floods came, the winds blew and battered that house, but it did not collapse because it was founded on rock.’

A key text on listening is repeated twice in the chapter on obedience: ‘Whoever listens to you listens to me.’ This text forms the basis for the response that is expected. It is to

6 RB 64.10,18,13; 31.15; James 2:13; Gen 33:13; Isa 42:3; Sir 18:17. 7 RB 28.6,7; 1 Cor 5:13, 7:15. 8 RB 2.35,36; Matt 6:33; Ps 34:10. 9 RB 3.13, 64.9,7,22; Sir 32:24; Matt 13:52; Luke 16:2; Matt 24:47. 10 RB Prol 10,33; Ps 94:8; Matt 7:24-25.
be a ready response — 'when he heard me he obeyed me.' It is a cheerful one, for 'God loves a cheerful giver.' It may be a response that leads to a difficult path because 'the route that leads to life is narrow.'

The centrepiece and reason for it all, follows Benedict's statements that the way of life is for those who value the judgment of another and choose to live in a community with an abbot over them. Here the text is calling for imitation of Christ, the only reason for such a choice and such a response: 'I did not come to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me.'

It is towards the end of the rule that a scripture text sums up the attitude of the obedience that must be given by brothers to one another, as well as to God and the abbot: 'Let them strive to be the first to honor one another.' Thus is emphasized the importance of mutual obedience, obedience to one another as brothers.

Benedict's use of these texts makes clear that the abbot is a central figure in the rule but that he always exercises his role in a spirit of mercy and compassion. It is also evident that he listens to the brothers, that he relies on those with special tasks in the monastery to carry out their roles and above all that the brothers who have chosen to live under a rule and a superior will make a ready response in obedience.

**Significant Words in the Text.**

The teaching of Benedict is further emphasized when words that are significant and used frequently in the appropriate chapters are examined. A selection has been made, based on the frequency of use, and again the same pattern emerges. We see what kind of person the abbot is to be, how he is to act in the exercise of authority and finally

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11 RB 5.6,15; Luke 10:16; Ps 17:45; 2 Cor 9:7; Matt 7:14.

12 RB 5.5,16,10,13; Ps 18:45; 2 Cor 9:7; Matt 7:14; Jn 6:38.

13 RB 72.4; Rom 12:10.
what is expected of the community – how the members understand and respond to the authority that is being exercised.

The central word is abbas or its derivatives, used some fifty times in chapters on the abbot, the officials of the monastery, and in the chapters on obedience. It is also used twice as many times again in relation to other sections of the rule. It carries the weight of a tradition of spiritual fatherhood, as well as emphasizing the centrality of the person and the role. The abbot is a father, one who exercises authority so that those who live this way of life may be led to life. All his qualities and functions follow from this.

Benedict writes his rule for those who want to live in community and serve under a rule and an abbot. This is the overarching statement about the role of the abbot in Benedict’s mind, and when he sets out to arrange a way of life for that most vigorous race, the cenobites, he begins with his chapter on the abbot who must always remember what he is called and live up to the title by his actions. The word pater (father) is also used. There are constant reminders of his accountability for those whose father he is. At all times his overall responsibility flows from this title, though he may share the burdens of his position with others, for example the cellarer or the deans.

The word magister (master) is used to designate the abbot and in these cases the emphasis is on the abbot as father and life giver in another way. He is a master who must arrange all with foresight and justice for the disciples who follow him. He is the

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14 RB 1.2.
15 RB 1.13; 2.1,30.
16 RB 2.24; 31.2.
17 RB 2.6,7.
18 RB 21.2,3; 31.4,12,15.
one who speaks and teaches his disciples and who can expect from them a ready response.\(^{19}\) The word *medicus* (physician) also indicates what sort of a person the abbot should be.\(^{20}\) Benedict understands the human condition and knows that there will be mistakes and deviations and that therefore there is need for someone who knows how to heal. The same meaning is evident when the abbot is described by the word *pastor* (shepherd).\(^{21}\)

Some key words appear and re-appear drawing out how such a person would act. Many times the abbot is reminded that he must give an account of his stewardship. The phrase, *rationem reddere*, shows this.\(^{22}\) This adds a very important dimension to the exercise of authority, which can never then be at the whim of an individual. There is always a two way effect. The abbot is expected to give commands (*iubere, iussio*)\(^{23}\) However, it is expected of him, that careful judgment and consideration will be part of all exercise of authority and decision making and the words *iudicare* and *iudicium* are often used.\(^{24}\)

Punishment and correction of faults are also part of a role that is to lead to improvement and healing. There is frequent use of the words *correptus* and *corripere*.\(^{25}\) However, along with the idea that correction is never just for the sake of punishment for its own sake, there is the use of words such as *amare, caritas, cura, diligere, sollicitudo, sollicitus, misericordia*. The frequent repetition of these ideas

\(^{19}\) RB 3.6; 6.6; 5.9.

\(^{20}\) RB 27.1,2; 28.2.

\(^{21}\) RB 2.7; 27.7.

\(^{22}\) RB 2.34,37,38; 3.11; 31.9; 64.7.

\(^{23}\) RB 2.4.5; 5.9,14,18.

\(^{24}\) RB 3.2,5,11; 5.12; 65.14.

\(^{25}\) RB 28.1; 64.12; 65.19; 2.25,27; 21.5.
relating to ideas of love and care, tempers remarkably any notion of excessive severity. Those in the care of the abbot must be treated with love and especially when they are wavering and need to be brought back to the community. 26 Behaviour here is characterized by solicitude and officials such as the deans and the cellarer act in the same way. 27

Wisdom (sapientia) is also to be characteristic of how those in authority are to act. 28 Practices that result from this wisdom will be discerning and full of discretion, (discernere, discretio). 29

And finally, repeated words reveal much about the community itself. On many occasions the members of the community are called disciples, (discipuli) and in particular this often occurs when the idea of learning (doctrina) is connected to it. 30 But the word that most often describes the community is fratres (brothers). In the same way as the key word for the abbot is abbas, and that it is from this that all other understanding of the role flows, so it is the same with the idea that the members of the community are brothers. For the chapters under discussion, the word appears when related to mutual obedience. 31 However it appears in the total rule some one hundred times. Characteristic of brothers is their care for each other (invicem) 32 and the caritas (love) that is asked of the abbot is also expected in mutual relations. 33

26 RB 27.4; 64.14.
27 RB 21.1; 31.9.
28 RB 27.2; 28.2; 64.2; 21.4; 31.4.
29 RB 2.16,21; 64.17,18,19.
30 RB 2.5,6,11,12,13; 3.6; 5.9,16,17.
31 RB 71,72.
32 RB 65.8; 71.1; 72.4.
33 RB 71.4; 72.8,10.
A willing and listening obedience is the response both to the abbot and to each other in the community. There will be no murmuring or complaining (murmurare)\textsuperscript{34} but instead a ready response as befits those who have chosen to live in a community, under a rule and an abbot (oboedienter, oboedire)\textsuperscript{35}

So the essentials of the practice of authority and obedience are evident in the use of repeated words that emphasize attitudes and actions that are important for Benedict. The abbot is a father, a teacher, a healer, and accountable at all times for his actions. But his authority is exercised in a community of brothers, mutually obedient to one another, living in a community where members act with love, and are always ready to respond and serve when called to obedience to God, the abbot or to one another.

\textsuperscript{34} RB 5.14,17,18,19.

\textsuperscript{35} RB 2.6,17; 5.1,8,14,15; 71.1,2; 72.6; 2.25; 3.5,6; 5.5,12,17; 71.1,4.
Downside Abbey today

On the right is the original Downside Abbey building.
PART 2

AUTHORITY AND POLDING

CHAPTER 5

THE CONTEXT

In order to understand John Bede Polding's vision for Benedictine life in Australia, the context from which he came and into which he came is examined. Such a discussion helps to highlight the difficulties he faced in terms of the exercise of his authority and it also helps to understand, how although he was influenced by the attitudes of the times, he nonetheless was forced to reflect on the issue, and even perhaps to modify some of his approaches to it. There is no doubt that authority was a key question both in society, Church and the religious groups he was establishing. This included his Benedictine establishments.

The English Benedictine Context.

John Bede Polding, a Benedictine monk from St Gregory's, Downside near Bath in England, was consecrated Bishop in 1834 and left for Australia in March, 1835, arriving in Sydney on the 13th September of that year.¹ Zeal for helping convicts has often been cited as Polding's motivation for wanting to come to Sydney, and indeed this may have been of great importance to him.² However, in the context of the history of the English Benedictine congregation of the eighteenth century such a missionary venture was very normal. This is an example of how difficult it is to cast off the influence of a present situation. For example, it is easy to simply identify English

² ibid., p.3.
Benedictinism with the Downside Abbey of the present and to see as essential components, independent status, abbot, school and no overseas missionary outreach. There is need to understand the development of Downside (whence Polding came) within the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century English Benedictine congregation so that such an ahistorical perspective does not apply. In this way it will be seen just how much it was to be expected that Polding would undertake his venture with such missionary enthusiasm.

Granted that there is no direct continuity of the English Benedictine congregation with medieval English monasteries, and that the congregation is a modern congregation which dates from 1619, its development need only be considered from that date. However, recent work on the monks in England emphasizes strongly an aspect of English Benedictine life that is very important as a context for Polding's mission in Australia. Whether or not Gregory, who sent Augustine to England, knew and lived the Rule of Benedict as we now know it, may be open to debate, but it can be claimed that the success of the mission to England and the resultant sending of monks to Europe was in fact decisive in ensuring that the Rule of Benedict became the basic law of monastic life in the West. The English monasteries which later on were Benedictine, looked to Gregory as their patron, and as the inspiration for a missionary impulse in monastic life with which Benedictine monks came to be identified.

From its earliest expressions, Benedictine monastic life was not a closed system. It was characterized by the Gospel imperative of “mission”, of “being sent” in the name of

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6 ibid., p.17.
the Church to spread the good news of the Gospel in forms that would vary in mode and character across the centuries, in different historical, cultural and geographical settings.

The significance of this for any discussion of the English Benedictine context and of the effect of this on Polding should not be underestimated. The missionary spirit did not merely derive from the English Benedictine congregation's exile in France, but from the very beginning, was an example of how Benedictine life has always brought its own dynamism into engagement with the needs of the Church and people of the day.7

After the dissolution of the Benedictine monasteries during the Reformation, Englishmen went to Europe in the late 16th and early 17th centuries if they wanted to join Benedictine communities. Most of these communities were Italian (Cassinese) or Spanish. However, finally there was a revived English Benedictine congregation, independent of Italy or Spain, set up as a result of Papal Bulls in 1619 and 1633. There had been four communities established in France – St Gregory's at Douai, 1607, St Laurence's at Dieulouard, in Lorraine 1608, St. Benedict's at S Malo, 1611, and St. Edmund's in Paris 1615. In 1643 a monastery at Lambspring in Germany joined the congregation.8

The constitutions for this English Benedictine congregation were finalised in 1661, and it is very significant for Polding's work later, that they provided for a centralised congregation ruled by a President General and his Council, known as the Regimen. These were elected every four years by a self perpetuating General Chapter made up of


various superiors and officials of the congregation. The General Chapter was the supreme executive body within the congregation and it elected or appointed the priors of the monasteries and two provincials – of Canterbury in the South, and York in the North who administered the Benedictine mission in England. A provincial Chapter was held in each province a month before the General Chapter. The provincial structure was operative in the Cassinese congregation, so it was a very familiar structure. These manuscript constitutions for the English Benedictine congregation were revised and the first fully-printed set was issued in 1784. These would have been essentially the constitutions under which Polding lived. Perhaps the influence of these constitutions is evident later when he set up the three Benedictine groups in Sydney, and in one way or another legislated for them.

Some monks had already returned to England as missionaries in the early 17th century and were even in a very secure and privileged position when the Catholic James II acceded to the throne in 1685. In spite of various plots and variations in favourable conditions, the missionary endeavour was succeeding at a time when greater tolerance towards Catholics was evident in England. The missionary endeavour was central to the English Benedictines – in fact the monks took a fourth vow to go to the English mission. However, they could be recalled by the President at any time.

The monks on the mission in England enjoyed much more freedom than the monks who remained in the monasteries in France. There was a great prominence given to the missionary endeavour, and the contemplative tradition suffered in the light of this. A tension existed between the two modes of existence, and some of the monks who remained in the monasteries wanted stricter monastic observance.

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9 ibid., p.10.

10 Lunn, op. cit., pp. 25-34.

11 Scott, pp.25 & 41.
In France, around the middle of the 18th century, there were government pressures for the reform of the monasteries, and when the government was seen to be intervening, the members of the English Benedictine congregation monasteries tended to stress their foreign background and their missionary orientation. Thus their missionary emphasis was strengthened. There was the thinnest structural thread keeping the congregation going, with tensions just mentioned, tensions between President and Provincials, difficult personnel and lack of direction.\(^12\) The practicalities of the missionary life really threatened the unity of the congregation throughout the century. Many of the missionaries were adrift from all authority.\(^13\) By 1794 there were 30 missioners in the north of England and 18 in the South.

The first Catholic Relief act was passed in England in 1778 and the second in 1791. In France a decree against the properties of the monasteries was passed in 1789 but the foreign ones were exempt. However, in 1793, all schools and communities were suppressed. Scott notes that the well established provinces in England were thus the reason for the survival of the English Benedictine congregation. The monks in France returned to England and the community from Douai settled at Acton Burnell in Shropshire in 1795. There they remained until they moved to Downside, near Bath, in 1814.

This community at Acton Burnell was the one where Polding (born 1794) began his monastic life in 1811. He had been educated at Woolton, the school which his uncle, Bede Brewer, a Benedictine, established in Liverpool. This school had been taken over by the Benedictine nuns who had escaped from Cambrai in France. Polding was ordained in 1819 at Downside, and held various positions there, novice master 1824-34, sub-prior 1826 onwards, and often procurator or prefect of studies. He was responsible for the expansion of the school and its buildings, and was very involved in the affairs of the congregation, being at the General Chapter held at Downside in 1826.

\(^{12}\) Foster, op.cit., p.14.

\(^{13}\) Scott, p.51 & 89.
Archbishop John Bede Polding, osb
He also acted as secretary to Abbot Birdsall, the president of the congregation. He has been called the mainstay of the establishment.\textsuperscript{14} Later there followed his consecration as Bishop in 1834 and his journey to Australia in 1835 where he came to be called the “Bishop of Botany Bay.”

Strong Benedictine and educational influences formed Polding for nearly forty years and prepared him for the next forty in Australia.\textsuperscript{15} The thing most significant in relation to this work is that Polding was formed with an understanding of the missionary vocation of Benedictines, as it had been strongly lived and emphasised during the exile to France after the suppression in England, and during the years when the monks returned to England. He had also lived the monastic life at Downside and worked in the school, much as the communities in France had done. He lived under the 1784 constitutions and thus carried with him to Sydney these particular understandings of the Benedictine way of life.\textsuperscript{16}

The Australian Context.

The following is a brief outline of the Australian context to which Polding came and which developed during his forty years as Bishop/Archbishop. This is given in order to set the scene for the context in which much of Polding’s understanding and exercise of authority took place, since it is assumed that this would influence in some way how he established the authority structures of his Benedictine communities of his time. He died in 1877, and Australia was very different then, from when he arrived in 1835. O’Farrell argues that the 30 years following Polding’s arrival were marked as having a

\textsuperscript{14} O’Donoghue, op.cit.,p.4. She is quoting from the Birt collection, vol.1 p.242. A petition to the Pope from the Prior of Downside said that Folding was ‘the column and the mainstay of the establishment.’


\textsuperscript{16} Copy obtained from the Archives at Downside Abbey.
dominant theme of conflict over the form, organization and destiny of Catholicism in Australia. What follows is a summary of issues that were relevant.

The story of the development of Catholicism in Australia has been already told, and there is no need to repeat it, except in so far as it impinges on the Benedictine communities under discussion. In fact the two stories of Catholicism and Benedictine life in mid-nineteenth century Australia are strongly entwined. It will be useful to examine the general context, tensions with the clergy, with other religions, with the laity, with Rome and with orders other than Benedictines.

The General Context.

It is estimated that by about 1820 there could have been six or seven thousand nominal Catholics in the colony. The 1828 census indicated about eight thousand Catholics in a population of forty thousand. These were widely spread over large areas and were a mixture of convicts, free settlers, those who had been emancipated, the native-born – mostly children – and Aboriginal people. Many of the new settlers were Irish and so there were Irish people, English laws, English Bishop, Irish priests and later Irish Bishops. By the time of Polding’s arrival the number of Catholics had doubled.

Another significant fact is that Polding arrived during the administration of Governor Bourke who was sympathetic to all Christian denominations. He was responsible for the Church Act in 1836, which gave financial help to all religions, thus enabling Polding’s strengthening of the Catholic Church in the colony. (This Church Act was

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20 O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.20.
21 Waldersee, op.cit., p.279.
repealed in 1862.) Australia was being affected by parliamentary reforms in Britain and this added to the sympathetic climate. The needs and means were there and Polding saw in Australia a unique and challenging mission. For him it was a response to ‘the pressing wants of the Catholic population of New Holland.’

In setting the following context, a context of tension in many areas, it is not intended to give a full and detailed account of the events that occurred. Those that are mentioned, are mentioned briefly, to set a context of a conflict of authority and a troubled situation into which Polding eventually introduced Benedictine life. In fact, especially in the case of the St Mary’s Benedictine community of men, these various conflicts became entwined with problems of the community. It is impossible to speak of Polding’s exercise or understanding of authority without referring to these aspects.

The Background with the Clergy.

The early ministrations of priests in Australia were often disastrous. Three convict priests, Rev. James Harold, Rev. James Dixon and Rev. Peter O’Neil made little impact, and the erratic Jeremiah O'Flynn who came to Australia in 1817 without proper authorization, and who was deported in 1818, became a source of tension and yet a popular myth. It was easy to elevate his deportation into that of a persecuted Catholicism and thus into a political issue. The truth of the matter is difficult to sort out but at least it can be said that it was an unhappy beginning.

In 1819 Edward Slater, an English Benedictine, was appointed vicar apostolic of the Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius and Madagascar. Australasia was later added to this. Philip Conolly and John Therry were appointed with government approval to work in Sydney and arrived in 1820. It was not long before tensions arose between them and

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22 Birt, Vol. 1, p.245; O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.3.

in 1821 Conolly went to Van Diemen’s Land where he was later a source of great problems. Between 1820 and 1833, Therry dominated the small world of Australian Catholicism and he was in a constant state of running warfare with authority. Therry was dismissed as official chaplain in 1825 and was only re-instated in 1837. When Daniel Power was appointed to replace him, Therry undermined and opposed him and there were virtually two camps. Christopher Dowling who succeeded Power after the latter’s death in 1830 was treated in the same way and thus Therry had made impossible any other ministry than his own.

In this troubled situation, it was clear that someone with real authority with whom the government could deal, was necessary, and William Morris, who had by now replaced Slater, appointed William Ullathorne as vicar general in 1832. He worked to try to overcome the factions that Therry seemed to cause and relish and some relative peace was established. Therry was moved to Campbelltown. However, Ullathorne could see the need for a bishop and eventually Polding was appointed.

Another significant missionary cleric was John McEncroe who had arrived with the Catholic layman, John Plunkett. It was McEncroe who early on could see that the Benedictines were not going to be able to provide the necessary ministry for the growing number of Catholics, many of whom were Irish. His role in the later appointment of Irish Bishops was significant. However, it seems that Ullathorne also believed that the Benedictines were not going to be able to provide enough missionaries, while Polding was unable to see it until it was too late. These were early tensions and they did not diminish.

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24 E. O’Brien, Life and Letters of Archpriest John Joseph Therry, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1922, treats this in detail.


There was the Willson-Polding dispute, which dragged on for fourteen years and which began as a dispute over responsibility for a debt between Therry and Bishop Willson of Van Diemen's land. Polding had to try to mediate, but no matter whom he supported, trouble would result from the other party. It is easy to imagine that the dispute accentuated divisions already developing in Sydney where Catholics began to take sides on principles that were disturbing them. It furthered the conflict of liberty and equality as against authority and hierarchy. There were also the problems with Bishop Brady of Perth, a diocese which by 1849 was in a grave financial situation. When Joseph Serra was appointed coadjutor the problems worsened. Polding had to travel to Perth in 1852, and although Brady was removed and Serra installed as Bishop, the effects of the dispute lasted a long time. There was also the apparent loss of ease between Polding and Ullathome who left Australia in 1840.

In later years there were serious problems with two secular priests, Patrick Bermingham and Michael McAlroy, called the Bermingham clique. They opposed Polding in many ways, especially regarding his plans for education. Polding had taken them into the Yass Goulburn area after they fell out with Bishop Goold in Melbourne. Perhaps this is an example of Polding’s inability to judge the nature of the people he chose, or perhaps it was indeed an example of his faith in human nature. He admits that the receiving of Bermingham into the diocese was a bad mistake, but it was on the side of charity...I firmly believed that he would become wiser by experience, and perhaps by gratitude,... and although I had moreover, been cautioned by his Bishop that he had been responsible to a large extent for sowing the seed of discord between the regular and secular priests in Melbourne, I did hope, however, that he would develop some good sense and discretion. But I was mistaken. He has zeal, but it is quite spoilt by faults that should be found only in early adolescence.


28 O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.75.

29 Polding to Barnabò, 20th December, 1860, SAA, U1418. In _Letters of John Bede Polding_, Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Sydney, 1996, vol.2, p.332. The title of this recently published three volume collection of Polding’s letters, will be referred to in further footnotes as _Letters_.


However, it became evident to Polding that Bermingham's faults were to cause more serious trouble. He later spoke of underhandedness and deceitfulness in his character, and that the priest had acted towards him not only ungratefully, but treacherously. Patrick Dunne who had been removed from Belfast in Victoria, joined ranks with Bermingham and McAlroy, and Polding always suspected they were behind many of the allegations against him: 'We shall have intrigues and representation in abundance from the Bermingham-McAlroy party,' and again: 'These calumnies .. have the smack of the Yass and Bermingham mendaciousness.' He spoke of Dunne as the co-conspirator with Bermingham, and felt strongly enough to state that 'what they have said of the mission is descriptive of them, "they are rotten to the core"'.

Through the 'intrigues and machinations' of Bermingham, Polding felt that a partisan spirit had developed. Later when Bermingham returned to Ireland, Polding spoke of him as the head of the clique in Ireland – a clique still busy at its dirty work – and stated that there was much Irish intrigue, scheming and hypocrisy. He concluded that 'such will be the case as long as an Englishman is in the position I occupy,' and hardest of all for Polding was that he felt 'not supported at Rome.' The accusations that the Irish clergy were treated badly, must have been very difficult for Polding who did not want to emphasise Irish or English. We are neither, he said, but Australian.

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31 Polding to Brown, 20 February 1862, CAA, *Letters*, vol.3.,p.66; Polding to Smith, 22 December 1862, SAA,O1735/1-11, *Letters*, vol.3.,p98; Polding to Barnabo, 22 December 1863, SAA,U1418/6-12, *Letters*, vol.3.,p.138.


The constant accusations, and the fact that they seemed to have been believed by Rome, led Polding to reflect on the nature of some of the priests who came to the mission: ‘May it please the Sacred congregation to observe how priests of every kind – vagabonds, over-ambitious men, dissolute, quarrelsome, and money grabbing men – drift to these far distant regions,’ and he also spoke of discontented priests who apparently found an ear at Rome to receive their monstrous calumnious stories. Polding came to believe, and it seems with just cause, that there was no one he could trust – ‘nought but dissimulation and hollowness,’ and he never felt safe: ‘We know not the day nor hour nor year when accusations shall be brought forward.’ Polding did lack perception, perhaps he was too naive and trusting, and perhaps he was too eager to obtain priests for the mission and took anyone who offered to come. The combination of all of these things had the gradual effect of making it impossible to govern his diocese and to have people believe that he was capable of doing so.

Other Christian Denominations.

O'Donoghue claims that before Polding appeared on the scene, with an authorized and dominant presence, there was little evidence of sectarianism, because Catholics were an imperceptible and powerless minority. However, Bishop William Broughton who had come as head of the Church of England in 1829, soon saw Polding as a threat. He held political power which Folding feared, and Judge William Burton, a member of the judiciary, was also hostile. Polding was to call Burton a ‘bitter enemy and ceaseless contriver of mischief,’ because of the religious dissension he spread through his


35 Polding to Gregory, 20 March 1861, Da, N320, Letters, vol.3, p.16; Polding to Barnabo, 21 December 1861, PF CO, vol.7, f.396, Letters, vol.3, p.52. Throughout the letters there builds up an incredible sense of reports, complaints, weaknesses, in the men who came to the mission. There is also a cumulative sense of Polding having to continually justify himself and explain situations.

36 O'Donoghue, op.cit., p.47.
writings. He also speaks of the ‘mischievous designs’ of such men as John Dunmore Lang, leader of the Presbyterian Church and Campbell Riddell, a government officer.37

The Church Act of 1836 gave equality to the various religious denominations, but Broughton and Lang made many efforts to undo the legislation. There were many public exchanges between Broughton and Polding, especially over the issue of education. Polding believed that Broughton was responsible for misrepresentations regarding numbers, catholic doctrine and use of scriptures.38 When Broughton questioned Polding’s authority to wear bishop’s robes, calling him a foreign Bishop, Polding rightly saw the issue as not to do with vestments and habiliments, crosses and rings, ‘but something of infinitely higher importance; whether each religious denomination is to enjoy freedom of conscience on the footing of perfect equality, or whether a hateful exclusiveness is to be introduced and established.’ He certainly did not want one person, the Bishop of the Church of England to hold sole authority.39 He believed that Broughton’s questioning of Polding’s right to be recognized as a Bishop had roused a spirit in the Catholic community such as he had never before seen.40

More than a year later he painted a very black picture of sectarianism rife in the country.

We still continue to suffer the most violent persecution from the head of the Church of England and his adherents. Their great object is to overturn the Church Act, as it is called, by which perfect equality in civil matters is established in the colony, and to force the government to declare their sect to be the established church... One of the judges publicly stigmatized us some time since as idolaters (sic); another, Mr Burton, has filled a large book with false statements and deceptions about us.41

38 Polding to The Australian, 23 August 1836, 30 August 1836, Letters, vol.1, pp.66 & 68.
40 Polding to Therry, 9 July 1839, SAA, Letters, vol.1, p.142.
Polding knew that if he did not hold out he would never possess any authority in the colony.

The establishment of a Catholic hierarchy in 1842 exacerbated the already tense and competitive situation, as did the fact that Polding now held the title of Archbishop. Both these events made it obvious that Polding would become more and more established and recognized. Later there were bigoted tirades from Lang. However the greatest tensions appeared in the sectarian debates over education and the repeal of the Church Act in 1862, removing state aid for religion. When state aid to denominational schools was withdrawn in the 1870s and 1880s the National scheme for education had won over the Denominational scheme. However, over these years, Polding's other conflicts, many internal to the Church, took up a great deal of his time, and his letters are not dominated by his concerns over sectarianism.

Tensions with the Laity.

O’Farrell pinpoints the trouble in Australian Catholicism from 1840-1860 as a questioning of authority, any authority, and he gives three reasons. He notes that the extension of questioning of authority in the secular areas to the questioning of clerical authority was a natural transference, and indeed democratic, anti-authoritarian pressures were very evident in society in the mid-nineteenth century. His second point is that because the people had been for so long without episcopal authority, there would be tensions when it came. He notes that, as well as many in lower social and economic orders, there were also a few well-educated and intellectual Catholics affected by the Liberal Catholic movements in Europe and England.


42 O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.65.
Significant in the turmoil was the *Freeman's Journal*. It became the generator of an aggressive Irish Australian Catholicism of an explicitly political kind. It was also the forum for the criticism of Church administration as well as of Benedictine failings. William Duncan, an educated and prominent Catholic layman had been dismissed from editorship of the *Chronicle* in Polding's absence, and the *Freeman's Journal* was established to succeed it in 1850 by McEncroe. There grew up around it a group of active, vocal laymen, who used it as a forum of criticism of the administration of the Church. It also took a strong role in political issues, and it became the spearhead of attacks against the Benedictines. The *Freeman's Journal* enabled McEncroe to assume an influence over Catholic public opinion that was very significant.

The list of *Assertions by Catholic Laymen* (February, 1858) which was probably compiled from various issues of the *Freeman's Journal* contained serious accusations. It included such points that, although the archdiocese was prosperous, Polding's administration was so bad that no fruits of this prosperity could be seen; that priests with any learning were forced to leave the diocese; that schools were in a disgraceful condition; that secular priests were treated very badly, and that the administration of Polding was unjust and arbitrary. The bishops, Polding, Goold and Willson, united to issue a joint pastoral of admonition and Polding invited the laymen to present their grievances to him through Therry. The grievances were issued to the press prior to the meeting, and Polding was angered and would not pursue the reconciliation he had initiated.

The appointment of a Protestant to the board of the Orphan School in Parramatta after Plunkett resigned, added fuel to the fire, and a public meeting was held on 26 February.

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43 ibid., p.95.

44 O'Farrell, op.cit., p.100; O'Donoghue, op.cit., p.113.

45 Suttor, op. cit., p.56.

46 O'Donoghue, op. cit., p.114.
1859. Out of the turmoil that resulted, seven laymen were threatened with excommunication.\(^{47}\) The wording of the resolutions from this meeting was very strong, and it is no wonder that Polding saw this as a threat to his authority. It was stated that it was neither safe nor creditable for Catholics to continue confidence in Church administration, which was called maladministration. Progressive mismanagement on the part of ecclesiastical authorities was noted. Polding wrote a Pastoral letter explaining that the appointee was merely concerned with the material welfare of the orphans, and that in fact the appointment had been withdrawn.\(^{48}\) The resolutions were sent to Rome by a group of laity. This was indeed a challenge to Polding's authority.

One of the things that worried Polding most was that there was a proposal to form a provisional committee with the design of intervening by means of the civil government in appointments which concerned Ecclesiastical administration.\(^{49}\) Polding believed that they could have no part in this matter. In fact he saw it as hampering the progress of the Church, and that the dissidents were using the *Freeman's Journal* as their organ.\(^{50}\) Again Polding was put in a situation of having to justify himself and answer the allegations. It would be easy to understand why he speaks of experiencing a general flood of afflictions, and most of them threatening or questioning his authority.\(^{51}\)

Henry Gregory osb, Polding's vicar-general from 1844 and superior of St Mary's community, was seen as the cause of many of the problems and he was recalled in 1861, perhaps as a scapegoat. There are strong connections here with the Benedictine problems, and these will be discussed in detail.

\(^{47}\) O'Donoghue, op. cit., p.115.


\(^{49}\) Polding to Barnabò, mid April 1859, PF CO, vol.6, ff.564-5, *Letters*, vol.2, p.278.


\(^{51}\) Polding to Geoghegan, 20 May 1859, SAA, U1419/5-4, *Letters*, vol.2, p.293.
There were also tensions later over the education debate, because William Duncan who was editor of the *Chronicle* and John Plunkett, the solicitor-general, favoured a national scheme and Polding and McEncroe favoured a denominational scheme. However the internal divisions here were not seen to be very significant because, as the national scheme gradually won favour, the Catholic hierarchy took a stand for denominational education.

**Polding, Authority and Rome**

There have been some very clear analyses of attitudes and interactions between the Church of Australia and the Church of Rome in the nineteenth century. This includes tensions with both clergy and laity.\(^52\) In the context of this thesis, I wish to consider the possible effect that the conflicts or attitudes, evident in the dealings between Rome and Australia, had on Polding. It seems most likely that what he experienced in the exercise of authority by Rome modified his perception and practice of authority. At least one can know from his letters and comments that he complained bitterly about the way Rome dealt with him. There are also glimpses in his comments, that he believed it could have been otherwise.

Dowd comments, rightly, that Polding's main tactic in dealing with disputes was the invocation of authority. There were few attempts to sort out difficulties locally; instead, recourse was had to Rome for solutions.53

This is even true in regards to matters where there was no conflict. Some of these are noted, simply to show how Polding's attitude to connections with Rome changed over the years. In the beginning it was Polding's view that he needed at times to present cases for solution to Rome. This was understandable in the early years when, for the first time, Australia had a bishop.

As the Church in Australia was becoming established it would be difficult, even at a remote distance from Rome, for this bishop to be confident in taking the final responsibility for matters always considered the preserve of the official Roman Church. Polding was very ready to consult Rome, for example over marriage cases, or over modifications in rules for the clergy about what official prayers were to be said.54 Sometimes he must have simply felt the need for advice from a colleague on such matters.55

However, Polding did not hesitate to issue clear statements on his own authority, without reference to Rome. He published a statement, What is to be Observed by all the Priests admitted to the Sacred Ministry in our Region, very soon after his arrival.56 This includes prescriptions about duties in their ministry as well as instructions about the avoidance of pursuits 'unbecoming to the ecclesiastical state,' such as wasting time in taverns or at night parties, since the task of the priests, as he saw it, was to lead the

53 Dowd, op. cit., p.40.


55 Polding to Brown, 14th June 1837, DAJ 418, Letters, vol.1, p.82.

56 Polding to the Clergy, 15th October 1835, SAA, Box U 1105, Letters, vol.1, p. 54.
faithful and by word and example, to try 'to arouse in them an ardour for Christian perfection.' A similar letter to the clergy was written 'for the establishment and conservation of Holy Discipline amongst us, and for the preservation of the ecclesiastical character in its purity.' This time, many of the prescriptions were about financial or property matters, so he knew he had the authority to address areas he saw to be problems with the clergy.

Without hesitation, Polding also undertook to suspend an erring priest. The wording is strong,

we, having given Canonical admonition and being invested by the Supreme head of the Church with full authority for the same, do suspend and hereby declare you, Reverend Philip Conolly, to be suspended from the exercise of all Sacerdotal functions, whatsoever. And we warn you, that from this sentence of Suspension, no authority, save that of the Holy See and our own can absolve you.

Clearly the distinction in these instances, was that Polding did not hesitate to use his authority to provide a solution when he was sure that he had such authority. In dubious cases, he sought the support of a higher authority, looking to Rome for either a ruling or guidance.

However, as times and circumstances changed, the matters became more complicated, and he had to spend time justifying himself with Rome over complaints that were made directly to Rome from many quarters. As the years went by the number of direct communications increased and there was a change in the nature of the contents. The situation finally arrived where Polding knew Rome should not be interfering, and where he resented the fact that this happened.

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57 Polding to The Clergy, 9th January 1840, SAA U 1101, Letters, vol.1, p.151.

58 See also Letter to Propaganda, 6th March 1842 which commences, 'The Holy See is asked to make a declaration on the following matters.' These included faculties for priests, questions about the operations of Bishops, laws of fast and abstinence, and some marriage questions. PF CO vol.2, f 58, 63, Letters, vol.1, p.196.

From the early 1850s, correspondence exists on many controversial topics between Polding and Cardinal Fransoni who was head of Propaganda Fide in Rome. Propaganda Fide was founded in 1622 to regulate affairs in countries considered missionary. One of the issues was the complaints of the dissident monks.\(^6^0\) This issue was raised again in 1854 and further correspondence exists.\(^6^1\) Another controversial matter was the ownership of property of the sisters of Charity, who by then had gone to Tasmania.\(^6^2\)

There had also been a long running dispute on the ownership of property in Tasmania between Bishop Willson and Fr McEncroe and this dispute had come to the attention of Rome.\(^6^3\) However, in this latter case, Polding is not at the centre of the debate as if he were the cause, though Willson blamed him for not taking his side against McEncroe. There is a sense in all these conflicts that Polding has been put in a defensive situation, and that he has to justify or explain situations. He expressed this clearly in a letter to Brown, ‘in our regard, the first principles of justice seem to be reversed – instead of believing that the conduct of persons in authority was what it ought to be, until proof to the contrary, it was deemed to be wrong till proved to be right. Every idle story seemed to be welcomed.’\(^6^4\)

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\(^6^0\) Reclamation of Polding, 10-12 December 1851; Polding to Fransoni, 29 December 1851, PF CO vol.4, ff.701-711, *Letters*, vol.2, p.168.


\(^6^4\) Polding to Brown, c.20 December 1861(?),CAA, *Letters*, vol.3,p.46.
Of interest is a letter in which Polding himself suggests solutions about the debates over the Benedictine questions that he names as one, 'or perhaps the greatest, of the difficulties which are a disturbance to our peace in the Sydney Mission.' These included the possibility of entrusting him (Polding), with the care and administration of the St Mary’s community, and nominating another Archbishop. The monastery may have survived if this had happened, but the Church in Australia would have been the poorer. At any rate, it is certain that its history would have been different.

By 1859, Polding was in a serious situation of explaining to Cardinal Barnabo, now head of Propaganda Fide, the reporting in the Freeman's Journal about a meeting of Catholics who were expressing their dissatisfaction about many issues in the diocese. Rome responded to the complaints and Polding told Barnabo that the laity were pleased with the response, which he (Polding) considered was not a good thing as the laymen felt themselves to be justified. According to the report of this in the Freeman's Journal the communications were satisfactory because there was a ‘recognition of our right to appeal, and the proper mode of making such appeal suggested.’ The report goes on to say that the form of the appeal is the only problem, not the substance and spirit of it. The complainants felt vindicated, and again it is difficult to see how Polding came out of the situation blameless in the eyes of Rome. Indeed, it must have been exactly the opposite and Rome must have been completely convinced that the Church of Australia was in a parlous situation and certainly not flourishing under the administration of Polding.


66 Polding to Barnabo, 12 March, 12 April, mid April, 13 May 1859. PF CO, ff.503-7, 560-2, 564-5, 562-3, Letters, vol.2, p.271,276,278,284. The last of these letters is a detailed refutation of the accusations.

67 Freeman's Journal, 28 September 1859.
At about this time, Polding began to defend Gregory, his vicar general, against whom much venom had been expended. 68 The disturbances and complaints were mounting into a tide, and there was no doubt that something would have to be done. In effect what happened was that Gregory was recalled as a scapegoat to try to restore peace. 69 Barnabó, writing to Polding a few months after Gregory's departure, claimed that the recall was not because of any fault of Gregory's, but because of 'the situation of matters in Sydney.... so this devout priest who has most dutifully served that Church, yields place and departs from it.' 70 The whole episode was, as Dowd says, one of the most spectacular examples of buck-passing in the history of Australian Catholicism. 71 It was an act of gross disloyalty by Rome to Polding and a worse act of injustice done to Gregory.

There is no need to recount the events in detail, because they have been told often enough. 72 However the response of Polding needs exploring further. How he felt in the matter becomes clear in his correspondence with Gregory, a friend to whom he was able to speak the truth. This was so especially in the early years after Gregory left Sydney. Nothing was held back about how Polding viewed the actions of Rome in the recall of Gregory, and the way it was done. Dowd called the event a personally searing experience of Roman power for Polding, one from which he probably never recovered, and there is every reason to believe that this is true. 73

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69 Dowd, op.cit.,p.175.


71 ibid.,p.182.


73 Dowd, op.cit., p.164.
Polding's various comments about the affair are a surprising revelation, given his filial affection towards Rome together with his earlier dependent attitudes. It had been said that at the discussion regarding the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in Rome in 1854, Polding had intervened when disagreement was strong, saying that he was the representative of 11 Bishops in Australia, ‘and was come to bow down to the Holy See. Thou art Pius, we are thy children. Teach us, lead us, confirm our faith.’ Perhaps after his later experiences with Rome he would not have been able to express himself in those terms.

Polding had questioned the whole procedure related to Gregory's removal as soon as it happened. Then, when Gregory departed in early 1861, Polding took up the cudgels even more determinedly and he questioned Barnabo on the fact that Abbot Richard Burchall, the president of the English Benedictine congregation, said Rome had recalled Gregory. Rome, on the other hand, said the Benedictine superiors recalled him. This raised another authority question to which Polding refers. Given the attitude of the English Benedictine congregation to the Benedictine community in Australia, one of complete distancing from it, the congregation hardly had any right to act thus. The truth may have been that Ullathorne suggested the procedure in order to deal more gently with Polding. The uncertainty about the cause of Gregory's recall added to Polding's upset, because he did not know the truth about who was working against him. Polding felt that respect for ecclesiastical authority had been lost because of the episode and that the calumniators had won. To Goold, he expressed the same

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sentiments. 'A wound has been inflicted on Ecclesiastical authority and discipline which will not heal readily.'

Both Brown and Heptonstall, English Benedictines, became convinced that Gregory was mistaken in not defending himself and one of Brown's comments is significant as a way of dealing with Rome, ‘...no man can afford to despise injurious reports amongst those whose good opinion he values, still less among those who are his superiors, as are the authorities in Rome in Gregory's case.’

Polding continued to worry about who was responsible for this great blow of Gregory's recall. One of his strongest statements about the effect the events had on him in relation to his view of authority, was written to Geoghegan. He comments on the mixed messages, and says that the contradictions are disturbing, with Ullathorne saying Gregory was not fit to be Vicar General, and Barnabo saying the action was because of disturbance in the diocese. As a result he felt that a grievous blow had been struck to the independence of the Bishop, and that his 'confidence in the authority of Superiors has been somewhat shaken.' In the same tone he complained to Brown. ‘Was an Archbishop ever treated as I have been - my V.G ordered away without cause given or assigned, I not written to, much less consulted.’

By 1863 these attitudes were still there and were expressed when he spoke of the appointment of local bishops without his being involved. To Geoghegan he wrote, ‘Pretty cool is it not ? Bps in Ireland to recommend priests in Australia to the Episcopacy, not to dioceses in Ireland but Australia. And Priests to inform and to be

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79 Brown to Polding, 19 September 1861, see M. Shanahan, Out of Time and Out of Place, pp.169-170; Heptonstall to Polding, 25 September, 1861.


81 Polding to Brown, c.20 December 1861, CAA, Letters, vol.3, p.46.
the first to inform the Ap of it.'\textsuperscript{82} And one of his strongest statements about the same time was to Gregory, (surely a clear expression of his real feelings), when speaking of Barnabo. 'I would not treat a Schoolboy as he treats Bishops - Cardinal though he be, he is only a priest... I have no respect for a man who has no respect for his Office, allowing it to be the vehicle of slander and of insult.'\textsuperscript{83}

The question of appointment of Bishops to Australia was an issue for him as early as 1865. He wrote to Smith saying that he has heard rumours about appointments of Bishops and then very strongly, 'Of a truth the Cardinal has had a multitude of Counsellors about our Australian matters. Whether there has been amongst them an abundance of wisdom is another affair.'\textsuperscript{84}

One of Polding's concerns was that he had been judged not only by Propaganda, but even by the Pope himself. He wrote to Smith saying, 'It is not to the purpose to say that Propaganda has nothing against us. One higher that Propaganda has judged and sentenced.'\textsuperscript{85} He had known since 1861 that it was being said that the Pope had expressed his determination that Gregory would never be a Bishop and Barnabo was said to have stated this publicly at a dinner in Rome.\textsuperscript{86}

But whatever he felt about local affairs (to Smith in the same letter he had also said 'So little is known in Rome of the state of this country') he knew that in the end Rome did hold the power. So he wrote to Smith again, wondering whether he would go to Rome about the appointment of bishops. 'There are so many matters of vital importance to the due organization of these Missions, which can only be disposed and arranged by

\textsuperscript{82} Polding to Geoghegan, 17 December 1863, SAA U1419/5-22, Letters, vol.3, p.132.


\textsuperscript{84} Polding to Smith, 20 August 1865, SAA O1735/3-2, Letters, vol.3, p.190.


\textsuperscript{86} Polding to Brown, c.20 December 1861, CAA, Letters, vol.3, p.46.
personal interviews with authorities. It seems very evident that more and more, Polding was aware that local questions needed local solutions. In the letter to Brown quoted above, Polding stated this clearly, 'this mode of governing us - at this distance - is most mischievous. Our confidence is shaken.' So later, he told Salvado in Western Australia, quite definitely, when the successor to Serra was being decided, that since he [Salvado] knew the place so well, no one would be able to give better counsel about who was suitable. To Gregory he had complained concerning the appointment of Bishops, 'How ignorant the people in Rome are of our real position.'

Another reason that can be added to Polding's realization that there was something wrong in the way Rome operated so centrally was that there was such inconsistency in the way various complaints were considered. For example, he remarked to Geoghegan on the differences in the way 'Mrs de Lacy's fabulous grievances' were listened to, compared with the 'unceremonious manner in which my Vicar General .. was ordered off from me.' Likewise the charges of a priest, McGirr, whom Polding had expelled from his jurisdiction, resulted in 'the arraignment of the Archbishop before the highest Ecclesiastical tribunal in the world.' No wonder indeed that he would begin to see authority and its exercise differently. And that he could lament in the same letter, 'and is such a cloud to hang over the declining years of one who has served the Church well-nigh fifty years? - Is this the recompense. And is the H.F. to be liable to the suspicion of vindictiveness without a shadow of real cause?'

The genuineness of the attitudes expressed by Barnabo over Gregory's recall may questioned, but he certainly spoke of trying to 'soothe the pain of the Archbishop and of the said Abbot [Gregory]' since he was aware that the recall had caused great
trouble to both of them.\footnote{Barnabo to Ullathorne, 13 July 1860, Ref Dowd,op.cit.,p.182.} Much later Cardinal Pitra expressed the same concern when writing to Abbot Burchall, by then President General of the English Benedictine congregation,

> I was delighted to form so intimate an acquaintance with this venerable Apostle of Australia, & I cordially shared the extremely sympathetic respect which he everywhere inspires. He did me the honour, more than once, of confiding to me his trials and his consolations. I would wish to omit nothing which depends upon me, to soothe the one and to increase the other.\footnote{Pitra to Abbot Burchall, 27 May 1866, A.A, reference T. Kavenagh, ‘Vaughan and the Monks of Sydney,’ Tjurunga, 25, 1983, p.170. Copy of letter in SAA.}

In pursuit of this effort to provide consolation to Polding, Pitra saw that a key factor would be the ensuring of the future of his Benedictine family (Pitra was a Benedictine\footnote{ibid.}) and he asked if it would be possible to raise again the question of connecting the Australian Benedictines to England. He noted that, ‘Both for the interests of Propaganda, & for the love I bear towards our venerable order, I most sincerely desire that the Benedictine tents should be spread more and more in the mission of Australia.’\footnote{The words used to describe religious communities vary. Often they are spoken of as ‘Orders,’ which is a general term. It is used in this section to describe the groups under discussion. Polding often used the word ‘Institute,’ which was used more often for groups that were founded in modern times. The word ‘Congregation’ is also used and this writer will use it in relation to the new foundation, the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, seeing it as a grouping within a larger Benedictine Order. Hence, ‘Congregation of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict,’ describes the situation accurately.} If only Pitra knew it, it was already far too late to ensure the future, at least of part of the Benedictine family, the St Mary’s monks.

**Tensions with Other Orders.**\footnote{94}

Relevant here, in setting a context of conflicts of authority in the Australian Church of the time, is a discussion of Polding’s view of his relations with other religious orders. However, it is outside the scope of this thesis to examine the whole truth of the
situation regarding four orders. Others have done this from various perspectives. Here the purpose is simply to describe how Polding saw the situation. There were problems with the Passionists and the Christian Brothers who both left Australia after a short time. Some of the sisters of Charity moved to Tasmania. The Marist Fathers who came uninvited, remained, but seemed to have had trouble keeping their independence and establishing themselves. Yet Polding asked the Passionists, the Christian Brothers, and the sisters of Charity to come, presumably seeing that they could help, and knowing that they were not Benedictines.

The question was in fact a question of authority. It seems that Polding and Gregory showed scant respect for their rightful independence once the orders had arrived in the colony. Kavenagh comments that maybe Polding simply did not paint a true picture of the conditions of the place to which they were coming. This certainly could explain the dilemma of the Passionists, who ended up trying to serve the Aborigines on Stradbroke Island in very difficult conditions for which their Italian origins would have ill-prepared them. The problem seems to be located in how Polding saw his responsibility as Archbishop for these orders. At that time, the position of the local Bishop in relation to religious orders was very unclear, but Polding always believed that he had a great deal of authority over them. The religious orders saw it differently.

The truth of whether Polding expected all the orders to become Benedictines is very hard to sort out. There seems to be no direct evidence of this. In fact what he wrote would not support this line of thinking, though what he wrote and what he said may be two different matters. At least it is certain, that the orders seemed to have perceived it


96 T.Kavenagh, 'Polding and 19th Century Monasticism,' Tjurunga, 8, 1974, p.186.

97 Congregations engaged in works of charity, such as were founded in the 19th century, did not fit with a former understanding of religious orders, especially of women which were marked by enclosure and the taking of solemn vows. Their status as "real" religious was only clarified by Leo XIII in his constitution, Conditae a Christo, 8th December, 1900.
this way. Polding did see himself as the superior. So too did most bishops of the time. Bishop Quinn in Brisbane certainly did with the Mercy sisters, and much later Cardinal Moran was dealing as superior at least with the Subiaco nuns. So confusion about such issues reigned, and much depended on how the bishop or archbishop saw the limits of his power.

One can only assume from Polding's comments what his views were. In 1847, when he was seeking permission to found other Benedictine houses, he noted that he would be the regular superior, but he added that this would be so, provided that he had the consent of the Major Superiors of the English Benedictine congregation. What follows is more significant in terms of the present discussion. Writing to Pius IX in the third person he said,

He begs in addition, that he might have the same faculties also in regard to other religious orders that have been approved, provided that he had the consent of the Superiors of these orders, and he pleads that Your Holiness in consideration of the distance of the places would grant that all these concessions should pertain also to the successors in the See of the petitioner.

The file simply notes that the answer is Affirmative, Given at Rome, 21st March 1847. So this would explain how Polding saw his role in relation to other orders.

However, one would also be able to assume that what he says about formation of priests for the mission, could apply to his view of the distinctiveness of other orders. He noted that his seminary partakes of the monastic character which he believed was the best preparation for the future Apostolic Missionary. This belief is a very

98 Even later in history if congregations were approved by Rome, rather than by a diocesan bishop, the local bishop did have some areas which were his responsibility, for example the approval of new houses in his diocese, the presiding at elections. This was clarified in Norms issued in 1901.

99 Polding to Pius IX, 21 March 1847, SAA, U1315/13-9, Letters, vol.2, p.80

different matter to assuming that because of this he wanted all to be Benedictines. Even when he wrote that he hoped in Melbourne as in Sydney, bishop, clergy and the seminarians would live in community, it is in terms of the tradition of the church that living in common was a valuable way for all to live, not that Benedictines were the only ones who lived in community.\(^{101}\)

His request for modification of obligations regarding the breviary is in fact only for the monks.\(^ {102}\) And when in 1844 he did ask if secular priests may use the Benedictine Office and Missal, he noted that the request concerned ‘those who wish it.’\(^ {103}\) However, it would be easy to draw conclusions that there was a pressure here if one felt that way in any case. Polding did say he saw advantages in having all one order in charge of a diocese, but having one order in charge, does not mean he did not see a place for others.

In fact, there is some evidence that he did respect the uniqueness of each group and was happy to have a variety of orders. There is pride in his note to Propaganda in late 1854 that he had educated and ordained twenty-two secular priests for the mission at his own expense. At the same time five priests of the Benedictine Institute had been wholly or partly trained. There is no hint of pressure in this comment for all those ordained to be Benedictine. The same attitude is obvious when he reports to Rome in 1866 on the progress of his diocese. He lists the works of various orders, sisters of Charity, Good Samaritan sisters, sisters of Mercy, Benedictine nuns with some pride. His observations about the problems and their outcome come in the same report. They are the fruit of his own experience he says. This experience is, that when a Bishop is seeking a community to work in his diocese, he will turn to religious superiors. Often unsuitable people are sent

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To agree with the wishes of the Bishop [that is his request for help], they send off afar restless, importunate spirits and it is only too late when the Bishop realises that he has incurred a great expense in order to bind himself and encumber his diocese with people worse than useless.  

Above all they have imprinted in them one idea 'that they ought not allow the Bishop too much authority over them.' He also went on to say that, if a congregation were to ask to open a house under his jurisdiction, rather than respond to a request for one to be opened, there seemed to be more hope that suitable people would be sent.

One would have to examine all the dealings of Polding with the four orders mentioned to draw complete conclusions about what happened in each case. The discussion here centres only around his own comments in letters about his relationships with the orders. This is how Polding himself saw his actions, and another view of the situation is possible, but not within the scope of this thesis.

Regarding the Christian Brothers, Polding asked the Pope to commission them to come to Australia knowing that, as they were trying to fulfil so many requests for help, they may not listen directly to Polding himself.  

His request was in terms of the great needs of Australia, and the great work that such men could do. His undertaking was to 'appropriately provide everything for their livelihood and care.' Polding did note that he was paying them forty pounds each and the rent for their house, fifty five pounds sterling.

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106 Polding to Cardinal Fransoni, 10 April 1845, and Polding to Secretary of Propagation of the Faith, 20 October 1845, Letters, vol.2, pp. 26,42. The comments were made when explaining the costs in comparison to how much more had been given to the Passionists, so were not in any way negative comments about the Brothers.
Polding was ready to express his pleasure at their coming. He spoke of them, together with the sisters of Charity, as instruments of the greatest good. He added, 'Their establishment and support are of first importance to the mission,' and noted that, together with the Passionists, they were all most happy in devoting themselves to the mission.

Trouble began over a question of authority. Polding believed he should have some say in whether or not they accepted novices, and the Brothers claimed that they were independent of the Bishop. Polding frequently spoke of this as a claim to be exempt from episcopal jurisdiction, even stating that the constitutions of the Brothers carried no such claim. In a very clear statement, Polding summed up how he saw the issue: '[but] I will never sanction an unwarranted assumption of exemption from the authority which God has appointed to rule in his Church. This cannot tend to the good of the parties concerned nor to general edification.' Finally the brothers left Australia without even notifying Polding or discussing matters with him. In his justification to Fransoni against their accusations of unjust treatment, he argued that they were not established in a monastery canonically erected, but living as private persons. This sounds somewhat specious, and it is simply the first of many occasions where he acted in a way that showed he believed that as bishop he had a particular claim over the religious groups in his diocese.

Little is said of the Marists in Polding's correspondence. In 1846, he writes to the Superior General saying, 'Be quite sure, Dear Fr Superior General, of the deep interest

I have in your congregation and the very sincere wish I have to be of use to it. In the beginning, he expresses his joy to see their numbers increasing day by day. But the question of the relationship of the missionaries with the episcopal authority is again an issue. In explaining the situation to Fransoni, Polding claims that it is important for one order to be in charge. Therefore he notes that he has admitted the Marist Fathers to the diocese not in their identity as an order, but simply as individual missionaries, French subjects working in a French mission. In that way they were unable to constitute themselves in the public eye as a visible religious community. His exact words of explanation show that there will be great tensions, and he even notes that he is aware that they will be upset by his limitations on them.

My firmly grounded opinion is that, for the good of Religion, in a recently established Christian community, it is only right that a single religious order should be in charge of it. The administration of another body, of another community, and especially of another Provincial would set in competition two good organisations which would do each other harm, and would give rise to jealousy and touchiness among the clergy, and would impair the union of heart between the flock and their shepherd.

Again here, there is a mere statement of opinion, without real argument or evidence, a method Folding often uses when discussing areas where there are conflicting opinions about authority.

By 1847 the conflict with the Marists had come to a head and recourse was had to Rome about the situation. Polding was asked to explain. He referred to his original plan to allow the establishment of a Procurate, which he saw as simply a house established for the convenience of missionaries travelling to remote islands. Such an establishment was obviously seen by Polding as having no official position within the diocese. But again the question arose as to whether the procurators should be exempt from episcopal jurisdiction. His stand is clear,

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That all members of other Regular orders are subject to the Archbishop, that this helps to concentrate efforts to spread the faith, and finally and specifically for a French group, that exemptions may cause difficulties with the local government for non English subject priests.  

Polding and some of the religious orders obviously saw things from different viewpoints.

There is no information about how this situation was resolved, but the Marists remained in the diocese and twenty years later Polding wrote to the superior of the time asking for priests to take charge of one or several missions. He claimed that he had long admired the zeal, piety and spirit of self denial of the priests, with whom he had had such intimate relationships for many years. This indicates that harmony was later established, but the main point is that Polding saw himself as having episcopal authority over the religious in the Diocese.

The Passionists came to work with the Aborigines, and Polding made great efforts to help establish the mission at Moreton Bay. He provided money, obtained buildings, bought a boat, arranged for supplies, and even stayed with the priests for some time. However, again there was the stumbling block of authority. In reporting on the Aboriginal mission, Polding notes that he was astonished to learn from the head of the Passionists, that they were asking to be considered as a constituted body independent of the established, principal ecclesiastical authority. The Passionists pointed to an authority from Rome, which Polding knew nothing about. His account of the situation to Heptonstall adds further details about the conflict. Polding was accused of hindering the mission, yet when he then told them the Passionists could go and do as they like, they begged him not to give them up. They had letters of independence, yet

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he was held responsible, and they would not accept his appointment of a procurator to
care for the mission. In the end the Passionists left the mission, intending to go to
Western Australia, but in fact they stayed in South Australia. The conflict was not
resolved.

The problems that occurred with the sisters of Charity centred more on particular
difficulties with personnel than with overall questions of Polding's authority. In fact
when a question arose of obtaining money and support from Ireland, the place of their
establishment, Polding was loath to interfere. He wrote to Archbishop Murray of
Dublin to explain how he saw the situation. Here in this situation may lie the seeds of
the problems with the Irish Bishops, who were ready to hear adverse accounts of
Polding. Two years later, Polding ensured that the question of official separation from
the jurisdiction of Ireland for the sisters of Charity was carried through. But it seems
that dissident voices always found a hearing with the Bishops there.

Two sisters went to Tasmania, and it was not long before a conflict arose over the
ownership of the Parramatta property that Polding had obtained for the sisters when
they first came. Polding claimed that the property was for the use of the sisters in New
South Wales. Again he was in the situation of having to defend himself at length to
Roman authorities.

118 Polding to Heptonstall, 26 May 1845, DAL 390, Letters, vol.2, p.28. See also Polding's
similar explanations of the difficulties to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 20


122 Polding to Propaganda Fide, 30 June 1854, PF CO, vol.5, ff.539-542, Letters, vol.2,
pp.202-209.
The so-called de Lacy affair centred around conflicts with Sister Baptist de Lacy, a difficult personality. Polding certainly saw it as a problem with a particular person.\(^\text{123}\) He may well be justified in saying to Cullen, 'Oh! that her humility had been equal to her active desire to aid the poor,' but it is worth noting that again it is Polding who is always in a situation of defense. We will never know just what the rights and wrongs of the situations were, but at least we can be sure that the Roman authorities were gaining an increasing opinion of Polding as a person constantly involved in conflict situations. Polding himself puts the de Lacy affair as a matter of ecclesiastical discipline since she had deliberately and without authorization left her own convent and returned to Ireland. He later has to justify himself to Rome, yet again, and he does this in a lengthy document.\(^\text{124}\)

Polding's anxiety over Cardinal Cullen's reception of de Lacy and his interference in Australian affairs were expressed to Goold and it seems that he had good reason to be anxious.\(^\text{125}\) De Lacy received a good hearing, and the case against Polding grew.

Polding was to suffer greatly from accusations that came after the de Lacy affair because it became one of the issues taken up by people already looking for complaints about the administration. No doubt it also added to the tide that finally caused the recall of Gregory. There were accusations of injustice when a greatly disaffected de Lacy returned to Ireland. The clearest statement of the details of the affair from Polding's perspective is in a letter to Goold, which shows how Polding perceived the situation:

Oh my dear friend if you have communities, be sure you have the founders of these of a right spirit. These Ss almost from the beginning have been more or less a cause of trouble to us. Distrust of Superiors, bad temper, making too much of little things, arbitrariness in the Governing, oversensitiveness in the


Governed - these are the bane of good discipline and domestic happiness in the cloister as elsewhere.\textsuperscript{126}

This comment has the flavour of reflection on long experience and the wisdom that has been learnt through it.

Relationships with the sisters of Charity were still on a controversial footing in 1867 as indicated by a letter from Polding reproaching M Joseph O'Brien, the Rectress, of violating the law of Ecclesiastical obedience and setting aside the directions of the Ecclesiastical Superior. This situation may well have been solved by a letter of apology from her but the overall effects of the conflicts would leave their mark.\textsuperscript{127}

The feelings of the sisters of Charity over the matter could not have been helped by the ambiguous position of their superior, Mother Scholastica Gibbons, in her role in relation to the establishment of the sisters of the Good Samaritan.\textsuperscript{128}

It is clear therefore that there were tensions and conflicts between Polding and these four groups of religious. It is understandable that the orders could have felt that pressure was being put on them to give control to Polding and thus they feared a loss of an independence they prized. It is indeed obvious from Polding's own comments that he felt justified in exercising his rights as ecclesiastical superior. The sad thing about it all is that he did genuinely appreciate the work of the communities, as he so often expressed, but mistakes and different understandings only led to conflict and a perception of Polding on all fronts, in Australia and elsewhere, as an authoritarian person, involved in a series of mis-managed and conflictual affairs.


\textsuperscript{128} A detailed discussion of the situation from the point of view of the Sisters of Charity appears in M.O'Sullivan, '\textit{A Cause of Trouble}? Irish Nuns and English Clerics', Sydney : Crossing Press, 1995.
In this complex and troubled period Polding did not always handle situations with great wisdom, but the care and concern for those involved in the conflicts did reflect the qualities required by Benedict of his abbot. The people he chose to exercise special roles did not always live up to his expectations or to the expectations of vocal and, at times, dissident members of Church and society. Polding's ecclesiastical role and relationships seemed to ask more of him than he was able to fulfil and he felt a lack of support. Structures did not exist that enabled this support to be given. All his energies were spent on his missionary endeavours and his desire for the advancement of the Church in Australia, and given this fact, it is sad that his struggles were so overwhelming, and at the time seemed so fraught with failure.
St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney, in the early 1860s.
St Mary’s Monastery was a part of this complex.
CHAPTER 6

THE BENEDICTINES OF ST MARY'S

The previous discussion regarding the general problems in the Australian Church context refers to issues that overlap with the Benedictine context, and many of the problems were closely connected. In particular, Gregory's role will be seen to be very significant. It has been said that 'by linking the aggressive, blundering energies of Gregory to Benedictine aspirations, Polding gave his dream a hard abrasive edge.'1 It is necessary to see what the Benedictine aspirations were, to look at the abrasive edge or edges, and to see how the questions of authority were central in all of this.

The Missionary Vision

Polding's letter to the Chapter of the English Benedictine congregation in 1846 shows how he saw his work in establishing Benedictine life in Australia.2 He connected his task with that of the Apostles of England such as Augustine and says,

May the Benedictine order, which during so many centuries has produced the fruits of eternal life in England, be transplanted in its native vigour to the far distant south - to a country in every respect excellently adapted to receive Religious institutions of a Monastic Missionary character.

The operative words are 'monastic' and 'missionary.' In many of his letters too, he expressed aspects of this vision, for example, 'the institute that civilised and Christianized the North of Europe more than 1000 years since, now taking its flight into the Southern Hemisphere for the purposes equally noble and good.'3 He also noted

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1 O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.79.


that English Benedictines are not as Benedictines are in France under Gueranger, devoted almost entirely to sacred literature. He saw them as essentially devoted to the missions, and even more significantly he stated,

We shall in our Institute, come as near to the form of the Benedictine Institute as it existed before the Reformation in England as we can, blending as it did in perfect harmony the Episcopal authority with the Abbatial, and producing Missionaries who more zealously fulfilled their duties, from the habitual renunciation of all things, the consequence of their Monastic Profession.4

These letters were written some ten years after Polding came to Australia, so his vision had not diminished. It had even clarified. He saw too the need for adaptation and part of the same letter to the 1846 Chapter, already quoted, says this,

Since the last meeting of Chapter, I have been enabled to commence successfully a design, which from the period of my consecration I have never ceased to entertain - I mean the Establishment of our Holy congregation of the order of St. Benedict in Australia, after a form approved by the Holy See and adapted to the exigencies of that far distant country.

It is very clear that Polding was indeed trying to do something absolutely new. He was setting up an urban monastery rather than a rural one, as happened in England when the Benedictines returned from France. He was trying to blend episcopal and abbatial authority. There was no great Benedictine Abbey in England at the time, let alone an abbey seminary and abbey diocese which made Polding's dream for Australia extraordinary.5 Collier, the English Benedictine congregation Procurator in Rome, gave advice to Polding in 1839, that 'the most eligible form of government for any monastic establishments in Australia would be that of Cathedral priories as in medieval times.'6 One must ask how would he know? One must also ask was Polding thinking this already? He was to visit other European monasteries in Italy, Germany

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5 Suttor, op.cit.,p.68.
6 T.Kavenagh, 'The 1855 Monastic Declarations of St Mary's : Adapting "RB" to Colonial Australia,' Tjurunga, 34, 1988, p.73.
and Switzerland, especially when he was drawing up Constitutions for St. Mary's, but they would not have helped him to formulate his ideas about the missionary spirit.

His own English Benedictine congregation had been full of missionary zeal during its time of exile in France, and its origins from Gregory and Augustine would have strongly affected these attitudes. Lunardi notes the significance of Polding's contact with an Italian monk Pietro Casaretto, who was later President of the Cassinese congregation. This is also significant because Polding used the Cassinese rules when he was drawing up the Constitutions for St. Mary's and later used a Cassinese women's rule when he was preparing the rules for the sisters of the Good Samaritan. Polding encouraged Casaretto to set up a seminary to train those who were called to missionary work. Lunardi situates this great missionary ideal in the strong missionary spirit of the nineteenth century. So both Casaretto and Polding were people of their times. Though Lunardi indicates that he himself has some reservations about being both a monk and a missionary – ('was this life a sort of a hybrid,' he asks,), he notes that Casaretto had no doubts. The missionary was to be Benedictine, as were the missionary monks who brought civilization to Europe in the Middle Ages. He even added to the vow formula a promise that the monk would readily go to the missions when called, to whatever place and for whatever time.

The notion of monk-missionary was uppermost in Polding's mind. Perhaps the two ideas of abbey-diocese and missionary-monk were the main cause of difficulty, and the reason for the final outcome of failure to achieve the dream. It was indeed a daunting and difficult task to try to reconcile the two ideas in practice. There is no doubt that Polding's own life was informed and activated by his missionary zeal and his search for those who were lost, convicts, aborigines, women on the streets, people isolated in the country. However, it is also true that Polding came with a firm intention of setting

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8 ibid., p.44.
up a Benedictine monastery as the centre and form of Catholic life.  

He thought the monastery would give focus and ideal meaning to the mission, as in fact it could have done. This idea goes back to the time even before he came to Sydney in 1834. He wrote to the Chapter of the English Benedictine congregation stating, 'My earnest desire is to establish the institute of the English Benedictine congregation in the Vicariate placed under my jurisdiction.'

His request was refused but the idea remained.

Not long after his arrival, Polding wrote that he was going to the Illawarra (sic) district, about forty-six miles from Sydney, to determine upon the site of a monastery. Did this mean that the establishment of the abbey diocese at St Mary's was not then the priority? Perhaps his early idea was to establish a monastery such as Downside in a country area. Or maybe he simply hoped that there would be immediate expansion, and that there would be the abbey-diocese, and other monasteries around the countryside as well. If this were so, we need to see why it did not happen like this. Was part of it that Polding was first a missionary and priest, then a bishop and a poor third a monk. And did his dream of a Benedictine Australia fail because he did not attempt to achieve it above all else?

A study of Benedictines in history shows that there is no one way to live the Benedictine life, whatever the proponents of monastic or missionary or both, would say. Polding's great struggle was to do something that was certainly new, and incredible obstacles of events of the times or of sheer human weakness made his vision impossible to realize. The abbey-diocese failed and in the historical circumstances it is

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9 O'Farrell, op.cit., pp.40,44.


12 Polding to Brown, 1 November 1835, DA J 17, Letters, vol.1, p.57.

13 O'Farrell, op.cit., p.46.
not so hard to see why, but it could have been possible that the Benedictine community, already largely detached from it at Lyndhurst, could have survived independently. The fact is that they were too closely interwoven. The two Benedictine groups of women survived - the Subiaco nuns (now at Jamberoo in New South Wales) as did the Good Samaritans sisters of the order of St Benedict, which Polding founded. The difference may have been in the way the women and the men saw the value of and lived out the communal life, but there could be no doubt that the other problems Polding was encountering at the time, already discussed, must have had an effect on the Benedictine community of St Mary's.

O'Donoghue uses a heading for a section of her book “Monk or Missioner 1845-54”. This could imply that Polding did not make one or other a priority, or it might mean that he could not, or it might indicate that it is not possible to marry the two. There is no doubt that the history of Benedictine life would indicate that it is possible to be both monk and missionary, but at least one must note that there are always difficulties and divisions about the two concepts or about how they are understood. If missionary is understood in its true meaning of helping to spread the good news of the Gospel, Benedictine monks could always do that whether they lived a more enclosed life or travelled to where there was need. Were the great Benedictine missionaries like Augustine, Boniface or the German missionaries who went to the United States in the same era as Polding, successful because they were not permanently resident in an abbey monastery? Polding could not have stayed at home in the abbey and have done what he did in terms of his zeal for those who needed help in so many parts of the continent. Is the fact that he did not, part of the reason for the failure? This issue is

14 O'Donoghue, op.cit.,p.74.

15 See Molony, op.cit.,p.11, where he comments on the tensions between the social conditions of the time and the question of monastic stability. However, it must be noted that stability has a broader meaning than being rooted in one geographical place. It also connotes being securely settled in a particular way of life, the commitment to which, one can live wherever one happens to be.
also relevant to the question of Polding's role as abbot and also to the question of the formation of the monks.

**St Mary's and the English Benedictine Congregation Connection.**

The role of the English Benedictine congregation needs to be discussed in relation to the establishment of Benedictine life in Australia. In July of 1834, before Polding left England for the first time, he asked the English Benedictine congregation for permission to establish the Institute in his new Vicariate - specifically that it would be formed into a province of the congregation with himself as Supreme Head, and that he be empowered on behalf of the congregation to receive and eventually profess novices. This was refused. There may have been many reasons for this. 16 One was, that there were in fact only 99 priests and clerics in 1834 in the congregation, so the suggestion that shortage of personnel was a problem, was in fact true. There may have been other possibilities, for example fear that the "province" would be so different from the other two existing ones, the fact that the circumstances were unknown to any of them, including Polding, and perhaps even their fear of the idea of monk-bishops. After the disastrous experiences with Bishop Edward Slater and Bishop William Morris in Mauritius monk-bishops were a suspect breed in many English Benedictine congregation minds. Both Slater and Morris, English Benedictines, had been unsuccessful in the mission in Mauritius. 17

In March of 1835, Polding petitioned Rome for authority to establish a monastery in his new vicariate and was also refused on the grounds that this was premature. However, in 1837 Polding sent Ullathorne to recruit more people for the mission, and during that time, he was authorised to undertake the canonical erection of a Benedictine monastery in New South Wales. 18 The terms of this recrypt note that the

16 See Kavenagh, op. cit., *Tjurunga*, 34.
18 Rescript from Pope Gregory XVI, 4 June 1837.
monks were to be dependent on Polding and that there were no legal ties with the English Benedictine congregation.

Richard Marsh was the English Benedictine congregation's procurator general in 1839 and he wrote a letter giving Polding authority, but in careful words, distancing the venture from the English congregation. This letter was printed in the 1855 copy of the Declarations for the St Mary's community when they were approved and distributed. The end of it reads,

As things stand it seems to me (and I have consulted the Definitors of the Regimen) that those who have been professed can have you as their only regular superior, since the enormous distance is too great for them to come under the examination of Superiors living in England. Nevertheless we hope that there will always be between those you profess and our congregation, a unity of hearts, prayers and good works.

In 1842 Polding pleaded at the General Chapter of the congregation for more missionaries, and again this request was denied. So that the English Benedictine congregation was not accepting any responsibility for the mission. In the light of all of that, it is interesting that Gregory was recalled to England in 1861, and there seems to have been some role played by the congregation as well as by Rome. He ended his days with the English Benedictine congregation, yet he had come to Australia with Polding as a subdeacon, been ordained here and served here for 25 years. The English Benedictine congregation really had no authority to play a part in the recall of Gregory, as Polding consistently stated.

The Establishment of St Mary's Community

The first novices were received in August of 1843, which could be seen as the inauguration of Benedictine life officially in Australia, and in April 1845 four choir


monks and six lay brothers were professed. In April of 1844 Gregory XVI had declared officially that the monastery be designated for the making of lawful novitiates and professions.  

During Ullathorne's visit to Europe in 1837 in order to recruit more priests, he was only able to obtain the help of Irish priests, and already in 1838, he was saying that to do anything Benedictine in the colony was now out of the question. For him the Benedictine dream was over. A vision for an abbey diocese and for the provision of Benedictine priests to cover the great needs.

However, Polding obtained a decree when he was in Rome, at the same time as the hierarchy was established in 1841, setting up St. Mary's as a monastic cathedral with a Benedictine monastery attached. Whatever Ullathorne thought, Polding was not to be deflected from the pursuit of his vision. In fact, when writing to Murray, he was very clear about how he hoped to establish small groups on each mission, 'my desire is to establish two priests and a lay brother in each mission. After much consideration, it is the best plan, I feel assured, to guard against the dangers of our calling.' And he adds, 'Of course, the Archbishop will be always the principal Superior.' This idea was still evident after the declarations of St Mary's were approved. Polding wrote to Brown sending him a copy of the declarations and he asked for observations and 'suggestions for the future, for the development of the forms for the Government when our infant institute spreads into houses.'

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21 Kavenagh, op.cit., pp.69-70.


In 1852, when the dioceses in the Australian Church were established, the plan for Benedictines to form the Cathedral Chapter, and to have future Archbishops selected from their number, was refused. The constitutions for St. Mary's were approved in 1855, and Polding was made abbot for life. But at the same time it was noted that the abbey diocese was not to continue.

It took a long time for Polding to acknowledge that there was no hope even for a Benedictine institute. He centred his hopes on a Benedictine successor, and in 1868, he was writing to Gregory, hoping for Vaughan as his co-adjutor. 'I wish I could have Bede Vaughan. Unless I do all is up with the Benedictine community.' And even more definitely in 1870 'As regards the Benedictines, I fear the case is hopeless.' He had already told Gregory as he still lamented his loss, that he knew there was no one among the Benedictines fit to be superior.

Yet in 1873, writing to Barnabo, he saw the problem only in terms of a need for reorganization and he stated that he believed that the arrival of Vaughan would make this possible.

With regard to the reorganization of Benedictines (a rather difficult and toilsome task) I entirely agree with the H. Father and with your Eminence that it should be carried out slowly and prudently. So I am trusting rather in the prudence and great experience of Bishop Vaughan in such a matter.

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25 Letter signed by Fransoni and Barnabo, 4th June, 1852, Printed in Kavenagh, Tjurunga, op.cit., pp.69-70.

26 Shanahan, op.cit., p.63.


Even Gregory assured Polding in a letter in 1873 \(^{31}\) that Vaughan was ‘full of going out, and of taking with him Benedictine material to make a fresh start.’ Little did he or Polding know that the wide powers that Polding gave Vaughan soon afterwards, giving him power as administrator to examine, correct or change everything that seemed to pertain to the spiritual or temporal welfare of this Archdiocese, would lead to the complete suppression of the community soon after Polding’s death. \(^{32}\) In fact, it seems that Vaughan came determined on this course of action. At least, one could hardly say his efforts for the survival of the community were great ones.

**Factors Leading to the Demise of the Community.**

It has been noted, perhaps too simply, that the cause of the suppression of St. Mary’s Community can be attributed to both the Benedictine congregation (its lack of support and its unpopularity in Rome) as well as to factors in colonial society. \(^{33}\) In particular the English - Irish tensions were mentioned. As well as this there was also the fact that Polding was unable to settle the tension caused by the community emphasis of his Benedictine life and his constant travels because of his missionary zeal. His role as abbot and the roles assigned to others did not solve this problem.

Then there is the question of personalities in respect of Polding’s own character and indeed Gregory’s as well. There is also the question of the nature of the candidates for Benedictine life as well as the type of formation they were given. The very nature of the time and the place was another influence, but one could argue against Shanahan that the concept and its attempted realization was "out of time and out of place", because the history of Benedictine life has shown that the Benedictine way of life as

\(^{31}\) Gregory to Polding, 20 January 1873, SAA.

\(^{32}\) Polding to Vaughan, 10 January 1874, SAA, U1523/19-9, *Letters*, vol.3, p.377.

\(^{33}\) Shanahan, op.cit., p.xiv.
both expressed in the rule and as lived out over the centuries is for all times and all places and circumstances.

So we need to look at some of the factors that had bearing on the failure of both the Benedictine abbey-diocese and the St Mary's Benedictine community.

Attacks from without:

One cannot underestimate the degree of venom that was brought to bear on the Benedictines and their way of life by many outspoken laymen in Sydney at the time. This is intertwined with the problems with the laity already discussed, but here the emphasis is on the connection with the Benedictine problems. There was a great deal of backing for the claims because of the scandals within the monastery and this will be discussed in the next section.

The growing influence of liberal ideas was evident, and this was expressed in the *Freeman's Journal*. By the mid-1850s, the journal was becoming much more concerned with the church's internal affairs and increasingly critical of what it saw as an authoritarian structure. ³⁴ For a time, a former Benedictine, Sheridan Moore had been editor, but he was removed by Polding. However, Jabez Heydon, the new editor and William Duncan a contributor, continued to attack the Benedictines even more openly and strongly. Both claimed that a clergy must be fit and available, be devoted to the mission, be constantly active. Polding had met these requirements, so he, personally, escaped some of the ire. However, on the grounds of seeking co-operation with the laity in determining policy, he would have failed. It has been claimed that Gregory was made the butt of much of this, because Polding himself was admired for his care of the needy and for his missionary work, and because people would have been reluctant to attack someone at the very heart of the church. ³⁵

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³⁴ O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.100.

³⁵ ibid.,p.102.
It was very easy for the educated laity to see the patronising attitude that it was the function of bishops to govern and the duty of priests and laity to obey.\textsuperscript{36} Such attitudes were considered to be expressed and symbolised in the monastery in the person and role of the abbot. The monastery was perceived as isolated from the church and "real life". So no matter what was wrong could be blamed on Benedictinization.\textsuperscript{37} Whatever was the truth in all of this, there resulted a building up, in Rome and in Ireland, of a picture of serious mis-administration.\textsuperscript{38}

**Problems from within the monastery**

And what was the truth in all of this? One can say a thing often enough and it will come to be seen as the truth. However, there were serious problems within the monastery itself. There were 32 monks in 1846, in 1851 there were 45 in the monastery, so that would seem a viable group. (By 1877 when Vaughan suppressed the monastery, there were 12) However, there was a great deal of dissension. A group of monks, perhaps unhappy and looking for a way out of religious life, began to question the validity of their vows. There were scandals, restlessness and indiscipline. It is to be noted that Polding wrote his resignation in 1854 the day after these monks signed a letter setting out their grievances. This fact is not often connected, and Polding's resignation is more often related to the external conflicts.\textsuperscript{39}

The consequences of this were that, though Polding was freed from the charges which the monks brought against him, it was made obvious that Rome could no longer countenance the Benedictine diocese. Polding's resignation was not accepted and both Gregory and he returned. Gregory continued to be the butt of criticism and feeling

\textsuperscript{36} Shanahan, op.cit.,p.119.

\textsuperscript{37} Suttor, op.cit.,p.80.

\textsuperscript{38} O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.115.

\textsuperscript{39} Kavenagh, op.cit., *Tjurunga*, 35, 1988, p.56.
against him grew. He was in fact recalled in 1860, perhaps the scapegoat, or at least the price of peace. There is no doubt that Polding saw this as a frontal blow to his authority and the adversarial laymen saw the recall as a victory, a victory of democracy over authority.\(^{40}\)

Bishop Davis' role during his time in charge of the monastery when both Polding and Gregory were away could make an interesting contrast to the effect of the later administration of Gregory. Davis, a Benedictine, came in 1848 as Polding's co-adjutor, and was appointed as prior of the monastery. Many positive comments have been made about his connection both with the monastery and the diocese.\(^{41}\) He died after a very short time here, in 1854 – yet another quirk of history. Yet even Davis may not have prevented the decline of the community, with its apparent lack of discipline and commitment, with members not properly formed and trained, and with many of the candidates not suitable in the first place.

The removal of many of the community to the school site at Lyndhurst (including the novices) did not help the situation, since the community that remained would have been even further depleted in numbers and strength by this move. Lyndhurst had been set up as a school for boys to provide a classical education to a more elite class. Its education was seen as elitist, both in its clientele and its curriculum, so the cause of the Benedictines was not helped by its establishment or its maintenance. Many of the major scandals to have centred around the monks there.

Some of the charges that were made against the monks have been addressed by Kavenagh.\(^{42}\) In 1877, Vaughan asked Duncan to write a report on the Benedictines and how they had lived before he (Vaughan) arrived in the colony. Very early after his

\(^{40}\) O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.124.

\(^{41}\) See Molony, op.cit.,p.30; Shanahan, op.cit.,p.57; O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.90.

arrival, he noted the bad name and many scandals associated with the monks and that the only hope seemed to have been to start the order afresh.\textsuperscript{43} This was surely an unlikely prospect, but his unexpected and premature death removed even any remote hope of such an event. Duncan could hardly have been called a friend of the Benedictines, and many of his statements are outrageous and unsupported. Kavenagh shows that some of the allegations must simply have been the result of prejudice and hearsay. The point is not that there were no causes for the complaints and ill-feelings, but that the situation was out of hand and even grossly exaggerated. However, in a climate such as this, there was little hope for redemption. In fact Vaughan closed Lyndhurst in 1874 and recommended in 1877 that the monastery be suppressed. The conclusion of his recommendation regarding the Benedictines is as follows.

\begin{quote}
Therefore - having considered the Past and Present of Monasticism in this Diocese, the disposition of the monks themselves, and public opinion - I suggest that by a decree of the Holy See, the monks who remain be placed under the jurisdiction of the ordinary, with the advice to the same ordinary, (that is, me) to re-establish the order of St Benedict when he deems opportune, leaving to the discretion of the Archbishop the time and the way in which such a restoration should be effected. Dated 27 October 1877.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Polding had died in March of that year.

Other factors such as the Farrelly affair, the Sheehy affair, and above all the influence of the Bishops in Australia who were under the influence of the Irish Cardinal Cullen, and known as the Cullenite bishops, are also important.\textsuperscript{45}

However, it was not only the bishops who had been manoeuvred into appointments under Cullen, who had fears about the Benedictine influence. Polding recounted to Gregory that Willson from Hobart, who had felt antagonistic to Polding because he felt

\textsuperscript{43} ibid., p.154.

\textsuperscript{44} Quoted in Kavenagh, op.cit., p.206.

\textsuperscript{45} See this thesis pp.149-150 for a discussion of the Farrelly affair and p.195-196 for a discussion of the Sheehy affair in relation to the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.
lack of support from him in the long-running Willson - Therry debate over land ownership, had stayed with him in Sydney. It had been a pleasant stay, but at the end of the time, Willson 'opened out on the Benedictines having taken possession of Sydney, and deprecated a Benedictine successor.'

Polding's comments and insights in a letter to Geoghegan after the scandal when the monk, Anselm Curtis, left the community to live with the former housekeeper, are important. He says

our system has been too self-indulgent, not sufficiently reticent, the absence of modification interior and exterior has given a distaste for spiritual things, and a love of the sensual. Whether the result as regards some of the older can be corrected I fear to say - as regards the younger we must provide. After all the great fault has been a desire to do too much, to educate for the Priesthood and the Monastic state, and to attend to the Mission - impossible as I now see.

One cannot help but admire Polding for the honest appraisal, though it came too late to enable him to remedy the situation and realize his hopes.

Never to be daunted however, we find him writing to Salvado in 1869 suggesting that a community from Western Australia may come to Sydney to take over, because he says 'I fear our little Community fails or will fail after my demise.' And so it did.

All of the above reasons no doubt contributed in one way or another to the failure of the community. And underlying all of the areas discussed, is the fact that perhaps the effects would not have been so detrimental if there had been good and stable leadership of the community, whether exercised by Polding himself or by one he appointed as his delegate.

The Exercise of Authority.

It is difficult to judge whether one can measure degrees of responsibility for the failure of the vision on which Polding set his heart. But very significant in the failure is the way Polding exercised his authority. Sometimes he is considered to have been 'curiously authoritarian' and Davis' methods are compared to his. [Davis] 'dampened the conflicts and resentments generated by Polding's strongly hierarchical and sometimes arbitrary ideas of how the monastic community should function.'

Even Davis commented that Polding (and Gregory) had a strong hankering after the absolutism of the Abbot, dictating the rule according to circumstances. In the trouble with the monks of St. Mary's in 1851 and 1852, one of the criticisms was that there was no sure ground in the Benedictine rule as observed at St Mary's, because it was subject to Polding's fluctuating interpretations. Benedict himself did of course leave much flexibility of interpretation to the Abbot, and no doubt Polding was a man of his time, and exercised authority as it was understood at the time. There was little allowance for questioning, discussion and consultation in the church of the time. Rome exercised great authority over him and likewise he exercised authority over the church in Australia. In fact Sydney was the Catholic centre and so Polding really annexed all authority to himself as the highest authority in the Church.

Polding's own perceptions of how he exercised authority are interesting. In the response to one of the criticisms levelled against him by the dissident monks, it is stated,

On the third head of variability, reviewing the authority of the Superior, the Most distinguished Archbishop testifies that there were no changes from the

49 O'Farrell, op.cit.,p.90.
50 Davis to Brown, 28 February 1849,DA M154.
51 O'Donoghue, op.cit.,p.97.
52 Suttor, op.cit.,p.67.
beginning up till now, for he has always exercised absolute authority over his subjects in a consistently moderate manner. 53

It would not be easy to exercise what Polding calls absolute authority in a consistently moderate manner, though it depends on how absolute authority is interpreted. Certainly one would hope that it is possible to be consistently moderate in the exercise of authority. And even more of an insight is found in the comment in a letter to Gregory in 1871 about Austin Sheehy. Polding says that Sheehy was 'cold and distant... He has no idea of the undulating line so much required in government. Angularity will not do.' 54 This comment may well have described Polding's view of his own exercise of authority. At least it shows that in theory, if not in practice, this is what he believed. It would seem that Polding thought that he himself operated in an undulating line, not with angularity. Undulating would certainly be a better description of how Benedict would expect the abbot to govern.

Other Comments:

As a brief conclusion, there are other reasons for some of the troubles with the Benedictines and possible causes for their eventual demise. There was the question of suitable formation of the monks and also the question of the character of the men who joined the monastery. 55 Polding always knew this was a problem and, whether his comments referred to secular priests, Benedictines or other religious, his frequent references show that he knew what an important issue it was. Just after he arrived in Australia, he wrote to Birdsall about the need for more priests for the mission, '..they must be of the right sort - zealous, laborious Missioners, no love for self or pelf. How necessary it is to be careful in selecting clergymen for these Colonies! They live so continually in the eye of the Public, their conduct must be spotless, or religion vitally


55 Shanahan, op.cit.,pp.49,53.
suffers.' It must have been the case that, though Polding knew this, he was so anxious to have help that he was not careful in his selection. Davis observed this as he wrote to the prior of Downside, ‘Entre nous the good Archbishop made a slip in his last importation of labourers,’ and he went on to comment on the failure of the Passionist, Father Peter and the French Benedictine, Father John. Events were to prove him exactly right.

Later, Polding repeated the same idea, noting that there were troubles with those who do not like authority. ‘O they are saints, but let them feel that they are under authority and immediately they turn their nose from us at least due east of Sydney Heads.’ He followed this comment with an observation on the need for native-born clergy. To Gregory, Polding again wrote one of his honest and accurate insights, bearing on both the choice of subjects and their formation. ‘There is something radically wrong, either in the choice of subjects or in the mode of education.’ A few months later he asked Gregory, ‘do dear Gregory send me some god-fearing, man-loving priests,’ and he added that it would all be of no use ‘until we can educate our own clergy.’ As he was writing to the President of All Hallows seminary in Ireland about the type of priests wanted on the mission he noted, ‘We do not want good preachers, we want good catechists.’

And lastly, and very significantly in view of all that has been said about the abbot, there is the question of how Polding could be an effective abbot in view of his long absences either on missionary journeys or overseas. Appointing Gregory as prior, with

56 Polding to Birdsall, 7 June 1836, DA J 168, Letters, vol.1,p.64.
57 Davis to Prior of Downside, 28 February 1849, DA M154.
the title of Father Abbot after the *Constitutions* were approved in 1855, was no substitute for Polding operating himself as abbot, since in fact he had established himself as such for life. How could he exercise a paternal and caring authority with his monks in the face of his many and long absences? When he is recounting a list of problems with clergy, specifically in relation to the aboriginal mission, Polding notes, 'My absence has not been of service to the Mission.'\(^{62}\) The same could be said of the community.

**The Declarations of St Mary's Community**

In April 1855, Polding was notified that the rules (or declarations as they were called,) for St Mary's were approved.\(^{63}\) The text of the rules was both intricate and sophisticated.\(^{64}\) It was written in the form of statements that followed each chapter of the *Rule of St Benedict*, making St Benedict's teaching applicable for this group. So the text appeared, with the relevant chapter from the *Rule of Benedict*, followed by statements on how this was to be interpreted in this situation. The text drew from three sources, and sometimes very cleverly wove together sentences and phrases from these sources.\(^{65}\)

One of the sources used was the 1680 declarations of an Italian Benedictine congregation, called the Cassinese congregation. Polding had been in contact with Abbot Casaretto of this congregation, since it was Casaretto who had founded a

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\(^{62}\) Polding to Heptonstall, 9 June 1843, D A L 244, *Letters*, vol.1, p.224.


\(^{64}\) Kavenagh, op.cit., *Tjurunga*, 35, p.60.

\(^{65}\) The 1855 edition of the St Mary's *Declarations*, was printed in Liverpool, England, and is a small book of 159 pages. In Australia, one copy is held in the Benedictine library of Arcadia, New South Wales, and another in the women's Benedictine community at Jamberoo, New South Wales. T. Kavenagh did extensive research on the text and published his comments and translation in a series of articles in *Tjurunga* in 1988. It is this translation that has been used in this discussion.
community for the formation of missionary Benedictines, and Polding was very interested in the venture, having an eye to the training of men for his own mission. The 1784 English Benedictine constitutions were also used, (the ones Polding would have lived by in England.) The third source was the constitutions of a French congregation, the Maurist congregation. The reason for the use of the latter is not known.

A second decree dated 16 April 1855, was also enclosed with the text of approval of the St Mary's Declarations and it appointed Polding as Abbot for life of the St. Mary's community. This has very important ramifications for the implementation of the Declarations as was to be seen in practice. Polding brought the copy of the text with him from England, arriving home in Sydney on 26 January 1856. On 15 February he formally promulgated the new legislation.

There are some important events prior to the approval of the 1855 Declarations that have a bearing on their preparation and on their effectiveness.

Brother Edmund Moore, a Benedictine who had come to Australia from Downside, had first perceived St Mary's as "more of a monastery" than Downside. He noted that the 'rule followed is, as our Prior Dr Gregory told me yesterday, St Benedict's rule as far as missionary circumstances permit.' So it seems that Polding at this point saw no need for any declarations or written interpretations of the rule. However, by 1849 Moore had changed his mind about the satisfactory nature of this arrangement. He claimed that there was not one rule of any kind for the government of the House. When he spoke to Polding about this he was assured that Polding himself had drawn up a set of rules before he left for Europe.

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66 Moore to Morrall, 8 February 1848, DA M69.

67 This was in February 1846. Kavenagh suggests that these rules would have been the ones approved by a Propaganda decree, 15 May 1847.
This issue of whether or not there were rules, or whether they were known or lived by, became a crucial and damaging issue. There is a very significant letter of Bishop Davis, who had been appointed co-adjutor to Polding and who had been given responsibility for the monastery. He noted in a letter to Prior Wilson at Downside that the Monastery had hitherto been governed by our holy father's rule [i.e. Benedict's rule] as interpreted by the Abbot, (the latter four words underlined by Davis). He continued, saying that this may have been appropriate when Benedict lived, since he was always there to interpret the rule, but it is difficult when Polding and Gregory (the Abbot and the Prior) had such heavy involvement in the missionary work. Davis noted that he was trying to introduce standing orders, that is a regular pattern for the community's life, and Polding was not averse to this. The often-quoted phrase that 'Both the Archbp and Dr G have a strong hanking (sic) after the absolutism of the Abbot dictating the rule according to circumstances' is followed immediately by a phrase which modifies this. Davis states that Polding and Gregory are not opposed altogether to his suggestions and arrangements. He also went on, in a passage which shows a sympathetic approach to Polding, and which the above text, taken out of context, does not convey. He stated that the wonder is, not that things have not been done, but that so much has been done and done so well. However, the comment does show that Polding was operating without very specific rules, or at least he believed that he had a right to dispense with them. This would fit with Benedict's flexibility, and his strong emphasis that the abbot can decide or adapt in case of need. Yet the point that Davis makes, either about fairly random interpretations, or about Polding's (and Gregory's) view of authority, cannot be ignored.

The dissatisfaction and unsettled state of many of the monks up to the mid-1850s surely had an important bearing on the development of the 1855 Declarations. Seven of the monks wrote a letter of petition to Propaganda Fide setting out their

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68 Davis to Wilson, Prior of Downside, 29 February 1849, DA M154.
complaints.\textsuperscript{69} This was the day before Polding wrote his letter of resignation and at the same time as there was profound unrest among the laity of Sydney. The first section of the complaint had to do with the supposed uncertainty about the validity of the vows taken by the monks. This question had already been raised in 1851 and they had apparently been satisfied for a short time after the ensuing discussions.

However, the matter was again raised in the 1854 statement and the section of the complaint dealing with the fact that the monks claimed that they had no certain and approved rule is relevant to the current discussion. Having first questioned whether or not the community was fully approved by Rome, the monks went on to say that even if Rome had given permission to establish a new congregation of the Benedictine order, they would have supposed that Polding would proceed ‘to draw up certain fixed rules - to publish them- to submit them and have them approved by the Holy See - to leave no one ignorant of their nature and extent.’ While not wishing to accuse the Archbishop of wilfully and intentionally omitting to do this, they ‘merely state the fact that it has not been done.’

Then followed statement in regards to their commitment by vow to the community, and how they saw their connection with the \textit{Rule of Benedict}.

\begin{quote}
At profession we vowed obedience to St Benedict's rule, according to its Modifications in our own house. We never understood the rule itself to be our guide - in fact, so various are our duties as Missioners or Professors in Schools, or performing some duty in the Monastery, that St Benedict's rule would not be an applicable one for us in all circumstances. However, we professed to it according to certain modifications:

They then quote the relevant words of their Formula of Profession, "secundum Regulam S. Benedicti, modificatam prout observatur in hoc Monasterio."
\end{quote}

They go on to use examples of changes in important matters and even less important ones, in the process questioning the Archbishop's claim that since he received power

\textsuperscript{69} Letter of petition of seven monks to Propaganda Fide, 19 March 1854. This is quoted in full in a series of articles by Kavenagh op.cit.
from Rome to establish a religious order, he must also have received ‘power to make such rules and Regulations as circumstances might require or prudence dictate and change the same when he deemed such things necessary.’ They end this section by saying, ‘We have no fixed rule of life - no Constitutions - no Chapter - no well known and approved regulations.’

While not denying the fact of the long-term dissidence and obvious unhappiness of the monks, especially Serenus Farrelly, and the fact that they could use such accusations as a way of solving their personal dissatisfactions, one would have to admit that they had a point. Nor was Rome's response satisfactory regarding this point.

Polding saw the document when he arrived in Rome (the monks claimed that it had been given to him in Sydney, but Polding denied this) and he made notes on it and commissioned three Roman canon lawyers to write a report on the document. The report included Polding's own comments about the complaint that there was no rule, hardly a satisfactory rebuttal. It said,

They have been published by means of the first and principal manner of ecclesiastical publication, that is through the general and traditional observance: they have been published through the instructions during the novitiate and afterwards: they have been published as they are everyday through having them written out in beautiful large letters and put up in the Priory.

If the latter were true, it means that there was some form of written rules. The response then shows that some of the examples used by the complainants were not valid ones, and the section ends, ‘reviewing the authority of the Superior, the Most distinguished Archbishop testifies that there were no changes from the beginning of the community up till now, for he had always exercised absolute authority over his subjects in a consistently moderate manner.’ Hardly an acceptable answer, but by it Polding was

70 ibid. This particular section is in Tjurunga, 35, 1988, pp.53-56.

71 ibid., p.57.
vindicated by Rome. Rome believed that the way the rules were claimed to have been published was sufficient, and they believed his testimony about the way he exercised his authority – consistent throughout the community's life, and in a spirit of moderation such as Benedict would have approved.

It is necessary to situate the production of the *Declarations* in its context as described above. It would have to be assumed that the stand of the monks had some effect in the hastening of the preparation of the *Declarations*. However, there is no real evidence for this and the dates are tight, considering the intricacy of the work. Perhaps Polding had already seen the need for such a document after the complaints of the early 1850s. Perhaps Davis had a hand in it since he had seen the difficulty. Perhaps Polding and Gregory worked on it on the long sea voyage, especially the journey begun on 20 March 1854. Perhaps there was time in Rome while he was re-establishing his credibility during that year. But the document must have been ready by late 1854 in order to be submitted for approval and to have the response of April 1855 written by Propaganda Fide.\(^2^2\)

As already noted, printing in England was done by October 1855. Whether the preparation was provoked by the actions of the monks, or hastened by it, at least the coinciding of the events was important. However, it was probably too late to save the monastery, though the monks must have lived according to these *Declarations* in some form or another for the almost twenty years that followed, until the suppression. But the delay of twelve to thirteen years after the foundation, before the written rules appeared, was undoubtedly too long, and allowed the questioners of Polding's use of authority to establish a damaging case, and to further the perceptions that the monastery was not functioning well under his leadership.

\(^{22}\) Shanahan, op.cit., p.63.
The Text Itself

In the discussion of the text itself the emphasis will be on statements that are made in commentary on the Rule of Benedict that show how Polding saw the role of authority in the day to day running of the monastery. The format of the St Mary's Declarations, with the insertion of a commentary on each chapter following the text of the Rule of Benedict, was how Polding saw the need to adapt the rule to local conditions. The discussions on the understanding of authority in the rule of Benedict underlies all that is said. 73

Kavenagh comments that none of the various forms of local adaptation of the rule can be judged as especially profound, ‘Unfortunately, it seems clear that, in the end, the enormous amount of time and skill which had been invested in the St. Mary’s declarations, produced nothing of lasting significance.’ 74 However, in view of the task of examining Polding’s perception of authority in a Benedictine community, and hence of his even modest attempts at adaptation, there are some significant points to be made.

The Roles of those in Authority.

The first, and probably the most difficult area, is to analyse how Polding saw the various roles in his monastery and to relate them to the Benedictine tradition. The most confusing area is to examine how he saw his own role as abbot for life. Gregory had been prior from the beginning, yet he, like Polding, was often away overseas or on missionary journeys.

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73 The analysis of the sources for the Declarations will not be used unless relevant. Major work on these has been very satisfactorily done by Kavenagh in a series of articles in Tjurunga 34-39. 1988-1990. The references to the text are to these articles which also include a copy of the text translated by Kavenagh. This text is used because it enables easy reference.

Whether Davis was ever officially appointed to a position of authority is not clear, but he would have held a position of honour since he was Polding's coadjutor and titular Bishop of Maitland (though he never went there). Davis' letter of 1849 indicates that he certainly acted as one holding a position of responsibility when Polding and Gregory were absent. He had written to Prior Wilson saying that what was needed was a few stout-hearted men to take upon themselves responsibility. 'During the absence of the Archbp and Dr Gregory I have no one to share authority and responsibility in the Direction of the Monastery.' He also noted that the subprior, Maurus Connell, was a very young though promising man. It has been claimed that Davis was the only man in the colony who could do anything to restore peace.75 If this were so, the hopes were never fulfilled, because Davis died in 1854.

An extraordinary step was taken by Polding when he was proclaiming the Declarations in 1856. He stated that Gregory was to be known as Father Abbot. There seems to be no evidence that the monks were consulted and it appears to be a totally arbitrary exercise of authority by Polding, such as the dissident monks had already complained about in other matters. Polding may have seen it as an honorary title in view of the fact that he himself was officially abbot for life. However, when he was writing to Gregory in the early days of his shock at Gregory's recall to England, he questioned the right of the president of the English Benedictine congregation to exercise the power of recalling Gregory.76 His statement is very significant, 'your dignity as a Mitred Abbot takes you I think out of the ordinary nature of monastic duties and obedience. In Italy the abbots reside where they please as regards the Monastery, and are exempt from duty.' The comment reveals that in fact Polding saw Gregory as more than the prior, and it also reveals something of how Polding saw the abbot. This is surely a debased interpretation of the Rule of Benedict. Benedict would

75 Shanahan, op.cit., p.61.

76 He was probably correct since the English Benedictine Congregation had never recognized a legal connection of St. Mary's Monastery with the Congregation. Polding to Gregory, 17 February 1861, DA, N312, Letters, vol.3, p.11.
never have agreed that the abbot could be seen as outside the ordinary nature of monastic duties, or residing where he may please, or as exempt from duty.

It is to explain the role of the prior (in the immediate case, Gregory) as the one with real responsibility for the monastery, that the statement is made in the Declarations after chapter 2 of the Rule of Benedict, What Kind of Man the Abbot Ought to Be. The analysis of the importance of this chapter of the Rule of Benedict has already been discussed in detail. One would expect that the Declarations would have some profound comments on such an important text, but the only comment that is made is that, "We declare that what is said in this chapter concerning the Abbot should be understood to apply also to the Prior." 77 So Gregory as prior, or now called Father Abbot, should have been expected to fulfil the lofty ideals of chapter 2 of Benedict. Kavenagh notes that this comment of the Declarations is an echo of the Cassinese declarations.

The only thing that would shed any light on how Polding saw himself was that he reflected his understanding of how the English Benedictine congregation was governed. The government of that congregation was a central government, with division of communities into provinces. Each monastery had a prior appointed by a president, and it was not until the great controversies in the English Benedictine congregation in the later part of the 19th century that the model of Benedictine houses as independent, each with its own abbot, came into being. This all happened in the light of the debates over whether the monks lived as missionaries with an outreach to wherever they were needed, or lived a monastic life more oriented to life within the monastery.

These debates occurred over a long period of time, as the monks of the English Benedictine congregation settled back in England after their return from France, and had had time to reflect on what their identity was. The "monastic" movement won, and

each monastery was raised to the status of Abbey and elected its own abbot from 1900.\footnote{E.Hicks, Hugh Edmund Ford, Sands and Co, London, 1947.} This momentous change was of course far in the future as far as Polding was concerned. Could he have seen his role as one similar to the President of the English Benedictine congregation who had overall responsibility for all the Benedictine communities in England, but with a subdivision of groups of monasteries governed by provincials, and with priors governing each monastery?

There is a unique statement used by Polding when writing to Pius IX about the dissident monks, Corish and Curtis. He called himself the Archbishop who is the petitioner and at the same time the Superior General of the Australian Benedictines.\footnote{Polding to Pope Pius IX, 10 January 1855, SAA, U1418, Letters, vol.2, p.219.} This is definitely a new term, but sometimes Polding used a term adapted to what he thought would be within the understanding of the reader. He would also have been aware of the difficulties of using the term abbot, since he was about to declare that Gregory was to be called father abbot.

By the late 1850s there were few monks at St Marys because many monks, together with the novices had moved to Lyndhurst in July, 1857.\footnote{Benedictine Journal, 9 July 1857, SAA.} Gregory was no longer at St Mary's as prior from 1861, having been recalled in that year, so it is very difficult to understand how Polding saw and exercised his role as abbot then. The fact that the Declarations stated that all the teaching on the Abbot in chapter 2 of the Rule of Benedict was to be applied to the prior, is a most complicating one, and it affects so much of the presentation of the Declarations for St. Mary's. Polding obviously thought that this had to be done because of his unusual role of abbot for life, but with Gregory installed as virtual abbot. Polding moved his residence to Darlinghurst in 1864, so it is even more difficult to imagine how he saw his role as abbot in those circumstances.
The other key chapter on the abbot in the *Rule of Benedict* is chapter 64, *The Election of an Abbot*. There are very detailed comments on this in the St Mary's *Declarations*, as one would expect, since the details of elections would have to be spelled out. The opening section notes that though future abbots have to be elected by the whole congregation, or at least by more than half the voters, in this first instance a decree of the Holy See had installed Polding as abbot. There is also a confused statement about future elections. The right of election is to be given to the congregation to elect the abbot, who is Archbishop of Sydney, as long as he is a Benedictine, just as the English Benedictine congregation can elect as president any bishop of that congregation.81 Again there is the extraordinary confusion about Polding's role of abbot.

It is very unclear how Polding saw the connection of someone being abbot and archbishop in the future. If the role of archbishop and abbot were connected, how does one interpret the statement about the community's right to elect an abbot? In effect they would have no choice. Usually any Benedictine elected as abbot would never try to exercise the two functions (for example Cardinal Hume and Archbishop Weakland in the present day, both gave up their role as abbot when appointed as archbishop). Polding may have known that this was impossible in practice, so what he was trying to do by appointing Gregory was to cover the fact. He was unwilling to let go the position of abbot himself, even though he probably knew he could not exercise it. The whole of the clarity and beauty of Benedict's chapter 64 on the election of the abbot, but even more importantly on the qualities the abbot must have, is ignored in the *Declarations*.

In the midst of details for the actual procedure for voting, a very important statement on the role of the abbot, exactly in keeping with Benedict's teaching is included. For Benedict the abbot has the ultimate responsibility for everything in the monastery. 'It will be the responsibility of the Abbot who is elected and constituted in this fashion, to rule and govern the Institute in both spiritual and temporal matters.'82 The text also

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81 St Mary's *Declarations*, op.cit.,p.129.
82 St Mary's *Declarations*, op.cit.,p.135.
goes on to note that the abbot must visit the monks who work on the mission or in
seminaries, at least every second year, either himself or through a deputy whom he
appoints. This part of the text has been written by Polding (or the compiler) and has
not been borrowed from previous sources. It expresses an important understanding
about the life of the monastery in that the abbot is responsible for the total way of life
and that he must take steps (in this case visitation) to ensure that all aspects of the life
the monks lived were in keeping with their vocation.

In Benedict's vision the spiritual and the material aspects of the whole way of life were
to be wholly integrated, as we can see for example from the importance he gives to
prescriptions for the daily prayer, as well as an equal importance for the details about
such things as food, clothing and bedding. 83

There is a comment in the declaration on chapter 48 of the Rule of Benedict, On the
Daily Manual Labour, which also expresses the same understanding of the life being
an integrated one. However, it is the superior who is mentioned here, and in the
context of the Declarations, Polding seems to mean the person in direct charge, the
prior. Benedict likewise uses other terms such as Maior, but because the role of the
abbot is so clear there is never any confusion about the terms used. In Polding's time,
the word superior was commonly used in religious communities, especially in those
without a monastic orientation. In the monastic groups, abbot or prior would be more
common.

The idea of consultation with councillors is mentioned in this matter. 'We declare that
the arrangement of everything connected with the Divine Office, with readings, with
work and with other exercises is up to the decision of the Superior in consultation with
councillors.' However, 'the Abbot is the sole Judge of the proper arrangement.' It
would seem that, though the superior (apparently the person in charge of the daily

83 RB 8-20; 22; 39-41; 55.
affairs) may need counsel, the abbot is finally the sole judge as in the *Rule of Benedict*. It is more and more clear in the text of the *Declarations* that Polding was making large adaptations, and setting up a system where a superior or prior would help the community to function on a day to day basis, but that Polding, as abbot for life, would hold untimate responsibility, perhaps even from a distance.

The declaration on an important chapter from the *Rule of Benedict* on the question of counsel, chapter 3, * Summoning the Brethren for Counsel*, contains nothing further on the concept, which is surprising considering that the idea of seeking counsel from the community is one of the most important ways by which the abbot is expected to function. It could be Polding's view that the abbot needed no modification to his absolute power. It could also reflect a view of authority where the notion of consultation did not exist, and that whoever was the authority figure, whether pope, bishop or abbot, ruled supreme.

However, the declaration does speak of confidentiality between monk and superior, and it defines the meaning of words that indicate roles. Benedict used the word seniors and also the word deans, and at times it is not clear what he means by those terms. He does not use the word councillor, a more modern term, so Polding sees the need to clarify the terms. This he does by stating that the word seniors means councillors, and the term councillor includes subprior, the procurator [bursar] and the novice master. There may be other councillors appointed so that there is one councillor for every four monks.

The declaration on chapter 65 of the *Rule of Benedict*, *The Prior of the Monastery*, contains an interesting shift. As all that is said about the abbot in chapter 2, is applied to the prior, the discussion in this chapter centres about the role of the subprior, another extreme complication. There are some important points made about this role. First

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84 St Mary's *Declarations*, op. cit., p.25.

85 ibid., p.139.
of all, the prior may select his subprior, though with the approval of the abbot. He is to lead by example, to be the prior's deputy and assistant and to take on responsibility for supervision of everything connected with observance of the rule, declarations and customs. He is to visit officials to ensure they are carrying out their role, to note defects, and to suggest anything that assists good government. He will be in charge of the house if the prior is away. The Declarations understand the prior to be the person who in other cases is called the superior. The declaration goes on then to discuss the first councillor who is next in charge after the subprior. Then surprisingly, since Benedict has a whole chapter on the deans, the deans are introduced here.\(^{86}\)

Kavenagh notes that the 1784 Constitutions, of the English Benedictine congregation, one of the sources for the Declarations, do not mention the deans, but that they were of great significance in the Declarations of another source, the Cassinese congregation. In the St Mary's Declarations, under chapter 65 on the prior, it is stated that the dean may be nominated by the superior, (does he mean abbot or prior?) and may be a councillor. The role is to assist the subprior. He may also act for the superior in certain matters, and is to lead by example. In short, ‘the dean, no less than the subprior, is the superior’s right hand man.’ The deans’ task is to help the superior in whatever general or particular responsibilities are given to them.\(^{87}\)

Overall, Polding saw the government of the Monastery thus:

Abbot - in the present case, Polding, abbot for life, and the hope that future abbots and the archbishop of Sydney would be one and the same for at least as long as the archbishop was a Benedictine.

Prior - the one who was responsible for the daily running of the monastery, also at times called superior. The teaching on the abbot in RB 2 was applied to the prior in the St Mary's Declarations.

\(^{86}\) RB 21.

\(^{87}\) ibid., p.140.
Sub-prior - the deputy to the prior, with a duty to assist the prior. His role is discussed in the declarations on chapter 65 of RB on the Prior.

First Councillor - next in charge to the sub-prior.

Dean - may be a councillor, with a role of assisting the sub-prior, acting for the superior in certain matters, helping the superior with certain responsibilities and leading by example.

The declarations on another very important chapter of RB, chapter 31, *Qualifications of the Monastery Cellarer*, which deals with the person who carries out the role of care for the goods of the Monastery, tell us little except that the superior is to choose the cellarer in consultation with the councillors, and place his name before the abbot for approval. All in all, with the discussion of so many officials in the monastery, it sounds rather like a situation of over-government. Yet the irony is that the problems of the monastery, even before the proclamation of the *Declarations*, and certainly after it, stemmed from lack of a government that was able to give good leadership to the community, and prevent its gradual disintegration.

It must also be remembered that Polding was still hoping for an expanded monastic life in Australia, so his legislation would not have been devised with a consideration only for the current St. Mary's community. The details of this discussion on the roles of the officials of the monastery may seem trivial, but the point is that the text shows how Polding was trying to adapt Benedict's teaching to a different situation, especially to a situation where his role as abbot could not be exercised in the way that Benedict envisaged. If Polding had simply left aside his desire to be abbot of the one or many monasteries he hoped would eventually exist, the normal election of an abbot could have taken place and the monastery may well have functioned better, and perhaps even survived. The events that finally led to disintegration and suppression showed just how serious the situation was because authority in the community was not exercised effectively.

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88 *St Mary's Declarations*, op.cit.,p.70.
The Responsibilities of those in Authority.

The discussion of the *Declarations* to date deals with areas that would emphasise the perceptions of various roles in the monastery. However, there are many statements which show how Polding would see the abbot (or the superior or prior) being responsible for many aspects of the life of the monastery.

- Responsibility for Prayer and Spirituality.

One area is that of the spirituality and prayer of the monks. Chapters 8-20 of the *Rule of Benedict* consist of detailed prescriptions about how the monk is to pray in common with his brother monks. The St Mary's *Declarations* add little by way of details to the interpretation of these chapters. There is a note of adaptation that the superior can make in relation to chapter 8, *The Divine Office at Night*. Though the monks are to rise at half past four in the morning, '[the] arrangement of the ensuing hours of prayer, however, is the Superior's decision, although it must be made with the Abbot's approval and take account of particular places, times and people.' 89 Likewise the comment on the *Rule of Benedict*, chapter 16, *The Celebration of the Divine Office During the Day*, is that the times for reciting the Divine Office during the day are at the disposal of the superior in consultation with the abbot. 90 This is an attempt to allow for a situation of expansion where the superior was responsible for a local community, but needed at times to refer to the abbot, Polding, to confirm these decisions.

Not surprisingly, given the significance of chapters 19 and 20 of the *Rule of Benedict*, and the importance of the Divine Office in the life of St Mary's, in the declaration on chapter 19, *The Manner of Saying the Psalms*, and chapter 20, *On Reverence in

89 ibid., p.43.
90 ibid., p.50.
Prayer, there are very detailed points made. The superior is to give a ruling, this time at his own discretion, for the attendance at the Divine Office of those who are missionaries, teachers or monastic officials. 91 In the declaration on RB chapter 47, On Giving the Signal for the Work of God, the superior is to commission some responsible brother to rise speedily in the morning to call the others to prayer. 92 In the same declaration there is an adaptation noted that the superior is to make sure that those who are placed under him are to ‘receive most careful training in the language which befits both reverence to God and the apostolic mission.’ Benedict had prescribed that only those who can edify the hearers are to read, so important does he consider the actual performance of the public prayer. 93 Polding took this point very seriously and adds emphasis by connecting the idea with the care that is needed in the training of those who will work on the mission. Reverence to God must be shown by the care with which the worship of God is carried out in the ceremonial.

The superior was also to see to the monks’ reading of scripture, retreats, and the assuming of any practices of penance, and to give a pious exhortation on Benedict’s chapter 49, The Observance of Lent, on Ash Wednesday when the chapter is to be read. 94

- Responsibility for Obedience.

The Declarations on The Rule of Benedict, chapter 5 on Obedience contain very little on obedience itself, but there is one very significant use of an idea from the Rule of Benedict about how a superior should deal with a monk who errs. Chapter 27 & 28 of the rule show how the abbot must exercise a firm yet compassionate role with erring

91 ibid., p.56.
92 ibid., p.93.
93 RB 38.12.
94 St Mary’s Declaration, op.cit., pp.57, 58, 97.
brothers. An echo of this appears in the Declarations on chapter 5. There is to be no fraternal correction but rather, if offences are noted, they are to be reported to the superior to whom 'belongs the right of imposing punishments on offenders.' 'The Superior... will use his own paternal love to warn and correct the offending brother.'

- Responsibility for Contact with those outside the Monastery.

Another area where there are clear statements about the superior's role is in relation to contacts of the monks with those outside the monastery. The superior must give permission for the monks to have conversations with outsiders at the gate or in the guesthouse. As well as that statement, there is an adaptation included in that the superior may allow a general exemption from this rule to missionaries and those who have outside duties.

There is also a note that reception of letters and sending of them is subject to the Superior's permission. There is a repetition of this idea in the declaration on chapter 54 of RB, Whether a Monk Should Receive Letters or Gifts, exactly where one would have expected such comment. No doubt the early introduction of the notion, and its repetition here at a later point, reflects Polding's concern about the effects of contacts with outsiders, which in the climate of the times seems to have been very destructive. The statement here on the role of the superior is strong. 'Whatever letters and gifts come to the monastery are always brought straight to the Superior. No one is allowed, without the Superior's permission to inform either the man to whom the letters or gifts were directed, or any other religious of the fact.' This of course leaves great control in the hands of the superior, and supposes great discretion and integrity on his part.

There is another strong warning in the same part of the Declarations. 'We forbid anyone to tell outsiders what has been done or is to be done in the monastery, to seek

95 ibid.,p.33.
96 ibid.,p.106.
advice from outsiders without the Superior's permission, to take responsibility for any affairs outside or to offer his services to that end.' Considering the nature of the monks' missionary work, this seems a very limiting prescription. It also leaves open the strong possibility that, in view of the outside work of the monks, it will be very difficult to fulfil the prescription and therefore that the rule would be ignored.

Responsibility for New Members

As one would expect, there are detailed declarations on chapter 58 of RB, The Procedure for Receiving Brothers. Given the difficulties already experienced by Polding with some of the monks who were entirely unsuitable for monastic life, or else were insufficiently trained (or both), surely Polding would have taken particular care with this chapter. The text is very carefully wrought, and relies heavily on the English constitutions, with some significant use of the Maurist text. However, much of the text is the work of the compiler. The role of the superior is significant, in that he is to seek the abbot's permission for the person to be received. The superior is to control the novice's contacts with others, and with the council, and is the one who decides on admitting the novice to profession. This is surprising in that one would expect the abbot (Polding) to determine this. However, this chapter more than any other reminds us that the abbot does in fact have the ultimate word in most areas. The person chosen to form the novices is chosen by the abbot, so it shows how important Polding considers that role. The superior has no role in the choice of the person.

The crucial points of the prayer life of the monks, living the way of life without unnecessary interference, and details of how the candidates are to be prepared for monastic life are all strongly subject to the superior, and in some cases to the overall decision of the abbot. However, Benedict would see all aspects of the life of the monastery as significant. The Declarations reflect this by including comments on such
things as work, the dress of the monks, the meals, their possessions. And again the superior is expected to take a significant role in these areas.

- Responsibility for Work

Benedict’s rule has always been noted for its flexibility and balance. One of the declarations for St. Mary’s Community that best reflects this is the text which relates to chapter 48 of RB, *On the Daily Manual Labour.* A comment has already been made on the first section of this declaration relating to the arrangement of the Divine Office. The text goes on to speak of manual labour as, ‘of great benefit to both body and mind,’ noting that the performance of manual labour is not to become so burdensome as to cause exhaustion to the community and thus affect the ‘careful and proper performance of the Divine Office, spiritual exercises and studies.’ But the key statement is: ‘Everything should be done with balance and wisdom.’ It is the superior’s role to ensure this happens, since he has been given responsibility for the arrangement of the day.


There are some points of adaptation, which can be made by the superior, indicated in the declaration on chapter 55 of RB, *The Clothes and Shoes of the Brethren.* One would hope this would be so, since in the *Rule of Benedict* there are allowances for clothing to fit the climate, as well as the size of the monks. The superior is to determine what is appropriate in relation to the material and colour of shirts, (not a term that Benedict would use), after taking into account the circumstances of individuals. Without permission of the superior there will be no extra clothing or clothing not specified in their record. This record is later described as ‘the book for the

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97 ibid., p.97.
accurate record of the garments given to each religious... and the dates on which they were given.’ The declaration closes with the statement: ‘Policy about clothing and other matters of this kind is always the prerogative of the Superior, after due consideration of local custom and the spirit of the rule.’ Thus is emphasized the concern of Benedict that the abbot will care for every aspect of the way of life, as well as that he should exercise a spirit of flexibility and adaptation to circumstances. The declaration at this point also shows that the abbot is to care for the individuals and he is to express this in what may seem even minor details.

The superior also figures largely in the declaration on the Rule of Benedict, chapter 41, The Times for the Brothers' Meals. No one is to eat outside the refectory, to eat at different times or to eat different food without the express permission of the superior. He is to lay down times for the meals after consulting the councillors regarding general convenience and local custom. The superior is to examine the young monks on what has been read in the refectory, and punish those who have been negligent in absorbing what will nourish their spiritual lives, rather than concentrating too much on nourishing their bodies. There are details about what food is to be served, but the superior shall permit whatever drink accords with local custom. It is simply laid down in the declaration that daily consumption of meat is permitted since dairy products are scarce and often expensive. Benedict allows two dishes so that there is a choice, and this declaration also allows this. There is a shift of terms towards the end of the chapter and the word prior is used. ‘For the rest.... all regulations as to the quantity and quality of other food, [is to] be based on the prior's judgement of local needs, after he has consulted his councillors.’ The prior must consider everything carefully, ‘lest satiety or drunkenness creep in.’\(^9\) In the context, it would be assumed that the superior and the prior are one and the same person, with the abbot operating as the person with ultimate responsibility and leaving the daily details to the prior or superior.
Responsibility for Possession of Goods.

There are eight detailed prescriptions about possessions in the declaration related to Benedict's important chapter 33, *Monks and Private Ownership*. Polding was much concerned with the need for poverty in the missionary life, and this chapter reflects this. The same concern is also for those who live within the monastery, but Polding saw that there was more possibility for deviation in this area when the monks were living away from the community and experienced greater relative freedom. The superior is mentioned in each of the eight points. He must give permission for the monks to spend money, must be given whatever gifts the monks receive, must control the monks' involvement in civil affairs of relatives, the raising of loans and the distribution of the monks' possessions when he dies. He must also, once every year, check what the monk owns.

Conclusion

In choosing to write the *Declarations* for the St Mary's Community in the form he did, as comments on the chapters from the *Rule of Benedict*, Polding did two important things. Firstly, he stressed that the basic rule of life for the monks was the *Rule of Benedict*. Therefore, central areas of this rule's teaching such as the primary place of the abbot, the concern of the abbot for individuals, and the significance and integration of all areas of the monks' lives were emphasized by Polding. However, the second thing he was doing was adapting and interpreting what Benedict had written for a very different time and place. Sometimes this was done carefully and successfully, but at other times the adaptations were not well thought through. There were some inconsistencies, for example with the titles by which the roles were described.

Clearly, the very basic difficulty that occurred in writing the *Declarations*, was the fact of trying to fit Polding's own role as abbot for life into the situation. The "power" of

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98 ibid., p.83.
the abbot or the prior or superior was a reflection of Benedict's teaching, though it appears more absolute because Polding chose not to repeat the phrases in the Rule of Benedict which emphasize the accountability of the abbot. However, the confusion that arose in trying to adapt or fit all the roles together did not arise from Benedict's teaching but from the particular situation of Polding being appointed and continuing to claim the role of abbot for life. It could also be added that another significant outcome of all of this was the difficulty of finding suitable persons to assume the roles. This proved a particular disaster for the community in that circumstances showed Gregory not to be suitable for the role in which Polding placed him.
CHAPTER 7

THE BENEDICTINES OF SUBIACO

In correspondence with Pope Gregory XVI we find Polding requesting that he be permitted to found other monasteries of men and women along the same lines as the already existing St. Mary's community. He noted that this would be contingent on consent from the English Benedictine congregation, and very significantly that he would be their regular superior. The request was repeated to Pius IX and later that year he was writing to the Pope saying that some Benedictine nuns were setting out for Australia. This was to establish a Benedictine convent in New South Wales.

In fact he had arranged in 1842 for two possible candidates for the Australian mission to be trained at Princethorpe, Sister Scholastica Gregory and Sister Benedict Edgar. He wrote to them showing that he thought of them in the same way as he had considered the monks who had already gone to Australia.

What a delightful thing it is to contemplate the institute that civilised and Christianized the North of Europe more than a thousand years since, now taking its flight into the Southern Hemisphere for the purposes equally noble and good and how humble we ought to be if we are used as instruments on this great work.

In the end, Sister Benedict Edgar withdrew, and when Polding sought volunteers at Stanbrook, Mother Magdalene le Clerc, an older and experienced religious offered to go with him. The two sisters and Polding left for Australia in October 1847, arriving

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Benedictine Monastery, Subiaco
in February of 1848. A house was not available and for a year they lived at St Mary's until they moved to the property that Polding purchased for them — Macarthur's property at Parramatta, "The Vineyard." It was given the name Subiaco and the nuns took up residence there at the end of January, 1849. Novices were received on 2 February, and so one could then consider the community officially to have commenced its life.

Birt called the Benedictine Nuns of Subiaco 'these much afflicted daughters of St. Benedict.' There are many reasons for this, for example, financial struggles which made it difficult for them to survive, internal divisions and factions and that they were considered to be associated with the St Mary's community because of the common way of Benedictine life. This latter point led them to suffer the same condemnations or suspicions that afflicted the men's community at St. Mary's, though that they deserved none of the opprobrium that was, at least in part, justifiably heaped on the men's community.

But the most significant cause of affliction may have been what one writer claims, 'authority and its exercise was for a long time the rock on which Subiaco foundered.' So in this general overview of the establishment and early development of the community, before a detailed analysis of the rules is undertaken, it is necessary to look at the authority questions which keep surfacing. Whether it was as serious as being an intrusive operation of 'Polding's benevolent paternalism and administrative

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4 The significance of this event for the Church in Australia and the details of the first year when the community lived at St. Marys is recorded in a thoroughly researched article, Marie Gregory Forster, 'Subiaco: The Arrival of Benedictine Nuns in Sydney,' *Tjurunga*, May 1998, No.54, pp. 21-55. The same article contains a description of the purchase and preparation of the house for them at Parramatta, and their moving to that residence, called Subiaco.


impracticality' is not known.\textsuperscript{8} In the light of the discussion that follows, it was not as simple as that.

Part of the problem was that Polding came to believe that Magdalene le Clerc was unfit for leadership of the community. She was twenty years older than Scholastica and would have been the obvious first choice. Polding wrote to Barber, President of the English Benedictine congregation, that she was 'the most extraordinary compound of character I ever met with.' He noted in the same letter that he thought she would wish to be back in England, 'not being constituted what in conscience I could not appoint her to be,' that is, the superior of the community. As well as being a comment on his view of Magdalene, this remark shows clearly that Polding thought himself to have such authority over the community as to be the one who determined who the superior would be. He wondered how she could join the miserable, petty vanity of wishing to be appointed superior with piety, love of prayer and generally speaking, good sense. 'Alas! she has been so accustomed to govern others that she has not habituated herself to self-control,' he wrote in the same letter.\textsuperscript{9}

Davis, earlier that year, when writing to the prior of Downside, expressed the same sentiments, affirming that though an excellent woman, and religious in her way, she was unfit for the colony, and that Polding was right in keeping the superiorship in his own hands, as Magdalene was not at all suited for such a position. He thought that in two or more years Sister Scholastica would make a first-rate superioress.\textsuperscript{10}

Scholastica was not to be superior because she died in October of 1850, after less than two years on the mission. This loss must have been great to Polding who considered her 'worth ten times her weight in Gold, aye worth all Californy.'\textsuperscript{11} In order to solve

\textsuperscript{8} O'Farrell, op.cit., p.118.

\textsuperscript{9} Polding to Barber, 6 August 1849, DA, M212, Letters, vol.2, p.140.

\textsuperscript{10} Davis to Prior of Downside, 28 February 1849, DA, Birt Collection, M154.

\textsuperscript{11} Polding to Barber, 6 August 1849, DA, M212, Letters, vol.2, p.140.
the problem of Magdalene's perceived inadequacy, Polding had appointed Scholastica in charge of "temporals" and Magdalene in charge of "spirituals". Such a move could not fit with Benedict's teaching on the abbot, because Benedict is clear that the whole life, in all its aspects, is the responsibility of the abbot. The material aspects of the way of life are equally as important as the spiritual, or rather, they form an integrated whole. Such a move could only be understood in any way, if indeed Polding considered himself as virtual superior of the community and in the appointments was simply ensuring that the monastery was running smoothly.

In view of the opinion he expressed about Magdalene, it is interesting that after Scholastica's death in October, 1850, he did appoint Magdalene as superioress. This may have been a merely pragmatic move as there was not much choice, but he may have seen something else of value in her.

Three sisters came from Princethorpe to join and assist the community in 1856. They stayed for five years, and one of them writing of the situation in retrospect in 1890 shows a very different view of Magdalene. 'Between ourselves, Dame Magdalene was superior in every way [to Scholastica Gregory].' She commented that there was perfect concord between one of the Princethorpe sisters, Mother Scholastica MacCarthy, who was subprioress and Dame Magdalen, then superior. She also noted that, after the first prioress was elected by the community in 1864, (not appointed by Polding who must have willingly organized that there be an election,) she wondered how things went on under this new government: 'God only knows. I ignore, and bless the Lord for my ignorance.'

Another contemporary writer notes that, after all, Magdalene kept the community in existence from 1850-1864 in very adverse circumstances, and also the school.13

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12 Mère des Anges Chevot, Princethorpe, to Dame Benedict of Stanbrook. Copy in Jamberoo Community Archives.

13 M. Gregory, op.cit, p.261.
Magdalene accepted without obvious bitterness the non-fulfillment of her expectations, and took on whatever was asked of her. She was even able to write to Luker Barber, President of the English Benedictine congregation that Polding was indeed a kind father to all under his care, 'and those who do not find happiness under such a superior have only themselves to blame.' It is not clear in what way she thought of Polding as superior. She may have meant simply the ecclesiastical superior, but the phrase does show that she thought of him as an authority figure in some way.

Polding acted as the superior of the Subiaco community for many years. There are many examples of this and many comments that show how he was seen in this role. An existing document addressed to the nuns includes prescriptions about general discipline questions, about work, outside contacts, recreation and customs. Much of this is couched in what is appropriate for people who are living a religious life, 'to suit the simplicity of our state,' in Polding's phrase, but it is certainly detailed and definite. The comment that, '[in] the event, Polding became the Subiaco Constitutions, with a flexibility of interpreting the rule as he considered best in the circumstances,' is certainly apt. Another contemporary writer says, 'Remember Polding had been both founder of the community and ordinary [bishop] of the archdiocese. In fact, for the first fifteen years, he was the virtual superior of the community.'

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14 Sr.Magdalene to Barber, 8 February 1850, Quoted in *Tjurunga*, vol.8, Appendix 2, from Jamberoo Archives.


Kavenagh wonders if it were possible that Polding considered himself as superior of a twin foundation - St Mary's and Subiaco. In view of the discussion which follows of his apparently changed attitude to the exercise of authority at Subiaco, this would seem to be not so. But the links were always close. The nuns followed the same order of the day as the monks. At times the monks visited Subiaco for recreation and recited the common prayer together. And always underlying Polding's approach to Subiaco, was the fact that it was a Benedictine community and therefore part of his vision for Australia.

Another point that is significant is the formula of vows used, for example on the schedule of profession of Sister Benedicta Lett. The vows were made in the monastery of Subiaco under the authority, obedience and immediate jurisdiction of the Reverend and Illustrious D.D. J.B. Polding. This would indicate that he saw himself as the overall and ultimate superior.

The person elected at the first canonical election in 1864 was Mother Walburge Wallis. Magdalene was then sub-prioress. Polding also ensured that there was a council to give advice to the prioress and he arranged that they make a promise to give conscientious advice at all times and to keep all matters confidential.

18 T. Kavenagh, Polding and 19th Century Monasticism, Tjurunga, 8, 1974, p.175.
19 Dame Magdalene to Abbess of Stanbrook, 10 July 1860, Stanbrook Archives, Copy in Jamberoo Archives.
20 Dame Magdalene le Clerc to Prioress of Princethorpe, 20 October 1850. Also Sister Walburge Wallis to Abbess of Stanbrook, 4th July 1856. Copies in Jamberoo Archives. Also Benedictine Journal, 4 July 1850, SAA, which contains an item noting that the monks undertook a fast to pray that the death of Sr. Scholastica may be averted.
21 M. Gregory, op.cit., p.323.
A contemporary writer comments that even after Walburge was elected prioress, the community was very much subject to Polding, and relations were traditionally close.\textsuperscript{23} Traditionally close could mean many things both positive and negative. Polding wrote to the prioress about relaxing the rule for the visit of the relatives of one of the sisters, so he certainly saw himself as the one who could make these adaptations when necessary, and so did the community.\textsuperscript{24}

In analysing the letters, it is always difficult to know whether what is said fits with what is done. But it is interesting to see Polding's response regarding his exercise of authority in relation to the community after the officially elected prioress assumed office. In the same letter to the prioress, quoted above, Polding discussed with her the fact that some of the young sisters wished to see him. He knew that the matter was their dissatisfaction with the nature of the spiritual help being given them by the sub-prioress (Mother Magdalene le Clerc). His comment is very significant: 'It will never do for the members of a Community — out of the time of visitation, to solicit the interference of an authority external to that which governs the Community, and for that authority to interfere, unless in a case of absolute necessity, which the present is not.' Later in the same letter he writes, '[it] is absolutely necessary that the Community should, ordinarily speaking, be governed by the lawfully constituted ordinary authority — interference from without is sure sooner or later to be followed by mischief.' These are certainly comments that show an understanding of the way rightful authority should operate.

Even in regards to the school where there were also complaints, the same idea is reinforced — 'this is evidently a matter which is to be dealt with by the ordinary governing authority, interference from without would be unreasonable.' He may give advice, he says, for the upholding of her authority, but 'any active interference on my part must not be.' It is also interesting that he must have suspected there was some

\textsuperscript{23} M.T.Malone, op.cit.,p.64.

\textsuperscript{24} Polding to M.Walburge Wallis, SAA, N2101, \textit{Letters}, vol.3,p.150.
truth in the complaints, yet still would not interfere, because he told Gregory that the community at Subiaco was happy under the new prioress, ‘though the young ones feel the icy rule of M.Sub [prioress].’

Many conclusions could be drawn about this stand. Polding may have been simply reacting to the difficult situation regarding his perception that Magdalen was not suitable for the position. Since he could not appoint Scholastica, so much her junior, to the position, the only thing he could do, would be what in fact he did — assume the position himself. After all, he had established the community and was therefore greatly concerned with what happened to it. Perhaps later, having been on the receiving end of the autocratic exercise of authority by Rome, for example in the recall of Gregory, he had come to a new view of authority. ‘I would not treat a Schoolboy as he treats Bishops,’ he says of Barnabo, head of Propaganda. So given this, his ideas had changed. Another thing that may have helped Polding express the understandings about outside authority that have been discussed, is simply the wisdom gained by experience. In about the same era, it was very obvious that Polding never "interfered" with the order he founded, the Good Samaritans, in the same way as other orders maintain that he did with them earlier.

It has been noted that the relationship between Polding, Gregory and the nuns was one of affectionate familiarity such as exists between members of the same family. This was Polding’s ideal - a happy, easy relationship where he could help all to carry out their vocation with inspiration, courage and joy and perhaps it was the way he wished to exercise authority. His letters support this in that there are so many mentions of Subiaco, especially in those to Gregory. He compared the Reception Ceremony of the Mercy sisters in Goulburn, saying it was pretty enough, but ‘not to be compared to

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27 Shanahan. op.cit.,p.112.
ours. As he was getting older he became ‘anxious to place Subiaco [and] Lyndhurst the little community now going on so well, in safe Benedictine hands.’ There was a real concern for the well-being of the community. His own early life at Downside had been lived in this way, under an authority that enabled the monks to live with ‘inspiration, courage and joy,’ so he knew the ideal.

Polding’s personal concern is shown in the frequent references to the fact that the Subiaco community was managing well. Then there are many references to his worries about people there, and the school with its falling numbers. The tone is one of familiarity and concern and we have such access to his real feelings because he is able to express them openly to his own friend, Gregory, whom he knows will also be concerned. The frequency of his references indicates how dear to his heart was Subiaco, obviously not only simply as part of the Benedictine enterprise, but as a community that he loves. Such concern for a community would exactly express the nature of authority as Benedict sees it – personal, relational and caring.

Another question related to Polding’s exercise of authority is that of financial arrangements. His original plan was to use a house at Windsor for the sisters’ accommodation. He went on to say that he believed that the £30 per year allowed to each of the sisters of Charity, found to be sufficient for their comfortable subsistence, would likewise be given to each sister in the Benedictine Convent ‘until it shall be

enabled to support itself by its school, which with reason we may hope will eventually be the case.  

This letter shows that Polding asked the President of the English Benedictine congregation for permission to finalize arrangements with Dame Magdalen whose community belonged to that congregation, but he does not feel any need to consult him on the fact of setting up a community or on any details concerning it. By now, his original desire to maintain connections with the English Benedictine congregation no longer exists.

The community was ultimately settled at a very suitable house in Parramatta. Sister Scholastica called it a most magnificent place, and Dame Magdalen, just after they had taken up residence, is full of praise for a magnificent place which ‘really might have been built for us (as no doubt it was in the views of Divine Providence.).’

However, there is no doubt that the community at Subiaco faced grave problems of survival. Polding’s frequent references to the worries about the school have to be seen in this context, as well as that of ordinary human concern. The community was dependent for the reception of its money from the procurator of St. Mary’s and that in itself, apart from the apparent insufficiency of the money, created a problem of control.

In 1856, three more sisters came from Princethorpe to assist the struggling community, but instead of assistance, this added to the factions and difficulties. They returned to Princethorpe in 1861. Some of their difficulties related to the questions of the constitutions, and this will be discussed in the next section. One of the sisters writing in retrospect remarks on the fact ‘that difficulties were with ecclesiastical Superiors more than with the community, and we considered them insurmountable.’

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33 Sister Scholastica to Princethorpe Community, 14 October 1848. Dame Magdalen to Barber, 14 February 1849, Copies, Jamberoo Archives.

34 Mère Des Anges Chivot, writing from Princethorpe in 1890, Stanbrook Archives, copy in Jamberoo Archives.
of these difficulties with ecclesiastical superiors is not fully known. However, it seems
that financial problems were amongst them. Scholastica MacCarthy, one of the three
from Princethorpe, in her efforts to sort out the financial difficulties, had asked for a
separation of finances from those of St. Mary's. In fact Subiaco did receive financial
independence soon after the three from Princethorpe left.

Did Polding know of the financial struggles? It is hard to imagine that he did not.
There is an implication that he did not, but should have done so. He certainly was
worried when he wrote to Gregory 'with a heavy heart.' One of the issues was the fact
that there were 'only 24 children [in the school] and pounds near 500 of debt.' Later
he wrote to Gregory 'Subiaco economizes to the utmost – there are only 15 pupils and
that number is fluctuating, and every penny I can spare must go to assist them to tide
over their difficulties.' He knew that the laundry would cost 50 pounds for 'recovery'
and the oven had been reconstructed at a cost of 20 pounds, and the roof was very
much in need of repair. This does not sound like someone who did not know the
problems, but rather like someone who was aware, but had not the means to help.
Perhaps he knew of the help that Bede Sumner, a Benedictine monk who was chaplain
to the community, gave the sisters. Birt describes Sumner as assuming and settling a
debt for £800 which Mother Walburge, soon after her election, discovered the
community owed. According to Birt, Sumner also put the entire establishment at
Subiaco into thorough repair at his own expense. This may have been one of the
reasons that Polding was able to say of Sumner at his death in 1871, 'Bede may have
had his problems (drink) but he also had his excellencies.'

35 M. Gregory, op.cit.,p.299.
39 ibid., 4 Nov 1871, vol.2, p.369,
Given that Polding loved both communities, Subiaco and Lyndhurst, had been responsible for establishing them, and had seen them as part of his vision for Benedictine life in Australia, his own comment is a sad conclusion to reach. He wrote to Goold ‘Subiaco and Lyndhurst have great difficulty in holding on. I cannot but attribute the cause to myself, or to prejudices somehow connected with myself, and gladly, oh, how gladly, would I retire to make room for another more efficient.’

The Subiaco Constitutions.

In relation to constitutions a very different situation held at Subiaco, from the one at St Mary’s. One of the two founding sisters, Scholastica Gregory, came from the Princethorpe community in England, and although her companion, Magdalene le Clerc, came from Stanbrook, it seems to have always been understood that the Subiaco community would follow the Princethorpe constitutions that interpreted for them the Rule of Benedict. This idea appeared throughout Polding’s communications with the prioress of Princethorpe. Some months after the arrival of the sisters in Sydney he wrote to tell her of the purchase of a suitable house, he asked for more sisters, and he told her that he intended that the constitutions and the ceremonial should be followed as far as climate and the difference of circumstances will permit them at Subiaco, and that it will be a filiation of Princethorpe. This word "filiation" implies a close dependent connection.

He repeated the same idea when he wrote again to the prioress, this time after the death of Scholastica. He thanked her for sending a copy of the ‘Reglements’ and goes on, ‘Be assured, Dear Mother Prioress, it is my anxious desire to model our Community

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on that of Princethorpe. No change is made in the Constitutions or in the other forms except such as the difference of locality may require.42

This idea is even more explicit in the letter he wrote to the Prioress when he is arranging for three more sisters to come to Subiaco. Here he was responding to her questions and he answers that they will not have any claim on the Mother House for support and maintenance unless they return to it, that they may return if the situation does not work or if they then cannot establish another house. And very emphatically, he states,

My object in taking out the sisters is that they may devote themselves to aid in the establishing the community of Subiaco according to the Constitutions of St. Mary’s Priory Princethorpe, with such accidental modifications as the circumstances of New South Wales require and that they may be introduced in strict harmony with the spirit of the rule and Constitutions ascertained and regulated in Canonical visitation.43

In the same way as for St Mary’s, Polding was always careful to allow for modifications according to the needs of the time and place, at least in his writings. It may be for this reason that he was pleased to have the community live by the Princethorpe constitutions. Perhaps in his desire to make adaptations he even had it in mind that it was good for the community to have a set of constitutions designed specifically for women.

Part of the difficulty about the three sisters who came from Princethorpe in 1856, and returned in 1861 and who claimed that they had problems with the ecclesiastical superiors, must have been about the living of the constitutions of Princethorpe. In July 1860, Magdalene writing to Stanbrook noted that Polding was accused of breaking his


agreement that the Princethorpe constitutions should be observed. However, she went on to say that such was not the case. In fact she says, they were being observed to the very letter, even more strictly at times than at Princethorpe. There seems to have been some questions about the Cambray (Stanbrook) constitutions, but for the most part the Princethorpe constitutions were followed by the community from 1849 until 1903, apart from modifications introduced after the first election of a prioress in 1864. Polding told Gregory that ‘Constitutions have been revised by me, adapted and are promulgated.’ One wonders about the extent of the revision or adaptation. He went on immediately after the above text to speak of the cut of the veil having been simplified so as ‘to prevent that unseemly flying about.’ His revisions may have been of a kind that seem trivial to us but they may have been of importance to Polding and the community.

The community had a long and difficult road in order to have a set of Constitutions that they could suitably call their own. This included two visits to overseas monasteries, in 1876 and 1888. The prioress, Mother Walburge had found a suitable text at the monastery of Beuron, but the approval of the text was delayed by the fact that Cardinal Moran, then the ecclesiastical superior as Archbishop of Sydney, would have nothing to do with the community for eleven years. Some reconciliation took place in 1902, the new Constitutions were adopted in 1903 on a trial basis and finally approved by Cardinal Moran in 1908.

The Text Itself

In many ways, the original text of the rules for the founding group at Subiaco does not deserve the attention that was given to the St Mary's declarations, which at least were an attempt to relate the way of life to be lived closely to the Rule of Benedict. In that

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44 Magdalene to Stanbrook, 10 July 1860, op.cit., Tjurunga, 8, 1974, p.298.
sense that text was indeed an original effort at adaptation of an ancient rule to a very different time and place.

The Princethorpe text is for the most part a list of minute regulations and petty details. However, such a way of interpreting how one would live religious life was part of a particular understanding of the times and it can also be safely assumed that the community knew and lived by the Rule of Benedict which informed their spirit. Polding felt bound by his promises that the group would live by the constitutions of their founding community and he may have thought they were an adequate interpretation of the Rule of Benedict for this group of women. At the same time he never had the time to give the text his attention as he had done for the St Mary's group. The result was that, again, a completely different way came into being by which a group attempted to live according to the Rule of Benedict. The Subiaco nuns simply had the rule as a basic text and then used the Princethorpe constitutions as a way of interpreting the rule for them. The trouble is that not enough account was then taken for changing times and circumstances that should have brought about adaptation.

The Princethorpe constitutions reveal a strong French influence and therefore the piety they express reflects this. The Princethorpe community was a group of Benedictine nuns from Montmartre, in France. They had been founded in 1630, and they fled to England from France in 1792 because of the French Revolution. Eventually they settled at Princethorpe Priory in Warwickshire, in 1835. In 1966 they took up residence in Fernham Priory, near Faringdon in England.

However, the introduction to the Constitutions does indicate that what the text was doing was not making new rules, but grafting onto the old ones 'so as to accommodate them to present circumstances, and develop certain points, rendered obscure or impracticable by the difference of the times or local changes.' Another preface

46 Mother Priress Agnes du Chastelet, Preface to Constitutions, 15 April 1842, Copy in Jamberoo Archives.
written by a later prioress noted that '[these] regulations which we have drawn up, are points of perfection conformable to the Spirit of our Holy Rule and to the practices of the ancient Fathers.'

There are very few references to the Rule of Benedict in the text, either directly or as echoes one would recognize. This could be interpreted in either of two ways. It either assumes that the rule is there as a basis for living, and that this goes without saying, or that Benedict's way of life would have very little influence on lives so ruled by such detail. However, one does have a sense that the former is true, because when the Holy Rule is referred to, it is as a familiar document that the group will be at home with. Direct references to the Rule of Benedict are made in relation to possessions, and in relation to the books that are to be read in Lent.

After the opening section, heavy with detailed descriptions of a spirituality that Benedict may not recognize, one comes to the section on the superior. This is of most interest in this context since it is the text that guided the group in its understanding of authority, and the one that Polding allowed to thus influence the community. However it is very brief, and one would have to assume that the teaching from the Rule of Benedict was also an influence on the community. After all, as Mother Prioress Agnes de Chastelet had said in the preface to the document, the spirit of the rule will not change, 'for that proceeds from an immutable principle, which human vicissitudes cannot affect.'

This section on authority in the community deals with the submission and respect that is to be given to the prioress, how the sisters are to relate to other officials, subprioress, dean and those who preside, and finally the attitudes of sisters when they are reproved by Superiors. There are some clear reflections of the Rule of Benedict in these

47 Mother Genevieve Nau, Preface to Constitutions 4, Copy in Jamberoo Archives.

48 Copy of Constitutions. 39, 42.

49 Constitutions, C 5, Of Respect due to Superiors, 20.
sections. For example, nothing is to be deemed of slight consequence in God's house and the importance of rendering submission to others for the sake of God is stressed. So too is reverence for the seniors but there is no mention as in Benedict, that the young must be loved by the seniors. It is also noted that the superior is to be approached in the spirit of faith for she holds the place of God.\textsuperscript{50}

There are direct references in the same chapter to Benedict's teaching on obedience and humility and here it is certainly clear that the text of Benedict was known to the sisters. The subprioress and the dean also deserve respect because of their position. The subprioress acts under her influence as head of the community and is the mother prioress's right arm.\textsuperscript{51}

Apart from these chapters, the superior is rarely mentioned. However, the prescriptions about meals, clothing, work, relationships with outsiders and possessions are written down and then it seems as if it can be assumed that they will be observed without any intervention of the superior. This is very different to the number of times the superior figures in the St Mary's \textit{Constitutions} in relation to these aspects of the community's life. So in the Subiaco Constitutions there are minute details given without the superior being mentioned.

One wonders why Polding did not undertake a design of a specific document for the community at Subiaco. This was such a different approach from his attitude to a rule for St Mary's, and, later, for what he did for the Good Samaritan sisters. No doubt he thought of the establishment of the Subiaco community in a different light, not as a new community he was setting up himself but as one he was transplanting and one that he thought could simply live in Australia by the same rules they had observed in England.

\textsuperscript{50} RB 22; 32; 48; 55; 57; 71; 2.
Conclusion

There are both positive and negative outcomes of the fact that Polding did not attempt to formulate a new text for the Subiaco community. The lack of a newly written text that the community would have felt obliged to see as a specific interpretation for this new establishment of Benedictine life in Australia left the nuns a certain freedom, especially if they understood well the values of the Rule of Benedict. However, the community suffered through trying to live details of a set of Constitutions for a time and place far removed from nineteenth century Australia, and they became restricted by irrelevant details. It is easy to believe that written details of living are more important than the spirit and values of a more general text. The other important thing is that, when the group in subsequent decades and into the twentieth century had to face the preparation of a more suitable text, they were left to sort out a very difficult situation themselves without the support of a sympathetic Polding. This struggle must have made the life for the Subiaco nuns very difficult until they finally had approved a suitable text for their particular community. By then it was the beginning of the twentieth century.

51 RB 65; 21; 31.
THE NEW FOUNDATION AND AUTHORITY.

CHAPTER 8

SISTERS OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN OF THE ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT.

The Context and the History of the Development.

The abbey diocese plan ended in 1854, St Mary's was suppressed by Vaughan in 1874, but Subiaco developed eventually into a flourishing Benedictine community of women, now resident at Jamberoo, in country New South Wales. Another part of Benedictine life in Australia is a women's community, the sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St. Benedict, established by Polding in 1857. The great efforts that Polding put into founding St. Mary's, the great struggles for Subiaco to become established, were not so obvious with Polding's new community. However, Polding's use of a sister of Charity to establish and form the new community did cause some problems later, so again authority questions became significant. Nonetheless, the fact that Polding was able to leave the main governance in the hands of this sister, Sister Scholastica Gibbons, also had a very positive side. There was no sense of Polding stepping in, in the way he seems to have done with other orders and even with Subiaco, and the congregation developed smoothly, relatively free from internal problems.

Polding situated the establishment of the community in terms of his disappointment with the success of other groups. While recognizing that this statement is included in an official report, which may put a different light on matters, his statement of his own
perception is to be noted.1 Having given some account of the diocese, its growth and the general climate, he embarked on some ‘humble observations.’ They had to do with difficulties over suitable personnel in some orders, and the fact that this difficulty often led to the desire of such people not to let the Bishop have too much authority over them. And he went on, ‘[i]t was therefore in consequence of my many expensive disappointments that I began the Institute of Australian Benedictine monks and also the Institute of pious ladies to undertake works of charity in the year 1856.’ The first part of this comment must refer to the fact of the formal approval of the Constitutions for the Monks of St Mary’s in 1855, since the community had been functioning since 1846. The comments indicate that a factor that helped to lead him to the idea of the establishment of the sisters of the Good Samaritans, (the institute of pious ladies, mentioned in the report) was the fact that others could not satisfy the needs for works of charity.

Scholastica Gibbons is regarded as the co-foundress of the sisters of the Good Samaritan - co-foundress with Archbishop Polding. The perception and reality, that Scholastica was co-foundress, may have spared the Good Samaritans some conflict of authority. Polding had great confidence in Scholastica; he had chosen her, and he seems to have let her be. An example of this is in a letter which Polding wrote to her in which he wanted to tell her ‘how admirably your Daughters are going through their duties,’ and he added, ‘I hope your large and variegated family is all you would wish it to be.’2 There does not seem to be any conflict of authority here, and certainly no intrusion. The Good Samaritans are her daughters, her family. Polding considered that she was able to fulfil what he hoped for in a superior of a community.


He had expressed this thought in a letter to Mother Joseph O'Brien who was rectress of the sisters of Charity.³ 'It is a great good to Religion when a Religious Community by the presence of the Superior is well regulated and in peace.' However, it is interesting to note that it is Polding, not Scholastica, who wrote to Sister Ignatius Clarke, one of the first group of sisters, telling her that she cannot renew her vows, and giving the reasons in no uncertain terms, (her instability and her unhappiness).⁴ So all must have accepted that he had the right to exercise his authority in some matters, in this case regarding suitability for the community.

Throughout his correspondence, especially with Gregory, we gain information about the progress of the new congregation. However, in the correspondence there is no ring of authoritarianism. It is rather simply a note of concern and interest and even pride. We hear of new members.⁵ To Lanigan, after reporting the reception of five excellent postulants he adds, '[under] the Blessing of God, his own good work prospers.'⁶ We hear of deaths in the community.⁷ There is information that there are over 200 in the school run by the sisters, that a filiation has been sent to Maitland: 'Much good will result.'⁸ In a letter to Goold Polding noted that Subiaco and Lyndhurst were having great difficulty holding on, but there is no mention of the Good Samaritans, which would lead us to assume that they were managing without great problems.⁹

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⁴ Polding to Sr Ignatius Clarke, 28 December 1861, SAA, P69.27, Letters, vol.3, p.56.  
In 1859, when answering the allegations of the laity about his administration, Polding noted the early progress both in numbers and in works of the community, then called the Good Shepherd.\textsuperscript{10} By 1866, when he was presenting the rules for approval to Barnabo, Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred congregation of Propaganda Fide \textsuperscript{11} he recorded that the sisters now numbered 30, that they had, as well as the House of the Good Shepherd which had brought back to a better life more that 800 persons, an Orphanage with 250-300 and six schools with 750 to 800 pupils. So he has a just pride in the growth of his ‘new Australian Benedictine Institute.’ \textsuperscript{12}

It is said that Polding requested permission for the establishment of this different kind of Benedictine group of women when he was in Rome in 1854.\textsuperscript{13} The factor that led to this request at that particular time, has always been held to be the fact that the sisters of Charity were unable to keep staffing a refuge for women which had been established in 1848. St Vincent’s Hospital was to be established in 1857, and this would have been an added significant drain on the already limited resources of the sisters of Charity. The women’s refuge occupied a section of Carters Barracks in Pitt St, Sydney, known as the Debtor’s and Sheriff’s prison.

The sisters of Charity had come to Australia in 1838 and had been involved very successfully in great works of charity including this refuge which was known as the House of the Good Shepherd. Mother Scholastica Gibbons was in charge of the refuge, and within twenty-four hours in March, 1853, both the other two sisters died. One was Scholastica’s sister, Ignatius Gibbons, and the other, Teresa Walsh. No more sisters of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] ibid.,p.80.
\item[13] Oral tradition has it that the document was framed and hung in the Pitt St. Convent for many years. See M.Kelleher, ‘Sister Scholastica Gibbons.’ \textit{Tjurunga}, 50, 1996, p.17.
\end{footnotes}
The Debtors’ Prison, a part of Carters’ Barracks in Pitt Street, Sydney. This became the House of the Good Shepherd in 1848 and, in 1857, the first convent of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.

The House of the Good Shepherd showing extensions added from 1859 to 1861.
Charity were available, so Scholastica carried on the work with the help of a widow, Mrs Blake.  

Polding asked Scholastica to receive and train some suitable persons for the work, and this was the nucleus of Polding's new Benedictine institute. The first five sisters began their formal life as sisters of the Good Samaritan on 2 February 1857, which is regarded as the date of the official establishment of the congregation. One of these novices, Mary Ann Adamson, Polding had brought back with him from England in 1856 and she spent that year at Subiaco waiting to become part of the foundation of the new community. She was later (in 1876) to be the first elected superior of the congregation.

The Benedictine basis and the connection of Polding and Scholastica is illustrated in the wording of the vow formula of Sr. M. Agnes Hart, one of the first five sisters professed. Polding was seen as her superior and Mother Scholastica as her immediate superioress. She made her vows as

\begin{quote}
    a member of the Institution of the Good Shepherd in the city of Sydney; founded according to the spirit of the rule of our Holy Father Saint Benedict.... under the direction of my Superior the Most Reverend John Bede Archbishop of Sydney, and his successors and of the Rev Mother Mary Scholastica, my immediate Superioress.
\end{quote}

Four questions of authority are particularly relevant for discussion here, and all are connected with Mother Scholastica, 'the immediate superioress' of the new community. They all affect in some way how she was thought of as superior, and in fact all contributed in one way or another to the ultimate apparent loss of confidence in her which caused her to resign. But even more importantly, they affected Polding who

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14 Memoir, Sister Agnes Hart, GSA.


16 13 July 1858, GSA.
thought that the reason for many of the problems was that people were really trying to undermine him by attacking someone he had appointed and in whom he had such confidence.

Ultimately all were connected in one way or another with the confusion over the status of Scholastica whom Polding wanted to be superioress for life, and his inability to sort this out, prevented the approval of the rules and the Institute at that time. In fact, this final approval of the rules was not gained until 1932. There was the question of whether Scholastica would remain a sister of Charity. There was the problem of her relationship with the sisters of Charity, especially regarding the problem of Sister Baptist de Lacy, which became part of a public scandal in Sydney. There was her connection with Sheehy a Benedictine monk and vicar general. This connection was significant in the fact that Sheehy never became the bishop that he had been appointed by Rome to become, because of a scandal connected with Scholastica. Finally there were the questions that led directly to her resignation in 1876.

Polding was involved in the question of whether Scholastica would remain a sister of Charity. She was head superior of the sisters of Charity as well as being responsible for the establishment of the new congregation. He wrote to her from Rome when he was seeking approval for the congregation and his proposal was that she would be ‘appointed Superioress for life of the Good Samaritans.’ He had obviously discussed her status in Rome - could she be Superioress for life and remain a professed sister of Charity? He seems to have received assurances that she could change her obligations. More difficult was the question of change of dress. He acknowledged that her own feelings on the matter should be taken into account, as well as what the sisters of Charity would say. However, the tone of the letter seems to imply that he wanted the change to happen.

When the rules were being examined in Rome in 1867 the question of her status was considered, and the reply of the Sacred congregation was that the whole matter of the rules was to be deferred until they received information required from Polding about Sister Scholastica Gibbon. (sic)\(^{18}\)

So the matter was not as simple as Polding was led to believe. In fact he seems to have never responded to this request, and the question of seeking further approval of the rules was left in abeyance until 1902.\(^{19}\) However, Polding shed some interesting light on his view of the matter in a letter to Smith, which indicated that he was asking Smith in Rome to follow up the matter.\(^{20}\) In response to a request by Rome to know by whose authority Mrs Gibbons had formed and governed this community and whether the superior of the sisters of Charity had given her consent to this transfer, Polding noted,

\[
I, \text{ as Abp of Sydney, am Superior of the one House of the Institute which is separated from the Parent Institute in Dublin, and that it was under my authority that Mother M.S.Gibbons was employed in forming and governing, and also that I, as her Superior presented the petition for her transfer to the Institute she had formed.}
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This text is important because it illustrates how Polding saw himself not only in relation to M.Scholastica, but also in relation to the sisters of Charity. This same letter records that he would defer the question of the status of M.Scholastica until he returned to Australia, though he hoped that the constitutions could be approved. In fact they were not, as the document of 8 April shows.

However, does the fact that Scholastica never changed her status as a sister of Charity show that she did not want to do so? Or does it at least show that this is what she thought she had to do. How free was she really? She faithfully led the Good Samaritans until 1876, but she did not change her dress or her obligations, always

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\(^{18}\) Document, 8 April 1867, GSA.

\(^{19}\) Rules of Polding, op.cit., p.87.

remaining a sister of Charity. After 1876 she joined the sisters of Charity in Hobart, but returned to live with the Good Samaritans in 1885 and died with them at Marrickville in 1901.

The second issue is what has come to be known as the de Lacy affair on which much has been written.\(^{21}\) It is discussed here in terms of the confusion of authority through having Mother Scholastica trying to fulfill the role of head superior of the sisters of Charity, as well as being superioress of the Good Samaritans. Polding's comments to Geoghegan, 'I am in trouble about my Convents - Oh dear how hard it is to govern good folk who like to have their own way,' could have referred to the problems with Subiaco, but no doubt they could also have referred to this situation with de Lacy.\(^{22}\)

There seemed to have been many problems with Baptist de Lacy, a sister of Charity, including her removal from the joint position of superior of the community and rectress of the hospital. Scholastica claimed that the sisters themselves (the sisters of Charity) had requested this because they could not live under her. This had been done with Polding's advice.\(^{23}\) Polding's letters to M. Scholastica indicates the suffering that the situation entailed for both Polding himself as well as for Scholastica. After asking her to put in writing the reasons that led to Scholastica removing de Lacy from her position as Mother Rectress, he went on to speak of the event as a purifying process. He also implied that the scandals had affected the newly founded community of the Good Samaritans because he says, 'the little Comm[unity] will rise gloriously from its apparently prostrate state.' De Lacy returned to Ireland, and received a good hearing from Cardinal Cullen. Polding wrote, 'mrs de Lacy goes home, and through Dr Cullen


\(^{22}\) Polding to Geoghegan, 20 May 1859, SAA, U1419/5-4, Letters, vol.2, p.293.

brings against me a number of ludicrously false charges, which I am called upon to answer."\textsuperscript{24}

The matter was seized upon by the \textit{Freeman's Journal} and became a significant issue in June 1859. Scholastica was presented as incompetent and incapable of being head superior of the sisters of Charity, and de Lacy was cast in the role of the martyr.\textsuperscript{25} This was the era of the strongest anti-Benedictine feeling and was to lead to the recall of Gregory. The event was seen by Polding as a way of attacking himself, through others connected with him and it certainly seems to have been a part of a campaign against him. In any case Scholastica resigned from the role of head superior of the sisters of Charity in 1859. Polding wrote his version of the events in a Pièce Justificative to Propaganda Fide.\textsuperscript{26} Scholastica, in a letter to the Cardinal Prefect, denied the accusations against her that she had dealt unjustly with Baptist de Lacy.\textsuperscript{27}

The third conflict was also one that entered the public arena. Polding was in Rome from the end of 1865 to July of 1867 and while there, his request for a co-adjutor (he was now over 70) had been granted. Sheehy was appointed as co-adjutor in October 1866.\textsuperscript{28} Polding landed home in Sydney in August 1867 to find that Scholastica had been named in anonymous calumnies about Sheehy, and that Sheehy's consecration as bishop was to be delayed.\textsuperscript{29} Dowd claims that most of Sheehy's detractors had a grievance against the Benedictines in general or Polding in particular.


\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Freemans Journal}, 18 June 1859.

\textsuperscript{26} Pièce Justificative, 16 April 1860, op.cit.,p.318.

\textsuperscript{27} M Scholastica to Cardinal Prefect, 20 April 1860.

\textsuperscript{28} See Dowd, op.cit.,pp.273-295, in a chapter 'The Sheehy Affair 1866-1869,' for an excellent and detailed discussion of this.

\textsuperscript{29} Polding to Gregory, 24 August 1867, DA 0221, \textit{Letters}, vol.3, p.274.
There is no doubt that the Bishops Quinn and Bishop Lanigan (the Cullenite Bishops as they are called because of their connection with, and the support given them by the Irish Cardinal Cullen) had a role in the passing on of the scandal to Rome, but it seems certain that the prime mover was Murray, bishop of Maitland. The letter he wrote claims that, when Scholastica was attending sick priests or boys at Lyndhurst, she was seen leaving Father Sheehy's room in an intoxicated state.30

Polding sent an extraordinary commissioner, Barsanti, a Franciscan, to Rome and his long memorial denies and tries to explain how the accusations may have originated.31 He too believed that the calumnies were invented, not so much to damage Sheehy or Scholastica, but to oppose Polding by defaming the two persons he had recommended to Rome. Barsanti spoke of Scholastica as a God fearing and prayerful soul, loved by all the city for her gentle ways and rare goodness. However, whatever the truth of the matter, the effect was hard to erase. Sheehy effectively resigned from the bishopric he had never assumed. We know nothing of the effect that the accusations had on Scholastica, and there is nothing to indicate how the members of her community reacted. One must assume that the life of the congregation went on as normal. The accusation itself was serious and when set in the context of the times, and considering the role the Irish bishops played, the opposition to the Benedictines and the strong feelings of the laity, it is understandable how the episode could have such consequences.

The final question to be discussed is the end of Scholastica's role as superior of the Good Samaritan community that she had co-founded with Polding, formed and led for nearly twenty years. Roger Bede Vaughan, another English Benedictine was appointed


31 Barsanti, Memorial, 28 November 1867, PF SC, vol.8.
co-adjutor in 1873. Polding was by now nearly 80 and he gave Vaughan wide-ranging powers of administration in the archdiocese. In response to Polding's conferral of these powers on him, he accepted the role of sole Vicar General, 'with all the faculties, rights and privileges duly assigned.' But the most significant section of his letter, in view of subsequent events (for example the suppression of St Mary's community and the resignation of Mother Scholastica) was his acceptance of the role of Administrator. 'Your Grace has in addition deigned to confer on me that high office of Your Administrator, with absolute power of overseeing, examining or changing all that pertains either to the spiritual or to the temporal welfare of the Archdiocese.'

It was as a result of his fulfilling his administrative role, that Mother Scholastica's resignation eventuated. Apart from the personal significance of the change of leadership for the congregation after she, the co-founder, had governed it for nearly twenty years, there was the added point that the community for the first time elected its superior. Polding's wish for Scholastica to be superior for life was not to be fulfilled. In January 1875 Vaughan carried out a visitation of the community and interviewed twenty-two sisters. There were some comments on Scholastica's exercise of authority (three people mentioned it) and three sisters complained about not seeing the constitutions. A remarkable change had happened by the visitation of 3 July 1876 when there were significant complaints against Scholastica. As recorded by Vaughan, a third of the 51 sisters interviewed complained about the problem of Scholastica's drinking and there were eight others who spoke adversely of her exercise of authority.

It is very difficult to interpret this change, and people will continue to draw conclusions. Was it gossip, was it true, had the stress she had undergone, for example over the Sheehy affair and the de Lacy affair, really led to this? One could ask was the problem of drink so widespread, or was it simply perceived to be. The issue is also

32 Dowd calls this a spectacular victory for Polding. op.cit., p.333.
33 Polding to Vaughan, 10 January 1874, SAA, U1523/19-9, Letters, vol.3, p.378.
34 The notes of these interviews still exist, SAA.
raised in Vaughan's visitation notes in relation to the sisters of Charity in June 1876. Polding himself had earlier been distraught — 'stricken to the heart,' as he responded to rumours that had been reported to Rome about the sisters of Mercy, that they were living a totally worldly life, and there were accusations 'even of intoxication.'

As far as the truth of the affair regarding Mother Scholastica goes, we will never really know but it was obvious that, whatever the cause, there was a crisis of confidence about Scholastica's leadership. The last entry of Vaughan's visitation notes simply states, 'Rev Mother will write to me and resign — she wishes this.' Her letter of resignation does not exist as far as is known, but there is Vaughan's reply indicating that her letter was written on the 6 September. He notes her saying that, since the sisters of the Good Samaritan have been founded over twenty years, it is time to elect a superior of their own. He also says that both the archbishop and himself agree that the Institute should begin to govern itself, and he acknowledges that she will 'ever be looked upon as the foundress of the Institute' which had gained so much by her charity, patience and humility.

In a less formal and more affectionate letter written by Vaughan to her when she requested permission to go to Tasmania to live with the sisters of Charity there, he wrote, 'I simply add that if, at any time, you should feel inclined to return to Sydney, you will be received with all affection and respect; for we shall never forget that you are the foundress of the Institute, and that you have the first claim on its affections and good offices.' Thus ended the first phase of the government of the Good Samaritan sisters.

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36 Vaughan to M. Scholastica, 7 September 1876, GSA.

37 Vaughan to M. Scholastica, 5 January 1877, GSA.
One cannot help wondering what Polding thought of all of this, which happened just a few months before his death. It is interesting that, whatever the truth of the charges about Scholastica's drinking problem, they seemed to have been soon forgotten. There was some indication in the notes of visitation of 1879 and 1880 that some sisters thought things were going better, but there continued to be a string of petty complaints that seem to have been the stuff of these visitation interviews. Memoirs of some of the early sisters speak fondly of Mother Scholastica, and oral tradition has always been very respectful and affectionate regarding her.\textsuperscript{38} Even in the public arena, by 1897, the \textit{Freeman's Journal}, which had earlier done her so much damage, speaks of her and her work in now glowing terms as she celebrated the fiftieth year of her religious profession, the first nun in Australia to celebrate such an event. The \textit{Freeman's Journal} had no doubt changed, and time had also erased the memory of things that had once been considered scandals.

After Scholastica's death on 15 October 1901, there was also only praise for what she had done, including the fact that she had ‘founded with Archbishop Polding the religious institute of the order of the Good Shepherd.’ Its special object, the press noted accurately was ‘to combine the monastic perfection of the Benedictine rule – the Archbishop being a Benedictine – with the more active works of mercy necessary in Australia.’\textsuperscript{39}

It seems that this time Polding had made a wise choice about who was to lead the new congregation he founded, though even in this case, rightly or wrongly, he had to suffer many adversities in relation to his choice. It certainly seems that his mode of operating in relation to the Good Samaritans was a fruitful one.

\textsuperscript{38} GSA.

\textsuperscript{39} Catholic Press, 19 October 1901.
The Good Samaritans and the Development of the Rules.  

An indication that Polding had in mind a different way of life for his 'new Australian Benedictine Institute,' different, that is, from the traditional understanding of enclosed Benedictine communities, appeared in 1859 when he wrote that since his return in 1856 he had set up a Community of the Good Shepherd. 'Its primary object is the care of repentant young women and the second is the performance of all the works of mercy under the direction and authority of the Church.'

The community of Benedictine nuns had been functioning at Subiaco since 1849, and they had established a school that had always been thought to be like Lyndhurst, for the education of the "better class" of citizens. At this stage, the work of Good Samaritans in schools, (which later and for many years was to be their major work,) had not begun. Polding was concerned about other social needs that needed to be done by a non-enclosed group. The sisters of Charity, with a similar emphasis on social needs, and also non-enclosed, were also to deploy many of their resources in a hospital, and some of their group had gone to Tasmania. Therefore, there were needs that they could not fulfil, and Polding could see that another group was needed to help.

But there was something else very new in Polding's idea and that was to have the new community's way of life centred on the Rule of Benedict. There is an interesting comparison to be made with the enclosed Benedictines who went to America at the same time in history (mid nineteenth century.) They came from enclosed monastic communities and were forced by circumstances to change this enclosed way of life to

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40 Much of this information is available as a result of the research of P.Pullen. Some of it is published in Rules of Polding, op.cit. Some of it is unpublished.

41 Polding to Propaganda, 5 May 1866, PF, vol.232, pp.194-221.


43 Note the change of name from Good Shepherd to Good Samaritan in the correspondence of 5 May 1866. op.cit.
Original Rules of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.
Until 1866 the Congregation was named Sisters of the Good Shepherd.
meet the needs that confronted them." For Polding’s Good Samaritans, the vision was established from the beginning.

**History**

This different vision is clearly reflected in the rules that were ready for the beginnings of the congregation, 2 February 1857. In them Polding used an entirely different model of rules to that of St. Mary’s community and the Subiaco community. One can only admire the creativity of his approach for the three different groups, no matter how successful or otherwise each text was.

The first set of rules for the Good Samaritan sisters was a manuscript copy. Its cover page bears the title, *Rules for the sisters of the Good Shepherd*, also the inscription, *Convent of the Good Shepherd, February 2nd, 1857*. The sisters were first called sisters of the Good Shepherd and they used these rules for at least ten years.

The text contained ten chapters from the *Rule of Benedict*, five chapters from the *Directory* of the Visitation Nuns and two chapters from the rules of the sisters of Charity. Especially since Polding had asked Sister Scholasticca, a sister of Charity, to help him to establish the new foundation, this small borrowing from the sisters of Charity is interesting. Though the works of charity in which both congregations were involved were to be similar, the basis of the way of life of the new congregation was to be different. It was to have the *Rule of Benedict* as a base. The format was entirely new in that a complete new text was written, not simply comments on chapters of the *Rule of Benedict* adapted for the purpose. This surely had to do with his vision of the newness of the enterprise.

It is easy to understand the borrowing from the Visitation *Directory*. The Visitation nuns had been founded in France in the early seventeenth century by Francis de Sales.

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and Jane Frances de Chantal. They too had a vision for a new type of religious community. They were a contemplative community founded to do works of charity, but very early in their history they were forced by their local Bishop (of Lyons) to discontinue these external works and to become completely cloistered. However, the spirit of St Frances de Sales has always been thought to be very much in harmony with that of St Benedict. There is a clarity in both about the primary focus of their lives being a seeking of God and there is a great balance in their outlook as well as a profound understanding of human nature.45

Polding would have known the Visitation community who lived not far from Downside, in Westbury, England, and this contact could well have provided the material for the five chapters from the Visitation Directory that he used. Interestingly, one of these chapters was Of the Duty of the Sisters towards the Superioress, so he must have thought the practices contained therein, were in keeping with the foundation of obedience according to the spirit of the Rule of Benedict, which was evident in his rules for the new community.

The fact that Polding had these rules ready in written form as the new institute commenced its life was no doubt a result of the troubles he had had over the accusations from the Benedictine men over lack of a written text (up until their 1855 Declarations). He was not going to be open to such accusations again.

It is necessary to discuss briefly the early history of the rules of the Good Samaritan sisters in order to establish which text is being used in the discussion. The first set of manuscript rules were used by the sisters for about ten years. Polding must have seen the first set as interim, and he was concerned to produce a text that would be acceptable in Rome when he sought approval. It may have been that, as the community

experienced the rules over the ten years, he saw adaptations that needed to be made or areas that needed clarification.

By 1865, Polding had prepared a fuller text and this was the text he took to Rome when he was seeking approval for his new congregation. He had added sections from the declarations of the Italian Cassinese Benedictine nuns, further emphasising the Benedictine basis for the rules, and he had also used some of the text from the rule and constitutions of the sisters of Mercy which was relevant to the external works of charity in which the Good Samaritan sisters were engaged. This Mercy text was also taken from an Italian version. Some of this latter text was also used in the section on government.

It was this developed set of rules that Polding wrote about over this era, showing his great concern to have the rules approved. He was still working on them during his journey to Rome in 1865, because he wrote to Mother Scholastica expressing satisfaction with what had been done. However he noted that 'before they can be presented for approbation much must be supplied – in reference to Govt.— and this when [we] get into smoother water, I will endeavour to do.'

A significant statement about his view of the congregation and its government was also made in the same letter. 'May God grant that the spirit of simplicity and of humility which animates the little institute may ever continue to be its life. The Govt. for this purpose must be in the same spirit.'

Over the next two years, during his absence from Sydney, his letters reflect this concern about gaining approval for the rules. Again to Mother Scholastica he writes, this time from Rome, referring to 'our great affair,' and noting that he has not made much progress since his last letter. However, he says, he is almost ready to place in the proper hands the whole rule translated into Italian. He also comments on the usual

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order of things in relation to approbation of rules. They would be examined by a group of priests and if they were to give a favourable report, (and he is confident that will be so,) the rules would be given approval for a certain time. Then after a time of trial in seeing how they work, final approbation would be given. By April, he was thinking about his letter to Propaganda seeking approbation, and was wishing he had some statistics on the Institute. He goes on, ‘I have completed the constitutions, but they are not yet written out fair in Italian.’ He was hoping to make the application the next week, and had already spoken to people about the general idea of the congregation, and had received a favourable response.

This letter is a very significant one, in that here he first told Scholastica that the name, up until now the Good Shepherd, would be changed because an already existing European group bore that name. But also very important was his statement that he wanted Scholastica to be superioress for life, and that this would involve her changing from being a sister of Charity to belonging fully to the congregation she was directing. Polding also asked the question as to whether she should continue to wear the dress of the sisters of Charity.

The rules were presented to the Sacred congregation on May 5 1866. A Consultor was appointed and he worked with Polding on some revisions. Polding recorded this in a letter to Mother Scholastica. ‘The Rules and Ordinances are in the hands of P Nailini ...”


49 Polding seems to have used the words rules and constitutions in an ad hoc fashion and it is difficult to know how he thought of them. If he had not included the chapters from the Rule of Benedict, it would seem more likely that he thought of them as a commentary and practical application of the Rule of Benedict. Even so, it is difficult to understand his perception. There is a comment in RPI (3) 4 on the instruction of novices stating the texts they would use together with the Holy Rule and the Constitutions. In the RP 1878 and 1891 this text is changed to together with the Holy Rule and these Constitutions. So it would seem in the lived experience of the Sisters that the Rules of Polding were being perceived as constitutions. After a set of constitutions was produced in 1911, that could no longer be so.
and [he] finding it was nothing new altogether but founded on the holy Rule of St Benedict. said there would be no difficulty, all would be in ordine for my return. ⁵⁰

By July, Polding had left Rome and he wrote to Mother Scholastica from England saying that he had heard nothing. Though haste had been promised, ' [alas] the word haste in Rome has its own peculiar sense, so that it is possible that little has been done.' ⁵¹ He also noted to Gregory that one of the things he had to do was to get the rules of the Good Samaritans approved. ⁵²

Polding returned to Rome later in July, and in August the new manuscript of the rules, together with Cirino's comments, had been submitted to Propaganda Fide. The comments indicate that the first and third part of the rules are almost entirely taken from the Rule of St Benedict, and from authentic Declarations, 'except for the considerable modifications demanded by the purpose of this new Institute which is directed towards the active life, whereas that of the Benedictine nuns is entirely directed towards the contemplative life.' ⁵³ Cirino also comments on the necessary modifications in regard to the organization of government 'since each Benedictine monastery has a life isolated from and independent of the other monasteries while each house or establishment of the new Institute must be in continual relationship and dependence on the house where the Superior General resides.' This is a very significant comment, and shows that Cirino had well understood Polding's vision, that there would be communities away from the central house, but always connected to it in the government structures. Polding could have understood this as possible because of his experience of the government of the English Benedictine congregation.

⁵⁰ Polding to M.Scholastica Gibbons, 23 May 1866, GSA, Letters, vol.3, p.211. Note that the correct name is Cirino, but Polding called him Cerini.


By the beginning of 1867, Polding, again back in England, was expressing some concern about the process to Salvado.54 ‘And I feel not a little anxious about the Constitutions of our Institute the Oblates of St Benedict or the S.S. of the Good Samaritan.’ He had been told that, having the approbation of the Consultor, the passing through Propaganda would be a mere matter of form. But he was wondering if it had been rash of him to leave Rome before the rule had been formally approved.

The question of delay seems to have centred around the role of Scholastica, and her transfer to the new congregation from the sisters of Charity, and this is expressed in a letter to Polding from Propaganda.55 Since the whole situation needed sorting out, Polding stated that he would deal with the matter when he returned to Australia. He does however, express the hope that the constitutions can receive assent.

In April, Cardinal Pitra presented a further comment on the situation to Propaganda. It adds little to Cirino’s comments, but does show that under Cirino’s examination, changes had been made to the working text. At the end of the text of Pitra he set out four questions that needed to be resolved. One was, were there to be any required modifications, another was the question of what approval would be given, the third was whether the name of Good Samaritan was approved.56 However, the final question was whether or not to present to the Pope the request about Mother Scholastica’s transfer. This is very significant since it is obvious that, because of this question, the whole matter was deferred by Propaganda, at their meeting of 8 April 1867. ‘Deferred


Capitolo XVIII.

Dell’elezione dell’Addessa, Madre Superiore.

1. La Madre Superiore sarà detta fra quelle dichiamo non nel Capitolo, distinta per le sue prudente, discerniva, e virtù. Avrà almeno trent’anni di età, e fatta di religione, ed deve avere la maggior parte dei voti per essere validamente detta.

2. La Madre Superiore, giudicata validamente detta, governerà per ciò anni, e non vi figurerà delle ragioni che renderà di deporre dall’ufficio durante quel tempo.

3. Una lettera a prima del giorno 8. Novembre in cui dovrà recitare alla salute della nuova Madre Superiore, Madre Superiore, di far arrivare ogni giorno serviti preghe al Signore, in privato da tutte le Religiose; in comune nel Coro, dovrà recitarsi l’Inno delle Sante, con le sue orazione; e nel giorno dell’elezione, prima

A page from the manuscript copy of the Rules of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.
This was a working document used by Archbishop Polding when he was preparing the Rules for approval.
and they will bring the matter up again after the Archbishop of Sydney has given information required from him about Sister M. Scholastica Gibbon.  

Polding was in England at the time and he left for Australia on April 24. There is no evidence that he made the response to Propaganda about Mother Scholastica's status. In fact, the first stage of formal approval of the congregation did not happen until 1902 when Cardinal Moran was Archbishop of Sydney.

Polding returned to Australia in August 1867 bringing with him the Italian text of the rules that he had worked on in the revision with Cirino, before the final presentation to Propaganda. This text was translated by Mr Makinson, the Archbishop's secretary, and was the one on which the future printing of the rules was based. Polding probably never saw the final version that was presented in Rome. There is evidence that the sisters copied out the rules by hand for their use, and this text was used by the sisters until 1878.

This Makinson Manuscript was called 'Rules of the Institute of the Oblate sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St Benedict, in the Archdiocese of Sydney, Australia,' and for many years it was believed to be a copy in Polding's handwriting, because a note at the front signed by Cardinal Moran states that it was. However, further work on the letters of Polding and examination of Makinson's writing, show that the text is indeed not written by Polding but by Makinson. In the front of the copy is a chapter on the Scope and Character of the Institute which had been added to the Italian manuscript, and a list of chapters in the form in which the rules were to be re-shaped, as had been done in the final Italian version submitted for approval. This re-ordering was done in the 1878 printing of the rules.

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57 Reply of Sacred Congregation, 8 April 1867, Rules of Polding, p. 87.

58 Birt, vol 11, op. cit., p. 323.
However, the astonishing thing is that in 1981 the relevant documents relating to the request to Propaganda in 1866 were discovered in the archives of Propaganda Fide. Accompanying these documents was a copy of a printed Italian text of the rules, which the Good Samaritans did not know existed. This text was not the same as that translated by Makinson. It contained the revisions that had been made by Polding and the Consultor, but Polding probably had never seen the final printed text as he had left Rome before it was ready. After the discovery, in 1981, the text, now known to be the one that Polding wished the Good Samaritans to have, was published and is considered the official text of the Rules of Polding for the congregation.\(^\text{59}\) It is this text that will be used for the discussion to follow which refers to the Rules of Polding.

At the visitation by Vaughan in 1877, he made a suggestion that the rules should be printed. This was done and the next significant text is the 1878 set of rules. This text was arranged in the format suggested for the revised text in the front of Makinson's translation, and it is based on Makinson's translation. It bears the same title together with the Benedictine motto, \textit{Pax} and \textit{In Omnibus Glorificetur Deus}. Differences from the final Italian version that had been presented for approval, but unknown at the time will be discussed later. There is a whole section of these rules given under the heading \textit{Of the Internal Government of the Institute}. This text is very important, because even though there were modifications over time, it became the official basic text of the rules until 1982.

There was a reprinting of the rules in 1891, then in 1934 and 1947. Modifications that occurred in relation to government and authority will be discussed in the next section.

\textbf{Papal Approval}

It was a long road before the rules and the congregation received Papal approval. Reference has already been made to the fact that after the revised manuscript was

presented to the Sacred congregation and the matter deferred, the question of approval lapsed until 1902.

The sisters attempted to gain approval for the rules in 1880 when they wrote to Archbishop Vaughan requesting him to seek confirmation.\(^{60}\) He left for Rome in 1883, but died in England en route, and the request for approval was never made at that time.

In 1893 Mother Magdalen Adamson, who succeeded Mother Scholastica Gibbons, wrote to Cardinal Moran enclosing a petition to the Pope, but there is no record that it was ever presented and no reply was received. In 1901, Mother Berchmans, the fourth Superior General, noted that a set of constitutions that could be submitted for approval was required. This was meant to be a short legal document showing what were the aims and scope of the institute as well as the method of government. It was prepared but, as Cardinal Moran wrote from Rome, would have to be recast in an approved form.\(^{61}\) All such constitutions, he noted, have to omit pious exhortations and many details. However, a document called a *Decree of Praise*, was dated 12 June 1902 by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide. It contained a statement that the sisters of the Good Samaritan 'should be praised and commended in a very high degree.'

**The Production of Constitutions.**

A new phase of the history of the rules was now in process with the production of *Constitutions*. After the 1902 *Decree of Praise*, the next step was to prepare a suitable set of constitutions. This was done with the help of Fr P Keating S.J. who had been recommended by Cardinal Moran. The copy was ready in 1911. Oral tradition has it that, when it was taken to Archbishop Kelly for approval, (Cardinal Moran had recently died and was succeeded by Archbishop Kelly) he was unwilling to sign the

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\(^{60}\) Minutes of Council Meetings, 18 April 1880, GSA.

\(^{61}\) Letter Cardinal Moran to Mother Berchmans, 14 June 1902, GSA.
approval saying that the old Rule of St Benedict was a nice, old easy rule and why would one want to change?\textsuperscript{62}

However, he did sign a statement approving the Constitutions for experimentation for three years. In this text too, there appears the 1902 Decree of Praise. This is the first set of Constitutions in existence, and it provides a significant change in government, because the statements contained in the document are clear, legal statements that do not allow for misinterpretation. From here on, the Rules of Polding would remain substantially unchanged, except to omit details that were seen as belonging to constitutions. Most changes that were necessary in the operation of the order were made in the constitutions. Such a document was reviewed at each gathering of the Chapter (every six years), when representatives of the sisters met to discuss the affairs of the congregation and to elect a superior general.

In the period under discussion there was a revised version of the Constitutions in 1920, affected by the 1917 Code of Canon Law. In the 1920 text there is printed a Decree from the Sacred congregation of Religious approving and confirming these constitutions by way of experiment for seven years. However, approbation of the congregation itself was deferred.

There were minor revisions only, and no re-print of the Constitutions in 1927. The council minutes of August 1927 note that the Constitutions were to be revised and sent to Rome through the Papal Delegate for final approbation when commendatory letters had been received from Bishops in whose dioceses the sisters worked. The minutes of the meeting of January 1928 indicate that a petition to the holy Father was ready and approved by the council. However, no response is recorded and in September, 1930 a further request was made through the Apostolic Delegate, Cardinal Cerretti.\textsuperscript{63} The final approval was given on 5 January 1932 and a reprinted version of the

\textsuperscript{62} Sister Clare Slattery, History of our Holy Rule and of the Constitutions, 1932, GSA.

\textsuperscript{63} Council Minutes, September 1930, GSA.
Constitutions was issued in 1933. This document of approval was very significant for the congregation, and it states that Pius XI ‘has graciously deigned to approve and confirm the Institute as by the tenor of this present decree and he also definitely approved and confirmed the Constitutions.’ The text of this set of Constitutions remained substantially unchanged until 1969, because the attitude was that this was the final version. If modifications were made at gatherings of the sisters in Chapter every six years, they were published by means of a document called "Acts of the Chapter"

The Final Italian Text of the Rules of Polding.

Analysis and Comparison with the Rule of Benedict.

Before changes in different texts are noted, it is important to analyse the sections of the final Italian text of the rules since this would be the version containing Polding's vision for the government of the institute as he saw it at the time of seeking final approval for the text.

The concern in examining the text of the Rules of Polding, as with the discussion of the Declarations/Constitutions for the men's Benedictine community at St Mary's and the women's community of Subiaco, is to note how Polding allowed to be expressed through the text, the kind of authority he wanted exercised in the community. This manifestly reflects his view of authority. There is a constant testing of the text against the original basic document, the Rule of Benedict which will note correspondences, echoes and adaptations. It will show what attitudes towards authority in the Rule of Benedict, were still thought by Polding to be important principles for religious living a communal life and what he thought needed to be adapted for the time and the place.

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64 'Decree of Praise,' 5 January 1932. Text printed in the 1933 Constitutions.
Polding used sections of other rules already approved, and often his reference to the teaching of Benedict was more by allusion than directly. He mentioned what he called the *Holy Rule*, meaning the *Rule of Benedict*, in various places, and obviously expected that it was available and used.\(^{66}\)

One can only surmise about the question as to why Polding chose the format he did. Based on the assumption that the total *Rule of Benedict* was available, it is difficult to determine why he chose to insert into his text for the Good Samaritan sisters whole chapters of the rule as he did, and then added other sections either from rules of other communities or texts that he himself devised. In the view of this writer, the format probably was adopted because of his desire to adapt Benedict's rule for an active congregation. This goes without saying in his use of texts about schools, visiting the sick, caring for the penitent women, the orphanage, and other areas relevant to a congregation engaged in active works (not from the *Rule of Benedict*). But the strong basis of the *Rule of Benedict* in Part 1 of the rules is obviously chosen to lay the Benedictine foundation for the life that underlies the works.

When one examines the chapters chosen from the *Rule of Benedict* they are seen to be the ones that would inform a way of living for the sisters. They are key chapters, the teaching of which is unaffected by exigencies of time and place. It would seem that Polding selected these chapters as basic to the Benedictine life and as suitable for living by an "active" group. It was a strong modification because of his vision for the group.

There is the *Prologue* to the *Rule of Benedict* which describes the call to and the response of those who choose to live this way of life. Then there is the gospel teaching

\(^{65}\) This text, which is now known as the final Italian text, is the one that Polding submitted for approval, and is the one now used is the official text by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan since its discovery in the Propaganda Archives in 1982.

\(^{66}\) *Rules of Polding (2)* 1.10; 4.20; 8.4. The title will be abbreviated to the traditional form, RP, for any further footnotes. Brackets are used to indicate sections of the rules, Parts 1 or 2 or 3.
of the chapter, *Instruments of Good Works*, the chapters on *Obedience, Silence, Humility, The Psalms and Prayer*. The other two chapters have not such an obvious reason for inclusion. There is the chapter on *Receiving Letters or Gifts* perhaps included because of difficulties of relationships with those outside the monastery, that he had seen with the monks. Then there is the chapter on the *Weekly Servers in the Kitchen*. This latter chapter is included in Part Three: *Of the Internal Government of the Institute*. It does reflect a strong attitude of service that is expected of those with special roles of service in the monastery, which could explain its inclusion at all, and in particular in this place.

However, the interesting thing is, that after most of the chapters used from the *Rule of Benedict*, there is a practical chapter included. This is similar to the idea Polding used in the preparation of the St Mary's * Declarations* - the text of a chapter of the *Rule of Benedict*, followed by comments for implementation. The *Rules of Polding* text uses a similar idea to this, though a different format is used, and not all the chapters are included. So, for example, after the chapter on *Obedience* there follows a chapter *Of the duties of the Sisters toward the Superior*. After the chapter on *Silence* there is a chapter called *Practices of Silence*, and after the two chapters on *Prayer* there is a chapter called *Of Reciting Office and of Mental Prayer*.

Then Polding does something different in relation to government. Here he does not include whole chapters, but uses comments that have strong connections with the *Rule of Benedict*. It indicates how carefully he thought it all out. It is also worth noting that,

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67 RB 4 & RP(1)2; RB 5 & RP(1)3; RB 6 & RP(1)5; RB 7 & RP(1)7; RB 19 & 20 & RP(1)8 & 9.
68 RB 54 & RP(1)14.
69 RB 35 & RP(3)9.
70 RP(1)3 & 4; 5 & 6; 8,9 & 10. This point is not directly related to the question of authority, but is important in examining the structure of the *Rules of Polding* and connecting it to the *Rule of Benedict*. It helps to understand how Polding saw and used his sources, especially in the adaptations he was making for his new community.
because he used the text of the Rule of Benedict from the Cassinese women Benedictines, the Good Samaritans always knew a feminized version of the text that had been included from the Rule of Benedict.\textsuperscript{71}

The rules are divided into three parts, and commence with a general statement on the Scope and Character of the Institute. Part One Polding called Of the Perfection of the Oblate Sisters,\textsuperscript{72} Part Two, Of the Works of Charity of the Institute, and Part Three, Of the Internal Government of the Institute.

None of the chapters in his section on government (Part 3) is taken in full from the Rule of Benedict, though it is interesting that he used the whole chapter on Obedience from the Rule of Benedict.\textsuperscript{73} This chapter and its accompanying comment on the duties of sisters towards their superior, will be included in the discussion, with the chapters of Part 3. Perhaps the adaptations here in Part 3, are in keeping with his comments to Scholastica about the need for simplicity of government to reflect the spirit of simplicity and humility that he saw was animating the group. It is also obvious that he was adapting the Rule of Benedict for different circumstances - a group of women, living in Australia, in the nineteenth century.

Three of the chapter headings in Part 3 are directly related to chapters from the Rule of Benedict.

Part 3. Chapter 1 Of the Election of the Mother Superior

\textsuperscript{71} e.g. The opening of the Prologue in the Rules of Polding is ‘Harken, O my daughter..’ cf the usual text, ‘Obscula, O fili..’

\textsuperscript{72} There is no information available about Polding’s use of the word “Oblate” which also appears in the title of the rules from the Makinson translation until the 1934 edition. One can only assume that he was trying to emphasise the newness of what he was establishing in that these Sisters were not enclosed as the current understanding of Benedictine life for women was assumed to be. The modern usage of the word is to describe those who are not members of the Congregation but who try to live according to the spirit of the Rule of Benedict while living their ordinary daily life. Such a meaning cannot apply to Polding’s use of the word.

\textsuperscript{73} RP(1)3 cf.RB 5.
Part 3. Chapter 2

What Sort of a Person the Mother Superior should be.

Part 3. Chapter 6

Of the Deans and their Office

cf RB 2 What Sort of a Person the Abbot should be
translated in RB 1980 as Qualities of the Abbot)

cf RB 21 The Deans of the Monastery

Other chapters are also relevant and discuss "officials" in the community – chapter 3
Of the Mother Assistant (Cf RB 65 The Prior of the Monastery), chapter 4, Of the
Mistress of Novices and Postulants (Cf RB 58 The Procedure for Receiving Brothers.)
chapter 5, Of the Mother Econome (Cf RB 31 Qualifications of the Monastery
Cellarer.)

There is no need to repeat at length Benedict's teaching on obedience that is included
in full in Polding's Rules. 74 It is written by Benedict to show the eagerness with which
monks were to listen to the voice of authority, impelled by love, wholeheartedly
responding, and realizing that the way is not easy. But for those who choose 'to live in
monasteries and to have an abbot over them,' it is appropriate.75

The chapter that Polding includes immediately after this one, taken from the Visitation
Sisters Directory, is of particular interest. It contains echoes of the Constitutions of
Princethorpe that the Subiaco community used, and this is not surprising considering
the similar French influences that would have affected both texts. There are resonances
of chapter 2 of the Rule of Benedict when it notes that respect is due to the superior
because God speaks through her. Apart from this, the chapter deals with an attitude
and emphasis on respect for a superior that would have been specific to the times,
attitudes expected when the sister is reproved, prescriptions for standing or kneeling or

74 RB 5 & RP(1)3.
75 RB 5.12.
bowing in the presence of the person. These are the only chapters from Parts One and Two of the *Rules of Polding* that are relevant for the discussion of authority.

It is interesting to note that what Benedict wrote in the sixth century is less outdated and more relevant in general than nineteenth century religious texts. This is no doubt because the principles do not change, but the practices change dramatically over time. The practices of the nineteenth century reflect a Church that has a strong authoritarian attitude.

The following chapters are all from Part Three: *Of the Internal Government of the Institute*. Chapter 1, *Of the Election of the Mother Superior*, is simply a detailed account of how the election of a superior is to happen, and has a strong canonical and legal emphasis. It is only later in the chapter that there is an echo of chapter 64 of the *Rule of Benedict* to which the title is connected.\(^{76}\) Whereas Benedict has rich teaching on the qualities of the person to be elected, after a brief comment on the procedures for election, the reverse is true in Polding's text. Most of it is details about the election, and the only comment on the kind of person the one elected is to be, uses a phrase similar to Benedict's idea, 'let her have a holy persuasion that it is more profitable for her to govern with love than to rule with severity and to make a show of authority.'\(^{77}\) There is another practical prescription immediately following this text, and it is related to the right of the mother superior to choose the persons whom 'in her conscience she believes most suited for the offices of Mother Assistant, Mistress of Novices and Econome.'\(^{78}\)

The last part of the chapter is a puzzling section. Perhaps Polding was looking ahead to the expansion of the congregation and envisaging different provinces or regional divisions. He notes that there will be only one mother superior in each diocese. The

\(^{76}\) RP(3)1.18; RB 64.

\(^{77}\) RP(3)1.18; Cf.RB 64.15, and *Rule of Augustine* 7.3.

\(^{78}\) RP(3)1.19.
term mother superior usually means superior general, and he uses that term in verse 21. This part of the text seems to go against the idea of central government, but again he may be influenced by his English Benedictine connections and envisaging the mother superior in each diocese more as a provincial in the English congregation's terms, where the overall government would then be in the hands of an equivalent to the president. Certainly the functions of the mother superior in each diocese, appointing superiors of houses after hearing her counsel, fits with that. It could also be that Polding used sources here that were not well integrated. The source of this section (if there is one) has not been traced. It could also have been the simplest explanation, that he envisaged that the communities in other dioceses would become independent.

The final section of the chapter brings the process full circle. After the superior has fulfilled her term of office she 'shall resume that position in the Community which [she] held previously.' This is a significant view of authority, whether Polding wrote it or selected it. It shows the position, not as a privilege, but as a service, which those appointed or elected will easily relinquish after the set time.

Chapter 2, What Sort of a Person the Mother Superior should be, does in fact contain many references to chapter 2 of the Rule of Benedict, Qualities of the Abbot (or a closer translation, What Sort of a Man the Abbot must be.) The source for this chapter is wholly from the Declarations of the Cassinese Benedictines, except for one verse, so the close connection to the Rule of Benedict is not surprising. The one judged worthy to govern, must fulfil the duties that belong to her office as mother.\(^79\) She has a role of correction and of giving encouragement to live virtuously, and this echoes various phrases from the Rule of Benedict.\(^80\) The significant role of the superior in

\(^79\) RP(3)2.1-2; RB 2.13,30,38.

\(^80\) RP(3)2.16; RB 2.5,23,26.
listening, sympathising, consoling, is a reminder of Benedict's teaching on the abbot as he cares for the brothers who have been excommunicated. 81

As in Benedict, the superior is to have a special care for the sick, making sure that suitable food is prepared, and providing required medical help. She is to visit them once a day, and no distinction is to be made whether the sick person is professed, or a novice or a postulant. 82 She also has a responsibility to ensure that the rule is observed with exactness. 83

The last sentence of the chapter has echoes of Benedict's concern for all variety of temperaments, for different characters and different levels of intelligence, in those he governs. 84 Benedict has said that there is to be no favouritism, or distinction because of rank. He is to show equal love to everybody and apply the same discipline to all according to merits. This teaching is reflected when Polding writes: 'Finally, let her make herself all to all in order that she may be wholly of Jesus Christ.' 85

The taking of counsel that Benedict discusses in chapter 3 is reflected in the Rules of Polding in the prescription that the superior calls her council every first Wednesday, listens to them, is not offended if opinions are different to her own, and that she will embrace the opinion of the council when she is convinced by their reasons. 86 The council is called to examine the accounts, and to discuss the most expedient ways of promoting the temporal and spiritual welfare of the community. So as in Benedict, taking counsel is to be done for all areas of the life. This is because of Benedict's

81 RB 27.1,3,4,8,9.
82 cf RB.36, The Sick Brothers.
83 Here the phrase 'Holy Rule' is used, and because of the context, Polding obviously means the Rule of Benedict. cf RB 2.6-10; 2.30-40; 64.7-8.
84 RB 2.31-33.
85 RB 2.16-17,22; RP(3)2.21.
86 RP(3)2.17-20; RB 3.3,13.
concern with the overall responsibility of the abbot for the total way of life. Benedict has said that as often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, all the brothers are to be called and are to be able to speak, so that the abbot having listened, may then after careful discernment, decide. On less important matters, the seniors are to be consulted. Thus one has a sense that the abbot never decides without having listened to someone.

Those Called to Special Roles of Service in the Community.

This is then followed by four chapters on those with special roles. The first of these is chapter 3, Of the Mother Assistant. The opening section of this chapter is from the Declarations of the Cassinese Benedictines. The phrase used here, that the mother assistant is to be the right hand and eye of the mother superior, though subject to her orders and never doing anything of her own will, is similar to the description in the Princethorpe constitutions used by Subiaco. There the assistant is said to be the right arm of the superior.\(^87\) As in that same text from Subiaco, the mother assistant is to preside in the superior’s absence. She holds a particular position as first among the deans, and in the ordering in the community, is followed by the mistress of novices and postulants.

Chapter 4, Of the Mistress of Novices and Postulants, has details on what is required for such an important office. It is taken in large part from the Benedictine Cassinese Declarations, but does not reflect much of Benedict's chapter, The Procedure for Receiving Brothers.\(^88\) However, some of the text of chapters 7 & 8, Of the Chapters of the Sisters, and Of the Clothing and Profession of Postulants, does echo Benedict’s teaching on new members. It is worth noting that the formula of profession, included

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\(^{87}\) Again this is to acknowledge common sources for rules whatever these sources may be. Polding was doing nothing unusual in borrowing from others. Such has always been the case, as for example was so obvious in the way Benedict used sources.

\(^{88}\) RB 58.
in chapter 8 uses the phrase, 'in the presence of ... Bishop of N... and of Reverend Mother N Superior of the said Monastery and of the Nuns of the Community.' This seems a very different role for Polding, the bishop, than that used in the Subiaco vow formula. In his rules for the new community, Polding gives both the superior and the community a role by acknowledging the presence of bishop, superior and community, as the traditional Benedictine vows, 'stability, conversion of [my] life and obedience, according to the rule of St Benedict,' are made. 89

Chapter 5 is entitled, Of the Mother Econome. The role is obviously thought by Polding to have a connection to that of cellarer, that most important person described in chapter 31 of the Rule of Benedict. There are echoes of this in chapter 6 of Polding's rules because the Econome is described as needing to be well informed in domestic matters, prudent and economical, and by her affability capable of procuring the esteem and respect of all with whom she may have business to transact. There is also a statement about what she must do if she has to deny anything to the sisters. She is not to upset them, but give them her answer with all humility and sweetness. She is responsible for the accounts. 90

Chapter 6 Of the Deans and their Office, contains many allusions to the Rule of Benedict. It is interesting that Polding nominated the mother assistant as the first among the deans, the mistress of novices and postulants, the second, and the econome as the third. These, together with the one dean chosen for every six nuns of the community 91 make up the council of the mother superior. This is a much more specific government structure than is suggested in Benedict. The council is to be consulted on serious and important matters so that with the help of their advice the mother superior can determine what ought to be done. 92 This is a repetition and

89 RP(3)8.28.
90 RP(3)5.2-5; RB 31.1,8,14,16.
91 RP(3)6.1.
92 RP(3)6.4; RB 3.1.
emphasis on the statement in chapter 2. As in Benedict, and unlike the Master with his emphasis on supervision of the monks by the deans, the role is seen as a supportive one for the superior.

The analysis of this text of the *Rules of Polding* and its comparison with the *Rule of Benedict*, is considered extremely important in that it shows what Polding wanted for his new community. It seems obvious that he wanted to base obedience and authority on Benedict's teaching. However, because he was trying to adapt to a new situation and new expectations, he included teaching from other "modern" congregations. What limitations and incompleteness are found in his provisions, could simply be because he did not know how the new community would develop. But he certainly made clear at the time that he was indeed trying to do something very new, but grounded in the solid teaching of the *Rule of Benedict*, whether by use of exact texts or as is often the case by allusion. It remains to examine how further adaptations and interpretations were made over the period from Polding to the last decade of the twentieth century.
CHAPTER 9

CHANGES IN PRACTICE AND UNDERSTANDING OF AUTHORITY

1857-1969

This thesis has taken up a discussion of the context of Polding and his use of authority in this general context. It has then examined his ideas and use of authority in relation to the three Benedictine communities that he established. Then, having examined in detail Benedict’s teaching on authority, it has situated the rules for the three communities within that Benedictine tradition, and shown how this influence, or at times the lack of it, was expressed.

What remains is to return to one of the original questions - in what way did Polding want to express this tradition in the rules for one of the communities, the sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St Benedict, and how has this influence been expressed in the lived history of this group. It is proposed to do this by examining the written rules and the practice of the group throughout its history. Finally some conclusions will be drawn relevant to the group and, perhaps to a certain extent, applicable even more widely to all institutions in their exercise of authority. This section of the thesis will be presented as a study of theory and practice from the beginning of the order, 1857, until 1993.

The discussion will first centre on the period until 1969 because, at the calling of the special general chapter in 1969 in response to the requirements of the Second Vatican Council, most significant changes occurred. The period from 1969 to 1993 will be dealt with in a separate section. 1993 is taken as an end point because, at the Chapter of that year, further important changes which had been discussed and prepared for over several years prior to the meeting in 1993 were confirmed. They were to alter government structures of the congregation but it would be premature at this stage to analyse the results of these changes from 1993 onwards.
Changes In Understanding and Expressions Of Authority In The Rules and Constitutions: 1857-1969

The way authority is described and exercised is a reflection of an understanding of authority. This period of history, leading up to and following the First Vatican Council, was a period in the Church of a fairly rigid understanding of authority. This was expressed in the definition of the infallibility of the Pope at the Council, under Pope Pius IX.

In general, such an attitude was reflected in religious communities. First there was the fact that such documents as the Constitutions, the legal prescriptions by which such communities lived, had to be approved by Rome, and that the congregation itself was dependent for approval on Roman decrees. A fairly absolute authority was common. Within the congregation itself this was also evident, although a council which gave advice, and without which a superior could not act, always operated. It would have been difficult to retain attitudes that reflect Benedict's teaching at times, especially when there is evidence that Cardinal Moran seemed eager to have this Benedictine influence removed. This will be noted as appropriate and relevant to government and authority questions.

Another factor, especially after the 1917 Code of Canon Law that laid down prescriptions for religious communities, was the difficulty of locating a non-enclosed group of Benedictine religious under these laws, since Benedictines generally were thought to be cloistered. More and more, the Constitutions reflected the structures by which other active religious founded in the 19th Century were expected to live, and the wonderful flexibility and moderation of the Rule of Benedict was lost.

1 American Benedictine Sisters suffered from the same problems.
Some of the modifications noted are indeed minor, and it is apparent that they are made when former practices are seen not to be in keeping with how attitudes to authority should be expressed. There is no doubt that social manners, as well as Church attitudes, at times provide an impetus for change. There are times when the modifications are made simply for convenience when it is seen that prescriptions are not practicable. However, some of the changes, though they may have seemed minor at the time, provide very significant shifts which affected the exercise of authority, at least until the 1969 Chapter gathering of the sisters.  

Changes will be noted in the Printed Rules of 1878, 1891, 1934 and 1947. Also relevant will be the text of the Constitutions and changes in this text in the 1911 version, 1920 and 1933 editions. The texts from 1969 - 1993 will be discussed in a separate section.

Some General Comments.

To open the discussion, a chapter called On the duties of the Sisters towards their Superioress is used as an example. It characterises how attitudes to authority are reflected in the written text. This chapter was taken by Polding from the Visitation Directory, and was used in all texts from the beginning. It was obviously meant to state how the sisters would act towards their superior, and in the final version it was inserted after the chapter on Obedience taken from the Rule of Benedict. The opening section

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2 In the discussion of changes in the rules, only those chapters relating to authority and its exercise will be discussed.

3 For the purposes of consistency, the Rules of Polding will be named in the referencing according to the year of publication, i.e. RP 1878; RP 1891; RP 1934; RP 1947. The 1947 version of the Rules of Polding were simply a re-printing of the 1934 text, so for convenience the latter only will be given as a reference. The final Italian version which since 1982 has been the official version of the rules is called RPI. To indicate which section of the rules is being quoted, the numbers 1, 2 or 3 will be added. Thus RP 1878.(3) 1.2. means the printed version of 1878, part 3, chapter 1, paragraph 2. The Constitutions will be identified as follows. Const.1911; Const.1920; Const.1933. Individual references are given as chapter numbers and article (paragraph) number.
of this chapter *On the Duties of the Sisters towards their Superioress* is quoted to illustrate the prevalent attitudes.

The sisters must show great respect to the Superioress seeing God in her person, and knowing her as the organ of the holy spirit; wherefore let them kneel whenever they are manifesting to her their troubles, humbling themselves not only in body but in spirit to receive her admonition, her advice, her correction as if they came from the mouth of God.⁴

This section remained unchanged throughout history. The Makinson chapter speaks of sisters kissing the ground if corrected for misdemeanours, but the 1878 printed version of the Rules omits this prescription.⁵ The sister may still be required to kneel or bow on various occasions, and even to kiss the superior's hand when she receives anything from her, but the phrase on kissing the ground is omitted. The kissing of the hand is omitted in the 1891 version, and then in 1934 and 1947. These are minor practices, but indicative of attitudes that emphasize the importance of the person in authority in the understanding of the time.

Benedict included nothing of these details of behaviour, being concerned that both monks and superiors understand the significance and motivation for obedience as an important part of the way of life he was proposing. The abbot may have held strong authority, but it was always for the good of the monk, and there was always a reminder of his own accountability to God and the rule itself.

Another interesting general example is the fact that a modification could be made even in the chapter from the *Rule of Benedict*, On Obedience.⁶ The chapter from Benedict in the 1878 version is intact, but in the 1891 version and then the 1934 and 1947 ones,

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⁴ RP(1)4.1-4.

⁵ RP 1878(1)3.1 In all versions until the final Italian version was printed in 1982, paragraph numbers are used, not verse numbers.

⁶ This chapter, RB 5, is chapter 2 of RP 1878; 1891; 1934; 1947, though in the Makinson version and the RPI it was chapter 3, because the prologue of RB was printed as a separate introductory section.
the opening statement that should be, 'The first degree of humility is obedience without delay,' became 'The first degree is obedience without delay.' This caused a loss of understanding of the connection Benedict was making between humility and obedience, and it also adds an emphasis to this expression of obedience that Benedict did not intend – the idea that "without delay" is the key factor of obedience. The chapter from Benedict is intact in Polding's version. Perhaps the omission is part of a loss of understanding of Benedict's teaching or perhaps it flows from the influence of Cardinal Moran, because various other Benedictine references are modified in the 1891 text.

The Modification of Benedictine References.

A full discussion of these modifications is outside the scope of this work, but some examples are included. The purpose of including this brief discussion is that it shows changing understanding of the significance of Benedict's text, which in turn would affect attitudes to authority. It may also be significant if the changes were the effect of ecclesiastical authority, showing where authority in relation to religious communities was seen to reside.

The title of the 1891 Rules was changed from Rules of the Institute of the Oblate Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St Benedict, to omit 'Of the order of St Benedict.' The vow formula had been, 'I promise perseverance, and conversion of my life and obedience according to the Rule of St Benedict,' and in the 1891 version the phrase, 'according to the Rule of the Oblate sisters of the Good Samaritan' was substituted. Rome had decreed that the vows made be changed to those of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, which all active, non-Benedictine religious made, and this

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7 RP 1891, 1934,(1)3.

8 RP 1878, RP 1891, Title; RP 1878(3)8.8, RP 1891(3)8.8.
change appears in the 1911 version of the *Constitutions.* Other Benedictine groups found a solution by adding poverty and chastity to the original three vows. But that is another story.

Two of St Benedict's degrees on humility, the fifth and the twelfth, were omitted from the Rules from 1891 onwards. The fifth degree deals with manifestation of faults to the superior, and it may have been omitted because it was seen as an intrusion on an individual's conscience. The twelfth deals with a manifestation of humility in one's total bearing, and its literal interpretation may have been seen as not suitable to a community which had responsibilities for work in the outside world. In the 1934 text of the Rules, one of the references to St Benedict in the chapter called the Character of the Institute was dropped. Polding's final version and the 1878 and 1891 versions had contained an opening sentence, 'This congregation of sisters is designed for the practice of the spiritual and corporal works of charity, under the guidance of holy obedience according to the Rule of St Benedict.' The phrase, 'according to the Rule of St Benedict' was dropped in the 1934 and 1947 printings. The reason for this is not known, but it is assumed that the close connection with the Rule of Benedict during the early decades of the congregation's existence was being lost.

**Those Exercising Authority in The Community.**

Changes in understanding and practice in this period will first be considered as expressed in statements about the Superior and then about those who held special roles.

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9 Const.1911 6.45. References to the constitutions will be given by the abbreviation Const. followed by the year of revision.


11 A Roman Decree *Quemadmodum* of 17th December, 1890, printed in Const.1911, p.55, specifically forbids any superior to engage in forcing a manifestation of conscience.

of service in the community, and who were placed in these positions to help the superior to exercise her role as well as to help the community in its functioning.

- The Superior of the Community.

All versions of the rules contain a chapter in Part 3 Of the Internal Government of the Institute that deals with what sort of a person the superior should be. There is a very interesting shift in application over the four versions of the Rules, 1898-1947. By 1934 the chapter is being used so that it could apply to local superiors. It is headed Of Superiors, What Sort of Person a Superior should be. In Polding's version, and in the 1878 and 1891 edition, the chapter is an echo of the Rule of Benedict's chapter 2, What Sort of a Person the Abbot should be, and then applies to the person in charge of the whole congregation.

An interesting point about this title is that in what appears to be the working Italian version of the rules that Polding and the Consultor used, and from which Makinson made the translation, the title had first been 'The abbess or mother superior' and the word abbess is crossed out. Likewise in the same text, the word 'prioress' is changed to 'mother assistant' and 'cellarer' to 'procuratrix or econome.' This would indicate that the Benedictine titles were thought by Polding or the consultor to be not suitable for a group for which Polding was trying to adapt the Rule of Benedict in those times, especially since the idea was absolutely new, and therefore very open to misunderstanding.

Benedict's teaching is not repeated in detail in this chapter, but the opening reminds the person who has been judged worthy to govern that she should often read over the

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13 RB 2; RPI 1878,1891,1934,(3) 2. In RP 1878 the Chapter is headed What Sort of Person the Mother Superioress should be, and in RP 1891, What Sort of person the Mother Superior should be.
grave admonitions of our holy Father (Benedict), so that she should fulfil the duties of ‘her office as common Mother, as she ought to be called.’ 14

The 1934 and 1947 versions of the Rules omit the point that the superior was to express her special care for the sick by visiting them once a day. The end of the chapter in these two versions is different too. After an admonition that the mother superior shall take care that the rule be observed in all its aspects, mentioning in particular poverty, silence and the observance of respective duties, there is an omission of a very detailed section on the chapter of faults. This is simply a pious practice and its omission is not significant.

All versions of the rules retain the chapter in Part 3, On the Internal Government of the Institute, entitled Of the Election of the Mother Superioress. Throughout all the texts there is retained only a very small element, that could connect this chapter with the rich teaching of Benedict's chapter 64. This is that the person elected is to be distinguished for prudence, discretion and virtue. 15 The other echo of Benedict, ‘let her have a holy persuasion that it is more profitable for her to govern with love than to rule with severity and to make a show of authority’ is dropped from the 1934 text onwards. 16 For the rest, the chapter simply details the procedures for the election, including the allowance for the flexibility of date. 17

Perhaps in omitting this rich teaching, Folding was assuming that, in this matter as in others, the sisters would refer to the full text of the Rule of Benedict. He would have

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14 RP 1878 (3) 2.1. This phrase, common Mother, is included in inverted commas in this text and in 1891. From then on it became Mother, but the inverted commas remained. RPI had the title common Mother, but no inverted commas.

15 RPI, RP 1878, 1891, 1934,(3) 1. The Chapter is entitled, Of the Election of the Mother Superior in RPI and RP 1891, Of the Election of the Mother Superioress in RP 1878, and Authority in the Institute in RP 1934, cf. RB 64.2,18-19.

16 RPI(3)1.18; RP 1878 (3) 1.9; RP 1891 (3) 1.8; RB 64.15.

17 It is noted that the date is to be 8 November in RPI (3) 1.4, and ‘If it is convenient’ is added in RP 1878 and 1891 (3) 1.3. No particular date is specified in RP 1934.
been concerned to ensure that practical details of election in this new situation were clear and so his emphasis would have been on these details.

Polding's final version of the rules simply states that the superior shall be elected from among those who have a vote in chapter. There is a clarification of who may vote, in the 1878 version of the rules, where it is stated that 'All sisters who have made final vows shall have the right to vote in such election.' This still holds in the 1891 printing. Admittedly the numbers were smaller, but the idea that all could vote is very much a reflection of how Benedictine communities operated, and it also reflects a particular understanding of the word, Chapter. This point will be discussed later, and it is a very important one in the light of the fact of current practice in the congregation.

This chapter in the rules was much simplified and re-named Authority in the Institute in the 1934 and 1947 printings of the text. This would support the idea that by then the chapter on the superior was related to local superiors who were not elected. Also, by then the Constitutions carried details of how the election of the mother superior was to be carried out, giving clear details about this.18

The confusing text at the end of the chapter On the Election of the Mother Superior in Polding's final rules and in the 1878 and 1891 versions, that there must be only one mother superior in each diocese, is replaced from 1934 by a comment about provincial superiors who are to be elected by the council general. So it can be assumed that if Polding had been uncertain about central government in the beginning, after the formation of provinces that was no longer an issue.

Some light may be thrown on this question of relationship with dioceses and bishops, by a modification that appeared regarding a chapter which had appeared in the 1911 Constitutions entitled, Of the Ecclesiastical Superior. It opens by saying, 'Under the

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18 These appeared in Const.1911, Part 2.6; Const.1920, Part 2.5; Const. 1933, Part 2.4.
Holy See, the Archbishop of Sydney – for the time being – is the Ecclesiastical Superior of the Institute.¹ This is interesting in the light of the discussions about how Polding viewed himself in relation to all religious orders, and may reflect the current thinking. In a history of the rules and constitutions it is stated that Archbishop Ceretti, the first Apostolic Delegate to Australia, noted when he was examining the 1911 constitutions, that this chapter must come out since it is not suitable for a Pontifical Institute, applying only to Diocesan Institutes.¹⁹ Whether or not it did happen like this, the fact is that this chapter never appeared again.

In the final Rules of Polding, at the end of this chapter on elections, there is a simple statement about rank. It is stated that after the term of office the superiors shall resume that position in the community that they held previously. This must have been thought not suitable by 1878 where in that version of the rules it is stated that the superior after having fulfilled her term of office shall take her rank immediately after the mother procuratrix (the bursar).²⁰

So it would seem that over this period, there were gradual shifts of emphasis as the role of local superior became established. Polding himself did not repeat the rich teaching on the role of the abbot in his rules, and it seems that even what was there became less obvious over this long period, no doubt as constitutions came into being and Canon Law became more and more important. Perhaps Polding expected that this teaching would be understood as sisters lived by the ‘Holy Rule’ as the Rule of Benedict was called in the beginning. In practice, it would seem that over these decades the parts of Benedict’s rule that had the major effect were the chapters that had been included in the Rules of Polding, so since chapters 2 and 64 were not included,

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¹ Pontifical Institutes are directly responsible to papal authority. Diocesan Institutes are under the authority of the local Bishop.

²⁰ RPI (3)1.2; RP 1878, 1891 (3)1.10. In RP 1934 and 1947 there is no such statement.
except by a few allusions, this teaching gradually lost its effect, and the Church's attitude to authority at the time prevailed.  

- Those who Hold Special Roles in the Community

In all versions of the rules until 1891, the superior having been elected, chooses the most suitable persons for mother assistant, mistress of novices, and procuratrix. The person who was responsible for confirming these appointments varied over the period. These officials together with the deans, one appointed for every six sisters, or later consultors, one for every fifteen sisters were to form the council of the superior. By 1911, the council was to be elected by the general chapter.

Some of the significant functions of officials in the community will now be discussed - the mother assistant, the econome (or bursar), the mistress of novices. Then as structures changed, two other significant groups of officials emerged, provincial superiors and local superiors, and these will be discussed in the next section.

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21 R. McBrien, in *Catholicism*, Winston Press, Minneapolis, 1981, describes the understanding the Church as a juridical organization with emphasis on rules, regulations and officials. He also notes the increasingly centralized authority that prevailed in the nineteenth century and until Vatican II. pp.824; 826. These attitudes were reflected in how religious Congregations understood and practised authority.

22 The equivalent modern term for procuratrix would be bursar.

23 In RPI (3) 3.1 the bishop or his vicar must approve the appointment of the mother assistant. RP 1878 and 1891 (3) 1.9 state that both the mother assistant and the mistress of novices, must be approved by the bishop. The procuratrix required no such confirmation.

24 RPI (3) 6.3; RP 1878 & 1891 (3) 6.1; Const. 1911 Part 2. 7.167.
The mother assistant chosen by the mother superior was obviously seen as significant in the texts until 1891.\textsuperscript{25} There is a clear statement about her role, 'She shall be the right hand and eye of the Mother Superior, although always subject to her orders and never doing anything of her own will.' In the 1878 and 1891 rules, a specific listing of her duties was changed to 'in the absence of the Mother Superior she shall take her place in everything.' She was still called the first among the deans in 1878 and the first among the consultors in 1891, in keeping with the change of terms from deans to consultors. The 1878 and 1891 rules take account of another contingency, that in the event of the death of the mother superior she shall take her place until another mother superior be duly elected. She must also ensure that there is no undue delay in holding such election. Polding had not thought as far ahead as this, and there is no mention of this as part of anyone's role in his rules.

\section*{The Econome or Bursar.}

Much more detail is given, especially in the \textit{Constitutions} on the role of the econome, no doubt because such a person was responsible for administration of material goods. In Polding's rules she was named as the third of the deans in the chapter \textit{Of the Mother Econome} and in the chapter \textit{Of the Deans and their Office}. The 1878 rules called her the mother procuratrix and these ideas are repeated. Her weekly submission of accounts to the superior in the presence of the council becomes a quarterly submission to the council, though her books are to be always open to the superior so that she may know how the accounts stand. There is also a note that a portion of her duty of keeping accounts may be imposed by the mother superioress on another. There are no changes

\footnote{\textsuperscript{25} RPI, RP 1878 & 1891 (3) 2. is devoted to a description of the role of mother assistant. In Const.1911 and in all version of rules and constitutions from then on, she is mentioned very little, and simply as one of the elected council. However, she is the one who is first elected as a member of the council.}
in the 1891 version, but the whole chapter is omitted in 1934 and 1947, again no doubt because the duties are covered in the *Constitutions*.

In the 1911 *Constitutions*, in chapter VII on the election of the council-general, the secretary-general and the econome general, it is stated that the mother-general with her council shall elect the secretary and the econome-general. Details of her role are included in a chapter *Of the General Council*. Here there is a conflicting statement about the manner of selection as it is said that she is selected outside the council by the chapter-general. She is to administer the property belonging to the Institute under the direction of the superior-general. She keeps account of income and expenditure and submits the accounts to the council every six months. These laws were unchanged over the succeeding versions of the *Constitutions*. The bursar is not mentioned in the chapter on the property of the community that appears in each version of the rules. Here again the personal nature of the contact with Benedict's cellarer is lost to legal prescriptions and operations. 26

In the 1934 and 1947 rules, there is an interesting shift. All that has been stated about the econome, obviously in relation to management of the overall financial affairs of the order is translated to a chapter entitled, *Of the Local Econome*, and refers to each community. 27 The importance of local communities was obviously growing to such an extent that as with the role of mother superior (equivalent to the abbot) of Polding's time, this teaching is now being applied locally. Later the wheel is to turn again and this shift is to be reversed.

26 RPI, RP 1878, 1891 (3) 5. Const.1911 include a statement that she is to be elected by the mother general and her council Part 2. 7.167., and it describes her role in a chapter on the general council, Part 2. 10.199-203. Const 1920 and 1933 have a whole chapter dedicated to her role, Part 2. 9 & 10 respectively.

27 RP 1934 (3) 4. *Of the Local Econome.*
The Mistress of Novices

The mistress of novices is mentioned by Polding as the second of the deans and therefore one of the council. She is the second among the deans or consultors and as such she officially had a role in the government of the order. A whole chapter is devoted to her role in preparing the novices for their work, but this does not have to do with government and authority. She is to be appointed by the mother superior and this remains so until the 1934 rules where she is to be appointed by the council. The significance of her role is shown by the fact that the chapter appears after the one on the mother assistant in 1878 and 1891. When that chapter is omitted in 1934 and 1947, though she does not have an official role in government, the chapter appears immediately after the one on the superior.

All versions of the Constitutions carry a chapter on the mistress of novices. In 1911 it states that she is to be elected by the mother-general and her council. After a description of the qualities she must possess it is stated that she cannot be a member of the general council, but is to be consulted on all affairs to do with the novices. The chapter remained unchanged except that the prescription that she may not belong to the council was dropped from the 1933 constitutions.

One thing that is clear in Polding's description of these roles is that he saw the importance, as did Benedict, of appointing people to these special roles of service. Church understanding of this was also evident, and though there may have been a different understanding of the roles and the way such people were appointed, there was no doubt about the significance of such people in the life of the congregation.

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28 RPI, RP 1878, 1891 (3) 3.4 & 4. RP 1934 (3) 3.
29 Const.1911, 1933, Part 2.11; Const.1920 Part 2.12.
Understanding Of The Exercise Of Authority.

Taking Counsel, Chapter and Council.

Polding understood the concept in Benedict's rule that the abbot must always seek counsel before deciding, but he did not so clearly express how this was to be done. Even more so over the period under discussion, did the idea come to have less and less clarity, both in the way it was understood and the way it was exercised. Again this could have been because of lack of clarity in the documents, and also because of the effect of the understanding and practice of authority in the Church of the time. Such attitudes affected religious life through prescriptions of Canon Law.

Very significant shifts happened in this concept over history. There is also enormous confusion in relation to an understanding of council and Chapter meetings. In Polding's final version of the rules, and until 1891, there is mention of the council in three places – in the chapter on the superior already mentioned, in a chapter on the deans and in a chapter called On the Chapters of the Sisters. The superior was expected to consult her council and the clear phrase that 'In the affairs of the Religious Family let her avail herself of the opinion of the Council,' was an obvious reference to the Rule of Benedict. This was omitted in 1934 and 1947, though it was shown by the details in the Constitutions that a council did operate. This may have been a mere tidying up of the text but is seems important in that it is placing less stress on the superior seeking advice of others.

The 1878 rules add to Polding's statement: 'Such Council shall consist of the Deans.' This word Deans, from the Benedictine tradition, is changed to Consultors in 1891.

30 RPI, RP 1878,1891 (3) 2,6,7; RB 3.

31 In terms of changing emphases, it is interesting to note that the change from the terms Deans to Consultors (1891 Rules) is then followed by change to the word Counsellors in the 1911 Constitutions. The phrase members of the council is used, but the word
but the prescriptions remain. The superior was to assemble the deans or consultors regularly.\(^{32}\) Each version states that it should be oftener if necessary. The purpose was to examine the accounts and discuss the most expedient ways of promoting the temporal and spiritual welfare of the community. By removing such teaching from the chapter on the superior in the 1934 and 1947 versions, there is a shift away from emphasis on the importance of the council. The constitutions indeed state clearly the existence, mode of election and duties of the council, but because of their legal nature, they would not for example include such a phrase which reflects Benedict's understanding, 'She shall listen to their opinion, and shall not be offended if it be different from her own, but shall show herself disposed to embrace their opinion when she shall be convinced by their reasons.'\(^{33}\) There is also a statement that she is not obliged to follow the advice of the council, unless in specified matters. Polding did not have such a sentence.

Further information on the operation of the Council is given in the chapter Of the Deans (Consultors) and their Office. It is stated that the superior was to consult them in all serious and important matters and with the help of their advice she would determine what would seem to be most expedient for the good of the Community and of the order. There is also a prescription about confidentiality.\(^{34}\)

Throughout the Constitutions one can see the development of a legal understanding of the role of the council. However, in a less legal expression than usual it is stated in all versions of the Constitutions that the council sisters ought to reside in the principal house with the mother-general. Their function is to aid the mother-general in the

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\(^{32}\) RPI (3) 2.7. has the first Wednesday of every month, RP 1878 (3) 2.7 says on a fixed day in the first week of the first month in each quarter, and RP 1891 (3) 2.7 says simply quarterly.

\(^{33}\) RPI, RP 1878, 1891(3) 2.7; RB 3.

\(^{34}\) RPI, RP 1878, 1891 (3) 6.
government and in the administration of the whole institute. This residence in the same house is so that she can call them when she wishes, and also propose any matters that may seem of some utility for the institute. However, all versions allow for cases of necessity where two of the council may reside elsewhere, as long as they can easily be present every time at the council meeting.

Rules for election and membership are clearly defined and gradually the institution of the council seemed a more rigid structure. This is not to say that the superior did not consult the council. She was in fact obliged to do so on a regular basis, but the workings of the council seemed very remote from the rest of the congregation, except in so far as the decisions made affected them. As functions were more and more clearly defined, the emphasis that the role of the council was as in Benedict to give advice and good counsel to the Superior did not seem to be as evident as in the early rules. 35

Chapter and/or Council?

There is great confusion about the role and understanding of the Chapter and the council over history. This resulted in a complete loss of an understanding of Chapter as being a gathering of the whole community. The word continued to be used to describe the pious practice of Chapter of Faults where members acknowledged minor faults publicly before the community.

The other use of the word that was maintained throughout the history of the congregation was to describe meetings of representatives who met in provinces or centrally, at determined times, to discuss the affairs of the congregation and to elect the superior. These meetings happened every six years and were called either provincial chapters if held regionally, or general chapters when held centrally. In some aspects,

35 Const.1911 Part 2.10; Const.1920 Part 2.9; Const.1933 Part 2.8.
the original meaning could have been retained here, because there was discussion about the affairs of the congregation. However, the representative nature, with the presence of delegates only, was different. Until fairly recent history, it was difficult for those other than delegates to have any sense of being part of the proceedings, except that they were able to vote for delegates. This whole area is a very good example of changing understanding and practice. The whole community seen as Chapter, and the practice of consulting them was lost.

The confusion commenced with Polding.\textsuperscript{36} At that time one would expect the word *Chapter* to have been understood in its traditional Benedictine sense of the whole community who were called together to give advice. Perhaps such an understanding was not prevalent at the time, or perhaps Polding assembled the material too quickly and did not see the complications. The opening sentence: ‘Sisters who have a vote shall assemble in Chapter as often as the mother superior may deem it expedient to consult their opinion,’ would fit with this understanding. However the text goes on to speak of the deans (who have been described as the council of the superior),\textsuperscript{37} assembling one month before the profession of a novice to determine her eligibility. The rest of the relevant chapter of the rule concerns this question of suitability of candidates, so this use of the word *Chapter* here is connected to this question only.

The first printing of the rules in 1878, takes account of this confusion. The opening section is the same, but there is a stronger statement about keeping matters that are discussed confidential. The members of the council are required to make a solemn declaration to this effect on being appointed deans. The section that was included early in chapter 7 about the deans assembling to discuss candidates, is moved to this chapter 6. This leaves the opening of chapter 7 as a much clearer statement: ‘All sisters who have taken their final vows have a voice in Chapter.’ Then to take account of the idea of the deans forming the council, it goes on to explain when this is to happen. It is they

\textsuperscript{36} RPI (3) 7 Of the Chapters of the Sisters.

\textsuperscript{37} RPI, RP 1878, 1891 (3) 6.1.
(that is all sisters who have taken final vows) who will take part in the election of the mother superioress. It is they who will finally decide on admission to the habit and to holy profession. It also goes on to add: ‘They shall also assemble as often as the mother superioress shall deem it expedient to ask their opinion.’ There is then a general statement obviously derived from chapter 3 of the Rule of Benedict about the dispositions necessary when gathered in Chapter: ‘All shall listen with attention to that which shall be proposed for consideration, weighing every circumstance in their minds before God. They shall give their opinion with modesty, candour and humility.’ Then the discussion resumes about the reception of novices and postulants.\(^38\)

And finally the text ends making clear that there is a distinction between Chapter and council: ‘The Chapter as well as the council shall always be commenced with great devotion.’ Polding’s Rule had confused the two, and ends with ‘The Chapter or council shall always be commenced with great devotion.’\(^39\)

This is a most interesting attempt by those responsible for the 1878 edition of the rules to improve on the understanding of Chapter, or at least it was an effort to show that they believed a real understanding and function of Chapter as a gathering of the whole body of sisters was possible.

The 1878 rules, obviously concerned to clarify the matter, go on even more explicitly to add a chapter, Mode of Conducting Meetings of the Council and of the Chapter.\(^40\)

The chapter opens with prescriptions that apply to meetings of either council or Chapter, for example, how they are summoned, who acts as secretary and how the meetings are conducted. Then it clearly defines the types of meetings: ‘The meetings will be of three kinds viz.; 1. The Quarterly Meetings of the Council; 2, Special Meetings of the Council; and, 3, Meetings of the Chapter.’

\(^38\) RP 1878, 1891(3) 7. On the Chapters of the Sisters.

\(^39\) RP 1878, 1891(3) 7.4; RPI (3)7.4.
The conduct of each is then described. Quarterly meetings of the council deal with previous minutes, receipts and expenditure, and any notice of motion that had been circulated prior to the meeting. There is a comment on the order of speaking, where the youngest member is to speak first after the person who presented the motion has spoken. All speak in order and the senior member last. Sometimes a vote is required, but at times the superior will have to make the decision. If that is the case, 'the responsibility of which after having heard the opinion of the members of the council, rests upon herself, she shall do that, which before God, she believes to be most conducive to His honor and glory.' Other matters may then be brought forward, and this time the order is different. The superior does this first, then the senior and then all members of the council in turn.

There is then a comment on special meetings of the council, but there is no mention of what would be the agenda. The procedure is to be the same as the ordinary meetings, and one would assume that such meetings would be called if serious matters arose that required immediate attention.

Likewise, it is not clear why the Chapter is to be called, except in cases already mentioned – election of the superior, discussion of candidates, and on occasions when the mother superior deems it expedient to ask their opinion. Procedures shall be the same as for the meetings of the council. The very significant thing is that the distinction has been made between the council and the Chapter.

By the 1891 version of the rule, the word Deans is changed to Consultor, and there is to be one consultor for every fifteen sisters of the community, (cf one dean for six previously). This was probably a practical matter as the number of members by then had grown to 105. The other change is that the paragraph devoted especially to meetings of the Chapter is omitted. This is probably because by then it was thought

40 RP 1878, 1891 (3)14.
that the Chapter referred to council meetings, though the three types of meetings were mentioned as in 1878. It may simply be that the understanding of Chapter and the significance of its real meaning were being lost.

The word *Chapter* was kept alive throughout history by the retention of a chapter in the rules in 1934 and 1947 entitled *Of the Chapters of the Sisters*. It is difficult to see how this was perceived, but it refers to the idea of the council and the two words are used in a confusing manner. The connection with the discussion of suitable candidates is omitted. Part of the procedures are inserted from the 1878 and 1891 chapter on *Modes of Conducting Meetings of the Council and the Chapter*, and that Chapter as such, is omitted. There is certainly no definition of different kinds of meetings.

In practice, it is clear that separate meetings were held until 1910. The minutes of council meetings are recorded from 21 September, 1878 onwards, and the minutes of Chapter meetings from 16 June 1879 to 24 September 1910. From 1879 until 1900 the numbers attending Chapter meetings varied, but the maximum was 33 in 1895. In most years there were at least three meetings, and sometimes five or six, until 1897 when the frequency decreased. After that, only in 1901 and 1905 were there three meetings and in six years from 1897 there was only one meeting per year. In 1903 and 1904 there were no meetings. Gradually the numbers attending them decreased and in the last three years (1908-1910) the average number attending was only about 9. The numbers attending never corresponded to the numbers of sisters, but that is understandable as difficulties of transport would have made attendance difficult. By this time also, communities were established in other States. However in theory these meetings were open to all.

Matters dealt with at Chapter meetings mainly concerned the admission of new members. Until 1889 admission to the formal phase of novitiate, called reception, and

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41 GSA, Minutes Books. The membership, matters discussed, attendance and frequency of meetings is derived from an analysis of these Minutes.
the first profession of vows were decided by the Chapter. Decisions about initial membership, renewal of vows and final profession was decided by the council. In time it seemed that the council first dealt with these matters and that the Chapter then ratified these decisions. At first the meetings were held on different days, but after 1889 the two kinds of meetings came to be held on the same day. There are 40 occasions when this happened and in those cases both council and Chapter minutes record the same names of those sisters who were admitted to reception and profession. After 1900, there were nineteen occasions when the council admitted members without reference to the Chapter. This indicates that there must have been a feeling that the Chapter was irrelevant.

The Chapter meeting of 29 June 1889 was different in that it was discussing questions of changes to the rules. It also discussed the role of deans, and the connection of deans with local superiors. There were also questions relating to prayers, use of time, penitents, furniture and accounts. There were 26 present at this meeting, ten being superiors and twelve non-superiors, together with the reverend mother, the mother assistant, procuratrix and the mistress of novices. At most Chapter meetings, the number of sisters exceeded the number of superiors.

Council membership was usually maintained as Polding prescribed. In 1879, there were eleven deans apart from those who were ex officio. Five of these were superiors, six were sisters. At this time there were about 51 in the community, so the number of deans was about one for every five sisters. In 1889, there were eleven deans and 90 in the community, and by that time only three of the deans were sisters and the rest superiors. In 1895 there were nine deans, now called consultors, three sisters and six superiors, and 129 in the community. This means there was a consultor for about every fifteen sisters, as prescribed in the 1891 rules. Numbers attending the meetings varied.
So, there was a loss of understanding of the role of the superior, and also to a certain extent of the roles of those called to special positions in the community, as Benedict would have understood them. There was also a gradual loss of a most important concept, that the whole community is the Chapter, that they should be consulted on matters of importance and that the superior should only act after listening to counsel. It is also possible that, since the last Chapter meeting was held in 1910, the decisions to discontinue them was also connected with the preparation of the constitutions, with the emphasis in that document being on legal prescriptions relevant to nineteenth century religious congregations. Such groups not of the Benedictine tradition would not be familiar with the concept of Chapter as understood in that tradition.

New Structures

Local Superiors

An increase in the number of sisters, and the spread of communities as more and more works of charity were undertaken, demanded that new structures of government would emerge. Already in the 1878 Rules there was a chapter on branch convents, and there were local superiors in these houses responsible for the life of the community. By then, ten other houses apart from the head house at Pitt Street had been established, so there was need for something to be written about these houses. There are some interesting points that can be deduced from the chapter devoted to this topic. The role of the superior was seen as a dignity, but one that did not remove the superior from the obligation of obedience to the Rev. Mother, (the title not yet mother general). Many of her obligations centred about responsibility for observance of the rule and for good administration. There is to be mutual confidence between the mother superior and the superiors of the convents. It was also stated that the mother superior should uphold the local superiors in their authority. The term local superior had appeared in Polding's

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42 RP 1878 (3)13.
chapter on the orphanage, but from now on it became the term always used in relation to the person appointed to lead a particular community.

A very significant point relating to devolution of authority was that the superiors of respective convents were said to occupy the place of reverend mother: ‘They are to be obeyed in every respect just as Rev. Mother is to be obeyed, and the same attention is to be shown to them by the sisters.’ In fact, the reverend mother was to give all directions as to government of branch convents through the immediate superior. Yet it is also noted that any sister may have direct access to the mother superior. There is no corresponding chapter on branch houses or local superiors in the 1934 and 1947 edition of the rules, again no doubt because the matters were thought to be covered in Constitutions. However, it has been noted that by 1934, the chapter originally relating to the person in charge of the whole congregation, was applied to local superiors. The development of branch houses and local superiors, and the need to write descriptions into the texts, is significant because another layer of authority is introduced for the first time in the documents.

The 1911 Constitutions introduce a chapter Of the Local Superiors.\footnote{Const.1911 Part 2.13.} Here it is noted that the local superior is elected by the mother general and the council general. This is the first time this title of mother general appears, though mother superior general had been used in an earlier chapter.\footnote{Const.1911 Part 2 1.21.} It never appeared in earlier editions of the rules, but perhaps the introduction of local superiors who were to be called “Mother” caused a need for a new term to save confusion. From then on, that title, as with other religious communities, was used for the person responsible for the whole congregation.

The duties of the local superior in relation to financial management were spelt out and also the fact that she was to provide all that was necessary for the sisters, but exclude what was superfluous. There were also to be two counsellors and an econome
appointed by the mother general in each house to aid the superior in her administration. The use of the word Counsellors is consistent with its usage for the Counsellors for the whole congregation at central level at this stage.

The 1920 text of the Constitutions is similar, but the word Counsellor is replaced by Councillor. There is also a different and stronger statement on the authority of the local superior. The superior in each house rules in virtue of the authority given her by the Constitutions and not simply as agent or delegate of the mother general. The difficulty of making general laws apply to each group is illustrated in this chapter on local superiors by the fact that there is a prescription that there is to be a safe in all houses that holds money or bonds equivalent to more than one thousand lira, hardly an appropriate statement for an Australian group.\(^\text{45}\)

Because by 1933 the congregation was divided into provinces, the opening of the equivalent chapter in the 1933 Constitutions says that the local superior shall be elected by the mother general and the council general, after they have first listened to the respective provincial superior. Here is the acknowledgement of another layer of authority that will be discussed next. The rest of the chapter remains unchanged.

Provinces.

The spread of communities beyond Sydney brought about the need for another structure, a grouping of communities in regions called provinces. Details about provinces and provincials who managed them, appear in all versions of the Constitutions, even prematurely in the 1911 ones when there were certainly no such divisions. Once more we see how the congregation was being affected by Church laws which were thought to be able to apply to all religious communities, no matter from what basic tradition. In a chapter, entitled Of the members of the General Chapter, the

\(^{45}\) Const.1920 Part 2 14.274.
members are stated to be the mother general, the counsellors-general, the provincials and elected delegates. The 1920 Constitutions picked up this anomaly and stated in a chapter entitled *Of the Composition of the General Chapter*, 'Until the Institute is divided into provinces, the members of the General Chapter shall be The Superior-General, The Councillors-General, The Secretary-General, The Econome-General, The Superiors of houses in which twelve sisters reside and delegates from smaller houses.'

In 1921 the decision about provinces was noted. The congregation was to be divided into three Provinces. 1. All houses in New South Wales. 11. Those in Queensland - provincial to live in Brisbane. 111. Those in Victoria and South Australia - Provincial to live in Melbourne. By the 1927 Chapter, when small modifications of the Constitutions were made, they took account of this and named the provincials as delegates to the General Chapter.

By 1933 there were four provinces when the communities in New South Wales were divided into what was called a city province and a country province, and the provincial superiors were named as delegates to the General Chapter. Appointments of provincials for city houses and for country houses were recorded in 1932. There were twelve city houses and 165 sisters therein, and sixteen country houses with 112 sisters. The first two provincials had been appointed in December, 1922. This was for Queensland and for Victoria/South Australia. Communities were established in Japan in 1948 and it became a region in 1965 and a province in 1981. This structure of provinces remained until the provinces were suppressed in 1993.

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46 Const.1911 Part 2 3.135.

47 Const.1920 Part 2 2.155.

48 Minutes of General Council meeting, 21 February 1921, GSA.

49 Minutes of General Council Meeting, 10 August 1932.
The Role of Provincial Superior

There is no reference to the role of provincial as the person responsible for leading the provinces, in any edition of the rules. It was not relevant up until 1891, and in 1934 and 1947 it would have been seen as matter for Constitutions.

As mentioned already, the 1911 Constitutions carried a chapter entitled Of the Provincials and the Provinces, even before provinces were formed. The provincial was to be elected by the mother general and the council. The structure of government in each province was similar to that of the central government level. There was a council of four, and two of the councillors were to reside in the provincial house. The councillors were elected by the mother general and her council, Provincial Chapters were to be held every three years, the provincial was to visit all houses of the province each year. It must have been envisaged that formation of new members would take place in each province as it was noted the house of the provincial was the novitiate house of that province. That never operated in the Good Samaritan congregation, which always conducted a central novitiate house in Sydney. The rules may have been applicable for international orders, but not for this one, let alone at a time when there were not even provinces.  

In 1920 the constitutions changed the opening of the equivalent chapter noting the prescriptions were to apply when provinces were formed. It also notes that to form provinces, suppress or unite them or make new boundaries, apostolic (papal) consent is necessary.

There is a clear listing of things for which the provincial council is responsible. Dismissal and reception of novices is among them, confirming the above view that formation was assumed to happen at the level of a province. There is a change of rules

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50 Const.1911 Part 2. 12.

51 Const.1920 Part 2 13.
for who could be elected provincial. In 1911 she was to be thirty-five years of age and 10 years professed. In the 1920 version she was to be forty years of age, 10 years professed and born in lawful wedlock.

This chapter also includes a listing of the membership of the General Chapter: ‘When the Institute is divided into provinces.’ A modification inserted after the 1927 Chapter when there were two new provinces gives the members of the General Chapter for a time when the congregation is divided into seven provinces. This did not ever happen. The chapter in the 1920 Constitutions also discusses membership of Provincial Chapters. Much of the detail in the 1920, the modifications of 1927 and the 1933 version have to do with Chapters and delegates elected to be present at them. This issue of who attended Provincial and General Chapters remained an issue throughout the history of the congregation as well. The Benedictine concept of Chapter as the whole community gathering to discuss issues of importance had been totally lost. Of course, even practically, because of geography and numbers, the gathering of all sisters to discuss matters of importance and to elect officials would have been very difficult. Decisions to do with changes after each meeting of delegates, at what was called the General Chapter, were noted in Acts of the Chapter and Chapter Handbooks.

The relationship of the provincial with the superior general was given briefly. In each version the provincial is instructed to write frequently to the mother general and to consult her on matters of importance. As well as this, each member of the provincial council was to write a report on the affairs of the province once a year and send it to the mother general. The role and the province structure of modern orders, especially of ones that were international, sat uneasily with the Good Samaritans of a Benedictine tradition, though they operated for 70 years of their history.

By 1933 there existed Constitutions containing legal statements about government, and in 1934 the Rules of Polding were re-printed taking account of what was in the Constitutions. The 1947 edition of the Rules of Polding contained no differences in content, and was just a reprinting in a slightly different format.
These written laws and rules affected the practice of authority until 1969. They remained static and so did the practices and understanding. It seems to have been considered that because the congregation had received final approbation in 1932, and the Constitutions re-printed after this in 1933, that no significant changes would occur, and in fact very few did until 1969. Minor changes in practices were decided by the six yearly meetings of General Chapters, but there is nothing that is relevant to this discussion.

In this long period of the congregation's establishment and consolidation, (1857-1969) practices and written texts about authority reflected such things as the need for pragmatic arrangements because of a growth in numbers and the spread of the congregation from one community to many, spread over four states, and to Japan by 1969. They also reflected the effect of Church prescriptions regarding religious life, and above all a very static world-view and understanding of authority.

If we are to understand and appreciate what happened from 1969-1993, it must be set in this context. Roles had changed and new ones had been established, there were new structures, Benedictine terms and understandings had been lost, especially the sense of the whole community being Chapter, consultation was no longer thought to be important, so decision making resided at the top of an hierarchical scale. To a certain extent this loss was modified because of the importance given to local communities and superiors, thus decentralizing government. However, in spite of the fact that the life of the local communities was considered so important, it was strongly affected by decisions from the central government. There was very little room for differences, and general laws applied for all. The effect of Canon Law and the production of legally expressed constitutions also had a stultifying effect. And finally a static world and Church view of authority as dominance rather than service, added an influence on a congregation established in the 19th Century, and consolidated in the early twentieth century. However, in some ways the rich and flexible heritage and tradition of a
Benedict of the sixth century was remembered, and this even to a small extent affected the living of the congregation, and prepared it for the changes to come.
CHAPTER 10

THE WHEEL COMES FULL CIRCLE

POST VATICAN II, 1969-1993

The image of the wheel making progress through each revolution is used to describe the dynamism of movement forward in the congregation in this period. In this understanding, the idea of coming full circle, in no way implies a return to the past, though it does include a sense that tradition is not ignored in each revolution that took the congregation to new stages and new ways of living after Vatican II.


The changes that happened must be set in the context of the effects of the Second Vatican Council. All religious orders were affected by this, and the changes in attitudes to authority and practices of government in the sisters of the Good Samaritan were part of a change that was happening world wide. The first official act to bring about such renewal was the calling of the special General Chapter in 1969.

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1 This phrase is familiar to Sisters of the Good Samaritan since the history written for the centenary of foundation, 1857-1957, was entitled The Wheeling Years. The title was based on the words of Dante, 'Il Paradiso, Canto xxxiii:'

Power failed high fantasy here, yet swift to move,
Even as a wheel moves equal, free from jars,
Already my heart and will were wheeled by love
The Love that moves the sun and stars.

The phrase, 'The wheel has come full circle' was used in the song composed for the centenary celebrations.

Every six years, delegates and ex officio members of the congregation meet in what is called a General Chapter to discuss the affairs of the congregation and to elect or re-elect a superior. The stage under discussion here is from the 1969 General Chapter through to the 1975 one. There was a special nature to the Chapter of 1969 because the Vatican Council II had asked all religious to consider renewal and updating. In the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life called *Perfectae Caritatis* \(^2\) all Religious Communities were called to examine and renew their lives, and in order to do this, it was noted that two aspects were to be considered. There was to be a constant return to the sources of the whole of Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the religious orders, and there was to be adaptation to the changed conditions of our times. These two areas have been the constant foci of all developments since then.

In order to facilitate such renewal, each congregation was directed to call a special General Chapter: 'In each Institute in order to put renewal and adaptation into effect, a special General Chapter is to be summoned within two or at the most three years.' \(^3\) It also noted that the general council must arrange by some suitable means for an ample and free consultation of members. The Good Samaritan sisters called this special General Chapter to be held from 12th December, 1968 – 21st January, 1969. There was also the ordinary General Chapter held in September, 1969. A new superior had to be elected, since the person holding office had completed twelve years in office and according to the *Constitutions* could not be re-elected. This was done in the September 1969 Chapter. The main focus of this discussion is the special Chapter of December/January.

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\(^2\) 28th October, 1965.

The outcomes of this gathering in Chapter were printed in a document entitled *Declaration*. This document included on the title page a resumption of the full title of the order, *Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St Benedict*, which had not been used since the 1911 *Constitutions*. This would have been part of the instruction to put into effect a return to the sources of the original inspiration of the congregation, its Benedictine basis. It contained inspirational material, constitutions, a directory and enactments (these latter two being very practical details.) It was to be used over a period of six years until the 1975 General Chapter for a period of experimentation. The most significant thing was that it was a definite departure from the format and in places, the style, of what had come to be thought of as constitutional material, which was often prescriptions, fairly legal in tone which applied Canon Law to a particular religious congregation.

Part 1 of *Declaration* contained material relating to the religious life in general, and Part 11, headed *Government* formed a substantial section of the text. This section opened with what could be called "Inspirational Material" and was obviously an effort to re-interpret authority and government in the light of some of the new principles of Vatican II. Chapter 1 included three sections, brief statements (but not legal ones) on the "Basic Concept of Authority," "Authority in General," and the "Role of the Superior." Succeeding chapters deal with the mother general, the general council, provincial and regional superiors and local superiors (acknowledging the various layers of government) and other people who held important roles such as secretary and bursar.

There are some very significant shifts in an understanding of authority in this section. These reflect the changing ecclesiology of the Vatican Council. In the statements of this Council, the Church was described as "The People of God," and the emphasis was

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5 *Declaration*, Part 11, Government, p.32.

6 *Declaration*, Part 11, Government, Chapters 2-4, pp.33-36.
far from its being an institutional hierarchy. There was a shift towards decentralization, collegiality and subsidiarity, where members were seen to be responsible for the life of the Church, and were considered able to participate in decision-making processes at local level. The Church was also considered to have an important role in relation to the world and all that is human.  

The opening statement in chapter 1 of Declaration is a reminder that all authority comes from God and the sisters have by Baptism and religious profession committed themselves to give willing submission. Very little change in theology can be detected in that final phrase. However, an entirely new expression was added, acknowledging that all sisters are co-responsible with their superiors for the life of the Institute in its service of God and neighbour. This statement goes on: ‘Superiors therefore are to apply the principle of subsidiarity in the exercise of authority.’ It was acknowledged that this way of operating made it possible for all the resources of the community to be utilised in the service of the Church.

The section headed "Authority in General," simply re-iterates legal statements about where authority resides, for example, all sisters are to give due deference and obedience to the pope and the local bishop. There is a clear statement that the General Chapter, when assembled, exercises supreme authority within the institute and that the mother general has authority over all provinces, regions, houses and members and exercises this according to the Constitutions. A definition follows of the areas wherein provincial, regional and local superiors exercise their rightful authority. Not only is the content similar to previous such statements, but it is even arranged in a hierarchical form of pope, bishops, mother general, provincial, local superior which proves that it

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8 Declaration, p.32. no.120.
takes a long time for new understandings to permeate the written text, let alone the lived reality.\(^9\)

However, the third section, "The Role of the Superior," captures some of the effort to re-think approaches, as did the first section. Here there is a slight flavour and echo of some of Benedict's teaching. It notes that the first and chief concern of every superior is to lead the sisters in their search for God. She represents Christ, adapts herself to all and sees them as persons to be loved rather than as subjects to be governed.\(^10\) She puts concern for her sisters before efficiency as an administrator. This statement is significant because, not only does it indicate a shift, but it could also show what had been the contrasting previous attitudes.

The question of consultation also comes up in this section. The local superior is to consult frequently with the sisters, to encourage initiative and to value suggestions, though reserving the right to make decisions. The ideas are of Benedict, but the language is not. This section also shows the importance that the local superior, and all superiors, had assumed in the life of the congregation.

The chapter on the mother general is a mixture of the inspirational and the legal.\(^11\) There are such things included as the fact that her authority derives from her election to office by a lawfully constituted general chapter, the term of her office, place of residence, roles such as placement of sisters, visitation of communities, reports to the Holy See and the fact that she is assisted in government and administration by general councillors. Her relationship to provincial and local superiors is described as one of guiding and advising, (note the emphasis on a one way process). However, the chapter does include statements that she is responsible for the members and it is her care to promote the spiritual progress of the Institute, to guard its spirit and to animate the

\(^9\) Declaration, p.32.

\(^10\) RB 2, 64; Declaration, Part 11, chapter 1, pp.127-129.

\(^11\) Declaration, Part 11, chapter 11, pp.33-34.
members according to the directives of the Church and the intentions of the founder. It is also noted that she uses her authority in a spirit of service, and encourages effective co-operation amongst the sisters.

The question of consultation is addressed in the next section on the general council, where it is stated that the four councillors must be readily available for consultation. Their role is defined as that of advising and assisting the mother general in the exercise of her office and to study questions that concern the spiritual and material welfare of the Institute and its members, and to vote on matters where votes are required. The rest of the chapter simply lists details that would have been necessary to state about any councillor in any era.

In the section on provinces and provincial superiors, there is little inspirational material. However, there are some important statements. It is noted that the purpose of provinces is the more efficient government of the Institute, and that provinces have the status of distinct moral persons. This means that they can stand and act alone. The provincial's primary duty is the individual and common good, and she should ensure that a spirit of peace, unity and co-operation prevails in each house of the province. She too is to have a council, appointed by the mother general with the vote of her council, but after consultation with the sisters within the province. This idea of consulting the members of the province before the appointment of a provincial was an entirely new concept, and an effort to exercise consultation and subsidiarity. The chapter on regional superiors contained the same instructions, and was included because Japan had been named a region in 1965. A region was defined as being an area that had not sufficient houses or religious to form a province.

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12 Declaration, Part 11, Chapter 111, pp.34-37.
14 Declaration, Part 11, Chapter VI, pp.39-41.
Much of the teaching of Benedict on the superior had been interpreted to apply to the local superior as emphases changed from 1857-1969. Here there is slightly more effort to change the approach to an understanding of authority as radiating from the centre, with one person, now called the superior general, being more equivalent to Benedict's abbot. However, at this time, the shift was slight. But in the way the congregation operated the local superior was very important, so any change in direction was then important.

The importance of the local superior's role is indicated in the opening article of the chapter relating to her where it is noted that she has the right to govern the house in all matters except those reserved to higher authorities. However, before her appointment by the mother general and council, there was also to be consultation with the sisters. ¹⁵ She had responsibility for the life of the local community in totality, but she was to apply to all aspects of that life, the principle of subsidiarity. By frequent consultation with all sisters, she was to promote the involvement of them in the religious and apostolic life of the community. Care for the sick was important in her role, as were spiritual concerns. The daily life of the community was acknowledged to be of concern to all sisters who lived it, and the superior, in collaboration with the sisters, was to examine and determine the order of daily life in the community and then inform the provincial superior of the arrangements. For the most part, prior to this, the schedule in most communities would have been more or less the same throughout the entire institute, so this gave much greater autonomy to the local group.

A chapter on *Obedience* is a legal statement on when and how formal commands were to be given. In a section of the *Directory* (on the whole, detailed statements about details) there is a chapter on government and finance, and there is nothing of significance here except that there is an order of rank given. This would be reflective of a former understanding of authority.

¹⁵ *Declaration*, Part 11, Chapter 7.211, p.41.
In general the shifts are slight, though the format, and the efforts to state things differently, did reflect the beginning of change. The principles that sisters were to be consulted and that government would be done in a spirit of subsidiarity began to create some alterations to understanding and practice.

The ordinary General Chapter of September 1969 fulfilled the very important role of electing a new mother general (Mother M. de Lourdes Ronayne) and council, and another era, building on the changes that were happening, was begun.¹⁶ This General Chapter also noted that the provisionary constitutions in the Declaration were to be used until the next Chapter with some minor editorial changes. It was also noted clearly that the title *Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St Benedict*, given to us by the founder, Polding, was to be retained as the official title of the Institute.¹⁷

An even more significant statement, most surprising at the time, was to lead the Institute more strongly to its Benedictine origins. It was stated, that ‘[the] Holy Rule of St Benedict, in particular the Prologue and chapters 4-7, 19,20, 35, 36, 54, given to us by our Founder is the foundation of our life as religious.’ The practical application is found in updated form in the provisional constitutions and directory. The book formerly known as Our Holy Rule (i.e.Polding’s Rules) ‘is now a revered historical document.’¹⁸

This statement by the highest governing body in the congregation at the time, the General Chapter, led the congregation back very strongly to Benedict’s Rule, as well as confirming the importance of the Constitutions as the practical application of this. In practice however, the Rules of Polding were taken up with renewed understanding and

¹⁶ Mother M. de Lourdes Ronayne was to lead the congregation from 1969-1981 during the period of radical post-Vatican II changes. Her vision and leadership enabled many necessary changes to happen and prepared the way for further developments in the succeeding administration (1981-1993).

enthusiasm some years later, and study of them accompanied the careful study of the *Rule of Benedict*. Prior to this, the effect of this renewed attention to the *Rule of Benedict* is noted as being very evident in the outcome of the 1975 Chapter.

In this period, the statements of the Declaration were the written texts by which the congregation functioned. Before the 1975 Chapter there was widespread consultation on various areas, and each province was assigned to prepare papers, after consultation, that would be presented at the Chapter gathering. The province assigned to prepare the material on authority and government, was the city province of New South Wales, and the document produced as the third draft of a position paper had a profound effect on the Chapter discussions and the document that emerged from the 1975 Chapter. It was called *Hearken*. So before the Document itself and the 1975 Chapter gathering is discussed there is need to give some attention to this position paper on authority and government.

The paper included two sections, Section A. Principles : The ideals of the Church and of our Institute in regard to authority and government, and Section B. Problems : An attempt to identify our difficulties in reaching these ideals. The discussion centred around attitudes in the Gospel to authority and obedience, how these gospel values were expressed in the Benedictine tradition, how the relationship between authority and obedience was relevant to the social reality of the times, how the traditional expressions and understandings could be harmonised with development of a new way of looking at questions of authority and obedience, how tradition was to be safeguarded, and a final section on the role of General Chapters. Many of the questions raised in this paper still continue to be asked, so it is not easy to provide solutions. However, what was significant at the time was the fact that such questions could even be asked, and then addressed in such a sound way.

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The construction of the paper was one of great clarity. Since the Rules of Polding were not addressed, the clear areas were the Gospel, the Rule of Benedict and the recent Church documents of Vatican II. There were some significant shifts in the principles that were presented. Gospel values were emphasised such as that respect must be given to all, since the source of authority is the Spirit of God, present in all; that authority and obedience will be flexible and original as long as they operate from Gospel principles. It was clear too that Benedict's teaching, stating that the person in authority was to be a teacher, healer and reconciler, not a manager involved in administrative processes, was understood. Obedience and authority were expressed as being about service and listening, not dominance and organization.

The paper then went on to discuss the developing concepts in current Church documents, such as responsible co-operation, where all can contribute to the life for which they are all responsible, and subsidiarity, which indicates that those in authority should enable those at all levels to act in their own right where possible. This is far from a hierarchical or pyramidal structure. If such principles were to operate, the personal dignity of those in authority and of all members would be safeguarded.

The second section of the paper was entitled, "Problems Arising in the Area of Authority and Government." This was a significant attempt to face the realities and difficulties of a situation. It raised questions for discussion such as the danger of those in authority imposing a multiplicity of minute prescriptions that could cause people to reject legitimate authority. It raised the question of the difficulty of finding the balance between the need for individual and communal dialogue and the undeniable right of the superior to decide what has to be done. This was facing the fact that such principles as co-responsibility, subsidiarity, delegation of authority and collegiality had to be balanced against the Benedictine tradition. It discussed the way superiors who exercised authority at local level should be helped to do this well.

There was also reference to confusion of roles and areas of responsibility because of different layers of government. Since councillors have an important consultative role
it was seen as important that they have a wide and deep knowledge of the life of the order. The question of the balance between decentralisation and central government was raised, and the importance of the General Chapter was noted.

No answers were given to these "problems", but the fact that they were discussed and registered was an important step. This is an indication of a growing clarity about the fact that there were different ways authority and government could operate, and an indication that those in authority and all members were willing to address the situation. It was also evident that there was an understanding that basic principles of the Gospel and the Benedictine tradition were not at odds with these understandings of authority. Though they may have seemed new to a society affected by an authority that operated out of dominance, they were in fact as old as Benedict who knew the importance of listening to the wisdom of others, and who valued the dignity of each person.

This has been discussed at some length because, when the document that emerged from the 1975 Chapter, *Hearken*, was examined, it was obvious that this position paper and the discussion it generated had had a profound influence on the attitudes to authority and government that were contained within it.

**The 1975 Chapter.**

This Chapter gathering was held from the 21 August until the 8 September 1975. The document that emerged from this meeting was called *Hearken*, and it contained principles, statements, directory material and amendments to the *Provisionary Constitutions* of 1969. There were some amendments to the latter in relation to authority and these will be discussed after reference has been made to the principles contained in the document.
In the six years since the 1969 special General Chapter had attempted to return to the original sources and inspiration of the order, and to consider this in the light of the current reality, much work had been done. This was reflected in the written text, *Hearken*. There were clear statements about the basis of the life of the order being founded in the values of the Gospel and the *Rule of Benedict*. Relevant and very specific sections relating to the connection of the *Rules of Polding* to the *Rule of Benedict* are included. This is very important because questions of authority and obedience are so pervasive in the *Rule of Benedict* that current discussions relating to these issues must be considered in the context of this Rule.

Under the general heading *Return to Original Inspiration*, is another section relating to the *Rules of Polding*... its *Basis in Benedictine Spirituality*. Sections of the text are very important for the current discussion and need to be quoted in full.

5. Polding placed his Institute firmly within the Benedictine tradition. He named it The Institute of the Oblate sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St Benedict, designing it for the practice of the spiritual and corporal works of charity, under the guidance of holy obedience according to the Rule of St. Benedict.

6. To understand what our Rule means as well as what it says, requires a familiarity with the concepts of the spiritual life contained in the Rule of St. Benedict.

7. Since this Rule given to us by our founder is our guide, and under its inspiration we live a gospel way of life, decisions affecting the life of the Institute are based on the spirit of this Rule.

8. There is a distinctive spirit peculiar to our Institute that is derived from the rule given us by our founder, which has its derivation from the Rule of St Benedict and the spirit of apostolic life initiated by St Francis de Sales. This spirit needs to be safeguarded and lived out in active fidelity.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{19}\) *Hearken*, p.2, GSA.
Within the context of such statements is situated the approach to authority and obedience contained in the document. Regarding obedience, the document has this to say,

5. Our vows are made according to the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict. This spirit implies that, when a decision has been reached, our response is based "on the foundation of obedience, prompt, unquestioning and cheerful". (Rules of Polding. Ch 11)

6. Benedictine obedience is not confined to particular acts but involves a total interior attitude. In the rule it is coupled with humility and poverty and is the expression of one's openness before God and those who act in his place. It is that emptying of self and attentive listening to God that generates trust and forgiveness.²⁰

The superior is to exercise her role according to Benedictine principles. She does retain the right to decide, but there must always be community discernment and respectful dialogue. The service of obedience is to be rendered not only to superiors but also to one another.²¹

Then...

In an atmosphere of supportive obedience, superiors, and those whom they lead in the search for God's presence in their lives can together build a community in which Benedictine "peace" can become a reality.²²

The Principles section of the third draft of the position paper, which had been prepared prior to the Chapter, was included in full, and discussion of its contents and emphases appears above.

The Provisionary Constitutions of 1969 which were part of the document, Declaration, were amended in some ways, but most of the amendments were insignificant. In a statement about the authority of the superior, the term mother general was changed to superior general, and it was noted that she exercised her

²⁰ Hearken, p.4, GSA.

²¹ Hearken, 4.8,1,12; RB 3,71.

²² Hearken, 4.13, GSA.
authority according to Canon Law and the constitutions. Wherever mother general had appeared it was changed to superior general and it was also noted that the minimum age for election was 35 years, instead of 40 as had been stated in the Declaration. Whereas in the Declaration it had been stated that she may be re-elected but only for a second period of six years, this document stated that she may not be re-elected for a third period immediately following.

The minimum age for councillors was reduced from 35 to 30 and instead of being professed at least eight years, they simply had to have made perpetual profession. It is interesting that the statement in the Declaration that there had to be consultation with all sisters who had made perpetual profession, before the councillors were elected, was omitted. Perhaps the practicalities of this made it difficult. The minimum age for provincials was also reduced to 30 and from being eight years professed they simply had to be perpetually professed. These are all mere details, but show that amendments had to be made so that the constitutions were aligned with Canon Law.

The document ends, under a section called "Statements," with one such statement on "Authority and Obedience." It provides a summary of all the teaching and underlying principles that have gone before. Its stated purpose is that it 'is intended to bring out clearly and simply some practical points in our understanding of obedience and its correlative, authority. The Documents of Vatican II... and the Rule of our founder furnish the material.' Some of the points already discussed are clearly expressed in point form. Church teaching refers to the spirit of service out of which the superior

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23 The phrase "Canon Law" was inserted, *Hearken*, p.48, no.125.

24 *Hearken*, p.48, no.134.

25 *Hearken*, p.49, no.151.

26 *Hearken*, p.70.
should operate, and the question of concern for individuals and the role that each
member should take in responsibility for the life of the order are mentioned.27

A summary of Benedictine features follows. Obedience freely undertaken is the
foundation of the life and the superior represents Christ to the community. Then there
follows a summary of ways by which each level of government is to function. The
ideas that those in authority are sources of unity, that they seek to know and be known
by the sisters, that they show special concern for those in need, and that they work for
the individual and common good are important areas that are re-inforced. Consultation
is to be done on important community matters and the kind of obedience encouraged is
active, responsible obedience.28

Significantly, the final section is a summary of the role of the sister in community.
This in itself is a shift, to note that the role of the individual is so important. There are
clear statements such as that she must work 'together with the superior in the
preliminary thinking out, planning and discussion before the superior makes the
decision in important matters.' Then she must co-operate wholeheartedly in the
implementation of decisions made.29

The details that have been included are important in that they show that what had been
begun to be expressed in the 1969 document, Declaration, based on the principles that
were emerging from the Vatican Council Documents, was now much more clearly
stated here in the 1975 document, Hearken. It was moreover solidly grounded in the
traditional Benedictine values of consultation, the importance of relationships and the
recognition of the dignity of the individual. These understandings were to grow in
importance in the lived experience of the members of the congregation over the years

27 Hearken, p.71.
28 Hearken, pp.71-74.
29 Hearken, p.75.
from 1975 to 1981 and led to even more radical changes in attitudes and in the written text emerging from the Chapters that follow.

In 1978 a person was appointed with the specific responsibility of community renewal.\textsuperscript{30} As a result of this, a programme of Benedictine Studies was devised in conjunction with two monks from the Cistercian Monastery, Tarrawarra, in Victoria. This was a very significant effort to engage all in a detailed study of the \textit{Rule of Benedict}, and most sisters participated in it over a two-year period, 1979 and 1980. This provided a solid background for the work that was to be done at the 1981 General Chapter where a new superior, Sister Helen Lombard, was elected. During the twelve years she held office, she recognized Benedict’s wisdom in making teaching an essential component of the exercise of authority. This created a climate of meaning by which the whole congregation was guided to a new vision. She exercised genuine and creative leadership, so that changes were not imposed from above, but involved all members of the community in the complex paths of re-thinking and adapting, and thus the vision came to be more and more realized. A discussion follows of these significant shifts in understanding and practice of authority and governance during the twelve years she held office.

1981-1993

The Chapter statement issued from the 1981 Chapter was called \textit{Vision of the New} and it contained brief statements about all aspects of the life of the order. It was based on a text of Scripture that included the line: "Here and now I am doing something new" \textsuperscript{31} The language of the text was new, though of course it built on the changes that had been occurring since 1969. The text noted: ‘As we reflect back over the past six years,

\textsuperscript{30} This person was Sister Helen Lombard who was later to be elected superior general (1981)

\textsuperscript{31} Isaiah 43:18-21.
we the sisters gathered in the General Chapter of 1981, see a whole pattern of growth and movement leading to this particular point in the life of the Institute.'

The statement that is relevant to this topic of authority was that ‘the place in community of leadership exercised in a climate of co-responsibility and mutual obedience,’ was affirmed. The idea of co-responsibility had been clearly expressed prior to this, but the term mutual obedience (obedience to one another in community) a very Benedictine concept was given a new emphasis.

It was also significant that the challenges written down as arising from this vision were very much centred on local community, which was named as the organic and formative centre of the lives of the sisters. The need for formation and study to deepen an understanding of the tradition and the lived reality was also expressed. All of this was seen to be necessary so that there could be a courageous movement forward as, together, the sisters confronted these challenges. Emphases that had been emerging were now clearly stated. A shift was made from government as instigating movement from above, to local groups as the centre. There was also a shift from seeing the movement as the responsibility of those in positions of authority, to seeing it as the responsibility of everyone.

• Grouping of Communities in Clusters

Soon after this Chapter gathering, when it came to appointing new superiors for local groups, a decision was made to group some houses together under one local superior. This was possible constitutionally because of a statement in the Constitutions of 1981, which said ‘[the] basic unit of government within the congregation is the house which consists of one or more local communities and is governed by a local superior.’

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32 Vision of the New, 1981 Chapter Statement, GSA.
33 RB 71.
34 Constitutions 1981, 8.17, p.47.
fact that a house could be one or more local communities and could be governed by
one local superior was a radical shift, though it may have seemed insignificant at the
time. It certainly led to other more radical changes in due time. It was a much
questioned and much debated decision at the time, because it seemed to be at variance
with the traditional teaching of Benedict on the importance of the superior. What in
fact it led to, was an understanding that the congregation could be seen as having one
superior, the person who was elected to lead the total group. But this took time to
further develop.

The letter announcing this change situated the decision within the tradition, saying that
it was believed that such a move was a part of the outcome of the 1981 Chapter
gathering, which was a statement seeking to strengthen co-responsibility and mutual
obedience. The superior stated that this was 'a way we believe will strengthen the
exercise of leadership in a Benedictine sense and call us to corporate expression of life
and to mutual obedience which is the very essence of Benedictine community.' This
move, though it could not have been foreseen at the time, turned out to be one of the
most significant ones that led to further changes in government. It showed that
communities could live without the physical presence of one responsible person, and it
showed that all could take responsibility for the functioning of the community.

Soon after this letter, all superiors who had been appointed to what came to be called
"cluster communities" were called together for what was the beginning of a series of
Leadership Formation Programmes. In the address to these new leaders, the superior
situated the decision in the on-going movement of the recent Chapter. She noted that
the decision was not someone's bright idea, nor an isolated decision, nor a planned
movement for organizational change or alternative forms of government, It was not
even an experiment. Rather it was a 'call to re-vitalize our understanding of strong

35 Letter of Superior General, Sister Helen Lombard, to the whole congregation,
September 24, 1981, GSA.

36 October 30th - November 1st, 1981.
leadership in the Benedictine tradition, our experience of a community made up of fully participating members in which the interaction of charisms is a vital force, and our living of mutual obedience within such a community.' The re-grouping was seen to be a catalyst, and to involve all in corporate movement forward, the cutting edge of growth. In an address in 1993, prior to the Chapter gathering of that year, the superior, Sister Helen Lombard, would note this as being a most decisive event in relation to the growth in understanding of authority. In fact it was indeed so.

- Constitutions, 1981.

The Constitutions that were approved by the 1981 Chapter were a sifting and refining of preparatory work that had been done prior to the Chapter. They were presented in an entirely new format, and the content reflected the attitudes towards authority that had developed in the years prior to the 1981 Chapter, especially the insights that had grown out of the document Hearken, with its strong Benedictine emphases.

There was a very important statement at the beginning that even reflected a wholly new view of the role of Constitutions. Throughout the history of the order, as was shown in the discussion of previous sets of Constitutions, they were always viewed as documents containing legal requirements to be observed. Even the Provisionary Constitutions of 1969 fitted that idea. However, from 1981 on, the three sets of Constitutions that have been printed, all note that the constitutions are a statement of Good Samaritan life at the time. In that way it is acknowledged that life is lived ahead of law, and when law is written it simply expresses what has happened, as well as confirming it and thus leading to new growth. This introduction in the 1981 text clearly notes that

this statement of our way of life does not stand by itself. It draws its vitality from the basic document of our tradition, the *Rule of St. Benedict*, and from the *Rules of Polding* by which this tradition is interpreted to give us our particular character and mission. Together with the Statutes, the Acts of the General Chapter, and the Chapter Handbook, these Constitutions form the laws of the congregation which provide for us a framework for living the gospel in fidelity to our charism.38

Thus the place of the constitutions is stated clearly in relation to the other documents of the congregation, especially the Rule of Benedict and the Rules of Polding.

Two key chapters, out of eight, relate to questions of authority and governance. Likewise two corresponding chapters in the *Statutes*, printed in the same book deal with the practical application of what appears in these two chapters of the *Constitutions*. Both chapters took their titles from phrases and words of the *Rule of Benedict*. The first, chapter 5 was called *Under a Rule and a Superior*, and the second was chapter 7, *Those Called to Hold the Place of Christ in the Community*.39 Chapter 5 deals more with the nature of the commitment of all to live under a rule and a superior. The emphasis is that the personal response of individuals is given form and direction through commitment to the corporate life of the congregation.40 So this chapter deals more with obedience. Within this commitment to the corporate life, the importance of leadership is acknowledged, ‘leadership which unites us in Christ, gives direction to our corporate life and calls us to continuing growth in response to the Spirit.’

Various aspects of the life of the congregation are noted as important, and they all are expressions of a new way of understanding authority. All are expected to participate in Chapter (the name given to local community meetings, so at this stage there was not

38 Charism can be defined as the particular characteristics that are evident in each religious congregation's way of living. It is an emphasis that marks one congregation from another.

39 RB 1.2; 2.2.

yet a return to the full understanding of the word as a gathering of all sisters in the congregation), to respond to processes of consultation and participation, to support decisions made in the name of the community, to represent differing opinions through appropriate channels, thus avoiding divisiveness and factions, and to participate in ongoing formation and education.

The emphasis in chapter 7, *Those Called to Hold the Place of Christ in the Community* was on those who held positions of authority. In the tradition of Benedict, much of what was said, referred to what sort a person the one called to authority should be. The chapter uses many phrases derived from, or related to, Benedict's teaching on the abbot.\(^{41}\) There is the question of the centrality of Scripture, concern for individuals, the manifestation of discretion and moderation, compassion, healing and reconciling, adapting to different dispositions, exercise of responsible stewardship, a spirit of serving rather than presiding over those for whom the superior was responsible. All of this is central to Benedict's understanding of, and teaching on, authority.

After that introduction there was reference to the different channels of authority in the congregation. There was, however, a reversal of order beginning with local superiors and moving to provincial superiors and finally to the superior general. In the address in 1993, the superior noted that when this text was being written it reflected the former structures since any new ones had not been lived. This is true, but the expression contains some new insights. The significance of the fact that the basic unit of government was the house which could be one or more communities has already been discussed.\(^{42}\) The local Chapter meeting was seen as an important way of exercising co-

\(^{41}\) RB 2, 64.

responsibility with the local superior, in her role of leadership and stewardship within the house.\textsuperscript{43}

Provinces were still seen as a way of promoting effective leadership and stewardship within the congregation. The significance of the Provincial Chapter, which was a gathering of elected delegates from the province every six years prior to the General Chapter, was noted. It was seen to be a focus of unity and formation, of collaboration and participation within a province. It was also noted that while such a meeting was in session, it was an expression of collegial government within the province. This would imply that it had a right to make decisions about the life of the province, but as has already been noted, the structure of the congregation was really very different to that of an international congregation where the provinces needed to function very independently. This did not happen within the Good Samaritan congregation because of the central government which had always operated. This principle had been strongly adhered to throughout the life of the congregation, in contrast to groups that lived under diocesan control, and were much more dependent on the local bishop. This is an example of the confusion created, through having different layers of government within a congregation almost wholly located in Australia.

There is some freshness about the statements concerning the General Chapter. It was seen to gather together the life and mission of the whole congregation, to give it direction for the future and to be a source of unity and formation, of collaboration and participation for the whole congregation. Indeed a General Chapter, when in session, is an expression of collegial government.\textsuperscript{44} All members act as equal, and the body can make decisions for the whole order. This is a far cry from a former understanding of General Chapter as a body that would issue prescriptions, some very minute, about the daily life of members of the congregation. It was also a beginning of important changes in understanding that were to happen regarding the General Chapter.

\textsuperscript{43} Constitutions 1981, 7.15.

\textsuperscript{44} Constitutions 1981, 7.25.
The Statutes printed in the same book, after the Constitutions, are meant to interpret in a practical way the ideas in the corresponding sections of the Constitutions. The most significant expression in the Statutes,\(^{45}\) was an emphasis on the practical role of the local Chapter or community meeting. It was seen to be a means of consultation, collaboration and participation within the house and within the congregation. In hindsight, that is exactly an expression of how all sisters, if seen as members of Chapter, a total gathering of all members would operate. In practice, this statement of the Statutes led to a clarification of the real understanding of the concept of Chapter in the Benedictine tradition. The local Chapter was said to form an integral part of the preparation for the General Chapter and a response to, and realisation of, the vision of the Chapter. This is a similar statement to the above, and its significance would only be realized in practice over the next twelve years.

Strong responsibility was given to the local superior in statements of the Statutes, chapter 7, Those Called to Hold the Place of Christ in the Community. She was to govern according to the principles of ecclesial authority and pastoral government. She was to work ‘in collaboration with her provincial superior and to contribute towards the establishment and maintenance of appropriate channels of communication, collaboration and participation within the house and within the congregation.’\(^{46}\)

Provincial superiors were to operate in the same way, and much of their role, as for the role of local superiors, was expressed in concern for the sisters. The sections still contained necessary legal prescriptions related to the roles. This would also be true of the section on the superior general, who is described as the guardian of the spirit of the congregation.\(^{47}\) There is a careful listing of the things for which the provincial is

\(^{45}\) Constitutions 1981, Statutes 5.2-4.

\(^{46}\) Constitutions, 1981, Statutes 7.1.

responsible, those for which she requires the consent of the council, and those for which she requires the consent both of the council and the local bishop. Other sections in the Statutes relate to provincial and general council, bursars and secretaries.

A new structure of government, in the advisory sense, was introduced. This was called an "Extended Council." 48 This was seen as a body which would widen consultation within the order, and apart from officials, was to include representatives from each province and sisters co-opted as required. Its function was to study and examine matters of particular importance and to review the on-going life of the congregation in the light of the vision, thrust and legislation of a General Chapter. This body was required to meet at least once a year and it did so over the period from 1982 - 1987. One of the sessions (1985) was held in two parts, one in Australia and one in Japan, so that the sisters in Japan could participate. Membership varied, sometimes with a very wide membership, including people who did not belong to the congregation, and it turned out to be a highly educative and participative body over the six-year period.

Topics such as church and ministry were discussed. This was the body that was involved in a mid-term evaluation of the life of the congregation in 1985, and that also helped to draw up a framework designed to lead to the collaboration and participation of the whole congregation in the General Chapter of 1987. The days were gone when a superior, or even a superior and her council, saw themselves with the narrow focus of determining future directions. The role of the "Extended Council" was taken over by what was named as a "Plenary Council" from 1987 - 1993, and this body further clarified the function of a widening of consultation in the congregation. However, the beginnings of this were there in the functioning of the "Extended Council."

A last section of the 1981 Constitutions that referred to authority and government was an appendix entitled Ecclesial Authority and Pastoral Government. This section also became a strong influence regarding the understanding and practice of authority over

the next six-year period. It was an attempt to relate the operation of the government of the religious community to the kind of authority that belongs to the Church.

Ecclesial authority is described as not being the maternal or paternal authority exercised in a family, nor the political authority of the state. It does not work out of the obligations of family membership or social contract, but out of a free response to a covenant relationship of steadfast love and mercy which is offered by God to all people. The statement notes different expressions of ecclesial authority in the church as being authority of commission or of office, authority of community which belongs to members simply by their right of membership, and the authority of maturity which arises from an individual’s adult and human personhood. If pastoral government is to emerge from this, the three bases of ecclesial authority must interact with each other. Structures of government must take account of all. Over the six years the congregation did grow in understanding and practice of the importance of authority of office, authority of community and authority of maturity, though the terms were not to continue in usage.

There was also a clear statement about subsidiarity, delegation of authority and collegiality, which words had been appearing over the years since 1969. And finally there was a statement of the need for mutual obedience which demands that authority speaks to authority. There is not at this time a full drawing out of an understanding of the implications of mutual obedience in the daily life of the communities.

This statement on ecclesial authority and pastoral government was an effort to express in a new form a renewed understanding of, and obedience to, the spirit of the congregation. It is expressed in language other than that of the Rule of Benedict, yet is not counter to it in principle or practice and shows how the principles of the rule can interact with a modern reality.
Leadership Programmes

The value of the Extended Council has already been discussed, and there is likewise need to examine the Leadership Formation Programs and their effect on the understanding and practice of authority over the six years from 1981-1987. Because superiors were appointed for a period of no more than six succeeding years, over this period a large number of people participated in these programs and were directly affected by the effort to find new ways of exercising their authority. Hence the expression in written form in the 1981 Constitutions was extended in practice, and improved by the reflection that took place. Other groupings of superior general and provincials, superior general, councillors and provincial were held, and each year a session was held for newly appointed superiors. In fact from October 1981 until February 1983, twelve such leadership programmes were held, with up to seventy people attending each.

After the first gathering of superiors appointed to cluster communities – groupings of communities under one superior – the next significant event was the gathering of all those in authority in 1982. The question of Leadership in a Benedictine Perspective was addressed. This material was later made available for all sisters, since it was understood that it was not only the superiors who needed to understand the principles of operation, but in fact all members of the community. From this time onwards, each year, all those in authority gathered and discussed such topics as their experience of leadership and stewardship, channels of communication, collaboration and participation, principles of consultation, and the superior's responsibility for formation in local communities. Various speakers, both from within the congregation and from outside, contributed but always there was emphasis on deepening the understanding of the approach to authority in the Constitutions and reflecting on its practice in the light of this. Over so many years, and with so many people involved, this had a profound

49 January 6-12, 1982.
effect on the congregation as a whole. The sessions raised issues concerning authority, both its principles and practice, and enabled the participants to discuss and clarify these issues. New understandings of authority and a renewal in the way it was exercised gradually but definitely became evident.

In 1983, the superior general, Sister Helen Lombard, gave one of the main sessions which seemed to sum up, at about the mid-point of the six-year term, how the understanding of authority had so clearly developed. The lecture was entitled, "Authority within the Community of Disciples." It reviewed the fundamentals of teaching and practice of authority, that authority vested in a person is integral to the very structure of life, that the Gospel paradox is that authority is about service not dominance, that authority is a gift, given to those asked to exercise it. Then she related it to the situation of the congregation, describing it as a reading of our own reality. Here she related questions of authority to the understanding that authority is located within the community of disciples, it is never to be seen as operating over and above it by one who is outside it. This approach would lead to deepening the understanding that all share common responsibility. The primary concern of the one in authority was to be a careful steward of the way of life of the congregation, and a concern for living this way of life well. In this way the Gospel would be proclaimed to others. The ideas expressed here were in fact developed even further over the years, and led to the significant changes that occurred by 1993 under the leadership of the same person.

In 1986 Sister Helen Lombard, the superior general, wrote a letter formally convoking the twenty first General Chapter of the congregation. ⁵⁰ In this letter she quoted the Constitutions, which defined the General Chapter as a source of unity and formation, of collaboration and participation for the whole congregation. Its function was noted as being to review the life and mission of the congregation, and give it direction for the

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⁵⁰ Letter of superior general, Sister Helen Lombard, to the whole congregation, March 11, 1986, GSA.
future in fidelity to its heritage and tradition and in response to the social reality of the
time.\textsuperscript{51}

A wide group had met in 1985 to draw up a framework designed to lead to the
collaboration and participation of the whole congregation in the General Chapter of
1987. A very important point of the letter was the idea that in these meetings two
emphases had emerged. The first was the beginning of a new understanding of
Chapter, from Chapter as a single event to Chapter as extended process, and a move
from representation (by delegates) to a Chapter process that would involve all in
participation to the greatest extent possible. The significance of this was seen in full
later, but its effects were already felt in the lead up to the 1987 General Chapter and
the gathering itself.

- The General Chapter of 1987.
  - The Superior General’s Report.

Wide discussions were held before the delegates gathered for the Chapter of 1987.\textsuperscript{52} In
the Report to the Chapter given by the superior general, the sections on changed
attitudes to authority and changed practices were summed up. The vision of the new of
the 1981 Chapter was being realized and a courageous movement forward was taking
place. She noted that ‘the area of most questioning and most growth since the 1981
Chapter has been our understanding and our lived experience of the role of authority in
a community of disciples.’ The congregation had moved towards situating authority
within a Gospel model of a community of adult followers of Christ, mutually
dependent on one another for life and growth and mutually responsible for the life and
growth of the community. She named the fact that the whole congregation was taking
responsibility for the life and growth of the whole, that there were more and more

\textsuperscript{51} Constitutions 1981, 7.12.

\textsuperscript{52} July 26-August 8, 1987.
processes of consultation in place and that there was a new vision of the importance of the General Chapter as a collegial body which would focus the vision and set directions for the corporate life. She noted the move away from maternal, immature attitudes and hierarchical structures, which had been helped to happen by the leadership formation programmes. The role of the cluster communities in developing maturity and in the breaking of old models was noted. Participative structures had developed and they had helped develop the idea that all shared responsibility for the life of the congregation.

She also named the challenge that had to be faced by virtue of the fact that the sisters had come to understand the mutuality of their lives and yet the congregation was less sure how to express structurally the concept of living together under one superior. There was a rich understanding of authority in the Benedictine tradition that she believed could help further development as it was gradually understood more deeply. The idea of calling the community to take counsel had been happening in various ways, but the phrase was used in this report, and became significant over the next six years. 'We seek to build structures of government based on the Benedictine concept of calling the community together to take counsel.' \(^53\)

The final challenge was regarding the General Chapter, and in the light of events of the 1993 Chapter to come, it was a prophetic statement. 'We seek new expressions of the General Chapter process, ones which build on the experience of this '87 Chapter in which we have moved from representation to participation, from Chapter as a single event to Chapter as an extended process.' \(^54\)


\(^{54}\) ibid.
The Chapter Document. Before an Icon... A Communion of Disciples.

A short summary issued at the end of the gathering noted that, 'Called by the Vision of the New from our 1981 General Chapter, we have taken up the challenge of collaboration and participation of the whole congregation in each of the five Provinces, in the total Chapter process, leading up to the formal sessions.' The Acts of the General Chapter were contained in the document entitled Before an Icon... A Communion of Disciples, and this document presented the vision and directions that would carry the congregation forward over the next six years.\(^5\)

Because the new directions had implications for the Constitutions, especially in terms of government and authority, a redrafting of these was commissioned. The document itself, under a heading, A New Way of Being Together - A Communion of Disciples, has a significant emphasis on authority as well as some very important practical decisions that were taken. The relevant part of the opening section is quoted.

> Formed by the gospel as a communion of disciples, we live under a rule and a superior. We acknowledge the authority of the superior in the person elected to this ministry by the General Chapter. We understand this authority to be exercised in rightful relation to the authority of each group and the personal authority of each member. We accept that at the heart of our tradition are the principles of the taking of counsel, the sharing of responsibilities and the making of decisions at the level of those affected by them.\(^6\)

All the ideas expressed in this quotation were in fact taken up in the decisions and the living out of them.

The document also recorded the ideas that had been expressed in relation to authority throughout the Chapter preparation process. There had been a call to devise more effective ways of taking counsel together, a call for increased participation, and mutual

\(^{55}\) Acts of the General Chapter, 1987, Before an Icon... A Communion of Disciples, GSA.
responsibility for the life of the group, a clear call for groupings and structures that are flexible and life-giving, a need to promote more active involvements in direction setting and decision making, a need to move from what is perceived by some to be over-governance and overlapping roles. These are all very important areas relating to authority, and decisions were made that it was hoped would affect as many of these areas as possible.

Taking account of these calls, the Chapter members took decisions ‘based on the principles of authority, and of the taking of counsel within a communion of disciples, in the spirit of our sources.’ The decisions were in fact radical ones. The sisters were grouped into area communities, which meant a grouping of one or more local communities into what was called an area community, in order to promote life and mission. Each area was to select a team and an area counsellor, the name of the provincial was changed to that of province counsellor, and the members of the general council were also to be called counsellors. All of this was to emphasise the importance of the process of taking counsel as a basic process of government.

A statement about the role of the person formerly known as the superior general was a clarification of what had been a difficult area. ‘Living under a rule and a superior means that the authority of the superior is vested in one person, formerly known as the superior general, now known as the superior.’ Though the most significant practical effect of this was that there were to be no local superiors appointed for any community, it was not stated as such in the document. The significant point was not that the decision was made not to have local superiors. What mattered was the reasons for and the effects of such a decision, that more responsibility would be taken by the group. However, the most significant outcome was the understanding that there was one single superior. The question is important: ‘Who in the Good Samaritan Community is equivalent to Benedict’s abbot?’ Some aspects of Benedict’s teaching on the abbot had always been used and applied to local superiors. But from now on it

56 Chapter Document, ibid.
was clear - in this Good Samaritan congregation, there was one superior only and she was equivalent to Benedict's abbot.

Another important structure was established, called a "Plenary Council" which consisted of the elected counsellors, and the province counsellors. It was to meet twice a year to foster participation and the taking of counsel across the whole congregation and to stimulate bonding across the congregation. This became a very important structure and its role will be discussed at a later point.

The superior was also to take counsel in developing the whole concept of the Chapter process over the next six-year period and to take counsel regarding an appropriate model of preparation for the next Chapter.


- Address of the Superior to all sisters Gathered in each Province.

At the beginning of 1988, when the sisters returned to their communities and took up the process of operating without a local superior or anyone appointed to be responsible, the superior (Sister Helen Lombard had been re-elected at the 1987 Chapter for a further period of six years) gave a long address to a gathering of sisters in each province. She rightly identified the six-year period that was about to begin as a new phase in the history of the congregation, and spoke of the key directions that were emerging. The address located the movements in the life of the congregation, within the historical context of the second Vatican Council. There was a theological basis to

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57 Address by the superior, Sister Helen Lombard, to all sisters gathered in each province, January, 1988. GSA.
all that was to be done, and this ecclesiology of the Church and the congregation being a communion of disciples, underlay all structural changes. The changes were not simply a tinkering with the nuts and bolts of government structures, but a radical change in the way of living together as Church.

Over many years, and in previous documents there had been a stress on mutuality, complementarity and co-responsibility. In practice, the cluster communities and the leadership formation programmes had reformed the congregation in the practice and understanding of authority and leadership. The superior noted that the Chapter preparation had brought all of this to a sharper focus. The congregation had had an experience of functioning together in a different way and it had modelled in processes and behaviour what was now being expressed in words. Restructuring was needed that was not based on hierarchical structures but on mutuality and interdependence.

Out of this background, the superior named seven significant points. In effect all had to do with authority and how structural changes that were to be made would affect the life of all. There was an affirmation of the basic principle for any Benedictine group, that ‘we are those who, living in community, desire to serve under a rule and a superior.’ She acknowledged that there had been a growing perception that this living under a rule and a superior was not necessarily linked to the role of a local superior, that the absence of such a person could help the group to come to Gospel maturity, that this could help a shift of balance from authority to living in communion, that local communities had to seize responsibility for their own life, and that in doing all of this the congregation could build up a model of being a communion of local communities. Finally there was another statement which proved prophetic. ‘The Taking of Counsel is perhaps the most challenging of all areas and potentially the most energising.’\textsuperscript{58} A shift of language was happening here. From talking of structures of government there is a shift to talking of processes of taking counsel. The implications of this address

\textsuperscript{58} Address to all sisters, January, 1988, ibid.
could not have been fully absorbed at the time, but the living out of the ideas in it over the next six years, were to prove its validity.

- Constitutions, 1987

As was commissioned at the 1987 General Chapter, the Constitutions were to be revised to take account of changes that had been made. The 1981 text had been formally approved by Rome just before the Chapter gathering. This text, with various revisions made during negotiations with the group in Rome responsible for approving Constitutions, was printed in 1987 and was the written statement in force from 1987-1993. So the written text was behind the lived experience. However, as had been commissioned by the 1987 Chapter, work was done in revision over that period to take account of changes, and that resulted in the text that was reprinted after the 1993 Chapter. This will be discussed later.

Over the period of negotiation for approval of the Constitutions with the Roman body, some changes had already been made from the printed 1981 text. In chapter 5, Under a Rule and a Superior, the importance of the personal authority of the superior was emphasized, and likewise the importance of obedience in relation to the directions of the General Chapter. The opening of chapter 7, Those called to Authority in the Community was a clear statement of the role of the superior and the way she shared responsibilities with other persons in authority. The order of the 1981 text in discussing channels of authority was again reversed and returned to placing the General Chapter first, then the superior general, the local superior, and then the provincial superior (the latter out of hierarchical order). This change was not a change desired or requested by the congregation, but was required during the various negotiations with Rome in the quest for approval. So the written text was still reflecting the practice of 1981, or even prior to that. However, it did not prevent the

decisions of the Chapter of 1987 being effected, as the Chapter itself had commissioned them.

- The Plenary Council 1987-1993

This became a significant body for the giving and taking of counsel over the six-year period. It met fourteen times until April 1992, much more than the required twice a year as prescribed by the 1987 Chapter gathering. It helped to form policy, and it was a means of evaluating new structures. It also became a body that interacted with the newly formed areas, (groupings of communities) and helped the communities as they learnt to operate without a local superior responsible for the life of the group. When policies were in question, there was always a flow of discussion and information back and forth rather than up and down between the plenary council (superior, general counsellors and province counsellors at this stage,) and areas, that is all members.

In this way the beginnings of the Chapter process that would lead to the 1993 gathering of all sisters occurred. The first discussions about this 1993 Chapter took place at the April, 1991 meeting of the Plenary Council. In October of that year, the Plenary Council began to devise key principles out of which the Chapter process would operate. After discussion in area groupings, the principles that emerged were formulated. Three of them had to do with structures and processes. They stated that the Chapter processes should ‘build on our way of life and honour our new structures, that we enable maximum participation and inclusion at all stages and ensure free flow of communication, within the context of giving and taking of counsel, and that we accept personal and mutual responsibility for the life of the congregation.’ The phrase in the second of these three, ‘maximum participation and inclusion at all stages,’ was a determining factor in how the Chapter process was finally designed. 60

60 ‘Key Principles underlying the Chapter Process,’ 1993, GSA.
In June of 1992 the process of giving and taking of counsel was broadened by involving the people who had taken on responsibility as area counsellors in groupings of local communities. This happened, not through any formally planned move, but simply out of the desire to broaden the consultation processes as much as possible. This group then became involved in discussions and planning about the Chapter and also met in October 1992, April, June and August of 1993 as a broadened Plenary Council. In between meetings, these area counsellors were directly involved with all members of their area communities, so consultation was very broad. It was not thought to be another hierarchical structure, with movements up and down between all members and those in governance positions. It was simply an effort to enable a broader section of the community to contribute and benefit to be gained from the wisdom of all. Because of large numbers and geographical spread, all sisters could not be called together for consultation about matters of importance, and the Plenary Council meetings were a way of engaging as many as possible in a process of consultation. These meetings were never seen to be for decision making but as a way by which a congregation of such a size and geographical spread can operate as Chapter, a way by which the congregation lives and breathes.

Meetings of what had originally been called the Plenary Council, superior, general counsellors and province counsellors, continued on a monthly basis. By August of 1993, just before the gathering of sisters in Chapter, this group either with its original membership or the broadened membership had met twenty-seven times over the six years. When the 22nd Chapter had been officially proclaimed to be inaugurated that day and to culminate in September, 1993, the call had been

\begin{quote}

to realize our own identity as a Benedictine community clearly and significantly

to enter into an intensive process of the giving and taking of counsel

to bear responsibility together for the life and mission of the congregation

to take the movement of the last General Chapter into a new phase.\footnote{February 2, 1992.}
\end{quote}
Through the process in which the Plenary Council was involved, all these things were well realized. It was a very different process to setting out a plan and policies at the beginning and then working to achieve this. That is the opposite to what happens in a process where counsel is sought and given, and the next step is worked out at each stage. The latter is what happened over the period, and it is a risky, but genuinely consultative process. It can lead in unknown directions, depending on what happens at a particular stage, as advice is genuinely sought and then listened to, and only then are decisions made. It is also different to operating in a committee structure, which though it may be seen to help inclusivity, in fact often effectively excludes participation by all who do not feel directly responsible for what happens in a particular committee.

- Reflection on Authority and Governance, 1993.

At the meeting of April, 1993, the superior, Sister Helen Lombard, gave an address in which she reflected on Governance, describing processes that had developed in the congregation since 1981. This address was video-taped and made available to all sisters, and was a very significant factor in bringing to realization important issues that could influence decisions that would be made about government. It also clarified many of the attitudes that were already developing. Prior to this, the superior had visited all areas and sought advice about the possibility of all sisters gathering for the election of the new superior at the 1993 Chapter. This was a fulfillment, in an unexpected way, of the idea that had emerged even in the 1987 Chapter process, ‘from representation to participation,’ and of one of the key principles for the 1993 Chapter, ‘that we enable maximum participation and inclusion at all stages.’ However, when these phrases were used, no one would have envisaged that it would be possible for all sisters to

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62 Sister Helen Lombard, ‘Governance : Processes that have Developed since 1981.’ Address to Plenary Council, April, 1993. Video Presentation. GSA.

gather, so ingrained in the thinking was the idea that delegation was the way all could participate. After much discussion, it had been decided by April of 1993 that all sisters who were able would gather for a week in September to affirm directions that were already being discussed, and to elect a new superior.

Therefore when the superior gave this address in April, the decision for all to gather in September had already been taken. She noted many of the changes that had led the congregation to this point and spoke of the realizations that had developed, that the congregation was living under one superior, that at all times it lives under a rule and a superior, that all are responsible for life and mission, and that processes were there so that the giving and taking of counsel could happen at all times rather than for a particular circumstance. Fluid processes had developed through the grouping of communities into areas, and government structures could no longer be seen in a hierarchical diagrammatic form with information and decisions descending (or even ascending) through different layers and levels of authority. Rather a circular diagrammatic representation could best describe what had happened, the superior being the centre of unity and listening and a free flow of information happening all the time.  

This understanding could best be expressed by re-grasping the Benedictine concept that all members of the congregation are the *Chapter*. This is the traditional understanding of the word, but it had not been so used in this way for most of the history of the congregation, though there are signs that the 1878 and 1891 Rules understood it as such. The concept was new to most and needed clarification, which was done in this address. The superior described the three modes in which the Chapter (the group of people) functioned, a consultative mode, a consenting mode where the whole body decided that its way of giving consent on matters where that is needed was through the general council, and thirdly in a collegial mode, where all are involved as was to happen when all sisters gathered to elect the new Superior.

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64 ibid.
The Chapter Gathering - 1993

This address opened a period of the Chapter process when discussion took place throughout the congregation on changes that could happen to enable all these principles that had been discussed to happen more easily. At the June meeting of the Plenary Council, a document had been prepared that expressed the results of this discussion, and, in effect, was a statement that was affirmed at the Chapter Gathering in September. Principles of governance were set out emphasising new expressions, for example, that all sisters by profession are members of the Chapter. The name, general council, was changed to the council of the superior and its members could be either appointed or elected. It was decided that there would be seven members. It became obvious that the layer of government, provinces, that had been part of the government structure since 1922, need no longer exist. So structures of governance were named as including local and area communities, plenary council, council of the superior and the superior.  

The opening statement of this document gave the rationale: ‘That we enable our Vision to be activated by developing structures and processes of governance that are participative and pastoral, based on the giving and taking of counsel, and faithful to our sources and tradition.’ The changes that had happened since 1969 had led the congregation to understand the sources and tradition in such a new and deeper way that these radical changes were possible.

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65 Document presented at the Plenary Council meeting, June, 1993, GSA.

66 ibid. In fact the document that was finally approved in September, 1993 was slightly simplified, but the same ideas remained.
In fact, all sisters of the congregation who were able to do so gathered in Sydney in September 1993.\textsuperscript{67} The superior in her report noted that there had been a transformation over the years and it had been one of emerging and developing processes, deeply rooted in the sources and tradition of the congregation. The gathered group was itself a symbol of all of this. She named the areas that have been discussed above, noting that there was a new way of living and breathing as a congregation. Directions that had been emerging were affirmed by all, and for the first time in history in this century all were involved in electing a new superior.\textsuperscript{68} The current superior had completed twelve years of office and according to the \textit{Constitutions} was unable to be re-elected.

The Chapter statement - Acts of the 22nd Gathering in Chapter, Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St. Benedict, included the following text.

\begin{quote}
A New Model of Governance

The Chapter affirmed that the implementation of the Acts of the General Chapter 1987, has led to the formulation of a New Model of Governance based on our sources and tradition and drawing deeply on life from our charism. As a communion of disciples we live under a rule and a superior and acknowledge that at the heart of our tradition is the giving and taking of counsel. This new mode of governance includes:

The congregation as a communion of communities, including:
- local community
- area community
- area counsellor
- area team

The Chapter of the congregation
- is all sisters by reason of their profession
- is called by the Superior to function in three modes:
  . consultative
  . collegial
  . consenting
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67} September 27 - October 1. 1993. More than 300 sisters were present, the first such large gathering of sisters ever held.

The Superior

The Council of the Superior

The Plenary Council

The suppression of the provinces of the congregation. 69

What remained at the end of this period under discussion was to amend the Constitutions to take into account where the life of the congregation had led in these radical changes in understanding and practice of authority. The Chapter gathering approved this, and chapter 7 now to be called, "Authority in the Community" was re-written to incorporate the changes and contains expressions that reflect all of the above. 70

There has been a significant effort by the community of the sisters of the Good Samaritan to return to Polding's original vision for them, and they are re-grasping his desire for them to become a new Australian Benedictine Institute. The more one studies the text and the history of the Rules of Polding, the more it becomes obvious that the vision of Polding as well as the text of the rules throughout history must be viewed in continuing interaction with the Rule of Benedict.

In practice, this is particularly evident in the way it was envisaged that the whole body of sisters would operate as Chapter, being consulted on matters of major importance. This concept existed in the early history of the congregation, was gradually lost, then re-claimed. Efforts were made in 1993 to find ways in which these processes could be effective, and the living out of them will show whether or not they require further adaptation.

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69 Acts of the Chapter, 1993, GSA.

70 Two Chapters from the 1993 Constitutions relating to Authority are Chapter 5, 'Under a Rule and a Superior' and Chapter 7, 'Authority in the Community.'
Another significant growth in understanding in recent years is the significance of the role of the superior in the community as equivalent to Benedict's abbot. In this tradition, the superior's place is central, and if there is to be fidelity to a tradition, this must be maintained in theory and practice. This does not mean that efforts are not to be made to find new ways by which the superior can function in this complex world, but the central understanding of the concept must remain. Ultimately the important value is in the spiritual realm, and can be described as wisdom. Such a person is a teacher, a giver of life, one who enables both the strong and the weak to live the chosen way of life.

There must also be ways of acknowledging the corresponding centrality of the community and the relationships within it. Community members need to recognize this themselves and assume responsibility for the life of the congregation.

There has always been a place within this tradition for those who hold special places of service in the community. They are required to work towards a deeper understanding of their roles and an effective living of them. For both the superior and the "officials"– the abbot's collaborators in Vogüé's terms – the understanding is that the roles are not ones of privilege, but ones of service to the community, based on Christian Gospel values.

A study of the documents and practice of this congregation makes clear that the history and identity of the group will determine what governance structures and processes operate. These are the challenges that lie ahead for a community living in the twentieth century, and adapting the principles of authority, derived from a fourteen hundred year long tradition.
CONCLUSION

This work commenced with a study of the exercise and understanding of authority in the sixth century Rule of Benedict, and ended with a similar study of a twentieth century religious congregation, the sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St. Benedict. The question has often been in this writer's mind during the course of this study as to whether Polding would now easily recognize this community that he established in 1857. Another question is, would Benedict have recognized what Polding was doing in 1857, and what the sisters of the Good Samaritan are doing on the brink of the twenty-first century.

There would have been no way that Polding could have foreseen what his missionary endeavour in Australia would have achieved. When studies of Polding's vision for Benedictines in Australia are undertaken it is most often concluded that, for various reasons, Polding's plans failed. More often than not, studies centre around the failure of his plans for an abbey diocese and the failure of his Benedictine community for men. However, whatever Polding's dreams and emphases were, Benedictine life in Australia did not end in the nineteenth century. The emphasis here has been on the women's community that Polding established, the sisters of the Good Samaritan, which has survived until near the end of the twentieth century and will continue into the twenty-first century. The women's Benedictine community of Subiaco, now at Jamberoo, likewise continues to exist.

There are clear and basic values evident in the life of this contemporary community, the sisters of the Good Samaritan, that link it historically and religiously with Polding and Benedict. The historical connection is clear from Benedict to the English mission of the monk, Augustine and through to the English Benedictine congregation. Specifically for this work the connection to one of those communities, St Gregory's, Downside where Polding began his religious life is important. This latter community,
with its origins in France, had developed a strong missionary outreach, and this affected Polding and encouraged his desire to come to Australia. This thesis illustrates how his awareness of the needs of early Australian society led him to establish the sisters of the Good Samaritan.

The religious connection resides in the strong Benedictine basis of the rule he wrote for his new community. Certainly it was a new way of living Benedictine life but, as the history of Benedictine life has shown, this is simply what has happened throughout time when various groups took the Rule of Benedict as a basis of their living and adapted it to circumstances. Perhaps this flexibility has ensured the survival of the tradition.

Earlier in the thesis the question of authentic adaptation was raised.¹ Ricoeur's work was discussed from the moment when a text relevant to a particular event is committed to writing, through to how this text then takes on a life of its own, and finally finds life in a projected world out in front of a text and is never terminated. Benedict wrote his rule for a particular place, time and community. It was written in the genre of literature that was not a list of prescriptions but rather a guide for a way of life to be lived, such as is presented in Wisdom literature in the Bible.

The text has a ring of real life experiences as Benedict prescribes for his cenobites who have chosen to live under a rule and a superior, but who nonetheless require maxims to help them live a Gospel life. They need encouragement to be obedient, humble and silent, they need details for a common prayer life as well as details regarding food, drink, clothing, service and how to care for those who were sick.² He also knew that individual needs were important, and he understood that all things in a community are common to all.³ Benedict was fully aware that there would be times when some monks

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¹ See this thesis, pp.6-7.
² RB 4-7; 8-20; 35-40; 55; 71-72.
³ RB 32-34.
would be stubborn, disobedient, lazy, defiant, proud, presumptuous, and therefore prescriptions were needed about what should be done to call the monks to conversion.\textsuperscript{4}

But Benedict's committal of his text to writing enabled others in the future to find in it a network of meaning. This happened especially when it was later recognized as a rule of moderation and good sense that had application beyond its own historical time. In due course Benedict's rule became the one by which all monastic communities lived for several centuries. So there were new 'audiences' who lived according to his text and adapted it for the circumstances of their own particular time and place in history.

For Polding, coming at the end of many centuries of the living of the Rule of Benedict, the process was the same. In an entirely original and creative way he took the essentials of the \textit{Rule of Benedict} and added texts that expressed how he wanted his new community, the Good Samaritan sisters, to live in the nineteenth century and beyond. He saw the important issue as one of making it possible for the sisters to have the freedom to respond to any call of need.\textsuperscript{5} Therefore, they could not be enclosed as other women who lived the Benedictine life had been. This was indeed a new vision and one for which, in the midst of his many failures, credit is not often given for the remarkable nature of what he initiated.

What Polding had done for the St. Mary's community was far more traditional, and in relatively minor ways he simply tried in their \textit{Declarations} to make some practical rules that would adapt the \textit{Rule of Benedict} for the time and place. But the adaptation was not a priority for him, since the basic text of the Rule was there as a guide. The same thing applied to the women's community at Subiaco. The Princethorpe Constitutions with their minor efforts of adaptation of the \textit{Rule of Benedict} sufficed in Polding's view. For both these communities it was obvious that a traditional and

\textsuperscript{4} RB 23-30.

\textsuperscript{5} RP Scope and Character.
recognizable way of being ‘Benedictines’ was to be the way they were to live. For the men this would include missionary activity as was usual for Polding in the English Benedictine congregation. For the women, enclosure and a life not so oriented towards diverse ministries outside the community confines was the path.

For the Good Samaritans this was not to be the way. Nor was their way to be that of other modern congregations, with a fairly distant connection to ancient rules such as the *Rule of Augustine*. The phenomenon of these mainly nineteenth century congregations was really only faced by the Church, when they were recognized by Leo XIII’s document, *Conditae a Christo* of 8 December 1900, and the *Norms* of the following year, explaining how ‘modern’ congregations could be approved, though in fact some had obtained approval before this. For the new foundation of Polding the *Rule of Benedict* was an integral part of his text, yet the norms for other nineteenth century congregations did affect the sisters of the Good Samaritan. Sometimes the attitudes and legislation did not sit comfortably with the tradition and sometimes it was difficult for those who legislated for all religious congregations to conceive of how an ancient tradition could be adapted to the nineteenth century. However, because of Polding’s vision for the new foundation, it was shown yet again in history that there is no one way or one time or one place for living a Benedictine life.

It must then be asked if the way of life set up for Polding in nineteenth century Australia was an authentic Benedictine life. Was the original tradition of sixth century Benedict authentically maintained?

A way of answering this question is to apply the three criteria for testing the authenticity of interpretation and explanation that Groome proposes. They are *continuity, consequences* and *community.* Since in this thesis, the concern is not the total rules, but simply one aspect, the understanding and practice of authority, the criteria will only be applied to texts that are relevant.

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6 Groome, op.cit. pp.223-240.
Throughout the thesis it has been considered important to situate the discussion of the text within its context, since especially in Polding’s time the authority questions that surrounded him, in fact inundated him, must have affected him. It seems this was in two ways and the fact was that it forced him to consider how he exercised authority. He obviously had reflected on this, as was evidenced in his attitudes to the community at Subiaco when he refused to override the legitimate authority of the Superior. It was even more obvious when he reflected on his reactions to the way he was treated by Roman authorities. This is not to assume that his exercise of authority was flawless. Indeed, events show that this was far from being so.

The second way Polding was affected by contextual authority conflicts was a simple one. He was so engaged in explaining, justifying and confronting opposition, that the effort he could have made to think through the authority structures for his new community was never done. He has often been considered to have been impractical, to have been unable to face the reality that his abbey-diocese dream was a failure and that his St. Mary’s community was not suitable for the time and the place. Perhaps if he had given his attention to selection and training of community members, if he had been able to take the time to make his adaptations more carefully, if he had sorted out his own role as abbot, vis-a-vis Gregory, things could have been different.

Groome says that, if a text is to be authentically applied, it must be in continuity with the constitutive truths and values of the whole vision of the group and that it must conserve the foundational trajectory of beliefs and truths, principles and values that are essential to the original vision.7

In spite of the difficulties with the St Mary’s community, there was continuity in what Polding was trying to do and it was clear that he meant the Rule of Benedict to be

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7 ibid.
lived by them. He did change the interpretation of how some of those with special positions in the community would operate, and there was confusion about how he saw himself as abbot. However, this seems to have been in an effort to adapt to the local situation. The text of the *Rule of Benedict* was maintained, so the continuity was obvious. This was also true with the Subiaco community, though the outcome in terms of survival was more successful.

For the Good Samaritans, the continuity was there in the key chapters from the text of the Rule of Benedict that Polding included in his rules for that community. As has been noted they were the key spirituality chapters, the prologue to the rule, and those chapters on obedience, silence, humility and prayer. His chapters within the government sections followed the pattern of Benedict in that, though he did not use texts directly, he made strong connections and followed the pattern of Benedict by writing on the election of the mother superior, what sort of a person she should be, on those with special roles, the mother assistant, the mistress of novices, the mother Econome, the deans. Also included in his government section was a chapter on servers in the kitchen, taken directly from the *Rule of Benedict*, and a chapter on the sick.

The continuity has remained throughout history as has been discussed in the various versions of rules and constitutions, though at times such documents were affected by other norms for religious life that did not take account of the tradition. Attitudes and practice were also affected by the understanding of authority current in the society of the time. However what was a constant, even when some Benedictine references were removed, was the understanding gained from the chapters that were directly taken from the *Rule of Benedict*, and from those that had close reference to them. In recent times, since the instruction of Vatican II for all religious to return to their sources, this

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8 RB 5-20.

9 cf. RB 64; 2; 65; 58; 31; 21.

10 cf. RB 35 & 36.
continuity is absolutely clear. This is evident in the interpretation of the *Rule of Benedict* in the constitutions from 1981 onwards, and in the gradual growth towards these documents from 1969 until then. It is also evident in the attention that is given to understanding and living the spirit of the whole *Rule of Benedict* and the *Rules of Polding* in the present day.

The consequences of the adaptations are that outcomes are in keeping with the vision and the *raison d'être* of the groups. For the St Mary's community the internal divisions and factions, the lack of clear direction, the unsuitability of the members, the constant criticism from outside the community and the confusion about Polding's role as abbot, prevented successful outcomes and the original vision and purpose of the group was obscured completely. This led to the dissolution of the community. For the Subiaco community there was a struggle to maintain the original vision because of the lack of support of the community by Cardinal Moran after Polding and Vaughan's time. However, the community persevered in developing suitable constitutions, visiting appropriate overseas communities and obtaining help from them. At all times they had the *Rule of Benedict* as their basic text. Eventually the differences with Cardinal Moran were resolved and the community was approved. So the consequences for this community were entirely in keeping with the original vision.

The Good Samaritan sisters were always clear about the vision of Polding for them. It was expressed by Polding thus:

> This congregation of Religious is designed for the practice of the spiritual and temporal works of charity, under the guidance of holy obedience according to the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Therefore, as directed by their Superiors the sisters are ready to teach in Schools, to visit and assist the sick in their own homes and in hospitals, to instruct ignorant persons in the faith, to conduct Orphanages, to reform the lives of penitent women and to apply themselves to every other charitable work.

The name sufficiently indicates the scope, since the Religious are called to imitate the charity of the kind Samaritan who was moved to pity the poor wounded man, and having poured oil and wine into his wounds to heal him, afterwards conveyed him to a place of security.
In like manner the Religious will use all gentleness and compassion for the unhappy whom they are to tend and all fervour of charity in restoring souls to the fold of Jesus Christ.11

The language expresses the message of the New Testament in a nineteenth century mode but the vision is clear in terms of what Polding wanted the community to do. Regarding authority, the outline of the vision is clearly from Benedict, but the interpretation was often of the times. New structures, such as provinces, developed and constitutions reflected details that were affected by attitudes to authority in the particular era. Much of the flexibility and moderation of Benedict was not maintained in the way authority was exercised. Authority was exercised in an hierarchical way for many years, and decisions were made without involvement or expression of opinion by the members of the community. However, society's attitudes to authority in the mid-twentieth century, as well as the effort by the community to re-grasp the original vision of Benedict, resulted in consequences that did reflect this vision. This is especially evident in the way the total community, the Chapter, is now involved in consultation and decision making. No important decision regarding the life of the community would be made without the involvement of all, and the challenge is to find processes that work effectively so that this can happen.

The way the community operates under one superior is also a consequence of the original vision of Benedict. For Polding this was also so, but as the community grew and spread, different structures of leadership were established though strong central government under what came to be called a superior general always existed. The connection with Benedict is quite clear in this present era, though there was a lack of clarity at times through history. There was uncertainty about the answers to such questions as to who was equivalent to Benedict's abbot? How did local superiors and provincial superiors fit, and on what basis did they operate? The suppression of provinces in 1993, and the fact that communities have operated since 1987 without local superiors, and thus with one superior, ensures that Benedict's vision is understood.
Groome also notes that a community also needs to confirm the validity of the interpretation if the adaptation is to be successful.\textsuperscript{12} Again this was an issue for the St. Mary's community. There were debates over what rules existed, and in terms of the community, confusion over various roles particularly over Polding's and Gregory's status. This was evident in the claims of Farrelly and the dissident monks and their complaints to Rome. Part of the reasons for the demise of the community was located in the community's inability to accept what Polding wanted, and perhaps he was unable to express this clearly thus making the situation more difficult. There is little evidence that there were problems in the Subiaco community's acceptance of their rules, though earlier on some divisions apparently caused some members to return to their original communities in England.

Throughout the history of the Good Samaritan sisters, on the whole, the community seems to have accepted adaptations. Changes that were required in the \textit{Constitutions} were simply seen as having been arranged by authorities with a right to make such changes at the six yearly gathering of delegates at General Chapters. In some ways the original strength of the Benedictine influence was watered down by the efforts of the community to live according to current Church expectations. There were times when a true understanding of what it means to live according to the \textit{Rule of Benedict} was not clear to all, and the outcome was confused according to different understandings.

The clarity of current documents, and the efforts of superior, office bearers and the total community to find appropriate ways of operating according to these documents, is on-going, but the community has grown in understanding that it is a mistake to assume that being Benedictine is expressed only by communities that live an enclosed life. This would go against all understanding of the history of Benedictine life, and the many and diverse ways that Benedictine life has been lived over many centuries. This

\textsuperscript{11} RP Scope and Character, 1,2.

\textsuperscript{12} Groome, op.cit., p.237.
will only be grasped when the texts of the *Rule of Benedict* and the *Rules of Polding* are understood in depth. A deep grasp of the events of the community’s history is also needed.

It is also important to note that documentation such as *Constitutions* are not written ‘ahead’ of life. They express what they do out of an experience of life, even though the understanding is not always evenly or fully grasped. Rules follow life and Benedict wrote out of his own experience, as did Polding. Changes of interpretation have also happened in the same way. The text has to illuminate and express how the community lives, thus helping the group to live with deeper understanding and fruitfulness. The rich interaction of text and life leads to further understanding on the part of the group. This has already happened with the sisters of the Good Samaritan, and their struggles to find and live with authority structures that fit the present, are faithful to past traditions and have blended ‘things both old and new.’

Throughout the discussions of this thesis it has been noted how important for the life of a community the understanding and practice of authority is. It has been clear that such an understanding does not simply concentrate on government structures or on a particular style of leadership. The exercise of authority reflects the basic spiritual approach that informs the whole way of life that the community lives. Undoubtedly, paths and directions can be clarified by those who hold authority, though in Benedict’s terms this will always be after consultation with the community. How this has happened over history is inevitably connected with the context of time, place and circumstances. This will continue to be so, and in order to clarify some future directions, which ultimately will be the subject of further research, discussions in terms of a current writer such as Margaret Wheatley may be helpful. ¹³

A characteristic of both society and religious life at the end of the twentieth century is the rapidity of change and a high level of unpredictability and uncontrollability. The medieval worldview that would have been partly operative even in Polding's time, no longer exists. There is no longer a view that ways are unchangeable and that life will be lived with a set hierarchy of status and roles. Instead, it is clear that rigid control leads to immobility and ultimately may doom the structure to disintegration. Those who write of the 'new science' speak of the way systems and all living organisms maintain their integrity and identity not by eliminating change or avoiding the chaotic, but by continuous dynamic interaction with the environment.

A nineteenth and early twentieth century understanding of authority in religious life would have emphasized equilibrium and control, and would have expected little interaction with the environment. It has been noted that 'leaders functioned somewhat like factory managers maintaining control (erroneously seen as order) for the sake of spiritual and ministerial efficiency.' Stability would have been seen as rigidity instead of the way it was expressed in a phrase in the present day definition of stability in the documents of the Good Samaritan sisters. This describes stability as the 'continuing effort to give ourselves to this way of life in all its changing circumstances.' So the emphasis is on change rather than rigidity.

The claim is made that systems are self-renewing because of openness to their environment, in fact that they are always off-balance, always changing in terms of their environment. However, they are always mobilized towards self-renewal.

Constant change and disequilibrium would have once been seen as destructive, and it could be seen as such if identity were not maintained while form was changed. This understanding is crucial in the accompanying discussions of a modern religious

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community. Schneiders maintains that identity is maintained precisely by changing in response to environmental influence. However, some systems do not survive, and what determines what is a healthy organism is that such organisms do not change randomly or in any or all directions. They change in ways that are responsive to the environment and consistent with already established identity. If this is true, it is essential that any organism or system that will survive will have a firmly established core identity. The term ‘fields’ is introduced here to describe how such an identity is established and identified. They are defined as the characteristic that gives a group a certain recognizable identity. A field is created by a group as it articulates visions and hopes and develops modes of interacting. Through this people are drawn together and begin to act in corporate ways. Thus the ethos of a group is recognizable. There will be change in interaction with the environment, but the identity is clear and is clearly grasped by the members. So there will be stable congregational identity in the midst of incessant change.

In the midst of chaos there is always an inherent orderliness and systems will never go beyond certain boundaries. The term used to describe this is the ‘strange attractor.’ This is what will ensure that a system has a form or shape, but will never have its inner variety reduced to predictability. There is however a frame of reference provided by means of clearly expressed values within a coherent vision.

Schneiders claims that the role of those in authority is to help the members to grasp the basic faith and ecclesial reality about religious life as it is lived out in continuity with its own identity. The way of life is not merely experience oriented but is lived with a strong interaction between experience and a clearly defined frame of reference – identity and values.

In terms of the community of sisters of the Good Samaritan, so as to enable clearer understanding of their past and present, such ‘postmodern’ understandings do seem
particularly helpful. They explain the importance of a study of the history of the development of authority in both practice and documents. Enormous changes have happened, but instead of seeing them as chaotic in that they will lead to destruction they can be seen as a way of self-renewal that will emerge from inevitable change. The key is a clear understanding of identity and the discussion of the question of authority in the *Rule of Benedict* and the *Rules of Polding* is a way of deepening this understanding. It seems particularly important to see the two Rules always in dynamic interaction with each other as one examines how Polding sought to adapt the extraordinarily flexible *Rule of Benedict* to nineteenth century Australia.

This discussion is introduced here at the end of the thesis, because it seems to be particularly useful in helping to understand what has happened in recent years, in religious life in general, and in particular in the communities under discussion. Such current writing could help a community, in the present and in the future, to continue examining the way it governs itself and checking whether or not this way is consistent with its identity. Efforts must be made to maintain the old and the new in dynamic interaction in order that self-renewal will happen within a group that clearly understands its history and identity.

Focussing on authority, this thesis combines a textual and historical study of Benedictine life as established by Polding in Australia. It thereby attempts to show that what he did, especially with the women's group he founded, was indeed a creative adaptation of the Rule of Benedict. He appropriated and adapted the text so that it was an authentic but new way of living the Benedictine life when it was established in nineteenth century Australia. In the last third of the twentieth century, the community of the sisters of the Good Samaritan have re-claimed the original vision of Benedict and Polding. They have made adaptations consonant with their basic identity and values by skillfully blending 'things both old and new.'
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