

RB 3 SUMMONING THE COMMUNITY FOR COUNSEL

Aquinata Bockmann, OSB “Summoning the Brothers for Counsel (RB 3) Part II ABR 54:4-Dec. 2003; & ABR 55:1 March 2004

1 As often as important questions have to be dealt with in the monastery, the prioress should convene the whole community and herself tell [explain] them what is involved.

- The Oblate Director/s consult the Oblate community.
- In recognizing what is best for the community, the director/s needs help; she needs each of the Oblates, both in the group that gives counsel and in the function of giving counsel. She calls the whole Oblate community together.
- Benedict calls for 5 steps of action in matters that concern the whole community: **stating, listening, consider-discerning, and acting.**
 - The Oblate director begins and gives information. She explains the situation, what is needed, as objectively as possible. She also shows that she wants the Oblates to share her responsibility.

2 When she has heard the advice of the members, let her ponder the matter and then do what she thinks (judges) best [the wiser course].

- The Oblate director/s is shown as a **listener**. She seems to be listening in all directions: to the Oblate Community, the Benedictine Community, the world; ultimately she is listening to Holy Scripture, by which God’s will is made known.
- The Oblate director/s invites Oblate members to make recommendations of topics for each year. The Oblates listen to the Spirit in pondering the topic.
- The Oblate director/s will seek to discern what is the wiser course in view of the Oblate community’s recommendations.
- The formation team **discusses** the topic together and **discern** what is best and who might be on the Oblate team.
- They invite an Oblate team to follow through with the topic recommendation.

3 Now the reason why we said that all are to be convened [all should be called for counsel] is that God often reveals what is best to the younger.

- The ultimate reason for summoning everyone for counsel is God’s action.
- “God often reveals what is better to the younger.” The small and unimportant person can be more open to God’s inspiration.
 - The elders possess wisdom and life experience.
 - The younger tend to be more flexible, open to what is new.
 - It is good to hear both sides & possibly something new and revolutionary.
- “What is better”—only God knows what is truly better for the community.

4 The members, however, should offer their advice with all deference and humility, and not presume to assert their views in a bold manner [obstinately].

- “With all **humility of submission**”—pre-requisite for finding the will of God, there must be the basic readiness to submit to the Oblate director and Oblate community’s decisions.

- **“The members shall not presume to defend their own views obstinately”—to force one’s own will on another, to be arrogant, to use what we have no claim to.**
 - As soon as someone starts insisting obstinately and stubbornly, the common seeking for God’s will can easily become a struggle for the victory of certain persons rather than concern about the will of God.
 - To avoid the danger of defending something stubbornly, polemically and obstinately, we do well to ask ourselves whether we would be ready to do the opposite of what we passionately desire, if that were God’s will. If we are not ready, we could pray for this
 - **Defending something obstinately** refers to that which “seems good to them.” It is only a part of the truth. To complement what seems right to us, we need the opinions of others. We must ask how they see the matter in order to come nearer to the truth. This requires accepting our human limitations, being humble.

5 Rather, the decision should depend on the prioress’ judgment, [so that when she has determined what is more prudent] and let all obey.

- “The decision is rather the Oblate Director/Directors to make.” It depends on the Oblate director/directors’ decision. Benedict is concerned about the Oblate Director/Directors authority, though he trusts more in the Oblates’ ability. Someone must have the final word.
- “What is **more prudent**”—more beneficial for the health and well- being so that souls may be saved.
- **The readiness to obey is a pre-requisite for discernment.** Even those who do not agree or who previously held a different view must be ready to submit at last to the result of community consultation.
- Obedience creates community. It is rendered in love, for love of Christ, but also for love of the community and for its oneness.
- Benedict emphasizes that all should obey.
- If Benedict entrusts the final decision to the Oblate Director/Directors, he also requires much from the Oblate Director/Directors: that she be concerned about the common good and give attention to the weaker members. (Traits from Ch 2, 64)

6 But just as it is the place of disciples to obey their teacher, it is her job to arrange things with foresight and justice.

- The Oblate Director/Directors has spoken and taught but she has also kept silence and listened.
- “To settle everything with **foresight and fairness**”—The Oblate Director/Directors should invite discernment from the Oblates on a topic for the year, and with the Formation team arrange for the topics to be led by a group who will organize and work with the Oblate Director/Directors.
- “With **foresight**”—The Oblate Director/Directors should with foresight order organize everything so that it serves the well-being of the Oblates; she must think of the orientation and future of the whole community;
- “**Justice**”—She may not make any unjust arrangements.

7 Thus let all follow the [teachings of the] Rule in every instance, and no one should be so rash as to deviate from it in the slightest.

- **V7-8 nucleus of the whole chapter**

- “The teaching/spirit of the Rule”—The intention is to limit the Oblate Director/Directors power; she also is under the authority of the Rule,
- The Rule will lead us to none other than Christ.
- **Everyone shall follow the Spirit of the Rule.**
- “No one is to deviate from it **rashly**.”—rashness is related to the **presumption and the desire to follow one’s ways and wishes.**
 - One deviates from a written document to meet the current situation by following the criteria of the Rule as a guide.

8 Let no one in the monastery pursue a personal agenda [follow one’s own heart’s (ego) desire),

- means self-will, obstinacy, egotism, wanting to dominate
- Someone who thinks only of his/her benefit, not the well-being of the community.
- The heart is capable of love of God, truth, purity and intense devotion. From it also comes evil thoughts, murmuring, arrogance and self-will.
- A person’s interior is the center of these negative and positive drives and dynamism.
- **The egotistical heart is contrasted with the pliant heart, open for God.**
- Demands readiness to seek God with the community, under the Rule and Oblate Director/Directors.
- Benedict is concerned about the human heart. Here is the root of the barriers that prevent the common seeking: the heart which is not subject to God.

9 nor should anyone presume to argue [contend] defiantly with the Prioress.

- All one’s energy is exerted for something that is passionately desired.
- No one possesses the will of God; all are seeking it and each one sees only a part. Whoever quarrels fanatically wants to push through the part s/he sees.
- Verbal battles: answering vehemently, shamelessly, impetuously, defiantly, boldly.
- When the argument becomes polemical and vehement, there is no more communal seeking for the will of God.
- **God can be sought only in open dialogue, in humility and in obedience.**
- Benedict admonishes us to shun arrogance, resistance and contradiction.

10 If someone presumes to do so, let them undergo the discipline of the Rule.

- A process for bettering Oblates after faults—ex. like murmuring, talkativeness, pride and refusal to be reconciled.
 - The goal is the healing of his/her tendency to quarrel.

11 Moreover, the Oblate Director/Directors herself must reverence God and observe the Rule in everything she does; she can be sure beyond any doubt that she will have to give an account of all her decisions to God, the most impartial of all judges.

- **All should live in God’s presence and from this vantage point assess people and the monastery’s practical issues.** All these Oblates have to deal with weak Oblates, with the poor and insignificant.
- The **fear of God** can preclude being hindered by human respect, afraid of reality or the consequences of a decision.

- Such fear can dominate persons and jeopardize free discernment.
- The Oblate Director/Directors is admonished in RB to exempt nothing from the observance of RB.
- The Oblate Director/Directors is accountable to God for all her decisions.
- **How will this decision hold up before God? God examines the heart.**

12 Now if there are any less important decisions to be made concerning the affairs of the monastery, she shall use only the counsel of the seniors,

- What might be **less important business**.
- Today this happens in the Formation Team of an Oblate community
- The seniors help provide a good spiritual atmosphere.
- A senior is someone with life experiences. S/he may not be older in years but must possess maturity and wisdom, human and spiritual, and a younger person can also have these.

13 for it is written: “Do all things with counsel, and afterward you will have nothing to regret.”

- **“Do everything with counsel”—the Oblate Director/Directors is admonished not to treat lightly the spiritual welfare of those entrusted to her.**
- Proverbs reflect everyday wisdom born of experience.
- **Be open to good advice.**
- If we have done what is possible, we can more calmly accept the consequences, even though they may not always be positive.

Summary:

- This chapter grew out of the Rule as a whole. It seems to have developed slowly with experience.
- In this chapter these basic virtues are named: listening, obeying, humility, fear of God, awareness of the ultimate realities.
- Discretion is used in the sense of discerning and deciding according to the will of God, avoiding extremes, and asking the older and younger members for their view.
- Benedict shows his sense for the uniqueness of persons. He is radical in regard to essential matters, even harsh in the battle against the “will of one’s own heart” and “rash deviating.”
- Today, the more monastics share in the decision-making, the more they also must help bear the responsibility of the prioress.
- Not everything applies literally to our times. The prioress does not have the final decision in every case.
- This chapter shows us how Benedict strove, and how we also can and must strive together in complex situations and with all our strength to seek the will of God.

Questions

- 1. What is the best way to offer my wisdom on a topic?**
- 2. If I am defending my own view obstinately, how does this prevent the Oblate group from listening to the wisdom of the Spirit working through each member.**