

# Monasticism and Ecumenism: the Monastic Community of Bose

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*The paper outlines the history and the spirituality of the Monastic Community of Bose, founded in 1968 in Italy by fr. Enzo Bianchi (b. 1943), in the broader context of the ecumenical movement and of the monastic renewal of the twentieth century, when monasticism rediscovered its vocation to unity, as an epiclesis to the Holy Spirit so that all may be one (Jn 17,22). In particular, the article considers the monastic spirituality of Bose, its roots in the tradition of the monastic Fathers both Eastern and Western, its peculiar ecumenical vocation and ecumenical service.*

**Keywords:** *Monasticism, Monastic spirituality, Monastic renewal, Christian unity, ecumenism, Community of Bose*

## 1. Introduction

If we were to identify a mysticism of unity in the Christian tradition, it should perhaps be indicated in monasticism. Not only etymologically does monk, *monachos*, mean “one”, that is, *unified* in his heart, in his mind, and in his body, in order to achieve union with God, but also the community of monks, the Holy *koinonia*, is configured as a portion of the One and Holy Church. Over the centuries, on the one hand, monasticism has always experienced the tension between solitude and communion, the *coenobium* and the vocation to hermitic asceticism.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, monks have themselves become part of the divisions and conflicts that have torn the unity of the Church in the course of history. However, it is only in the 20th century, with the awakening of the *nostalgia* for unity and the beginnings of the ecumenical movement, that monasticism explicitly rediscovered the deeper meaning of its vocation to unity, as an epiclesis to the Holy Spirit so that *all may be one* (Jn 17.22).<sup>2</sup> In the historical context of monastic spirit-

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<sup>1</sup> See: Sabino Chialà, Lisa Cremaschi and Adalberto Mainardi, eds., *Comunione e solitudine. Atti del XVIII Convegno ecumenico internazionale di Spiritualità ortodossa, Bose, 8-11 settembre 2010* (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See: Enzo Bianchi, *Monasticism and Ecumenism* (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2000); Donato Giordano, ed., *Il ruolo del monachesimo nell'ecumenismo. Atti del Simposio ecumenico internazionale, abbazia di Monte Oliveto Maggiore, dal 30 agosto al 1 settembre 2000* (Siena: Abbazia

uality it is easier to understand the much more limited story of the monastic community of Bose and its ecumenical engagement.<sup>3</sup>

We will first briefly outline the relationship between monasticism and unity (2) and between monasticism and the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century (3), then provide some elements on the history of the monastic community of Bose (4), describing its spirituality (5), and its service to Christian unity (6). Some final remarks will follow (7).

## 2. Monasticism: a way of inner unification and communion

Monasticism is a particular vocation within the Christian vocation to holiness. “What is proper to the Christian?” Basil asks himself in his *Moral Rules*, and answers with the words of the Apostle:

“The faith that works through charity” (Gal. 5.6). What is proper to the believer? To conform, with such full certainty, to the meaning of the words of Scripture [...] What is proper to the Christian? To love one another as Christ loved us (cf. Jn 13.34-35). What is proper to the Christian? To see the Lord always before himself (cf. Ps. 16.8). What is proper to the Christian? To watch every day and

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Monte Oliveto Maggiore, 2002); Adalberto Mainardi, *Insieme verso l'unità. L'esperienza monastica e il cammino ecumenico* (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2014); Mainardi and Matthias Wirz, “Expériences monastiques et mouvement œcuménique au 20. siècle,” in *Toward a history of the desire for Christian unity: preliminary research papers: proceedings of the international conference at the Monastery of Bose (November 2014)*, ed. Luca Ferracci (Zürich: LIT, 2015), 81–98.

<sup>3</sup> Essential bibliography: Daniel Attinger, *Vivre l'évangile: une communauté œcuménique au service des églises et des hommes* (Magnano: edizioni Comunità di Bose 1969); Comunità di Bose, “Bose: ieri e oggi...” *Studi francescani* 1 (1971): 1–23; Bianchi, “La Comunità di Bose,” *Servitium* 3 (1969): 679–86; idem, “Bose: una comunidad interconfesional na Italia,” *Concilium* 9 (1973): 1130–37; idem, s.v. “Bose,” in *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*, Roma 1974, vol. I, coll. 1533–37; idem, “La Comunità di Bose,” in *Il monachesimo nel dopo concilio* (Parma: Monastero San Giovanni Ev., 1981), 289–98; idem, “La comunità di Bose: il vangelo nella sua radicalità,” in *La vita consacrata a vent'anni dal concilio. Atti del Convegno di Testimoni (La Mendola 8-13 settembre 1986)*, ed. L. Guccini (Bologna, 1986), 247–53; Juan Manuel Ramos, “Bose, una comunidad joven, ecuménica, mixta,” *Vida religiosa* (September 1987): 373–79; Mario Torcivia, *Il segno di Bose*, con un'intervista a Enzo Bianchi, prefazione di André Louf (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 2003); Robert Masson, *Bose: la radicalité de l'évangile. Entretiens avec Enzo Bianchi et la communauté* (Paris: Parole et silence, 2006); Luciano Manicardi, *Le Tracce spirituali e la Regola di Bose: una lettura* (Monastero di Bose, 2008); Vittoria Prisciandaro and Giovanni Ferrò, “Bose: i monaci dell'età secolare,” *Jesus* 33, no. 9 (settembre 2011): 41–73; Stefania Palmisano, *Exploring New Monastic Communities: the (re)invention of Tradition* (Farnham-Burlington: Ashgate, 2015); Alexis Jenni and Nathalie Sarthou-Lajus, *Une vie simple: rencontre avec la communauté monastique d'Enzo Bianchi* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2017). Information on the Monastic Community of Bose and its ecumenical activity is available on the website of the community: <https://www.monasterodibose.it/>.

every hour and be ready to do what pleases God, knowing that the Lord is coming at an unexpected hour (cf. Lk. 12.40).<sup>4</sup>

Whenever Basil speaks of the *monks* (although he never uses this term), he speaks of the Christians; and when he traces radical Christian life, he speaks of monasticism. What specifically defines monastic life, apparently, is only negative: free renunciation of marriage (celibacy); free renunciation of one's will (obedience); free renunciation of the possession of personal property (poverty). However, the root of these renunciations is not the denial of the world, but the search for the essential: to love God with all one's heart, with all one's strength, with all one's being; and to love one's brother, sister, one's neighbour, like ourselves. Here is the first paradox: the monk is "alone", but to be united to all, as states a famous sentence by Evagrius: "Monk is who, separated from all, is united to all."<sup>5</sup> Augustine takes this idea up again and deepens it by emphasizing the communal dimension of monasticism:

μονος means 'one' although not just simply one [...] Μονος in fact means *one alone* (*unus solus*). Those who therefore live in unity (*in unum*), so as to constitute one man, so that what is written is true in their case: "one soul and one heart" (Acts 4.32) – many bodies but not many souls, many bodies but not many hearts – they are rightly called each μονος, that is "one".<sup>6</sup>

The solitude of the monk is an instrument for living intimacy with God and opening one's heart to communion with all. The ancient Western monastic rules constantly stress the unanimity in fraternal love. Let's quote a few examples, from the Rule of Ferréol and that of Paul and Stephen, both from the sixth century:

"Love is kind, is not envious or boastful or arrogant ... Love never ends" (1 Cor. 13.4,8) [...] It is fitting that the monk should adhere to this precept, so that even though there are many they become, according to the Blessed Apostle, one body in Christ (cf. Rom. 12.5) and fulfil in themselves what we read in the Acts of the Apostles, and which is written as an example for all, but especially for religious people: 'They were one heart and one soul' (Acts 4.32); and the other word of the Book of Psalms: 'God, who makes people dwell together in one house' (Ps. 68.7).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Moralia* 80, 22, PG 31, 868–69 (if not otherwise stated, all translations are mine).

<sup>5</sup> Evagrius, *De oratione* 124, PG 79, 1193.

<sup>6</sup> Augustinus, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 132, 6 (LXX), PL 36, 1732–33.

<sup>7</sup> *Regola di Ferréol* 4, 2–6, in *Regole monastiche d'occidente*, ed. Enzo Bianchi, trans. Cecilia Falchini (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), 160.

First, we urge everyone to have the fear of God, mutual charity and unanimity in zeal for good.<sup>8</sup>

Aelred of Rievaulx (twelfth century), has some penetrating pages on the paradox of the unity of the many:

This unity is only found in the One. When all that we are will be but one with God: one in the One, with the One and for the One, without other desire but for unity, then, unified forever, we shall also be forever in peace.<sup>9</sup>

This common, “coenobitic” dimension of monasticism, is the aspect Latin monasticism will emphasize most; but even here, the Latin coenobium is a loan from the Greek κοινόβιον, “common life”, an intuition developed by Pacomian monasticism in Egypt. Saint Benedict (480ca.-550ca.), considered the “father” of Western monasticism, looked above all to the East, to the desert fathers and to Saint Basil. In the conclusion of his “minimal rule for beginners,” as he himself defines it, Benedict reminds that his “rule” is essentially a spiritual text for inner freedom, not a list of prescriptions, and it represents the rudiments of the religious life. However, he adds,

for those who would hasten to the perfection of that life there are the teaching of the holy Fathers, the observance of which leads to the height of perfection [...] Then the Conferences and the Institutes and the Lives of the Fathers, as also the Rule of our holy Father Basil – what else are they but tools of virtue for right-living and obedient monks? But for us who are lazy and ill-living and negligent they are a source of shame and confusion.<sup>10</sup>

Whenever a movement of renewal and rebirth of monastic life has arisen in the West, it has turned to the East, to the tradition of orthodox monasticism. We may recall the Cistercian Fathers in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, or the Camaldolese reform of Ambrogio Traversari and Paolo Giustiniani between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries; the reform of the Cistercian order in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; finally, closer to us, the liturgical and patristic renewal of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, begun in the monasteries, which prepared the turning point of Vatican Council II.

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<sup>8</sup> *Regola di Paolo e Stefano* 1, in *Regole monastiche d'occidente*, 267.

<sup>9</sup> *Speculum caritatis* 3, 1; Aelredo di Rievaulx, *Lo specchio della carità*, ed. Domenico Pezzini (Milano: Paoline, 1999), 253–4.

<sup>10</sup> *Regula Benedicti* 73, 2–7; *St. Benedict's Rule for Monasteries*, trans. Leonard J. Doyle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1950).

### 3. Monastic life and the quest for unity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

In the Catholic milieu, the biblical movement and the liturgical movement gave rise to new questions: how is it possible that the one Body of Christ cannot be shared by those who confess him as their one Lord? The liturgical renewal is the breeding ground from which dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960), a Benedictine monk of Mont Cesar's Abbey, started "a monastic work for the union of the churches" in 1926 at Amay-sur-Meuse (since 1939 Chevetogne), after having obtained the approval by Pius XI (with the bull *Equidem verba* of 21 March 1924).<sup>11</sup>

According to Beauduin, the other church must not be "brought back to union," nor absorbed, but first of all known and therefore loved for its spiritual riches and fidelity to Christ. Central to the ecumenical work of the new foundation is the practice of the liturgy in the two rites, Latin and Byzantine. One and the same community celebrates the complete *cursus* of the two main liturgical traditions of Christianity, as an exercise of knowledge and listening, of progressive removal of psychological reserves. It was not just a missionary expedient, but the very principle of "bringing the West and the East closer in prayer"<sup>12</sup>. "The great prayer of the Church, the daily liturgy [...] will become an everlasting echo of the priestly prayer of the Lord: *ut unum sint*"<sup>13</sup>. A new journal was expressly established for "the work of the union" with a programmatic name: *Irénikon*, the Greek translation of the Benedictine motto, *pax*. Beauduin's vision was far-sighted. The "monks of the Union" will abstain "from any action that might hurt the feelings of our brothers": "No proselytism, neither individual nor collective; neither today nor tomorrow, neither discreet nor indiscreet; neither with one method nor another," but a patient spiritual work "in an atmosphere of respect, confidence and mutual sympathy."<sup>14</sup>

Dom Beauduin was removed from his community in 1928, only three years after its foundation, by the ecclesiastical authority. But the ecumenical work of the "monks of the union" continued. Amay (and after-

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<sup>11</sup> See: Louis Bouyer, *Dom Lambert Beauduin. Un homme d'Église* (Paris-Tournai: Casterman, 1964); Patrick Lyons, "Monks and Ecumenism: The Case of Lambert Beauduin," *The American Benedictine Review* 48, no. 2 (March-December 1997): 129-60; Raymond Loonbeek and Jacques Mortiau, *Un pionnier. Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960). Liturgie et unité des chrétiens*, 2 vols. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Collège Erasme-Éditions de Chevetogne, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Lambert Beauduin, *Une Œuvre Monastique pour l'Union des Églises* (Abbaye du Mont-César, 1925), 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Beauduin, "Dans quel esprit nous voudrions travailler," *Irénikon* 1 (1926): 117.

wards Chevetogne) became a welcoming place for those who worked for the unity of the churches, among whose Msgr Angelo Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII) and Father Yves-Marie Congar. Meetings have been held at Chevetogne since 1943 with Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants in an atmosphere of mutual trust as a pioneering theological work in preparation for the Second Vatican Council<sup>15</sup>.

In Germany, Emmanuel Heufelder (1898-1982), prior from 1934 and then abbot (1949-1968) of the Benedictine Abbey of Niederaltaich, promoted in his turn an intense work of meeting and exchange with the Eastern Churches, participating at the same time in the Catholic circles of *Una Sancta*. Since 1949 the community of Niederaltaich has been celebrating in both the Latin and Byzantine rites<sup>16</sup>.

The monastic and ecumenical parable of the “Piccolo Eremo” (Little Hermitage) of Campello on Mount Clitunno (in Umbria, Italy) can be traced back to Dom Lambert’s daring experience: beginning in 1926, in an ancient Franciscan hermitage, a small group of Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran women gathered around “sorella Maria” (Valeria Pignetti, 1875-1961)<sup>17</sup>, to share a common life of prayer and work in the simplicity of the Franciscan monastic tradition.

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<sup>15</sup> See the proceedings of the Conferences: 1054-1954. *L'Église et les Églises* (Chevetogne, 1954); *Le concile et les conciles. Contribution à l'histoire de la vie conciliaire de l'Église* (Paris: Éditions de Chevetogne-Éditions du Cerf, 1960); *La collegialité épiscopale: histoire et théologie*, ed. Yves Congar (Paris: Cerf, 1963); *L'infaillibilité de l'église. Journées œcuméniques de Chevetogne: 25-29 septembre 1961*, ed. Olivier Rousseau (Chevetogne, 1963); *Écriture et tradition: constitution conciliaire sur la Révélation. Journées œcuméniques de Chevetogne 1968* (Chevetogne, 1970). More recently: *L'Esprit saint, lien d'unité: 27<sup>e</sup> rencontre interconfessionnelle des religieuses, Chevetogne, 9-16 juillet 1998* (Chevetogne 1998); “Vers une seule Communauté eucharistique. Eucharistie et communion des Églises. Acte du Colloque de Chevetogne,” *Irénikon* 72, no. 3-4 (1999). Cf. Albert Verdoodt, *Les colloques œcuméniques de Chevetogne (1942-1983) et la réception par l'église catholique de charismes d'autres communions chrétiennes* (Chevetogne, 1986); Lambert Vos, “L'activité œcuménique du monastère de Chevetogne,” in *Il ruolo del monachesimo*, 175-91; Emmanuel Lanne, “Il ruolo del monastero di Chevetogne al Concilio Vaticano 2,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 27 (2006): 513-46.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Emmanuel M. Heufelder, *Der Ruf zur Einheit* (Recklinghausen: Paulus Verlag, 1959); idem, *In the hope of his coming: studies in Christian unity* (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1964).

<sup>17</sup> See: *Sorella Maria. Raccolta di pensieri*, ed. Giovanni Vannucci (Eremo di Campello sul Clitunno: *pro manuscripto*, 1971); Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Maria dell'Eremo di Campello: un'avventura spirituale nell'Italia del Novecento* (Milano: Guerini e Associati, 1998); Sorella Maria and Giovanni M. Vannucci, *Il canto dell'allodola. Lettere scelte (1947-1961)*, ed. Paolo Marangon (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2006); Sorella Maria di Campello, Primo Mazzolari, *L'ineffabile fraternità. Carteggio (1925-1959)*, ed. Mariangela Maraviglia (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2007); Mariano Borgognoni, *Sorella Maria. Selvatica e libera in Cristo* (Assisi: Cittadella, 2007); *Maria di Campello. Un'amicizia francescana*, ed. Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2013).

On the other side, one should not forget that in the twentieth century monasticism was reborn within the Protestant churches. It is impossible to draw up here an exhaustive list of these new monastic communities, which constituted a real turning point in the Protestant world in the last century. But let us mention some of them. Certainly, the best known is the community of Taizé, founded in 1940 by frère Roger Schutz in France: it is difficult to overestimate its irradiation and relevance within the ecumenical movement<sup>18</sup>. The female community of Grandchamp, Switzerland (1936), shares the same Rule as Taizé<sup>19</sup>; the beginnings of the community of the sisters of Pomeyrol, France, go back to 1929<sup>20</sup>. Several monastic communities were founded in Germany within the Lutheran Church in the post-war period, including that of Imshausen (founded by Vera von Trott and Hans Eisenberg), the Sisters of Mary of Darmstadt, founded by Mother Basilea Schlink (1904–2001) and Mother Martyria Madauss (1904–1999)<sup>21</sup>, but also the Christusbruderschaft of Selbitz (founded in 1949 by Pastor Walter Hümmer), the community of Casteller Ring (whose beginnings date from 1950) and the Jesus-Bruderschaft of Gnadenthal (1960s). In Scandinavia, different communities also came into being at the same time, especially in Sweden<sup>22</sup>, as the Sisters of the Holy Spirit at Alsike or the Brothers of Östanbäck.

Monastic communities in the Anglican Church would have required a special treatment<sup>23</sup>. All these communities are characterised by a great

<sup>18</sup> See: Roger Schutz, *L'idéal monacal jusqu'à Saint Benoît (VI<sup>ème</sup> siècle) et sa conformité avec l'Évangile* (typescript, 1943); idem, *L'Unité, espérance de Vie* (Taizé, 1962); idem, *Dynamique du provisoire* (Taizé, 1962); idem, *Unanimité dans le pluralisme* (Taizé, 1966); F. Van het Hof, "Être des hommes de réconciliation. Les témoignage d'un milieu monastique," *Lumen vitae. Revue internationale de la formation religieuse* 19, no. 3 (1964): 457–63; Jean-Marie Paupert, *Taizé et l'Eglise de demain* (Paris: Fayard, 1967); Jean-Claude Escaffit and Moïz Rasiwada, *Histoire de Taizé* (Paris: Seuil, 2008 e 2016<sup>2</sup>); Yves Chiron, *Frère Roger. Le fondateur de Taizé. 1915–2005* (Paris: Perrin, 2008); Matthias Wirz, "La testimonianza ecumenica di frère Roger di Taizé: insegnamento, prassi, vita," in *Oltre la divisione. L'intuizione ecumenica e il dialogo interreligioso*, ed. Andrea Pacini (Milano: Paoline, 2011), 169–202; Silvia Scatena, *Taizé, una parabola di unità: storia della comunità dalle origini al concilio dei giovani* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Minke De Vries, *Verso una gratuità feconda. L'avventura ecumenica di Grandchamp* (Milano: Paoline, 2008); *Soeur Minke de Grandchamp. Entretiens*, ed. Michel Cornuz (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *La communauté de Pomeyrol*, numéro spécial de *Foi et Vie* 6 (1977); Communauté de Pomeyrol, *Le chant des bien-aimés* (Strasbourg: Oberlin, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. [Basilea Schlink], *Oekumenische Marienschwesternschaft: Weg und Auftrag* (Darmstadt: Oekumenische Marienschwesternschaft, 1957); Basilea Schlink, *Chantier de Dieu* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1971); idem, *My All for Him* (Ada, MI: Bethany House, 1971).

<sup>22</sup> See Ö. Eckman, "Iniziative monastiche nella chiesa di Svezia," in *Monachesimo ed ecumenismo: esperienze delle comunità protestanti* (Roma: Moniales ordinis servorum, 1967), 37–41.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Frederick Anson, *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion* (London: SPCK, 1955); Arthur Macdonald Allchin, *The Silent*

ecumenical engagement, and often welcome diverse confessions into their midst. In this sense, their members have made a living contribution to the history of ecumenism in the twentieth century simply by their very existence. The Second Vatican Council was the turning point for the ecumenical commitment in Catholic monasticism, characterized by biblical and patristic spirituality, liturgical renewal and openness to the world.<sup>24</sup> The experience of Bose is situated in this broad furrow, thanks to the monastic intuition of its founder, Enzo Bianchi (b. 1943).<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. A brief history of Bose

##### 4.1. *An early ecumenical vocation. The Beginnings (1963-1971)*

In 1963, Enzo Bianchi, then a student at the University of Turin, started meeting regularly in his apartment with a small group of young people, belonging to different Christian confessions (Catholic, Baptist and Waldensian). They began reading the Bible together weekly, meeting every evening for the prayer of the hours, and celebrating the Eucharist together. With time, several members of the group began to discover a vocation to community life and celibacy. Br. Enzo decided to look for a quiet and rural location outside Turin, and rented a simple house at Bose, a small village outside the town of Magnano, on the moraine ridge between Ivrea and Biella. The group of friends organized a work camp to restore the beautiful Romanesque church of San Secondo (twelfth century), located several hundred meters from the dairy farms at Bose. This was the last activity of the Turin group: when Br. Enzo decided to move permanently to the small house (Bose at that time had no electricity, sewage system or running water), he found himself alone.<sup>26</sup>

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*Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities, 1845-1900* (London: SCM Press, 1958); Annie Perchenet, *Renouveau communautaire et unité chrétienne. Regards sur les communautés anglicanes et protestantes* (Paris: Mame, 1967); Arthur Macdonald Allchin, "La vie monastique et l'unité dans le Christ," *Collectanea cisterciensia* 40 (1978): 171–81; Alan Wilkinson, *The Community of the Resurrection. A Centenary History* (London: SCM Press, 1992); Allchin, "Monasticism in the Anglican Communion," in *Il ruolo del monachesimo*, 161–73.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Servi inutili. Monaci e vescovi alle sorgenti del Vangelo* (Negrarine di S. Pietro in Cariano: Il segno dei Gabrielli 2008); Alberto Melloni, ed., *Giuseppe Dossetti: Studies on an Italian Catholic Reformer* (Münster: LIT, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bianchi, *Non siamo migliori. La vita religiosa nella chiesa, tra gli uomini* (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2002). A bibliography of Bianchi's writings: Comunità di Bose, ed., "Bibliografia di Enzo Bianchi (1969-2012)", in *La sapienza del cuore: omaggio a Enzo Bianchi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2013), 739–60.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Bianchi, "Rendimento di grazie e anamnesi nei cinquant'anni di vita monastica a Bose," in *Ringraziamento e memoria: per i cinquant'anni della fondazione*, ed. Comunità monastica di Bose (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2019), 18.

From the time of his move to Bose on December 8, 1965, the last day of the Second Vatican Council, Br. Enzo lived almost three years of profound solitude. These were precious years dedicated in part to prayer and to hospitality, offered to those who, every now and then, stopped by Bose for a moment of silence and to listen to the Word of God. During this time Br. Enzo also had the opportunity to deepen his understanding of his vocation, through visits to Catholic monasteries (the Trappists of Tamié in France), Orthodox monasteries (at Mount Athos), and Protestant monasteries (fr. Roger Schutz and the Taizé Community in France); and also through conversations and friendships with individuals of profound spiritual insight, such as Father Michele Pellegrino, Cardinal of Turin, and Athenagoras, the patriarch of Constantinople. In addition to the trials of living in solitude, Br. Enzo faced the incomprehension of the local bishop, who on November 7, 1967 prohibited all public liturgical celebrations at Bose, due in large part to the frequent presence of non-Catholics among Br. Enzo's guests. On June 29, 1968 Father Pellegrino lifted the prohibition and celebrated Mass with all who were present that day at Bose. A few months later, in October 1968, the long wait ended: two young Catholics (Domenico Ciardi<sup>27</sup> and Maritè Calloni) and a Protestant minister from Switzerland (Daniel Attinger) decided to join Br. Enzo in a new common life.<sup>28</sup> A sister from the Protestant community of Grandchamp, whose presence Br. Enzo had requested from the prioress of the community, Sr. Minke De Vries, also arrived.<sup>29</sup> A well-known Italian priest and religious writer, Ernesto Balducci (1922-1992), on January 1, 1970, wrote in his *Journal*:

On a hill near Biella, a group of Christians of different denominations has occupied, for the past two years, a small group of houses, abandoned when the few inhabitants left for the city. One can hardly call these houses: the wind whistles through the open crevices, and the mist that envelops the buildings seems to be on the verge of dismantling them and carrying them away. There isn't even electricity. There is the paradoxical faith of these friends who intend to prepare, in absolute poverty, the Christianity of tomorrow.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Domenico Ciardi, "Memoria e ringraziamento," in *Ringraziamento e memoria*, 31–36.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Attinger, "Bose... Cinquant'anni. Un sogno da portare avanti!," in *Ringraziamento e memoria*, 36–40.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Bianchi, "Rendimento di grazie," 19–21.

<sup>30</sup> Ernesto Balducci, *Diario dell'esodo 1960/1970* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1971), 231.

#### 4.2. *In the footsteps of tradition*

Gathered together and sustained by the Word of God, the small group at Bose began to discover its roots in the monastic tradition. In several addresses to the first small group, br. Enzo shaped the lines of their monastic vocation.<sup>31</sup> From Pachomius in particular came the model of the “holy *koinonía*,” in which each member of the community makes him or herself a servant of the others, “washing the feet” of his or her brothers and sisters in response to the *mandatum novum* of the Lord (cf. Jn 13.1-35). The first rule adopted by the community was the description of community life in the Acts of the Apostles, the “summaries” (Acts 2.42-47; 4.32-35),<sup>32</sup> intended to guide the community until, in response to a concrete experience of daily life at Bose, a rule could be written on the basis of which each brother and sister would be able to make a life commitment.

Enzo Bianchi wrote a first rule for the community, which was then several times read and emended by all the members, who approved the final version during the chapter held at Sotto il Monte, on October 4, 1971.<sup>33</sup> The first seven members made their monastic profession at dawn on Easter Sunday, April 22, 1973, in the presence of God and in front of representatives of the Christian churches to which they belonged. They made a permanent commitment to community life and celibacy, in the conviction that the Christian commitments to poverty and obedience are already implied in the promises made by each Christian in baptism:

Brother, sister, you are a simple Christian called to live according to the Gospel in response to your first and essential vocation, baptism. Only by walking in the footsteps of Christ will you find your identity in Him and return to the Father. The Spirit is the one who guides this return, the one who acts as protagonist in carrying you to the Kingdom. [...] Nothing is more essential than the vocation that was addressed to you and confirmed with baptism. But you are called to live out this vocation in another way, with other means, because within the Church the Holy Spirit inspires specific charismata with which Christ’s Body—the communion of saints, the Church—is built up (Eph. 4.12) (Rule of Bose 6-7)

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<sup>31</sup> Bianchi, *Monotropia*, 2 vols. (Monastero di Bose: typescript, s.d.).

<sup>32</sup> “Un minimo comune” in Bianchi, *Scritti fondatori di Bose* (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2017), 11. This volume records the different stages in the redaction of the text.

<sup>33</sup> “Regola di Bose” in Bianchi, *Scritti fondatori*, 137–74. Quotations will be given in the text, with indication of the corresponding paragraphs of the Rule.

#### 4.3. *The sense of mission. The Fraternities of Bose*

The community “is not an end in itself: it is sent out into the world to proclaim the good news, and must be pervaded by a sense of mission (Mt. 28.19)” (Rule of Bose 41). Since the beginning of the community life, several fraternities have been established. The first one, in 1973, in the canton of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. This fraternity remained open until 1978 and offered a sign of the possibility of communion and collaboration between Catholics and Protestants. In an ongoing effort to understand more fully the Jewish roots of Christianity and explore in greater depth the Scripture shared by Jews and Christians, the community has been present in Jerusalem with a fraternity, from 1981 to 2013. The fraternity was also an opportunity for dialogue with the other churches present in Jerusalem.

In 1994, Bose opened a fraternity at the Abbey of St. Benedict at Subasio, outside of Assisi, as a sign of attention toward the local church of Assisi and as a way of understanding more completely the meaning of poverty. Three sisters of Bose lived in the fraternity until the earthquake of 1997. On October 22, 2011, the blessing of the Monastery of San Masseo took place in Assisi on the occasion of the beginning of the stable presence of a new fraternity of five brothers. During the homily, brother Enzo recalled the long and demanding journey that had taken the community up to the new foundation, stressing “the fidelity and inexhaustible mercies of the Lord, far beyond what we are able to see and what we would have expected.”<sup>34</sup>

Another brotherhood had been opened in 1997 outside the city of Ostuni in the region of Apulia, an area in which the community has always had, from the beginning, strong ties of friendship. In 2013 a fraternity of brothers was established at Cellole, near San Giminiano in Tuscany, in an ancient monastic settlement of the thirteenth Century, where a community of brothers and sisters took care of the lepers. In the Rule of Ildobrandino (1250 ca.), they were exhorted to “live in perfect fraternity, charity, patience, pray at specific times and live in such a way as to be a true fraternity of the Lord.” Recalling these past experiences of that place, in his homily during the consecration, br. Enzo reminded the centrality of baptism in an ecumenical perspective:

There is a bell that you have heard ringing and that bears the inscription 1254 and from that time is the octagonal baptistry at the entrance of the church where the water constantly gushes out to remind us that baptism makes us Christian disciples forever, in a Church that is larger than the present confessional churches.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See: <https://www.monasterodibose.it/fraternita/assisi/fraternita-assisi/22-ottobre-2011-assisi>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.monasterodibose.it/fraternita/cellole/fraternita-di-cellole/7-aprile-2013-cellole/6822-introduzione-di-enzo-bianchi>.

In 2014 five sisters of Bose joined the Benedictine nuns of the monastery of St. Scholastica at Civitella San Paolo, near Rome, starting a common life in one sisterhood. Two years later, at the blessing of the renewed church of the monastery (April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016), among others was present also the Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been attending Bose for years. In his speech Br. Enzo Bianchi recalled that the brothers and sisters of Bose are but “a small reality in the womb of the holy church and a monastic community that tries, without fully succeeding, to live the Gospel in common life, in prayer, in work and in welcoming all those who knock on our door”, as witnessed by Benedictine sisters and sisters of Bose living together, in “one communion and one prayer, one sharing of spiritual and material goods, one place in the local church”.<sup>36</sup>

#### *4.4. A synodal structure*

As far as the structure of the community is concerned, one must observe that the Rule of Bose is not intended to be a law but rather an instrument of communion, in response to which each person is asked to evaluate his or her membership in the community:

Brother, sister, if you choose to live in this community, your only goal is a radical commitment to live according to the Gospel. The Gospel will be the absolute and supreme rule. [...] This spiritual rule is provided to help you live according to the Gospel, and especially to encourage in the community a spirit of communion. It is not intended to be a law, but simply a description of life without which nothing can be built or created together with others. It is against this rule that you will evaluate your membership in the community (Rule of Bose 3; 5).

The Rule reminds the reader that “the Gospel is the absolute and supreme rule,” and that the brothers and sisters are the “living rule”. Obedience is accordingly understood as obedience to God, which finds its sacrament in submission to one another. It cannot be reduced in a legalistic way to a “law,” and it is not directed only to the person who presides in the community. Obedience addressed to the prior is actually only one example of Christian obedience.

It is certainly true that it is not possible to determine a precise condition in which the community, in expressing its aims and intentions, necessarily reflects the will of the Lord. [...] However,

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.monasterodibose.it/priore/conferenze-e-omelie/testi-priore/10402-discorso-introdotivo-per-la-benedizione-a-civitella>.

you should listen to and obey the decisions made by the council, since every agreement reached by the brothers and sisters during the council is the result of a sincere effort to discern the will of God for you and for the community (Rule of Bose 3-4).

The prior, who presides over the community in virtue of his gifts of solidity and discernment, has the task of assuring unity. In his ability to bring about *koinonía*, to function as “the eye of the community,” and in his task of guiding the community on its path and of watching over each brother and sister, he resembles the Basilian figure of the *proestós* or *praepositus* (cf. Rule of Bose 29-31).<sup>37</sup> As a spiritual guide for the community, he breaks the bread of the Word and interprets it in different situations.

The Rule of Bose makes a provision for other structures of authority in the community in addition to the authority of the prior. These additional structures are intended to maintain a synodal structure in the community: each member of the community participates in community decision making. The *council* is the supreme legislative body of the community and its members are all the brothers and sisters who have made their monastic profession; the *chapter*, in which participates whoever has completed the novitiate and taken the first commitments to community life; and finally, the *assembly*, attended by all brothers and sisters who have received the liturgical robe, granted at the beginning of the novitiate.

In November 2016 the council of the community approved a “Statute”, which lays out in detail the different juridical structures of community life. For the Roman Catholic canon law, the community is a *societas fidelium*, whose members live in celibacy and common life according to the monastic charisma. The Statute was approved by the Bishop of Biella on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016. In 2017 the founder of Bose resigned as its prior, and the community elected, according to the Statute, a new prior, br. Luciano Maincardi.

## 5. Monastic spirituality at Bose

### 5.1. Vocation

The desire to live according to the Gospel is the only reason for which a new arrival is admitted to the community (cf. Rule of Bose 3). Those who wish to enter the community begin a period of postulancy, the length of which varies from individual to individual. This is followed by the novitiate, which

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae fusius tractatae* XXIV; XXXV, 1, PG 31, 484–86; 1004. See: Jean Gribomont, “Obéissance et évangile selon saint Basile le grand,” *Supplément de la Vie spirituelle* no. 21 (1952): 192–215; Henri Delhougne, “Autorité et participation chez les Pères du cénobitisme,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 45 (1969): 369–94; 46 (1970): 3–32.

lasts approximately four years. During the novitiate the novice is guided by the novice master (either an elder sister or an elder brother), who helps him or her and the community to discern his or her vocation. The novices undertake an intensive period of preparation, consisting of a four-year cycle of courses (in Scripture, liturgy, patristic and monastic studies, ecumenism, etc.), and they also receive training in professional work. The novitiate ends with a liturgy (*accoglienza liturgica*), during which the novice makes his/her commitment to live in celibacy and in the community. The solemn monastic profession, which takes place after at least three more years, confirms in front of the church the vocation received, welcomed, and chosen.

The spirituality of Bose is in fact a monastic spirituality. The fundamental issue to discern a monastic vocation is the willingness to freely embrace chaste celibacy, voluntary poverty, mutual submission, in obedience to the Gospel. Monastic fathers have discovered, and have conveyed in their teaching, how the struggle against passions in a life of chastity, poverty and obedience, is aimed at the transparency and simplicity of fraternal relationships, the sharing of goods, communion in love.

## 5.2. Celibacy

Celibacy is not simply the condition of those who are free of emotional and family ties, but “must become an eloquent sign of assiduousness with the Lord, without divisions or distractions (cf. 1 Cor. 7.32-34), so as to proclaim – though always and only ‘as in enigma’ – the coming Kingdom”.<sup>38</sup> In the Rule of Bose celibacy is interpreted as an instrument towards an intimate knowledge of the Lord:

Brother, sister, you have been called by God to live out your Christian vocation in celibacy: this means that you must live in radical purity and in the solitude of celibacy. The effect of this purity of heart is being able to see God (Mt. 5.8), the effect of solitude is being able to listen to God, who speaks to your heart (Hos. 2.16). Do not forget: the decision for celibacy must be lived in the depths of your heart, and is valid only if it is a response to the inner call of Christ (Rule of Bose 18).

The choice of celibacy has an inner eschatological tension. Gregory of Nyssa wrote that such a life “overcomes the power of death”, and announces the coming of the Kingdom. “Truly in them the mortal condition has been swallowed up by life (cf. 2 Cor. 5.4), and the life lived in virginity appears to us as an image of future bliss, since it bears in itself many signs of the goods

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<sup>38</sup> Bianchi, “Introduzione,” in Bianchi, ed., *Regole monastiche*, xxii.

that we await in hope (cf. Col. 1.5)".<sup>39</sup> But the sign of celibacy is authentic if it grows in love. A twelfth century Cistercian monk, Baldwin of Ford, wrote that for those who live in common life "the Spirit of God is love, bond and communion; the greater the love, the stronger the bond and the fuller the communion and vice versa: the greater the communion, the stronger the bond and the fuller the love".<sup>40</sup> Another ancient western rule, from the end of the fifth century, the so-called Rule of Macarius, defines the brothers in common life as "relatives forever"<sup>41</sup> of the monk. This rule asks the candidate for monastic life to have at the same time fear and love for "the *presbiterus* of the monastery" and the brothers, "together with whom you trust that you too will find yourself in the glory of Christ".<sup>42</sup>

### 5.3. Poverty

Alongside celibacy, the other sign of the monastic following is poverty, which the Rule of Bose specifies in its dimension of radical communion of goods:

Brother, sister, your poverty according to the Gospel means sharing possessions and living in the most provisional way possible (Lk. 14.33; Mt. 6.25), so as to follow Christ who emptied and humbled himself (Phil. 2.8), and thereby become like him who, though he was rich, became poor among humanity (2 Cor. 8.9).

For you, poverty will mean a daily simplification and self-emptying, which will gradually make you one of the little ones, one of Yahweh's poor (Lk. 6.20). You know that as a brother or sister, even without distinctive dress or external signs, the visibility of the community you belong to will make it hard for you, if not impossible, to experience the poverty of the "last," the despised, the oppressed. [...] This is why the requirement of poverty must be joined to a great humility of spirit [...]

Poverty for you will also mean working like everyone else. You will work because the apostles and fathers worked for a living, because you are not allowed to make others serve you, because through your work you collaborate in the work of creation accomplished by the Wisdom of God (Rule of Bose 21; 23-24).

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<sup>39</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate* 14, 1. 4; Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité*, ed. Michel Aubineau (Paris: Cerf, 1966), 430, 440.

<sup>40</sup> Baldovino di Ford, *De vita cenobitica seu communi* VII, trans. Edoardo Arborio Mella (Magnano: Qiqajon 1987), 43.

<sup>41</sup> *Regola di Macario* 6, 4, in Bianchi, ed., *Regole monastiche*, 52.

<sup>42</sup> *Regola di Macario* 7, in Bianchi, ed., *Regole monastiche*, 53.

The community lives on the basis of its own earnings. The living is assured by agriculture, production of jam and honey, carpentry, a publishing house (Edizioni Qiqajon), ceramics, icon painting, as well as work outside the community (teaching in schools, hospital work). Everyone in the community participates in different tasks – cooking, washing dishes, cleaning up. Community members practice a complete sharing of both material and spiritual benefits. The reduction of one's needs to the essential is also a way of inner simplification and unification. However, poverty does not imply any disdain for the gifts of creation, their inherent beauty and goodness. In fact, poverty is not just one of the possible ascetical practices, aimed at personal perfection, but is an evangelical bliss (Mt. 5.4; Lk. 6.20): that is, a way of conforming to Christ, who went from being rich to being poor (1 Cor. 8.9). Poverty is ordered to fraternal communion: those who make reservations of themselves, that is, those who do not know how to share material goods and spiritual gifts, will always find themselves torn between personal aspirations and community needs.

#### 5.4. *Obedience*

Poverty is a remedy against the selfishness that always rises up in us, against the individualism that makes it impossible to work together in *obedience* to the Gospel:

Without unity of spirit, it is not possible to serve Jesus Christ in a total and audacious way. Individualism disrupts and blocks the life and journey of the community. Brother, sister, do not forget that Jesus is your model of obedience: “he became obedient to death.” (Phil. 2.8) During his life on earth he only obeyed, crying out, “Not my will but yours be done.” (Lk. 22.42) And so to be a brother or sister in Christ, you must do the Father's will. (Mt. 12:50) [...] The community, then, ordinarily expresses Christ's will for you in asking obedience of you, and in showing you the path to follow. This frees you from the subjectivism that menaces your life according to the Spirit, and you can be totally available in a way that does not permit you to hold yourself back (Rule of Bose 26).

The very etymology of the term obedience, both in Latin (to be ob-heard) and in Greek (υπακοή), as well as in Slavonic (*po-slušanie*) suggests that the essence of this disposition is listening: a ready listening to the Lord, submission to his Word, but at the same time submission to one's brothers and sisters. Obedience contradicts any kind of selfishness (*philautia*), any spirit of domination, and is ordered to the common life. It means at the same time obedience to God, to the Gospel, to the abbot, to one's brothers and sisters.

This humble and constant exercise is indispensable for those who try to be “one heart and one soul.” Obedience preserves from the drift of subjectivism and becomes the place for a common listening to “what the Spirit says to the churches” (cf. Rev. 2.7).<sup>43</sup> Benedict relates obedience to love:

Not only is the boon of obedience to be shown by all to the Abbot, but the brethren are also to obey one another, knowing that by this road of obedience they are going to God.<sup>44</sup>

Thus they should anticipate one another in honour (Rom. 12.10); most patiently endure one another’s infirmities, whether of body or of character; vie in paying obedience one to another – no one following what he considers useful for himself, but rather what benefits another ; tender the charity of brotherhood chastely; fear God in love; love their Abbot with a sincere and humble charity; prefer nothing whatever to Christ. And may He bring us all together to life everlasting!<sup>45</sup>

### 5.5. *Common prayer, ecumenical prayer, personal prayer*

The daily life of the community is based on prayer and work. As early as in 1973, the community published an Ecumenical Office for the liturgical year, which had several editions.<sup>46</sup> In the Preface to the third edition (1993), the Prior of Bose explains that this office is “an organic, complete liturgy of the Hours, in the effort to join the great Christian tradition of the united church”; not a “fabricated” liturgy, but “a fruit of the continuous and inexhaustible development of prayer in the life of the church”.

The structure of the common prayer at Bose is clearly recognizable “within the Western liturgical tradition”, but the sources from which the prayers are drawn belong to the different churches, both Western and Eastern: Catholic liturgy, Byzantine liturgy, Armenian, Coptic, Chaldean, Syriac, Reformed liturgy, Anglican liturgy. The orations are taken from ancient sacramentaries (Gelasian, Gregorian, Gallican, Ambrosian, Mozarabic), from the Tridentine Roman and Vatican II missals. Among the sources are also the texts elaborated by the “Commission Francophone Cistercienne”, the reformed churches of French-speaking Switzerland and those of the Common Worship for the Church of England. The preface also mentions

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Bianchi, “Introduzione,” xxiv.

<sup>44</sup> *Regula Benedicti* 71, 1–2, English text according to *St. Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries*, trans. Leonard J. Doyle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1950).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, 4–12.

<sup>46</sup> *Comunità Monastica di Bose, Preghiera dei giorni. Ufficio ecumenico per l’anno liturgico* (Torino: Gribaudi, 1973, 1935; Magnano: Qiqajon, 2016 e 2017).

previous ecumenical monastic offices: *Le cérémonial des Veilleurs* (1920), the “Église et liturgie” movement in the 1940s, the “Office de Taizé” and that of Pomeyrol in the 1960s. The *Prayer of the Days* of Bose grafts itself creatively into the liturgical tradition of the undivided Church, seeking to respond to the need for a common prayer of Christians who, while they share daily the same life of evangelical following, belong to churches that do not yet live full communion. In this way, the prayer of an ecumenical community is also a prayer of intercession for all churches and an invocation of unity.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to community prayer, personal prayer is fundamental to monastic life.

Brother, sister, [...] consecrate yourselves to becoming intimately familiar with the divine presence so that you will be able to give it witness; (1 Thess. 5.17) try to pray to your Lord without ceasing. (Mk. 10.37) Do not value anything above the love of Christ! [...] Christ is within you as well, and you must find him in yourself through prayer. If you truly want to live in God’s presence, you need silent, personal, hidden prayer, of which Jesus himself gave you an example (Lk. 9.28; 6.12) (Rule of Bose 2; 36).

An essential moment of personal prayer at Bose is *lectio divina* based on the daily Bible readings, in which each brother and sister reads, meditates, prays and contemplates the Word of God under the guidance of the Spirit. Personal and community prayer converge in the Eucharist, the prayer of prayers, celebrated every Sunday and Thursday and on feast days.<sup>48</sup> Every Saturday there is an evening prayer vigil, in which a common *lectio divina* takes place. The liturgy of the hours and daily *lectio divina* are the central elements of the prayer of the community, and each brother and sister continues his or her own prayer in silence and solitude. Solitude is an expression of simplicity, a way of living authentically in the community without imposing one’s presence on others. Solitude allows the members of the community to pursue together a deeper communion in God through prayer.

## 6. Serving the Churches. The way of ecumenism at Bose

On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the common life at Bose (1968-2018), Pope Francis addressed a letter to Brother Enzo Bianchi, in which

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<sup>47</sup> See: Goffredo Boselli, “La liturgie de Bose: ses principes inspirateurs et quelques éléments spécifiques,” *Liturgie*, no. 125 (2004): 103–16; Matthias Wirz, “Célébrer au quotidien,” *Vie & liturgie* 90 (2012): 6–11.

<sup>48</sup> Luciano Manicardi and Ovidio Vezzoli, “La via eucaristica per rinnovare la chiesa. Bose, riforma liturgica: nella memoria preziosa e fedele del concilio Vaticano II,” *Il Regno: mensile di attualità cattolica*, 10 (1994): 279–84.

he praises the community's "mission that fostered the renewal of religious life, interpreted as the Gospel lived in the great monastic tradition. Within this current of grace", continues Pope Francis, "your community has distinguished itself in its commitment for the unity of the Christian churches, becoming a place of prayer, meeting and dialogue among Christians, in view of the communion of faith and love for which Jesus prayed".<sup>49</sup> A similar judgment has been voiced by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in his letter for the same occasion: faithful "to the monastic tradition of the Fathers", the community of Bose "rightly enjoys international prestige and recognition for its multifaceted and ecumenical ministry in this world – the many conferences organized and the many publications given birth – while remaining faithful to its call as a place of spirituality, solitude, renewal and prayer for all the churches".<sup>50</sup>

This "ecumenical" ministry of the community of Bose is rooted in the local church, and it carries out an ecclesial service both within its own diocese and in other local churches.<sup>51</sup> Bose is a community of Christians of different denominations, and its members are not seeking to create a new church, but they remain in communion with the church in which they received their baptism. This is also a key for the ecumenical engagement of the community:

Brother, sister, you belong to a particular Christian church. You have not come to the community with the intention of re-designing a church according to your own ideas: you belong to Christ through the church which generated you as a Christian in baptism. For this reason, you will recognize and appreciate its ministers and leaders in their diversity, and you will always seek to be a sign of unity. [...] For you, ecumenism will be a daily task [...] You will work towards church unity and pray diligently for it. It is a question of reforming without breaking, of reconciling by reforming. Place yourself humbly at the service of the churches, help them when they need it, bear peace into the midst of conflicts and among the factions that exist within Christian denominations. If someone obliges you to walk a mile, go the second mile with him; in other words, do not try to defend every aspect of your own Christian denomination at the expense of others (Mt. 5.41). Try

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<sup>49</sup> *Ringraziamento e memoria*, 3–4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> On Bose and its ecumenical activity, see: Wirz, "Das tägliche Werk der Ökumene: Zeichen der Einheit in Bose," *Geist und Leben* 91, no. 4 (2018): 390–96; Brice Germain, *La Communauté de Bose et l'œcuménisme* (thèse présentée et soutenue le 14 décembre 2019 en vue du doctorat en théologie, Metz, 2019).

to see all that is good and holy in each Christian denomination, and do not complain about other denominations. The community is not denominational, but is comprised of members who belong to different Christian denominations. Every member must find a place for his confession of faith in the community, and an acceptance of his spirituality. (Rule of Bose 43; 45)

The ecumenical journey is not an activity alongside the others, but is inscribed in the Gospel commandment, in Jesus' prayer for the unity of those who believe in him (cf. Jn 17.21). Monasticism answers to this call with its peculiar charisma for inner unification and unity in common life. "Never resign yourself to the scandal of the separation between Christians", said fr Roger Schutz: "Have the passion for the unity of the Body of Christ".<sup>52</sup> The passion for the unity is inscribed in the life of every Christian monk. The monastic journey thus reveals itself as a real journey of "unification": personal, communal, and ecclesial (within each church, and among the different churches engaged in the search for full visible communion).

The brothers and sisters of Bose, coming from different Christian churches, from different nationalities, cultures and languages, have been able to experience within the community the riches and miseries that each one brings with them so that they may be shared, assumed or forgiven. In particular, in an effort to listen to, understand and serve other churches, the community has organized each year since 1993 an International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox spirituality.<sup>53</sup> In a similar spirit, in 1996 the community began to plan a series of Conferences in collaboration with various theological faculties (Protestant and Catholic of Strasbourg; Waldensian of Rome; Catholic of Lyon; the federation of the theological faculties of Geneva and Lausanne), concerning spiritual and theological issues.<sup>54</sup> Since 1994, when a reflection on the Eucharistic celebration after the second Vatican Council took place at Bose, the community organizes a series of International

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<sup>52</sup> Schutz, *Dynamique du provisoire*, 134.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Hugh Wybrew, "The Community of Bose and its Congresses," *Sobornost* 19, no. 2 (1997): 48–50; Michail Talalay, "Il IX Convegno Ecumenico Internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa russa (Monastero di Bose, 20-22 settembre 2001)," *Religioni e Società* 42 (2002): 127–32; Mainardi, "Apprendre à écouter les autres Églises. Les congrès œcuméniques de Bose," *Unité des chrétiens* 130 (2003): 19–20; idem, *Insieme verso l'unità*, 91–113.

<sup>54</sup> *Word and Eucharist. Path of unity?* (1996); *Spirituality in the History and Theology of the Churches* (1999); *Scripture – Gospel – Church* (2002); *Baptism, Source of Christian Life* (2005); *Repentance, Conversion, Reconciliation* (2008); *The Lord's Supper and the Unity of the Churches* (2012); *Reforming the Church* (2015); *Justification. The Gospel of Grace* (2017). See: Wirz, "Œcuménisme et spiritualité dans la Communauté de Bose (Italie)," *Positions luthériennes* 56, no. 4 (2008): 399–414.

Ecumenical Conferences on liturgy.<sup>55</sup> In 1998, then, a series of International Conferences on spirituality was started.<sup>56</sup> These encounters are essentially an occasion for listening to each other, welcoming Christians belonging to different Churches: Orthodox (Oriental and Byzantine), Reformed, Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, and others.

What lies at the heart of each specific Christian tradition is its own history of holiness, where the gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifest and become incarnate in a concrete manner and in a particular path, and through Grace come to bring sense and hope to all churches and to all mankind. The International Ecumenical Conferences on Orthodox spirituality at Bose soon came under the patronage of the Patriarchate of Moscow, thanks to the interest shown by Metropolitan Kyril of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (now patriarch of Moscow and All Russia), and later on by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos I. Since their beginning, the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity welcomed the initiative and assured its efficient cooperation. Gradually, representatives of all Churches, Orthodox and Protestant, came to join the initial Italian-Russian initiative, along with scholars and church personalities from other countries, all over Europe, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Middle East, the United States, and Canada. Conference Proceedings are published annually, assuring a scholarly level and a widespread impact of the meetings.<sup>57</sup> Here lies the ground for a renewed dialogue between the Eastern

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<sup>55</sup> The topics addressed so far are: *The Eucharistic Celebration* (1994); *The Altar* (2003); *The Ambon. Table of the Word of God* (2005); *Liturgical Space* (2006); *The Baptistery* (2007); *Holy Assembly* (2008); *Church and City* (2009); *Liturgy and Art* (2010); *Ars Liturgica* (2011); *Liturgical Adaptation* (2012); *The Second Vatican Council* (2013); *Liturgy and Cosmos* (2014); *Architectures of Light* (2015); *Seen from outside. The Exterior of Churches* (2016); *Inhabit / Celebrate / Transform. Participative Processes between Liturgy and Architecture* (2017); *Architectures of Proximity* (2018); *Altar. Recent Acquisitions, New Questions* (2019). The Proceedings are published yearly at Edizioni Qiqajon. See: Goffredo Boselli, "Il percorso dei Convegni di Bose," *Rivista di pastorale liturgica* 336, no. 5 (2019): 43–46.

<sup>56</sup> *Thomas Merton. Solitude and Communion* (2004); *Cloud of Witnesses*, in collaboration with the WCC (2008); *Matthew the Poor a Contemporary Desert Father*, in collaboration with the Coptic Orthodox Church (2016).

<sup>57</sup> The issues addressed so far are: *St. Sergius of Radonež* (1993); *St. Nil Sorsky and the Hesychasm* (1994); *St. Paisij Velickovskij* (1995); *St. Serafim of Sarov* (1996); *The Great Eve. Holiness and Spirituality in Russia from Ignatij Brjančaninov to Ioann of Kronstadt* (1997); *St. Silvan of Mount Athos* (1998); *The Autumn of Holy Russia* (1998); *The Night of the Russian Church. The Russian Orthodox Church from 1943 to the Present Day* (1999); *Saint Nicodemus Aghiorite and the Philocaly; Forms of Russian holiness* (2000); *Saint John Climachus and Mount Sinai; Way of Russian Monasticism* (2001); *Saint Simeon the New Theologian and monasticism in Constantinople; Optina pustyn' and Spiritual Fatherhood* (2002); *The Gaza Desert: Barsanuphius, John and Dorotheus; The Council of Moscow of 1917-1918* (2003); *Athanasius and monasticism at Mount Athos; the Prayer of Jesus in the Russian Spiritual Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (2004); *John of Damascus: a Father at the Rise of Islam; Andrej Rublev and*

and the Western Churches, sharing their spiritual traditions in faithfulness to the Gospel, in order to meet the challenges of modern culture and the contemporary world.

Over the years, the Monastic Community of Bose hosted several meetings of the international theological dialogue, both official (Faith and Constitution; Coordination group of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church), and unofficial (such as the “Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group”)<sup>58</sup>. In 2016 the Monastic community of Bose and its prior fr. Enzo Bianchi were awarded with the Abt-Emmanuel-Heufelder-Preis, in Niederaltaich Abbey, Germany, for their ecumenical activity.

## 7. Conclusion

In the course of its fifty-two-year history, the Community of Bose has been enriched by the arrival of new brothers and sisters from numerous regions of Italy and from abroad. The meaning and “purpose” of Bose continues to be its radical commitment to live according to the Gospel, listening to the call of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rev. 3.22). A monastic community may carry out various services and ministries in response to a demand of the Gospel or a request from the churches, but none of these services constitutes the fundamental identity of monastic life. The community desires to remain a “little flock” that hopes against all hope (cf. Rule of Bose 12; 23), conscious of being nothing more than a community of sinners who receive forgiveness from God to the extent to which they recognize their own smallness.

I would like to conclude with a word from Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis, former observer at Vatican Council II and representative of the Ecumenical patriarchate at the World Council of Churches in Genève. He

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*the Russian Icon* (2005); *Nicholas Cabasilas and the Divine Liturgy*; *The Missions of the Russian Orthodox Church* (2006); *The Transfigured Christ* (2007); *Spiritual Paternity* (2008); *Spiritual Struggle* (2009); *Communion and Solitude* (2010); *The Word of God* (2011); *Man, Custodian of Creation* (2012); *Ages of Spiritual Life* (2013); *Blessed are the Peacemakers* (2014); *Mercy and Forgiveness* (2015); *Martyrdom and Communion* (2016); *The Gift of Hospitality* (2017); *Discernment and the Christian life* (2018); *Called to Life in Christ* (2019).

<sup>58</sup> The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group met for its ninth session from 31 October to 4 November 2012 at the Monastery of Bose (Northern Italy): [https://de.moehlerinstitut.de/pdf/texte/kommunikues/2012\\_bose\\_en.pdf](https://de.moehlerinstitut.de/pdf/texte/kommunikues/2012_bose_en.pdf). The Document of the Irenaeus Group presented at Graz (2018) *Serving Communion Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality*, has been translated and published in Italian by the Community of Bose: Gruppo Sant’Ireneo, *Servire la comunione. Ripensare la comunione tra primato e sinodalità* (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2019). The original English text is available online: [https://de.moehlerinstitut.de/pdf/texte/kommunikues/2018\\_graz\\_serving\\_communion.pdf](https://de.moehlerinstitut.de/pdf/texte/kommunikues/2018_graz_serving_communion.pdf).

met brother Enzo Bianchi in the '70's, and after he retired in 1995, he established himself at Bose. He was convinced that in spite of a certain triumphalism over ecumenical achievements, the essential thing was "to cultivate the soil of Christian spirituality and above all of the extraordinary forces that derive from asceticism and monastic life"; and if someone objected to him that, even on this level, there were differences, he replied with evangelical frankness that "God will judge us on what was possible and authorized within the framework of reality". With his life, Metropolitan Emilianos showed that it is possible for Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants to live together: the fraternal friendship that he lived among the brothers and sisters of Bose was also the profound Christian witness that "we are all members of the one body of Christ. There is a deep communion that has already been achieved: it is the communion that we live where we share one common life".<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Emilianos Timiadis, *Chiamati alla libertà* (Magnano: Qiqajon, 2004), 149–50.