



Newsletter Nr.3 for the Commission of Benedictine Women

Spring 2001



Colloquium 2000, The participants gathered at the fishpond of S. Anselmo

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NEWS OF THE COMMISSION

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NEWS FROM THE REGIONS

Editorial

This is now the third time this newsletter is being sent out. Last Spring a first Newsletter was attempted, just to see if this way of communicating information concerning Benedictine Women could be helpful. The reaction has been very encouraging. A second edition sent out in October 2000 was a summary of the Colloquium 2000 held at S. Anselmo from 25th – 30th August 2000. It was intended to provide material for the members of the

Commission returning home and wishing to pass on what they had experienced in Rome to the others from their region. Both editions are very modest attempts to pass on information that is of interest to all monasteries of Benedictine Women. This third edition is equally modest, but the information, which is important to pass on, is multiplying quickly. Hopefully it will fill the need.

There are basically two areas that are covered in this issue: 1) the discussion concerning structures, and 2) the next international symposium.

Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, who made a point of meeting up with the representatives of the women as soon as possible after his election, has expressed his wish to support the autonomy of Women Benedictines in their international structures, and is encouraging us to strengthen our identity as women monastics. The next steps needed to be taken are explained here at length. They reach a first turning point at the Commission meetings before and after the Symposium. At those meetings the planned

changes in the statutes will be voted on. After the Symposium the election of the Moderator is due.

What shall we call ourselves?

It is a great tongue-twister, trying to say one wishes to talk about “all the Benedictine Women’s monasteries that are associated with the Confederation”. Now-a-days one talks about XYZ or ABC instead. The Benedictine men are lucky. They just say “the Confederation”, and everyone knows what they are talking about. At the meeting In S.Anselmo in August 2000 there was talk about calling the women the “International UNION”, but Spanish-speakers objected on the grounds that the translation into Spanish is not good.

Another idea has been suggested and this was passed on by the Moderator of the Commission, Abbess Máire Hickey, in her circular letter to all Benedictine Women’s communities this spring: **ALLIANCE**. To make an alliance means that one gets together for mutual support. That is what it is all about. It is a question of allying in a partner-relationship *with each other*. So how about “**International Alliance of Benedictine Women**” (IAB – or just ALLIANCE)? It would follow that the body representing all the Benedictine Women’s houses (now the Commission) could be called the “**Conference of Alliance Representatives**” (CAR or simple The Conference).....??? Further suggestions welcome before November 2001.

Thanks!!!

The Relationship between Benedictine Women and the “Confederation”.

(This article makes strong use of an article in “Conference Call”, Winter 1996)

The Benedictine Confederation for monks was established in 1883 by Pope Leo XIII. His aim was to create a dynamism amongst Roman Catholic Monks who could create a bridge to Orthodox monasticism and thus support an ecumenical movement. At that time there was no question of women participating in pastoral work, so Pope Leo XIII did not have Benedictine

Women in mind when creating the Confederation. Only in the following years did the question of the relationship between the Confederation and the monasteries of Benedictine Women arise. Benedictine Women have related to the Confederation in a variety of ways over the past 100 years. A study of this relationship has been made by Sr.Agatha Rohtert in her book “Werdendes Gleichgewicht”, soon to be published in English by the press with the title:

It is important to know about the reasons for the creation of the Confederation in order to understand the present structures. The Abbot Primate does not have jurisdiction over the communities of the Confederation, because Benedictines are governed at the local level. The Curia of the Confederation is small. The structure of the Benedictine Order is less centralised than that of other religious orders. Benedictines are local people. Abbot Primate Jerome Theissen once observed that if in all our diversity, unity could emerge, it might serve as a symbol, not only to Benedictines but for the Church. We Benedictines focus on the local community and reflect an ancient form of leadership in the Church. We can remind the Church that not everything needs to be organised from above; there is richness in diversity. The role of the Abbot Primate is a service for unity, as a figure and as a communicator. It might be a task for the Benedictine Order, as a service to the whole Church, to model unity and equality between men and women by developing the distinct identity of both male and female monasticism (both of which are needed to supplement each other) and also by recognising the unifying role of the Abbot Primate.

At the Colloquium Abbot Richard Yeo used two diagrams to illustrate the question of the relationship between the Confederation and the Benedictine Women.(See next page). The ius proprium of the Benedictine Confederation of 1985 describes the relationship between the men and the women as “consociatur”. This implies the parity of the two sides. But as the diagram shows, if the Confederation is a unified body with a corporate identity, then an equal partner also needs to be a unified body with a corporate identity. Individual houses, no matter how much

respect is shown to them, cannot enjoy equal status with the Confederation. Therefore one must conclude that the ius proprium was ahead of us. In order to fulfill what is expected of us, we too must find a corporate identity.

Important for mature dialogue

In our conflict torn world many people turn to our monasteries, asking us for help in conflict resolution. St.Benedict's Rule gives us many clues. These are being more and more recognised when seen through the eyes of people trained by modern communication experts. That is why it is good to turn to modern communication experts, in order to become more aware of the riches that our Rule has to offer.

In a manual on how to resolve conflict (Everyone can win, by Helena Cornelius and Shoshana Faire) we are told that one prerequisite for mature dialogue and conflict resolution is the recognition of one's own worth as an equal partner in the dialogue, and the associated ability to state one's own case without arousing the defenses of the other. This is an aspect with which many women have difficulty, especially if they have been educated in a culture where the female role is one of submission. The Catholic Church with its structure of leadership through the clergy is ofcourse an example of such a culture. As everyone knows, respect towards the representatives of the Church has often led to an inability of women to state their own case, whenever a conflict arose with a member of the clergy. So in these days where we seek to model behaviour leading to peace and reconciliation for our conflict torn world, we Benedictine Women need to help each other find that self-respect and sense of our own worth which makes it possible to state our case without arousing the defenses of the other. As a body of women living the Gospel with the guidance of the Rule of St.Benedict, we

can strengthen our sense of identity in the Church and discover the female strengths in the monastic tradition. This can give us that humble inner security of St.Scholastica, which helped her to confront her brother without letting him be shamed, and that quality which St.Benedict expects of his bursar, turning down inappropriate requests humbly but firmly without causing "tristitia". ("Si quis frater ab eo forte aliqua inrationabiliter postulat, non spernendo eum contristet, sed rationabiliter cum humilitate male petenti deneget." RB 31,7)



The steps to be taken towards clarifying international structures for Benedictine Women:

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| Jan - April 2001 | 1. to review the Statutes of the Commission (approved 1997) and the Ius Proprium in terms of updating them on the basis of the developments of the past years. |
| May 2001 | 2. to present a draft of recommendations, concerning the major concepts involved, to the Executive Committee at their meeting in May 2001, |
| June 2001 | 3. to send out the draft for preliminary study to all the members of the Commission after the meeting of the Executive Committee in May 2001, |
| Nov. 2001 | 4. to present the recommendations concerning the major concepts to the Commission at their meeting in November 2001, |
| Dec.2001 - April 2002 | 5. after the Commission has approved of the draft, to draw up a detailed proposal, |
| May 2002 | 6. present the detailed proposal to the Abbot Primate at the meeting of the Executive Committee in May 2002 |
| 3. Sept. 2002 | 7. present the final version for approval at the first meeting of the Commission (before the Symposium) on September 3 rd 2002, |
| Sept. 2002 - May 2003 | 8. spell out the implications of the changes and make a proposal for changes in the Ius Proprium. This proposal should be put to the Commission at its meeting in 2003 for approval. |
| Juli 2003 - Sept. 2004 | 9. On the basis of the discussion at the Commission meeting in 2003, a presentation is to be prepared for the Congress of Abbots 2004 |

SYMPOSIUM 2002
4th International Symposium of
Benedictine Women
S. Anselmo, Rome, Sept. 3 - 12, 2002

Theme:

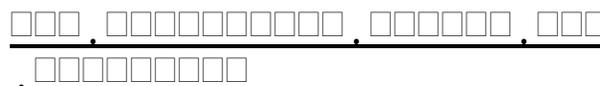
RB. 72, In the Workshop of the Monastery

It is planned to send out invitations to 100 participants as in 1998. The numbers of invitations for each region will be agreed upon very soon and the members of the Commission will be asked to send in the names of those representing their region. The official languages of the Symposium will be English, French, Italian, Spanish and perhaps German. As the

The Abbot Primate's Commission of Benedictine Women

is a commission representing Benedictine women's monasteries all over the world. The Commission has the task of advising the Abbot Primate, of liaising between the Abbot Primate and the Benedictine women's communities throughout the world and of furthering the exchange of ideas and mutual

support among Benedictine women on an international level. The official languages of the Commission are English and French.



The Commission of Benedictine Women came together for their yearly meeting 1999 from June 28th – 30th 1999.

At their meeting in S. Anselmo September 12th, 1998 the question arose, whether future meetings could take place in other continents, thus giving the members a chance to encounter monasticism translated into different cultures. Despite some misgivings it was decided to take up the invitation of the American prioresses and so 22 of the 23 members of the Commission met with Fr. Abbot Primate in St. Louis, not far from his own home monastery. The meeting was followed by a five day tour to other communities in the area. The response to this experience was overwhelmingly positive. Here are some of the reactions:

- “I was deeply moved when I discovered in the Clyde archives letters concerning material help sent by Clyde to our community in the difficult foundation years (1949-1952). When I spoke about this to the whole group in Clyde, other Commission members from third world countries (M. Cecilia, Korea; M. Waldetrudis, Philippines; Sr. Irmgard, Namibia) reported in turn how Clyde had helped them too during their foundation years by sending books for formation and for their libraries. Sr. Tarcisia was the one who organised this. Then it was the turn of Clyde to be moved. One sister put it into words: ‘When I was a novice I used to help Sr. Tarcisia to pack these books, and I used to wonder what is all this

about. It seemed such a remote thing to do. And now here is someone from Korea and the Philippines letting us see what it was about and saying Thank You.’ ”:

- “Something deep was expressed when on July 4th during midday prayer M. Vera Lucia was invited to dance and she got all to dance to the music of “America the beautiful”. There we were, Benedictine women from all over the world, guests in Clyde, dancing to the music and the words of this hymn. It was something that happened spontaneously but it created a deep bond.”
- “One of the Commission Members who had expressed great reserves about going to USA in 1998 thanked the American sisters in very warm words after the experience.”
- “The experience of American hospitality, liturgy and caring relationships has been an eye-opener for many of us as regards the American Benedictines’ way of life.”



Changes in membership

The following changes on the list of Members of the Commission have taken place since the last list was distributed in July:

Region 1 M. Battista Boggero of Fabriano has been elected substitute.

Region 2 M. Maria-Lurdes Solé i Camanes of Barcelona has resigned as Abbess of her community. With her resignation she automatically gives up her role as Member of the Commission. Her substitute, M. Concepción Fanjul Camporro of Alba de Tormes, will be taking her place until the new election for the region takes place.

Region 6 In order to give the Moderator more time for matters of the whole Commission, a new representative for this Region, M. Lucia Wagner (Venio, Munich), has been elected for the next two years.

Region 7 M. Jadwiga Jasínska has been elected as substitute.

Region 8 There is still no substitute for this Region as no house seems in a position to offer a superior for the job.

Region 15 Sr. Sonia has been re-elected for a further term

Region 16/17 It has proved too difficult to include Nigeria in the English-speaking Region 16, because of the long distance between the countries. And so for the time being the monasteries in Nigeria will be included in Region 17, West Africa, despite the fact that French is the main language of that region.

Region 19 M. Stella of Ashirbhavan has been nominated substitute.

COLLOQUIUM 2000

The mutual understanding and encouragement experienced through the discussions of this international forum of Benedictine superiors seemed for the Members of the Commission to be of such value, that they decided to have an extended meeting in the Holy Year 2000 and to share the experience with a second person from each region. In most cases the substitute of each Member of the Commission will be the second representative. It has proved invaluable having a partner from one’s own region who has shared the experience and who can help passing it on at the regional meeting.

The Colloquium will take place from August 28th – 30th in S.Anselmo. The Members of the Commission are invited to stay on for the Abbots’

Congress that is due again this year September 3rd – 14th. Themes that will be discussed



The Executive Committee of the Commission met with Fr. Abbot Primate Marcel Rooney for their autumn meeting from November 20 – 22 1999 in Rome.

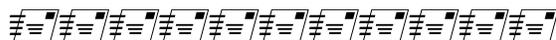
They discussed the details of the Colloquium planned for August 2000. Assessing the meeting of the Commission in St. Louis they came to the conclusion that an important process of networking is quietly taking place that is already showing fruit through the quality of discussion between the members. The theme of the meeting in St. Louis: "Future international structures for Benedictine women" is still of importance. The question of structures is twofold: firstly, there is the search for "structures uniting all Benedictine women" and secondly there is the search for "structures that form a bond between Benedictine women and Benedictine men." The Colloquium planned for August 2000 in S.Anselmo will be working further on these questions.

On the feast of Saint Cecilia 22.11. they were invited to Sta. Cecilia and were able to take part in the traditional solemn Vespers. Afterwards they took supper with the student sisters living in the house, an admirable occasion to get acquainted with their situation.



Please Note:

On the agenda for the Executive Committee was the question of the timing of the next Symposium. Because of the quickly changing circle of Abbesses and Prioresses representing their regions on an international level, it was decided to organise **the next Symposium from September 4 – 11, 2002**, (travelling on 4th and 12th September) four years after the last Symposium. This would mean that the international meeting of the women would alternate with the international meeting of the men (Abbots' Congress) which meets 2000 and 2004.



We would be very pleased to have more ideas, items or offers to help with this newsletter. Please send your comments to Sr. Monica Lewis OSB, Abtei St.Scholastika, D - 49413 Dinklage, Fax: 0049/4443/3670,

NEWS FROM THE REGIONS

 M. Clothilde Sanyika of Region 16, East Africa, reports that communities in her region have been considering the question of international structures for Benedictine women. She presented a paper with their proposals to the Commission in July 1999 in St. Louis.

 M. Vera Lucia of Region 11, Brazil organised a questionnaire in order to encourage discussion in her region on the question of international structures for Benedictine women. The results of this questionnaire was presented to the Commission in July 1999 in St. Louis.

 . . In the Amazon region there has been a first profession of a native born sister. This was in the congregation Regina Apostolorum. This is a big step as there are very few vocations. Nevertheless the monasteries have an important role to play in the local Church. The sisters in Bahia have also now one vocation from Brazil.

 . . For the first time ever on Kiribati (Central Pacific) on April 17th 1999 a Good Samaritan Benedictine made her profession.

 . In the Philippines the women Benedictines have decided they need more mutual support and have formed the ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN BENEDICTINES IN THE PHILIPPINES (AWBP). Their common vision is "to exchange ideas on how to live our monastic life and mission, to get to know one another, and to offer mutual support in living out our Benedictine tradition."



Liturgy: The praise of God
Sr. Marie-Sophie from Korea has agreed to co-ordinate the liturgy at the Colloquium this summer. She studied Liturgy at S.Anselmo and is

much in demand for talks on liturgical subjects. This spring she has been on a lecturing tour in Canada and USA. She will be looking for help in including different cultural

elements in the office during the meeting.



The following is an article we received from a prioress in Africa. It has an inspiring message for us all.

" THE CANCELLATION OF THE DEBT

(These are only a few guidelines, as opposed to a written article)

During recent times there is much talk and writing about the cancellation of debt to very poor countries. I do not wish to develop this topic here, nor even to begin to address the moral and economic questions involved; I have neither the qualifications to do so, nor indeed the authority. On the other hand, the Holy Father's request has caused me to reflect deeply: it is not enough for us to pray or to sign petitions for the debt to be cancelled. How indeed can I, a Benedictine Nun, participate effectively in the cancellation of such a debt in a way that is TRUE?

Might there not be, indeed is there not, monastically speaking, a similar cancellation of debt needed to be carried out, one that could only be expressed by renewal, creating a real Jubilee Year, and a real cause for celebration?

What is there to say? *Forgive us our debts as we forgive others.* This implies the cancellation of debt amongst ourselves. But what kind of debt do we mean and between which groups of people?

- In the hearts of our own communities why should we not go beyond mere self-forgiveness, and cancel the debts that others owe us, thus settling our debts with each other? Of course, it is inevitable that we live with fear about such and such a Sister or person, with unremovable labels put on us by others, or which we indeed have put on one or other of our Sisters; sometimes have we not put our Sisters into categories? etc. Let us begin again then, cancelling everything, not just by articulating it in words, nor by expressing it in magnanimous gestures, but from the depths of our hearts and from the depths of our silence, in truth the depth of God's silence which, enveloping the whole community can pardon us all, enabling us to begin again, and thus together we will be able to sing 'Our Father'.

- North/South : It is obviously essential that the European countries cancel the debt owed by poor nations. However it is equally important that the poorer countries cancel the European debt of colonisation, as well as the debt of evangelisation which is so often allied to colonisation. It is hoped, too, that the 'poor' countries will cancel their own internal debts - debts of compromise, corruption, dishonesty, waste, and take on board the consequences, thus eliminating from their own hearts (false) ethnic debts, or fear of differences, as well as pride and envy.

- Let us cancel our own debts, within our specific Foundations, especially reciprocal debts of past mistakes, of ruthless behaviour, of the abuse of consumerism or the allure of materialism, so much at the heart of Europe; we can list debts concerning rash judgements, sometimes spiteful and often unjust, debts of all too often wanting to dominate, to gain or seize power, the debt also of those who having capitulated were forced to give up simply because the struggle became too difficult.

On the threshold of this second millennium let us hope that our communities will all be debt free, indeed will all be renewed for the service and praise of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A Benedictine nun.

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The next Symposium is provisionally planned for September 4 - 11, 2002, with travelling on September 3rd and 12th.