

## **WORKSHOP – D5**

### **The institutional development of the relationship between the CIB and Benedictine Confederation.**

Moderated by Abbot Richard Yeo and Sister Judith Ann Heble

#### **Part I**

On November 6, 2001, the CIB was born and named the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum*. However, it was since 1966 that efforts were being made to recognize the Benedictine women by inviting them to attend meetings of the Congress of Abbots as observers.

On September 27, 2004, the Congress of Abbots approved the updating of the 1985 Norms of the *Lex Propria* to recognize the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* (CIB) and its relationship to the Benedictine Confederation. Currently, the CIB officially represents one body of Benedictine women's communities consociated with the Benedictine Confederation. We have those communities listed in our *Catalogus*.

Since 2001, the CIB Delegates from the nineteen Regions of the world have been meeting together every other year in Rome and the alternate year in one of the Regions. Every four years the CIB holds a symposium at Sant'Anselmo for one hundred Benedictine women. In September, 2014, we held the 7<sup>th</sup> International Symposium. Sister Scholastika Häring of Dinklage, made a presentation to the participants on her work for her dissertation on the development of the CIB and Canon Law. As a result, some members felt that the CIB is at a point now in its existence to begin looking at a juridical structure so as to give the CIB some further identity as an organization.

At the meeting of the CIB Administrative Council last September, 2015 in France, Abbot Richard Yeo was invited to share his thoughts with us on whether or not there is a possibility to have some type of juridical structure in the Church.

#### **Part II**

My response to the CIB's question could be summarized as follows. I was involved in preparing for the birth of the CIB in 2001, and I had had quite a lot of contact with the Congregation for Religious in previous years, and I felt that I was acquainted with their thinking.

I think the first recognition by the Holy See of links between the Confederation and Benedictine women is in the *Lex propria* of 1952, when the way was opened for women's communities to be 'aggregated' to the Confederation, and in the time of Abbot Primate Rembert Weakland we had the two Commissions founded: one for nuns, the other for sisters.

In 1988 the two Commissions were amalgamated into the Commission for Benedictine Women, and when the CIB was founded ten years later there was a strong wish to follow this pattern – a single organization uniting all Benedictine women.

My feeling was that if this were presented to the Congregation for Religious, this pattern – of uniting moniales and sorores in a single organization – would be controversial; that it would take time to persuade the Congregation that it was opportune, and I felt there was a real risk that the reply would be that it would not be approved.

My advice was therefore that the CIB should be juridically under the umbrella of the Confederation. This way, the Confederation would set up the CIB; it would take a certain responsibility for it; and for that reason the Abbot Primate would have to give his approval to the Statutes of the CIB, and to any changes in those Statutes.

The advantage of this approach was that we would not need to seek the approval of the Holy See – and risk, I felt, receiving a negative answer. The disadvantage is that the CIB is not autonomous; it is juridically dependent on the Confederation, and that does not give a good message. But it does mean that we were able to give birth to the CIB in November 2001.

In 2015, I was asked to and share with the CIB my thoughts about the possibilities of securing a juridical status in the Church. Before doing this, I made informal consultations to try and ascertain how such a move would be received by the Holy See.

The reply was that such a move would be premature. We needed to remember that just a year previously, the Holy See has issued a questionnaire to the *moniales*, about a number of questions, including their relationships with other communities of their Order. It was going to take a considerable amount of time to analyse the results of that questionnaire, and then prepare a response to it. If we were to ask for a juridical structure for the CIB today, we would be effectively pre-judging the response to that questionnaire. The CIB should not make any application until the Holy See's response was published. I recommended that the CIB proceed in this way.

### **Part III**

As you can see, over the years there have been some limited efforts at collaboration between the Confederation and the CIB. Perhaps more is needed at this time for us to stay true to extending the mission of Jesus Christ in the context of our Benedictine tradition. Our collective mission cannot be static but needs to be adaptive to new circumstances in order to retain its viability and be true to its ultimate purpose of bringing God's life to the world.

Historically, many monasteries of men and women were built in close geographical proximity to one another. Today, in several regions of the world, there is a fine spirit of mutual support and collaboration among the Benedictine communities of both women and men that is both effective and life-giving. Together they engage in addressing the

issues facing monastic life today exhibiting courage, mutual trust and a breadth of vision.

Throughout our histories, many women's communities have depended on the communities of monks to provide chaplains, confessors, conferences and retreats. I do not have to tell you that that is not the case everywhere. In some areas, the celebration of the daily Eucharist – and even on Sundays – has become a luxury not only for our communities, but also for the people of the area.

Yes, we live in very challenging times. There are no doubt many issues in our Order, the world and the Church today that may call for not only a change of perspective but also a mutual response from both the Benedictine women and men. Without thoughtful change and adaptation on the part of all of us in the Order, the mission of the Church, and our Order in particular, can atrophy and weaken. Perhaps it is time for such renewal in the context of some collaboration between us.