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Ecological responsibility of Benedictine monasteries: a study of three cases (Plankstetten, Andechs and Gut Aich)

In post-secular debate on monasticism and spirituality the theme of ecology seems to play more and more important role. For the moment, the mainstream narration on ecology is dominated by the “Franciscan paradigm”, reminded and reinforced by Pope’s Francis ecological encyclical *Laudato si’*. However, the monastic tradition may offer here many practical and successful solutions which have been elaborated sometimes for many centuries. They all, mostly unknown – or too obvious – prove a constant sensibility of monastic tradition for ecology.

It is worth noticing that ecology has in monastic tradition a very vast context. The liturgy itself, in a sense identified with Benedictine monasticism may be regarded as “expression in itself of ecological sense: it is a living ecology translating in stylizations of life, in a first symbiotic participation with the world, as a real home (oikos) in which eventually

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it would be still possible to «live poetically on the earth»². Through their ecological activity the monasteries contribute to a new spiritual quality which seems to appear, as a new science, growing in dialog with the world, culture and mysticism, though yet not legitimized theologically.³ Ecology understood widely has become a space of interreligious dialogue⁴ in which monastic life seen as a return to paradise results as a form of global consciousness⁵ where the monastic values become a base of ecology of stability.⁶

So the contribution of monasticism to ecology has a long and, unfortunately not too much known tradition, in a way unjustly remaining in the shadow of the Franciscan one.⁷ The very vast and integral panorama of ecologic activity of monasteries – throughout history and at different latitudes – can be found in an article published in 2014 in “Studia Monastica”⁸.

The intention of this paper is a brief presentation of three European Benedictine monasteries, leading in application of modern ecological solutions. They will serve as concrete, important and visible examples of real contribution of Benedictine monasteries to ecology. These three monasteries belong to two German speaking Benedictine Congregations, each of which is characterized by a diverse mission, history and style.

Plankstetten Abbey, a monastery of the Benedictine Bavarian Congregation, was founded in the 12th century. In 1994 its farm was transformed into an organic-biologic one what coincided with a wide restoration of the buildings. From 1998 the Plankstetten Klosterbier has

² *Ecologia e liturgia*, ed. A. N.Terrin, Padova 2003, p. 20 [transl. BS].

³ *Ecologia e liturgia*, op. cit., p. 125.

⁴ One example of this activity: *Green Monasticism, A Buddhist-Catholic Response to an Environmental Calamity*, eds. D. W. Mitchell, W. Skudlarek OSB, New York 2010.

⁵ *Green Monasticism...*, op. cit., p. 30–34.

⁶ *Green Monasticism...*, op. cit., p. 72, 77.

⁷ B. Sawicki, *Una glossa monastica alla lettera enciclica “Laudato si” del papa Francesco*, “Studia Monastica” 57 (2015) 2, p. 423–434.

⁸ J. M. Mallarach, J. Corcó, T. Papayannis, *Christian monastic communities living in harmony with environment: a noverview od positive trends and best practices*, “Studia Monastica” 56 (2014) 2, p. 353–391.

been produced. The community consists of 14 monks, aging between 46 and 94.

Andechs Abbey (18 monks, between 44 and 90) also belongs to the Benedictine Bavarian Congregation. First of all it is a sanctuary visited by many pilgrims. However, the abbey is also known and because of its beer.

Gut Aich Priory belongs Benedictine Austrian Congregation, has 5 monks, between 48 and 67, was founded in 1999. Its agricultural activities have very clear educational dimension, bringing together creativity, nature and spirituality.⁹

What is very important, the communities of these monasteries remain vibrant centers of liturgy, hospitality and education, however, they are also actively involved in various ecological projects including self-sufficiency, energy policy, sustainability, food production, herb gardens and therapy. In this way they realize the fore mentioned model of integrated ecology. Apart from description of these activities, mainly according to the materials available in media (with a particular consideration of internet¹⁰), this paper will try to refer them into the vast context of Benedictine tradition and its social reception.

In this place I would like to thank to F. Beda Sonnenberg OSB, Abbot of Plankstetten, F.Johannes Pausch OSB, prior of Gut Eich and Mr. Martin Glaab from Andechs for their help in my research for this paper.

1. Motivation

According to the hint in the previous section, the ecological openness and activity of these monasteries has its theological background. They vary in its character and intensity. The monks of Plankstetten make here a reference to Psalm 8 which connects the beauty of creation with the responsibility of human being. Man, on behalf of God, is manager of the

⁹ All these data are taken from *Catalogus Monasterium O.S.B Monachorum*, SS. Patriarchae Benedicti Familiae Confoederatae Edition XXII 2015, Roma.

¹⁰ The access to the quoted websites was on Dec.30th, 2016. The translation was made by the author

creation. According to them, in practical way the message of this psalm is implemented by:

- the self-sufficiency and energy concept,
- the management and work according to BIOLAND guidelines
- the connectedness between relationship of faith, standing behind the fore mentioned achievements is illustrated by an exposition in the monastery.¹¹

The monastery of Andechs explains its ecologic activity more in pastoral and social than theological terms. This abbey, the brewery tradition of which goes back to 1455, invested in efficiency of energy in order to combine more strongly its environmentally friendly production processes with its philosophy of quality. The monks admit that they are interested in an intact environment, both as a spiritual center and the oldest place of pilgrimage in Bavaria, as well as an excursion destination for nearly one million visitors per year as well as a producer of high-quality food. Moreover they want to spread the information about its ecological activity as the special combination of Benedictine hospitality, Baroque culture and the Bavarian way of life alive here on the Holy Mountain of Bavaria.¹²

This activity indirectly is reflected in other activities of the monastery. The monks see their pastoral involvement “also in connection with the fact that their business enterprises financially enable the extensive pastoral, social and cultural commitment of our monastic community in Munich and Andechs. All the pastoral activities of this monastery as well as their library and help to the homeless people in Munich is financed directly by the monastery without the help of Church tax.”¹³

Moreover, the monks of Andechs justify their ecologic interest also by the Benedictine vow of stability: “According to the Benedictine stability, the careful handling of the environment and its resources is firmly anchored in the corporate philosophy of monastic economic enterprises.

¹¹ <http://www.kloster-plankstetten.de/html/okologie.html>.

¹² <http://andechs.de/de/nachhaltigkeit/klosterbrauerei/>.

¹³ <http://andechs.de/de/nachhaltigkeit/>.

Economic and ecological actions are two sides of a coin for the monastery and its economic enterprises. The monastery's farms have always strived for a long-term organic growth combined with a continuous improvement of their ecological balance."¹⁴

Monastery Gut Aich motivates its ecologic activity by a wide, meta-physical and spiritual context, emphasizing its healing aspect.

Here the ecological proposal is focused on healing and more concretely – on monastic healing. This goal is referred to the Benedictine spirituality as the basis of monastic healing – that is, relationship on all levels. "Man in his totality is realized as human being in his/her relationships

- to oneself
- to others
- to creation and
- to God
- always in mindfulness".

This anthropocentric approach leads directly to the main service offered by the community of Gut Aich: the monastic healing which "helps and supports to search, to perceive and to take care of the manifold relationships of human beings, to maintain and develop the relationships, to become aware of and to heal disruptions and breaches of relationships, the self-healing powers of the sick man." However, and above all, monastic medicine works as a preventive measure. It draws its knowledge from the tradition of monasteries and wants to make this knowledge aware, cultivate it and pass it on.

By healing the monks of Gut Aich understand a lifelong process of learning the human formation and development, which takes place in eight ever-recurring stages:

- "mindful perception
- naming
- structuring
- applying
- reflecting
- deepened application

¹⁴ <http://andechs.de/de/nachhaltigkeit/>.

- gratitude
- new perception.”

Everything happens in the monastery because its facilities and its surroundings are: a real framework in which relationships are made possible and a real ground and source of spiritual experience and for healing.

In the proposal of Gut Aich there is no explicit reference to theology. Instead the spirituality is mentioned:

“Spirituality means to be alive in an enhanced form, and life is a relationship—to be related *to oneself*, to others, to the surrounding world and to an all-embracing reality “which we call God” (K. Rahner).

Disease is the expression of a non-lived or disturbed relationship. In order to be healed, it needs the experience of relationship. Thus, the innermost core of healing is lived relationship, living spirituality.

Like in the case of previous monasteries, explaining their ecological orientation the monks of Gut Aich also refer to the Benedictine spirituality:

Benedictine spirituality is a relationship-spirituality and expresses itself in the concrete everyday life: in common food, working, praying, talking and leisure time.

Benedictine spirituality is intensified in practice, especially in meditation, contemplation, in retreats, and in silence.”¹⁵

Such vision of integrated spirituality has its symbolic form. It is reflected in character of the place. For example the construction of the church is based of important Biblical numbers: “The theological basic concept of church building is „heavenly Jerusalem” as described in the biblical book of Revelation. The number 12 stands for totality and derives from the solar circle: 12 double arches (gates), 12 columns, 12 stones, 12 Apostles crosses – the room measures 12 × 12 meters. At the east gate of the church is the Mary Chapel with the fountain stone. Here the water appears, as in the description of the temple by the prophet Ezekiel (Ez 47: 1).”¹⁶

¹⁵ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/spiritualitaet>.

¹⁶ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/spiritualitaet/kirche>.

The symbolic place leads directly to personal spiritual experience. Here, first of all, the emphasis is put on meditation:

“Meditation is a way in the middle. It is a path of simplicity in which we experience the ordering power of silence, concentration, and silence. This way shifts the focus of our being from a restless and uncertain point of view toward a secure resting in the fullness of being. This creates a new force from the inside, which is not caused by any external circumstances. Our heart is wide, and we come into contact with the divine primal ground. This path is a process that must be practiced again and again. On the path of meditation, we come from the external to the inwardness, from the activity to the rest, from the unessential to the essential.”¹⁷

Meditation may lead to contemplation:

“A monastery is a place of contemplation, of contemplation in the most comprehensive sense. Conscious listening, looking, smelling, tasting and feeling create meaning. I can sense the senses. The way of perception is enhanced by listening and seeing with the heart. This seeing and hearing with the inner eye and the inner ear is essential to the monkish tradition of all world religions. «Man finds meaning when his heart has come to rest.» (Brother David Steindl-Rast)

Saint Augustine says: «Our heart is restless until it finds peace in you, my God.» The contemplative path leads to the heart-rest and to the «god-chess». Contemplation is the source of meaning, peace and healing.”¹⁸

Everything requires silence which is an important dimension of life in monastery:

“Silence stills the soul. Listen silently with the heart, have nothing to say, and simply exist. Times of stillness need it to arrive in HERE and NOW. To arrive at oneself with body and soul takes time and space. The monastery is such a refuge. Especially when the human being is ill and injured, such shelters and times of silence are needed. In this way, man returns to the origin and starting point of his life – the silence which we call God. Silence is the highest form of communication. I am alone

¹⁷ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/spiritualitaet/meditation>.

¹⁸ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/spiritualitaet/kontemplation>.

with everything and everyone is connected. This experience of belonging nourishes body and soul and allows for a path of reconciliation, peace and healing.”¹⁹

2. The self-sufficiency

A good, diversified motivation leads to the first concrete ecologic objective: the self-sufficiency which also results from the Rule of Saint Benedict. Having direct economic implication, indirectly the self-sufficiency is related to the vow of Benedictine stability which connected monastery with its surroundings by multiple bonds. For many years the self-sufficiency has been achieved and expressed by manual work and craftsmanship. It lead to the necessity of everyday labor which formed monks' mindfulness and responsibility. Also today the labor, quite often of natural character, is to ensure the maintenance of life. As the monks of Plankstetten explain, it means: “to receive life (also in nature, in the field); to respect life – also in life and breeding of Animals which later will be killed for meat; to create life – through healthy food produced by the monastery.”

In this context the classical Benedictine values receive a new quality. *Stabilitas* – sustainability – becomes a key feature in the monastic food production, meaning the following of concrete, fixed rules, personal care for the quality – without any haste or inattention. Hospitality permits to see the products of monastery as a message. The guests should feel and notice this message even in the way the monks work or prepare their meals. In this case the Glorification of God (one of the most important Benedictine characteristic: “in everything God may be glorified” 1 Peter 4, 11) is simply identified with the satisfaction and wellbeing of the guests – especially if they feel better or recover from their indispositions or diseases.²⁰

¹⁹ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/spiritualitaet/schweigewochen>.

²⁰ <http://www.kloster-plankstetten.de/html/autarkiekonzept.html>.

The geographical location of the monastery is not irrelevant here. The extension of Main-Donau Channel (opened in 1992) as well as the requirement of the European Union to develop rural areas proved to play a very stimulating role. The new form of the Channel brought the increase of tourists visiting the region (by boat or bike). The activities of the monastery connected with this developments has decreased considerably unemployment in the region (Guest House, monastery gift shop, bookshop, ecological shops). At the same time a new culture of consumption is promoted: focusing on sobriety, responsibility and discretion.

Also the agriculture of Plankstetten is completely run in organic and biologic way.²¹ It covers 230 ha of land, 120 of which are fully used for cultivation. The Plankstetten farm is indicated by the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture as exemplary, demonstrational organic farm (Demonstrationsbetrieb ökologischer Landbau)²² what means it is available as a place of study visit and school excursions where one can learn about different types of and about beer production, admire flourishing plants, forest honey, various sorts of bread, flesh as well as spelt products. The cultivation is divided into spelt (17 ha), brew barley (16 ha), brew and bake wheat (10 ha), field beans (6 ha), peas (6 ha), potatoes (5 ha), corn (5 ha), oats (5 ha), sunflowers (1 ha). Besides about 45 cows are reared for milk and meat. The monastery keeps also ca 100 fattening pigs.

The forestry of the monastery covers ca 60 ha and serves as a source of construction wood. There is a carpentry on the place, making wood for windows, door, furniture and so on. The softwood is used for heating of the monastery. The monastic shop offers also, for a fairer price, the ecologic products fitting the norms and coming from other farms.

The further processing of this farm production also takes part in the monastery. The animals are slaughtered and processed in monastic masonry. The cereals are mostly used in Riedenburger Brewery for production of three sorts of beer.²³ Monastery bakery makes different sorts

²¹ <http://www.kloster-plankstetten.de/html/landwirtschaft.html>.

²² <https://www.oekolandbau.de/verbraucher/demonstrationsbetriebe/demobetriebe-im-portraet/bayern/klostergut-plankstetten/>.

²³ <http://www.riedenburger.de/>.

of bread. Also the kitchen of monastery uses the farm products, particularly the food potatoes which are also available in the shop of monastery.

“This ecologic agricultural activity of Plankstetten Abbey is accomplished by:

- Sustainable promotion of organic farming and environmentally healthy proceeding;
- Integration and cooperation with organic farmers in the region;
- Processing of agricultural products in bakery and butchery;
- Consumption of the products produced in the monastery itself, in its guest house and restaurant;
- Marketing of the products produced in the monastery or in the region in the ÖKO farm shop of the monastery, by presence on sales markets as well as by delivery to other ecclesiastical institutions (e.g. monasteries, educational and retreat houses);
- Building a larger marketing rail for organic regional products;
- Preservation and improvement of the cultural landscape in the Jura;
- Creation and maintenance of jobs;
- Support for environmentally-friendly and alternative forms of energy;
- Promotion of the energetic utilization of renewable raw materials;
- Offering the impulse and model for the region (intellectual, social, cultural and economic);
- Presentation of synergy effects through the networking of economic enterprises in the monastery;
- Information and knowledge transfer to the population;
- Presentation of Rural Development and the 5b Objectives Demonstration of exemplary solutions for the land of 5b category together with many other objectives concerning this type of land presented comprehensively in one place;
- Mediation of the necessity and success of organic farming;
- Presentation of the regional autonomy of the monasteries in the Middle Ages and its implementation today in the monastery Plankstetten (cycling farm, regionality).”

To achieve these objectives the following measures have been implemented:

“a) In the farm – planning and implementation of an agrarian ecological concept on the agricultural land through the planting of biotopes, hedges, orchards and marginal strips. (In the past few years, over 150 trees have been planted by the monastery and a windbreak hedge has been laid on a length of 450 m, which is the beginning of an ecological interconnection system.); support for the farmers in testing of new crops.

b) In the forestry: self-utilization of the wood in the monastery (wooden floors, furniture, construction wood, wood chips ...); wood chip purchase of forestry workers of the region; collaboration with the Working Community HOLZ of Jura 2000.”²⁴

The Andechs farm comes back to 1850. Originally thought as the food resource for the monks produces food for far more people. From 1995 the development of the farm has followed the guidelines of the Association of the Land of Nature²⁵. The livestock farming, for example, is a continuation of tradition of family Metz, existing on this land before. “Since the Metz family also manages a biologically active dairy farm, many cooperative economic links have emerged. The cows are kept in a deep litter in order to be able to keep the animal in an appropriate manner. The required straw comes from the monastic farmland. In return, to preserve soil fertility and to secure harvest yields, the entire crop seizure is used for fertilization in the arable land of the monastery. The Metz family also uses the clover grassland and surrounding meadows and pastures of the monastery as a feedstuff for their cattle. The monastic agriculture has a total area of 150 hectares, which is divided into 110 hectares of arable land, 25 hectares of meadows and pastures as well as 15 hectares of water and farmland. The arable land is used for the production of spelled, rye, wheat, oats, as well as forage beans and peas. The whole bread cereal is taken by the Hofpfisterei (Court baking) in Munich. Among other things, it produces the «Andechser Brot».

²⁴ <http://www.kloster-plankstetten.de/html/autarkiekonzept.html>.

²⁵ <http://www.naturland.de/de/>.

Another task is the management and management of the 160 ha of forest. Above all the old coniferous stands, i.e. about half of the forest area, were severely damaged by the storms in 1990 and 1992. As in the other areas, mixed forest stands are used on the resulting bare areas. The resulting forestry work is outsourced to third parties. The forest areas of the monastery are also subject to certified sustainable forest management according to the German PEFC (Pan European Forest Certification) system. In 2009 the agriculture of the monastery Andechs has been awarded the Golden Safety Label of the Agricultural Professional Cooperative (LBG) Franconia and Upper Bavarians.”²⁶

Today the Andechs Abbey brewery is the largest of only a few authentic monastery breweries in Germany, owned and lead independently by an existing monastic community. This brewery belongs to the Benedictines of St. Bonifaz in Munich & Andechs. Brewed and bottled is only on site in Andechs.²⁷

3. Energy

Eco-friendly production of energy as the conscious handling of energy is one of central themes of Plankstetten ecology. Therefore, wherever possible and economically viable, the monks try to reduce energy consumption by investing and replace fossil fuels with renewable energy.

In 1995 the possibilities of saving energy in the abbey were examined. As a result the heating system was centralized and unified. For one part of the building a decentralized supply with natural gas was recognized and introduced as the most optimal one. In this solution there are no heat conduction losses. Because of monumental character of the buildings, some internal parts of the buildings were insulated. All these works were done in a saving energy way. In cooling units for electricity saving and domestic hot water heating the heat recovery was applied.

²⁶ <http://andechs.de/de/kirche-amp-kloster/landwirtschaft/>.

²⁷ <http://andechs.de/de/die-klosterbrauerei/>.

A renewable energy source the biomass is used. The advantage of this lies in CO² neutrality, since only the same CO² is released during combustion, as was consumed during the growth of the plants. This reduces the “greenhouse effect”. In addition, the purchase of regionally produced biomass transport routes is shortened. The heating has a mixed character, using different sources (natural gas, solar collector system and for some machines rape seed oil as fuel).²⁸

All these activities are accompanied by the exposition *Believe and act (Glauben und handeln)* where deep spiritual and theological background of ecological activities is shown.

By faith in God for ecological action and thus God’s creation honor. In the rhythm of prayer and work the Creator and his work praise. Respect for God makes us aware of the whole of creation.²⁹

Practically speaking, the main objective of ecological activities of Andechs Abbey is reduction of energy. The results are precisely published in yearly reports. For instance, in 2013 the monastery brewery has reduced its total energy consumption per hectoliter of beer produced by around 3 per cent to below 46 kWh. The CO₂ emissions were reduced by a good 5 per cent to just over 12 kg per hectoliter. Each year also the plans of reduction of energy for the next year are presented. So, in the environmental statement for 2014, with the figures from 2009 to 2013, the monastery brewery presented the changes to its environmental management system and updated its environmental program.³⁰

Federal Environment Minister Dr. Barbara Hendricks awarded the Andechs brewery in Berlin on 17 January 2014 as an “innovative EMAS company”, one of eighteen others. With investments of more than one million euros, the Klosterbrauerei has been able to reduce its total energy consumption by almost 20% since 2008, despite the constantly high demand for Andechser monastic beer. The monastery brewery is thus

²⁸ <http://www.kloster-plankstetten.de/html/energiekonzept.html>. See also http://www.kloster-plankstetten.de/Energiekonzept_Flyer.pdf.

²⁹ <http://www.kloster-plankstetten.de/html/ausstellungen.html>.

³⁰ <http://andechs.de/index.php?id=1652>.

one of the currently 21 of the approximately 650 medium-sized and large breweries in Germany that have received the EMAS certificate.³¹

4. Herb gardens

A very meaningful example of multidimensional and integrated ecological awareness is the herb garden of the Andechs Abbey. “This garden was developed in cooperation with the company Steierl-Pharma GmbH in Herrsching, a manufacturer of natural medicines. It is used for schools, naturopaths, pharmacists and doctors as a nursery. Herbal and medicinal plants are shown in herbal medicine, homeopathy and in the folklore.” The tradition of healing activity is derived from the Rule of Saint Benedict. “Chapter RB 36, 1 states that «care for the sick is before and above all other duties». While up to then only those who had been educated received medical care, the monks treated the Christian Caritas as an aid to all those in need – including the homeless and the poor. The monks of Andechs refer to the medical care the traces of which are present in the famous plan of monastery of St. Gall (Swiss) as well as in the monastery of the isle Reichenau and, above all, in the writings of Saint Hildegard of Bingen. The plants growing in this garden are taken from the list coming from the 15th century from the Andechs pharmacy. “This historical document of the pharmacy from the 15th century provides an overview of the medicine of the Late Medieval and belongs to a collective handwriting, a description of diseases, medicinal prescriptions and herbs of herbs.” From 1763 till 1811 the monastery run its own pharmacy. The building still exists, parts of the pharmacy facility are in the holdings of the German Museum in Munich. “The plants are marked with signs on the beds. A system based on individual organs provides information on the fields of application of medicinal plants. The herb garden is operated without the use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides according to the guidelines of organic farming. In the summer of 2016 the Andechs herb garden has moved to the sculpture park of the monastery.

³¹ <http://andechs.de/index.php?id=1570&key=0>.

Many different healing and spice plants can now be experienced directly in several bays.”³²

In Gut Aich the garden has an explicit spiritual meaning. It helps to integrate personal healing and nature:

“The herbal medicine is only a small part of the so-called «monastic cure», which wants a comprehensive holistic treatment of body and soul. Nevertheless, the herbs are important and helpful.

In the monasteries healing herbs have always been cultivated and used for the sick brothers and sisters, but also for the people outside the monastery. As a rule, the herbs relieved the pain but the healing changes in the patient’s life had not yet been achieved. If a physical or mental disorder arose and made man sick, then this was a case in the broad sense of the term for the holistic cure of the cloister, which went far beyond the herbal treatment.

Not only a healing herb makes people healthy but also their return to a balanced life rhythm. This includes the realization that one has to change something in life – the broken disease was merely a signal which indicated the disorder and a healing herb could give strength for comprehensive recovery.”³³

“If possible, the monastery should be designed in such a way that everything necessary, namely, water, mill and garden, is within the convent, and the various kinds of craftsmanship can be exercised there” (RB 66, 6).

So the different forms of healing garden are at the heart of ecology and ecological hospitality of monastery in Gut Aich. Here is the short characteristics of available objects: “1.«Hortus Conclusus» – a classical, enclosed monastery garden with work and training rooms; 2. Natural herb garden with focus on wild herbs Meadows /Forests /Alm.”

The gardens enable: A new impetus for creativity, a combination of new and old through innovations, enculturation, openness for inspiration with spirit and joy. Most of medicinal plants in Gut Aich are enculturated migrants. The garden is a pedagogical impulse, conscious

³² <http://andechs.de/de/kirche-amp-kloster/kraeutergarten/>.

³³ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/heilkraeuter-u-naturerfahrung>.

perception with all senses / mindfulness training, unfolding of individual abilities, such as: learning from the traditions of different cultures for the future, perceiving the garden as a therapeutic possibility, joy of growing and becoming in nature through common learning and working, encouraging creativity in cultivation and processing herbs, communication of culturally basic social competencies, learning and expansion of intercultural competence. So, as the motto, the monks of Gut Aich put the phrase: “If you want to know God, you must go into the garden. In the Europakloster Gut Aich there are three herbal gardens, still requiring special care: the herb garden (since 1993), Hildegard herb garden (since 1996), Liqueur herb garden (since 2004).”³⁴

In Gut Aich the healing through herbs is presented as a pillar of monastic medical care. Since the founding of the monastery Gut Aich in 1993, the monks have been striving with great internal commitment to the cultivation and processing of medicinal herbs. As an integral part of “monastic healing”, herbal medicine is a vital pillar for a comprehensive holistic treatment of body and soul. For the monks, medicinal herbs are gifts of life, of creation and of the Creator, and are cultivated, healed, collected and processed into salutary treasures when cultivated with reverence and love. In the salutary encounter with nature, the monks teach people to deal with the primordial and primordial forces of creation in a very sensitive way. The plants absorb the well balanced natural elements of nature and pass them on to humans as a remedy. In the conscious handling and access to nature, man can learn to remain or be healthy in body and soul. In the sense of Benedictine spirituality, the monks want to convey to their visitors the possibility that a person or an organism can easily find a better life by observing the orderly principles of creation. Medicinal herbs can provide the power to perform healing changes and to bring back to the balanced rhythm of life. The spiritual predecessors of the Benedictine community of Gut Aich, the Franciscans of Au am Inn, have laid out the gardens about 50 years ago. They have never used artificial fertilizers in these gardens, but only natural fertilizers, because they were convinced by their own fertilizer and

³⁴ <https://www.europakloster.com/garten-forst/>.

“artificial fertilizer” could not afford. This tradition was continued by the Benedictine monks. Only self-made composters are used as fertilizer.³⁵

The way of gardening has also an integrated character, involving different people and activating different aspects of the garden:

“Herbs have never been used in herbicides or snuffing agents. The control of snails is carried out. The elevation of the monastery gardens of Gut Aich (600 m) and the monastery alms (up to 1,600 m) are ideal for the cultivation and the prosperity of the herbs. Cultivation, care, collection and processing of the herbs is accomplished by monks, volunteers and the family of the monastery. It is important with what inner attitude people deal with these herbs.

All herbs and gardens are always blessed. The blessing of the herbs and herbal gardens is not only a good, Benedictine tradition, but it encounters us in all the monastic traditions of world religions, e.g. Also in Tibet and India.

The herbs are cleaned immediately after the harvest and blessed once again, before they are hand-processed. This is a very great internal and external effort. That is why the herbal liqueurs from the monastery Gut Aich are also so precious.

The monks of the monastery Gut Aich stand in the tradition of the Benedictine Order, which for 1500 years has had experience with the cultivation, processing and application of medicinal herbs and storing them to a balanced lifestyle.”³⁶

Finally different therapeutic activities are offered. Firstly the work with body:

“In the concept of European monastic healing, man is seen as a whole. Body, mind, and soul are related and cannot be separated. Therefore, all concepts and methods of movement, which are applied, are also subject to the holistic view in scientific investigations. As every impulse of the mind and of the soul in the positive as in the negative acts upon the

³⁵ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/heilkraeuter-u-naturerfahrung/kraeuterheilkunde>.

³⁶ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/heilkraeuter-u-naturerfahrung/kraeutergaerten>.

body, every impulse of the body acts upon the soul and the spirit. Healing impulses can therefore also be placed over the body through breathing and movement. Body, mind, and soul are in harmony when all the exercises, whether resting, moving, or breathing, are performed with the utmost mindfulness and awareness. This is why body and movement concepts are applied, which place mindfulness and awareness in the center of practice.

These include: yoga, circles in fields, meditative dance, expressive dance.”³⁷

There are also other forms of therapy:

“The Hildegard Center is an outpatient center for physiotherapy, psychotherapy and massage. The curative activity in the Hildegard Center is based on Benedictine hospitality, on the healing task of the gospel, and the conviction that man strives for a unity between body, soul and spirit.

For all patients and visitors, the Hildegard Center offers competent treatments in the area of massage, physiotherapy and psychotherapy to promote the healing process and to maintain health.

Throughout the year fasting, silence and health seminars are offered. In addition there are retreat weeks, «Days in the monastery» and the offer «Monastery on time». A special facility is the opportunity to live as a «monk on time».

In cooperation with the University of Salzburg, the results of the treatments were and are evaluated.”³⁸

This offer is enriched by the massages and special treatments against burn-out and stress.

Conclusion

These three monasteries, despite of differences in their profiles, represent a conscious, creative and socially oriented ecologic sensitivity and praxis. Depending on its historical and economic background, each

³⁷ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/leibarbeit-u-bewegung>.

³⁸ <http://www.klosterheilkunde.com/index.php/therapie>.

of them has developed its specific branch of production and service (beer, food, healing therapy). In parallel with this production – but also “around it” – each of these monasteries managed to develop its specific ecologic discourse and project. Generally speaking, these programs cover three main fields: self-sufficiency, energy saving and herb gardens. They interlace one with another, creating space for pastoral and spiritual activity. All this only proves monastic values, giving them a witness at various levels. This is an example of integral ecologic sensitivity which inserts a monastery in a network of larger economic and energetic interaction – as a very clear, constructive and responsible contribution of ecclesiastical institutions to the research of solutions helping to diminish the global concern for environment.

These cases are only a sample of other, more or less developed ecologic practices of Benedictine monasteries. It would be very helpful not only to make them more known but to use them as inspiration to enlarge the Church response for the Pope Francis’ appeal issued in his encyclical *Laudato si’*. The ecological activity of Benedictine monasteries is nothing else but an integral ecology, mentioned by the pope in Chapter Four of this encyclical,³⁹ taking into consideration the interconnectedness of all aspects of our activities. Benedictine care for every single human being (like guests or pilgrims) and for relationships between as a way for salvation lived in harmony with nature make the Christian spirituality discretely and efficiently incarnated. Human microcosm resonates here with the whole universe in and through Christ. In this context being a monk appears as universal archetype, to use the expression of Raimundo Panikkar⁴⁰ and may be a sign for a new world of people reconciled – first with God, than with themselves so that, finally, regain the harmony with nature.

³⁹ Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, 134.

⁴⁰ R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity. The Monk as Universal Archetype*, New York 1982, p. 5–10.

Summary

Ecological responsibility of Benedictine monasteries: a study of three cases (Plankstetten, Andechs and Gut Aich)

This paper presents the practical contribution of three Benedictine monasteries to an integrated ecology, strongly recommended in pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'*. Based mainly on the materials inserted on the websites of these monasteries, a particular and important connection is observed between modern, ecological solutions and pastoral activities. Everything arises from the balanced Benedictine spirituality, where liturgy and communal life are integrated through personal prayer and reading of the Bible. After considering the motivations presented by these three monasteries for their ecological accomplishments, the specific domains are examined, such as self-sufficiency, energy and gardens.

Keywords: Benedictines, ecology, economy, energy, spirituality

Ekologiczna odpowiedzialność klasztorów benedyktyńskich: studium trzech przypadków (Plankstetten, Andechs i Gut Aich)

Artykuł prezentuje praktyczny wkład trzech benedyktyńskich klasztorów w zintegrowaną ekologię, propagowaną przez Franciszka w encyklice *Laudato si'*. Bazując głównie na materiałach zawartych na stronach internetowych tych klasztorów, można zaobserwować szczególnie i ważny związek między współczesnymi rozwiązaniami ekologicznymi a działalnością duszpasterską. Wszystko to wynika ze zrównoważonej benedyktyńskiej duchowości, w której liturgia i życie wspólnotowe łączą się poprzez osobistą modlitwę i czytanie Biblii. Po rozważeniu motywacji poszczególnych klasztorów do ich działań ekologicznych rozpatrzono konkretne ich dziedziny, takie jak samowystarczalność, energię i ogrodnictwo.

Słowa kluczowe: benedyktyni, ekologia, ekonomia, energia, duchowość

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