

The Canons Regular: St Norbert and the Premonstratensians¹

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Abstract

This year is the 900th anniversary of the founding of the Norbertines or Premonstratensians or White Canons, the fifth oldest surviving Order in the Catholic Church. The foundation aimed to bring about renewal among the clergy by bridging the gap between monastic life and clerical life. In this article, an attempt is made to make known to the Christian world the unique role played by the Norbertines in reforming the Church at a crucial time in the history of the Church and their relevance even today. Canons Regular was connected with the intense religious growth of the age. The compelling force behind the foundation of the Premonstratensians was to reform and educate the diocesan clergy and to introduce common life among them. The Premonstratensians introduced a new form of spirituality to the people and they worked under a Rule. The article concludes with an appeal to the Norbertines in India to get involved in the renewal of the Indian Church through new initiatives.

Keywords: Premonstratensians, Canons Regular, Norbert, Augustinian Rule, Canon, Cistercians

Introduction

The Canons Regular was a reform attempt in Europe during the Medieval time among the diocesan clergy focusing on community life

¹ Norbertines, Premonstratensians, White Canons are the names used to refer the followers of St Norbert. Premonstratensians refer to Prémontré, the Mother Abbey of the Norbertines and the members of the Prémontré community all over the world; Cf. also, [http:// www.Prémontré.org/](http://www.Prémontré.org/)

and care of the souls. Three evils which the Medieval Church had to face were simony, nicolaitism, and lay investiture, the first being the buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices, the second laxity in the practice of chastity, and the third undue interference of the feudal and secular lords in the daily life and administration of the monasteries and dioceses. With the Cluny movement (910) the reform attempts were inaugurated and the practice of proprietary churches and proprietary monasteries were checked and controlled and with the reform efforts of Gregory VII and his successors' canonical election of the ecclesiastical offices was guaranteed, especially with the Concordat of Worms in 1122. Almost one year before the Concordat of Worms, on Christmas 1121, St Norbert and his companions took religious profession, and thus a new chapter in the reform history of the Medieval Church was inaugurated. The Norbertines, Premonstratensians, or White Canons, are the fifth oldest surviving Order in the Catholic Church and were founded to bring about renewal in the clergy by bridging the gap between monastic life and clerical life. This year being the nine hundredth year of the foundation of the Norbertines, a humble attempt is made here to make known to the Christian world the unique role of the Norbertines in reforming the Church at a crucial time in the history of the Church and its relevance even today.

The Canons Regular

The Canons Regular (Jedin, 1980) is the result of the reform of the diocesan clergy in the Middle Ages. Originally, they were attached to large urban churches, who from the close of the fourth century began to lead a common life under the influence of monastic ideals. St Augustine (+430) was a great champion of the reform of the clergy and he promoted community life among the diocesan clergy and the notion of a community of clerics already obtained a stable form with St Eusebius of Vercelli (+371) and St Augustine. The name Canon (Ardura, 2002) appears in the sixth century and becomes very frequent in the seventh century. It refers to those clerics whose names are written in the "Canon," that is, the official list of clerics serving a church under the supervision of the bishop. They were called Canons as they were priests ascribed to a diocese, lived according to the canons, distinct from the clergy who were part of a private church or proprietary church of the feudal lords. They were known as Regular as they lived a common life according to a rule. *Canonici regulares* are distinct from the more numerous *canonici saeculares*, secular clerics.

The first organized known community life among the diocesan clergy in France goes back to the sixth century. The term *Clerici Canonici* came into use in the West to denote the bishop's clergy, and it was slowly applied to the members of the communities now arising, the Canons (Jedin, 1980). Bishop Chrodegang of Metz (+766), one of the disciples of Boniface, composed rules for Canons and thus helped the canonical institution to take a proper direction and this was the first rule for the Canons. Thus, among the noteworthy attempts (Sheldon, 1994) to give the clergy, a better education and discipline was that which was embodied in the canonical institutes of Chrodegang of Metz. To secure a better oversight and training for his clergy, he conceived the plan of gathering them into a kind of college, where they should live as a fraternity with common interests, and under a uniform system of rules. The Augustinian Rule which was adopted differed little from those which governed Benedictine monasteries, except that a strict renunciation of private property was not required. However, more importance was given to the pastoral needs of the people around them. The reform scheme of Chrodegang was copied in various quarters.

Charles the Great (+814) encouraged the new way of life instituted by Bishop St Chrodegang. He established the custom that, in the larger churches, which were served by a number of priests, the clergy should live a life in common under a rule. They gave up their private property and they assisted as a body at the daily church offices. The rule made provision for systematic study, and it provided for a public correction of faults. By means of the reform legislation of Louis the Pious (+840), the *vita canonica* was separated once for all from the *vita monastica* and the details were worked out in the Synod of Aachen in 816 and a new rule was published in 817 and under its influence Cathedral or Collegial Chapters developed. This rule did not demand the total renunciation of the goods of this world. Unlike monks, Canons "disregard the world, without having renounced it." As clerics, they exercised their ministry in the world, in the service of souls. The concession of private ownership did not please all who attended the Synod.

In the tenth century, the canonical institutes themselves became subject to great abuses. An attempt in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to effect a reform by excluding private property gave rise to a new order of canons, who, in distinction from the old, were called *Canons Regular*. With this the Church reformers of the Middle Ages wanted to re-establish a link with the early Church to reinforce the reform ideas and wished to accept fully "those practices the Church had known in its beginnings."

As part of the Gregorian Reformation, the Roman Synod of 1059 under Pope Nicholas II (+1061), ordered the *vita communis et apostolica* for clerics of the same church, thereby fostering the movement of the Canons Regular (Jedin, 1980, p. 363). This began in many cathedrals, community life of the clergy who participated three times in common prayers and took a keen interest in the care of the souls. The priests who accepted this type of life were called Canons Regular. Canons Regular was an attempt to go back to the original *ecclesia apostolica et evangelica*. Peter Damian (+1072), one of the promoters of the Gregorian Reformation, desired that all clergy would become monks. Although the desire was ideal and very high, he could realize something substantial with the Canons Regular in the direction of the reform of the clergy. In fact, a great number of clergy opted for this new initiative. Since the Canons Regular were very much involved in pastoral care, they preferred the rule of St Augustine, not the Benedictine rule.

Although the origin of Canons is a cloudy part of history, Pope Urban II (1088-1099) considered the life of the Canons to be as authentically rooted in primitive Christianity. The Cluniac Pope Urban II assured the Canons Regular their due place in the Church by placing their ideal of the *vita apostolica* on par with the monastic ideal of perfection and forbade the Canon Regular from entering a monastery without the permission of his community and his provost (Jedin, 1980, p.389).

The Canons Regular was connected with the intense religious growth of the period, and it gave stability to what was best in the eremitical movement. There were various groups of Canons Regular and therefore differed considerably from each other in their personnel and recruitment. Except for the observance of the Rule of St Augustine, there was no juridical connection between the various foundations, which carried out diversified ministries. The commandments of the Canons Regular include apostolic life in the sense of living in community and renouncing all private property (Leclercq, 196, p. 1388). "By adding to the celibacy common to all priests the further obligations of poverty and obedience, the Canons Regular bring the institution of the priesthood to its perfection" (Leclercq, 1968, p. 139). The Canons, in their way of life in which the care of the souls takes a greater place, also harmonize the contemplative life.

Canons Regular (Pelliccia&Rocca, 1975) are by nature clergy, who participate in the priesthood of Christ; they lead a community life or a society of the common life to serve the people of God for the building up

of the Body of Christ, which is Church. They are attached to a prominent church or cathedral or collegiate church that have their intimate commitment to bishop or diocese and actively participate in the regular prayers of the church (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2003). The Rule of St Augustine became the basis for the life of the Canons Regular and they themselves were recognized as religious but distinct from monks (Aumann, 1985).

We do not have much details about the original spirit of the Canons Regular. However, Pope Urban II (1088-1099) gives some idea about the Canons Regular. According to him, “the Canons had revived a neglected primitive tradition of the Church – a tradition in which practical service had a dominant place – and had restored a balance which the overwhelming success of Benedictine monasticism in the preceding centuries had destroyed” (Southern, 1970). The Canons gave a new turn to the tradition of organized religion by living under a modest Rule and by performing modest services for men of moderate means and moderate needs. One of the best examples is to be found in the South of France near Avignon. Here the Augustinian abbey of St Ruf had become very famous by the end of the eleventh century.

The Canons Regular was really a hybrid order of clerical monks. Pope Gregory VII argued for the common life of the clerics based upon the renunciation of personal property after the example of the primitive Church. According to Peter Damian “the call to renounce private possessions and embrace a fully communal life was evangelical, and therefore obligatory upon all clergy serving cathedral and collegiate churches, as opposed to the rural clergy for whom it was impracticable” (Lawrence, 1991). The Rule of Augustine provided the formal basis for three major institutions – the Canons Regular, the Order of Prémontré, and the Dominicans or the Order of Preachers. Pastoral ministry and care of the soul were given due importance in the new dispensation.

Canons Regular of St Augustine

Augustinian Canons or Regular Canons were not strictly a monastic order, “but were groups of ordained clergy who wished to live a common life of poverty, celibacy, and obedience to a superior, without withdrawal from the world” (Walker, 1997). It was an attempt to restore the apostolic life of pastoral service to the world. Compared to the traditional monastic orders, Canons Regular had their rules sufficiently flexible to keep them in touch with the practical needs of medieval society.

The Augustinians (Schaffe, 1988) were a distinct family from the Benedictines, followed the so-called Rule of St Augustine, and were divided into the Canons Regular of St Augustine and the mendicant friars of St Augustine. Canons Regular occupied a position between strict monastic existence and independent clerical life. The various church services, as, for example, the service of song, the obligation of celibacy, encouraged or demanded a plurality of clergymen for a church. Moved by the strong impulse in the direction of conventual communities, these groups inclined to the communal life and sought some common rule of discipline.

Canons of St Victor

As mentioned above, there were different groups of Canons Regular. With the Canons of St Victor, the trend was in a different direction from that of the Premonstratensians, about whom we mention later. Although the Canons of St Victor remained in the monastic tradition and followed the Rule of St Augustine, the Victorines concentrated their efforts to a large extent on intellectual pursuits, thus contributing to the development of Scholasticism. William of Champeaux (+1122), professor at the school of Notre Dame in Paris, who in 1108 retired to a hermitage near Paris with some disciples. In 1113 the group adopted the Rule of St Augustine and soon the monastery of St Victor became an outstanding theological center and enjoyed tremendous growth as a congregation of Canons Regular. The intellectual contributions of the members of St Victor are unparalleled. Some members even had a great influence on the early Franciscans like St Bonaventure and St Antony of Padua.

Canoness

Since titular “Canon” involves all clergy, including minor orders, cloistered within a single house, the feminine usage Canoness covers all members of a corresponding community of women living under a rule, although not necessarily under a perpetual vow. For all practical purposes, there is a little distinction from the designation “nun.”

Background of the Foundation of the Premonstratensians

Although the immediate historical background is already narrated in the context of the formation of the Canons Regular, here I mention a few more factors that led to the foundation of the Premonstratensians. In medieval Europe, one cannot speak about the scarcity of clergy and they were plenty in number. However, their intellectual training was very poor and one out of a hundred might have visited regular schools. Some studied

by themselves and some did no study anything. Many were chaplains of the feudal lords and they were satisfied with saying masses for their feudal lords. Compared to the secular clergy the monks were better trained and well accepted in the society. The central theme of the reform of the 11th century was to improve the quality of the secular clergy and focus on the care of the souls. The reformers had before them the only possibility of reforming the secular clergy was to introduce common life among the clergy with the observance of evangelical councils. This was the compelling force behind St Norbert in the establishment of the Premonstratensians (Southern, 1970).

Many clergymen of the Middle Ages (Dowley, 1990) recognized the need to bring a new form of spirituality to the people and found a method that would enable them to work in the world but at the same time live under a spiritual rule. A group of the clergy would live together under a strict rule but go out to work among the ordinary population. Among the orders that operated in this fashion are the Premonstratensians, who had a rule resembling the Cistercians, and the Augustinians or Austin monks, who used the Rule of Augustine. They followed as much of the monastic life as was possible while carrying out their duties of preaching and teaching in the world.

During the High Middle Ages, the religious fervour and ascetical spirit were reflected in the secular clergy, and many who were attached to the cathedrals opted for community life (*vita communis*). Many reformers like Hildebrand (later Pope Gregory VII), Peter Damian, encouraged the movement and spread rapidly. Many adopted a monastic rule and thus secular canons became Regular Canons (*canonicisaeculares* and *canoniciregulares*). Many embraced the so-called Rule of St Augustine and those who followed this rule came to be called *Augustinians* or *Augustinian Canons*. In the beginning, there was no union between the various houses. But slowly these houses were united into congregations and became a great support to the Gregorian Reformation. “It (the Canon movement) expressed a new view of the priesthood, and exerted a salutary influence on the spiritual life of clergy and people; but its most valuable contribution to the Church was the systematization of parish work and the care of the souls” (Bihlmeyer-Tuechle, p.223). This was the spiritual and ecclesial dimension of the foundation of the Premonstratensians. It was in this context St Norbert founded the canonical community of Prémontré with the motto: *solo Christo duce* – Christ alone as a guide.

Premonstratensians

The various monasteries of the Canons Regular were organized into congregations, either by affiliation to some already existing house or by new foundations. Hence came into being the congregations of Saint-Quentin, Beauvais, Rottenbuch, Saint-Ruf, and others. Sometimes groups of these Canons joined together in something very much like a religious order. The best known of this type of organization that of Premonstratensians, and they played a great role in raising the spiritual level of the clergy in the twelfth century. Canons strongly proclaim that two elements inherent in every search for perfection are solitude and the love of the brethren (Lawrence, 1991, p. 141).

St Norbert of Xanten (Hughes, 1985), born in 1080, in Germany, was leading a life of a worldly noble at the imperial court and *canonicus saecularis* of the diocese of Cologne. In 1115 he retired to solitude to lead a life of prayer and austerity and took a strong decision to renounce the world and to lead a life of penance and became a reformer. For the next three years, he opted for solitude and was preparing himself for the life of preaching which he discerned as his special call. He met with opposition and in 1118 he was condemned for preaching without proper authorization. It was a turning point in the life of Norbert who decided to dedicate himself to ceaseless preaching (Aumann, 1985, pp.114-122). He shared his property with the poor and left for France. Pope Gelasius II (+1119) sanctioned his way of life and gave him the license to preach and he identified his vocation to lead an austere and poor life. Norbert then travelled about in Germany and France as a preacher of repentance, calling the people together by a sheep's bell. With others like-minded with himself he settled, in 1119, in the woods of Coucy, near Laon, France, giving the spot the name of Premonstratum, or Prémontré, the designated field, with reference to his having been directed to it by a higher power.

St Norbert who possessed an outstanding personality organized the Canons Regular who followed the Rule of St Augustine and founded the first such monastery at Prémontré in France. On Christmas Day, 1121, after spending a year in prayer and meditation, Norbert and his thirteen companions made their first profession of vows, thus founding the Canons Regular of Prémontré, also known as the Premonstratenians or Norbertnes. Norbert held up the example of the first Christians gathered around Mary, whose community life, as described in Acts 2, 42-47, was marked by the power of the Spirit, the sharing of all things and

the desire to serve others: “Ever Ancient, Ever New.” The Order secured papal sanction in 1126, and received, like other orders, special papal privileges. Norbert wanted the Prémontré community as a Jerusalem community where a multitude of believers gathered around the apostles. St Norbert and his first companions had an ideal, the apostolic community of Jerusalem; a stimulus, the Gregorian movement; and a Rule, that of St Augustine (Ardura, 2002, p. 147).

Prémontré and the numerous houses which in imitation of it now began to be founded, were not monasteries: they were houses where lived in common observance the Canons who served the churches attached to them. The movement that began at Prémontré was to introduce into the lives of clergy something of the systematic asceticism which, from the beginning, had been of the very essence of monasticism.

By founding this monastery after the model of traditional abbey Norbert brought stability to the institutes of Canons Regular with sufficient flexibility for the pastoral care (Lawrence, 1991, pp. 169-172). “An unconditioned devotion to religion, coupled with the charism of impassioned preaching, a will keenly intent on a goal, and intimate relations with nobles, princesses, Emperors, and Popes provided Norbert with an uncommonly powerful influence” (Jedin, 1980, p. 464). St Norbert continued his active itinerant apostolate as a preacher.

In 1126, St Norbert was forced to become the Archbishop of Magdeburg. With Norbert there went to Magdeburg his own Premonstratensians, and the city once more became a centre of missionary activity. New foundations were established in Germany, Poland, and Scandinavia, where Norbertines must be counted as one of the main forces of social development and civilization together with spiritual renewal. Contrary to the existing practice of wearing black habit, Norbert opted for white habit and thus they are known as White Canons. Their habit was bleached wool. Till his death in 1134, Norbert was increasingly absorbed in the creation of missionary communities in the Slav lands. For Norbert *vita apostolica* meant a combination of community life organized around the ideal of ascetical poverty with the active role of a missionary preacher. Norbert was canonized in 1582. Peter the Venerable and Bernard of Clairvaux praised the Order and Norbert himself as a man who stood near to God.

The original vision of Norbert was to found an active preaching Order, combining a life of apostolic poverty with a pastoral role. His conversion of the chapter of Magdeburg into a body of Premonstratensian Canons

with pastoral responsibilities inspired a similar change in the Cathedral Chapters of Brandenburg and Havelberg and led to a succession of German Premonstratensian bishops.

So long as Norbert lived, his personal influence and example sufficed for a rule. A rule was compiled by Blessed Hugh of Fosses, the successor of St Norbert, where the itinerant preaching did not find a proper place. The rule's basis was the so-called rule of St Augustine and borrowed many elements from St Benedict, and St Victor at Paris. In its organization, the Order had much in common with the Cistercians. Each house was ruled by an abbot whom the canons of the house elected, under the supervision of the abbot of the house whence the electing house was first founded. The abbot's powers were very wide, but he was subject to visitation from the Abbot of Prémontré or his deputy and subject also to the General Chapter. It was the abbot who named all the officials of his abbey, the Prior, sub-Prior, and, a particular invention of Prémontré, the Circator- an official charged to watch over the general observance of the rule. In the order, the Abbot of Prémontré was a great figure and he was a kind of primate.

“It seems that Norbert's conception of the apostolic life laid particular stress on preaching, pastoral activity, and evangelization. But the statutes of Hugh de Fosses, which drew upon both the Cistercian *Carta Caritatis* and the customs of Cluny, slanted the order decisively towards the more enclosed type of contemplative life that was the feature of the reformed monasticism of the twelfth century” (Lawrence, 1991, p. 170). In fact, the first Statutes of the Order never made any reference to the ministry outside of the abbey. Norbert being a great admirer of St Bernard might have influenced the legislators to borrow many of the organizational features of the Cistercians, but the Premonstratensians had adopted the customs and practices of other communities of Canons Regular, for example, in Oigny, in Arrouaise (France) or in Springiersbach (Germany). Like the Cistercians the Norbertines developed the practice of summoning all abbots to an annual general chapter held at Prémontré. Different from Cistercians, the Premonstratensians did not adopt the system of affiliation between a mother abbey and a daughter abbey, but selected a system of regional meetings or assembly called *circary*. The presence of lay brothers or *conversi* was a practice among the Norbertines.

The legislations of the chapters of 1131-1135 set the order on a different course, in which it modelled itself increasingly on Cistercian practice and this led a tension in the community and eventually led to a division.

“The full realization of Norbert’s vision of a canonical order following a monastic regime, but committed to an active missionary understanding of the *vita apostolica*, had to await the coming of the Dominican friars in the thirteenth century” (Lawrence, 1991, p. 172).

Anyhow, “It answered to a practical need of the day. In the time of Hugh of Fosses alone, two hundred abbeys were founded, and by the end of the century there were thousands of these white canons serving parishes on all the marches of Christendom” (Hughes, 1985, p.265). Norbert and the Gregorian reformers had but one aim, to reform the Church, and to accomplish this they opted for reform of the clergy and the Premonstratensian abbey became the first seminary for the training of a parochial clergy and they soon spread to almost every country in Europe.

There was an insistence on basic education to be part of the Prémontré tradition. Further, a knowledge of Grammar and Latin is required before he can be clothed, and progress in knowledge is made a condition of ordination. Each house has its librarian and, from the beginning, there are instituted definite courses of study.

The almost incredible number of one thousand houses is claimed for this Order in its flourishing period. There was also a flowering of female monasteries, each one being associated with a male abbey, which is said to have numbered ten thousand women during Norbert’s lifetime. Thus, Prémontré continued to grow after 1121 in the form of the double abbey, with its community of canons, its lay brothers, and its community of sisters. Hugh of Fosses was the real organizer. After the death of St Norbert in 1134, the women monasteries got separated and they had to adopt an internal structure similar to that of the men’s communities. “Historically, the spirituality of the twelfth-thirteenth century by Norbertines represented a transition between the old spirit of Benedictine monasticism and the ideal of the mendicant orders” (Ardura, 2002, p. 145). A man of prayer is not asleep; he lives in a state of alertness. To perceive the inner call of grace, he shuts himself in the cloister with his brothers, keeping himself “ready for every good work.”

St Norbert was a forerunner of the mendicant orders of the thirteenth century as he did to establish a religious order that would combine the monastic observances with the priestly ministry. It is visible from the apostolate and strict observance of poverty. Although the Norbertines faithfully observed the Rule of St Augustine, the *Statutes of Prémontré* were observed differently according to the regions, either in France, or in the German Empire, or in England or in the Central European Countries, or in

the Middle East. The course of history and the events that followed explain that this diversification was for the realization of the Norbertinecharism. But eventually the Premonstratensians tipped the balance in favour of the apostolate and priestly ministry.

Norbertine Abbeys, priories and convents have been established throughout the world in Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, England, Scotland, Denmark, Canada, Brazil, Chile, South Africa, Australia, India, Peru, Zaire, and the United States. At the dawn of the year 2000, the Order of Prémontré is present in five continents and still continues the work begun by St Norbert. The abbeys resembled the ancient monasticism in their internal regime, but also in the kind of sites where they chose to settle: they tended to gravitate to waste upland areas, which were suitable mainly for sheep farming (Lawrence, 1991, p. 171)but also pisciculture, vineyards, maintenance forest, construction of canals to take water to the fields or for feeding the watermills, as attested, for example, the *Cartularium*² of the abbey of Prémontré. The Norbertine Order aims at the practice of the Love of God and neighbour through the solemn celebration of the Liturgy, recitation of the Divine Office in common and by engaging in parochial, educational, developmental, and social activities.

Political events caused serious setbacks to this Order. Norbertines underwent a serious crisis in Europe due to secularization and even the monastery at Prémontré was closed down. The situation of the Norbertine abbeys in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania were, in many ways, like that of the French Abbeys during the French Revolution. Confiscation of goods, imprisonment, torture, execution of religious, repression, isolation, and the banning of all apostolates, - this was the fate shared by hundreds of religious during the Communist regime. Several abbeys once existing behind the Iron Curtain were physically suppressed by the Communist governments. Today those properties are being returned to the Order and the Norbertine presence is being felt in those territories once again.

Norbertines also produced many scientists like Francis Placet, John Zahn, John Charton, Gaspar Mohr, are some examples. The saints and writers of Prémontré give a complete picture of its ideal both by their example and by their writings. Garenbert, a hermit and a layman

² A *Cartularium* Cartulary or Chartulary or is a medieval manuscript volume or roll containing transcriptions of original documents relating to the foundation, privileges and legal rights of ecclesiastical establishments, municipal corporations, industrial associations, institutes of learning and private families.

became the father of a community of canons and founded a monastery of nuns. The theological contributions of the Norbertines are great. Vivien wrote a treatise on *The Harmony between Grace and Free Will*, Blessed Herman Joseph, wrote poems in honour of our Lady. Philip de Harvengt wrote *A Treatise on the Formation of the Clergy*. He reminds the clergy how great is their dignity and what duties it brings with it. “The characteristics of Norbertine spirituality can best be seen in relation to the whole movement from which it sprang. It arose as the result of the monastic crisis. It was eremitical in the sense that the word often had at the time, that is, a life lived in common but in solitude and far from the towns” (Lawrence, 1991, p. 148).

The first sign of reform in the Order of Prémontré appeared in the abbey of Notre Dame of Magdeburg in the mid-fifteenth century. With the promulgation of the 1505 Statutes, “all the relaxations that entered the Norbertine abbeys in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries would have the force of law” (Lawrence, 1991, p. 160). Such was the situation of the Norbertines like many other religious orders on the eve of the Protestant Reformation. The system of *commendam* also adversely affected the spiritual life of the Norbertines. The original spirit of *commendam* allowed a cleric, whether he had the care of souls or not, to devote himself to his job, concerned only with doing his duty and free from all material concerns. For clerics who were officials of the Roman Curia and not paid for this work, benefices received in *commendam* were their source of income. But this was hijacked by influential families. They kept key ecclesiastical functions for themselves and quickly saw them as a way to get rich at little cost and with no risk. The *commendam* struck a blow at many dioceses and abbeys, not only by depriving them of a suitable titular, but by handing over their income to commendatories who were most of the time utterly uninvolved in their spiritual interests. Thus, *commendam* was one of the wounds of the Order of Prémontré. Its damaging effects made themselves felt from the fifteenth until the beginning of the eighteenth century (Lawrence, 1991, p. 163).

Structure

As each abbey or priory is autonomous, practices and apostolates differ; some are contemplative at the same time others are highly active in pastoral ministry. However, each is guided by the Rule of St Augustine as well the Constitutions established by the General Chapter which is held every six years. The head of the Order, Abbot General, is assisted

by the Definitions as well commissions established by various aspects of the Order's life.

Order Governance

Governance for Premonstatensians has to be understood both locally and globally. By locally, we understand governance within individual abbeys and independent priories. These are relatively autonomous. On a day to day basis, the governance rests with the abbot, or Prior de Regimine (Prior of an independent house) and his council. Prior, Abbot's Vicar and Treasurer are important offices. The elected members are chosen by all the solemnly professed members of a canonry gathered in Chapter. An Abbot is elected at a canonry chapter which fixes the term of office which is from a minimum nine or to life with an age limit fixed by the Chapter before each election. Globally there is Abbot General elected by the General Chapter assisted by four definitions. Circary is the term used for various representing regions.

Church in Need

A passing mention must be made about the Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), a Pontifical Foundation of the Catholic Church, founded in 1947 by Fr. Werenfried van Straaten (1913-2003), a Norbertine from Amsterdam, Netherlands. ACN is a funding agency of international status and the main thrust was to help the people in the Eastern Block, behind the Iron Curtain, who were adversely affected by the Second World War. The founder aimed to reawaken the Christian charity in the context of the Second World War. It also extends its support to the churches belonging to the Oriental or Eastern tradition. Pope John Paul II in 2003 honoured Werenfried (meaning, warrior for peace) with the title "Outstanding Apostle of Charity."

Premonstratensians in India

India, the land of monks and rich religious traditions had to wait for eight hundred years after the foundation of the Premonstratensians for their presence in India. The first three Norbertines arrived on Indian soil in 1923 as missionaries from the Abbey of Berne, Netherlands. Their field of activity was located in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. In 1929 they took up Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh in Central India for their apostolate. They concentrated mainly on the development of the people of Mandla District, through pastoral, educational, and health care activities. Rt.Rev. Dr.ConradDubbleman, O.Praem became the first bishop of Jabalpur in 1954. St Norbert Priory, the first house of the Norbertine Order in India,

was started at Jamtara, in the suburbs of Jabalpur. It was raised to the status of Sub-Canonry on July 31, 1976 and declared as an autonomous Canonry on February 15, 1984. Rev. Abbot Marcus Champia O. Praem is the fourth Abbot. The members are engaged in various activities, pastoral, educational, and social and they are present in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

It was in the year 1978, under the initiative of Abbot Wolfgang Boehm from Villingen in Germany, came to Mananthavady, Kerala, with the help of Bishop Jacob Thhonkuzhy, then bishop of Mananthavady. The new community in Mananthavady sprouted and grew rapidly under the care and concern of Abbot Wolfgang. The new foundation at Mananthavady was officially recognized as an autonomous Canonry of the Order on November 20, 2007. Fr. Vincent Mattammel is the present Prelate. Today the Canonry has 71 final professed members, 26 juniors, 14 novices, and 56 candidates in the minor seminary. Their pastoral, educational, and social commitments in the different parts of India, especially in Karnataka and Kerala are praiseworthy.

Norbertines in India cut a public figure in Bengaluru through the activities of Empowerment of Children and Human Rights Organization (ECHO) which was founded in 2000 by Rev. Dr. Sebastian O. Praem., advocate, a member of the Mananthavady Priory. ECHO was started to empower children in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection, under the Indian Juvenile Justice Act 2000. ECHO gives voices to thousands of neglected and delinquent children through legal aid, counselling, and releasing children from Government Observation Homes, Children's Centres, etc. Legal proceedings for the transition of children to ECHO's Transitional Home and Rehabilitation Centre are undertaken. The Centre also provides informal education, vocational training, job placements, and follow-ups to monitor the released juveniles.

Conclusion

Norbert, inspired by the Spirit of God, discerned the need of the time, i.e. the reform of the diocesan clergy and the reform of the Church by active involvement in pastoral ministry, especially by preaching. Through ups and downs, Norbertines succeeded in faithfully carrying out the charism bequeathed by St Norbert and the pioneers. Norbertine charism is very relevant even today, even in the context of Pandemic COVID - 19, to make a retrospection of the pastoral commitments of the clergy and the Church authorities. As a souvenir of the presence of the Norbertines in the world for the last 900 years and in the context of the Norbertine presence

in India, it is high time for the Norbertines in India to popularize the Norbertine spirituality, a spirituality based on the Scriptures, a spirituality based on the meaningful celebration of the Eucharist and a spirituality based on Marian devotion. The diocesan clergy and those who are directly engaged in pastoral ministry, face lot of challenges in the pastoral field, especially in the backdrop of the IT revolution and in particular in the tough context of COVID -19. The unique contribution the Norbertines could render to the Indian Church in this particular context of the history of the Church is to give new orientations to the holistic care of the souls. For the realization of effective pastoral management, the Norbertines in India may establish two institutions, one in South and another in North India, to train the diocesan clergy and those who are involved in pastoral care and the Norbertines are blessed with the abundance of resources of the last 900 years to work out an effective and future-oriented pastoral programme.

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