



THE TIGHTROPE (BETWEEN TWO WORLDS)

90 Years of Venio
A History in Pictures



“For me Venio is always an adventure, and I mean that in a good sense. It is a tightrope that you try to walk, and that you do indeed walk: to be a nun and not a nun – to be in the world without being of the world. To walk this tightrope is very hard, but therein lies, at the same time, its enormous potential.”

Prof. Engelbert Neuhäusler



Mother Agnes 1927



Fr. Alois and Mother Agnes with some professed sisters, 1935

SHORT COMMENTARY ON THE HISTORY

In **1920 Marianne Johannes** (1900 – 1993) attends a youth retreat at the Benedictine convent in Ettal, which kindles in her a love of the Divine Office and Gregorian chant. Marianne Johannes lives in Munich and works at the women's school – a social project. Her desire to enter a Benedictine convent cannot be realised immediately, so she begins to meet with some of her female colleagues after work to pray vespers and compline with them.

The beginnings of the community lie in the years **1924-1926**, and coincide with the liturgical movement and the youth movement. The slowly developing group is accompanied and guided into the Benedictine life by **Fr. Alois Mager OSB** (1883-1946), who at that time led the Beuron College in Munich (Schraudolphstrasse). It is in this chapel that he celebrates a regular community Mass („Missa recitata“) with the group.

At the women's urgent request, Marianne Johannes takes official responsibility for the small group on **24th November 1926**. She had taken the name Sr Agnes when she became an oblate in Beuron in 1925; now she becomes „**Mother Agnes**“.

She chooses the community's name from Psalm 40.8: „Ecce **venio**“ – “Behold, I come ... to do Thy will” (see also Hebrews 10.7). This name has been our motivation and our program ever since.

In 1927 Cardinal Michael Faulhaber (1869-1952) gives his express permission for them to live the “Vita communis”, „common life“.

To more firmly secure their ties to the Benedictine world the women become oblates in various Benedictine communities.

On 28th October 1928 three of the women (Mother Agnes Johannes, Sr Gertrud Wunsch, Sr Lioba Jörisen) take final vows in the catacombs of St Peter's, Salzburg, the first members of the Venio community to take this step.

In **1929** a house is purchased at **Baaderstr 56A in Munich**. From this time on, the majority of the sisters are able to live communally. However, the house is ultimately intended to be a centre of formation and as a spiritual focal point.

A chapel is built in the attic of the house, which Cardinal Faulhaber dedicates on 5th November 1929. The Divine Office and the “Missa recitata” are celebrated henceforth in the community's own chapel.

Since Pentecost 1930 the sisters have worn the habit for the Divine Office, and since 1935 the veil as well.



In the holiday home in Schleching. Mother Agnes (middle) with Sr Sylvia Reinach, Sr Renata Lohr and Sr Juta Lechner, ca. 1939

The group proves to be attractive. In 1936 it already has 28 members. In the years 1938-1940, despite Nazism and war, the community struggles to find consensus concerning its future way of life. Finally the decision is made in favour of Mother Agnes's preferred stricter form (permanent commitment, regulated daily schedule through prayer and work, deepened spiritual life) as opposed to Fr. Alois's ideas, which envisioned more individual freedom.

The division of Venio into **two circles**, the "outer circle" (oblates) and the "inner circle" to which the women belong, is finalized in **1940**. The women decide on a path consisting of a trial period followed by a permanent commitment enacted by vows. Father Alois withdraws, leaving Mother Agnes in sole charge. She is supported by Ilse Lohr, **Sr Renata** (1911-1963) who had entered in 1938. The interplay of these two women determines the direction that Venio is to take.

Contacts with Maria Laach intensify, and Abbot Angelus Kupfer OSB of Ettal (1900-1951) assumes the delegation for Venio, an additional demand of the Ordinariat.



The move from the city centre to Döllingerstraße in 1952

The group grows and needs to look for a new residence. In **1952** the community purchases the house at **Döllingerstrasse 32**. Even before they move in, building work begins on a **new chapel**. It is the first church designed by the architect Siegfried Östreicher (1919—2003), and is dedicated on 15th February 1953 by Cardinal Joseph Wendel (1901-1960). In 1956 the community in Venio builds another house on the property for guests and persons from the area.

*Das Bleibende eines sehr
langen Lebens ist Gott selbst.*

Mother Agnes Johannes

Venio's spheres of influence expand. The list of professions, initially confined to social work and charitable professions, becomes longer and more varied. To this day Venio sees itself in terms of that same tandem of professional activity plus Benedictine life that has been present from her very beginnings.

For the first time Venio is officially recognized within the Benedictine world by means of its incorporation ("**Aggregatio**") into the **Bavarian Benedictine Congregation** (BBA) by Abbot Sigisbert Mitterer OSB (1891-1968) on 21.1.1957.



The first chapel in the Baaderstrasse, Munich



The chapel in the Döllingerstrasse, Munich



Choir chapel on the White Hill in Prague

The year **1973** brings a decisive change: Mother Agnes hands over the leadership to the next generation. The community elects Sr **Agape Gensbaur** (1922-2015) as its **second prioress**. The musicologist from Prague is faced with the challenge of transitioning from the founders' generation and implementing the renovations in monastic life demanded by the Second Vatican Council.



Cardinal Friedrich Wetter sits between Mother Agape and Mother Agnes

Venio's amphibious form, between convent and secular institute, proves difficult to classify in canon law. It is not until the 7th deposition to Rome that a positive response is received.

The decree of **6th August 1992** establishes The Community of Venio OSB as **an independent Benedictine priory** within the archdiocese of Munich and Freising. This is followed on the **25th August 1992** by her Consociatio with the **Confoederatio Benedictina** under Abbot Primate Victor Dammertz. This concludes a long struggle. The celebration on the 24/11/1992 is the last official event which our foundress, Mother Agnes, is able to attend.



The pilgrimage church Maria de Victoria on the White Hill

The handovers to the 3rd and 4th prioresses are less dramatic for the community. On the **3rd September 1993 Sr Lucia Wagner** is elected the 3rd prioress and on **6th February 2010** her successor, **Sr Carmen Tatschmurat**, is elected the 4th prioress. Presiding at both ceremonies is our long-standing episcopal delegate Abbot Gregor Zasche OSB of Schaeftlarn.

Relations with Benedictine monasteries were good from the very beginning, based on friendships and joint work on monastic questions. On the way to the chapel in Munich we pass by the coats-of-arms of those monasteries that have been especially important to us: Ettal, Frauenchiemsee, Beuron, Maria Laach, Herstelle, Schaeftlarn, Scheyern, St. Bonifaz/ Munich and (more recently) Břevnov/Prague. In the years since 1998 Venio has expanded her Benedictine contacts through cooperation in the Worldwide Communion of Benedictines (Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum, CIB).

„Venio was not founded, she arose“, as we say. This is equally true of Venio’s little **subsidiary on the White Hill in Prague**. The German/Czech convent is dedicated on **8th December 2007** by Cardinal Miloslav Vlk (1932-2017). Despite many problems and aided by the work of many (Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, Fr. Prior Prokop Siostrzonek of Břevnov, among others) but in the end as if through a miracle, a Benedictine Convent arose in the Czech Republic after almost a hundred years of interruption, caused mainly by politics. Three Czech and one German sister live, pray and work there. This historic site challenges us especially to strive for ecumenism and for reconciliation between peoples.

One highlight in the history of Venio is the **11th July 2013**. On the feast of St. Benedict the priory of Venio is promoted to the **status of abbey**. At the solemn service, celebrated in the Benedictine church of St Bonifaz in Munich, **Sr Carmen Tatschmurat** is consecrated as **abbess** by Cardinal Reinhard Marx (we discover only later that she is not only the first abbess in Venio, but the first Benedictine abbess in Munich!)



Cardinal Reinhard Marx, hands Sr Carmen the abbatial staff, 2013

Regarding the cover picture by Paul Klee „Polyphton gefasstes Weiß“, watercolour 1930: „The picture gives an idea of what community is capable of becoming: living diversity within an ordered whole. Each colour and form has its own local significance, but at the same time they complement each other. They are bound together and form a composite striving towards the light. This attests a centre that is free and points beyond itself into that which is no longer expressed.“

M. Agape Gensbaur



Our community in front of the entrance to St. Boniface Abbey, Munich, directly after the monastery was raised to the status of abbey.



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