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ST. BENEDICT'S LEGACY: AN EUROPEAN LESSON OF "CIVIL ECONOMY" ABOUT SYSTEM'S COMPETITIVENESS AND COMPANY'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Preface

St. Benedict, the Patron Saint of Europe, has handed down a precious legacy to posterity not only spiritually, but economically.

The Benedictine Order has represented a light in the darkness of early Middle Ages. It has been a bulwark of civilization in gloomy times characterized by war, invasions, plagues, starvation after the collapse of the Roman Empire¹⁹. It has anticipated the birth of Europe from an historical, spiritual, political, social, and even economic point of view²⁰. This last contribution is surely less known as regards the more classical (and more celebrated) Christian roots of Europe, but it has sown the seeds of the birth of the mercantile economy and of the economic recovery which took place around the year one thousand through its labour ethics, the enlivening of the territory, the birth of the first nucleus of entrepreneurship being the Benedictine abbey the forerunner of modern non profit company.

Different lessons can spring from Benedictine Rule at macro, meso and micro economic level.

First: one can wonder the role that an institution, like spirituality (in a second moment crystallized into a monastic Order), can generally play for the market.

Second: the theory that capitalism arises only from Protestant religion can be critically confuted, having Benedictine monks and Franciscan Friars (who were born, originally, like a form of radical and critical expression of Catholic Church) given, through different ways, an important push to the birth of a proto-capitalism (which will develop, more consistently, later on at the time of the Italian free cities).

Third: the special quality of urban embryonal capitalism to which Benedictine abbey has given origin which consists in a *civil* economy, not violent like nineteenth-century industrial capitalism or predatory like modern financial capitalism.

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¹⁹ See Salvatorelli (1983).

²⁰ See Moulin (1980).

Fourth: the role of social capital in building market can also be seen because around abbeys developed a trustful and peaceful atmosphere which meant the return to market exchange, the birth of the commercial fairs, the cultivations of neglected lands according to new lease contracts and institutions, the implementation of the first forms of economic accounting.

Fifth: the organization of the territory and the increasing of system's competitiveness can be discovered from the fact that abbeys became the proto-agent of a "polarized development à la Perroux" giving a great contribution to the birth of towns, of commercial and manufacturing activities in their neighbourhood all together interrelated (many modern industrial districts show a coincidence of localization with monastic areas of settlement).

Sixth: the federalist organization existing among abbeys which were independent one from each other, but coordinated at European level in a democratic assembly (ahead of the modern European Parliament). But the lesson does not exhaust itself only at macro and meso economic level. At micro economic level Benedictine abbey represents a prototype of the modern social cooperative company characterized by non profit nature, production of relational goods, mutuality among members, high intrinsic motivation, active participation to the life of the organization, democratic governance. But Benedictine abbey offers also to contemporary profit companies some useful suggestions to increase their competitiveness and to rejoin ethics and economics in their action, becoming *civil*. Infact they can mutuate from Benedictine abbey the labour ethics, the model of work-social life conciliation and the wise time-management, the celebration of some virtue which are also business virtues, the attribution of tasks according to person's qualities, the principle of corporate social responsibility through a multi-stakeholder approach, the centrality of innovation, all requisites which make companies more competitive.

1. A macroeconomic lesson from the Benedictine Rule and abbey

1.1 Spirituality: an immaterial force for the birth of new institutions precious to economic system and development

Spirituality, the force of deep renewal of religious faith and apparatus, can reveal itself strategical even for the revival of economic development and for the economic structure. Religions are the material precipitate of spiritual teachings which crystallize, dogmatize, become imprisoned in hierarchical institutions. So religion is the "hard" component of a faith, while spirituality is the "soft" component of a creed, having spirituality the task of founding and renewing religion periodically. So religion (St. Peter's principle) and spirituality (Marian principle) are more in dialectic and complementary rela-

tionship rather than in conflict²¹. Spirituality, with its revolutionary intangible force, make institutions evolve. Infact institutions on one hand receive innovation with high graduality and prudence, but on the other hand they permit, after having absorbed the shock, its diffusion on a larger scale. Spirituality acts inside the institution, not outside, in a hard and slow research of peaceful cohabitation of old and new, made in a perspective of unity and harmony, trying not to confine itself in a dimension of separatism, intransigence, social insignificance.

The Holy Spirit can make single (both laic and religious) “small” or “big” gift, named charisms. By the help of these spiritual gifts people act, in an innovative way, in the belonging communities (society or Church)²². These gifts, which are only fruit of the Grace of God, not of receivers’ merits, work together to build Common Good not only in the place where they have the chance to be expressed firstly, but also in border fields²³. The “big” gifts are those which make some people really “special”, alias which make people be able to:

1. understand the more pressing problems of society or Church, considering that between these two worlds there is osmosis and that to catch and solve problems in a sphere can bring positive effects on the other sphere too²⁴;
2. transform problems in opportunities of change;
3. find innovative solutions to problems (founding new institutions which contaminate and modify, in an innovative way, the world in which they operate, with beneficial spill-over effects in other ambits too);
4. found (sometimes even in an unconscious way) new paradigms, not only new institutions, invent new theories (more or less formalized) on which their new institutions are formed and based.

Charismatic people embody Authority and this characteristic can make easier the carrying out of their utopian visions, because Authority produces obedience in a relation in which partners remain free and the hierarchical order is voluntarily acknowledged, differently from the coercion of power and the persuasion of populist leader.

²¹ See Bruni and Smerilli (2008), p.23.

²² See Bruni and Smerilli (2008), p.20.

²³ See Bruni and Smerilli (2008), p.21.

²⁴ See, for instance, Saint Teresa’s of Avila case who reformed Carmelitan’s Order, but who was also an extraordinary example of female force, a magistral example of female freedom and greatness in the society of her times. See Montesi and Andreani (2010).

St. Benedict²⁵ (480-547) seems to meet perfectly the characteristics of the “big charismatic” persons just illustrated because:

1. he has perfectly understood the decline of the civil order of the Roman Empire and the moral decadence of the Church, whose spiritual discipline has been too much slackened as years went by from its origin and has weakened specially with the fall of the Roman Empire;
2. he has turned a state of crisis into an opportunity of spiritual rebirth recovering the original purity of life-style of the Egyptian Desert's Fathers which can be summed up in three words: poverty, work and prayer²⁶;
3. he has diverted the spiritual renewal to the modification of the institutionalized character of religion founding, in this direction, a new Institution, a new monastic Order, the Benedictine Order, with its specificity in comparison with other male monastic Orders of that time (a codified Rule, a special attention to the communitarian dimension of life, the economic self-sufficiency of the abbey which should not live only on charity);
4. he has pervaded also the more global Church's Universe inspiring, on the organizational side, Pope Gregorio Magno's Church's Reform of VI century;
5. he has represented, through the creation of the Benedictine abbey, a novelty also for the society and the economic system of his time, reacting to the entropy not only of Church, but also of society and economics;
6. he spread out other effects at political level having Charlemagne applied the organizational principles of his Rule to the government of the Holy Roman Empire in IX century. Besides the system of free and regular election of the abbot which took place in the Benedictine abbeys influenced the statutes of many Italian free cities.

So spirituality, in its continuous religion's goading, can act in moral, social, economic and political sphere. From all these consideration one can desume

²⁵ According to the biography written by Pope Gregorio Magno, St.Benedict was born in 480 in Norcia, a small village in Umbria (Italy). He was sent for his studies to Rome, but he left the capital to go to Subiaco where he lived like an heremit in a wood for three years. After this solitude's period he was called by some local monks to direct their community. The experience was not happy and culminated with an attempt of poisoning St.Benedict. So he abandoned this first nucleus and founded twelve communities, each of them composed by twelve monks managed by a Superior, but all coordinated by St.Benedict. But also in this case he was contested. He repaired with his more faithful friends to Montecassino where he founded around 530 A.D. the abbey where he lived till death. See Gregorio Magno (1995).

²⁶ St.Benedict referred to Pacomio's experience, an ex-soldier who founded in IV century a monastery which was operating also as an economic community. See Skrabec (2007), p.16.

that not only institutionalized religions can play a role in economic development, like Calvinism in Max Weber's view²⁷, but also charisms.

According to this interpretative frame the birth of capitalism took lymph, in addition naturally to other factors (among which Protestantism, specially in its more ascetic expressions), by the revolutionary, but peaceful, spirituality of Catholic world. Many scholars (Zamagni, Bruni, Todeschini, etc.)²⁸ have identified in some charismatic figures of Western monks (St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi), who reformed Catholic Church, the inspirers or the inventors of new institutions (the Benedictine Rule and abbey, the Mont-de-piété), which were essential for the embryonal take-off of capitalism.

But which kind of capitalism was the one promoted by spirituality? It was not a capitalism based on avidity²⁹, rather on the tendency of accumulating money to put it again into circulation (like in fact did the Franciscan banks)³⁰. It was not a capitalism based on irrationality (with profit conquered through violence: war, piracy, exploitation) or rooted on adventurousness (with profit made through free-riding, opportunism, speculation, political hooks). It was a capitalism founded on *rationality* (with *pacific* added value gained through a rational organization of work and the use of technological innovations, two distinctive elements of Benedictine abbey).

1.2 The Benedictine abbey like a champion of civil economy

The rational and pacific capitalism inspired by spirituality did not occur simply through market exchange, but in virtue of the social capital generated by Benedictine abbeys which restored a climate of order, security, peace, trust which encouraged the recovery of economic activities all around and the gradual renaissance, in its neighbourhood, of an urban micro-cosmos confronted with the desolating "towns' cemetery" created by barbaric invasions³¹. This is why they must be considered champions of *civil economics*³².

²⁷ See Weber (1991).

²⁸ See Bruni and Zamagni (2004), Bruni and Zamagni (2009), Todeschini (2004), Calzoni and Cavazzoni (1996), Cavazzoni (1992), Bruni and Smerilli (2008), Novak (1994).

²⁹ See Zamagni (2009).

³⁰ See Bruni and Zamagni (2004), p.37-40. See also Bruni and Smerilli (2008), pp.79-85.

³¹ See Le Goff (2011); Cherubini (2009); Brogiolo and Gelichi (2006), Berengo (1999). The history of San Gallo abbey is an extraordinary example of how a monastic centre has favoured the growth of a town.

³² See Bruni and Zamagni (2004), p.34.

2. A mesoeconomic lesson from the Benedictine abbey

The relation between Benedictine abbey and territory was rich and complex. The abbey had many relations of different kind and intensity with many actors, in a multi-stakeholder approach, showing the research of *mutual benefit* between the organization and the local people like in the *civil company* (and not the pursuit of selfish interest)³³.

The Benedictine abbeys supply food, rational and organized work, and capital to local community which reciprocated it providing work force and demand from economic market.

On religious level the abbey kept up with penitents, converts and excommunicates.

On social level with pilgrims, foreigners, but also with local people in the name of welcome's principle.

On charitable and sanitary level with poors and patients.

On educational level with more primitive and rude people to whom some artisan or agricultural techniques were taught together with some accounting techniques³⁴.

On economic level with customers by selling abbey's surplus on local market or on the occasion of local fairs; with craftsmen for the realization of architectonic works; with farmers to whom abbey's lands sometimes were let according to different agrarian contracts or with whom original models of partnership were founded.

The abbey, fully and harmoniously embedded in its territory, exercised in its area of settlement a strong attractive power, like a Perroux's development pole, though it had not an industrial characterization in modern terms neither the disadvantages linked to it. Benedictine abbey was also in contact with the other abbeys diffused in many European countries³⁵. Each abbey was completely autonomous from the other, but they used to meet one time a year in a special assembly called *Parliamentum*³⁶. In this convention, the first European formal mechanism of institutional coordination, general and homogeneous directives were democratically approved, to reinforce the integrity and the identification of the abbeys in one only community.

³³ See Bruni (2009), Montesi (2009a e 2009b), Montesi (2011).

³⁴ The translation in different languages of the liturgical practises were made by the monks to include more people in prayers. According to J.Stead in England Barbarians learnt agriculture and sheep-breeding from the Benedictine monks. Woolen trade would have become the basis of national economics. See Stead (1993).

³⁵ The Reference, in this case, is to Cistercians' Order. In 1250 there were more than 350 Cistercians' abbeys situated in every European countries. See Lekai (1957, 1977).

³⁶ The *Parliamentum* was the fruit of the institutional creativity of Stephen Harding, abbot of the Citeaux abbey.

3. A microeconomic lesson from the Benedictine abbey

3.1 *The Labour Ethics*

St. Benedict rehabilitates work respect to the dominant conception of his time which conceived in monastic life the exaltation of contemplation and in laical life the glorification of no working activities (which were a privilege of dominant classes: rentiers, aristocrats, ecclesiastics)³⁷. According to St. Benedict holy work must win on idleness. Indolence is the enemy of soul (chapet 48). The principle of not being lazy is celebrated (chapter 4). But there are different forms of work in the abbey³⁸: *labor*, the manual work necessary for sustenance; *ars*, the exercise of art or of craft (like medicine, the metal-working, glass-making, marble-working, paper-making, salt-refinery, olive-oil making, clock-making, etc.)³⁹; *opus*, the intellectual work (study, text copying, realizations of scientific and technical works); *opus Dei* (individual and collective prayer); *lectio divina* (the reading of the Holy Scriptures), *bonum* (charities to other people), *conversation morum*⁴⁰ (the interior work to ascend God through twelve steps in the application of humility's virtue). All the works must be done in the abbey: this means that there is not separation between world and spirit. All works must be done by all monks (equality principle). All works have *pair dignity* (there is not superiority of intellectual work on manual work). The distribution of all activities during the day must be balanced⁴¹. All works must be done with passion and zeal, rejoining love and work (chapter 72).

This work's paradigm is very different from the liberal-individualistic conception (based only on extrinsic motivation, individual performance, selfish-realization) and from the marxian approach (based only on extrinsic motivation, class performance, no workers' realization, but exploitation). Benedictine work is infact based on team working⁴² (where individual objectives are conciliated with community's ones in a "we-rationality" or "team rationality" scheme⁴³), on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (on love on job in itself

³⁷ See Folador (2008).

³⁸ See Bruni and Smerilli (2008), p.56.

³⁹ At the beginning Benedictine abbeys were specialized in wool-manufacture, fishing, in corn-milling, in horse-breeding. In XV century they had enlarged their activities to many other fields.

⁴⁰ For this point see chapter 7 of the Benedictine Rule.

⁴¹ From chapter 8 of the Rule time management covers more than twenty chapters.

⁴² Team working is not explicitly mentioned in the Rule, but it can be desumed in many passages of it.

⁴³ In chapter 57 excessive pride in work is punished because it tears team-working. The virtue of humility is indispensable for the management of the abbey (both pro-

and not only on the reward linked to it; on the cross-fertilization between spirituality and manual and intellectual work), on mutual flourishing (inside the abbey among its members and outside the abbey between monks and local society), on conciliation between work and social and spiritual dimension. These characteristics make Benedictine work's paradigm still valid in modern times⁴⁴.

3.2 The Anticipation of modern non profit company

Benedictine abbey was not an isolated centre of prayer, but also a productive system. Infact St.Benedict wanted them to be completely self-sufficient for their reproductive needs. So abbeys should have mill, market garden and all the instruments to practise the professions necessary to maintain the community (chapter 66). The modalities of utilization and the conservation of the technical immobilizations are under the responsibility of the abbot, helped by other monks, reliable for their life and behaviour, who must draw up their inventory (chapter 32)⁴⁵.

Benedictine abbey represents a prototype of the modern social cooperative company⁴⁶ characterized by non profit nature, production of relational goods, mutuality among members, high intrinsic motivation, active participation to the life of the organization, democratic governance. The non profit nature of the abbey can be inferred by the fact that, in fixing prices of the exceeding goods to be sold on the market, one must not follow avarice, but determine it at a lower level of the existing market price so that the selling could be glorified in God (ch.57). The Benedictine abbeys must reach economic efficiency, but the maximization of efficiency is not the end of the organization. Besides what comes out from the sale, like everything already present in the abbey, must be kept in common with everybody and must not be appropriated by anyone (chapter 33). So part of it must be reinvested in the community for the common good, part of it must be given to the poor.

ductive and social). Instead in Japanese conception of team working is indispensable only the virtue of obedience.

⁴⁴ See Bianchi (2006) and Folador (2006).

⁴⁵ In this way the first forms of accounting have been born in the abbey and then exported outside to be taught to others, an other example of civil economics.

⁴⁶ The Benedictine abbey participates of both the nature of the modern *social* cooperative companies. If we look at the tipologies of activities we see that some social cooperatives produce only services to persons (socio-sanitary or educative), some other produce goods to be sold on the market, but in the production include people who have difficulties to enter labour market (like ex-prisoners, people addicted to substances, disabled, etc.). In the first kind of social cooperatives we could recognize the different modalities of assistance to persons which the abbey provided to people (social, spiritual, sanitary, educational, etc.), in the other the abbey's agricultural activities in which sometimes were implied ex-prisoners.

The production of relational goods is very clear in the inner and external functioning of the abbey⁴⁷, as reciprocity principle, intrinsic motivation and protagonism in communitarian life, all elements of non profit organizations. So it is worth while to examine more in detail the last element: the democratic traits of the abbey.

3.3 The democratic Traits of Benedictine abbey

All abbey's life was regulated by the Rule. Even the abbot is subordinated to it (chapter 3)⁴⁸. The abbot is democratically elected with universal suffrage (chapter 64) and responds to those who have elected him (chapter 21). If the monks are not all unanimous in voting the abbot, he can be elected by a minority provided that this group has a wiser advice (chapter 64). Abbey is anyway managed by its leadership. Final decisions are up to the abbot, but abbot's decision concerning some important affair must be taken after having consulted *all* the community (chapter 3). The advices of senior members on minor matters are recommended by the Rule to the abbot, always to be requested in a free and consultative way (chapter 3). Everyday in the abbey a short briefing takes place (the morning Capitolo), which is an other occasion of giving voice to each monks, a chance to canalize, in a constructive way, the eventual dissent. All these traits have made Benedictine abbeys be very efficient and longeval from an organizational point of view⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ Many chapters of the Rule are conceived to increase inner and outer social capital or to avoid its deterioration in different ways (see chapters 43, 51, 53, 61).

⁴⁸ The idea that every power must be submitted to the law and exercised under its constraints is very modern.

⁴⁹ "Studying the governance of monasteries offers the following advantages: Firstly, monasteries were, and still are, confronted with similar principal agency problems to stock corporations: a core problem is that individuals occupying leading positions tend to accumulate uncontrolled discretion. However, monasteries address agency problems differently from stock corporations. Monastic leaders are disciplined either through members exerting their participation rights, or through internal control mechanisms, like the development of value systems and special supervisory concepts. Secondly, monasteries are experts in internal control mechanisms: their organizational members are committed to one institution for their entire lives. Limited exit-options are compensated by more 'voice'. When members perceive a decrease in the quality of their organization, they have the possibility of improving the situation. Furthermore, there are hardly any institutions which have implemented and tested normative systems to this degree. Thirdly, Benedictine monasteries, with over 1000 years' history, have more experience in solving agency problems than stock corporations". See Rost, Inauen, Osterloh, Frey (2008), p.4.

3.4 The Guide Principles of Benedictine abbey

Benedictine Rule is very concentrated to build and maintain social and spiritual community before worrying about the structure. Some guide principles are indispensable to this scope: *harmony, stability, common good*.

For what concerns harmony, the Rule does not consent its destruction through negative behaviour (not only disobedience, but also complaints) (chapter 34). If some monks are unsatisfied with the Rule and contest it, the abbot assign to them a mentor (chapter 27). These monks must anyway be treated gently and with sympathy (chapter 27). Disobedience is not tolerated more than three warnings, the first two in private form, the third in public form (chapter 23), after which there is a punishment (chapter 28). If even this remedy is not valid, individual and collective prayers must be used to convert insubordination. If also this instrument does not work expulsion must be decided (chapter 28). Two other possibilities of re-entry are given to banished monks (chapter 29). As regards to stability, it can be obtained through the expulsion of the rebels, through a severe and complex recruitment of the members of the community which prevents future defections (the final admission to the abbey includes a initiation rite to claim obedience and life's conversion)⁵⁰ (chapter 58), through daily routines which do not bring tedium, but a feeling of safety and trust.

Common good means that good to be really common must be of everybody, but also of each individual⁵¹, so community's needs and individuals' needs must be combined together and conciliated (not being the individual necessarily sacrificed for the wellbeing of the community)⁵².

3.5 The Guide Figures of Benedictine abbey

The Benedictine abbey is more similar to a non profit organization, but it can give some suggestions to profit companies too. Among them, in addition to labour ethics, its model of work-social life conciliation and wise time-management, the celebration of some virtues above all obedience (chapter 5) and humility (chapter 7), but also discretion, prudence, loyalty which are also business virtues⁵³, the attribution of tasks according to human qualities, more than professional skills, which are specific for every role. This can be seen in the requisites for the Guide Figures of Benedictine abbey: the Abbot

⁵⁰This was the final step of a ten months period during which the novice was asked twice to confirm his adhesion to the Rule (the first time after two months, the second time after six months of presence in the abbey). His training included also the guide and assistance of a senior monk.

⁵¹ See Grasselli (2009) and Zamagni (2007).

⁵² For a parallelism between Maslow's Triangle and St.Benedict's Rule see Skrabec (2007), p.27.

⁵³ See Montesi (2009a and 2009b).

(chapter 2), the Prior (chapter 65) who can replace the Abbot when it is necessary, the Decans (chapter 21 and 65) equivalent to middle management, the Cellularius (chapter 31) equivalent to the administrative chief, the Hospitarius equivalent to the public relation manager (chapter 53).

3.6 *The Centrality of innovations in Benedictine abbey*

Intellectual and manual work were both contemplated by the Rule and cultivated in Benedictine abbeys since their origin. So St. Benedict had legitimated the role of knowledge and transformed abbey in a dynamic cognitive system (*lege* in addition to *ora et labora*), whose dynamism depended chiefly on abbot's capabilities of being a "master". The creation made by Cistercians of the *Scriptoria*, centres of reproduction of manuscripts⁵⁴, centres of transcription of information and news, centres of redrawing up of catalogues of the existing manuscripts, potentiated the circulation of codified knowledge. Scriptoria were the informative system of that time. Abbeys could exchange manuscripts and information during the annual meeting (general Capitolo) and during the monks' cross-visits to other colleagues' sites. The encounter and hospitality in abbeys of many and different people coming from the farthest corner of Europe was an other channel of knowledge's diffusion. The attitude of sharing, present in every day life of the monks, was very useful to multiply written knowledge among abbeys and people unlike medieval guilds who were jealous of their knowledge which travelled only in verbal form. To let people learn better through vision, Benedictine monks made also large use of pictures and of colour. They throw the basis for the birth of Universities, being for a long time one of the few places of education together with some cathedrals.

Benedictine abbeys were agricultural and manufacturing centres often holding the full productive chain (agriculture, animals' breeding, manufacture of instruments applied to animals' exploitation, metal-working, mining activities). The productive diversification together with the need of rising productivity pulled for an increase of scientific research. So Benedictine abbeys became also centres of development of applicative knowledge. They transformed a world still linked to agriculture into a society more inclined to technology. Benedictine monks were protagonist of many innovations, specially in agriculture (innovations of process: water-mill, plough, smelting furnace⁵⁵; new techniques to mine coal, to melt copper, to produce iron, to

⁵⁴Thanks to Benedictine monks many Greek and Latin literary works of antiquity have been transmitted to posterity in addition to Bible and other holy Writ.

⁵⁵In Rievaulx abbey in North Yorkshire (England) a smelting furnace was already in use in 1538, alis two hundred years before its appearance during the Industrial Revolution. The abbey was specialized in sheep-breeding (14.000 animals). The need of to shear them induced the manufacture of scissors from iron.

reclaim lands; innovations of product: cheese, honey, beer, champagne, wine, etc.).

Conclusion

St. Benedict's legacy, as it has been shown, is very important from a macro, meso, micro economic and managerial point of view, and his lesson is still valid nowadays⁵⁶.

Benedictine Rule concerns and give some advice to resolve many questions which spur modern societies and companies: management; interpersonal relations; authority; community's cohesion; balance between different spheres of life and balance of powers in democratic regime; work; material, psychological and spiritual evolution. It is an organizational *systemic* Rule (not only spiritual), very similar to modern ISO 9000, which, after 1500 years, has not set yet. But it is not only a procedural model, it is also a philosophy, a more general conception⁵⁷ of organizations which emphasizes some principles (harmony, stability, common good) and some factors necessary to resist systems'entropy. Its eternity is due to the acknowledgment of the importance of a rational codified organization for the survival of the system, to the clever mix of authority and democracy, to the joint exercise of obedience's and humility's virtues by leadership and by subordinates, to the balanced mixture of self-realization and common good. The possibility of a flexible application of the Rule by the abbot according to the characteristics of the context (places and individuals), granted by the same Rule, has been on other point of its strength. Also the proclamation in the Rule (chapter 73) of the principle of "continuous improvement" is really brilliant and is a sign of St. Benedict's cleverness, humility, and modernity.

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⁵⁶ For St.Benedict's heritage in Umbria (Italy) and particularly on the development of the industrial area of Terni see Montesi (2002).

⁵⁷ As Deming's Total Quality Management does not exhaust itself in the ISO, so the Benedictine Rule is not confined only to some procedures to be observed.

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article interprète la règle de Saint Benoît non seulement dans la culture traditionnelle, comme expression des racines chrétiennes de l’Europe (il était en fait le Saint Patron de l’Europe), mais aussi comme un point de vue macro, méso et microéconomique encore valide au niveau universel, pour différents types d’économie et différents types d’entreprises (publiques, privées, à but non lucratif). Saint Benoît était en fait un animateur de «l’Europe des universités et des territoires»si l’on pense à l’abbaye bénédictine comme lieu de rayonnement de la culture et de l’innovation technologique et centre de vie donnant sur l’espace environnant. L’abbaye bénédictine peut en fait être interprétée comme un système cognitif dans le contexte d’économie de la connaissance de l’époque et comme un vecteur de commercialisation. L’Abbaye bénédictine nous offre l’occasion de

comprendre le rôle joué aussi par les «charismatiques», dans le développement économique, à la naissance d'une forme de capitalisme, à travers la création du capital social, de la société et par conséquent du marché. Au niveau microéconomique, l'abbaye bénédictine peut aussi être vue comme précurseur d'une société moderne sans but lucratif (plus particulièrement d'une coopérative sociale), basée sur les principes directeurs de l'harmonie, de la stabilité et du bien commun.

ABSTRACT

The paper wants to interpret St.Benedict and his Rule not only in the traditional *cultural* key, alias as the expression of the *Christian roots of Europe* (being infact the Patron Saint of Europe), but also as a *precious heritage from a macro, meso and micro economic perspective*, still valid, at universal level, for various types of economy and various kinds of enterprises (public, private, non profit). St.Benedict was infact a facilitator of the "Europe of the universities and of the territories" if we think of the Benedictine abbey as a place of irradiation of culture and technological innovation and as a life-giving center of the surrounding space. The Benedictine abbey may infact be interpreted as a cognitive system in the context of knowledge's economy of that time and as a magnet of the territorial marketing of that age. Benedictine abbey offer us the opportunity to understand the role played also by the "charisms", besides religions, in economic development, in the birth of a proto form of a *rational and pacific* capitalism, expression of *civil economy*, having Benedictine abbey civilized in dark times, through the creation of social capital, society and consequently market. At the microeconomic level Benedictine abbey can also be seen as the forerunner of a modern non-profit firms (more particularly of a social cooperative), based on the guiding principles of harmony, stability, common good.