Dear Heloise,

These rules that you are talking about were written by men for men to follow actually. Therefore your concerns about not being able to embrace those rules are completely understandable and it is normal that these rules are not fully adaptable for women. But please don’t take yourself as weak; the underlying reason for all of the conflicts is that you are not a man. Women have some conflicts about how to follow precepts and become a proper Christian because in some cases it is very hard to implement those precepts as women due to their physical and psychological differences between men. But this doesn't imply that they are weak, especially you, my dear, you wouldn’t be weak anyway. Please don’t tell me you forget about all the things that I told you about you? My thoughts did not change at all. You are still the most talented woman in philosophy as I said before. (Abelard qtd. in Warren 133)

Following these precepts by heart is not necessary. There could be some exceptions and most of the convents accept them without understanding as you mentioned. People believe some actions will please God and they desire to act in this way. This is the way they accept the rules written by Saint Benedict, it is a guidance to please God.(Abelard qtd. in Warren 139)

But in reality, intention is the most important thing. In other words, the intention is much more significant than the rules. All of those rules which have written by the men can change in the future. Implementation of the rules can be shifted according to the factors as time, place, or anything else. But when it comes to the intention, it is the only thing that never affected by other factors because people, rules, time, place can change but intention remains. In other words, intention is permanent and anything else which is no intention is temporary. This is why an action can only become good if the intention is good. On the other hand, if intention is not good, then the action cannot be considered as good no matter what the consequences or effects of the action are. For instance, if you help a person with the idea of showing your actions to the others and take the credit from them, even though you really help the person, your action cannot be regarded as good. My point is that a person can only be doing well if he or she approaches the rules with a good intention. As long as you understand why these rules are written and which intention is aimed to be driven by the doer you can adapt these rules as you wish. (Abelard qtd. in Warren 140)

In fact, once you can understand, and I know you understand, how intention operates you don't need any rule which is written by any Saint. You can only become a good and religious woman if you are accepting God’s will and have a good intention it is enough for you to follow only the divine rules. (Abelard qtd. in Warren 140)

**REFERENCES**

Warren, Karen. *An Unconventional History Of Western Philosophy*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009. Print.

My Lady,

You ask me to write some rules that can be applied for the handmaidens of Christ. I want to propose not a written directive rule, but some flexible advices for you to develop a suitable one for women.

You are already familiar with my argument on the morality of intent. However, you still ask whether it is convenient to sit the table and have dinner with male guests or not (Page 107). As you already know, Saint Benedict does not differ the rule of eating for women and men. I do not think that there is a need to make strict rule especially for women either. As long as you and your nuns do not intend to perform particularly sinful acts with your male guests, your deeds are morally indifferent. For instance, when women are obliged to host the men who came their convent and are in need to take a rest while traveling, it is not a problem for women to sit or talk with them. By the interest of the men, your nuns might be brought to pleasure, but not to consent. So, which nature makes necessary, a fault? I hope this kind of reasoning will help you and clear your doubts when you are socially forced to behave in a certain manner.

In your letter, another thing you mentioned is that ***those whom nature had not created equal must not have equal work***. You continue with the need of different adjustments for different circumstances. First of all, I do agree that women are, by their nature, physically weaker in sex. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women are also weaker in the continence (144). In contrast, because ***you were granted by divine mercy to your weaker nature***, women can also fulfill the necessities of true temperance, which involves self-restraint and abstinence. Thus, on one hand, I am pleased with the statement that you and your nuns are satisfied with less food than men eat. On the other hand, your request for drinking more wine just because women are more prone to drunkenness makes me sad. You, my lady, should not consider religion as a source of profit which you can adjust in accordance with your standards and reasoning. In a way, religion can be considered as love: just like the love based on the purpose of seeking interests stands firm or collapses with the fortunes, the religion totally based on human reason and sound persuasion also distracts our faith when there is no rational persuasive force. For this, temperance is not always a relative mean between two excesses. While this is the case, you should follow the harder paths paved by abstinence and self-control.

Another point that you indicated in your letter was about clothing. My lady, here again I am going to mention the point “intention”. If a woman does not want to seduce a man, I meant if she does not have such an evil intention, she can wear how she wants.

To the abbess of the Paraclete,

I would have to deny your second request.

You say that women are different from men, yet you ask me, a man, to institute a rule suitable for your convent. If, as you say, women cannot follow the rule set for men, then it would be no great leap of logic to conclude that those very men can not come up with a rule suitable for women. For what can men, those very men who have yet to create a separate rule for women, know of the state of being a women if they are indeed as different as you describe them to be?

You may then request that a rule could be devised by a woman herself. But what does one individual woman know of other women? What does she know of their plights, their sorrows, their fears, their perseverance, their chastity, their piety, their temperament or their constitution? For just as all men are different, so are women.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that a truly representative woman is chosen to indite a rule that would be applicable to her as well as you, for were a woman to be chosen to decide upon a rule, she would have to be part of the Sisterhood. What are the chances that that one woman comes up with a rule appropriate for all the sisterhood in France? She could very well, in the throes of the same religious fervor that leads some women to take the vows while ignorant, come up with a rule that could be much harsher in some ways than the one you have to follow now, so harsh that even when tempered for the individual, it would still be harder than the current rule. Or, as it is human nature to seek ease, she could, consciously or unconsciously, create a rule that would perhaps not be as demanding as it should be for the women of God.

Keeping this in mind, then, I would advise that you try to follow the Rule of St. Benedict insofar it does not hamper you needlessly. For while Man should strive towards Good, it is likely that he will not reach it, for the only one who is truly Good is God and His Son. True Goodness is the realm of God, and while it might be all but closed off to Man, it does not mean that Man should stop striving towards it, for it sets a clear standard for Man to struggle towards, and therein lies the path to the Kingdom of Heaven. For God knows all that is in the heart of Man, God knows when men truly strive towards Good, and God knows when they dissemble, when they merely adapt a veneer of piety that can only fool their fellow men and themselves.

My Dear Heloise,

I see that your love for and fellow human beings prompts you to ask about the origin of your role and the best way to follow the footsteps of our lord. It seems like you are wondering a rule for women to follow, a written directive suitable for women, detailing in full the condition and habit of women’s way of life. But I think what you are really asking is whether women and men can be virtuous in the same way. My beloved Heloise, women and men can be virtuous in the same way as opposed to your views. Virtue has nothing to do with mean but it has to do with good intention and extreme good. It is not important that whether you are able to fulfil your duties or not as opposed to St. James mentioned. If your actions are good if you have done good things no doubt you will go to eternal life. As long as you keep your intention good you will be virtuous. If an extreme good resides in wearing woolen clothing next to the skin or in drinking wine or working in harvest you will have to intend to follow these principles in Benedictian rule though it does not suit your nature.

Farewell my beloved,

Abelard