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“In this fourth volume of her commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, Aquinata Böckmann takes us into a richly sustained analysis of the spiritual wisdom at the heart of the Rule. Once again, the reader is exposed to a thoroughgoing exegesis, this time of chapters 4–7, with Aquinata’s usual adept use of patristic and scriptural material. Her emphasis on the personal challenges and pastoral implications which these texts examine when correctly interpreted in the light of today’s social, political, and ethical questions confirms the continuing relevance of the Rule of St. Benedict in the twenty-first century.”

—Carmel Posa, SGS
Co-editor of *Tjurunga: An Australasian Benedictine Review*

Aquinata Böckmann, OSB

From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility

**A Commentary on
Chapters 4–7 of Benedict’s Rule**

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LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

This work was previously published in German as *Christus hören: Prolog bis Kapitel 7* (Editions Sankt Ottilien, 2011).

Cover design by Ann Blattner. Detail, “The Coronation of the Virgin,” Lorenzo Monaco, 1414.

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The numbering of the psalms follows the Vulgate in the context of Latin texts; otherwise it follows the NAB translation. In ambiguous cases both numbers are given.

The translation of RB in the German original is the author’s own; the English translation is based on the author’s German translation and on the Latin.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been requested.

ISBN 978-0-8146-4661-8 ISBN 978-0-8146-4685-4 (ebook)

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Preface

This book contains the four chapters of Benedict's Rule (RB 4–7) that represent the so-called spiritual foundation of his Rule. Chapter 4, on the instruments of good works, could even be considered a summary of the Rule. It is followed by the equally important chapters on obedience, silence, and humility. This chapter is the longest in RB and constitutes, as it were, the first focal point of an ellipsis, whose second focal point is chapter 72, on the good zeal. These four chapters, which are added to the fundamental chapters RB 1–3,¹ clearly show how Benedict used his immediate source, the Rule of the Master (*Regula Magistri*). While he copied it to a large extent, it is all the more important to note what he omitted from the text of RM and what he added or changed in actual quotes, even if the change consists in just a few words. As already noted in the preface to *A Listening Community*, it is here again very important to read the two texts—the Master and Benedict—side by side. Reading RB in the context of his sources helps us to see more clearly the character of Benedict.

When explaining such important texts, it is—as far as possible—necessary to refrain from inserting one's own ideas into the text, and instead to listen closely to what the text itself has to say. For doing this, structural exegesis has been of great help to me. I will present each chapter, or each part of a chapter, trying to detect the particular structure of the text. Often circular structures (chiastic forms) are discovered, although only the course of the detailed exegesis will show whether the verse or verses in the center indeed contain the core of Benedict's message. Evidently not every sentence in a chapter has the same weight.

1. The commentary on the Prologue and RB 1–3 is found in *A Listening Community* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015). In Sr. Aquinata's German commentary the first volume (2011) contains the Prologue and RB 1–7; the second (2011), RB 8–52; and the third (2015), RB 53–72. Earlier commentary on verses 1–4 and 45–50 of the Prologue and RB 72 is available in English translation in *Perspectives on the Rule of Saint Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

I basically follow the principles of biblical exegesis. First, I look at the text itself, then I look for possible sources (here very often the Rule of the Master), and only then does it become important for me to explore what a particular text may have to say to us today. Especially in this part of the Rule, it seems very important to me not to remain on the surface of the words but rather to investigate the particular aim of an instruction or in what direction it is designed to form us. And then we need to ask ourselves what steps—however small—will help us today to approach the goal.

Two images helped me in working with text in this manner. The first one comes from my friend Jacques Dupont, a biblical exegete, who said that reading a text is like blowing softly again and again into ashes until the flame emerges. In a second image I compare this way of reading with rubbing matches, or rubbing two uneven stones—the text and our feeling—until the flame appears.

Most of the commentaries on RB we use were written by abbots or monks. Up to now we have only a few written by Benedictine women living in their community. The common life does not leave much time for writing, but it has the advantage that the commentary remains in the reality of daily common life. I am grateful to have lived in my international community in Rome since 1973. Although community life always takes up much time, it also helps me to remain close to the “earth” in my work with Benedict’s Rule. In seminars, in conferences, and on visits I have been able to experience other monastic communities on the different continents. I also owe much to my students and my colleagues at the Benedictine University of San Anselmo in Rome where I was able to teach for almost forty years.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my superiors and fellow sisters for all their help; to all my students and colleagues for constructive criticism; to Sr. Marianne Burkhard, OSB, and Sr. Andrea Westkamp, OSB, for the translation of this book into English; and to Liturgical Press for their encouragement and acceptance of the manuscript.

Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, OSB
September 17, 2016
Rome

Chapter 4

The Instruments of Good Works

The word “instruments” (or “tools”) generates associations of work, of workshop. It could also remind us of sentences and official documents (currently, for instance, *Instrumentum laboris* as preparation for a conference of bishops). The title makes us aware of Benedict’s down-to-earth stance.

According to its form, this chapter is a collection of maxims, a catalogue of virtues and vices, a collection of sayings with moral aphorisms. These could be repeated in a way that they could penetrate the heart and from there affect the whole person. The Bible already contained such collections: for instance, the Ten Commandments, the book of Proverbs, the catalogues of vices and virtues of the Bible. There are also apocryphal texts of the first centuries, however, that contain such collections of sayings, for instance, the *Sententiae* of Sextus; they can also be found, for example, in the *Passio Juliani* (cf. below).

Herwegen points to the Rite of Baptism. Initially, the question is: What do you seek from the Church of God? Faith. What does faith accomplish? Eternal life. “If you want to gain eternal life, obey the commandments. You should love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind and your neighbor as yourself.”¹ The Rule of the Master (RM) points out the same at the beginning of chapter 3 with the profession of the Trinity (v. 1). Basically, this is about living a Christian life.

1. Herwegen, 88, refers to *Pontificale Romanum*.

God has invited, gifted us (Prologue²); now the conversion in everyday life needs to occur (cf. for possible resources below). Surely, the origins of this chapter can be seen in connection with the instructions for baptism in the early Christian community. Such instructions are based on Sacred Scripture, the New and Old Testament. When introducing people to the practice of Christian life, it was important to have something that was easy to memorize. Puzicha³ mentions also the genre of the *Testimonia*, as, for example, Cyprian's *Ad Quirinium*. Collections of quotes from other writings (*florilegia*) were very popular, as is also evident in our two rules.

Similar to Christian instruction of the catechumens that builds on the basics of Christian virtues, there is also monastic instruction. Such instructions we find in the Rule of the Master and the Rule of Benedict. Smaller collections of sayings are found already in the Prologue: RM Ths.13 and RB Prol.17 in the explanation of Psalm 33/34, and Ths.21-28, Prol.25-32 in the explanation of Psalm 14/15.

According to Masai and Manning, the collection of sayings was part of a spiritual treatise that in RM encompassed the theme and everything up to the end of the chapter on humility, where we read: "Here ends the treatment of the heart's service: How to flee sin through fear of God" (RM 10.123). Yet, he did not mark a corresponding beginning with its own *incipit*.⁴ It only precedes the title of RM 1: "The kinds, drink, conduct, and life of monks in monasteries." If we look at the complete so-called spiritual part, however, it certainly has quite different chapters. At least, chapters 1–2 are of a different kind. RM 7–10 (RB 5–7) are already typical monastic texts. Between these two blocks are RM 3–6 on the Holy Art. Especially RM 3 is based initially on Christian virtues or vices and has only a few monastic applications or concretizations. It certainly is a good hint that our life in the monastery is supposed to be a good human and Christian life, as it flows out of the gift of baptism.⁵

The Master seems to love the symbolism of the spiritual art as he speaks of instruments, of matter, of rust, of the workshop. The abbot is the *artifex* (e.g., 2.51), the master of the workshop; he teaches the spiritual craft.

At this point, we may indicate that the Master uses easy transitions from one chapter to the next, which point toward this art. At the end of chapter

2. Cf. commentary on the Prologue and in Böckmann, *Listening Community* (2015).

3. Puzicha, 95; see also *Quellen*, 80f.

4. The theme in RM has an *incipit* and an *explicit*. After his chapter on humility the Master connects the following part with the title "Here begins the Organization of the monastery . . ."

5. Cf. helpful introduction in Kardong, 96–102; Bozzi 1, 232–33.

1, he introduces the teacher. The end of chapter 2 (what characteristics the abbot should have), however, points more clearly to the doctrine in 2.51f., “The abbot is therefore the master [*artifex*] of this holy art, not attributing the performance of it to himself but to the Lord, whose grace achieves [*fabricatur*] in us whatever we do that is holy. This art must be taught and learned in the workshop of the monastery, and it can be practiced with the use of spiritual instruments.”

In RB and RM, we can note a sequence of chapters: After Benedict describes the main structure—Cenobites, Abbot, Council (RB 1–3)—four more chapters follow, which refer to the moral life of the monks: RB 4 as a summary, so to speak, then Obedience (RB 5), Silence (RB 6), and Humility (RB 7). We find a similar sequence in RM: RM 1–2 (with an addendum about the Council), RM 3–6 the spiritual art, and here RM 3 generally corresponds to RB 4. RM 4 is a catalog of virtues, RM 5 a catalog of vices, and RM 6 speaks of practicing the spiritual instruments in the monastery. Significantly, in RM, these chapters follow the chapter on the abbot so as to show the content of the abbot’s teaching or, we would say, as his book of instructions.

This is not the case in RB 4. It is a collection of sayings, which we can literally picture as a manual of monastic life in the hands of the monks. RM 3.84–95 ends the third chapter with a broad illustration of the eternal glory (based on apocryphal texts). Benedict omits such descriptions here and at the end of RB 7 (cf. RM 10.92–122). Vogüé thinks an earlier editing of RM might have looked as follows: RM 3.1–78, then 4.1–10 (spiritual instruments), and at the end the workshop (6.1–2). This means that the illustration of paradise in 3.79–95 and the catalog of vices (5.1–11) were added later.⁶ Following these chapters are the ones on Obedience (RM 7), Silence (RM 8–9 with anthropological treatise), and Humility (RM 10).

OVERVIEW OF RB 4

Even though it appears as if the sayings are loosely strung together, one can recognize that some of them form pairs or small paragraphs, a collection of sayings relating to specific content. An attempt at a rough organization of the text took place. The exegesis will show if this proves to be correct.

A Vv. 1–2 Love of God and neighbor

B Main emphasis on the conduct toward neighbor

Vv. 3–9 OT

Vv. 10–19 NT (Matt); 20–21 transition

6. Cf. Vogüé *IV*, 176–79 on the various editions.

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Vv. 22-33 Love of neighbor, modeled after the Beatitudes

C Vv. 34-40 Renunciation (how not to be)

D Vv. 41-50 *Custodia*, living in God's presence

D' Vv. 51-58 Means to go about this (silence, reading, prayer)

C Vv. 59-64 Renouncing oneself

B' Vv. 65-73 Main emphasis on conduct toward neighbor

A' Vv. 74-75 Love of God, "what God works for those who love him"

Looking over the chapter once more, we can mention Dorotheus of Gaza who says that one cannot build a house with only *one* wall and that for the construction of the spiritual life the collaboration of all the virtues is needed. Yes, if one builds just one very high wall instead of all the walls together at the same time, there is danger of it tumbling over. The foundation would be faith, and then the other walls would be added, i.e., obedience, patience (Cf. *Instr.* XIV, 150f.).

Apparently, Benedict created his own circular structure in which God's love forms the embracing ring (not in RM); the love of neighbor is then treated broadly in the middle. Of course, all of this requires renunciation (C and C'). In the center, the focus is again on God, the Lord, the last things (D), and is then followed by the instruments, which will help us to guard ourselves (*custodia*).

TITLE: THE TOOLS OF GOOD WORKS (QUAE SUNT INSTRUMENTA BONORUM OPERUM)

This title is Benedict's own. In RM we read, "What is the holy art that the abbot must teach his disciples in the monastery?" Thus, the connection with the previous chapter is more obvious. Explicitly, the Master says that this chapter is like a directory of his teachings to his students. Benedict changes the "holy art" to "good works," a phrase that appears only one more time, namely, in 2.21: "Only in one way are we distinguished in his eyes when we surpass others in good works and being humble." This is an addendum to the text of the Master. With this passage, Benedict created a connection to RB 4 but characteristically in texts that speak of community. Benedict does not write primarily from the perspective of the abbot, as does RM, which emphasizes the vertical line: student and master. It is significant for Benedict that, in general, he places greater emphasis on the community. Besides, his chapter title is more practical; "holy art" could sound more theoretical. In RM, the abbot is the art teacher; in RB—we might say—all are learning to use these instruments. In short, RM states what one has to teach (from the perspective of the abbot), RB what one has to learn (from the perspective

of the community). The “good works” are much more down to earth than the “holy art.”

The Master begins this chapter with a creed: “This is the holy art: first to believe in, to confess and to fear God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God in Trinity, the three in one, three in the one divine nature and one the threefold power of his majesty. Therefore, to love him with all one’s heart and all one’s soul” (3.1). The first commandment is not love, but first belief, confession of faith, and fear of God, and love comes only later, toward the end of this passage. We can find the same approach of connecting the first commandment of the Scriptures with the trinitarian baptismal formula in Pirmin of Reichenau, who might have been influenced by RM.⁷ Was this formula already in manuscript P (which Benedict possibly knew)? It is not impossible. The Master’s interest is theological; Benedict’s less so.

Vv. 1-2: First of all, love God, the Lord, with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength; then love your neighbor as yourself. (*In primis “Dominum Deum diligere ex toto corde, tota anima, tota virtute”; deinde proximum tamquam seipsum.*)

While in RM believing and loving are focused on the triune God, for Benedict the love of God is aligned to the Bible, to “God, the Lord,” with which he starts his chapter. RM shows marked differences and says about love of neighbor: “Then in second place to love one’s neighbor as oneself.” May we interpret this? Is love of neighbor seen as subordinate? Benedict prefaces the entire list of virtues quite clearly with the connection between love of God and love of neighbor, on which all the other tools depend. This is a difference to RB 7, in which the journey from fear to love is described (although Benedict did not pursue this as vigorously as the Master). Benedict is more consistent in basing everything on the love of God and neighbor since he has famous models, e.g., the *Didache*, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. After mentioning the path to life and death in one sentence, the *Didache* continues: “The path of life is now this: 1. You shall love your God who created you, 2. your neighbor as yourself, but everything that you do not want done to yourself, do not do to another” (1.2). Then several other instruments follow.

Assuming the double commandment of love in his rules, Basil says: “Therefore the Lord himself established the order of his commandments. As first and greatest commandment, he ordered the love of God. The

7. Cf. Vogüé, “Scholies” 149, 266; idem, “Le fil” on the discussion if Benedict found this formula in Rome already; it is also possible that this formula came from Lérins, cf. Bozzi 1, 233.

second one in this sequence is the commandment of love of neighbor, which is similar to the first or, more accurately, it complements the first and follows from it.”⁸ Basil’s next rule contains the entire Christian and thereby monastic life in community (*Reg* 2–3). In addition, the *Ordo monasterii* (*OM*, its first sentence is probably by Augustine himself) begins with this central precept: “Above all, dearest brothers, God is to be loved, then the neighbor, for these are the commandments that were given to us before all others.”⁹

Sacred Scripture makes it very clear that the double commandment is the fulfillment of the entire law (Matt 22:40). Jesus took the first commandment of God’s love from Deuteronomy 6 and added that a second one was equal to the first: loving one’s neighbor like oneself. RB 4.1 is melted together from different Scripture passages but is closest to Mark 12:30-31 in the Latin. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”¹⁰ It is possible that the formulation of the first commandment stems directly from Cyprian.¹¹ Many profound articles and books have been written about this double commandment. What is the first and the second, what is indirect, and what is direct? After all, Benedict seems to want to show that love of God flows into love of neighbor, and, conversely, love of neighbor is the measure of the love of God.¹²

In primis (first)! The priority of the love of God is evident. RM has not emphasized this as strongly as it rather sees the love of God as a logical consequence of the confession of the triune and one God. Similarly, Benedict states at the beginning of the Prologue (4): “First of all, whenever you begin a good work, you are to pray most earnestly that he will complete it.” In the chapter on the abbot he adds to his source “Seek first the reign of God” (RB 2.35). RB stresses some priorities in this context: Reign of God, prayer, love, humility, tending to the sick, and *lectio divina*.

We can also call to mind the priority of the *Opus Dei* to which nothing is to be preferred (43.3) or the statement that we are to prefer nothing whatever to the love of Christ (72.11; cf. also 4.21). We may point to Psalm 72/73:25: “Whom else have I in the heavens? None beside you delights me on earth.” *In primis* does not appear in the Vulgate very often; the meaning of 1 Corin-

8. *Regfus* 1; *Reg* 1.4-5; cf. also PsBasil *Adm* 3.

9. Cf. also *RegMac* 1.2-3.

10. Mark 12:30f. Cf. Deut 6:5; also Luke 10:27; Matt 22:37-39.

11. *De dom. or.* 28; yet manuscripts of the biblical text also have, like Mark, the three-pronged expression *cor, anima, virtus*.

12. Huerre, 69.

thians 15:3 is the closest: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received.”¹³ What is at stake here is the importance of the tradition, as it refers to death and resurrection, hence an absolute priority. Looking back to the text of RB, love of neighbor can only come second (*deinde*) with respect to the priority of love of God.

Love with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. Usually, *diligere* is translated with “loving” and has to do with *eligere*, to choose, to decide. It contains an act of the will. According to Sacred Scripture, *diligere* also signifies that something is not just theory but is expressed in good works and realized in “observing the commandments.”

This tool is quite radical; there are three repetitions, as in the Bible: “with all your” (*totus*). Since God loves us radically and infinitely, we cannot but answer radically and completely. Partial love is not commensurate with God’s love. This is an impossible commandment if we focus only on ourselves. Yet God loves us with boundless love first and thus prompts a radical response.

Heart, soul, strength (*cor, anima, virtus*)—I would like to suggest that this trinity comes from Cyprian, referring to Mark 12:30f.¹⁴ The Master wrote, “With whole heart and whole soul,” whereas the common gospel texts have a four-pronged expression: heart, soul, mind, strength or strengths. As emphasized before, Benedict loves tripartite expressions.

Primarily, the heart signifies the core of a person. The soul connotes not just the breath of life but also the human capacity of decision making and the total person with respect to his or her eternal destiny.¹⁵ *Virtus* most likely articulates strength. In RB the phrase “with all your strength” is used in 49.2 with the same meaning: “Since few, however, have the strength” to live always on the height of monasticism as in the season of Lent. According to the word’s use in biblical language, *virtus* signifies suitability, strength, efficiency, power, capability. It is an impossible demand, and the more we try it with all our strength, the more we will discover our own inadequacy. It is, however, the only possible response to God’s love for us, with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength. I believe this kind of response is possible only in the Holy Spirit.

Then to love your neighbor as yourself. This reminds us of Luke 10:29, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan, who was neighbor to the one who was attacked by robbers (Luke 10:25-37). In the monastery, my neighbors surely are the members of the community and,

13. Author’s translation of the Vulgate.

14. *De dom. or.* 28; cf. Mark 12:30f., but not according to Vulg.

15. Cf. Böckmann, “Der Mensch,” 44.

among them, those who especially rely on me. Paul makes it clear that all the commandments are summed up in this one: You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14). The fullness of the law is love (Rom 13:10).

The word “neighbor” with this meaning appears in RB and RM only in biblical quotes and, significantly for Benedict, in the lessons on the psalms for a good life: Prol.27 (twice). It is possible that this was easily misunderstood in the monastic context, for instance, that some are closer than others, or the other way around, that everyone is meant.

Self-love is not the point here, but it is made clear how much we should love our neighbor, namely, the way we usually love ourselves. This instrument refers to verse 9 (positively expressed): What we would like others to do to us, that we should also do to them.

We want to finish the first section with the collect of the Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time: “Holy God, you have given us the commandment to love you and to love our neighbor as the fulfillment of the law. Give us the strength to obey this commandment faithfully so that we may gain eternal life.”

V. 3: Then: not to kill,

V. 4: not to commit adultery;

V. 5: not to steal,

V. 6: not to covet;

V. 7: not to bear false witness;

V. 8: honor everyone,

V. 9: and never do to another what you do not want done to yourself.

The instruments in verses 3-7 share a similar pattern; five of them begin with “not.” The negative, the cutting off what is not in harmony with God, is necessarily also part of the path to God. Recall again that this is basic Christian instruction. The phrasing also points to the Christian baptismal formula (*non* and the verb in the infinitive at the end). We could be startled to find such elementary demands in a rule for monks, but the history of religious life shows that such things really happened. Gregory already recounts such terrible sins in Benedict’s community or environment (Vicovaro).¹⁶

Five of the Ten Commandments stem from different traditions of the gospels.¹⁷ We do not have our sequence in any of these texts. All five commandments appear in Exodus 20:12-17 and Deuteronomy 6:16-21, although RM and RB changed the sequence; “bearing false witness” comes after “not to covet,” and “honor father and mother” should be the fourth commandment

16. *Dial* II 3.1-4.

17. E.g., Luke 18:20; Matt 19:18f.; cf. Exod 20:12-21; Deut 5:16-21.

but appears as the sixth in RM. This prompts us to think that this rearrangement was deliberate. Maybe “bearing false witness” was seen as consequence of coveting. “Honor father and mother” is viewed positively in the biblical texts. One could see the Golden Rule as a positive consequence of verse 9.

V. 3: Then: not to kill, (*Deinde non occidere,*)

This stands in strongest opposition to the love of neighbor. One is reminded of 1 John 3:15, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.” Smaragdus (166) refers to this scriptural text and to Wisdom 16:14.

Benedict knows the recesses of the human heart. His experiences stem from Vicovaro, when the monks tried to kill him. Today, we can expand the commandment as it also deals with indirect offenses, allowing that human beings are killed—there is a broad field of application. People speak of “character assassination.” One can kill another through slander, defamation, degradation, and, finally, not expecting anything good of another, so that the person will lose all confidence in him- or herself. One can enslave a person in a way that she loses her sense of self. Finally, nowadays, there is also bullying. Our monasteries are not totally exempt from such behavior. Verse 3 has great relevance in society; just think of the discussion of abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, stem-cell research, etc. Sexual abuse could be counted among these.

V. 4: not to commit adultery; (*non adulterare,*)

Folk etymology describes the meaning of the Latin word as “going to another” (*ad alterum ire*).¹⁸ We should acknowledge that this has really happened in monastic history and is still occurring. In Scripture, we see the connection between adultery and murder in the stories of David and the wife of Uriah in 2 Samuel 11 and also of Susanna and her judgment in Daniel 13. Looking at somebody with lust is part of what the Bible understands by adultery (Matt 5:27). By lusting with our eyes, we can commit adultery. The Bible further speaks of adultery in connection with the covenant. God and God’s people have entered a kind of marital covenant. Israel has violated the marital covenant and has become an adulterous people (Hos 7:4; Ezek 23:37; Jer 23:14). Seen in this context, there are many possibilities to put God in second or last place and to be unfaithful to one’s promise.

Paul (2 Cor 2:17) explains that he is not committing adultery with the word of God, is not using it for business but proclaiming it sincerely. In 2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul writes, “Rather, we have renounced shameful, hidden things; not acting deceitfully or falsifying the word of God” (*neque adulterantes*

18. Cf. Monléon, *Instruments*, 33.

verbum Dei). In this sense, the instrument would mean that we use the word of God straightforwardly, honestly, without hoping for advantages for ourselves. This is also true for dealing with the words of others. We can find the allegorical exegesis of this commandment in Cassian,¹⁹ since he lists different kinds of adultery (*adulterium*) according to the spiritual development. This may be superstition (*superstitio pagana*) and legalism but could also mean that one does not fully trust God or focus on Christ, and, finally, it could also be heresy and its more subtle form, when one resorts to useless thoughts and moves away from God.

Perhaps adultery did not seem the greatest danger in Benedict's community but rather homosexuality. This is never directly named but stands behind many regulations (i.e., RB 22; cf. also comments on laughter).

V. 5: not to steal, (*non facere furtum*.)

Benedict names again a fundamental commandment that has validity already in the OT and for all Christians. Paul admonishes: "The thief must no longer steal" (Eph 4:28). Smaragdus (169) indicates that we are God's possession and do not own ourselves. If we let our moods run our lives, then we have stolen from God.

Many thefts have occurred in the history of religious life, small and big. Caesarius names theft in his Rule for Nuns as being instigated by the devil (*diabolo instigante*; 26.2). The third Rule of the Fathers calls theft a "sacrilege" (13). A saying of the Fathers²⁰ says: "If there is a brother who commits a sin through weakness, one must bear it, but if he steals (and is not stopped even after being reproved) drive him away, for it is hurtful to his soul and troubles all those who live in the neighborhood." Often it is reported that monks procured some sweets or took apples or other fruit. As a monk who made profession, he cannot just take something on his own accord without being guilty before God and the community. Furthermore, careless handling of earthly goods that God gave us for safekeeping is theft from the goods of the poor. Maybe Benedict was aware that even small thefts could severely undermine trust in a community. This could trigger tendencies to protect oneself, to lock everything away; monastics could then no longer leave their cells unconcerned. This kind of climate weighs heavily on the whole community. The religious community is built on mutual trust; it is essential that everyone's honesty and conscientiousness can be relied on. There is much stealing in the area of intellectual ideas. To claim something that I have read or heard someplace else as my own idea is theft too.

19. *Conf.* XIII.8.1-2; and especially XIV.11.2-5.

20. *Alph.*, Daniel 6.

V. 6: not to covet; (*non concupiscere*,)

Not all desires are bad; there are also good ones (cf. 4.46). Epicurus is supposed to have said that the joy that was gained through satisfaction of desires is only short lived; one should slowly kill these desires.²¹ Christianity is not about killing all desires. *Concupiscentia* can point to something good and can give our efforts vitality and strength. As is shown in the Ten Commandments, coveting here means a desire that strives for illicit goods and things (maybe even human beings). The Master uses this word only with negative meaning, whereas Benedict follows a more biblical parlance as one can have a desire for God, for God's temple, or for wisdom,²² but desire can lead to sin. The Letter of James (1:14) says that everyone can be tempted by *concupiscentia*. "Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death" (Jas 1:15). Paul admonishes in Romans 6:12 that we should not follow our desires and these need to be killed (Col 3:5). The book of Wisdom talks about disciplining desires.²³

This instrument again applies to all Christians. For monks who have renounced certain goods, this instrument often may have greater force. Fake desires may well up and become more acute because by living in close proximity with each other, they may see many things others have that they would like to own themselves. However, the more we give in, the more the desires will grow until they enslave us and weaken our power to love. God demands our full love (RB 41).

V. 7: not to bear false witness; (*non falsum testimonium dicere*,)

The word *testimonium* refers to trials in court in which a person testifies as a witness. There it is certainly very important that somebody not be judged falsely. Witnessing is also used in RB with this same meaning when Benedict speaks of some monks' "good witness" (21.1), for example, or that the bishop should be called in as a witness (62.9). Certainly we are talking here about important testimony. We should not testify falsely about another. This can then slide into many other forms, such as badmouthing, suspicions, negative criticism, exaggerations, or even untruths. Smaragdus (170) points out that each promise that is made only by words and not followed by actions is like giving false witness. In this sense, we could draw the connection with 4.25, "Never give a hollow greeting of peace." Proverbs 21:28 states: "The false

21. Cf. Monléon, *Instruments*, 39f.

22. Cf. Wis 6:18; 6:37 (Latin); Ps 83/84:3. For *concupiscentia*, cf. Bamberg, "Vitam aeternam."

23. Wis 6:18; cf. Tobit 3:6; Dan 13:8, 56; Deut 5:21.

witness will perish, but one who listens will give lasting testimony.” Furthermore, one should consider that we are called to be witnesses of the reign of God (Acts 1:8). If our life is not in accord with this call, we are giving false witness. Sometimes we are lacking courage to give witness.

After these five negative maxims from the Decalogue, a certain culmination follows in the next two instruments in verses 8-9.

V. 8: to honor everyone, (*honorare omnes homines,*)

Here Benedict changes the text of the Master that focuses on the Ten Commandments and uses “you shall honor father and mother” (3.8). It is not clear if the Master refers to a person’s biological parents or perhaps the abbot who is supposed to be father and mother (2.31). This particular instrument must be very important since it is placed before the Golden Rule. It is of interest to note that this commandment does not appear at this place in the Decalogue. It is in this spot when Jesus recounts the commandments to the rich young man (Matt 19:18ff.; Luke 18:20). RM thus more closely follows the gospel.

Contrary to monastic history, RM is relatively friendly to the parents of the monks. It is clear that one forsakes one’s earthly parents upon entering the monastery (Thp.2) and that the parental home of the candidate will no longer be his home (90.65); yet this is not expressed in a pejorative way. When somebody becomes a monk, he is not exempt from showing basic respect to father and mother.²⁴

Honoring (honorare) does not just apply to God and Christ (cf. RB 9.7; 63.13), or only to the elders (63.10) but to all. In this case, it is interesting to note that Benedict mentions only showing honor whereas the Master more often emphasizes receiving honor, striving for honor (a total of thirty-four times in RM). Just think of RM 92²⁵ where the honor of becoming a new abbot is presented as desirable.

All: the parents are certainly included here but the circle is widened just as Christ broadens it: “For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matt 12:50). Benedict aligns himself with “honoring everybody” as encouraged in 1 Peter 2:17. Nevertheless, if Benedict wrote it this way, the monks could assume that “everyone” only applies to everyone in the community, similar to what Benedict says at another point: “They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other” (63.17; 72.4; Rom 12:10).

24. Cf. Bozzi 1, 234f.; Borias, “Le moine”; cf. *VitPat* V.4.68; Leloir, “La donna,” 134.

25. Especially vv. 39, 43, 51, and 71.

When Benedict adds “all people” (*omnes homines*) he apparently wants to include another circle of persons:²⁶ concretely, the poor, foreigners, and brothers in the faith, who rely on the monastery in a special way and are being received hospitably by the community. In this way, this instrument is explained in RB 53 and 66. In these chapters, “everyone” is very much emphasized, the respect given to all, regardless of race or social class and the courtesy of respect. In the same way, all in the community should respect each other regardless of whether they were slave or free, with no favoritism (RB 2.20). Every human being has a right to this fundamental respect. Surely, this respect is rooted in the belief that one sees the presence of the Lord in every human being, not just in the community members. In the first chapter of his rule Augustine says, “mutually honoring God in yourselves, whose temples you have become.”²⁷

What does this mean in practice? We could consider humanness, friendliness, politeness, and decorum. Dorotheus of Gaza thinks if a person does not despise the other then he should also not judge the other. If we do not despise what is little and insignificant then we will not make grave mistakes (*Instr.* VI. 69) Smaragdus (172) adds that respecting all human beings also includes doing what is beneficial to others and being grateful to them.

Respecting every human being, the smallest as well as the most despised ones, is especially important in today’s world situation when we ponder wars, hunger, and the possibility to overcome them; social injustice; sexual abuse; and the stance toward the unborn and the elderly.

V. 9: and never do to another what you do not want done to yourself. (*et quod sibi quis fieri non vult, alio ne faciat.*)

The Golden Rule concludes this sequence of instruments in verses 3-9 providing a good basic principle. However, this can also refer back to verse 2, “loving your neighbor as yourself.” The Golden Rule is mentioned two more times in RB. The abbot should not accept anyone from another monastery without consulting with this monk’s abbot, because it is written, “never do to another what you do not want done to yourself” (61.14). This same saying is used in RB 70.7 as rationale not to be tempted to show anger toward the children.²⁸ Tobit passes these maxims on to his son (Tobit 4:16). The next verse (4:17) stresses that the young Tobiah has to share his bread with the poor and to clothe the naked (cf. also 4:14f.).

26. Cf. Vogüé, “Honorar,” 129–31.

27. *Praec* 1.8, which also hints at 1 Cor 3:16-17.

28. In RB 4 this maxim is only mentioned in the third person, while it is in second person in the original text.

The *Didache* combined the Golden Rule with the main commandment.²⁹ Cyprian also connects the main commandment with the Golden Rule but in a positive way.³⁰ Jesus uses the expression in the positive form in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.”³¹ The Golden Rule is based on the belief that all human beings have the same rights and that we should not apply double standards as we are easily prone to do. The Golden Rule is quite applicable to our behavior. The impulse to judge somebody is tempting—but I do not want others to do it to me. We are tempted to deceive somebody—but no, I do not want to be treated like that. This is also true for the small things in the monastery’s everyday life as well as for activities outside and interactions with all people.

- V. 10: Deny yourself to follow Christ,**
- V. 11: discipline your body,**
- V. 12: do not give in to temptations,**
- V. 13: love fasting,**
- V. 14: relieve the lot of the poor,**
- V. 15: clothe the naked,**
- V. 16: visit the sick,**
- V. 17: and bury the dead.**
- V. 18: Help the troubled,**
- V. 19: console the sorrowing.**
- V. 20: Act differently than the world;**
- V. 21: the love of Christ must come before all else.**

A new segment starts with verse 10 that now focuses on the love of neighbor and is used according to the New Testament. The first verse is setting the tone: this is about turning away from—and turning toward—Christ. Thus, three instruments follow that have a negative connotation; for example, to discipline one’s body, not to pamper oneself, and to love fasting (which is a sacrifice). It appears to me that these three are preconditions to enable the next six instruments, which are expressed in a positive way. These six are works of corporal and spiritual mercy. The concluding verses 20-21 are almost parallel to verse 10 and form a bridge to the next paragraph. With verse 20, the negative is again condensed as “the world’s way” to which we should become strangers followed by the positive perspective: to prefer nothing to the love of Christ. (Again, Christ is mentioned explicitly!) Verses 20-21 can shed a distinctive light on the works of mercy.

29. *Didache* 1–2.

30. *De dom. or.* 28.

31. Matt 7:12; cf. Luke 6:31.

V. 10: Deny yourself to follow Christ, (*Abnegare semetipsum sibi ut sequatur Christum.*)

Part of this instrument consists of a negative formulation, “renouncing yourself”; it is, however, followed by Latin “*ut*”: so that one will follow Christ, or in order to follow Christ. It is not about self-denial per se since it flows out of the positive goal, the imitation of Christ. Even practices of renunciation have legitimacy only in connection with the imitation of Christ or love. Conversely, to follow Christ wholeheartedly is possible only if we are prepared to discipline ourselves and to forego something that would be detrimental to following him. Matthew 7:21 highlights that we enter the reign of God through the narrow gate. This verse shows similarities with the statements in the chapter on obedience: to leave one’s own will behind in order to follow Christ who came to fulfill the Father’s will (5.13).

Verse 10 is also explained with the two instruments in verses 20-21: “To act differently than the world; to prefer nothing to the love of Christ.” One is a precondition for the other. We could look at the entire monastic history under this header: commitment to Christ that requires rejection of riches, of the “world,” and, finally, of oneself.³² Basil explains that one should renounce everything that is detrimental to following Christ, like habits, amusement, relatives, and oneself.³³ This quote is taken from Matthew 16:24 but was shortened: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (followed by, “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, whoever loses his life for my sake, will gain it”). Smaragdus (174) interprets the imitation of Christ in a similar way: “To bestow a favor on the ungrateful, not to repay the ill-willed according to their deserts and pray for one’s enemies; to love the good, have mercy on the perverse, attract the adversaries, and in charity support the converted; and to endure with equanimity those who are somewhat deceitful and the proud.”

Deny yourself. The Latin *sibi* (subsumed in “yourself”) is an intensification that Benedict adds to the Bible and to the text of the Master (most likely this is influenced by the *Passio Iuliani*; and possibly from an African reading of Matt 16:24). Thereby, he accentuates an interior renunciation. Should a person say “no” to him- or herself? Verse 2 presupposes that a person usually loves him- or herself and from there takes the measure for charity. As the next three instruments speak of mortification, abstinence from anything that provides pleasure, and fasting, we could legitimately think of physical discipline; but this is certainly not enough since the desires and inclinations

32. Cf. Böckmann, “Openness to the World” and “Xeniteia.”

33. *Reg* 4.2.

stem from much deeper roots. Verses 14-19 provide some help for interpretation: What hinders us to show such mercy and love? What hinders us to authentically follow Christ? The hindrances might be due to material things but are sometimes found in self-will, navel-gazing, egotism, and greed. According to monastic tradition, we begin with material renunciation like wealth or family; then our aim is to tear the dependence on things and certain relationships out of our heart. The next step is to have God purify our heart, to renounce everything that could hinder our love of God, and, finally, to renounce our egotistic I. Smaragdus (173) thinks this instrument could be interpreted as follows: to take off the old person, to put on the new one, or to deny the external person and to let the internal one grow.

To follow Christ. Again and again, the instruments offer a counterbalance to an egotistic stance, either love of neighbor or the relationship to Christ, to God. To follow Christ! The word “Christ” appears here in this chapter for the first time. Unlike RM, Benedict uses “Christ” and not “Jesus” since he thinks of the glorified Lord at the same time. There is a similar expression in the Prologue, “that he may never become the angry father who disinherits his sons because we did not want to follow him into glory” (Prol.6f.). Following Christ is expressed explicitly only at this point in RB. The word *sequi* (to follow) is emphasized strongly at significant passages; it means following or walking the journey. One is to seek peace and follow it (Prol.17). In Smaragdus’ interpretation, Christ is peace; thus, seeking peace and following it is following Christ (85).

We need to follow the Rule as our teacher, as *magistra*,³⁴ and not the will of our own heart (3.7-8). By our actions we follow the voice of the one who commands (5.8). These last two passages show that Benedict primarily underscores obedience. Eventually, we follow what we deem useful for others (72.7). Twice we are being pointed toward following Christ in a concrete community: through seeking peace and being focused on the well-being of the other through selfless love. For Benedict, this is a concrete way of following Christ. The monks are no longer able to follow Jesus’ footsteps directly as the disciples did. After Easter, the following of Christ is being translated physically, e.g., by suffering persecution for Christ. For the monks this takes mainly the form of obedience in community. In all this it is clear that our selfish ego needs to die (cf. John 12:24).

Verses 11-13 seem to form a unit as a prelude to the following instruments of the works of mercy. What we are able to deny ourselves, we can give to the poor.³⁵

34. For an explanation of this term, cf. *Listening Community*, 95.

35. Cf. Vogüé, *Ce que dit*, 54f.

V. 11: discipline your body, (*Corpus castigare*),

This is quoted from Paul in reference to disciplining the body to participate in a race (1 Cor 9:27). The end is not to inflict suffering on the body, but the body needs to be strengthened to serve a higher goal. On the other hand, Benedict does not take over the Master's term, "to chastise the body for the soul." Possibly he wanted to avoid the impression of dualism as it is present in RM. Benedict evidences an understanding of human beings that is more biblical and therefore more holistic. *Castigare* sounds like a severe word: its origins are *castum-ago* meaning chaste, purifying or disciplining, rebuking, improving, restraining. *Castus* has two meanings, something that is disciplined as well as something that is pure. Both meanings seem to converge here and interpretation flows from this view: dying to the vices and sins (Smaragdus 174); to discipline the body but neither to abuse nor soften it; rather to train it with real discretion, sacrifice, and asceticism; discipline it so that it will make us ready and sustain us for the reign of God. It is more important to stick with the discipline than taking on big projects only to quit after a short time. Monléon³⁶ talks about the contrast with this instrument by summoning an amusing story of St. Theresa of Avila, "On one day, we are not going to choir because we have a headache, neither the next day because we had a headache previously, and not the third day since we are afraid we could have a headache again."

V. 12: do not give in to temptations, (*delicias non amplecti*),

This tool stands between verses 11 and 13 indicating that the pleasures are food related. RM uses the term in this sense (cf. RM 53.24; 90.21). RB has the term only in this verse. The Bible uses it in both positive and negative ways. Wisdom "delights" in the human being (Prov 8:31), we may enjoy the light at night (Ps 138/139:11), but she also points to the pleasures of sin (Sir 27:14). God does not prescribe a joyless life but allows for pleasures. *Delicium* is synonymous with *voluptas*, *libido*, and it derives from *licio* (*lacesco*) (*lax*)—seduction, to captivate, to seduce.³⁷ The Master asserts that we should flee pleasures, but Benedict more correctly admonishes us not to embrace them or getting stuck with them. Pleasures are to instill joy and gratitude toward God but are not to enslave us. There are various pleasures: material, mental, and spiritual. Even to solace and pleasure experienced in prayer we should not hold on; in this way, we will always be open for the highest joy, which is God.

36. Monléon, *Instruments*, 64. The author could not verify this quote.

37. Ernout and Meillet, *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue Latine*, regarding *lax*.

V. 13: love fasting, (*ieiunium amare*.)

Benedict uses a similar form also in 4.64, “to love chastity” (*castitatem amare*). Both instruments belong together. Vogüé is the primary proponent of the importance of fasting for monks. By using the verb “to love” Benedict expresses that we should not take on fasting as duty but accept and embrace it willingly. He uses the word *amare* (“to love”) four times in this chapter (*odire*, “to hate,” twice). This use of the verb “to love” is to point out that the fulfilling of laws in the Christian-monastic life is not the focal point but an interior stance and engagement.³⁸ The oldest RB commentary (Smaragdus 177) states that there are many who fast but they do not love fasting: they take it as a duty. That is why they check the clock or the progression of the sun to see if the time to eat again has come. In this way, fasting cannot act as a medicine; correctly used, it is a good medicine; the passions diminish, prayer more easily reaches heaven, the gift of contrition is given, and the human being will become more spiritual. For the monks Benedict allows for two meals a day or one in the afternoon or evening (cf. RB 41). Generally, in RB, the word *ieiunium* means postponing a meal to a later time (afternoon or evening), and not to eat or drink beforehand. Vogüé shows that it is possible to live this direction, especially in the context of practicing silence.

Work or communal life often cause us to give up fasting, especially in situations in which we need to interact and spend a lot of energy. Vogüé thinks that fasting takes sufficient motivation, recollection, and gradual adaptation. Fasting could train us to control ourselves and turn into a source of joy for us.³⁹ Vogüé does not stress the social aspect as much as Benedict, who mentions relieving the fate of the poor right in the next verse. Fasting could be inspirational to many people today as a gesture of solidarity with the hungry. In fact, many fasting people report that they feel deeply united with all the poor. Fasting uncovers in us the greater hunger for God. Surely, fasting was first related to physical fasting but already early on *ieiunium* was used in a broader sense (cf. liturgy). What kind of fasting is relevant for us?

The major prophets strongly emphasize that correct fasting is not just consigned to abstinence and mortification but is expressed in love for the poor: “This is the manner of fasting I would choose . . . To bow one’s head . . . and lie upon sackcloth and ashes. . . . Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bring the afflicted and the homeless into your house;

38. Cf. Puzicha, 106; Kardong, 84.

39. Cf. Vogüé, “Aimer” (“To Love Fasting”); “Autour” (“On Regular Fasting”).

loathing the naked when you see them?” (Isa 58:5-7). It is an interesting endeavor to compare this Isaiah passage with RB 4.10-19.

Verses 14-19: The expression “relieving the lot of the poor” opens a new sequence that is inspired by Matthew 25 and summarizes the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The poor are grouped together with the naked, the sick, those in distress, and the grieving. It is a worthwhile question whether we could view verses 14-19 as the main content of verse 20 (“Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way”) and, further, whether verses 14-19 express verse 21, to prefer nothing to the love of Christ.⁴⁰ The Master added to the corporal works of mercy: “to lend money, to give to the needy.” It is apparent why Benedict omits this. Moreover, he could have viewed the last instrument as a repetition of verse 14 (cf. a similar omission of Ths.30).

In the various manuscripts, we can sense that the change from plural to singular has been found bothersome. Consequently, some have adopted the singular, others the plural; the original reading, however, is that the plural is used for the poor, and the singular for the other groups of persons. Could this be a clue that the poor are generally in the majority? Or, as indicated above, that the poor are seen as generic for all the other groups?

V. 14: relieve the lot of the poor, (*Pauperes recreare*),

The plural corresponds with the direct source, the *Passio Iuliani: cura pauperum—indigens, nudus*. The word “poor” appears for the first time in RB at this point. We should relieve the poor, serve and feed them, *recreare* (RB Hapax). Taken literally, it means to create again, revive; furthermore, to strengthen, to refresh, and in liturgical language to renew, e.g., through the Eucharist. RM uses the word for the wellspring of baptism through which we are born again (Th.13). At other times in RM it is used in connection with the brothers. It certainly includes a hearty meal and everything needed so that they can recover and renew their strength. Two RB texts explain this instrument: “Particularly diligent care and concern is to be shown in welcoming the poor and strangers because in them Christ is received even more particularly” (53.15) and that the cellarer is to show every care and concern for the poor (31.9). Therefore, we may well assume that verse 14 not only focuses on the category of alms giving but also embraces a holistic concern based on listening and empathy (cf. 66.3f.). The *Passio Iuliani*, which probably served as source for our rules, states in one passage that we should eagerly care for the poor through fasting so that others could be refreshed.⁴¹

40. Cf. Böckmann, “Arme,” 189; *Around the Monastic Table*, 95.

41. *Passio Iuliani* n. 46; cf. also Isa 58:6f.

This is something we do for Christ who is present in the poor. It is also an emulation, imitation of Christ, acting as he did.

Most likely, this verse means the poor outside the monastery (that is how the word “poor” is always used in RB). The community needs to ask itself: Who are the poor ones who need new life? Presumably, these are not only Christians but in general all the poor who need us.

V. 15: clothe the naked, (*nudum vestire,*)

This and the following instruments are in the singular, which most likely does not mean that there are only a few people of this kind; rather, this is a collective singular. According to RB 55.9, the wardrobe held clothes for the poor. Great numbers of poor people and strangers must have come to Monte Cassino. There is a story of Lucullus who had to lend one hundred coats for a feast. There were five hundred coats in his wardrobe! A contemporary example would be three thousand pairs of shoes of Imelda Marcos (Philippines).

Take this instrument also in the figurative sense: “You claim, ‘I am rich and affluent, I want for nothing.’ You do not realize that it is you who is wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked” (*nudus*; Rev 3:17). Alternatively, somebody did something wrong. This instrument is not about covering everything with the mantle of mercy but acting with discretion. Not everything needs to be exposed but only the absolute necessary while other things are being “covered” and protected so that the person can retain her dignity. This does not mean covering up or overlooking (cf. the scandal of sexual misconduct).

V. 16: visit the sick, (*infirmum visitare,*)

This verse is taken directly from Matthew 25:36, like the one in the last instrument. Sirach 7:32-35 (Vulg 36-39) can be used as background for this and the surrounding verses: “To the poor also extend your hand, that your blessing may be complete. Give your gift to all the living, and do not withhold your kindness from the dead. Do not avoid those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. Do not hesitate to visit the sick, because for such things you will be loved.” In RB 36.1-2, Benedict quotes Matthew 25:36 directly: “The sick must be cared for before and above all else, for it is truly Christ who is served in them. Because he himself said: *I was sick and you visited me.*” Yet for Benedict merely visiting the sick is not sufficient, as it seems to be for RM (cf. RM 69–70). Benedict is more concerned with caring and loving service to these preferred members of the community.

Historically, service to the sick and visiting them has been greatly valued in monasticism.⁴² “A brother asked a wise monk: ‘I know two brothers, of

42. Böckmann, “Von den kranken Brüdern”; *Around the Monastic Table*, 133–35.

whom one remains quiet in his cell for six days without interruptions, fasting and putting hard labor on himself. The other one, however, serves the sick. Which of the two pleases God more?' The old wise monk responded, 'Even if the one who fasts for six days would also hang himself by his nose, he would still not be equal to the one who serves the sick.'⁴³ In monastic history, monasteries have ministered to the sick, practiced healing arts, and started organizations that served the sick and their needs.⁴⁴

We cannot practice this instrument with the materially sick only. Benedict uses the word *infirmus* (sick) also for those weak in character and even for sinning brothers. Therefore, it is especially important not to break contact to those who are weak in this sense but to meet them where they are (*visitare*).

V. 17: and bury the dead. (*mortuum sepelire*.)

As background we may think of Tobit who risks everything to bury the dead (Tobit 1:17; 2:7, 9). Nowadays, Christian burial is planned and organized by organizations. Often we escort the deceased and in doing so honor the body of the person who comes from God. He is put into the soil like a seed (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-46). It is reported of a disciple of Abba Copres that he was very concerned with burying Christians wherever they died. And so it was Copres himself who lovingly buried his student.⁴⁵ It is known about Abbot Odilo of Cluny that he concerned himself especially with the care of the dead.⁴⁶

V. 18: Help the troubled, (*In tribulatione subvenire*),

This instrument seems to be similar to the next one. It can be practiced with people within or outside the community. What people are meant in verse 18? The root word for *tribulatio* signifies a threshing vehicle. The word can suggest torture, misfortune, sorrow, tribulation. It appears again in the fourth step of humility: "You placed tribulations on our backs" (7.40). The human being is in a tight spot, under a great burden, feels blows and bites, torn and overcome by fear. James 1:27 sees helping such people as true religion: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows [Vulg: *visitare*] in their affliction [*angustia/tribulatione*]."

Literally, the expression "to come to help" (*subvenire*; Hapax) means coming from below. This is a fitting image for what we can do if somebody

43. *VitPat* V.17.18; Teresa of Avila supposedly said, "Believe me that on the day you lack the sick, you will lack everything." (Quoted from Monléon, *Instruments*, 88.)

44. Crislip, *Monastery*; the entire book is worth reading in this regard.

45. *HistMon* 9.3-5.

46. Third antiphon of the Feast of the Holy Abbots of Cluny, *Antiphonale monasticum* (Paris, 1934), 875.

experiences such tribulations (Isa 1:17). We can assist them but not as if we mastered and knew everything in a superior way, but in a humble and sensitive way, from below. Of course, we can do many things naturally and unnoticed, without much to-do.

V. 19: console the sorrowing. (*dolentem consolari.*)

Here, the interior sorrow is also addressed. Benedict uses “to console” very often. Consoling does not just mean to speak words of comfort but also to sit with somebody silently or it can be expressed in actions or in words. For Benedict, this is a special trait of communal life that the members can experience consolation from each other (RB 1.5). The abbot is to send *senpectae* (wise monks) to the excommunicated members to comfort them and motivate them to convert and to console them so as to prevent their sliding into great sadness (27.3). Consoling (*consolari*) builds up; it leads to a positive end, conversion, and prevents deep sadness or depression, which can grow into despair. Consolation can also take place in actions. Those who extend their help to weak brothers are called comforters (*solacia*). God, who helped and comforted the brothers while serving in the kitchen (*consulatus est*), surely did not just do this with words but became new strength for the brothers (35.16).⁴⁷

After these sentences, Benedict omits two maxims from RM: “To lend money, to give to the needy.” In the same way, Benedict leaves out the explanation of Psalm 14 from RM (Ths.30), “who does not give money to usury and not accept bribes against the innocent.” Presumably, Benedict determined that these expressions do not apply to his community since not everybody could lend something or give away money. The latter was prohibited explicitly. The monk, in professing obedience, gives away his right to make decisions about himself or things (cf. RB 33, 54, 58.24f.).

Verses 20-21 belong together and can lead, on the one hand, to the principles from the Sermon on the Mount, which they contain, and, on the other, make clear that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy cannot be exercised without these principles. Verse 20 talks about the turning away from the world’s way and verse 21 about commitment to Christ.

V. 20: Act differently than the world; (*Saeculi actibus se facere alienum,*)

This verse deals with negation of the world’s behavior, its actions, buzz, habits, customs. “World” here does not signify the created world as a whole in contrast to the uncreated God but rather the “world” as society, infected by sin. Expressed concretely, it denotes egoism, striving for power, possessions

47. Cf. 2 Cor 5:4; 1 Thess 5:14.

(wealth), and lust without considering the needs of others. We should become strangers to these actions. This was true at Benedict's times as well as today.⁴⁸

It should be obvious that the entire monastic tradition of *xeniteia*—living as a stranger in a foreign land—plays a role here. The monk moves away like Abraham, leaving his family and home and also his country. He becomes a foreigner especially to his attachments. Outwardly, he goes into the desert or the monastery; inwardly he detaches from sins and vices until he lets himself be formed more and more by Christ (4.21). Paul admonishes the Romans: “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2).

V. 21: the love of Christ must come before all else. (*nihil amori Christi praeponere.*)

In recalling Cyprian,⁴⁹ we can expound: Christ himself has preferred nothing to us, therefore a total response is reasonable. The *Passio Iuliani* connected self-denial and the imitation of Christ with this instrument (n. 46). If we view the connection of this verse to the chapter, we receive an answer to the question, “what may we prefer?” The rich to the poor, the healthy to the sick, the hilarious to the sufferer; is this not a way to prefer some other thing to the love of Christ? Considering the next verse, we could say: “I may prefer anger, falsehood, and revenge to Christ.”

Verses 20-21 echo the gospel: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt 10:37). They also echo RB 4.1-2: “to love God with your whole heart, whole soul, and all your strength.” This same sentence appears again in similar form at the end of the Rule but in a more radical form: “to prefer nothing whatever to Christ” (72.11). We could say that the monastic life is supposed to lead us to an ever more radical imitation of the love of Christ. Verses 72.11-12 also make clear that this love of Christ causes us to run together toward the goal of community. Surely, we will see this instrument in connection with one of the concretizations of this love, “preferring nothing to the work of God” (43.3).

Love of Christ (*amor Christi*), this could be our love for Christ, which is contrary to the love of pleasures, gluttony, and the egotistic self, and goes together with love of the poor, the naked, the sorrowing. We can also understand this expression as the love that Christ has for us (*genitivus subjectivus*). The emphasis would then be on letting oneself be drawn by the love

48. Cf. Böckmann, “Xeniteia”; the word *alienus* (foreign) with this strong emphasis appears only here in RB (*hapax*).

49. *De dom. or.* 15: *Christo nihil omnino praeponere quia nec nobis quicquam ille praeposuit.*

of Christ, to expose oneself to it totally and to let it flow out to all the poor and mistreated.

A text from the *Life of Antony* (14.6)—though not a source for RB—can also illuminate this verse. There we read that God gave Antony the kindness of speech, “and so he comforted many who mourned; he reconciled others who quarreled with each other so that they would be friends; but he urged everyone to prefer nothing in the world to the love of Christ. In his instructions, he also counseled to remember the future gifts and the loving kindness that God has given us, ‘who did not spare his own son but gave him for the many’” (*VitAnt* 14.6).

In verses 22-33 some instruments follow that refer to realities which are contrary to the love of Christ (and, therefore, of human beings): acting in anger, planning revenge, holding deceitfulness in the heart, and giving false peace. These instruments are influenced mainly by three Scripture passages:

Matt 5	1 Pet 3:9	1 Cor 4:12	RB 4
22-23 on anger			22-23
27-32 on adultery			
33-37 on oath			27-28
38-42 on enduring	not repaying evil with		
injustice	evil		29/30
43-47 love of			31
enemies			
bless those who curse	not cursing those who	they curse us	32
	curse but blessing	we bless	
	them	they persecute	
		we endure	33

Vices like anger, malice, hypocrisy, perjury, injustice, hostility, and persecution are mentioned (cf. RB 7.35-43). In such situations, we would surmise that we could not stay in such an environment, if we want to imitate Christ, as stated in verse 10. Apparently, such a situation is not opposed to this statement. On the contrary! The positive characteristics of the imitation of Christ that prove their value precisely here are love, truthfulness, justice, reconciliation, blessing, and patience.

- V. 22: You are not to act in anger,**
V. 23: not to nurse a grudge,
V. 24: not to entertain deceitfulness in your heart,
V. 25: not to give a false greeting of peace,
V. 26: not to turn away from love,
V. 27: not to swear so as not to swear a false oath,
V. 28: to speak the truth with heart and tongue.

V. 22: You are not to act in anger, (*Iram non perficere*,)

The next two instruments belong together; they pertain to *ira* and *iracundia*. *Ira* appears only here in RB. It is opposed to mercy and peace; it goes together with dispute and vice. Benedict speaks later of an older person who can be angry (71.7; *iratus*). He views it as a sickness that can be healed through the humility of the younger and the blessing that the senior eventually gives. According to Jerome, anger is innate in human beings but it is unique to Christians not to carry out this anger. In the love of Christ, we Christians have the power to defeat the upsurge of anger.⁵⁰ The old Latin translation of Psalm 4 read, *irascimini et nolite peccare* (“be angry and do not sin”). Ephesians 4:26 took this over too. Apparently, Benedict depended on his source, the *Passio Iuliani*, which says not to turn anger into action, not to recompense evil with evil, and that the time of resentment should not last (n. 46).

Cassian thinks that we should not let *ira* and *iracundia* enter; they are only justified if these emotions are aimed against ourselves; otherwise, we should eradicate them with their roots.⁵¹ Benedict’s approach is somewhat milder. We should not put anger into action and foster it. The emotions of fury, anger and resentment well up in us. We need to decide if we want to give them free rein or to work through them, channeling them in an appropriate way, e.g., with creative work, with prayer, etc. Scripture says, “for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God” (Jas 1:20). Admittedly, there is also justified anger, which Jesus showed, for example, when he saw the temple defiled (John 2:17; Ps 68/69:10). Also, our two rules speak of Christ’s justified anger, namely, of the father who disowned his rebellious sons and servants (Prol.6; Ths.3).

50. Ep. 79.9.

51. The entire chapter of *Inst.* VIII is about *ira*, cf. especially VIII.7, 11, and 20; cf. also *Conf.* XVI.7.

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