

# *Exordium*

## UNIT SIX

# THE PATERNITY OF SAINT BENEDICT

### *The Relation of the First Cistercians with Benedict's Rule*

*This unit explores the priority given by the Founders to adherence to the Rule of Saint Benedict. The Founders believed that the Rule was the "practical expression of the Gospel" for them, we ask what principles governed its specific application.*

#### **Objectives**

- a) To list and explain the words and phrases used to describe the relation between Cistercian *conversatio* and the Rule of Benedict.
- b) To see which of the observances represented a return to the Rule and which were a departure from it.
- c) To derive further evidence on attitudes to the Rule from the writings of second- and third-generation Cistercians.

# THE PATERNITY OF SAINT BENEDICT

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Alberic and Stephen were both “lovers of the Rule”. The first of the values characteristic of the Cistercian reform is dedication to the Rule of Saint Benedict. In this Unit we shall examine the sources to determine how this dedication was expressed in practice. In this way we can begin the process of reflecting on our own personal and communal attitudes to the Rule.

## 1. Terminology for the Relationship with the Text of the Rule

The vocabulary used to describe the relationship with the Rule is not unusual; we find the same terminology in the writings of the Black Monks. Such phrases as “to serve God according to the Rule of Saint Benedict” (EP 2.2) are commonplace. It is important, however, to be aware of the distinctive flavour associated with each word, if we are attempting to determine the attitudes of the Founders from a close reading of the primitive texts.

Here are some of the *verbs* found to describe the relation to the Rule; sometimes there are cognate forms with prefixes.

▶	custodire	to guard or to keep
▶	observare	to observe
▶	obedire	to obey
▶	ordinare	to establish, ordain
▶	sequere	to follow
▶	servare	to keep
▶	tenere	to hold or keep

Among the *adverbs* used describing the quality or intensity of the relationship to the Rule are the following.

▶	arctius	more strictly/narrowly
▶	perfectius	more perfectly

It is important to remember that the adjective *regularis* does not mean “regular” in our normal sense, but “in accordance with a rule”; hence, “regular discipline” (CC1 1,2; cf. EP 6.6) means a discipline that follows the Rule.

The words and phrases used to describe an inappropriate attitude with regard to the Rule include:

- ▶ Contrary to the Rule
- ▶ Contempt for the Rule
- ▶ Violation of the Rule (*praevaricari*)
- ▶ Transgression of the Rule

Among the significant phrases which carry the discussion are the following.

! **Ad litteram regulae:** Bernard states explicitly that Cistercians differ from Black Monks in that the Cistercians promise an integral and purely literal observance of the Rule: *ex integro pure ad litteram* (Pre 49). Yet elsewhere he seems to say the opposite. Nobody keeps the Rule *ad litteram*. “You [the Cistercian] keep it more strictly; he [the Black Monk] keeps it with more discretion” (Apo 14). The *Exordium Magnum* says of the monks of the New Monastery that “they entered the strict and narrow way of keeping literally the Rule of the holy father Benedict and the more perfect life.” William of Malmsbury says that the monks are “so zealous about the Rule that they think that no jot or tittle is to be left aside” (4,336; PL 179 1288d). Ordericus says of them that “they decided to observe the Rule of Benedict as the Jews observed the Law of Moses, in its entirety *ad litteram*” (8.25).

! **Amator regulae:** The sobriquet given to the Founders is reflected in what is reported of the new recruits: “They began to love ardently the hard and rough precepts of the Rule” (EP 17.12) The same theme can be found in the wish expressed in the Prologue: that “they [we] may the more tenaciously love both the place and the observance of the Holy Rule there initiated”. The *Exordium Cistercii* expands the eulogy of Stephen”: “A most ardent lover and a most faithful promoter of religious observance, poverty and regular discipline (= the discipline imposed by the Rule)” (EC 2,7)..

*Opposite concepts include contemptor sanctae regulae* (CC1 9.2, as in RB 65.18, SCC 5,2.)

! **Custodia Regulae:** The prologue to the *Exordium Parvum* states that the Founders placed the ordering of their life under the guardianship of the Rule (EP *Prol* 2). This seems to indicate that fidelity to the Rule was considered a protection against the dangers of looser living.

- ! **Iugum regulae:** See RB 58,16. The recruits to the New Monastery came running “to bend their proud necks beneath the sweet yoke of Christ” (EP 17.12). William of Malmsbury applies the image to the Rule, reporting that the Cistercians resist any attempt to bend back anything of the “yoke of the Rule” (4,337; PL 179, 1290b).
  
- ! **Medulla regulae:** According to William of Malmsbury, Robert determined that only the “core” or the “pith” of the Rule was to be studied — as opposed to what was “superfluous” (4,335; PL 179, 1288a). Such an approach may be an invitation to subjectivism, since opinions about what is central vary.
  
- ! **Puritas regulae:** “They rejected ... whatever was opposed to the purity of the Rule” (EP 15.2). Bernard understood the phrase to mean “without the accretions of so many customs” (Pre 46). William of Malmsbury comments that “the purity of the Rule cannot be kept where congestion of riches and indigestion of foods could stifle even a soul reluctant [to accept them]” (4, 335; PL 179, 1288b). Conrad expands this theme thus: “The aforesaid abbot [Robert] and his men, fortified by such a great authority [Hugh] returned to Molesme and they chose from that college of brothers companions who rejected the blandness of a looser life and burned with a willing soul purely and simply to keep the purity and simplicity of the sacred Rule” (EM 1,12).
  
- ! **Rectitudo regulae:** “And so, following the straight path of the Rule over the entire tenor of their life...they matched or conformed their steps to the footprints traced by the Rule” (EP 1,3). This concept occurs also in the preface to Smaragdus’ *Expositio*: he writes his commentary on the Rule of Benedict “for those who hold to its *rectitudo* and who hope to enjoy eternal happiness”. Both *rectitudo* and *regula* derive from the verb *regere*, to “keep straight”, “rule” or “give direction” — both in a physical and moral sense. *Rectitudo regulae* is a double expression that means “the straight path of the Rule”, the shortest distance to the goal or destination. The image is that of the Rule as a sure guide that permits those who follow its directions to make speedy progress towards the monastic goal. Those who leave the path cease to go forward and risk being lost: they must be called back “by our solicitude to the straight path of life: *ad rectitudinem vitae*” (CC 1,4)..

The first watch [of the night] is *rectitudo* in what you do. It is for this that you have made profession of the Rule and try to make your whole life correspond to it, in all your ways and in the exercises of this life not transgressing the limits your fathers have set, not falling away to

right or to left. (VNat 3.6)

Peter the Venerable, in a letter to Bernard replies to Cistercian criticism thus: “We say that in no way do we have wandering feet in our observance of the Holy Rule, nor do we follow unknown tracks or pursue detours, but in everything we follow the straight path of the Rule that is our guide: *per omnia ducentis regulae rectitudinem sequi.*” (Ep 28; ed. Constable, p. 58). Later he adds, *Rectitudo autem regulae caritas est.* “The straight path of the Rule is charity. If charity is excluded, the path is not straight. If the path is not straight then the way is crooked. If the way is crooked the Rule is destroyed” (*Ibid.*, p. 90). Using the same metaphor, Ordericus attributes these words to Robert: “I propose that we hold to the Rule of Saint Benedict in everything, taking care not to deviate either to right or to left” (8.25; PL 188, 640).

*Opposite Concepts* based on the image of the Rule as a straight path include:

- a) to cross or go off at an angle from the path (*transgredior* hence “transgression of the Rule”: EP 3.6; see CC1 9.10: ),
- b) to go off the track (*a rectissima via sanctae regulae exorbitare*: CC1 9.6)
- c) to wander away from the Rule (*si a regula aberraverint*: CC1 9.6 )
- d) to fall away from the Rule’s observance (*si ab observatione sanctae regulae declinare temptaverint* CC1 1,4).

! **Severitas regula:** Bernard admits that the severity of a life lived according to the Rule is fearsome to prospective recruits (See EP 16,4); it is the pastor’s task to show them that such a life also has its consolations (Div 95,2).

! **Sola et nuda regula:** This expression occurs in A. Manrique, *Annales Cistercienses* (1642): “We will now touch upon this commencement and inauguration of the monastery of Cîteaux in which no new constitutions were then published, nor new laws written or invented. Their intention was only to change the place: their life was arranged according to the norm of the Rule, with nothing at all left out and nothing added... Therefore they used only the bare Rule, for they attempted to adhere only to the Rule” (*Anno* 1098, 3.4-5).

## 2. Later Cistercian Perceptions of Saint Benedict

Bernard Gueric and Aelred all preached sermons on St Benedict’s feast. None of them adverts to the fact that it is the anniversary day of the founding of Cîteaux.

Their reflections are usually quite general and in some sermons Benedict is barely mentioned. They all demonstrate an easy familiarity with the text of the Rule which enables them to pluck suitable texts readily to illustrate their theme. All seem to be familiar with the Life found in the second book of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, and this influences their image of Saint Benedict. Focussing on these sermons, but considering other writings, we should be able to assess the degree of devotion existing among second-generation Cistercians for Saint Benedict, and how this had an impact on daily life.

Explicit references to Benedict are not frequent in the writings of **Bernard of Clairvaux**: his favoured title is *Pater*, but he also uses *dux*, *legifer*, *legislator* and *magister*. The most obvious sources for information about Bernard's attitude to Saint Benedict and his Rule are the treatises, *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*, the *Apologia* and related material on monastic reform, *On Precept and Dispensation* and related material on the topic of *transitus* or transfer from one Order to another, as well as his two sermons for the feast of St Benedict, and his familiar monastic sermons (reflected in the *De diversis* and the Sentences).

### Saint Bernard and the Rule

Two main characteristics stand out in connection with his attitude to the Rule. The first is his insistence on moderation and discretion, on kindness, indulgence and broad-mindedness. The second is Bernard's liberty with regard to the text of the Rule in the rare cases where a particular prescription is in opposition to the line of conduct which he feels obliged to adopt in order to be faithful to the promptings of the Holy Spirit... Nothing is stranger to his mentality than the literalism which grew up in later periods... The texts of St Benedict are not to be separated from their realization in living tradition, this is a sure way of avoiding excess.

Jean Leclercq, "St Bernard and the Rule", pp. 166-167.

Bernard proposes St Benedict to his monks as an example of monastic living, as a teacher of evangelical life, and as an intercessor in heaven. The life in which Bernard had been formed and which was the dominant influence on his spirituality was based directly on the Rule of Benedict. He frequently quotes the Rule, drifting in and out of citations as easily as he does with the Bible. These reminiscences often serve a rhetorical purpose, acting as familiar milestones for his listeners or readers

as he helps them extend their horizons. Obviously, Bernard's reliance on the Rule of Benedict is more patent when he is treating of monastic matters. However, although it was the foundation of his own life and, as such, comes readily to his mind in certain circumstances, the Rule does not figure strongly or explicitly as a source in Bernard's major works.

**Guerric of Igny** has four sermons on St Benedict whom he calls "Father", "Master", "Leader" and "Standard-bearer". He compares him with Moses, possibly because Exodus texts were read during the Lenten season in which the feast occurs. "Both Moses and Benedict gave a law. But the one was the minister of the letter that kills, the other of the Spirit that gives life" (4.1). Benedict is praised especially for his discretion and mildness and for his stature as a teacher of spiritual doctrine. He is seen not so much as a source of wisdom as a means by which the teaching of the Gospel is transmitted: "Benedict has handed on the unique purity of the Gospel and the simplicity of its way of life" (4,1).

**Aelred of Rievaulx** has a total of five sermons on Benedict whom he generally calls "Father". He develops the parallel between Moses and Benedict: "God has given us greater things through Saint Benedict than he gave the Jews through Moses" (1.4). Benedict is presented as a practical guide to daily life. "Listen to Saint Benedict, he shows us the way" (1,11). "Let us follow the footsteps of our blessed Father Benedict. We have a most direct way by which we may arrive, namely his Rule and his doctrine. If we hold onto this as we ought, and persevere in it, without doubt we will come to where he is" (2,8).

**Helinand of Froidmont**, in an unedited sermon on St Benedict that is full of reminiscences of previous Cistercian sermons, has an extended comparison of Benedict with Moses, calling him *dux, legislator*, "standard-bearer of the army of monks", and praising both his faith and gentleness. **William of St Thierry** manifests familiarity with the Rule but it impinges on his thoughts only occasionally. There are extant 55 liturgical sermons from **Isaac of Stella**. None of them is for the feast of St Benedict, and the saint himself is never mentioned. There is an oblique remark about following the "rules and *instituta*" of the Fathers (39,18) and, in another place, mention is made of observances as "regular disciplines and strictnesses" (27,15). **Gilbert of Swineshead** also has much to say about "regular observance" and "regular discipline" but the linkage to the text of the Rule is weak and he has few direct references to St Benedict. **John of Forde** lists several of his sources who are "friends of the Bridegroom": Gregory, Augustine, Ambrose; Bernard, Guerric, Richard of St Victor and Gilbert of Swineshead. Benedict is not included, although his rule is cited 29 times in the 120 sermons on the Song of

Songs — mostly in a spiritual context. The most direct allusion to the function of a rule is in the plural, as if grouping together the precepts of Benedict and those emanating from the Order. “You have allowed your feet, that is your affections, to be contained by the very tight shoes which are the examples and rules of your fathers” (SC 65.10).

The evidence thus surveyed seems to indicate that while the early Cistercians lived the Rule and knew it well, though they had deep devotion to St Benedict, there was little tendency to absolutise the Rule or to interpret it in a fundamentalist way. The spiritual doctrine inherent in the Rule was harmonised and integrated with later Western theology and with a *conversatio* that owed much to experience.

### **3. The Controversy with the Black Monks**

To some extent the Cistercian sense of identity developed only through the process of feeling distinct from the Black Monks. The first generations of Cistercians pursued their initiative only because they considered their *conversatio* to be a better way of implementing the Rule of Benedict. This presupposition necessarily had as a corollary the belief that the conventional monastic life was inferior to that lived in reformed monasteries. Whether spoken or implicit, this assumption rankled the Black monks. Disharmony was the result, followed by controversy. Both sides of the debate found something to criticise; the “discussion” would continue for a long time.

This difference of opinion was expressed by polemical writings which enable us to become aware of some of the issues involved.

Monks of both Orders felt impelled to make public their offerings to this controversy. Although the conflict produced a great many public recriminations, it was not without charity and positive results. Finally the affair ended, probably with mutual sighs of relief, for lack of sustenance. But before the arguments had subsided, a number of tracts had been penned by monks of both parties; even secular clerics entered the controversy. (Jeremiah O’ Sullivan, CF 33, p. 5)

The Cistercian-Cluniac controversy is a topic worth pursuing as an aid to understanding the context of some of the assertions made about the early Cistercians’ relationship to the Rule. It would, however, be a digression from the objectives of this Unit to spend much time reflecting on this issue. It is, perhaps,

sufficient to say that the polarising effects of controversy meant that just as Black Monks were often compelled to defend beyond reasonable limits the notions of discretion and kindness in applying the Rule, so too the Cistercians often seem to be advocating an unrealistic level of material conformity with the details of the Rule. Neither view should be interpreted too literally. Polemical rhetoric is not always a good guide either to lived reality or to the real values of those who are arguing.

### Dossier of a Controversy

1. Bernard of Clairvaux: Ep (1120).
2. Bernard of Clairvaux: *Apologia*.(1124-1125)
3. Peter the Venerable: Ep 28, (1126-1127 [ed. Constable]).
4. Hugh of Reading, *Riposte* (1127-1128 [ed. Wilmart]).
5. Matthew of Albano's letter to the Benedictine abbots of the province of Reims and their reply (1131-1132).
6. Peter the Venerable, Ep 111 (1144, ed. Constable).
7. Peter the Venerable *Statutes* (1146).
8. Idung of Prüfening, *Dialogue of Two Monks* (1155, CF 33)
9. Anonymous of Bonnevaux, *Vita Amedaei* ch. 5, (1160, ed. Dimier)
10. Anonymous, *Tractulus* ("Nouvelle Réponse",ed. Leclercq)
11. Anonymous, *Vision of a Cistercian Novice* (ed. Constable)
12. Walter Map's *De Claravellensibus et Clunicensibus*

Some of these dates have been disputed.

#### 4. A Curious Absence of Commentaries

Each new foundation was to be provided with a copy of the Rule (SCC 9,4). This was less for the private study of individual monks than a part of the liturgical *corpus*. The text of the Rule that has come to be recognised as a Cistercian variant (Dijon Manuscript 114) probably came from Molesme or from the Benedictine monastery of Saint Benignus at Dijon. A section was chanted along with the martyrology in the daily chapter (a practice formalised in EO 70,19). The custom of the daily chapter is not found in RB itself: it is simply a traditional way of fulfilling Benedict's injunction that the Rule be read often in community (RB 66,8). The abbot or someone else then commented on the passage that had been read (EO 70,28) — expanding the text and applying it to the situation in the community. The text with which the monks became familiar was an interpreted text. If later

legislation reflects primitive usage, the Rule was never read without a commentary being given — even on Good Friday (EO 70,33). The *Charter of Charity* provided that the “Cistercian” interpretation of the Rule be the only one adopted (CC1 2,2-3). The meaning of this unanimity will be discussed in Unit 7.

Despite these daily commentaries none of the great Cistercian writers of the twelfth century has left a systematic commentary on Benedict’s Rule. However, see the articles by C. H. Talbot in the bibliography.

## **5. Beyond the Letter of the Law**

In addition to the dynamics of controversy, the Cistercian insistence on their adherence to the Rule of Benedict is further explained by the exigencies of obtaining the increasingly-necessary papal approbation. In the aftermath of the Gregorian reform, greater emphasis on canon law meant that only those monastic enterprises won approval that were constrained within the limits of an existing Rule: Augustine’s, Basil’s or Benedict’s. This meant that the lifestyle envisaged by the Cistercian founders had to be presented as a “more perfect” observance of Benedict’s Rule, clearly distinct from the “less perfect” implementation everywhere else apparent.

### **a) The Rule and the Order**

Far from being a fundamentalist insistence on material observance, the Cistercian approach was selective. Certain observances were given a higher profile, others were relegated to the sidelines. In the Statutes emanating from General Chapters of the twelfth century, norms implementing principles of austerity, poverty and separation from the world went far beyond the “middle way” described in the Rule. They represent a consistent endeavour to establish a lifestyle that was systematically stricter than St Benedict envisaged — but one that corresponded more fully to the call of the times and the aspirations of those who joined.

Conscious additions were made to the Rule: SCC 12,2 “Beyond what the Rule specifies ... this also is to be observed” The additional requirement is termed a law (*lex*) (SCC 12,3). The fact that the observance would need continual monitoring and adaptation is part of the reason for an annual General Chapter. “If something is to be amended or added in the observance of the Holy Rule or the Order, let them so ordain it” (CC1 7,2). As a result there came to be a twin source of legislation: the Rule and the Order (CC1 4,6; 7,2; 8,2; 9,2; SCC 3,3; 5,1), one embedded in the past

and unchanging, the other susceptible of constant fine-tuning and further definition.

Between the letter of Benedict's Rule and the daily life of a twelfth-century monk there were many lacunae. In the practical ordering of monastic activities some alternative had to be found to codify practices for which the Rule provided insufficient guidance. This is particularly true in the area of liturgy. The gap left by negating existing customaries was filled, at first, by improvisation (probably based on familiar monastic conventions). In time these ways of doing things would become accepted community custom, progressively regulated and enforced until finally it was committed to writing. The end result was not the abolition of customaries but their modification.

The role of statutory law and customaries in ordering community life meant that although the Rule of Benedict was honoured and its terminology continued, it no longer served as the primary agent in determining the particularities of the monk's daily behaviour.

#### b) The Rule and Experience

Modern theories of text-interpretation place great emphasis on the role of personal experience in understanding the meaning of a text, so that an ancient text is able to bring about new meanings as it interacts with a range of different experiences. Such a "fusion of horizons" was understood implicitly by the first Cistercians. Denis Farkasfalvy finds this in Bernard, but the same is also true of many of his contemporaries.

Bernard's use of the Rule is a fascinating example for the use of an unchanged traditional text enriched through new interpretations and adjusted to the needs and problems of one's own society and age."(p.262)

The twelfth-century Cistercians were constantly appealing to experience for the legitimation of their teaching. The specific dimension brought to the reading of the Rule by these men, was their concern with its interior resonances. "Fidelity" for them was not merely the slavish correspondence with material precepts or the reproduction of an archaic lifestyle. Fidelity was a marriage between the ancient text and present sensibility. The "authentic" interpretation was determined not only by lining up authorities — but principally by judging which interpretation most fully corresponds with the interior work of grace duly discerned not only in one person but in many. The "book of experience" is the guide to the interpretation of the book of the Rule. Personal aspirations were seen as an aid to understanding what St

Benedict was proposing. The Rule was seen to be a rule only to the extent that it conformed to and mediated the teaching of the Gospel as it is already stamped interiorly: “The life of Christ is for me a rule for living” (Tpl 18).

To some extent it can be said that the Founders already knew what they wanted. Their imagination drew pictures of the style of life to which they felt called. When they read the Rule it was not to discover something hitherto unknown. It was to find the justification and vindication of what they had dared to dream and the approved vocabulary in which to describe it.

### **The Rule Subordinated to Practice**

It is my contention that the principal motive in the foundation of Cîteaux was to create a life of austerity and poverty in perfect seclusion from the world. Frequent references to the Rule were demanded by legal considerations, but in its actual application and interpretation the Rule was subordinated to the principles of poverty and undisturbed solitude.

The ever increasing emphasis on the Rule as ultimate norm and guideline of Cistercian life was the result of two secondary factors. First, the necessity to furnish to the new establishment an undisputably firm legal foundation; and secondly, the need to defend the New Monastery and its inhabitants against the charges of *novitas*.

...References to the Rule were made only for the sake of pious convenience, while the true motive for both the rejection and the introduction of “novelties” was the monks’ ardent desire to live in undisturbed solitude.

Louis Lekai, CSQ 5 (1970), pp. 244 and 249.

No doubt the aspirations of the first Cistercians were shared by many of their contemporaries: the quest for effective separation from worldliness, poverty and simplicity. They found in the Rule of Benedict, a means of implementing these aspirations in structures already tested by experience, mutually supporting other elements of a lifestyle to achieve a result that was both livable and enduring.

c) The Rule and Theology

We know from the copying of the *Moralia* that Gregory the Great had a high standing with the founders. As the author of St Benedict's *Vita* and presumed to be his disciple, his theology was considered to be an authentic and legitimate extension of what St Benedict taught. The fact that Gregory himself was a collector meant that the first Cistercians embraced much of what was best in the Western tradition of theological discourse.

### **The Rule Integrated in Theology**

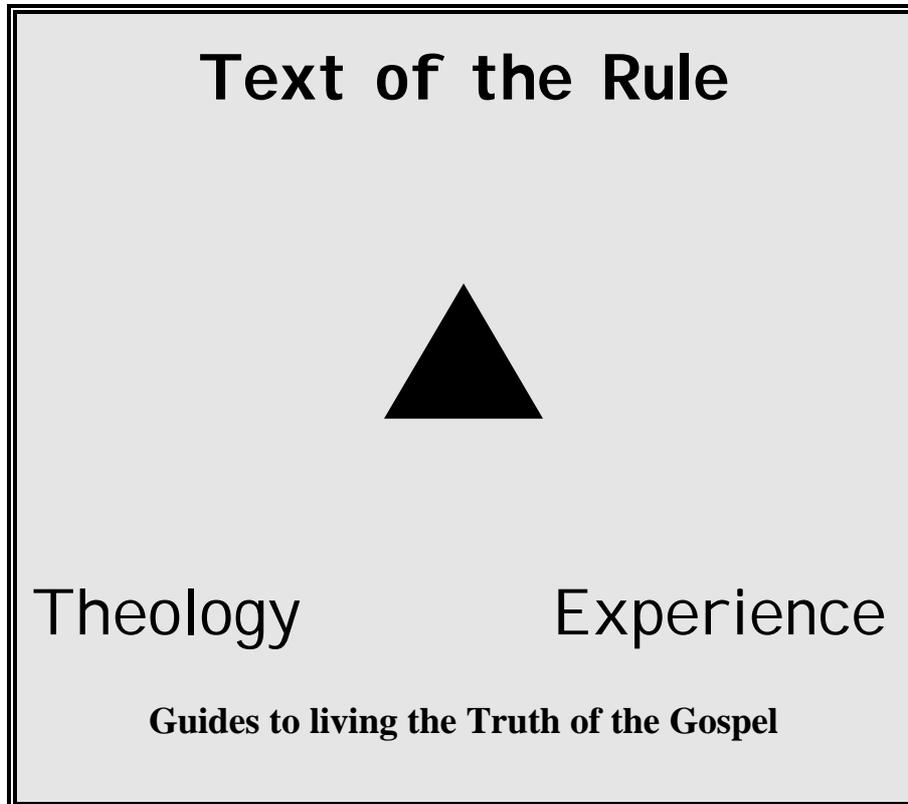
We must not forget that the Founders of Cîteaux have accomplished their task in the context of the monastic and spiritual theology of their time. This theology was founded on Scripture and the Fathers was also part of the idea that inspired them. It is also found in the best authors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and even beyond that period. In a certain sense this theology goes beyond RB; it develops many aspects of the spiritual life which are not found as such in the Rule. There are many examples of this: the doctrines of self-knowledge, the human soul, image and likeness, charity, contemplation, meditation, prayer. Even the very clear and profound christology of RB is no explanation for the devotion to the humanity of Christ among the Cistercian authors. The same is true regarding mariology and ecclesiology.

This proves that the authors have integrated a whole body of patristic doctrine in their life “according to the Rule of Saint Benedict”. These elements — Rule, monastic tradition, a spiritual doctrine inspired by RB, a contemporary monastic theology — have created a harmony and profound unity between the practice of monastic life and its theological inspiration without the first Cistercians feeling the need to write commentaries on the Rule. Their life itself served as commentary.

Edmond Mikkers, COCR 35 (1973), p. 212.

What the Cistercians saw in the Rule of St Benedict was a compendium of Gospel teaching: As Helinand of Froidmont writes, St Benedict “handed on to us Gospel purity and a simple discipline of behaviour”. As such it was appropriate to interpret the Rule in the context of contemporary theological reflection. In many ways patristic teaching is more evident in the major Cistercian authors than any overt reliance on the Rule of Benedict. For them there was no dissonance. The Rule, traditional theology and experience were all means by which the truth of the Gospel

became apparent — as such they must all be singing in harmony. Where something did not fit, it was calmly left aside.



#### d) Creative Fidelity

Our Founders yielded nothing in their devotion to St Benedict, in their appreciation of his spiritual doctrine and in their determination to live their lives under the guidance of his Rule. They were, however, intelligent men and they realised that this did not entail a wooden observance of every last detail that the Rule prescribes. They interpreted the Rule creatively — not trying to shield themselves from its exigencies but attempting to make the Rule do for them in the twelfth century what it aimed to accomplish in St Benedict's own day.

### **For Further Reading**

- ! Armand Veilleux, “Creativeness and Fidelity to Tradition,” CSQ 3 (1968), pp. 98-103.
- ! Armand Veilleux, “The Interpretation of a Monastic Rule,” in *The Cistercian Spirit* (Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1970), pp.. 48-65.

This creative fidelity must be considered as one of the principal characteristics of the Cistercian reform and a value to be cultivated still. There is an element of paradox involved because sometimes fidelity demands change and the refusal to change sometimes constitutes radical infidelity. We cannot allow “creative fidelity” to be hijacked either by progressives or conservatives — we need to see it as a normal means of living under the influence of the Rule without losing contact with the Church’s call today or with the insistent demands of an enlightened conscience.

Perhaps we need to read the Rule in a new light, not only with a listening heart but with a sense of urgency to hear today what the Spirit is saying to the churches. When we do this we will probably appreciate better how our Founders approached the Rule and how it became for them a source of liberation and grace and not stagnation or enslavement.

### **Odo of Morimond**

**If there is in us the beginning of perfection, if there is something of virtue, if we give any example of religious observance, then it takes its form from the Rule of our blessed father Benedict. He is our legislator who gave order to our life and discipline to our behaviour.**

Sermon on the Feast of St Benedict  
PL188, 1655-1656

*Exordium*

**Unit 6: Exercise**

*Using the technique of “close reading”, reread the primitive documents in the light of the topic of this Unit. Note down any references you find to the Rule of Saint Benedict.*

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)
- f)
- g)
- h)
- i)
- j)
- k)
- l)
- m)
- n)
- o)
- p)
- q)
- r)
- s)
- t)
- u)
- v)

! In your group reflection, share your findings with others. Is there consensus?

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## **Unit 6: Individual and Group Reflection**

1. Note three points that struck you as you read and reflected on this Unit

a)

b)

c)

2. What do you think the Founders sought in striving for the *rectitudo* or straightness of the Rule? Is it a useful image today?

3. How do you reconcile the idea of an Order as envisaged by the *Charter of Charity* with St Benedict's vision of an autonomous monastery?

4. Refer back to the Reflection Sheet for Unit 3. On the basis of your reflection in this unit do you consider the Cistercian reform to be "backward-looking" or "forward-looking"? And what about yourself?

5. What do you mean by "creative fidelity" and what is its role in ongoing reform? How is its authenticity tested?

6. How important is it that monks and nuns "dream dreams"?

7. Practically what needs to be done by individuals, by communities and by the whole Order if the Rule of Benedict is to become a more vital force today?

# *Exordium*

## UNIT SIX: THE PATERNITY OF ST BENEDICT

### FOUNDATION BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR COMMUNITIES

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#### PRIMARY SOURCES

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Therefore let there be no division within the Church. Let it remain whole and entire according to its inherited right. Concerning the Church it has been written, "at your right hand stands the queen in a golden robe, interlaced with variety." That is why different people receive different gifts. One is allotted one kind, another something different, irrespective of whether they be Cistercian or Cluniac, a regular or one of the laity. This applies to every Order and to all languages, to both sexes, to every age and condition of life, everywhere and always, from the first human being down to the last. This is why that robe is described as ankle-length, since it reaches down to the furthest extremities. As the Prophet says, "Nothing is concealed from its warmth"

Bernard of Clairvaux, Apo 6.