

There are evidently four kinds of monks. The first are the Cenobites, that is, those who live in monasteries, serving under a Rule and an abbot. The second are the anchorites or hermits, that is those who not in the first fervour of their conversion, but after long probation in a monastery, having learned in association with many brethren how to fight against the devil, go out well armed from the ranks of the community to the solitary combat of the desert. They are able now to live without the help of others, and by their own strength and God's assistance, to fight against the temptation of mind and body.

(Rule of St Benedict)

The Rule of Saint Benedict was important in its method of discussing the ways in which the monks are supposed to live. The author of this text, Benedict of Nursia, had been born into a family of high station in Rome and had been sent to Rome to study the liberal arts, but after witnessing other people lose sight of their faith had left all that behind and "his sole desire was to find favor with God."¹ After a period of solitude, he set up his first monastery in Monte Cassino and wrote the Rule. This was important to the widespread of monasticism during the Middle Ages since "monasticism was the quintessence of mediaeval spirituality,"² as it help the spread of Christianity and the preserving of literature and history. The Rule of Saint Benedict created a group known as the Benedictines and later came the Cistercians, a more strict form of the Benedictines.

There are four distinct groups of monks that exist in the Cistercian order that are described in the Rule. The first type of monks were the Cenobites, they were the form that lived at the monasteries and obeyed their abbot. The next type was the hermits, they were those who had lived at the monastery for a long time and had decided to go into the desert alone to "fight against the temptations of mind and body,"³ with nothing but the will of God. These two forms of monks were respected by Benedict and since they would follow the rules and they understood what their role was within the monastery. The next two forms of monks were the Sarabites and the Gyrovagues. The Sarabites were known as the "detestable one," since they still acted as though they were apart of society and did whatever their hearts desired. The Gyrovagues were considered "worse in all respects than the Sarabites" since they never found stability in their monastery, which was a vow they were meant to take to become a monk.

¹ 'Saint Benedict', Dialogues, Book 2, Gregory The Great, trans. Myra L. Uhlfelder, p. 5.

² 'Saint Benedict', ix

³ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Justin McCann, Ch. 1, 1989.

Throughout the Rule, the reoccurrence of solitary language is present throughout. They are described as living separately from society and only concerning themselves with issues within the monastery. They are also expected to spend their days reflecting in prayer, reading, or working which would leave no time for them to gossip amongst themselves. Even when a monk left the monastery on a journey he was not allowed to “tell another what he has seen or heard outside the monastery, because this causes very great harm,”⁴ since this would mean they were not paying attention to their jobs. The monasteries of the medieval times were also meant to decorated very plainly and without any precious metals so as not to distract the monks from their purposes and duties.

The use of militaristic language throughout the Rule indicated that the monks were viewed as soldiers or “representative of Christ”⁵ to fight the battle against evil. They are expected to live very strict lives, adhering completely to the rule and allowing no outside sources to interfere with their battle. Their only job is to fight for God, it is made clear that they “should not even have their bodies and wills at their own disposal,”⁶ since everything about them is meant to be God’s. This is reflected when they took their vow of obedience, promising to follow the will of God and spend their lives worshipping and fighting for him. They are expected to own nothing of their own and they will undergo harsh punishment so that the “evil of private ownership may be rooted out entirely,”⁷ since they are meant to be free of personal riches.

The Rule used very strict and harsh language in order to make it known to anyone who followed it that there should not be any misunderstandings about what Benedict was trying to say. He gave very specific times where they were meant to pray, known as ‘Opus Dei’ which is seven hours throughout the day that they are meant to worship him. They are also given specific times they are allowed to eat their meals and if they are to go on a short journey “let him not presume to eat while abroad,”⁸ without permission or he would be excommunicated. These strict measures ensured that the monks within a monastery understood their role in life was not to indulge in their every desire, but to obey and worship the Lord.

The Rule of Saint Benedict was a very important and influential text that started helped propel the Cistercians and Christianity further than ever. Its wording was a necessary and important part in keeping those apart of the monasteries in line and doing their spiritual duties. It also gave context into the differences between the lives of the

⁴ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch. 67

⁵ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch. 2

⁶ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch. 33

⁷ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch. 55

⁸ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch. 51

monks compared to society during the medieval times. It also provided details into the mindsets of the monks and how their ideas differ from those of the present.

Bibliography

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