

R.B. 72 : In the Workshop of the Monastery

What does Good Zeal mean for St. Benedict ?

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Introduction

The aim of this conference is to describe good zeal according to the Rule of Benedict. What did Benedict mean by this expression ?

We are asking this question today, at a time which is convulsed by evil zeal. We think, for example, of terrorists and their immense, all-consuming energy, filled with hatred and bent on destruction; and perhaps we think of anti-terrorist actions, which can become inhuman. Benedict would have experienced something similar in the time of the merciless wars of the Goths.

Moreover, the opposite of zeal is close to us: so many people live without great ideals, intent merely on getting by in comfort. Is community a thing to be desired? Certainly it is, from the point of view of congenial relationships, being supported, enrichment and happiness. However, the ideals of endurance and the giving of one's self with all one's energy seems to be falling away. In Benedict's time one might think of luxury, easy going life and instability. Both his and our horizons of perception are similar in many aspects.

It is rewarding, first to look at Chapter 72 as a whole (Nr.1), and then to see how it fits into the Rule and its sources (Nr.2). This gives us a better idea of what zeal itself - with all its different aspects - was for Benedict, and then we will understand better what meaning it has for us today.

1. General remarks on Chapter 72

I would first like to invite you to make this chapter your own (see extra sheet with text of the Rule), by underlining it in colours. Here is one way of doing it:

- **brown** for negative expressions
- **yellow** for eternal life, for God and Christ
- **orange** (or yellow) for verbs, showing their actions

- **blue** for the monastics
- **green** for their actions
- **green underlining** for expressions of movement
- **blue underlining** for adverbial expressions
- **red underlining** for intense expressions
- **grey square** around words indicating key concepts
- **pink or red square** around words indicating the language of love.

Thus we have a colourful chapter. **Yellow** (for God, or for Christ, or our final goal) appears at the beginning, in verses 1 - 2, and at the end, in verses 9 - 12. In the middle, verses 3 - 8, we have the horizontal dimension, embedded, so to speak, in the vertical one. **Brown**, the sign of negativity, appears at the beginning in verses 1 - 2, and at the end, in verse 11, and also in verse 7. It is much the same for the dynamic expressions, verbs, underlined in **green**.(verses 1 - 2 ,12 and 7). The language of love, (a **pink or red square**), is to be seen throughout almost the whole chapter right up to verse 10 included. Actions of the monastics (**green**) appear in almost every verse. Only verse 12 contains an action performed by a divine agent (**orange or yellow**) . Throughout the whole chapter there are many words underlined in **blue** and **red**, - that means the way in which a thing should be done is being emphasised (verses 3--6, 8--10) and Benedict expresses himself most strongly (in almost every verse). Where there is a state of war, with bad zeal on every side, the intensity of it is very palpable. Benedict puts all his energy into these expressions. One might ask, why? Was it because the monks were so zealous? Or was it rather the contrary, which made him shake them up, so to speak, with these radical statements?

Before we turn our attention to the principles of good zeal in verses 3— 11, there are a few details to notice at the beginning and the end. It is surprising that Benedict does not begin : as *there is a good zeal*. That would correspond with the title. On the contrary, he begins with the negative basis, with bitter zeal. It is understandable for us, in our present situation to understand this : war, terror, disregard for life, hatred and vengeance, all this may be closer to us than good zeal. Probably the situation was similar for Benedict. According to his view our communities should be counterweights.(v. 2) through their good zeal, to the evil zeal in the world. Hence the really vital question : what is good zeal according to Benedict ?

Another observation: in verse 2 it is good zeal which sets one in motion, while in verse 12 it is a person: Christ. That is obviously a pointer that a change of the driving force has taken place. Human good zeal, however radical it may be, is not enough. What is good zeal? In the last analysis it is the person of Christ, who works in us. This gives us in our world situation, on the one hand, calm and hope; and, on the other hand, it points our communities to the one thing necessary, that He, the Lord, should live and work in us.

Verses 3 and 11 form the frame for verses 4--10. In verse 3 it is clear: most fervent love is the content of good zeal. It does not deal with zeal in humility, in observance or in "good example". Most fervent love has to do both with persons and with Christ: *let them prefer absolutely nothing to him* (verse 11).

Verses 4--10 are artistically arranged like a poem. All the verbs (green) are in the plural, and in Latin the verb stands at the end. These verses deal with the monks, except for verse 7. All the verses are positive and intense (red underlined) except for verse 7. All the verses, except this one, say how a person should do something (emphasis on the adverb, underlined in blue). Verse 7 does not fit into the scheme; it stands out, colour wise, from its surroundings. Verses 4--6 and 8—10 respectively belong together. They each have a word which marks them out like *honour*, *weaknesses*, *obedience* (in the Latin placed at the beginning), *brotherhood*, *God*, *Abbot* (in a grey square), and in verse 11, the word *Christ*. Verses 4--6 emphasise reciprocity; verses 8--10 contain each a word of love (in Latin: *caritas*, *amor*, *caritas*, *diligere* - with a pink or red square around it). These verses, and particularly verses 6 and 8, with their identical expressions (*inpendere* in Latin) enfold verse 7, as if it were a jewel.

So we come to verse 7, which breaks the continuity and the harmony of the chapter, which otherwise reads very well without it. Verses 6 and 8, follow upon one another without a break, and are similar in form to each other. Verse 8 summarises verses 4 - 6 with regard to brotherhood.

How is it that this verse 7 is placed here? I would imagine that this sentence was incorporated later into the middle of the chapter, perhaps in the following way. The monks might have said to their abbot, Benedict: "Everything that you have written here is important and good! But can you tell us concretely what *most fervent love* means? How should we practise good zeal in a given situation?" And in the end, drawing on his experience, Benedict would have placed this tool (of good

work) in the middle of his testament. *Let no one follow what one judges useful for oneself, but rather what is useful for another.* If every individual does this, there will be no need to worry very much whether one is practising good zeal. It is a question of *what is useful for another* i.e. what helps him on his way to God, what makes him grow, humanly speaking and as a Christian. It does not mean what one finds pleasant.

Here a way is shown for everyone, which leads away from one's self and makes the other one's centre. It is a going-beyond-oneself, a transcending. The reaction of a novice, to whom I was trying to explain this verse, made me understand how radical it was. He turned pale and, when I asked if he felt ill, he replied: "There is absolutely nothing left for me anymore". Yes, exactly, it is that radical. Nothing for me, but everything is given to me as a gift. This means, according to the word of Jesus, to lose one's own life and to gain it (*Mk 8: 35 ff*), or to die with him like the grain of wheat (*John 12: 24*). I might, for all the good I do, end up as the focus, and want to prove myself by doing deeds of love. Here one will no longer measure the temperature of one's own good zeal, but forget one's self in reaching out for the good of the other.

I would call this verse Benedict's practical testament. He invites each one of his monks to judge and assess, in God's light, what is to the advantage of the other. This verse sets up a standard for the exercise of the other instruments; e.g.. reverence for each other, patience with each other, obedience to each other; in as much as it is for the other's good. It is also the criterion for the monastic virtues, like silence, asceticism and discipline within the community. ...

Verse 7 stands in relation to the beginning: the bitter zeal (verse 1) could thus be described as a constant seeking after what is useful for myself, be it material or spiritual. On the other hand, good zeal (verse 2), would mean orienting myself in love toward the good of the other. With regard to verse 11, I can ask, what do I prefer to Christ ? Isn't the answer often that which is to my own usefulness ? Thus, verse 7 describes a definite way of orientating myself towards Christ. Both verses (7 and 11) have a similar radicality. The continuity of verse 7 with verse 12 makes it clear that it does not mean to make a member of the community (*alius*) the centre of my thinking and action, to help them so much, that they isolate themselves from the community or hinder it in the pursuit of its goal. It is a question of perhaps carrying the other, so that all might arrive at their goal. As we reflect on verse 7 together with verses 11 and 12, we find a further clarification: "useful" means whatever allows the presence of Christ to develop in the other, so that we may all together be led by him (see

the meaning of profession). However, à propos of the change of subject in verse 12, it is clear, for this very reason, that I should allow space within myself for the action of Christ, so that he may grow in me. In practice, it is Christ, who follows in me that which is useful to the other ; who draws from within and continually opens me to the other. My own good zeal cannot bring this radical virtue to perfection.

Thus the chapter is written in the following manner.

Verses 1- 3 correspond with verses 11-12 (A - A*). They indicate the foundation, or the main imperatives, which derive from it. Verses 2 and 12 are similar and form an ' inclusion' (a frame, indented on the right side), except that verse 12 intensifies the statement. Christ himself is the leader, he takes us together, a prayer (*perducat* - a prayer) is expressed: "may he lead us definitively". And in fact it is not to God that he will bring us, because we are already in God with Christ (this is a kind of Christology ' *in nuce*' — in a nutshell), but rather he will bring us to everlasting life; this however is closely connected with the person of Christ as centre. In verse 12 the horizontal dimension is taken into the vertical . ' *Pariter*' (together) holds good for our journey to our goal under the leadership of Christ. The workshop of the monastery is not static , firmly enclosed, instead it is here in the *stabilitas in congregatione* (stability in the community) that a wide road opens up, leading into the heart of the Father, in the company, indeed, of all who have been entrusted to us.

B and B* (Verses 4-6 and 8-10) surround verse C as their centre, and are clarified by it, or give it a foundation.

This is as far as we come, examining the chapter on its own. A glance at the placing of R.B. 72 in the context of the Rule, as a whole, and its sources, will help us to portray better good zeal in the mind of Benedict.

2 R.B. 72 in the Rule and according to the Sources

There is good reason for saying that chapter 72 is the high point of the Rule. One might also say, it is the depth dimension, or call it the key, with which one can read the whole Rule, or rather, live it. Benedict developed considerably in the course of writing his Rule. Depending on his immediate source (the *Rule of the Master* = *R.M.*), he laid his foundation in the first chapters, up to and including chapter 7 on humility. Then he distanced himself from the Master more and more,

especially under the influence of St. Augustine's *Rule*, but also of other sources. Thus he came to stress community more and more, as well as reverence for one another, care for the weak, and discretion At the end he has become completely himself and writes chapter 72 as his testament, so to speak. Humility (R.B. 7), in the first section, is and remains the foundation, but humility is perfected by love, as already the end of R.B. 7 makes clear (e.g. 7:67).¹ It seems significant that Benedict does not tell us at the end of his Rule to do this or that, rather he says what attitude the monks should live. In so doing he opens the door to very many practical concretisations of these fundamental attitudes with regard to inculturation.

I should like to consider now individual verses, to see how Benedict, who had matured in the workshop of the monastery, understood good zeal.

Verses 1-3: *of good and evil zeal*. The word "zelus", when used without qualification in the Latin Bible, has on the one hand the meaning of jealousy, passion and wrangle (*Sir: 40: 4 ; Prov 6: 34 ; 1 Cor 3: 3*), while, on the other hand, a person can be zealous for God (*Ps 69 (68); 8, 10: John 2:17*). "Zelus" is a dynamic, all-consuming passion in people, the opposite of a lethargic, fainthearted and morose wandering about. In R.B. 72 it is an intense, burning, passionate love, which directs itself to the good of neighbour, and at the same time it includes a zeal for God and Christ, (the brethren and the abbot too). This good zeal is very different from what Benedict's immediate source, the *Regula Magistri*, characterises as good zeal (92: 51 ff). The R.M. is concerned with the desire for honour, and the displaying of holiness and goodness, with the secret hope of becoming the next abbot.

Good zeal becomes clearer from its negative image, that of evil zeal. When Benedict describes it in 65:7 in terms of envy, contentiousness, petty jealousies, dissension and disorders (see also 4: 65 – 69) , he does so in accordance with patristic writings and the Bible. In *Galatians* (4: 17 - 18) Paul gives the warning to be zealous for what is good and not for what is evil. The fruits of the Spirit according to *Gal 5 : 18 - 26* are opposed to the works of the flesh: e.g. contention, jealousy, violent temper, disunity, envy and ill will.

Romans 12: 9 - 18 serves as the background for good zeal: " Be subject to one another in brotherly love, outdo one another in showing each other honour. Do not grow slack in your zeal, let yourselves be inflamed by the Spirit. Rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction, persevering in prayer.

Give help to the saints when they are in need, always offer hospitality. Bless your persecutors Be of one mind towards one another Remain humble ... Have peace with everyone, as far as that is possible for you." Above all it is worthwhile to meditate on the canticle of love in *1 Cor 13* as being characteristic of good zeal.

The Bible and Benedict both describe good zeal as unbounded love of God and of neighbour, which manifests itself in reverence, patience, hospitality, selflessness and forgiveness, and which when it is directed to the Lord, is manifested in prayer, trust and in radical orientation towards God (see R.B. 4 :1-2).

Moreover individual verses of Ch. 72 have been prepared beforehand in the course of the Rule as climaxes. At the same time Benedict distances himself from R.M. and lets himself be inspired by other traditions.

R.B. 72: 3 "*This therefore is the zeal which the monastics must exercise with most ardent love*". (*Hunc ergo zelum ferventissimo amore exerceant monachi*). In this instance it is quite clear that good zeal, taking up the Bible meaning, is to be understood as most fervent love, the fruit of the Spirit, and the counterbalance to evil zeal. Where does this glowing fervour come from? Just as the widely expanded heart in *Prologue 49* (which is also a later addition of Benedict) , indicates God's indwelling, or that of the Spirit, in the same way that indwelling is implied here. It is Augustine who speaks of 'ferventissimus' in connection with love² while Cassian uses the adjective in connection with prayer. - "Zelus", in the positive sense is mentioned only once before in the Rule, in R.B. 64:6, where zeal for God is spoken of , but in that context it is not so clear that it means love.

V.4. "*This means, in honour they will anticipate each other,*" (*honore se invicem praeveniant*), This is a direct quotation from *Romans 12:10*, where the connection between good zeal and the fervour of the Spirit holds good (see above). For Benedict, honour is the first and fundamental expression of love. This is in opposition to the R.M. (see 92: 51), dealing , not with the honour for which a person strives, but with that honour, which is given to another.

Showing one another honour was stressed in R.B. 63:17, although actually it was rather reverence for the elders which was being urged . In Ch. 4:8 Benedict had already changed one of the instruments listed in his source (R.M. 3:8) into "*to honour all persons*", (*honorare omnes homines*).

Here, in addition, there is the emphasis on mutual anticipation, which is the mark of the zeal inspired by Christ, in the faith that Christ comes to us in everyone, particularly in little ones.

V.5. "*Their infirmities of body or of character, they will bear most patiently,*" (*infirmittates suas sive corporum sive morum patientissime tolerant*). The R.B. describes a wide field of human weaknesses, both of body and of character, as well as of morals (e.g. R.B. 28:5). The Master associates human weakness with laziness (e.g. 1:67; 7:10). Benedict, on the other hand, following the Bible, shows a merciful attitude, which takes into consideration the salvation and healing of the other. *1 Thess 5:14* says: "Help the weak and be patient with everyone." (e.g. *Gal 6:2*).

Bear with infirmities "most patiently" (*patientissime*); this maxim caused a former hermit in Cassian's writings to return to the community and to strive after perfection there. (*Coll xix 9:1*). To bear patiently with one another is, moreover part and parcel of friendship (*Coll xvi 7:27*). Such patience in bearing with one another is equal to the martyrdom of blood. As Basil says, "when the strong bear with the weak, they help them remove their infirmities" (*portare - exportare :Rule 177 ff*). We expand our hearts through love, which bears everything patiently. Patience is also found in the New Testament letters in connection with the good zeal of love : *1 Cor 13:4; Romans 12:12 ; 1 Peter 2: 20, 24*. Jesus Christ is himself the model, the Lamb of God, who bears the sins of the world, and so removes them (*tollis*).³ Certainly *Isaiah 53 : 4. 11* serves as a background.⁴

Benedict emphasised patience with infirmities earlier in his Rule, in dealing with the sick (36:5) but here, in Ch. 72, it must be practised on both sides, mutually. Everyone has some kind of infirmity, and in the workshop of the monastery these are often very much in evidence. Already in early monasticism the daily life of the community was called: "the furnace of Babylon." There, patience is the everyday form of love, of good zeal.

Verse 6 : "*Obedience they will give to each other in competing,*" (*oboedientiam sibi certatim inpendant*). *1 Peter 1:22* speaks of the obedience of love, otherwise there is no direct source for this verse either in the Bible, or in monastic texts. It is especially characteristic of Benedict himself to widen the application of obedience in this way. Mutual obedience is spoken of in the previous chapter, Ch.71 but actually in the verses that follow the relationship to superiors and seniors is described. Competing to obey one another is different from competing in humility, which Pachomius enjoins (*Praecepta et leges, 3*) and from the rivalry for honour, as recommended in the *Rule of the Master* (22:11; see 92::2, 49). The Master had said that one should obey every good person

wholeheartedly (3, 76). Benedict seems to be convinced that everyone in the community (holy or not) can mediate God's will. To believe in this and to act accordingly is seen as a way of practising, and implementing love for one another and love for Christ. Good Zeal!

Verse 7 : "*Nobody will follow what one judges useful for oneself, but what is more useful to the other*", (*nullus quod sibi utile iudicat sequatur, sed quod magis alio*). *Phil 2: 4* asks that we should only consider our own interests, but also those of the others. *1 Cor 10:24* urges people not to think of themselves, but rather to think of others. Then Paul sets himself up as a model in this matter: "I do not seek what is advantageous to myself, but that which is advantageous for the majority". We read in *1.Cor 13:5*: "love does not seek what is her own". According to Cassian, who refers to these texts, this attitude concretises the apostolic love (*Coll xvii 19:7* ; see *Basil Rule 3:5; 12:11; 82:4*). The *admonitio*" 4 (Pseudo Basil) gives this warning: "Do not do what is useful for yourself, but what is useful for someone else." In Basil's mind good zeal is orientated towards the building up of others. It is clear from the Bible and the Fathers that this is the way of Christ, who emptied himself, and lived and died wholly for us (see *Phil 2: 6-11*).

R.B. 72 verse 7 has scarcely any precedent in the Rule if one considers it in its entirety from a linguistic point of view, yet a comparison of the vocabulary within the Rule makes it clear that the exercise of judgement (*iudicare*) in general is normally the prerogative of the abbot, and presupposes an interior weighing up and pondering over the situation from various angles; (see 3: 2, 5; 65: 14) that "following" (*sequi*) when referring to following a person, is used in a qualified way pointing to obedience and discipleship (e.g. *Prologue 17; 3, 7 ff; 5:8*) -- particularly in 4:10: "in order to follow Christ," (*ut sequatur Christus* - notice that here the same form of the verb is used as in Ch.72:7) and that the word useful / advantageous (*utile / utilitas*), denotes the common good and the spiritual fruitfulness of individuals (see 7:18; 3:2; 42:4; 65:12).

In this verse Benedict gives to his monastics space and confidence to weigh, and to consider what is really of use to the other. From the sources it becomes more evident that it is a question of entering on Christ's way. This is the good zeal of love, in all its dynamism!

Verse 8 : "*The charity of fraternity they will give in a selfless way,*" (*caritatem fraternitatis caste inpendant*). Love of the brotherhood (literally translated) is to be found in texts of the New Testament: *Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 1: 22; Hebrews 13:1 and 1 Thess 4:9*. "Custus" stands here for "chaste" in its wider sense, especially for selfless, not merely chaste in a sexual context. In his *Testament*, Cesarius asks a priest to show a chaste love to the nuns (*castum amorem inpendat*), by

which he means a selfless high-minded love. Augustine also links love with *castus*, when love is directed at one's partner as a person, and not at his money (s. 137:8,9). So this verse in R.B. 72 is a double of verse 7.

It is hinted at in some of the ideas and lines of thought in the R.B. by the use of the word "caritas" (e.g. 35: 64 - 66); the emphasis on brotherhood which begins (e.g. 58: 23) at the altar during profession, and is prepared by the use of "caste" in the sense of selflessness (64:6). Benedict did not find all this in the R.M. But he found it in his own experience, having recourse to the Bible and Tradition. Selfless, disinterested love of the brother- or sisterhood is good zeal

Verse 9: "*In love they will fear God,*" (*amore Deum timeant*). We can think of the biblical fear of God, which encloses love within it (see *Deut 6: 2-5 ; Isaiah 11:2*). Tradition attests that servile fear gradually disappears and makes way for 'filial fear' which is joined to love. In Ch.72 fear has itself been purified and has become a sign of love (see Cassian , *Coll xi, 11-13*). Augustine stresses loving fear.⁵

We are prepared for verse 9 by the conclusion of R.B. 7. In 7: 67-69 fear is cast out, and love takes over. In that context there was as yet no mention of fear-in-love as a unity. Consequently, our verse in the exact form in this chapter is a climax of the R.B. and reveals the vertical anchoring of good zeal.

Verse 10: "*Their abbot they will love with a sincere and humble love,*" (*abbatem suum sincera et humili caritate diligant*). There is hardly any parallel for this in monastic and Biblical literature. We find the emphatic expression "to love with love" (*caritate diligere*) especially in Augustine. The whole of verse 10 must come from Benedict's own experience. The choice of the word "diligere" instead of "amare" underlines the fact that we are dealing with an act of the will, and not with a transport of the heart. It is in this way that love also builds up the abbot, so that he can make Christ more visible.

We have been prepared for this idea that the abbot should be loved in R.B. 63:13 and 64:11.14, where it says that the abbot, for his part, should love the brothers and help them out of love for them. In the R.M. on the contrary, the abbot is meant to be feared (see R.M. 7: 64 ; 11: 6). When making this change Benedict was able to draw from Augustine's *Rule* (*Praec vii:3*). Moreover, the sequence within this chapter, at first the reference to the brethren, and then the abbot, accords with Augustine's *Rule*. This verse reminds us that, while practising good zeal in the workshop of our monasteries, we should not forget our superiors.

Verse 11: "To Christ, nothing whatever they will prefer," (*Christo omnino nihil praeponant*). This text derives from the *Explanation of the Our Father* by Cyprian. However, he had said: "Prefer nothing whatever to Christ, because he preferred nothing to us" (*De Dom Or 15*). Benedict simply emphasises our reply to the forestalling love of Christ. This accords with the "literary genre" of the Rule. To judge by the vocabulary, we are again close to Augustine, who repeatedly speaks of preferring nothing to Christ.

In 4:21 Benedict had stressed with R.M. that "nothing should be preferred to the love of Christ," but here it is a question of "preferring nothing whatever to Christ". This may indicate that one's initial enthusiasm for Christ must be deepened through crises and difficulties, so that one's love becomes more fervent and more radical. It is also characteristic of Benedict to express the priority of the Liturgy in similar terms: "let nothing be preferred to the work of God" (*nihil Operi Dei praeponatur* : 43: 3). Our radical love for Christ must be shown in zeal for the Work of God (see also 58:7).

Verse 12 : "*May he lead us (effectively) all together to eternal life,*" (*Christo ... qui nos pariter ad vitam aeternam perducat*). Although the monastic's way was already very much stressed in the *Prologue* and the first chapters, it now becomes clear that it is a way travelled together (*pariter*). *Prologue 21* showed us only by its use of the plural, that we presumably "travel our ways under the guidance of the gospel" in company with the community. The common race begins at the altar of our profession, so to speak, where we become a brother or sister respectively, answerable for the welfare and the good of the other, and we reach our final goal only together, or not at all.

After surveying everything, it becomes clear how very much Benedict, as a person of the Bible, bears the stamp of the New Testament Letters, especially here. On no single occasion does he use "It is written". The Bible flows quite naturally into his style of writing. It is so close to him that he does not need to make any extra effort to produce an exact quotation. Despite all his dependence on patristic sources, particularly on the expressions of Augustine (the language of love), it becomes all the clearer how Benedict himself leaves his imprint on the whole of this chapter. And so one will be quite right to say that he himself had found his own self, a loving and fervent heart (*Prologue 49*) at whose centre is Christ himself.

As regards the relevance of good zeal and its practicability for us today, it is important to see that chapter 72 represents a climax of intensity within the Rule. Benedict has distanced himself from his direct source and, by drawing from Cyprian, Cassian and Basil, and especially Augustine and the New Testament, has found and put into words his inmost desire for himself and the community. This unconditional love, this ardent good zeal is the most important factor in monastic life. It is from this that the other virtues and their exercise derive their value and importance. The main objective for all our efforts and the greatest gift of grace will now be seen as that most fervent love (in which the horizontal and the vertical dimension become inseparable). This is totally oriented to Christ. The meaning of love entering into Christ's way, is simply to be considerate of the good of others; to allow Christ to work within us and so allow him to lead us together along the way to our final goal. This good zeal will be exercised (*exercere*, 72: 3) in the workshop of the monastery and beyond its limits.

Of course, the Rule does not describe in any detail how this last phenomenon takes place, but it puts three models into our hands which can orientate us for evangelisation in good zeal.

The first is that of hospitality (R.B. 53), which is especially suited to women. The monastery gates do not remain closed (as in R.M. 95: 22), but they are opened to the needy and strangers. All respect, love and human concern, and the greatest care are shown to them. Trouble is taken to bring them into contact with God (*ducantur ad orationem*: 53: 8), probably through participating in the liturgy, and to strengthen their faith, by allowing them to share in *lectio divina*. (53: 9). One might say that the monastics are intent on that which is useful for the others, the guests in this case, and they do this in all selflessness. The community offers outsiders a place where human and spiritual needs are attended to. Receptivity comes before activity (*suscipere — currere*). The good zeal of hospitality!

The second model of evangelisation is given to us in the chapter on the porters (R.B. 66). A dialogue is in question. In this case also there is first of all the receiving, i.e. listening to people's cries (66:1), especially to that of the poor (66:3), and then the reply given in the gentleness of the fear of God and in zealous love. Benedict says nothing here about the reply having to be in the affirmative, having to contain a 'yes', but it must be consistent with good zeal. This is the closest parallel to R.B. 72.

The third model for evangelisation is to go out in obedience. Benedict gives us this example in the first chapter of his supplement (Ch. 67). Here there is a being-sent (*dirigi*) by the

superior and the community, on their errand; the ones sent are sustained by the common liturgy. The prayer of all is offered at the beginning and end of each one of these missions, and accompanies them also (67:1-4).

All three models are anchored in Christ. Preferring nothing to him means listening and receiving, and to be sent out. In evangelisation we find him in everyone, especially the poor. At the same time we help them, so that he may grow in them, - and also in us. This is our desire, that we together with all persons, may reach our final goal. Good zeal!

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Footnotes:

¹ Progress in editing R.B. becomes clear when one compares the chapter on good works (R.B.4) with R.B.72. In the list of instruments Benedict is still dependent on the R.M., but he is already adding works directed towards the love of one's neighbour, or else emphasises them more clearly. We find examples of negative zeal, such as jealousy and strife (4: 66-68), but on the other hand also love, respect, reconciliation among each other.. Benedict emphasised at the beginning: *to love the Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.*

² *De Trinitate, 13, 4, 7, ad cath 5, 9*

³ See the similarity of sound and meaning between *tollere* and *tolerance*. (There are manuscripts of R.B. which interchange them)

⁴ See Basil, Reg.177: "infirmities nostras tulit et aegritudines nostras portavit."

⁵ See Enarr in Ps.102,5; s.270,4: "sic amemus quem timeamus, ut eum casto amore timeamus." De div. Questionibus 36,1; *De Civ. Dei xiv:9*

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Possible Questions

1. What strikes us as particularly relevant for today, on going through Ch. 72 ?

2. R.B. 72:7— following what is beneficial for the other— a criterion of monastic practice.

What does it mean in reality ?

What does it imply for our ways of showing respect, of showing patience to each other ? For the practice of silence ?

What does it imply in reality for our ways of practising

- Obedience
- Humility
- Fasting and other exercises ?

3. Meditate on R.B. 72 in connection with

a) *Romans 12: 9-12*

b) *1 Cor 13*

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RB 72 THE GOOD ZEAL THAT MONASTICS SHOULD HAVE

1 As there is an evil zeal of bitterness
which separates from God
and leads to hell

2 So there is a good zeal
which separates from sins
and leads to God
and to eternal life.

3 This therefore is the zeal which the monastics must exercise with most ardent love:

4 this means, in honor they will anticipate each other,

5 their infirmities of bodies or of characters, they will bear most patiently,

6 obedience, they will give to each other in competing;

7 nobody will follow what one judges useful for oneself,
but what is more useful to the other;

8 the charity of fraternity they will give in a selfless way.

9 In love they will fear God.

10 Their abbot, they will love with a sincere and humble love.

11 To Christ, nothing whatever they will prefer,

12 may He bring us all together
to eternal life. Amen.