The Rule of St. Benedict, composed in Italy about 530 but based on earlier compilations came to define the cenobitic type monastic life that came to be accepted throughout the West. Here are presented extended excerpts.

Prologue

... We are about to found therefore a school for the Lord's service; in the organization of which we trust that we shall ordain nothing severe and nothing burdensome. But even if, the demands of justice dictating it, something a little irksome shall be the result, for the purpose of amending vices or preserving charity; - thou shalt not therefore, struck by fear, flee the way of salvation, which can not be entered upon except through a narrow entrance. But as one's way of life and one's faith progresses, the heart becomes broadened, and, with the unutterable sweetness of love, the way of the mandates of the Lord is traversed. Thus, never departing from His guidance, continuing in the monastery in his teaching until death, through patience we are made partakers in Christ's passion, in order that we may merit to be companions in His kingdom.

1. Concerning the Kinds of Monks and Their Manner of Living.

It is manifest that there are four kinds of monks. The cenobites are the first kind; that is, those living in a monastery, serving under a rule or an abbot. Then the second kind is that of the anchorites; that is, the hermits-those who, not by the new fervour of a conversion but by the long probation of life in a monastery, have learned to fight against the devil, having already been taught by the solace of many. They, having been well prepared in the army of brothers for the solitary fight of the hermit, being secure now without the consolation of another, are able, God helping them, to fight with their own hand or arm against the vices of the flesh or of their thoughts.

But a third very bad kind of monks are the sarabaites, approved by no rule, experience being their teacher, as with the gold which is tried in the furnace. But, softened after the manner of lead, keeping faith with the world by their works, they are known through their tonsure to lie to God. These being shut up by twos or threes, or, indeed, alone, without a shepherd, not in the Lord's but in their own sheep-folds-their law is the satisfaction of their desires. For whatever they think good or choice, this they call holy; and what they do not wish, this they consider unlawful. But the fourth kind of we are about to found, therefore, a school for the monks is the kind which is called gyratory. During their whole life they are guests, for three or four days at a time, in the cells of the different monasteries, throughout the various provinces; always
wandering and never stationary, given over to the service of their own pleasures and the joys of
the palate, and in every way worse than the sarabaites. Concerning the most wretched way of
living of all such monks it is better to be silent than to speak. These things therefore being
omitted, let us proceed, with the aid of God, to treat of the best kind, the cenobites.

2. What the Abbot Should Be Like

An abbot who is worthy to preside over a monastery ought always to remember what he is
called, and carry out with his deeds the name of a Superior. For he is believed to be Christ's
representative, since he is called by His name, the apostle saying: "Ye have received the spirit of
adoption of sons, whereby we call Abba, Father." And so the abbot should not-grant that he may
not-teach, or decree, or order, any thing apart from the precept of the Lord; but his order or
teaching should be sprinkled with the ferment of divine justice in the minds of his disciples. Let
the abbot always be mindful that, at the tremendous judgment of God, both things will be
weighed in the balance: his teaching and the obedience of his disciples. And let the abbot know
that whatever the father of the family finds of less utility among the sheep is laid to the fault of
the shepherd. Only in a case where the whole diligence of their pastor shall have been bestowed
on an unruly and disobedient flock, and his whole care given to their morbid actions, shall that
pastor, absolved in the judgment of the Lord, be free to say to the Lord with the prophet: "I have
not hid Thy righteousness within my heart, I have declared Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation,
but they despising have scorned me." And then at length let the punishment for the disobedient
sheep under his care be death itself prevailing against them. Therefore, when any one receives
the name of abbot, he ought to rule over his disciples with a double teaching; that is, let him
show forth all good and holy things by deeds more than by words. So that to ready disciples he
may propound the mandates of God in words; but, to the hard-hearted and the more
simpleminded, he may show forth the divine precepts by his deeds. But as to all the things that
he has taught to his disciples to be wrong, he shall show by his deeds that they are not to be
done; lest, preaching to others, he himself shall be found worthy of blame, and lest God may say
at some time to him a sinner: "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes or that thou should'st
take my covenant in thy mouth. Seeing that thou hatest instruction and casteth my words behind
thee; and why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam
that is in thine own eye?" He shall make no distinction of persons in the monastery. One shall not
be more cherished than another, unless it be the one whom he finds excelling in good works or in
obedience. A free-born man shall not be preferred to one coming from servitude, unless there be
some other reasonable cause. But if, justice demanding that it should be thus, it seems good to
the abbot, he shall do this no matter what the rank shall be. But otherwise they shall keep their
own places; for whether we be bond or free we are all one in Christ; and, under one God, we
perform an equal service of subjection; for God is no respecter of persons. Only in this way is a
distinction made by Him concerning us: if we are found humble and surpassing others in good
works. Therefore let him (the abbot) have equal charity for all: let the same discipline be
administered in all cases according to merit. In his teaching indeed the abbot ought always to
observe that form laid down by the apostle when he says: "reprove, rebuke, exhort." That is,
mixing seasons with seasons, blandishments with terrors, let him display the feeling of a severe
yet devoted master. He should, namely, rebuke more severely the unruly and the turbulent. The
obedient, moreover, and the gentle and the patient, he should exhort, that they may progress to
higher things. But the negligent and scorners, we warn him to admonish and reprove....
3. About Calling in the Brethren to Take Council

As often as anything especial is to be done in the monastery, the abbot shall call together the whole congregation, and shall himself explain the question at issue. And, having heard the advice of the brethren, he shall think it over by himself, and shall do what he considers most advantageous.

4. What are the Instrument of Good Works

[contains a list of 72 biblical quotations - omitted]

5. Concerning Obedience

. The first grade of humility is obedience without delay. This becomes those who, on account of the holy service which they have professed, or on account of the fear of hell or the glory of eternal life, consider nothing dearer to them than Christ: so that, so soon as anything is commanded by their superior, they may not know how to suffer delay in doing it, even as if it were a divine command. Concerning whom the Lord said: "As soon as he heard of me he obeyed me."

6. Concerning Silence

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7. Concerning Humility

. The sixth grade of humility is, that a monk be contented with all lowliness or extremity, and consider himself, with regard to everything which is enjoined on him, as a poor and unworthy workman; saying to himself with the prophet: "I Was reduced to nothing and was ignorant; I was made as the cattle before thee, and I am always with thee." The seventh grade of humility is, not only that he, with his tongue, pronounce himself viler and more worthless than all; but that he also believe it in the inner-most workings of his heart; humbling himself and saying with the prophet, etc. The eighth degree of humility is that a monk do nothing except what the common rule of the monastery, or the example of his elders, urges him to do. The ninth degree of humility is that a monk restrain his tongue from speaking; and, keeping silence, do not speak until he is spoken to. The tenth grade of humility is that he be not ready, and easily inclined, to laugh. . . . The eleventh grade of humility is that a monk, when he speaks, speak slowly and without laughter, humbly with gravity, using few and reasonable words; and that he be not loud of voice. . . . The twelfth grade of humility is that a monk shall, not only with his heart but also with his body, always show humility to all who see him: that is, when at work, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields. And everywhere, sitting or walking or standing, let him always be with head inclined, his looks fixed upon the ground; remembering every hour that he is guilty of his sins. Let him think that he is already being presented before the tremendous judgment of God, saying always to himself in his heart what the publican of the gospel, fixing his eyes on the earth, said: "Lord I am not worthy, I a sinner, so much as to lift mine eyes unto Heaven."
8. Concerning the Divine Offices at Night

   In the winter time, that is from the Calends of November until Easter, according to what is reasonable, they must rise at the eighth hour of the night, so that they rest a little more than half the night, and rise when they have already digested. But let the time that remains after vigils be kept for meditation by those brothers who are in any way behind hand with the psalter or lessons. From Easter, moreover, until the aforesaid Calends of November, let the hour of keeping vigils be so arranged that, a short interval being observed in which the brethren may go out for the necessities of nature, the matins, which are always to take place with the dawning light, may straightway follow.


   In the winter first of all the verse shall be said: "Make haste oh God to deliver me; make haste to help me oh God." Then, secondly, there shall be said three times: "Oh Lord open Thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." To which is to be subjoined the third psalm and the Gloria. After this the ninety-fourth psalm is to be sung antiphonally or in unison. The Ambrosian chant shall then follow: then six psalms antiphonally. These having been said, the abbot shall, with the verse mentioned, give the blessing. And all being seated upon the benches, there shall be read in turn from the Scriptures-following out the analogy - three lessons; between which also three responses shall be sung. Two responses shall be said without the Gloria; but, after the third lesson, he who chants shall say the Gloria. And, when the cantor begins to say this, all shall straightway rise from their seats out of honour and reverence for the holy Trinity. Books, moreover, of the old as well as the New Testament of Divine authority shall be read at the Vigils; but also expositions of them which have been made by the most celebrated orthodox teachers and catholic Fathers. Moreover, after these three lessons with their responses, shall follow other six psalms to be sung with the Alleluia. After this a lesson of the Apostle shall follow, to be recited by heart; and verses and the supplication of the Litany, that is the Kyrie eleison: and thus shall end the nocturnal vigils.

10. How in Summer the Nocturnal Praise Shall be Carried On

11. How Vigils Should Be Conducted on Sundays

16. How Divine Service Shall Be Held through the Day.

As the prophet says: "Seven times in the day do I praise Thee." Which sacred number of seven will thus be fulfilled by us if, at matins, at the first, third, sixth, ninth hours, at vespers time and at "completorium" we perform the duties of our service; for it is of these hours of the day that he said: "Seven times in the day do I praise Thee." For, concerning nocturnal vigils, the same prophet says: "At midnight I arose to confess unto thee." Therefore, at these times, let us give thanks to our Creator concerning the judgments of his righteousness; that is, at matins, etc..... and at night we will rise and confess to him....
18. In What Order the Psalms are To Be Sung

19. Concerning the Art of Singing

20. Concerning Reverence for Prayer

21. Concerning the Deans of the Monastery


They shall sleep separately in separate beds. They shall receive positions for their beds, after the manner of their characters, according to the dispensation of their abbot. If it can be done, they shall all sleep in one place. If, however, their number do not permit it, they shall rest, by tens or twenties, with elders who will concern themselves about them. A candle shall always be burning in that same cell until early in the morning. They shall sleep clothed, and girt with belts or with ropes; and they shall not have their knives at their sides while they sleep, lest perchance in a dream they should wound the sleepers. And let the monks be always on the alert; and, when the signal is given, rising without delay, let them hasten to mutually prepare themselves for the service of God with all gravity and modesty, however. The younger brothers shall not have beds by themselves, but interspersed among those of the elder ones. And when they rise for the service of God, they shall exhort each other mutually with moderation on account of the excuses that those who are sleepy are inclined to make.

23. Concerning Excommunication for Faults

24. What Ought to Be the Measure of Excommunication

25. Concerning Graver Faults

26. Concerning those Who, Without Being Ordered by the Abbot, Associate with the Excommunicated

27. What Care the Abbot Should Exercise with Regard to the Excommunicated

28. Concerning those Who, Being Often Rebuked, Do Not Amend

29. Whether Brothers who Leave the Monastery Ought Again to Be Received

30. Concerning Boys under Age, How They Shall Be Corrected

31. Concerning the Cellarer of the Monastery, What Sort of a Person He Shall Be

As a cellarer of the monastery there shall be elected from the congregation one who is wise, mature in character, sober, not given to much eating, not proud, not turbulent, not an upbraider, not tardy, not prodigal, but fearing God: a father, as it were, to the whole congregation. He shall take care of everything, he shall do nothing without the order of the abbot. He shall have charge
of what things are ordered: he shall not rebuff the brethren. If any brother by chance demand anything unreasonably from him, he shall not, by spurning, rebuff him; but reasonably, with humility, shall deny to him who wrongly seeks.

32. Concerning the Utensils or Property of the Monastery

33. Whether the Monks Should Have Anything of Their Own

More than anything else is this special vice to be cut off root and branch from the monastery, that one should presume to give or receive anything without the order of the abbot, or should have anything of his own. He should have absolutely not anything: neither a book, nor tablets, nor a pen-nothing at all.-For indeed it is not allowed to the monks to have their own bodies or wills in their own power. But all things necessary they must expect from the Father of the monastery; nor is it allowable to have anything which the abbot did not give or permit. All things shall be common to all, as it is written: "Let not any man presume or call anything his own." But if any one shall have been discovered delighting in this most evil vice: being warned once and again, if he do not amend, let him be subjected to punishment.

34. Whether All Ought to Received Necessities Equally

35. Concerning the Weekly Officers of the Kitchen

36. Concerning Infirm Brothers

37. Concerning Old Age and Infancy

38. Concerning the Weekly Reader

39 Concerning the Amount of food

We believe, moreover, that, for the daily refection of the sixth as well as of the ninth hour, two cooked dishes, on account of the infirmities of the different ones, are enough for all tables: so that whoever, perchance, can not eat of one may partake of the other. Therefore let two cooked dishes suffice for all the brothers: and, if it is possible to obtain apples or growing vegetables, a third may be added. One full pound of bread shall suffice for a day, whether there be one refection, or a breakfast and a supper. But if they are going to have supper, the third part of that same pound shall be reserved by the cellarer, to be given back to those who are about to sup. But if, perchance, some greater labour shall have been performed, it shall be in the will and power of the abbot, if it is expedient, to increase anything; surfeiting above all things being guarded against, so that indigestion may never seize a monk: for nothing is so contrary to every Christian as surfeiting, as our Lord says: "Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting. " But to younger boys the same quantity shall not be served, but less than that to the older ones; moderation being observed in all things. But the eating of the flesh of quadrupeds shall be abstained from altogether by every one, excepting alone the weak and the sick.

40. Concerning the Amount of Drink.
Each one has his own gift from God, the one in this way, the other in that. Therefore it is with some hesitation that the amount of daily sustenance for others is fixed by us. Nevertheless, in view of the weakness of the infirm we believe that a hemina [just less than half a liter] of wine a day is enough for each one. Those moreover to whom God gives the ability of bearing abstinence shall know that they will have their own reward. But the prior shall judge if either the needs of the place, or labour or the heat of summer, requires more; considering in all things lest satiety or drunkenness creep in. Indeed we read that wine is not suitable for monks at all. But because, in our day, it is not possible to persuade the monks of this, let us agree at least as to the fact that we should not drink till we are sated, but sparingly. For wine can make even the wise to go astray. Where, moreover, the necessities of the place are such that the amount written above can not be found—but much less or nothing at all—those who live there shall bless God and shall not murmur. And we admonish them to this above all: that they be without murmuring.

41. At What Hours the Brothers Should Take Their Refection
42. That After the "Completorium" No-one Shall Speak
43. Concerning Those Who Come Late to Divine Service or To Table
44. Concerning Those Who Are Excommunicated, How They Shall Render Satisfaction
45. Concerning Those Who Make Mistakes in the Oratory

If any one, in saying a psalm, response, or antiphone or lesson, male a mistake; unless he humble himself there before all, giving satisfaction, he shall be subjected to greater punishment, as one who was unwilling to correct by humility that in which he had erred by neglect. But children, for such a fault, shall be whipped.

46. Concerning Those Who Err in Any Other Matter
47. Concerning The Announcement of the Hour of Divine Office

Idleness is the enemy of the soul. And therefore, at fixed times, the brothers ought to be occupied in manual labour; and again, at fixed times, in sacred reading. ... there shall certainly be appointed one or two elders, who shall go round the monastery at the hours in which the brothers are engaged in reading, and see to it that no troublesome brother chance to be found who is open to idleness and trifling, and is not intent on his reading; being not only of no use to himself, but also stirring up others.

49. Without title
50. Concerning Brothers Who Labour Far from the Oratary or Who are On A Journey
51. Concerning Brothers Who Do Not Journey Very Far
52. Concerning the Oratory of the Monastery

53. Concerning the Reception of Guests

54. Whether a Monk Shall be Allowed to Receive Letters or Anything

55. Concerning Clothes and Shoes

Vestments shall be given to the brothers according to the quality of the places where they dwell, or the temperature of the air. For in cold regions more is required; but in warm, less. This, therefore, is a matter for the abbot to decide. We nevertheless consider that for ordinary places there suffices for the monks a cowl and a gown apiece—the cowl, in winter hairy, in summer plain or old—and a working garment, on account of their labours. As clothing for the feet, shoes and boots.

56. Concerning the Table of the Abbot

57. Concerning the Artificers of the Monastery

58. Concerning the Manner of Receiving Brothers

When any new comer applies for conversion, an easy entrance shall not be granted him: but, as the apostle says, "Try the spirits if they be of God." Therefore, if he who comes perseveres in knocking, and is seen after four or five days to patiently endure the insults inflicted upon him, and the difficulty of ingress, and to persist in his demand: entrance shall be allowed him, and he shall remain for a few days in the cell of the guests. After this, moreover, he shall be in the cell of the novices, where he shall meditate and eat and sleep. And an elder shall be detailed off for him who shall be capable of saving souls, who shall altogether intently watch over him, and make it a care to see if he reverently seek God, if he be zealous in the service of God, in obedience, in suffering shame. And all the harshness and roughness of the means through which God is approached shall be told him in advance. If he promise perseverance in his steadfastness, after the lapse of two months this Rule shall be read to him in order, and it shall be said to him: Behold the law under which thou dost wish to serve; if thou canst observe it, enter; but if thou canst not, depart freely. If he have stood firm thus far, then he shall be led into the aforesaid cell of the novices; and again he shall be proven with all patience. And, after the lapse of six months, the Rule shall be read to him; that he may know upon what he is entering. And, if he stand firm thus far, after four months the same Rule shall again be re-read to him. And if, having deliberated with himself, he shall promise to keep everything, and to obey all the commands that are laid upon him: then he shall be received in the congregation; knowing that it is decreed, by the law of the Rule, that from that day he shall not be allowed to depart from the monastery, nor to shake free his neck from the yoke of the Rule, which, after such tardy deliberation, he was at liberty either to refuse or receive.

59. Concerning the Sons of Nobles of of poor Men Who Are Presented

60. Concerning Priests Who May Chance to Desire to Dwell in the Monastery
61. Concerning Pilgrim Monks: How They Shall Be Received

62. No title - concerns ordination by abbots

63. Concerning Rank in the Congregation

64. Concerning the Ordination of an Abbot

. In ordaining an abbot this consideration shall always be observed: that such a one shall be put into office as the whole congregation, according to the fear of God, with one heart—or even a part, however small, of the congregation with more prudent counsel—shall have chosen. He who is to be ordained, moreover, shall be elected for merit of life and learnedness in wisdom; even though he be the lowest in rank in the congregation. But even if the whole congregation with one consent shall have elected a person consenting to their vices—which God forbid;—and those vices shall in any way come clearly to the knowledge of the bishop to whose diocese that place pertains, or to the neighbouring abbots or Christians: the latter shall not allow the consent of the wicked to prevail, but shall set up a dispenser worthy of the house of God; knowing that they will receive a good reward for this, if they do it chastely and with zeal for God. just so they shall know, on the contrary, that they have sinned if they neglect it.

65. Concerning the Provost of the Monastery

66. Concerning the Doorkeepers of the Monastery

67. Concerning Brothers Sent on a Journey

68. If Impossibilities Are Enjoined on a Brother

69. That, in a Monastery, One Shall Not Presume to Defend Anothers

70. That No-one Shall Presume to Strike Promiscuously

71. That They Shall Be Mutually Obedient

72. Concerning the Good Zeal Which monks Ought to have

73. Concerning the Fact That Not Every Just Observance is Decreed in This Rule