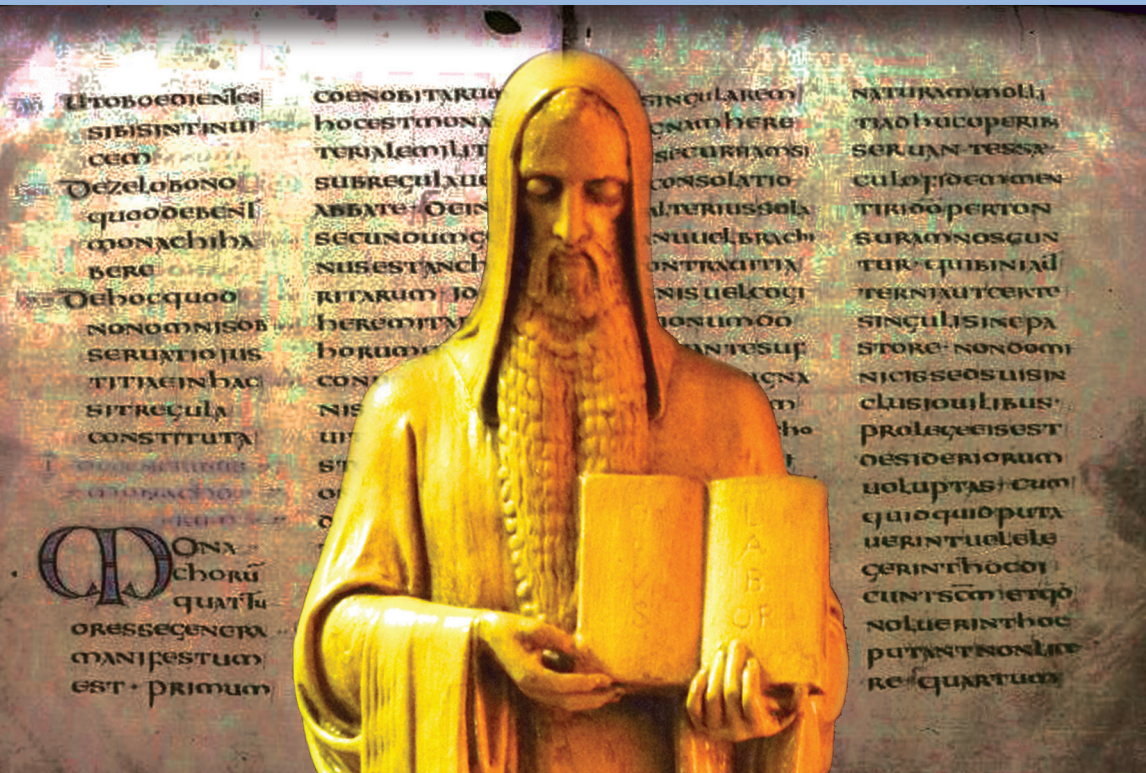


# A Critical Study of the Rule of Benedict

Volume 3: Liturgy, Sleeping Arrangements,  
and the Penal Code (RB 8-20, 22-30, 42-46)



Adalbert de Vogüé

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and the Penal Code (RB 8–20, 22–30, 42–46)**

by Adalbert de Vogüé

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Part One

# **The Work of God**





## Chapter One

### The Treatise on the Divine Office (RB 8–20)

#### I. The Importance of the Treatise

The liturgical section occupies a privileged place in RB. Its importance is first evidenced by the number of pages that are allotted to it. It makes up around a seventh of the total length of the Rule, while the corresponding section in RM scarcely occupies a fourteenth of the work.<sup>1</sup>

Relatively large, this treatise appears equally remarkable if one considers the attention with which it is written. In this regard, the *ordo* of Benedict yields nothing to that of the Master. RB is often much more vague and obscure than RM, particularly in matters of ritual and ceremony. Conversely, here it exercises the same painstaking care to specify each detail of the celebration of the Office.

This editorial effort corresponds to a complete recasting of liturgical structures. Few parts of the observance have been as profoundly modified by Benedict as the Divine Office. Such a renewal takes on its full significance if one compares RB 8–20 to nearby sections, such as the preceding treatise on spirituality, where the texts of the Master are simply transcribed, or even the following chapters on the deans and excommunication, where Benedict is often content with a rather prosaic summary of the legislation of the Master.

But the clearest indicator of the importance that Benedict assigns to the *ordo officii* is undoubtedly the position that he gives it at the beginning of the institutional part of the Rule. Immediately after the chapter on humility and its discussion of ascetic principles, one passes to the celebration of the Office, which thus appears as the principal work of cenobitic life. Perhaps Benedict intends to highlight the *Opus Dei* as the essential task of monks. This privileged place may also result, at least in part, from the editor's eagerness to discuss a matter on which he has more to say than any other.

#### II. Position in the Rule

In any case, the different position of the treatise in the two Rules is the first important fact that we must examine. In fact, one can ask in which of these two Rules the treatise is most firmly and naturally inserted.

At first sight, it seems that it is RM. We know how the Master effortlessly and seamlessly moves from the chapters on sleep and waking to the treatise on the Night Office (RM 30–33) and then, completing the liturgical section, passes with the same ease to the activities that occur between the Offices, that is to say, to the schedule of the workday (RM 49–50). On the other hand, there is nothing in the *ordo* of RB that ties it to what precedes it or follows it. It begins *ex abrupto* and ends likewise. Certainly one is justified in establishing a logical link between the treatise on spirituality (RB Prol–7) and the spiritual work par excellence, the Divine Office. But if Benedict wrote his *ordo* knowing this sequence, would he not have given the chapters that discuss the comportment necessary for psalmody and prayer priority of place at the beginning of the section? Yet, in RB, as in RM, these two chapters of a more spiritual character are instead at the end of the section (RB 19–20; cf. RM 47–48), while both authors begin with the schedule for Night Office. Thus, the structure common to both *ordines* fits instead with the place that the Master assigns to it, following the chapters on sleep and the night.

However, one cannot rely unduly on the explicit or very apparent ties of RM. They could be the work of an editor concerned with order and cohesion, who revised the original plan of the Rule as he thought necessary. Therefore, we will see if more certain indicators exist in favor of the anteriority of one position or the other.

### *The Introduction of RM 34*

One could first argue from RM 34.1. This passage sounds like an introduction and its original destination seems to have been at the opening of the liturgical section.<sup>2</sup> In fact, one finds it after the chapter on the Night Office (RM 33). Thus, the current order of RM seems to result from a move that has brought the chapter on the Night Office to the head of the *ordo*. But this clearly revised order is what one finds in RB: like that of RM, its *ordo* begins with the schedule and structure of the Night Office in winter, followed by that for the Night Office in summer (RB 8–10); the passage corresponding to RM 34.1–3 is presented only in the middle of the liturgical section (RB 16) and in no way makes one think of an introduction. Thus, RB agrees with the current version of RM that has been revised. Therefore, Benedict seems to depend on the Master, especially as this latter would have had no reason, if he followed RB or a source presenting the same order, to include this phrase that indicates a beginning in the midst of his *ordo*.<sup>3</sup>

*The Signal for the Office and the Leading of Psalms*

RB 47 provides a second indicator in this regard. This small chapter brings together two questions: who will be responsible to give the signal for the Office (cf. the title); in what order should the brothers succeed one another in leading the psalms? In RM these two themes are the object of two distinct and very long chapters: RM 31 (*De eudomadariis officii diuini in noctibus*) and RM 46 (*De inponendis psalmis in oratorio quouis tempore*). Yet what separates these chapters of the Master is precisely the main part of the liturgical section (RM 33–45), with the chapter on waking which serves to introduce it (RM 32). RM 46 is attached to this section by strong and evident ties; after having exhausted the question of the alleluia (RM 39–45), the Master goes on to discuss the manner of chanting the psalms and praying (RM 47–48). He thus passes from impersonal rubrics, concerning the entire community, to recommendations addressed to individuals. Chapter Forty-Six occurs at this time to establish the order in which individuals will chant the psalms. Thus, this chapter prepares for the *De disciplina psallendi* (RM 47).<sup>4</sup> Its place is so natural that one has difficulty imagining that it came there as a result of a move. It is this, however, that one must acknowledge if one judges that the order of Benedict is original: the Master would have had to move the liturgical section such that it is accommodated between the two passages of RB 47, that is to say between the announcement of the Office (RB 47.1) and the order for leading the psalms (RB 47.2), while pushing back the chapters on comportment in psalmody and prayer to after this last passage. Such a process is too much a tour de force for one to consider it likely.

In contrast, the transition from the order of the Master to that of Benedict could be accomplished relatively easily. When moving the liturgical section, Benedict would need only to keep RM 46 in its place. The rest of this chapter (RB 47.2–3) would then be in the neighborhood of the summary of RM 31 (RB 47.1). Then, with a simple reversal, of which we will speak later, the two passages are found in order. Benedict does not take the trouble to give the second its own title. He instead brings these two fragments together in a single chapter, beckoning to the similarity of their content: in both cases it is a matter of the abbot designating an individual for a task related to the Office. If one asks what motive leads him to separate RM 46 from the liturgical section, one might suppose that these prescriptions do not seem to him to fit into the extremely tightly woven texture of his *ordo*. The original relationship of RM 46.1–2 with *De disciplina psallendi* may be concealed from him by the presence of RM 46.3–7, if not RM 46.8–10.<sup>5</sup> But it is also quite

possible that the separation of RM 46 from its original context has as its determining motive the intent to join its indications to those of RM 31. This reunion is suggested not only by certain similarities of content, but also by the brevity of RB 47.1, which hardly provides material for a complete chapter.

Thus, in the present case, one can better explain the movement from RM to RB than the reverse process. But there is more: Benedict himself seems to attest to the original nearness of *De disciplina psallendi* to the note on the leading of the psalms. In fact, RB 47 concludes with some words that treat not only the choice of chanters and readers, but also the way that they must fulfill their office: *quod cum humilitate et grauitate et tremore fiat* (RB 47.4). It is difficult not to connect these expressions to those that one reads at the beginning of RM 47.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it seems that when Benedict writes this phrase he has in front of him the counsels of the Master on the method for chanting the psalms. It would be perfectly natural for these counsels to follow the prescriptions on the psalmody. Thus Benedict would summarize not only RM 31 and 46 in his Chapter Forty-Seven but also RM 47. In a second revision he would have a new, much more ample summary of this latter chapter and place it under its own title: the *De disciplina psallendi* that RB 19 offers us.<sup>7</sup> But the little phrase which ends RB 47 continues to witness to the original position of *De disciplina psallendi* and, in consequence, the entire liturgical section. This is the place that the section occupies in RM.

### *Those Who Come Late to Vigils*

The liturgical section has left still another remnant in this part of RB. In moving it, Benedict replaces it with a group of chapters on satisfaction (RB 43–46). Yet the first of these chapters deals only with latecomers to Office, a theme which appears in RM in the introduction to the liturgical section, speaking of the beginning of the Night Office (RM 32.9–15).

Benedict begins with three introductory verses that call to mind RM 54 (RB 43.1–3). Next, the body of the chapter examines the latecomers themselves, following a plan analogous to that of RM 73: first at night Vigils (RB 43.4–9; cf. RM 73.1–5), then at the Hours of the day (RB 43.10–12; cf. RM 73.6–7), and finally at table (RB 43.13–17; cf. RM 73.8–11). But the division of the Master undergoes a significant modification in RB. While the Master discusses Vigils, Matins,<sup>8</sup> and Vespers, that is to say the three great Hours, Benedict speaks only of *nocturnis uigiliis*, with no reference to Matins and Vespers. It seems that he will be no more concerned with these two Offices when he discusses the *diurnis horis*.<sup>9</sup> In any case, the fact that he begins by dealing only