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On Silence in the Rule of St. Benedict
A Study of Chapter 6: 1-6

by Karen F. Arce, OCSO

The metaphysics of silence and speech is really a word about being—about being human. In and through space and time man is a listener, one who hears a word spoken that constitutes his very being and continues to reveal his own being to himself while revealing all being in which he participates. Man is ultimately one who hears, and in hearing responds to being. The word man hears is a word of truth about being, about his own given.

INTRODUCTION

One of the characteristics of the early monastic movement was to seek solitude and silence, in order to know God and to pursue wisdom by contemplating the Word of God. The monastic, a seeker of God and wisdom, sought this silence in the desert away from the noises of the world. This exterior movement enabled the monastic to find an interior silence and stillness which led to deepen the spiritual life.

In the 6th century Benedict, in the midst of the chaos of war, formulated a Rule that promoted the values of monastic life in the Latin west. One of those values is silence, which basically aims at teaching the monastic how to listen with the ear of the heart. The very first word in the Rule of St. Benedict is listen (Obsculta): “Listen, O my son, to the teachings of your master, and turn to them with the ear of your heart.” There is a connection between silence and listening. Benedict wants the monastic to deepen the value of silence to get in touch with a deeper dimension of being human. It is in silence that one learns to hear with the ear of the heart in order to respond to the demands of daily life from the wisdom within. Wathen says, “Man is ultimately one who hears, and in hearing responds to being.” It is this response to being that Benedict wants to draw from the monastic.

The objective of this paper is to explore how Benedict forms the heart of the monk to be capable of listening with the ear of the heart which in turn will help the monastic to listen to God, one’s neighbor and oneself. This will be explored by first examining the opening and closing verses. Then one will survey its context and function and the interrelationship of each verse. Next one will explore two resources, one from the apparatus under the Latin text in RB -1980 and the other from Scripture. Then one will take two words in Latin from the passage and deepen the understanding of each by looking at three other ways the word is used in the Rule of St. Benedict. After finding what is unique in the text of RB, one will compare the Rule of the Master and the Rule of St. Benedict. Finally, one will reflect on how Benedict’s teaching on silence prepares the monk for a deeper interior life.

CHAPTER 6: 1-6: ON SILENCE

1. Let us follow the Prophet’s counsel: I said, I have resolved to keep watch over my ways that I may never sin with my tongue. I was silent and was humbled, and I restrained even from good words (Ps 38[39]:2-3). Here the Prophet indicates that there are times when good words are to be left unsaid out of esteem for silence. For all the more reason, then, should evil speech be curbed so that punishment for sin may be avoided. Indeed, so important is
silence that permission to speak should seldom be granted even to mature disciples, no matter how good or holy or constructive their talk, because it is written: In a flood of words you will not avoid sin (Prov. 10:19); and elsewhere, The tongue holds the key to life and death (Prov. 18:21). Speaking and teaching are the master’s task; the disciple is to be silent and listen.  

OPENING AND CLOSING FORMULAS

The Rule of St. Benedict is an interpretation of the Scriptures. In the Scripture Benedict finds a wealth of wisdom which is meant to be embodied in the life of the monk. In Chapter 6, Benedict begins and ends with Scripture. He opens with Psalm 38 (39) and closes with two passages from Proverbs 10:19 and 18:21. The opening Psalm sets the tone for this chapter effectively. It states the prophet’s resolution to guard his tongue, to be silent and humbled to the point that he refrains from even good words. So, if even good words are to be left out how much more evil talk: gossip, slander, and idle talk. This resolution to refrain from speech is to avoid sin and to create a space within for a silence that fosters a self-reflection that leads to self-knowledge. This is fundamental for the growth in the spiritual life.

The opening verse from Proverbs comes after Benedict’s third invitation to the monks to refrain from speaking even good or holy words. Benedict intends to help the monk focus their attention and intention. Above all what matters is to help the monk focus their attention and intention. Above all what matters is to help the monk focus their attention and intention.

The closing verse from Proverbs comes after Benedict’s third invitation to the monks to refrain from speaking even good or holy words. Benedict intends to help the monk focus their attention and intention. Above all what matters is to help the monk focus their attention and intention. Above all what matters is to help the monk focus their attention and intention.

CONTEXT AND FUNCTION

The context of Chapter 6, which are Chapter 5: On Obedience and Chapter 7: On Humility, will give further insight into the meaning of the value of monastic silence. There are interesting remarks about Benedict’s choice to place the chapter on silence between these two chapters. The first verse in Chapter 5 on obedience reads, “The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience.” For Benedict obedience is an act of humility. It is from this humble disposition of the heart that the monk is able to listen to the command from the superior. The word obedience comes from the Latin word obedio which means: to give ear to, listen to, follow a person’s advice. Obedience is essential for the disciple of Christ. Benedict addresses the superiors twice with the Scriptural passage from Luke 10:16: “Whoever listens to you, listens to me.” Already here one sees how, for Benedict, obedience is related to listening. It is through listening that the monastic shows his or her love for Christ. But even with this love the monastic is confronted by human limitations and weaknesses. One of these limitations comes in the form of murmuring.

In verses 14-19 one finds Benedict’s exhortation against murmuring. For example, verses 17-18 reads: “If a disciple obeys grudgingly and murmurs, not only our loud but also internally, even if he carries out the order, it will not be acceptable to God.” Benedict knows that there is no room for an obedient heart for those who murmur. The Latin word (murmuration) for murmuring appears four times within verses 14-19. Kardong says that in someone who

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4 RB 6.1-6.  
5 RB 6.3.  
6 RB 6.5.  

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7 RB 4.51-54.  
8 RB 5.1.  
9 Terrence G. Kardong, Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996). Hereafter all references to Kardong will be indicated by the abbreviation Kardong followed by the page number, or Kardong, followed by RB the chapter and verse. (Kardong, RB 5.17-18).
murmurs, “Benedict sees a recalcitrant heart as inimical to the whole monastic enterprise.” Hence the need to have those moments of silence during which the person can go deeper into what is being demanded of them. Perhaps it is also a concern about murmuring that leads Benedict to write the chapter on silence, which is mainly concerned about the importance of avoiding much talk that leads to sin.

Chapter 6 on silence is followed by chapter 7 on humility. Humility is very close to the meaning Benedict wants to transmit through the word Taciturnitas. It takes a humble attitude to have a disposition to listen rather than to talk. In the chapter on humility, Benedict gives twelve steps to grow in humility. It is important to notice that the themes of the previous two chapters, 5 and 6, are explicitly stated in chapter 7. The steps of humility 2-4 encourage the monk to obey; steps 9-12 state the importance of guarding the tongue at all times. The monastic is exhorted to grow in humility by obeying and guarding the tongue. And for this, Benedict warns the monks that God knows the human thoughts.

In the first step of humility Benedict develops a whole section from verses 12-18 about thoughts. The idea that stands out is that God knows human thoughts. In verse 12, one finds again the invitation to “guard oneself at all times from sins and vices, that is, of thoughts, tongue, hands, feet or self-will, but also desires of the flesh.” In verse 13 Benedict warns that the monk is constantly observed by God and his angels who give reports of their doings and therefore one must be watchful. This helps the monks to be aware that whether in deeds or thoughts nothing escapes the knowledge of God and therefore there is a healthy fear that can inform and guide the monk’s behaviour when it comes to obedience and guarding the thoughts. Verse 13 reads: “Let each one take into account that he is constantly observed by God and his angels everywhere lie open to the divine gaze and reported by the angels at every hour.” In verse 14 Benedict states, “The Prophet demonstrates this to us when he shows that God is always privy to our thoughts: God examines hearts and minds.”

In these three chapters Benedict weaves the movements of the human mind and heart with the action of God, allowing the monk to connect with both the capacity to listen and be aware of the tendency to murmur (Chapter 5), with the need to guard the mouth and choose to be silent (Chapter 6), and to the awareness that God knows our thoughts when it comes to obedience and guarding the tongue (Chapter 7). Next, we will explore chapter 6 and how their verses are interrelated.

**OUTLINE OF THE PASSAGE AND ITS INTERRELATIONSHIPS**

De Taciturnitate

V.1 Faciamus quod ait propheta: Dixi: Custodiam vias meas, ut non delinquam in lingua mea. Posui ori meo custodiam. Obmutui et humiliatus sum et silui a bonis.

(On Silence)³³

(Let us follow the Prophet’s counsel: I said, I have resolved to keep watch over my ways that I may never sin with my tongue. I was silent and was humbled, and I refrained even from good words. (Ps 38[39]:203))

In relation to the title, according to Kardong, the words silentium and taciturnitas can mean the same. He suggests that silentium implies physical silence whereas taciturnitas means “the human quality of being quiet.” In this chapter, Benedict wants to emphasize the quality of being quiet. Benedict repeats this word four times in different forms. This repetition accents his invitation to cultivate the quality of being quiet. Taciturnitas then can mean a state of being that makes the mind and heart available for a deeper listening.

Kardong, in his commentary, brings insights from other scholars to explain a more in-depth understanding of silence. Sr. Aquinata Böckmann makes the point that “silence and speech are inseparable” and both of these meanings are included in the word taciturnitas. He also points out from Wathen, “this word connotes more than purely physical silence. Basically, it refers to a person...”
who is sufficiently serene and wise so that his words arise out of silence and his silence itself speaks eloquently.”

Böckmann and Wathen’s understanding of the word silence help us see the wisdom that can come from silence and the eloquence of silence itself.

In verse 1, Benedict begins with a scriptural introduction which effectively sets the tone for the entire chapter. The prophet echoes Benedict’s desire to convey to the monastic the importance of keeping watch over the mouth. Kardong here affirms that Benedict is not so much against speech but he is concerned about evil talk. He says, “Neither should Benedict be seen as the absolute enemy of speech but of evil and excessive talk.”

V.2 Hic ostendit propheta, si a bonis eloquiis interdum propter taciturnitatem debet taceri, quanto magis a malis verbis propter poenam peccati debet cessari.

(Here the Prophet indicates that there are times when good words are to be unsaid out of esteem for silence. For all the more reason, then, should evil speech be curbed so that punishment for sin may be avoided.)

In this verse Benedict explains the previous scripture passage and gives two reasons why the monastic should refrain from much talk: First, to avoid punishment for sin and second for the esteem for silence. Benedict opens the monastic to the awareness that silence is even better than a good word. Benedict knows it is silence that will teach the monastic to listen and reveal what is in the heart more than words. In relation to choosing speech or silence, Kardong says, “Benedict is no proponent of mutism, as many texts from RB show. He knows it is unnatural for human beings to shun all speech; what is important is that the speech be modest and ‘reasonable.’”

Modest and reasonable speech is better than total mutism when it comes to fostering charity in the community. One of the characteristics of the Rule is its moderation which gives the monastic space to adapt to the needs of each individual in the community.

V.3 Ergo, quamvis de bonis et sanctis et aedificauion eloquis, perfectis discipulis propter taciturnitas gravitatem rara loquendi concedatur licentia,

(Indeed, so important is silence that permission to speak should seldom be granted even to mature disciples, no matter how good or holy or constructive their talk.)

The esteem for silence goes as far as restricting the permission to speak. In this verse the use of the word licentia speaks of privilege. Here Benedict is exhorting the superiors to seldom grant this privilege to speak even to mature disciples. One could also make the contrast between the exhortation to refrain even from good words and the exhortation to not give the privilege of permission to speak, even to the mature. In both cases, the opposites are emphasized. If that is the case with good words and mature disciples, how much more the restriction is to be applied to sinful words and to those who are still in formation in the monastic way of life.

Another contrast comes from what Kardong notes, namely, that the New Testament encourages disciples to speak with parrhesia, that is with boldness and confidence before God. This contrast between remaining silent on some occasions, and speaking with boldness on other occasions, invites one to think that to remain silent is also a way of expressing oneself with boldness. In both instances, the attitude of listening is required.

V.4 quia scriptum est: In multiloquio non effugies peccatum,

(because it is written: In a flood of words you will not avoid sin)

As one has seen so far it is this practice of guarding the tongue that leads one to the practice of silence. Here Benedict bases his teaching on Scripture: the need to stop the “flow of words” that is, all chattering in order to avoid sin. Benedict is aware that in order to listen one must be silent. Thus he affirms in the following verse:
V.5 et alibi: Mors et vita in manibus linguae.
(and elsewhere, The tongue holds the key to life and death)\textsuperscript{25}

This passage not only gives an emphasis to the importance of refraining from speaking, but also to the fact that words can lead to life or death. All along Benedict is concerned more about the speech that leads to sin, but here he is also stating that words can give life. For instance, the Word of God revealed through the words of the master are meant to lead to the growth in the spiritual life. What matters to Benedict is the speech that leads to life.

V.6 Nam loqui et docere magistrum condecet, tacere et audire discipulum convenit.

(Speaking and teaching are the master’s task; the disciple is to be silent and listen)\textsuperscript{26}

The master is not merely speaking but teaching the wisdom of the Word of God. The master shares the fruit of his own practice of silence and listening. In connection with verse 1, where Benedict invites the monks to listen to the prophet in the psalm, here he invites the disciple to listen to the master. Here Benedict is very specific, the role of the master is to teach and the role of the disciple to be silent and listen.

**SOURCE FROM SCRIPTURE**

In this chapter of the Rule, Benedict uses three scriptural passages, one from the Book of Psalms and two from the Book of Proverbs. Psalm 38 and Proverbs 10 supports his point on guarding the mouth to avoid sin; Proverbs 18 includes two sides of speech: “the tongue holds the key to life and death.” For Benedict one can never underestimate the power of our words. Speech can either carry life or death.

Here I will focus on Psalm 38[39] which shows how the prophet himself struggles between speaking and remaining silent.

\textsuperscript{3} Mute and silent before the wicked,
I refrain from good things.
But my sorrow increases;
\textsuperscript{4} my heart smolders within me.
In my sighing a fire blazes up,
and I break into speech: . . .
\textsuperscript{10} I am silent and do not open my mouth
because you are the one who did this.\textsuperscript{27}

Notice the intensity of the psalmist’s intention to remain silent: “I will watch”; “I will keep a muzzle”; “mute and silent”; “I refrain”. Silence is not easy when the mind and heart are charged with emotions and thoughts. There is good teaching here. First, he remains silent, then he struggles as he gets closer to the cause of his emotions and feelings, “my heart smolders within me,” “my sighing a fire blazes up.” The emotion is burning within until he cannot hold it any longer and bursts into speech. Then in verse 10 again he is silent and recognizes God’s action in his life. Twice he chooses to be silent. The first time he understands something of his emotions, in the second he recognizes God’s hand behind it all saying, “you are the one who did this” Silence is the space where the mind and heart can find wisdom even in the midst of struggles.

Another observation comes from Kardong who points out in verse 1, that the psalmist is willing to keep watch over his mouth, but in verse 4 the psalmist breaks the silence into speech. He explains that this is not “a moral failure by the Hebrew authors, for whom free speech with God was prized and honored.”\textsuperscript{28} Again, Kardong suggests that Benedict should not be seen as “the absolute enemy of speech.”\textsuperscript{29} Rather, Benedict is mindful of the importance of guarding the thoughts. It is in verse 10 the psalmist is again silent; this time in a silence of pure trust. It is this trust which will help to choose silence again and again.

\textsuperscript{28} Kardong,120.
\textsuperscript{29} Kardong,120.
Therefore, due to the great importance of silence itself, perfect disciples should rarely be granted permission to speak, even good, holy and edifying words.\(^{30}\)

The apparatus under the Latin text in RB-1980, gives Cassian’s Institutes 11. 4 as a source for verse 6:3. Throughout this chapter Cassian warns the reader against vainglory. Perhaps Benedict also has in mind that those who are perfect disciples may fall into the danger of vainglory by allowing them to speak. Guarding the tongue is also about guarding the purity of the heart. Silence can help but as Cassian also says even silence with the wrong intention can bring much harm. He states, “and him whom he has not succeeded in puffing up with the splendor of knowledge and fine speech he destroys with the gravity of silence.”\(^{31}\)

KEY LATIN WORDS USED IN RB 6.1-6 AND USED IN OTHER PARTS OF RB

Here one will see how the Latin words custodiam and verbum are used in this chapter.

**Custodiam**

RB 6.1 ‘custodiam vias meas’

RB 6.1 reads, “Let us do what the Prophet says: “I said: ‘I will guard (custodiam) my ways so as not to sin with my tongue. I placed a guard (custodiam) at my mouth. I was speechless and humiliated, refraining even from good speech.’”\(^{32}\)

According to Kardong in RM 8.21-23 the word custodiam (guard) means “literally the teeth clenched to block evil speech.”\(^{33}\) Kardong points out that according to Vogüé, Benedict adds omnibus locis in verse 8, to perhaps “show he does not want this kind of talk anywhere, even behind the clenched teeth or in the heart.”\(^{34}\) Also the word custodiam is used in two simultaneous movements of the heart. It shows the intention and the way the monk is carrying the intention. The intention is to guard and the way is by clenching the teeth. Here custodia is practiced as a way to learn to listen.

**RB 31.8 animam suam custodiat**

RB 31.8 reads, “Let him keep guard (custodiat) over his own soul, remembering always that saying of the Apostle: ‘Whoever serves well gains a good reward.’”\(^{35}\)

The principal aim of this chapter is to lead the cellarer to care for the goods of the monastery so as to maintain the peace in the house of God: “Thus no one will be upset or vexed in the house of God.” In this chapter on the qualities of the cellarer, Benedict twice uses the word custodiat to express the need for the cellarer to be watchful. Only if he is watchful for his own soul will he be able to be watchful and take good care of what has been entrusted to him. According to Kardong, “Benedict is convinced that the administration of the goods of the monastery is not merely an economic problem but a spiritual one.”\(^{36}\) Custodia is practiced as a way to maintain the peace in the monastery.

**RB 49.2 vitam suam custodire**

RB 49.2 reads, “However, because few have that kind of strength, we urge them to guard (custodire) their lives with all purity during these days of Lenten days.”\(^{37}\)

In this chapter the word custodire aims to lead the monk to be watchful, to discipline the mind and the heart. In the first verse of the chapter on the observance of Lent, Benedict exhorts, “At all times the lifestyle of a monk ought to have a Lenten quality.”\(^{38}\) What does ‘Lenten quality’ mean? It means keeping vigil, guarding the heart, and keeping watch over one’s actions. In verse 2 Benedict extends this vigilance by exhorted the monks to keep guard over their life. Kardong says the word purity (puritate) alludes to two different meanings, “(1) clean or not soiled; (2) focused on one thing… the first sense is more likely here, given the verb ‘to guard’”.\(^{39}\) Here the word “guard” is providing an emphasis on the cleansing that needs to take place during the time of Lent. Here custodia is practiced to discipline the mind and the heart.

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\(^{30}\) Kardong, RB 6.3.


\(^{32}\) Kardong, RB 6.1.

\(^{33}\) Kardong, 120.

\(^{34}\) Kardong, 123.

\(^{35}\) Kardong, RB 31.8.

\(^{36}\) Kardong, 262.

\(^{37}\) Kardong, RB 49.2.

\(^{38}\) Kardong, RB 49.1.

\(^{39}\) Kardong, 403.
each chapter Benedict uses the word *custodia* as a way to lead the monastic to learn something specific; and at the same time, they are interrelated. In RB 6 the monk keeps custody to learn to listen, in RB 31 to strive to maintain peace, and in RB 49 to learn to discipline the mind and the heart.

*Verbum*

The second word that sheds light on RB 6 is *Verbum*.

Prol. 33 *qui audit verba mea*

In Prol. 33 we find the word *verba*: “Thus the Lord says in the Gospel: ‘Whoever hears my words (*verba*) and does them I liken to the prudent person who built a house on a rock. The floods came, the winds blew and battered that house, but it did not collapse because it was founded on rock.’”

Here Benedict quotes the passage where Jesus exhorts His disciples to listen to His Words. And tells them that those who listen and act on His words build their house on a rock. The use of the word *verba* in relation to our discussion is important because it points to the importance of listening to the Word as an essential element to the monastic way of life and in the spiritual journey in general. It is within the chapter on silence, that Benedict invites the monks to be watchful of the words they say to help the monks cultivate the interior silence that is able to open the ear of the heart to the Word of God.

RB 6.2 *a malis verbis…debet cessari*

RB 6.2 reads: “Here the Prophet shows that if we sometimes ought to refrain from speaking good words on account of the intrinsic value of silence, so much the more ought we stop speaking evil words out of fear that it will be punished as sin.”

Here Benedict is contrasting the good words versus bad words. As we have seen, words can either bring life or death. The words which are uttered reflect what is in our thoughts and it is a constant work of love to choose to love by being silent and listening. As Kardong states, Benedict “knows it is unnatural for human beings to shun all speech; what is important is that speech be modest and ‘reasonable’.”

RB 7.60 *pauca verba et rationabilia*

In RB 7.60: “The eleventh step of humility is that when a monk speaks at all, he does so gently and without laughter, humbly and seriously, with few and careful words (*verba*).”

In this chapter Benedict gives specific descriptions of how words are to be uttered: gently, without laughter, humbly, seriously, with few and careful words. Words are important and how one expresses shows the state of the mind and the heart of the monk.

Kardong comments on this verse: “Degree eleven differs from degree nine in that the latter counsels no speech at all, while eleven wants speech to be marked by humility. This seems to be an admission that life demands speech. It also leads to the conclusion that proper speech can manifest humility quite as well as complete silence.” In all these cases one has seen how Benedict uses the word *verbum* effectively. First, he emphasizes the importance of listening; then he recommends guarding and refraining from even good words; and finally he illustrates the importance of uttering words in humility. Guarding, listening, and speaking with humility are crucial for Benedict in the spiritual journey.

**UNIQUE FEATURES IN RB**

What is unique in this chapter of RB is the rhetorical device of the repetition of keywords and phrases which reinforces his teaching on the value of silence. Each of the following words has from two to four repetitions in other verses: *Propheta* (v1 and v2); *custodia* (twice in v1); *lingua* (v1 and v5); *bonis* (v1, v2 and v3); *eloquium* (v2, v3, v6, and v8); *taciturnitas* (twice in v2, v3, and v6); *peccati* (v2 and v4); *discipulus* (v3, v6 and v8); *verbis* (v2 and v8); *humilitatus* (v1 and v8). Each repetition reinforces a previous statement. For instance, v2 exhorts the monks to avoid conversations that lead to sin and in v4 repeats that indeed in much speaking one will not avoid sin. In each repetition the rhetorical device helps to emphasize Benedict’s previous point.

40 Kardong, RB Prol. 33. (Matt 7: 24-25).
41 Kardong, 119.
42 Kardong, 120.
43 Kardong, RB 7.60.
44 Kardong, 157.
V.1 Faciamus quod ait prophetae: Dixi: Custodiem2 vias meas, ut non delinquam in lingua3 mea. Posui ori mea custodiem,2 Obmutui et humiliatus sum et silui a bonis.4

V.2 Hic ostendit prophetae, si a bonis eloquii5 interdum propter taciturnitate6 debet taceri,6 quanto magis a malis verbis propter poenam peccati7 debet cessari.

V.3 Ergo, quamvis de bonis4 et sanctis et aedificationi eloquii,5 perfectis discipulis8 propter taciturnitatem6 gravitate8 rara loquendi concedatur licentia,

V.4 quia scriptum est: In multiloquio non effugies peccatum7

V.5 et alibi: Mors et vita in manibus linguae.3

V.6 Nam loqui et docere magistrum conecet, tacere6 et audire discipulum8 convenit.

V.7 Et ideo, si qua requirenda sunt a priore, cum omni humilitate et subiectione reverentiae requirantur.

V.8 Scurritates vero vel verba otiosa et risum moventia aeterna clausura in omnibus locis damnamus et ad talia eloquia discipulum aperire os non permittimus.

Also the repetitions of themes gives in this chapter a double inclusio which is the kernel of the chapter:

In v1 and v7, humility is the keyword.

In v2 and v8 to refrain from speaking useless conversations is the theme.

In v3 and v6 the contrast between not allowing to speak to even perfect disciples versus the master who is the one exhorting and teaching.

One is left with two passages from Proverbs:

V4: “In much speaking, you will not avoid sin.”

V5: “Death and life are in the hands of the tongue.”

The kernel of the chapter is in these two passages from Proverbs. What matters to Benedict is to avoid sin so as to bring life into one’s speech.

COMPARISON OF RM 8 AND 9 WITH RB 6

In this section RM 8 and 9 will be compared with RB 6. The key idea of these chapters concerns the observance of silence by guarding the mouth. The Master has a total of eighty-eight verses counting both chapters, whereas Benedict summarizes these two chapters in eight verses. Benedict begins and ends with Scripture as one saw earlier and omits the entire section from RM 8 verses 1-30 and completely omits RM 9. Benedict retains the last section from the Master, which begins with Psalm 38. Benedict is in agreement with the Master on refraining from speech for the sake of silence and to avoid sin. Benedict also includes the exhortation to only grant permission to speak on rare occasions even to the perfect disciples in RM 8.33 and mature disciples in RB 6.3.

The tone in RM shows concern for the guarding of thoughts, speech and sight, so much so that the Master spends thirty verses trying to get this concern across. His tone is somehow dramatic as one can see in the following verses: “So if the soul in us activates the seeing of the eyes, the speaking of the mouth, the hearing of the ears, and, because it will be some day called to account by its maker, desires to obey the will of God and while in this life to serve under his command, it must close the windows of the eyes to its cravings and lower its gaze, fixing it on the ground.”

The tone in RB 6.1 is much more to the point: the monk is called to guard his mouth. Benedict sets the tone with Psalm 38 and is able from the beginning of verse 1 to the end of verse 6 to focus on the importance of guarding the mouth for the sake of silence. Benedict throughout the Rule simplifies the instructions and captures the central meaning of the monastic value. In this way he does not overwhelm with information and shows his preference for moderation. Perhaps it is for this reason the Rule of St. Benedict still continues to influence religious and lay people alike of the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I tried to show how Benedict forms the heart of the monk to make it capable of listening to God, to oneself and to one’s neighbor. The monastic value of silence is the basic foundation for developing the capacity

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45 The Rule of the Master, Cistercian Studies 6, translated by Luke Eberle (Kalamazoo, MT: Cistercian Publications, 1977). Hereafter all references to the Rule of the Master will be indicated by the abbreviation RM followed by the chapter and verse number: RM 8.17-19.
to listen. Benedict teaches us that since the mouth holds death and life, the monastic must be watchful and guard the tongue in order to listen. For this, obedience and humility are necessary interior dispositions. *Taciturnitas* in this sense then means a state of being that makes the mind and heart available for a deeper listening.