

RB 34 Whether All Should Receive Necessities in Equal Measure

¹As it is written: **Distribution was made** to each one as s/he had need (Acts 4:35).

²By this we do not recommend **favoritism but sympathy for weaknesses**. ³So the one who needs less should thank God and not be **distressed/sad**. ⁴And whoever needs more should be **humble** about this **weakness** and not gloat over the **kindness/mercy** shown. ⁵Thus all the **members** will be at **peace**. ⁶Above all, the evil of **murmuring** must not appear for any **cause** by any word or gesture whatsoever. (omit verse 7)

Title: RB 34 Whether all should receive necessities in equal measure

- The point of the ensuing chapter is that each one should indeed receive what is necessary, no more and no less
 - RB 34 is an original creation of Benedict, giving the appearance of a complement to RB 33
1. Titles match
 2. RB 34 starts with a commentary on Acts 4 which was also quoted near the end of RB 33
 3. 34.6 resembles 33.1
 4. the title seems to prolong the discussion of necessaria, which 33.5 says are to be petitioned from the abbot
- v. 1 Augustine quotes Acts 4:35 along with 4.32 but not in the twisted form given in RB 33. RB 34 is clearly Augustinian in its inspiration
- A vast amount of the **Rule of Augustine** is devoted to the same question as RB 34: should all members of the community receive the same material means of life?
 - Benedict will not follow the absolute egalitarianism of Pachomius but the realism of Augustine, based on the differing needs of the individual
- “**distribution was made**”—because Acts 4:34 seems to show the first Christians pooling all their resources, it was sometimes thought they were the first cenobites or perhaps economic communists
- A closer reading does not justify that conclusion. “used to sell” indicates this was an occasional practice or perhaps a generalization of the single case of Barnabas Acts 4:36-37. The basic thrust of Acts 2 and 4 is practical charity and the relief of suffering, not a theory of radical egalitarianism
- v. 2 Benedict cites Rom. 2:11, “God shows no partiality”
- Any preference in the monastery must be based on need and not the abbot’s whim
 - The abbot is only to advance monks beyond their rank if they show themselves “better in good actions and obedience”
- “**favoritism but sympathy for weaknesses**”—take into account the weaknesses of the needy, not the evil will of the envious
- Respect for persons
- “**weaknesses**”—the same term appears in Augustine 5.13, but probably meant something different. He discusses how to create one community from the rich and the poor
- Benedict is thinking more of the physically frail than of the pampered rich
- v. 3 “**distressed**”—monks are not to sadden each other unnecessarily
- Here there is no objective wrong and the monk should not imagine there is
 - The problem is envy, a false perception that I need something someone else has
- v. 4 “**humble**”—there is a fine line between humility and humiliation, the latter being a purely negative idea
- Nothing is gained if those who receive what they need are also crushed by the experience
 - Augustine explains those with great needs should perceive this as a weakness and not a source of privilege

“**weakness**”—this word figures in a rhetorical comparison

“**kindness/mercy**”—matter of mercy or compassion for the weaker members. Such a system can only be based on the divine largesse as in Mt 20:15

v. 5 “**members**”—the reference is to 1 Cor 12:12,26 where Paul compares the Church to the human body

- Only time Benedict employs this word or concept, it works well for his type of cenobitism
- As with the body, the cenobium is a differentiated system with the members performing different roles and having different needs and capabilities
- Similarity between a human body and a community: interconnection of the members

“**peace**”—objective situation where legitimate needs are being fulfilled

32.4 the justice required by Benedict is not mechanical, distributive justice, but the personal care of the abbot based on the divine generosity

v. 6 “**murmuring/grumbling**”—the biblical root of murmuring is to be found in the Exodus, where Israel complained bitterly against Yahweh and Moses for leading them out to the desert to suffer hardships Ex 15:24...

- Their sins was to forget the blessing of liberation from the slavery of Egypt. Likewise, the monk who complains has usually lost sight of the fundamental blessing of his vocation
- Lk 15.2 instructive biblical passage—strong monk who envies the favor shown the weak one manifests similar symptoms of ingratitude

“**cause/sign**”—put the emphasis on the individual monk

- Ban the cause for grumbling, namely, inequitable distribution which is one of the things that RB 34 seeks to eliminate

Overview

Poverty as a Biblical and Monastic Value

- Jewish Bible, the basic attitude toward possessions is positive: to have an abundance of goods is a sign of God’s blessing Ps 65:4-5
 - The community could be destroyed by the avarice of some Amos 4:1-13 and that wealth could blunt the felt need of the individual for God Prov. 30:8
- NT increasing appreciation of the spiritual value of poverty
 - Mt 6:25-34 simplicity of life, utterly dependent on God
 - Acts 2:44; 4:32-34 disciples pooling their resources as a means of building a true community of spirit
- Early monks attempted to put this gospel value into literal practice