

**PATERNAL METAPHOR IN THE RULE OF BENEDICT:
ITS ORIGINS IN BIBLICAL, MONASTIC, ECCLESIAL &
SECULAR TRADITIONS**

by

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Theology**

Melbourne College of Divinity

21st October 2009

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Summary of Thesis

Introduction

Benedict of Nursia lived in sixth century Italy and left a monastic rule which has endured until the present day.¹ It is believed to have been written in the vicinity of Rome sometime between the years 530 and 550 C.E. A central figure of the Rule of Benedict (henceforth RB) is its abbot. We are introduced to this figure towards the beginning of the Rule (RB 2) in which we are told he is addressed by a title of Christ, *abba, pater* (RB 2.2, 3). As the father of Benedict's monastic community, his essential role is to be the teacher of his monks, a role confirmed by two other titles given to him, namely *doctor* (RB 5.6) and *magister* (RB 2.24; 3.6; 5.9; 6.6); his teaching role, as we will see, being understood in terms of the paternity he holds over them.

The use of these paternal metaphors, namely *abbas* and *pater* (both translated "father" into English), to describe RB's monastic superior, is the subject of this thesis. In the course of this study, we will explore Benedict's reason and purpose in adopting such a metaphor; its origin in biblical, monastic/ecclesial, and cultural traditions, and the theological implications for its use. It is my premise that Benedict drew on all three traditions when formulating the "fatherly" role his superior would undertake within his community.

This thesis acts as a counter argument to those scholars of the origins of Christian monasticism who see the abbot in no way modelled on the Roman *paterfamilias* of Antiquity, or for that matter on the *paterfamilias* of sixth century Italy, and see the abbatial office solely modelled on the kind of fathering found in the Old and New Testaments. Since Christopher

¹ The author believes that Benedict is the author of the rule attributed to his name, there being no substantial evidence to suggest otherwise. Very few commentators dispute its authorship. See also Timothy Fry, ed., *RB 1980* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1981), p.70: the authors believe "there is no need for skepticism: the irresponsible rumors occasionally heard that unidentified "scholars" have disproved St. Benedict's existence or found that he never wrote a rule may serve to shock uninformed and delight the iconoclast, but are nonetheless utterly without foundation. What has happened [in the past sixty years] is that an extraordinary and extremely beneficial renewal of studies in the Rule of St. Benedict and related monastic literature has provided new insights that to some extent alter but, more important, clarify and deepen our understanding."

Butler² put forward the hypothesis that Benedict was heavily influenced by the example of the father of the Roman household of Antiquity, there has been much debate about the accuracy of this statement.

I propose to show that Benedict's use of the *abbas/pater* metaphor to describe the role and title of his monastic superior is not incompatible with the idea that it was modelled in part on the Roman *paterfamilias* of Antiquity. Similarities exist which cannot be dismissed, but as a study made by Ambrose Zenner³ has confirmed, now largely ignored among monastic scholars, Benedict, if he is modelling his superior on any secular father figure at all, would be more accurately modelling him on the Roman *paterfamilias* of sixth century Italy. As I will show, certainly elements of the earlier and later *paterfamilias* are evident in the superior of Benedict's monastic community.

Metaphors, as we will see, are generally rich in meaning; therefore it is not unreasonable to suppose that there is more than one model at play here. The use of the word *pater* in RB in itself would have easily created multiple images for the reader. Benedict's monks, through the daily practice of *lectio divina* and the recitation of the daily office, became versed in the Scriptures. This would have exposed them to the concept of the Israelite father especially as he was found in the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible and the Psalms. The Pauline use of the term as a description of his own relationship with those Christians over whom he had oversight would project yet another image, but not one unfamiliar with that found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Through the reading of the Early Church Fathers and other monastic writers prescribed by RB (RB 73), the *abbas* of the Egyptian Desert and the spiritual father found within the monastic traditions would also be readily called to mind. Indeed the

² Christopher Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919), pp.193-194.

³ Ambrose Zenner, 'Elements of Benedictine Peace', *American Benedictine Review* 4 (1953-54), pp.293-318.

Fatherhood of Christ, although somewhat alien to our way of thinking, but common enough among the writings of the early Church Fathers, was a concept familiar to Benedict, and we will see during the course of this thesis the importance Benedict places on this title of Christ; the abbot being his representative within the monastery. And finally, most sixth century Italian monks would have come from a traditional family with a “father” at its head. One therefore could not escape the comparison easily made between the superior of a monastery called *pater* and the head of a biological family also referred to by the same title. If Benedict had no desire to model his monastic superior on a sixth century father, would he have retained the title? To do so would only create confusion for a monk entering a monastery at such a time.

A metaphor such as *abbas/pater* works on many levels, and this thesis will show the rich meaning such a term ought to mediate to the reader of RB. We begin this thesis with a general look at how metaphorical language is understood and then we will move onto the Christian understanding of its use.

Chapter 1: Metaphor

Metaphor

Human beings, unlike other creatures, are linguists. We communicate through the written and spoken word, naming all things, and by so doing bring about a certain amount of order to our world. Amos Wilder reminds us that:

Any human language represents a special kind of order superimposed upon existence. Generations live in it as a habitat in which they are born and die. Outside of it is nescience... Perhaps one can say that nothing affects the significance of human existence more than the range and resource of our articulation, vocabulary, syntax and discourse.⁴

It is through words that we have the ability to define, describe, particularize, compare, and contrast; words help us to make sense of the world around us.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition has always been a strongly verbal one. Judaism and Christianity are predominately although not exclusively “*logos*” religions, in contrast to other religions of a more cultic nature. It is through the written word and aural tradition that they have made known God in the world. Analogical language is used to describe unseen realities in order for us to make some sense of them. This is done through the use of metaphors, analogies and symbols. It is in this context that the use of metaphor has become highly significant in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

⁴ Amos N. Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 13-14.

Throughout history, metaphorical language has formed an integral part of all cultures, including the culture in which Benedict lived. As a literary device, metaphor is used to describe one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience. They help us engage with and say what is often deemed unsayable. Jack Finnegan says:

metaphors give us a language to explore the awesome relationality of reality... metaphor leads to an expansion of meaning because it is tensive, that is, by simultaneously affirming and denying something it teases the mind to reach beyond the limits of the rationality into “newness of thought”.⁵

In our study of Benedict’s understanding of his monastic superior being an *abbas/pater* to his monks, we are being asked to consider these words within a context they may not conventionally inhabit. In this sense, as Finnegan has pointed out, in the spiritual realm, metaphors operate in 3 main ways “to build or construct spiritual realities, to guide and orient spiritual practices, and to structure, direct and focus future spiritual actions”.⁶

The value of metaphor often lies in their “non-literal, pragmatic, often thoughtful, imaginative and evocative use”.⁷ They are “irreplaceable tools in reflective practice and communication”.⁸ In so doing they provide “an inventive framework for non-literal imaginative communication”.⁹

One object of this thesis will be to answer the questions: In what way is Benedict’s monastic superior an *abbas/pater* to his monks? Just how are we to interpret these words? What

⁵ Jack Finnegan, *Audacity of Spirit* (Veritas: Dublin, 2008), pp.120, 122.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.124.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

meaning did they hold for Benedict? Why did he adopt these particular metaphors to describe his abbot?

On the meaning of metaphor, Finnegan writes:

The power of metaphor... arises from its imaginative and non-literal use of embodied human experiences in what are termed *source domains*, experiences which are then used to build bridges into the more opaque *target domains* we seek to understand and unfold.¹⁰

Therefore for us to get behind the meaning of the words, we will need to look at the source domains from which Benedict has drawn.

Metaphors are often pregnant with meaning and I will show in the course of this study just how charged with meaning the metaphors *abbas* and *pater* are for Benedict. In using them he sets out to “paint a theological picture”, to “make connections”, and to bring about a new level of understanding concerning his monastic superior.

What is important for our study is the fact that not all aspects from the root meaning of a metaphor are necessarily applied in its new situation. This is where I believe scholars of monasticism in the past have failed in their understanding of Benedict’s superior in any way being modelled on the Roman *paterfamilias*. Scholars in the past have compared and contrasted the various images and roles associated with the two. The early monastic scholars

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

in this field, like Butler, Chapman and Herwegen,¹¹ were convinced the Benedictine abbot was modelled on the Roman *paterfamilias*, listing many similarities between the two, but their comparison was at the expense of any other kind of “fathering” found in the ancient world. Then in the 1950’s, this was rejected by such scholars as Adalbert de Vogüé.¹² Although similarities were confirmed, it was thought that due to a number of differences between the role of an abbot and that of a *paterfamilias*, Benedict could not possibly have such a figure in mind. But this kind of thinking does not take into consideration how metaphors traditionally work. Not all aspects from the root meaning of a metaphor are necessarily applied to its new situation.

One could easily say that any metaphor, no matter how good, is more often than not limited in scope. The effect, therefore, of a good metaphor is the recognition it invokes for its appropriateness despite its inadequacies. The “is” of metaphor is always balanced by its paradoxically simultaneous “is not”. Metaphor is imaginatively poetic, not instrumentally literal. It evokes a reality, but it must be remembered, it does not constitute it.

One contemporary theorist on metaphor, I.A. Richards, in his definition of it gives this interactive view: “in the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction”.¹³

Therefore, taking Richards view, in our study of *abbas/pater*, and Benedict’s use of such terms, we must remember that the source domain from which they came, and the new

¹¹ Christopher Butler, *op. cit.*; J. Chapman, *St. Benedict and the Sixth Century* (1929; rpt. Westwood, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1972); I. Herwegen, *Sinn und Geist der Benediktinerregel* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1944).

¹² Adalbert de Vogüé, *Community and Abbot in the Rule of St Benedict. Vol. 1 & 2* (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, 1985), pp.98-99.

¹³ I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1965, p.93.

situation in which they are applied, remain in permanent tension and interaction with one another. Only through an investigation of the possible source domains open to Benedict can we be assured of any true understanding of the metaphors in question in their new context (i.e. RB).

In the realm of theology, therefore, where the desire to express the infinite is restricted to finite language, metaphor becomes a common tool and an efficient way of communicating religious truths and beliefs. The study of metaphorical language has become increasingly important in recent years, particularly in the realm of Christian theology, as theologians have come to recognize the central role metaphor plays in scriptural language and the writings of the Church Fathers.¹⁴

Metaphorical language abounds in both the Old and New Testaments. We see it in use throughout the Psalms, with metaphors such as “mother”, “father”, “creator”, “lover”, “lion”, “fortress” and “rock” used to describe YHWH, the God of Israel. The primitive Church also relied on metaphorical language when it set about spreading its message of salvation to the world. A reading of the New Testament brings to light such metaphors as God the Father, Jesus the Son, and John’s metaphors of Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. Paul, too, describes himself as a “father” and his fellow Christians as either “children” or “*adelphoi*” (brothers and sisters) in Christ. Metaphors were the way the Church developed and communicated her theology.

Metaphor became a means by which the early Christian communities developed their relationships among themselves. The kind of leadership that developed in the early Church

¹⁴ Sallie McFague, ‘Metaphor’ in A. Richardson & J. Bowden (eds), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 359-361,

was also dependent upon certain types of metaphors. Metaphors based on the *familia* provided a means by which Roman citizens could relate to the Christian religion as it expanded throughout the Roman Empire. As Eva Marie Lassen points out:

As family metaphors constituted one of the ways in which to speak about the new religion, it follows that the Romans would relate to Christianity partly by relating to the Christian use of family in metaphors. In other words, the Romans would understand one kind of experience, the Christian religion, by means of another kind of experience, the family.¹⁵

We face, however, a problem. The meaning of any metaphor may change over time within any culture; it may also change in meaning as it passes from one culture to another. The metaphors in question were articulated in a time far removed from our own, and our understanding of them raises many questions. Now, more than ever, we have become self-conscious about our use of language. Feminist theologians and commentators, and those sympathetic with them, now call into question any notion of paternal authority or “patriarchy” and any institutions which even vaguely call to mind notions of “paternal” authority are swiftly cast aside. However, the reader of RB must confront this issue face on. Benedict states that the authority of his abbot can in no way be set aside, and any modern day monastic community wishing to follow RB must take seriously the paternal authority of their abbot.

Therefore, in order for us to gain any true understanding of these paternal metaphors and why Benedict used them, we need to look at the context (i.e. the source domain) from which they

¹⁵ Eva Marie Lassen, ‘The Roman Family: Ideal and Metaphor’ in Halvor Moxnes, (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.103.

came; sources being crucial for any understanding of the meaning of a word or words. We need to take into account the larger cultural and historical milieu out of which they arose and in which they were originally used.

Benedict's Paternal Metaphors

As a metaphor to describe the superior of his monastic community, Benedict uses the word *abbas* (abbot), a Latinized form of the Aramaic word for father, *abba*, 126 times within his Rule. On four other occasions, he is also referred to by the Latin word for father, *pater* (RB 2.3; 2.24; 33.5; 49.9). In one of these instances, he is described as the *pater monasterii* (the father of the monastery); and in another as the *pater spiritualis* (spiritual father) of the community. The *abbas* is a very prominent figure in RB and there are two complete chapters devoted to the subject (RB 2 & 64). Interestingly, on 102 occasions, another familial metaphor, *frater*, is used and is Benedict's favourite term for the members of his monastic community.

The use of such metaphors as *abbas*, *pater* and *frater* raises the question whether Benedict considers his monastic community to be a family in some sense. Certainly, the intimacy of a monastic community recalls that of a family. The Abbots' Congress of 1967 had this to say on the subject:

Because of the stability and the vital intimacy of the bond among its members, a Benedictine community is rightly compared to a family, a term which is also used by

tradition. Like a family, it possesses an original uniqueness, its own manner of life, its own problems, and a unique destiny.¹⁶

But can such a comparison be truly made from the evidence contained in RB? Benedict never once uses the word *familia* to describe his monastic community. Instead we find his community described using such biblical metaphors as the *congregatio* (congregation or community), *domus Dei* (household of God), *corpus* (body), *grex* (flock), and so on. Other terms are also used such as *schola* (school), *officina* (workshop), and *monasterium* (monastery).

Benedict, it would appear, is somewhat hesitant in calling the head of his monastic community by the Latin title *pater* (used only 3 times), preferring to stay largely with the Aramaic term *abbas* (used 126 times). Is this significant? Again we shall see when we come to talk about the place of the *abbas* in the monastic traditions known to him.

Of note, Benedict never describes the head of his monastic community as a *paterfamilias*; the term is only found in RB once and is applied to God alone (RB 2.7). And although family imagery is found in the Rule of the Master (henceforth RM), an earlier rule which Benedict used as a template for his own,¹⁷ we find Benedict shying away from too much emphasis in this regard. The following section from RM has not been incorporated by Benedict into his Rule: “he [the abbot] will combine in himself the characteristics of both parents for all his disciples and sons by offering them equal love as their mother and showing them uniform kindness as their father” (RM 2.30-31).

¹⁶ *Erbe und Auftrag* 45 (1969), p.37f. cited in Aquinata Böckmann, *Perspectives on the Rule of St. Benedict: Expanding Our Hearts in Christ* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005), p.65.

¹⁷ For an overview of the precedence of RM to RB see Timothy Fry, ed., *RB 1980* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1981), pp.79-83.

Neither does Benedict use the ‘mother’ metaphor at any stage to describe the superior of his community. He also omits a sentence from RM which compares the monastic community with the extended family (RM 11.6-7). On another occasion, where RM states that one should “honour father and mother” (RM 3.8), Benedict has altered this passage in his Rule to “honour all persons” (RB 4.8); and in yet a further instance, Benedict alludes to a biblical text, saying that a good steward should be appointed, but omitting “for the family” and using the term “fellow servants” instead (RB 64.21). Interestingly, in RB we also find that the counterpart to the abbot is not the “sons” but the “brothers”, with only one minor exception (RB 2.29). However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the use of the term *frater* to describe the members of the monastic community in itself retains the use of a familial metaphor. Is Benedict avoiding any direct analogy of his monastic community to that of the human family? I believe not. But we might be better to think in terms of “emphasis”, rather than “avoidance”, at this point. I would say that Benedict, rather than wishing no analogy, at least desires this not to be the “sole” one. Benedict’s desire to build and construct spiritual realities may well be at play here. Is Benedict, “painting a theological picture” and making “partial connections” in an effort to build new realities? Adalbert de Vogüé has this to say on the matter:

The coenobium... is not a society created by the enactment of men and modelled on a secular “family”, but a church organized by God which, like the Church proper presents in its hierarchical structure a striking analogy with the *familia*. “Churches and monasteries” belong to the same category, the “divine households”. The “human

household” may serve our understanding of the divine constitution of these societies come down from heaven, but it is not their exemplary cause.¹⁸

Vogüé shows some hesitancy in any direct comparison of Benedict’s monastic family with a secular one, but he does not reject outright the comparisons that can easily be made. A secular title such as *pater* for Benedict’s monastic superior cannot go unheeded. It can, as Vogüé says, “serve our understanding”.

Benedict certainly prefers a more “spiritual model” for his superior than a secular one. And one might say that this is in direct contradiction to several commentators who have seen the abbot in RB as being modelled on the Roman *paterfamilias* of Antiquity. Taking the secular culture of Benedict’s time, together with its surviving social institutions, they believed the abbot to be modelled on the head of the Roman family.¹⁹ While similarities exist, in recent years other commentators have rejected this notion, seeing Benedict’s imagery of the abbot as more akin to the notions of fatherhood found in the Hebrew Scriptures.²⁰ However, I propose to show that one side of this argument is not solely exclusive to the detriment of the other. Both sides have something to add to our study. I do not believe it is an either/or situation.

Benedict was, without doubt, a product of a monastic sub-culture; he built upon existing monastic and ecclesial traditions, and his use of certain monastic metaphors and images was heavily influenced by his understanding of the Scriptures. He was a man immersed in the word of God and who often used the Scriptures as a filter when interpreting and adopting anything from monastic, ecclesial and secular traditions. To a certain degree, the monastic

¹⁸ Adalbert de Vogüé, *op. cit.*, p.101.

¹⁹ The first to put forward this view was Christopher Butler, *op. cit.*, pp.193-194.

²⁰ For a comprehensive look at this topic see John-Bede Pauley, O.S.B, ‘The Roman Paterfamilias and the Rule of St Benedict’, *Tjurunga* 55 (1998), pp.47-62.

sub-culture in which he lived may well have protected him from many outside influences but perhaps not all.

Any look at the metaphors Benedict has used in describing the superior of his monastic community will need to explore the monastic and scriptural traditions of which he was a part, but in doing so we must acknowledge that the secular world may well have impacted on his thought patterns too. A look at both the general influence of monastic and ecclesial traditions on RB and Benedict's own devotion to the Scriptures will help illustrate the central role they have played in the formation of his Rule.

Chapter 2: Influences on the Rule of Benedict

The General Influence of Monastic and Ecclesial Traditions on Benedict

There has been much discussion in recent years concerning the origins and source of the RB. And when we compare it with much of the literature produced in monastic circles from the fourth to the sixth centuries, we discover for ourselves that there is not much material specifically original to Benedict. He is best described as a compiler; there are many parts of the RB which are copied word for word from another source, and throughout the Rule one finds many quotes or allusions to other writers. Benedict was not unusual in this, as many of his contemporaries were also copyists or editors. There was no thought in these cases that any author was committing plagiarism in the modern sense of the word. As Terrence Kardong has pointed out “most of the monastic writers were not self-conscious litterateurs intent on writing original material. Usually they were busy superiors writing for the guidance of their own monks”.²¹

Through modern scholarship we are now able to trace the origin of those quotes and allusions. Describing Benedict as a compiler is not meant to discredit Benedict’s contribution to the monastic tradition. By a comparison of RB with the monastic literature which has gone before it, we can begin to create a picture of Benedict’s own unique contribution. Michael Casey has thus written that:

What is perhaps the more characteristic feature of the RB is its synthesis of previous monastic thought, its selection from a vast and unwieldy body of sometimes

²¹ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), p.xiv.

contradictory teaching, and its capacity to produce a substantially harmonious composite out of a combination of both eremitical and cenobitic streams of thought.²²

Therefore, any study of RB cannot ignore the source material from which it grew.

The overwhelming evidence is that RB uses RM as its immediate source. RM is believed to have been written shortly before RB, although it was once believed that it was a later expansion of Benedict's Rule. A series of analyses, however, have revealed that RM was first, and much of Benedict's text is either an abbreviation or adaptation of the longer rule. The text of RM can thus best be described as the template from which Benedict creates his own monastic rule. A comparison between RB and RM, therefore, often sheds light on Benedict's particular charism and contribution to the monastic tradition. One way we can do this is described by Kardong "when we compare the way Benedict picks his way carefully through the RM, sometimes copying for line after line, sometimes omitting a word or adding one, sometimes skipping whole pages, we do get some special insight into his mind".²³

Turning our attention to the earlier source material on which Benedict drew, it has long been established that he has been influenced by sources belonging to the eremitically inclined John Cassian (350 – 434) and Evagrius Pontus (345 – 399), whose works heavily influenced RM, and the more cenobitic Pachomius (286 – 346), Basil the Great (329 – 379) and Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), the works he has used to supplement RM.²⁴ It would appear that there are many other authors who have also influenced Benedict, those he terms "the holy catholic Fathers" (RB 73.4). While it is doubtful that Benedict could read Greek, he was undoubtedly

²² Michael Casey, 'Leadership in a Benedictine Context: An Interrogation of Tradition', *Tjurunga* 22 (1982), p.16.

²³ Terrence G. Kardong, *op. cit.*, p.xiv.

²⁴ Timothy Fry, *op.cit.*, p.89.

well read in the Latin Fathers and in those monastic sources from the East which had been translated into Latin by his time.²⁵

Benedict's Devotion to the Scriptures

As a devoted scholar of the Scriptures, Benedict was heavily influenced by what he found therein. According to one scholar, Benedict cites or alludes to the Scriptures some 572 times²⁶ and very few scholars would question the enormous influence scripture has had upon RB.²⁷ Benedict himself writes: “what page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?” (RB 73.3)

Estimates of the exact number of scriptural quotes and allusions contained in RB have varied widely among monastic scholars. *RB 1980* lists 132 references to the Old Testament and 189 to the New Testament.²⁸ No doubt, the criteria used by various scholars have varied.²⁹ A more recent study than *RB 1980* made by Demetrius Dumm has recorded the extent to which Benedict favoured certain biblical books and how often he quoted them. The book of Psalms was Benedict's favourite Old Testament book, with 51 quotes, followed by Proverbs with just 9. In the New Testament, Paul's letters are cited 29 times, while Matthew's Gospel is cited on 15 occasions. Benedict often alludes to biblical texts, weaving them into his own work. Dunn has therefore found only 64 direct quotations from the New Testament, but the much

²⁵ For an overview of the “context” of RB see *Ibid.*, pp.84-90.

²⁶ Demetrius Dumm, O.S.B., *Cherish Christ Above: The Bible in the Rule of Benedict* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 1996), p.1.

²⁷ See Mary Forman, ‘Benedict's Use of Scripture in the Rule: Introductory Understandings’, *American Benedictine Review* 53 (2001), pp.324-345.

²⁸ Timothy Fry, *op. cit.*, p.468.

²⁹ See Kathryn Sullivan, ‘A Scripture Scholar Looks at the Rule of St Benedict’ in M. Basil Pennington (ed.), *Rule and Life: An Interdisciplinary Symposium* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1971), p.73, for a comprehensive list of how many times each Book of the Bible is quoted.

larger sum of 135 allusions. He has also found 141 direct quotations from the Old Testament, and 232 allusions.³⁰

These statistics are presented to show how important the Scriptures were to Benedict and the extent to which they influenced the composition of his Rule. He demonstrates considerable familiarity with both the Old and New Testaments, and made no distinction between the two; the two together formed a whole in which God's message to humankind had been revealed.

Benedict encouraged a biblical culture throughout his monasteries, requiring that the abbot "must never teach or decree or command anything that would deviate from the Lord's instructions" (RB 2.4). He also encouraged his monks to study the scriptures every day "in the time remaining after Vigils, those who need to learn some of the psalter or readings should study them" (RB 8.3).

This form of study meant committing to memory large portions of scripture, which were particularly useful during times of community prayer.

Lectio divina, or divine reading, is also referred to many times in the Rule. This was a form of prayerful reading, in a slow, deliberate manner, undertaken by the monks which would allow a personal response to the word of God. We learn in the Rule that:

...the brothers should have specified periods of manual labour as well as for prayerful reading... From the fourth hour until the time of Sext, they will devote themselves to

³⁰ Demetrius Dumm, *op. cit.*, p.6.

reading... Then after their meal they will devote themselves to their reading or to the psalms” (RB 48.1, 4, 13).

Lectio divina was an essential characteristic of the monastic life and its purpose was to bring about a transformation in the life of the person. A monk would be so immersed in the Scriptures that they could be easily called to mind. For one living the monastic life over several years, large parts of scripture would be committed to memory. The Scriptures became the principal formative influence upon the whole of the monk’s life. As Claude Peifer states:

The monastic literature which has survived from antiquity is filled almost from beginning to end with biblical texts and allusions, which show not only that the monks read the Bible most assiduously, but that they consciously sought in the Scriptures the justification for their monastic practices, even down to the smallest of details. In this the monks followed the general tendency of the patristic period, for which the Bible was the principal book, when not the only one, of which all other Christian literature was regarded as merely an extension and an explanation.³¹

Benedict formed himself in the mentality of the Scriptures and it became the principal food for his soul. His Rule is shaped and fashioned by the Bible: prayer, work, fraternal relationships, and the role of the abbot are all determined and understood in a Biblical context. It is apparent that Holy Scripture has played a central role in Benedict’s spiritual life and thought.

³¹ Claude Peifer, ‘The Biblical Foundations of Monasticism’, *Cistercian Studies* 1 (1966), pp.11,12.

But were the Scriptures the only influence upon Benedict and his Rule? To what extent would scripture alone be the only influence upon his ideals? No person at any point in history has lived in a vacuum. Every scriptural writer or individual in the monastic traditions from Pachomius to Benedict has been influenced by his own culture and background and the religious traditions in which he lived. However, the extent of that influence is the subject of much debate. Might not Benedict's devotion to Scripture counterbalance any cultural influences upon him? John-Bede Pauley has hypothesised that:

If an essential characteristic of the monastic life is *lectio divina*, and if Scripture and the mysteries of the Christian faith have a transformative effect in the lives of believers; then a transformation will take place in the monastic's mental world and in their view of culture and society. This will mean maintaining some of one's own cultural outlooks, abandoning others, and consciously opposing some.³²

Pauley, himself a Benedictine monk, writes perhaps with a romanticized view of the Rule under which he lives. But even he acknowledges that "one's own cultural outlooks" have a part to play in any monastic's "mental world".

Nonetheless, any study of RB must always be undertaken with one eye firmly placed on the Scriptures. Without doubt, Benedict uses the Scriptures as his most fundamental selective principle. He is inclined to follow those monastic and non-monastic sources which he sees as the most scriptural, and he is also inclined to return to earlier scriptural notions in spite of later developments in the monastic tradition. With his devotion to Scripture assured, we should exercise caution when using other criteria to any great extent. But the emphasis here

³² John-Bede Pauley, *op. cit.*, p.54.

is placed on the word “caution”. Benedict, like any other human being of his time, would have been a product of his age and culture.

Bearing in mind Benedict’s devotion to Scripture, any study of his use of the *abbas* and *pater* metaphor needs to look at its development in the scriptural tradition. In the proceeding chapters we will look at the role of the “father” as it is found in the Hebrew Scriptures and move on to a look at the concept of “spiritual fatherhood” in the New Testament as understood by Paul, himself a product of the Jewish tradition. We will then take an overview of the concept of “spiritual fatherhood” as it is understood in monastic and ecclesial traditions. Closely linked to this, we will look at the concept of “spiritual fathers” being representatives of God, a theme running through the monastic traditions. Finally, we will see how Benedict has synthesised these traditions and brings them together in his Rule.

Chapter 3: Fatherhood in the Hebrew Scriptures

In this section of the thesis we are going to look at the concept of fatherhood as it is found in the Hebrew Scriptures. We will take a look at the role of the Israelite father in education, particularly as it is found in that group of books known as Wisdom literature. Here we will see how the Israelite father was a teacher to his children in matters religious, and the family home became the *schola* in which this teaching took place. Comparisons between the Israelite father and the teaching role of Benedict's superior will be made, thus establishing Benedict's desire to root and model his monastic superior within the teaching role of the father found in the Wisdom traditions. A closer look at the origin, development and context in which Wisdom literature arose will shed some light on Benedict's use of this material.

Fatherhood in Israel Society

The monastic John-Bede Pauley has made a study of the supposed influence of the Roman *paterfamilias* on RB.³³ Whether or not such an influence has actually taken place will be studied later in another chapter. However, what is relevant for our study at this point in time, is his belief that the kind of father we find in the Hebrew Scriptures closely models that of Benedict's monastic superior. The Israelite father of the Hebrew Scriptures taught his children about the relationship between the God of their fathers and the people of Israel. He became a loving father-teacher to his children, a role which Pauley sees applied to Benedict's superior. For Pauley, Benedict's notion of fatherhood is based solely on Scripture, and for anyone to have an understanding of the concept of the monastic family, one must have an understanding of the Jewish one.³⁴

³³ *Ibid.*, pp.47-62. See this study for his comprehensive look at the origins of fatherhood in RB.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.59-62.

With 21 references to God as “Father” found in the Hebrew Scriptures, in itself a metaphoric term describing the unique relationship between the chosen people and their God, there is I believe a connection between the revelation of God as father in the biblical tradition and the emergence of a new appreciation of the role and function of a certain kind of human fathering among the Israelite people. Whether Israelite fathers were any different to fathers in Israel’s surrounding cultures is uncertain, new modes of fatherhood appear to have evolved which consolidated and strengthened the place of the father in the Israelite family to a degree unknown elsewhere in the ancient world. This may well have developed through their experience of God as a caring, redemptive father (Isa 63:16), in particular from the time of Moses and Israel’s exodus from Egypt onward (Deut 32:6). These new modes of fatherhood meant that the father was intimately involved in the lives of his children.³⁵

The Israelite father played a leading role in certain family rituals, indicating his role as a guardian and caretaker of his children. These rituals can be found in the Book of Exodus, chapters 12 and 13, and include the observance of the Passover (Exod 12:1-28; 13:3-10), the redemption of the first-born (Exod 12:43-51; 13:1-2; 13:11-16), and circumcision (Exod 12:48-51). These, too, were rituals specific to the family and not that of the wider community; they were actions of the household, and showed the interaction between God as father and the Israelite father in the care of his children. “Through it fathers in Israel, as in no other culture we know of, appropriated to themselves an identity as redemptive caretakers, with an on-going and permanent stake in the life of their families”.³⁶

The “teaching father” is another role that the Israelite father upheld; he was part and parcel of his child’s upbringing. We see this manifested in those writings of the Hebrew Scriptures

³⁵ John W. Miller, *Biblical Faith and Fathering: Why We Call God “Father”* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), pp.69-87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.78,79.

known as Wisdom Literature. Among them we learn that children were instructed to listen to the teaching of their fathers (and of their mothers) (Prov 1:8; 23:22; 31:26). Fathers taught their children to cherish wisdom (Prov 4:14), in other words, to know the difference between good and evil and how to follow the path of the former and avoid the latter. In Psalm 78:3-8 we also find an overview of what a father would be expected to teach his child: to learn about YHWH, as to who he is, his past deeds, and his laws, so that children would learn to trust him and keep his commandments. The Hebrew Scriptures are full of references to the teaching and transmission of Israel's religious heritage between father and son (Deut 6:7, 20-33; 32:7, 45-47; Josh 4:21-22; Exod 13:8). These were seen as values proper to fatherhood.

By the time we reach first century Judaism, the father-involved family remained central to Jewish life. In the somewhat later Talmud (a series of rabbinical insights and teachings), there is a passage on the duties of fathers. The rabbis, it indicates, had thought much about the issue of fathering and had come to a consensus as to what this involved. The father was to remain an intimate part of his child's upbringing, teaching him both the Torah and a trade. And although by the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem education was becoming institutionalized, at least for the upper class elite,³⁷ the Jewish father still remained involved in the nurturing and education of his children.³⁸

Thus the family became the classroom, the place where "schools" were conducted, where children learnt by both precept and example the distilled wisdom of previous generations. One might argue that we hear an echo of Benedict's "school for the Lord's service" (RB Prol. 45) where the abbot must teach the Lord's instruction (RB 2.4) and in his teaching be as devoted and tender as only a father can be (RB 2.24).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.88 & John-Bede Pauley, *op. cit.*, p.59.

In view of these findings, a closer look at the origins and development of Wisdom literature, including the locale of the *schola* within these writings will shed considerable light on Benedict's desire to place his Rule within this tradition, and on his understanding of the father-teacher role his superior was called to undertake.

The Rule as Wisdom Literature

For the most part, the Prologue to RB is not an original work. Verses 5 to 45, together with verse 50, are taken from the Introduction of RM (RM Ths 2-46) and are a commentary on Psalms 14(15) and 33(34). Benedict, however, has added text to the beginning and the end of RM (RB Prol 1-4; 46-49), which gives the borrowed material a unique framework. More interesting to our study are the additional verses he has added to the beginning of RM's Introduction.

Verse 1 with its opening words to the Rule: "Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is the advice of a father who loves you..." (RB Prol 1), bears not just a passing resemblance to language and imagery found in the Book of Proverbs. Here are but a few examples in which to compare it; "Hear; my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8); "Listen, children, to a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight" (Prov 4:1); "Hear, my child, and accept my words..." (Prov 4:10a); "My child, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings" (Prov 4:20); and "My child, keep your father's commandment, and do not forsake your mother's teaching (Prov 6:20).

Benedict, therefore, appears to have been intentional in linking his Rule to that body of writings in the Hebrew Scriptures known as Wisdom Literature. RB Prol 14, as Kardong has pointed out,³⁹ may also bear a resemblance to Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8-9, who seeks out her disciples in the crowds. Such an allusion adds further weight to Benedict's desire to place his Rule in relation to the Wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Bible.

Why has Benedict done this? As this thesis is looking at the paternal metaphors found in RB, a study of these metaphors as they are found in the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible will shed considerable light on Benedict's own understanding and use of them.

Undoubtedly Benedict sees his monastic rule as having much in common with the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible. As the authors of *RB1980* rightly believe, like biblical wisdom RB "is derived primarily from, and reflects experience of, life. It is intended to be a guide to wise living in the practical situations of life".⁴⁰

RB can certainly be seen as a compendium of practical wisdom for the living of the monastic life. Throughout RB we find practices and regulations which experience has shown would be fruitful for other monks to follow. Benedict's desire was to adapt and transmit the monastic wisdom of previous centuries to the local conditions of sixth century Italy.

At what point did a specifically "monastic" wisdom first make its appearance? Initially, monastic wisdom, like biblical wisdom, was passed on by so called "teachers" to their "students" or "disciples" who gained it themselves from their own lived experience. Their disciples in turn, in an effort to preserve their wisdom and teaching, began to write it down.

³⁹ Terrance Kardong, *op.cit.*, pp.12, 27.

⁴⁰ Timothy Fry, *op.cit.*, p.145.

This wisdom literature existed in the form of biographies and collections of sayings, like those of the Desert Fathers, compilations of rules and regulations, such as those of Basil of Caesarea, and systematic efforts to set forth the spiritual life, as in the Institutes of Cassian.

Fatherhood in Wisdom Literature

As Benedict has connected his Rule to an establish tradition within the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible, a closer look at the role of the father within that tradition will be helpful at this point.

Hebrew Wisdom Literature falls into two basic categories. The first consists of practical advice to the young on how to live a successful and good life. We find these guidelines in the Book of Proverbs and in Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing in the first century C.E., described these books as “precepts for the conduct of human life”.⁴¹ The second consists of the more reflective searching about the meaning of life, and the reasons for human suffering. This “reflective” Wisdom Literature we find, for example, in the books of Ecclesiastes and Job. In our study of RB, we are concerned to look more deeply into the first category.

Israel saw the family as the primary context for the development and transmission of popular wisdom. Within the Book of Proverbs we find the process of education being described: both mother and father were involved in the passing of popular wisdom from one generation to another.

⁴¹ John Drane, *Old Testament Faith* (Lion Publishing, 1986), p.82.

Listen, children, to a father's instructions, and be attentive that you may gain insight; for I give you good precepts: do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, and my mother's favourite, he taught me, and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth (Prov 4:1-5).

Within chapter 6 of Sirach, there are a series of passages also describing the process of education in a family context.

My son, from your youth choose instruction, and until you are old you will keep finding wisdom... Listen, and accept my judgement; do not reject my counsel... If you are willing, my son, you will be taught, and if you apply yourself you will become clever. If you love to listen you will gain knowledge, and if you incline your ear you will become wise (Sirach 6:18, 23, 32-33).

Clearly, the setting in which these wisdom instructions find themselves is the family and the locus of such instruction was usually the home. The young would learn most of what they needed to know from their parents, and the practice recommended in the Book of Deuteronomy would have almost certainly continued throughout the period covered by the Hebrew Scriptures. "Never forget these commands that I am giving you today. Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working..." (Deut 6:6-7).

In Israel, without doubt, education was primarily provided within the family context. Although shying away from too much emphasis on family imagery in his Rule, Benedict, in common with the Wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures, sees to some extent his

community within a family context. The abbot is seen as a “spiritual father” transmitting a lived monastic tradition to his community of monks, who in turn are “brothers” to one another.

As we have shown, Benedict’s superior as a father is closely linked to his role as a teacher. The abbot is referred to as *magister* (RB 2.24: 3.6; 5.9; 6.6) several times in the Rule. And closely linked to this, in verse 45 of the Prologue of RB, Benedict describes his monastery as a “school for the Lord’s Service”. The use of such a term begs the question: Where did Benedict obtain the concept of his monastery as a *schola*? Is there any evidence that Benedict has been influenced in this matter by the Wisdom Literature found in the Hebrew Bible? Do we find, in fact, evidence for the existence of “schools” in the Hebrew Bible by which Benedict could have drawn inspiration? Or was he modelling his *schola* on that of the Israelite family home? If so, by placing his superior in the context of a family classroom, Benedict is certainly placing more credence to his superior being a father in line with the father-teacher found in the Wisdom tradition. A look at the evidence for the existence of formal schools in the Hebrew Scriptures may help us in our quest to answer some of the above questions.

The Location of the Schola in Ancient Israel

There has been much controversy among scholars concerning the possible existence of “schools” in ancient Israel.⁴² There is some evidence available, although inconclusive, that formal “schools” may have existed.

⁴² See James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, (New York: Doubleday, 1998), pp.86-90

The more intellectual nature of some Wisdom Literature may point to the existence of a group of professional “wise men” whose task was to study and teach in specialized schools. Some biblical scholars believe a system of formal education may have begun around the time of Solomon.⁴³ Teachers may have trained students in “schools” to read and write, copying literary texts which eventually became part of the canon of the Hebrew Bible. Other “classical texts” may have also been copied. Such places of learning, it is believed, would have served the royal court, providing “trained” scribes for political, administrative and artistic purposes. The existence of “wise men” or “scribes” can be traced with certainty to around 180 B.C.E., whose specialized subject appears to be the study of the Hebrew Bible itself (Sirach 39:1-4). But the question remains, however, did these “wise men” mentioned in Sirach conduct formal “schools” in Israel? There is one scriptural text which may support such an idea. “Draw near to me, you who are uneducated, and lodge in the house of instruction” (Sirach 51:23).

Interestingly, Sirach also reflects on the long line of tradition by which fathers pass their teachings along to their children. “Do not ignore the discourse of the aged, for they themselves learned from their parents; from them you learn how to understand and to give an answer when the need arises (Sirach 8:9).

In Isaiah, not one of the books usually associated with Wisdom literature, we have a text which describes the people’s ridicule of the prophet with whom they accuse of instructing them in the same childish way a teacher trains young children in the basics of reading and writing.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little (Isa 28:9-10).

Also we read in Isaiah, in the third of the servant songs, the servant is said to have an instructed tongue. “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens, wakens my ear to listen to those who are taught” (Isa 50:4).

As an analogy for prophetic or divine instruction such passages may indeed indicate formal schooling, but admittedly it is equally plausible they reflect the oral teaching that children would have received within the home.

As Crenshaw writes concerning the above servant passage: “As parents awaken their children and begin their day with sound advice that eventually takes hold and forms character, the divine Parent gently instructs the servant, who contrasts sharply with rebellious Israelites.”⁴⁴

Because it is known that scribal educators operated in Temple schools in Egypt and Babylonia, it has also been assumed by some scholars that biblical Wisdom has grown out of a similar setting and therefore formal “schools” of a comparable nature became part of Israel’s life.⁴⁵ However, caution needs to be exercised in this matter as Crenshaw points out:

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.93.

⁴⁵ R. Charles Hill, *Wisdom’s Many Faces* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), p.12.

“the emergence of Israel on the historical scene came centuries later than the heyday of schools in either Egypt or Mesopotamia”.⁴⁶

With Israel’s Wisdom Literature developing at a later period, it is unwise to make assumptions about the existence of temple schools in ancient Israel. We are on safer ground by recognizing the development of the Wisdom tradition within the context of the Israelite Family.

More importantly, the Hebrew Scriptures never specifically mention the existence of formal “schools” and such an omission may well be significant for our study. Nonetheless, as James L. Crenshaw points out:

...this silence can be read in two different ways: (1) the existence of schools was so well known that no one stated the obvious, or (2) there were no schools in ancient Israel. Arguments from silence often lack cogency, for the biblical authors were equally silent about significant aspects of daily life that undoubtedly existed at the time.⁴⁷

While it is true that some Hebrew texts may allude to the existence of formal “schools”, it is equally possible to understand them without assuming the existence of an actual place where students learnt to read and write.

Also important to our study is the fact that even if formal schools are alluded to in the Hebrew Scriptures, nowhere does the word “school” appear within them, begging our

⁴⁶ James L. Crenshaw, “Education in Ancient Israel”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985), p.609.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.90.

ongoing questions: What inspired Benedict to use the *schola* metaphor to describe his monastery? Was he influenced by the locale of the Hebrew family rather than any notion of a formal school, to establish his monastic superior in a father-teacher role?

Although formal “schools” may have been present in ancient Israel, providing vocational, moral and religious teaching, as we have seen, the evidence for such existence remains scant. And while it is true that scholars have generally assumed that “father” and “son” have a metaphorical function in the Book of Proverbs, meaning “teacher” and “disciple”, as Crenshaw has pointed out, there is nothing that prevents a literal understanding of these terms.⁴⁸

When it comes to the context of the Hebrew family, the evidence undoubtedly weighs more heavily on the family home being the primary location of the classroom. Such “schools” were conducted within a family context where children learnt by both precept and example the distilled wisdom of previous generations. Parents, therefore, assumed full responsibility for the teaching of their children. It was in this context that the Israelites passed on from one generation to another how best to relate to other people, and what not to do if they wanted to lead a happy and fulfilled existence. Such wisdom was based on the experience of their parents, and before them, their grandparents, who in turn learned from their own forebears. Many of the sayings in Proverbs (Prov 4:1-4, 20-23) and Sirach (3:1; 6:8, 23, 32-33; 23:7) certainly originated in this context and have the form of advice given by a parent to a child. But above all, the basic tradition of Hebrew schooling in the family home is seen best in the

⁴⁸ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction – Revised & Enlarged* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.24.

Book of Proverbs, a book which Benedict has repeatedly alluded to and quoted in his Rule: some sixteen times according to *RB 1980*.⁴⁹

Benedict, of course, uses the terms *pater* and *frater* in a metaphorical sense in his Rule. The relationship between abbot and monk and between the monks themselves is not based on blood ties. However, Benedict appears to have been influenced by a literal understanding of the *pater/frater* relationship within the Wisdom tradition. Benedict sees the “family” as the context in which instruction and learning primarily take place. He sees the “father” as the primary educator; his abbot adopting this role within his monastic community. It is as father-teacher that the abbot expresses his relationship with his monks in a monastic *schola*. This “school of the Lord’s service” in turn is seen as the monastic expression of the *schola* found within the Hebrew family home.

⁴⁹ Timothy Fry, *op. cit.*, p.588.

Chapter 4: Fatherhood in the New Testament

In this chapter we turn our attention to the role of paternal metaphor and spiritual fatherhood in the New Testament to determine the effect this had on RB.

It was within the father-involved tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures that Christianity came into being, and one with which Jesus himself, and the apostle Paul, would have been most familiar. Would it not have been within such a household that they lived as a child and grew to maturity? Paul I believe saw in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the Jewish world in which he lived, this fatherhood as a metaphor for his own relationship with his fellow Christians that he had given birth to in the life of Christ.

Paternal Metaphor and Spiritual Fatherhood in the Letters of Paul

In the New Testament, we find that Paul in his letters was a frequent user of metaphor. He adopts two familial metaphors in particular to describe himself and his fellow Christians. Paul refers to his fellow Christians as siblings, but at various points in virtually all of his letters, he refers to them as his “children” and himself as their “father” or “parent”. It is in this “father” metaphor that we are particularly interested. We see here a continuation of the father-teacher role inherent in the Jewish tradition.

Paul considers himself a “father” particularly to those he has begotten in the faith through his preaching of the word. In his First Letter to the Corinthians he writes:

I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I

appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every Church (1 Cor 4:14-17).

The word translated “guardian” here is *paidagogos*, and refers to a slave who would have exercised oversight of a child and one who often dealt out harsh punishments. Paul is taking this term and applying it to those who had created divisions among the Corinthian Christians. Paul, therefore, is reminding them that it was he, rather than these “guardians” who first brought them to faith in Christ, and by virtue of this he is their “father”, being the one who gave them life. “In Christ Jesus I became your father” is better translated from the Greek as “In Christ Jesus I begot (*egennēsa*) you”; therefore, the image of begetting is one in which life is transmitted from one person to another, and is closely related to the analogy of a father begetting a child. Paul as their father shows his love and affection for them (unlike a *paidagogos*), and in return calls his children to reciprocate.⁵⁰

This idea of “spiritual fatherhood” is also taken up by Paul in his Letter to Philemon. Writing to Philemon (master of Onesimus) from prison, he writes: “I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment” (Phlm 10). Again the idea of “giving birth to” is rendered in the Greek (*egennēsa*).

Along with Onesimus, Timothy and Titus held a particularly close relationship with Paul. All are referred to as his “children” (*teknon*). Both Timothy and Titus were his sons in their capacity as helpers and protégés. “Timothy’s worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (Phil 2:22).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.326-327.

Parental affection is also shown in Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians. Paul introduces a variety of metaphors, the father metaphor being one of them. "As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12).

Paul also urges his fellow Christians to be imitators of himself. We have already seen this above in his first letter to the Corinthians: "I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me" (1 Cor 4:16). Elsewhere in the same letter he says: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). In his first letter to the Thessalonians we read: "You became imitators of us and the Lord" (1 Thess 1:6). In Paul's letter to the Galatians he begs them to "become as I am" (Gal 4:12) and to the Philippians he says: "Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us" (Phil 3:17). This imitation of himself which Paul urges his fellow Christians to follow is "Christocentric". If Paul, as spiritual father, is able to manifest the life of Christ in his own life, those who imitate him, also imitate Christ.⁵¹

Paul saw himself and his fellow Christians as a continuation of the community which formed around Jesus depicted in the gospels, as did the early Christian community at Jerusalem (Act 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-14). The main difference is that the place of Christ was now taken by Paul who had become the mouthpiece of Christ to those who were his children. As the mouthpiece of Christ, he was the one who "begets" (*egennēsa*) them in the faith, transmitting the life of Christ from one person to another. Paul was able to teach them by example,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.326.

admonish them when required, and urge and encourage them to be imitators of Christ. In such a way, therefore, Paul was able to see his whole ministry in the terms of a “father” raising his children. “You know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:11-12).

As Felix Donahue has pointed out: “In this way Paul voiced God’s call, re-enforced it, kept his charges mindful of it, thereby participating in God’s own fatherly initiative.”⁵²

RB’s use of Paternal Metaphor and its concept of Spiritual Fatherhood

We now turn again to RB, and will look at the extent Benedict was influenced by the concept of spiritual fatherhood in the Letters of Paul. To begin with, do we find Paul’s concept of “spiritual fatherhood” and the “spiritual fatherhood” of Benedict’s abbot compatible?

In chapter 2 of the Rule, Benedict outlines the qualities required of his abbot:

He is believed to represent Christ in the monastery... Let his orders and teaching be kneaded into the minds of his disciples like the leaven of divine justice... Furthermore, when someone accepts the title of abbot, he should direct his disciples by a twofold teaching. That means he should demonstrate everything that is good and holy by his deeds more than by his words. He should teach gifted disciples the Lord’s commands by words, but he will have to personally model the divine precepts for those who are recalcitrant or naïve (RB 2.2, 5, 11-12).

⁵² Felix Donahue, “The Spiritual Father in the Scriptures’ in John R. Sommerfeldt (ed.), *Abba: Guides to Wholeness and Holiness East and West* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982), p.28.

The phrase “be kneaded (*conspargatur*, which literally means “sprinkled”) into the minds of his disciples like the leaven of divine justice (*divinae justitiae*)”, refers to the abbot’s role as the teacher of the divine precepts, *divinae justitiae* most likely referring to the Scriptures. Like Paul, the abbot is a “spiritual father” to those who have received the preaching of his word. The abbot, too, is also seen as one to be imitated, who transmits life by his words and deeds. Paul exhorted his fellow Christians to be imitators of him as he was of Christ; and Benedict’s abbot asks the same. The abbot also is to “represent” (*agere vices*) or “hold the place of” Christ in the monastery, again reminiscent of Paul and the relationship he has with his fellow Christians; both calling to mind the community which formed around Christ in the gospels. The word *discipuli* (disciples) used in verse twelve adds to this imagery. Paul and the abbot both become the mouthpiece of Christ in their respective communities; they both teach by example, admonish when required, and urge and encourage as they see fit:

In his teaching, the abbot ought always stay close to the apostolic pattern: “Correct, entreat, reproach” (2 Tim 4:2). That is to say, he should vary his approach according to the situation, mixing threats and enticements, now showing the sternness of a taskmaster, and now the tender affection of a father. Thus he should discipline the unruly and restless rather sharply, but entreat the obedient, mild and patient to make more progress. We warn him to reproach and upbraid the indifferent and the disdainful brothers (RB 2.23-25).

And a little further on in this chapter we learn:

The abbot must always remember what he is and what he is called... Let him know what a difficult and hard thing he has undertaken: to direct souls, and to adapt to many different temperaments, some by encouragement, some by rebuke, some by convincing of argument (RB 2.30, 31).⁵³

With the influence of Paul's notions of "spiritual fatherhood" on RB firmly established, to what extent were the monastic traditions an influence upon Benedict's use of the "father" metaphor for his superior?

⁵³ Timothy Fry, *op.cit.*, pp.350-351.

Chapter 5: Fatherhood in the Monastic and Ecclesial Traditions

Paternal Metaphor and Spiritual Fatherhood in Monastic and Ecclesial Traditions

How is paternal metaphor and spiritual fatherhood seen in those monastic and ecclesial traditions which influenced Benedict? The *abbas* metaphor traces its origins to fourth century Egyptian monasticism. It referred to a person who through the giving of a “word” (*rhēma*) brought about a spiritual awakening in the recipient. By the giving of a “word”, one became the spiritual father of another; the recipients became his “spiritual sons”.⁵⁴ And there may have been, of course, even at this early stage of the monastic tradition, an indirect reference to Rom 8:15⁵⁵ and Gal 4:6.⁵⁶

Pierre Salmon describes the characteristics of an *abbas* in fourth century Egyptian monasticism as:

Essentially a man of experience, a perfect monk who has fully realized in himself the calling of monastic life, and who can serve as model for others. Through contact with him and by the effect of his personal influence, one will become a monk. Ascetic perfection does not suffice to create an *abbas*; one must also be filled with the Spirit, endowed with discernment and the gift of speaking words which are adapted to the spiritual needs of each individual.⁵⁷

The archetypal “*abbas*” or “spiritual father” can be found in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the sayings of the Desert Fathers who lived mainly in the Scetes desert of Egypt, beginning about the third century. They engendered the life of the Spirit in their disciples through exercising

⁵⁴ See André Louf, ‘Spiritual Fatherhood in the Literature of the Desert’ in *Ibid.*, pp.37-61.

⁵⁵ Rom 8:15 “When we cry, Abba! Father!...”

⁵⁶ Gal 4:6 “And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba! Father!”

⁵⁷ Pierre Salmon, *The Abbot in Monastic Tradition* (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, 1972), p.4.

genuine “spiritual paternity”.⁵⁸ For them, he was a holy man, generally of advanced years, who was experienced in the monastic life:

Abba Joseph said: “While we were sitting with Abba Poemen, he mentioned Abba Agathon as being an abba, and we said to him: “He is very young; why do you call him ‘Abba’?” Abba Poemen replied: “Because his speech makes him worthy of being called abba.”⁵⁹

Typically, a visitor to an *abbas*, whether another hermit or a lay person, would approach them and ask for a *rhēma*, a “word” of salvation. “Abba, give me a word” would be the usual request of young monk to his elder. A “word” was generally a brief pronouncement which contained both simplicity and profound spiritual insight, and was often seen as a “prophetic charism” on the part of the elder and a “living word from God”. And it was through a very personal relationship with his disciple that an *abbas* became a “spiritual father”. The authors of *RB 1980* have noted that:

The portrait of the desert fathers that the literature reveals to us is an admirable example of the exercise of spiritual fatherhood... They knew that it is no trivial matter to direct another’s life and share in God’s own fatherhood on his behalf... The goal of spiritual fatherhood was the growth of a son to adulthood.⁶⁰

Suffice to say, any monastic legislator who uses the *abbas* metaphor to describe his monastic superior puts himself clearly within this tradition.

⁵⁸ Louis Merton, ‘The Spiritual Father in the Desert Tradition’, *Monastic Studies* 5 (1968), pp.87-111.

⁵⁹ *Apoph. Poemen* 61.

⁶⁰ Timothy Fry, *op. cit.*, p.355.

We find the concept of “spiritual fatherhood” arising in one the earliest cenobitic communities. Pachomius used the New Testament term *koinonia* or “fellowship” to describe his federation of monasteries in Egypt. He is often incorrectly attributed with being the founder of cenobitism, even though other cenobitic communities arose around the same period independent of his *koinonia*, such as Šeneset and Tmoušons. However, he was the first, it would seem, to bring together a number of monasteries into a tightly regulated whole, under a single superior, with an ordered hierarchy of offices working under him, and a regulated rhythm of work, prayer and spiritual formation. Pachomius himself remained as the “father” of the *koinonia*. Within Pachomian literature he is spoken of in terms of affection and referred to as “our father Pachomius”; the title *abbas* (or its Coptic form *apa*) being rarely bestowed upon others. Under the father of the *koinonia* was a superior of each individual monastery, known as the *oikonomos* (the steward). Each monastery was divided into houses headed by an *oikiakos* (a housemaster). This housemaster was the supervisor and teacher of the individual monk, and most importantly, his “spiritual father”.⁶¹

The concept of “fatherhood” and “sonship” is frequent in the Pachomian Literature. We read in the Coptic *Lives*: “a man who begets another in the work of God is his father after God”,⁶² and in reference to Paul begetting sons in the New Testament, the same passage further states:

So it is indeed with our father Pachomius, for he deserves to be called father because our Father who is in heaven dwells in him, as the Apostle confesses from his own mouth when he says, It is not I who live, it is Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20). This

⁶¹ For a comprehensive look at Pachomian monasticism see Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (University of California Press: Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1985); William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004), pp.115-163.

⁶² *Vita sa* 3.

is why through the divine goodness which was in him he encourages whoever wishes to obey him, saying, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Therefore, all who imitate the Apostle through their way of life deserve to be called fathers because of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them.⁶³

On occasion Pachomius also referred to himself as a “father”. Speaking to a man who is about to enter his *koinonia*, he says: “When we see that you have walked in the way that I am going to propose to you, I shall then be disposed as a father to take good care of you in everything your salvation calls for”.⁶⁴ And he would refer to other monks as fathers too. “Here is your father after God”⁶⁵ he says of an elder when entrusting a young monk to his care. Here we find echoes of the “spiritual paternity” exercised between *abbas* and disciple in the Scetes desert of Egypt.

Cassian’s contribution to the concept of “spiritual fatherhood” lies substantially in his appeal to tradition. He holds an important place in the development of western monasticism, and as we shall see later, he was a major influence upon RM. Cassian was heavily influenced by the desert tradition and brought about a new concept of the cenobitic life. Cassian lived his early monastic life in Egypt before settling in Gaul. On arrival he discovered existing forms of monasticism which were different from those he had known in Scetes. Encouraged by Castor, the bishop of Apt, he brought about a reform of western monasticism by introducing traditions from the east. Although Cassian was an eremite at heart, Castor wished him to legislate for cenobites. His *Institutes* and *Conferences*, both composed in Latin, show how he brought about a fusion of the cenobitic and eremitic traditions. Armand Veilleux writes:

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Vita bo* 115.

⁶⁵ *Vita sa* 5 93.

The fact is, it did not result from a harmonious fusion of the eremitic and cenobitic traditions. It is quite simply the transposition of the institutions of the desert “school” into a framework of stable common life. In other words, it consists of the transformation of a relationship – that of the disciple and master – which had always been, and is of its very nature temporary, into a permanent institution.⁶⁶

In Cassian’s efforts to reform monasticism, he appealed to tradition. He believed tradition to be the “unspoiled faith of the most ancient fathers, which remains pure in their successors up to the present day”.⁶⁷ Eastern monasticism, he was convinced, had received its tradition directly from the Apostles and this gave it its authenticity.⁶⁸ Cassian, then, made a link between the teaching authority of his superior and that of the Apostles.

For Cassian also, obedience offered to his superior is ultimately given to God: “They so strive to accomplish everything that has been ordered by him [the superior] without discussion and as if it were ordained from heaven by God...”⁶⁹

Cassian’s themes of tradition, authoritative teaching and obedience were later taken up by RM. In reference to the abbot, in RM, through an exegesis of 1 Cor 12:28 and Eph 4:11, we learn that in honour of the Trinity, the Lord has instituted three grades of teachers within the Church. These are first prophets, then apostles, and then teachers “according to their authority and teaching, the churches and schools of Christ are governed” (RM 1.82, 83).

Elsewhere in RM we learn:

⁶⁶ Armand Veilleux, ‘The Abbatial Office in Cenobitic Life’, *Monastic Studies* 6 (1968), pp.22-23.

⁶⁷ Cassian *Inst.*, 12, 19.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Cassian *Inst.*, Preface, 8; Cassian *Conf.*, 18.5.

⁶⁹ Cassian *Inst.*, 4, 10.

And for those who are learning the divine art he has appointed master in the churches, namely, bishops, priest, deacons, and clerics, to whom the people must listen and whom they must respect when, as representatives of God, they issue commands, and from them gain knowledge of the law of salvation. In monasteries these are the abbots and deans who for the soul's salvation must be listened to, superiors who must be respected as representatives of God. For to them, be they priest in the church or abbots and deans in the monastery, God said this: "Anyone who listens to you listens to me, and anyone who rejects you rejects me" (RM 11.8-12).

RM often applies the text of Luke 10:16 to the teaching authority of the abbot.⁷⁰

RM's abbot, therefore, came to be seen as a teacher commissioned by Christ himself, and as such, Christ's representative within the monastic community. This meant he was to maintain a role closely paralleled to that of the episcopate; like bishops, the abbot was also a successor to the apostles and endowed with their authority.⁷¹ Vogüé writes: "The Master affirms that the abbot, like the bishop, is a "teacher" instituted by Christ, a successor and heir to the apostles enjoying the authority conferred on the apostles and their successors by the most solemn texts of the New Testament".⁷² RM, therefore, likened monastic hierarchy to ecclesiastical hierarchy, an institution in itself which we will see later expressed spiritual paternity.

⁷⁰ See also RM 1.89; 7.6, 68; 10.51

⁷¹ See Adalbert de Vogüé, *Community and Abbot in the Rule of St Benedict. Vol. 1 & 2* (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, 1985), pp.103,104.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp.105,106.

Benedict has been influenced by two other theorists of the monastic life, namely Basil of Caesarea and Augustine of Hippo.

In Cappadocia, Basil, who had travelled to Egypt and witnessed the eremitical life of the desert, came to the conclusion that monastic life led in a community was by far a better way than life as an eremite. Basil began living a monastic community life with his family, and in time, under his influence some strands of monasticism underwent an organisational reform, leaving behind much of their eremitical stamp. In his *Rules*, which take the form of a collection of questions and answers, he also avoided using such terms as *abbas* in reference to the superior of his monastery, thus rejecting Egyptian monastic terminology. Basil's communities did not grow up around a celebrated *abbas*, as they did in Egypt, but formed first and foremost as a fraternity and then sought appropriate leadership for good organization and government. Basil's communities were based on the Jerusalem Community found in the Acts of the Apostles (Act 2:44; 4:32): "And all who believed were together and had all things in common"; individualism held no place.⁷³ Therefore, the superior of a Basilian monastic community was the product of the community and any concept of spiritual fatherhood exercised by its superior was much diminished.

Nonetheless, we do find references to the role the superior played within Basil's community. In the first edition of the *Asceticon* (known as the Small *Asceticon*), we read that he must be faithful to God and to the Scriptures in all that he commands, and to his community he must be like a nurse caring for her children. He is to have the concern of a father and a doctor for a son who is sick, and when required to correct a wayward member of the community.⁷⁴

⁷³ Basil. *reg. fus.* 7.

⁷⁴ Basil. *reg. fus.* 25.

Basil uses several titles to describe his superior: *ephestôs* (eye), *proestos* (the one presiding), *pepistuemenos* (he who is entrusted), *epitetagmenos* (he who is appointed), *presbyteros* (elder), and so on, but none based on familial metaphor. As Augustine Holmes has observed, “this vagueness in terminology clearly represents an early stage in the development of cenobitic leadership”.⁷⁵ We find that Basil’s notions of spiritual fatherhood are vague, but not altogether absent, and there is a clear rejection of Egyptian model of an *abbas* forming the centre of his community.

Augustine also adopted a monastic form of life quite independent of Egyptian monasticism. He too took inspiration from the fraternal unity he found in the Acts of the Apostles.⁷⁶ It was a common life that was humane, moderate, and balanced. Augustine also avoided the term *abbas* for his superior; he chose the much simpler term *praepositus* (the one placed over) instead. In his *Regula ad servos Dei* he says that his superior is to be shown obedience: “Obey your superior as a father, always with the respect worthy of his position, so as not to offend God in him”.⁷⁷ He is therefore a representative of God and as a consequence worthy of due honour. For Augustine, disrespect shown to the superior would be an offence against God. However, the authority of the *praepositus* was not necessarily final; he was to refer matters which “exceeded his competence and power” to the *presbyter*, a priest who had oversight of the community and one who was appointed by the local bishop.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Augustine Holmes, *A Life Pleasing to God: The Spirituality of the Rules of St Basil* (London: DLT, 2000), p.176

⁷⁶ Aug. *reg. serv.* 1.3, “Do not call anything your own; possess everything in common... For you read in the Acts of the Apostles: ‘They possess everything in common’, and ‘Distribution was made to each in proportion to each one’s need.’”.

⁷⁷ Aug. *reg. serv.* 7.1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Paternal Metaphor and Spiritual Fatherhood in the Ecclesial Traditions

From early on in the history of the Church, bishops have likewise received the title of “Father”. From Ignatius of Antioch we learn that “everyone must show the deacons respect. They represent Jesus Christ, just as the bishop has the role of the Father, and the presbyters are like God’s council and an apostolic band”.⁷⁹

He also believes the bishop to be the representative of God the Father, for when the presbyters defer to him, they are deferring:

not so much to him as to the Father of Jesus Christ, who is everybody’s bishop. For the honour, then, of him who loved us, we ought to obey without any dissembling, since the real issue is not that a man misleads a bishop whom he can see, but that he defrauds the One who is invisible.⁸⁰

In the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a third century document, we see the fatherhood of the bishop affirmed:

Let the layman also love the Bishop and honour him, and reverence him as father and lord and god and God Almighty... Let the Bishop love the laymen as children... He is a servant of the Word of God and a Mediator, but to you a Teacher and your Father after God, who has begotten you by means of water.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ignatius *Trall.* 3,1.

⁸⁰ Ignatius *Magn.* 3,1-2.

⁸¹ *Didasc.apost.* 7, 9.

As the author of RM was seen to show earlier (RM 11.8-12), these examples indicate that the “spiritual paternity” of ecclesial and monastic leadership was synonymous.

Benedict’s Interpretation of the Monastic Traditions

Clearly, Benedict’s use of the *abbas* metaphor puts him in a strong relationship to the early tradition of fourth century Egyptian monasticism. Like the *abbas* of the Scetes desert, Benedict’s abbot is a man filled with the Spirit and one who exercises “spiritual paternity” over his disciples. Even at this early fourth century stage of the monastic movement, the use of the term *abbas* would have conjured up images of Rom 8:15, turning the *abbas* figure of the desert into a representative of God. As Michael Casey points out, “certainly RB refers the term to this text and uses the reference as a means of building a theology of the abbatial office based on understanding the abbot as a Christ-figure”.⁸²

The paternity of the monastic superior was seen to be found in varying degrees among the various monastic traditions, and Benedict’s own understanding of this owes much to these traditions. Echoes from the writings of these traditions can be found throughout RB. Benedict makes frequent allusions to the Pachomian writings and he also prescribed the reading of Cassian’s *Institutes* and *Conferences* in the final chapter of his Rule (RB 73.5); these summarise Cassian’s monastic customs and teachings.

Basil’s influence on RB is also well attested. Interestingly, RB begins and ends with echoes of Basil. There is an allusion to a tract that was then believed to be by Basil, called the *Admonition to a Spiritual Son*, in the Rule’s Prologue, and its final chapter recommends that

⁸² Michael Casey, *op. cit.*, p.27.

“the Rule of our holy father Basil” (RB 73.5) should be read for further spiritual enlightenment. The first edition of the *Asceticon* was translated by Rufinus and known to Benedict.

Benedict was also certainly influenced by Augustine,⁸³ including his notion of the superior being a representative of God. The concept of “spiritual fatherhood” and the related belief that spiritual leaders were somehow representatives of God, and ultimately of Christ as well, were well attested within monastic traditions.

Despite developments in some parts of the monastic traditions against the title *abbas* for the monastic superior, Benedict was happy to apply the title to his monastic superior; its use 126 times in RB is testimony to that. This appears a deliberate act on Benedict’s part, rejecting the more “functional” titles used by other monastic legislators. As Michael Casey has pointed out, the title *abbas* is certainly not intended to be a functional title; it is not designed to describe the work that he does, but one which offers a theological interpretation of the superior’s role within the monastic community. And through his adoption of this non-Latin word, images of the *abbas* revered in monastic tradition are brought to the fore.⁸⁴ Michael Casey continues:

But Benedict’s choice of this term goes beyond a desire for historical continuity. He chooses it because, for him, it crystallises his principal conviction about the abbatial office: it is a position of primarily spiritual leadership; its main character is mystical or sacramental.⁸⁵

⁸³ See Timothy Fry, *op. cit.*, pp.594-595.

⁸⁴ Michael Casey, *op. cit.*, p.46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

It is to this mystical and sacramental dimension of Benedict's monastic superior that we now turn.

Chapter 6: The Fatherhood of Christ

The abbot is seen by Benedict to be a Christ-like figure within the community; like Christ, he is to be the teacher of his community (RB 2.4-6, 11-15, 23; 64.2, 9), their shepherd (RB 2.7-10, 32; 27.5-9; 28.8; 64.18), and their physician (RB 27.1-2; 30.3; 46.6). He conveys the teaching of Christ through his word and example. In turn, RB exhorts the members of the community to see Christ in him and give him due respect (RB 6.7; 63.13-14), love (RB 72.10), and obedience (RB 5; 7.34; 71.3). As we shall see, the abbot's status as a representative of Christ in Benedict's community is not surprising.

Benedict and the Fatherhood of Christ

When one compares RB to RM and other writings within early monastic traditions, we find that Benedict places Christ at the very centre of his Rule. By way of illustration, the word *Christus* appears 40 times within RM, but 19 times in RB. When you consider that RM is three times longer than RB, Benedict actually refers to Christ more often than the Master. In the sayings of the Desert Fathers, the name of Christ rarely appears, and although the place of Christ remained important throughout the monastic traditions, no other monastic writer gives Christ the same central position as does Benedict.⁸⁶ In chapter four we read: "Prefer nothing to the love of Christ" (RB 4.21) and in the penultimate chapter of RB: "Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life" (RB 72.12-13). Christ appears within the first few lines of the Rule (RB Prol. 3) and his voice and presence among the monastery community is affirmed:

... my eyes will be upon you and my ears will listen for your prayers; and even before you ask me, I will say to you: Here I am (Isa 58:9). What, dear brothers, is more delightful than this voice of the Lord calling to us? See how the Lord in his love

⁸⁶ For a more detailed analysis of RB's devotion to Christ see, Aquinata Böckmann, 'Benedict's Approach to Christ', *Tjurunga* 65 (2003), pp.84-86.

shows us the way of life. Clothed with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom (1 Thess 2:12) (RB Prol. 18-21).

In Benedict's time, Arianism was widespread, with its rejection of the full divinity of Christ. Benedict lived in an Italy which had been brought under the control of Arian Goths. Therefore, he is careful to expound sound doctrine in his Rule to counteract any Arian tendencies which might creep into his monasteries. This is perhaps why the word "Jesus" is not found in RB. Benedict prefers to call him by the title "*Christus*" (Christ) and "*Dominus*" (Lord), avoiding, it would appear, too human an image. For Benedict, Christ is synonymous with God. *Deus* (God) is also used to refer to Christ, although its use is often ambiguous.⁸⁷ By using such terms as *Christus*, *Dominus*, and *Deus*, Benedict stressed the divinity of Jesus.

Benedict too is adamant that a monk's life is a participation in the life of Christ. Christ is found in the sick (RB 36.1), in the guests of the monastery (RB 53.7, 15), and is embodied in the Abbot (RB 2.2; 63.13). Monastic life is a dialogue with Christ. The monk is urged to imitate Christ (RB 5.13; 7.32, 34; 27.8) to show him obedience (RB 5.13; 7.32), and to heed to "his holy teachings" (RB Prol. 35). Christ's help is also sought in the keeping of the Rule (RB 73.8), and he is designated the *paterfamilias* (father of the household) (RB 2.7) of the monastic community.

With this centrality of Christ in mind, RB states that:

⁸⁷ Alfons Kemmer, 'Christ in the Rule of St. Benedict', *Monastic Studies* 3 (1965), p.94.

The abbot who is worthy of ruling a monastery ought always to remember what he is called; he should live up to the name of superior by his actions. He is believed to represent Christ in the monastery, for he is called by his name in accord with the saying of the Apostle: “You have received the spirit of adoption of children, in which we cry “Abba, Father!”” (Rom 8:15) (RB 2.1-3).

And in chapter 63 we also find:

The abbot, because we believe that he holds the place of Christ, is to be called “lord” (*dominus*) and “abbot” (*abbas*), not for any claim of his own, but out of honour and love of Christ. He, for his part, must reflect on this, and in his behaviour show himself worthy of such honour (RB 63.13-14).

The superior, then, is the representative of Christ in the monastery, and his title of *abbas* and *pater* refers not to the first person of the Trinity, as we would expect, but to the person of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the son of God. Neither does the text from Romans which Benedict quotes refer to Christ as *abbas*; it is reserved for God the Father alone. Benedict has deliberately given this text from Romans a new context. For him, the superior of the monastery is ‘father’ because he takes the place of Christ, the ‘real father’ of the monks and becomes the spiritual father of the community. Therefore, rather than being a functional title (i.e. describing what the abbot does), the title *abbas* for the superior is a theological one, designed to clarify the meaning of his role. As Michael Casey has said, Benedict “chooses it because, for him, it crystallises his principal conviction about the abbatial office: it is a position of primarily spiritual leadership – its main character is mystical or sacramental”.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Michael Casey, *op. cit.*, p.46.

For Benedict, the superior of his community was a Christ-figure and his own life was to be modelled on the life of Christ (RB 2.1). In turn, his role was to teach his monks through his words and deeds “the law of the Lord” (RB 2.4b). His life and teaching should resemble closely those of Christ.

To our minds, applying the title of *abbas* or *pater* to Christ may seem foreign, but not so in the time of Benedict. RM, from which Benedict borrows this text (RM 2.1-3), is also familiar with the concept of Christ as father.⁸⁹ But RM goes one step further, and on a commentary of the Lord’s Prayer (RM Thp 1-81), a section of RM not used by Benedict, RM has the “Our Father” addressed to Christ. This can be seen in the following passage from RM’s commentary. “The voice of the Lord says: ‘If you keep my commandments, I will be your father and you shall be my sons’. So it is that we, though unworthy but aware of our baptism, dare in his prayer to call him father” (RM Thp 9-10). Although Benedict has left out this large section of RM, he has faithfully followed the Master’s concept of Christ as father, a concept not unfamiliar among the Fathers of the Church.

By the second century, the analogy of the fatherhood of Christ can be found among Patristic writings and is almost commonplace. These writers, more often than not, speak of Christ’s paternity in the spiritual realm. The authors of *RB 1980* have cited the following examples to illustrate this point.⁹⁰ In the *Acts* of Justin Martyr, for example, Hierax refers to Christ as “our true father, and our faith in him is our mother.”⁹¹ Irenaeus says that “the Word of God is

⁸⁹ Kardong has noted that Benedict “has omitted “to the Lord” (*Domino*) from the phrase “in which we cry.” Since *Domino* is not in Romans 8:15, he may be reverting to the original text. For Benedict, *Dominus* means Christ, so one would think the term would serve his purposes here, but biblical accuracy may outweigh expediency.” Terrence G. Kardong, *op. cit.*, p.51.

⁹⁰ Timothy Fry, *op. cit.*, pp.359,360.

⁹¹ *Passio Iust.*, recension B,4.

the Father of the human race”.⁹² The *Second Letter of Clement* says of Christ: “as a father he calls us sons; he saved us when we were perishing”.⁹³ In the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the apostles address the risen Lord with the words, “you are our father” and he in turn shows them how they too will become fathers through him by proclaiming the word of God, and by baptising and forgiving sins.⁹⁴ In Clement of Alexandria’s *Paedagogos*, Christ is seen as the Teacher, the one to whom God has entrusted the instruction of his children, and as their teacher he is characterized by the tender care and concern of a father (or mother),⁹⁵ He also refers to Christ by the title of “Father” in one of his hymns.⁹⁶ He also says, ““you have only one Father who is in heaven”, but [Christ] is also the Father of all through creation”.⁹⁷ Origen, too, freely refers to Christ as “Father”: “Our Father who created us and has begotten us is Christ”.⁹⁸ Christ, he says is “the Father of every soul”.⁹⁹ Augustine describes Christ as having “a fatherly attitude towards us when he says, “I shall not leave you orphans””.¹⁰⁰

As we have already seen, Benedict’s devotion to Scripture is well documented, and although the New Testament never directly applies the title “Father” to Christ, he would have found the idea of a paternity pertaining to Christ in its writings. For example, we have the parallel image of the relationship between Christ and his Father, and Christ with his people: “As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whom he will” (John 5:21) (i.e. it is a father who gives life.) And in the same gospel we find: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (John 15:9) (i.e. Christ shares a father’s love). There is also the image of Christ’s disciples as his children: “Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of

⁹² Iren. *adv. haer.* 4,31,2.

⁹³ Ps-Clem. *ad Cor.* 2,1,4.

⁹⁴ *Epist. apost.* 41-42.

⁹⁵ Clem. *paed.* 1,6.

⁹⁶ Clem. *paed.* 3,12.

⁹⁷ Clem. *strom.* 3,12.

⁹⁸ Orig. *hom. in Ex.* 6,2.

⁹⁹ Orig. *prin.* 4,3,7.

¹⁰⁰ Aug. *in Ioan.* 75.

God” (Mark 10:24). In John’s Gospel also he calls them “children” (*paidia*) (John 21:5) and “little children” (*teknia*) (John 13:33), and declares, “I will not leave you orphans” (John 14:18). Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul speaks of Christ as the second Adam. As the authors of *RB1980* have pointed out, “since Adam was father of the human race, and Christ has now assumed the role of the new Adam, he can likewise be considered our father”.¹⁰¹

The Church Fathers would have readily seen the connection between Christ as the new Adam and his spiritual fatherhood. In Isa 9:6 the Messianic King heralded by the prophet is called “Father of the world to come”. And since in the Gospel of Matthew this passage was believed to have been fulfilled in Christ (Matt 4:15-16), Christ is therefore able to take the title which belongs to that person. Origen, for example, says that Christ is “Father of the world to come, who says of himself, “I am the door. No one comes to the Father except through me”. ”¹⁰² Thus Origen made the connection between this text of Isaiah and Christ himself.

Through these biblical passages, then, the Fathers of the Church, and no doubt Benedict himself, were able to appropriate the title “Father” to Christ. As has been said many times before, we must not underestimate Benedict’s desire to ground his Rule in the Holy Scriptures.

The early Church cultivated a Christocentric piety, reflected in such writings as the acts of the martyrs and the practice of praying the psalms to Christ and addressing the Lord’s prayer to

¹⁰¹ Timothy Fry, *op cit.*, p.358.

¹⁰² Orig. *hom. in Num*, 27,2: GCS 30.

him, a practice we have noted of RM.¹⁰³ This paternal devotion to Christ, which finds its roots in scripture and early church piety, and was further developed in the thoughts of the Church Fathers, was held in particular admiration within the monastic tradition. It was precisely out of this setting that devotion to Christ's fatherhood grew in monastic circles.

Evagrius of Pontus, who was born around 345 and studied under the Cappadocian Fathers, was a fervent Origenist. He has left us a very valuable text which shows, not only his devotion to Christ as "Father" but also how it was extended into monastic circles to denote the superior of a community as a "spiritual father".

It is more fitting for you to seek the fruits of charity among yourselves, since divine charity possesses you as a result of selflessness, and indeed the sons do not provide riches for their fathers, but fathers for their sons. Therefore, since you are fathers, imitate Christ your Father, and nourish us at the appointed time with barley loaves through instruction for the betterment of our lives.¹⁰⁴

Benedict, therefore, would have been no stranger to this Christocentric tradition, stretching back many generations. I maintain that the fatherhood of Christ is reflected in the Israelite father, as discussed earlier, who was the guardian and caretaker of his children. As the "teaching father" was an integral part of a child's upbringing and religious education, so Christ was seen in the same light. Christ has been entrusted with the teaching of his children (his disciples), a role exercised with tenderness in the Jewish tradition; his paternity evident in several references in the gospels.

¹⁰³ Claude J. Peifer, 'The Use of Romans 8:15 in the Regula Magistri and Regula Benedicti' in E. Rozanne Elder, (ed.), *Benedictus: Studies in Honor of St Benedict of Nursia* (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, 1981), p.17.

¹⁰⁴ Evagr. *epist.* 61.

However, Terrence Kardong makes the following cautionary point regarding the abbot's paternity and title:

The fact that Benedict associates the abbot's paternity with that of Christ is a signal that this role is to be carefully distinguished from other, more obvious kinds of paternal relations. Just as Christ is not normally called father in the order of creation, so likewise the abbot is not a father in any ordinary human sense.¹⁰⁵

Kardong, therefore, would say we need to exercise care if we are tempted to find the "fatherhood" of Benedict's superior outside this ecclesial realm and in the material world. But again, I believe it is a matter of checks and balances. While Benedict certainly wishes to ground the paternity of his monastic superior in Christ, this in itself does not preclude the possibility of other outside cultural influences upon his makeup. The link made between the paternity of the Benedict's monastic superior and that of Christ adds another layer of "imaginative and evocative"¹⁰⁶ meaning to his use of the *abbas/pater* metaphor.

¹⁰⁵ Terrence G. Kardong, *The Benedictines* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), p.123.

¹⁰⁶ Jack Finnegan, *op. cit.*, p.124.

Chapter 7: The Impact of the Social Milieu on the Rule of Benedict

The Paterfamilias argument examined

In this thesis, we now turn to the impact of the social milieu on the paternal role of Benedict's monastic superior. The question here is whether or not Benedict has taken from the secular world around him any aspects of the father of a biological family and applied them to the abbot. Is the abbot, as has been argued by monastic scholars in the past, in any way modelled on the Roman *paterfamilias*? A comparison with Benedict's abbot and that of the Roman *paterfamilias* of the early Republic and the *paterfamilias* of sixth century Italy, will shed considerable light on these questions.

In *RB 1980*, the authors at first make this statement. "It should be noted that all the imagery of the two Rules [i.e. RM and RB] is eminently biblical; the entire description of the abbot is drawn from biblical themes and *in no sense* (my italics) from profane sources".¹⁰⁷

As the authors of *RB 1980* are Benedictine themselves, and no doubt possess a somewhat romanticized view of their Holy Rule, we need to exercise caution over such a statement. A few paragraphs later, the authors almost contradict themselves and say:

To say this is not to deny that the abbatial office is, like all human institutions, culture-conditioned and therefore subject to variations of understanding and execution with the passage of time. On this score, history is richly instructive. To this extent the analogy with profane institutions is not totally beside the point, for it is scarcely

¹⁰⁷ Timothy Fry, *op. cit.*, p.353.

possible for people of any period to be uninfluenced in their perception of religious institutions by the pre-understanding they have gained from their environment.¹⁰⁸

So what then do we make of such a statement. Is the description of the abbot and his titles, *abbas* and *pater*, drawn in any way from profane sources and the secular world? As an institution, is the abbatial office in any way culturally conditioned? Are not all human beings, no matter how pious or religious, in some form conditioned by the world around them? Is this not true for Benedict too? Could Benedict be totally unaffected by his secular environment, especially from the environment of his earlier years?

Christopher Butler was the first of several scholars to turn to profane sources and the secular culture of Benedict's day in determining the origin of the abbatial office.¹⁰⁹ Taking the secular culture of Benedict's time, together with its surviving social institutions, he believed the abbot to be modelled on the head of the Roman family, the *paterfamilias*. But in more recent times, even after acknowledging that some similarities exist, other commentators¹¹⁰ have rejected this notion, seeing Benedict's imagery of the abbot as more akin to the notions of fatherhood found in the Old and New Testaments and from within the monastic traditions.

The Roman *paterfamilias*¹¹¹ was a highly respected figure who retained economic power over those living in his household. According to Roman Law he could determine who could live and who could die within his household and who would have use of his property, and he could decide whom his children could marry. He also had the authority to say when his children and slaves were able to become independent of his authority, and all responsibility

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Fry, *op. cit.*, p.354.

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Butler, *op.cit*; J. Chapman, *op. cit.*; I. Herwegen, *op.cit.*

¹¹⁰ For a comprehensive look at this topic see John-Bede Pauley, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-62.

¹¹¹ For a comprehensive look at the Roman *paterfamilias* of Antiquity see Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

for their actions in the meantime remained with him. It was this kind of *paterfamilias* which the early monastic scholars had in mind when determining the origin of the abbatial office. But as Suzanne Dixon has pointed out, such a Roman *paterfamilias* belonged in reality to the time of the early Republic (c. fifth century B.C.E.) and in many ways does not reflect the *paterfamilias* of later periods. She says that when such a figure is transposed to a later time, it is

...entirely artificial and reflects neither the Roman *mentalité* of the late Republic and early Empire nor the reality of everyday relationships and the acknowledgement of obligations of affection, service, and material support that actually underpinned the living law of the family.¹¹²

Certainly, the role of the *paterfamilias* had evolved since the fifth century B.C.E. into something quite different nine centuries later. By the time Benedict was writing his Rule, the *paterfamilias* of Italy could no longer exercise his legal rights to the greatest effect. For example, a father could be brought to account for killing his child, and women and children of the family were now able to control their own destinies. Women of the upper classes were also able to engage in property sales. The *paterfamilias* of sixth century Italy could no longer take his rights at law literally.¹¹³

So what brought about the changing role of the *paterfamilias* by the time Benedict was constructing his Rule? Significantly, Christianity was beginning to consolidate itself within the fabric of Italian society and its beliefs and values were having an effect on the conduct of family life.

¹¹² Suzanne Dixon, *op. cit.*, p.60.

¹¹³ John-Bede Pauley, *op. cit.*, p.52.

From the time of the early Republic, the Roman *familia* comprised the wife and the children of the *paterfamilias* but also included slaves and other dependents living in the household. The *paterfamilias*, himself, according to Roman lawyers, was not a member of the *familia*. He in fact stood apart from it and over it. In both classical Greek and Latin, there is no word which corresponds to our modern understanding of the word “family”. In ancient Greek we find the word *genea* to designate offspring, lineage, or a generation of time, but it does not have the same meaning as we understand the word “family” today. In classical Latin, the word *familia* refers to everything and everyone under the *patria potestas* or paternal power of the head of the household, the *paterfamilias*. Thus we find the jurist Ulpian in the second century C.E. defining the Roman *familia* as those persons who by nature (that is, natural offspring) or by law (wife, adopted children, slaves) are subject to the *paterfamilias*. “By conventional law, we describe as a family the various people who are subjected to the power of the one, whether by nature or by law, namely the *paterfamilias*”.¹¹⁴ There is no distinction made between those related by blood ties and those who are servants and slaves in the household. But the distinction does remain between the father and the family, between those being ruled and the ruler.

However, by the beginning of the third century, as evident in the writings of such authors like Tertullian, we find the term *familia* being applied primarily to relations between those who are related by blood ties.¹¹⁵ And by the sixth, the *familia* was becoming “a co-residential, primary descent group”.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *Dig.* 50.16.195:TLL, 1990-, 6, 1, col. 237.

¹¹⁵ Charles J. Reid Jr., ‘The History of the Family’ in L.S. Cahill & D. Mieth, eds., *The Family* (London: SCM Press, 1995), pp.10-11.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.10

Much of what we know about the sixth century *familia* derives from the laws and commentaries found in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*,¹¹⁷ compiled during the time of the Emperor Justinian (527-65 C.E.). These documents constitute the single most important source for the legal institutions of the Roman Empire. As David Herlihy has shown, a study of these documents indicates that “in things touching on the family, the sixth century seems to make a sharper break with the past than did the political collapse of the western empire, in the fifth century”.¹¹⁸

The official toleration of Christianity, dating from 313 C.E., and its establishment as the state religion in 380 C.E. had a limited effect on the legal and social institutions of the time. Laws which affected family life and marriage did not substantially change, and were at times at variance with Christian teachings. Therefore the Church had to rely heavily on the private conscience of its members. Christian writers laid down Christian principles for the conduct of family and married life. It was these principles which brought about a new understanding of the role of the *paterfamilias*. Augustine of Hippo was instrumental in formulating this new understanding. He was especially influential in shaping the Church’s understanding of family life and marriage. Augustine, in his *De civitate Dei*,¹¹⁹ in fact describes a Roman *paterfamilias* but with one important factor: the addition of Christian traits of character.

Ambrose Zenner¹²⁰ has made a study, now largely ignored in monastic circles, of Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, and made a comparison between the Christian *paterfamilias* found therein and the abbatial office in RB. He hypothesized that Benedict had two models of family life

¹¹⁷ *CI*, 1954. There is an English translation in *Civil Law*, 1932.

¹¹⁸ David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), p.1.

¹¹⁹ Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*: PL 41.13; CCL 47 & 48.

¹²⁰ Ambrose Zenner, *op. cit.*

available to him for adaptation, namely the pagan Roman Family and the Christian Roman Family; Benedict, he believed, opted for the second.

Augustine's Christian *paterfamilias*, like his earlier pagan counterpart, had responsibility over the entire household.

Indeed because the Lord God teaches two main precepts, namely the love of God and of one's family; and in loving himself, this is not a sin if he also loves God: it follows that as he advises his family to love God, he may also take pleasure in loving himself; and similarly his wife, his children, his slaves and other possible members. From here is born a peace within the home, namely an agreed accord of those living together to order and to obey.¹²¹

We find the abbot in RB similarly has oversight of everything in the monastery (RB 3.5) and the ordering of the monastery depends on the will of the abbot (RB 65.16). Augustine's *paterfamilias* was also invested with authority and all those living in the household were required to obey him. "But they obey whom it is advised to obey; thus women obey their husbands, children their parents and slaves their masters".¹²² The abbot has the same power of authority over his monastery (RB 39.6; 54.3; 56.2; 63.2; 65.11) and his monks, similarly, must obey him in all things (RB 4:72-73; 7:99-101).

However, Augustine outlines four principal duties of the Christian *paterfamilias* which show a marked difference from his pagan counterpart. Firstly, he is to counsel those under his

¹²¹ Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Bk.19, Chap.14: PL, 41, 642-43.

¹²² Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Bk.19, Chap.14: PL, 41, 643.

authority to love God. “But those who are true *patresfamilias* advise all members of the family, just as much as their children, to worship and work for God”.¹²³

As Zenner points out:

The abbot is not expressly reminded of this duty in the Rule, but he is directed to remember that he has the care of souls and that his first concern is the progress in virtue and the salvation of those entrusted to him, which necessarily includes the love of God. (RB 2).

And in the duty of the Christian *paterfamilias* to “progress in virtue and the salvation of those entrusted to him... the love of God”, do we not see something of the father-teacher role of the Israelite father we examined earlier in the Hebrew Scriptures?

Secondly, the Christian *paterfamilias* serves those over whom he has authority: *qui imperant serviunt, quibus videntur imperare* (even those who rule also serve those whom they are seen to rule).¹²⁴ And elsewhere, we read: *qui praeesse dilexerit, non prodesse*, i.e., that he understands his authority as the one who “prefers not to preside rather than to assist”.¹²⁵ Equally, the abbot does the same: “Let him recognize that his goal must be profit for the monks, not pre-eminence for himself” *prodesse magis quam praeesse* (to assist rather than to preside) (RB 64.8). We can see that Benedict has literally taken this passage from the pages

¹²³ Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Bk 19, Chap.16: PL, 41, 644.

¹²⁴ Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Bk 19, Chap.14: PL 41, 643. “For those who advise also give orders, thus the husband to his wife, the parents to their children, master to slaves... but in the home as the just to those living out of faith, and still travelling from the celestial city, even those who rule also serve those whom they are seen to rule.”

¹²⁵ Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Bk 19, Chap.19: PL, 41, 647. “He wanted to show what ‘episcopatus’ means; for this Greek name and the root of the vocabulary relates to work, not honour, because the man in charge oversees his subjects, and manages their care; indeed, *επι* means ‘above’ and *σκοπός* means ‘sight’; hence, *επισκοπειν* might be rendered as ‘to have oversight; so that he understands the episcopus is not the one who prefers to preside rather than to assist.”

of Augustine.¹²⁶ Thirdly, the Christian *paterfamilias* makes no distinction between his own children and his slaves when it comes to encouraging those under his authority to love God.

On this topic even if our just fathers had slaves, they regulated domestic peace as that they could distinguish family members from slaves by their condition, according to these temporal goods; and that they advise all members of their household to worship God with equal love, in whom eternal good is to be hoped for.¹²⁷

Once again, Benedict insists that there is to be no distinction made between persons in his community:

The abbot should avoid all favouritism in the monastery. He is not to love one more than another unless he finds someone better in good actions and obedience. A man born free is not to be given higher rank than a slave who becomes a monk, except for some other good reason... Therefore, the abbot is to show equal love to everyone and apply the same discipline to all according to their merits (RB 2.16-18, 22).

Fourthly, the Christian *paterfamilias* has a duty to correct the faults of those in his household.

But if anybody should be in dispute at home through a failure to observe domestic peace, he will be reprov'd by word, by blows or by whatever other just and appropriate punishment permitted by human society, for the benefit of the one being reprov'd, and in order for him to fit back peacefully from where he had slipped.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ The authors of Timothy Fry, *RB1980*, *op. cit.*, p.594 & Terrence Kardong, *op. cit.*, pp.531-532 both note this comparison and believe it is a commonplace jingle.

¹²⁷ Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Bk 19, Chap. 16: PL, 41, 644.

¹²⁸ Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Bk 19, Chap.16: PL, 41, 644.

Benedict's abbot, likewise, must "prune [faults] away with prudence and love as he sees best for each individual" (RB 64.14). In those chapters on the correction of faults in the Rule, we see how the abbot also exercises this same duty as the Christian *paterfamilias*.

In summary, we see how the Christian *paterfamilias* had authority over his household, offering counsel to those under his authority to love God. His role was one of service; he made no distinction between members of his household; and his duty was to correct the faults of others under his care. Such traits describe the abbot of Benedict's community.

Zenner concludes his comparison of Benedict's abbot with that of Augustine's Christian *paterfamilias* by saying:

The above comparison of texts with St. Augustine shows how much St. Benedict was influenced by the notion of the Christian *paterfamilias* in formulating his idea of the abbot. The same comparison justifies the assertion that the abbot is truly a father, not only because he holds the place of Christ but also because he exercises paternal authority over the community.¹²⁹

Vogüé in *Community and Abbot*,¹³⁰ rejects any notion of Benedict's abbatial office being modelled on that of the Roman *paterfamilias*. He says there is "scant need to descend to the general run of writers who repeat this half-truth over and over again. And yet there is little in

¹²⁹ Ambrose Zenner, *op.cit.*, p.314.

¹³⁰ Adalbert de Vogüé, *op. cit.*, pp.98,99.

the texts to authorize our thinking that the roman *paterfamilias* served as a model for St Benedict”.¹³¹

In rejecting Butler’s secular analogy between the abbot of Benedict’s community and that of the Roman *paterfamilias* it is interesting to note that he makes no mention of Zenner’s findings published in 1953. De Vogüé’s *Community and Abbot* was first published in French in 1961, several years after Zenner put forward his hypothesis. However, Vogüé shows no evidence of knowing Zenner’s work, and like many other monastic scholars before and since, holds a somewhat romanticized view of the Rule by which they themselves live. While this is understandable, this leads to a fixation on Benedict’s loyalty to the Scriptures and monastic traditions at the expense of considering any outside influences on the Rule. Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* fits within the Monastic and Ecclesial traditions known to Benedict; the Christian *paterfamilias* described by Augustine would have been no stranger to him.

As stated earlier, several authors have suggested that Benedict was influenced by the ideal of the Roman *paterfamilias* when formulating the abbatial office. Herwegen, for example, believed the communitarian nature of monasticism was derived from the Roman family.¹³² Certainly analogies can be made. The *paterfamilias* too was invested with a public charge, as the *domesticus magistratus*, to bear responsibility for the faults of his children. The abbot similarly has to render an account “at the fearful judgement of God” of his disciples’ obedience (RB 2.6). Just as the precepts of Roman Law were viewed as pre-eminent in secular life, so “the abbot must never teach or decree or command anything that would deviate from the Lord’s instructions” (RB 2.4). As *domestica potestas*, the *paterfamilias* had the right to administer corporal chastisements; the abbot can to “those who are evil or

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.100.

¹³² I. Herwegen, *Sinn und Geist der Benediktinerregel* (Einsiedeln, Cologne: Benziger, 1944) cited in Adalbert de Vogüé, *op. cit.*, p.124.

stubborn, arrogant or disobedient... curb only by blows or some other physical punishment at the first offense” (RB 2.28). Pauley, even though rejecting the idea of the abbatial office being modelled in any form on the Roman *paterfamilias*, adds two more comparisons.¹³³ Firstly, he compares the Roman ideal of a *paterfamilias* running a large household on frugal lines to the notion of “restraint and good measure” in the use and distribution of goods throughout RB (e.g. RB 34). Secondly, he notes that by the sixth century C.E., the *paterfamilias* was “expected, and at times required”, to consult the family *consilium* before making any important or major decisions which affected the family. We see this in chapter 3 of the Rule, on “Summoning the Brothers for Counsel”:

As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the abbot shall call the whole community together and himself explain what the business is; and after hearing the advice of the brothers, let him ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course (RB 3.1-2).

Though Pauley cites the above similarities, and even adds two of his own, still he goes on to argue that Benedict does not have the Roman *paterfamilias* in mind. He offers the following three reasons. Firstly, on the death of a *paterfamilias* naturally a new one was not elected, but in the case of Benedict’s monastic community, an abbot is. Secondly, he says that the Romans only “assumed” the *paterfamilias* would call a *consilium* in important matters, it not being a requirement by law, whereas RB “leaves no room for assumption”, it is legislated that the whole community, even the younger members, will be summoned together for counsel (RB 3). Thirdly, he states that the word *paterfamilias* is never used in reference to the abbot.

¹³³ John-Bede Pauley, *op. cit.*, p.52.

Much of Pauley's objections are based on those put forward by Vogüé in *Community and Abbot*. Both Pauley and Vogüé point out that the word *paterfamilias* occurs only once in the Rule, but it is never used to describe the abbot; it is used in reference to Christ (RB 2.7). They both agree that the abbot holds the place of Christ in the monastery (RB2.2) but in the context in which we find the word *paterfamilias* used in chapter 2, it can in no way be applied to him.¹³⁴

It is true to say that the *paterfamilias* of Benedict's day is far removed from that of the Roman *paterfamilias* of the early Republic. But even Pauley suggests, since classical education was still based in sixth century Italy on the literature of the early Republic, the ideal of the Roman *paterfamilias* would have continued to be handed on to the educated classes from one generation to the next.¹³⁵ Knowledge of the Roman *paterfamilias* found in classical literature, and the ideal which prevailed, together with the images it would have provoked, would not have been foreign to an educated man like Benedict. I therefore judge that elements of both the Roman *paterfamilias* of the early Republic and the Christian *paterfamilias* of sixth century Italy have been incorporated into the fatherly role of Benedict's monastic superior.

Although Benedict may not call his abbot by the title of *paterfamilias*, he does on three occasions refer to his abbot by the title *pater* (RB 2.3; 33.5; 49.9). On one occasion he is referred to as the *pater monasterii*. The monks are urged "to look to the father of the monastery" for their material needs (RB 33.5). On another occasion the abbot is described as the *pater spiritualis*. During Lent the monk is "to make known to the abbot what he intends to do" and "whatever is undertaken without the permission of the spiritual father will be

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*; Adalbert de Vogüé, *op. cit.*, p.100.

¹³⁵ John-Bede Pauley, *op. cit.*, p.50-51.

reckoned as presumption and vainglory” (RB 49.8-9). As Benedict’s preferred title for superior of his community is *abbas*, he could have quite easily used this term, but he chose not to. Although used in a limited fashion, Benedict has used the title *pater* even though the corresponding passages taken from RM do not.¹³⁶ Benedict was a product of his times, and like every other monastic legislator before and since, was to some extent culture-conditioned. It is barely possible for anyone of any period in history to be uninfluenced in their perception of religious institutions by the pre-understanding they have gained from their environment. The use of such a metaphor as *pater* is in itself charged with meaning and would it not invoke the image of the father of a typical sixth century Italian family if used? Would it not also invoke the image of the Roman *paterfamilias* of the early Republic, one known to any educated individual? If one wished to use such a term linguistically, then one could hardly dismiss such an image without at least some explanation. It is my hypothesis that Benedict used this metaphor for the head of his monastic community knowing full well the kind of image it would create in the minds of his readers.

However, as was stated earlier in this thesis, Benedict never once uses the word *familia* to describe his community. It is my premise that presence of a family concept, although not immediately evident, can be found in RB, particularly through the nature of the abbot’s authority, the vow of stability all monks are required to take, and the existence of the monastic enclosure.¹³⁷ And to this I would say that the edict of Christ: “And anyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life” (Matt 19:29) has been taken literally by monks since the beginnings of monasticism. Family life is abandoned in the pursuit of God alone and the community of the monastery becomes the monk’s “new” family. In this

¹³⁶ RB 33.1-6 Private Ownership & RM 16.58-61; RB 49.8-10 Control by the abbot & RM 53.11-15; 74.1-4.

¹³⁷ Ambrose Zenner, *op. cit.*, pp.314-316.

“new” family he finds a new “father” in the abbot and new “brothers” in his fellow monks. Benedict, in making reference to a monk’s biological family in his Rule, never employs the words *pater*, *mater* or *frater*, as we saw earlier in this thesis, unlike RM. Instead he uses the term “parents” to designate a monk’s father and mother (RB 54.1-2; 59.1). When comparing RB to RM, Benedict’s refusal to use the terms *pater*, *mater*, or *frater* is conscious and deliberate. Benedict does not wish to refer to the biological family any more than is absolutely necessary. Does it mean, as André Borias has speculated in his study of the monk and his biological family, that Benedict is trying to bolster the monastic family by avoiding any mention of the natural one?¹³⁸

It would appear that the only father RB knows is that of the abbot and the community. This deliberate omission of the word *pater* in the designation of a monk’s biological father points to the abbot being in some way a substitute *paterfamilias* for him in a new, intentional family. This is where the vow of stability, unique to Benedictine life, may shed further light.

Through the vow of stability a monk binds himself to one community for life; a promise made by a novice at the end of his probation year (RB 58.17). Similarly, a priest or stranger who wishes to join the community must also promise stability (RB 60.9; 61.5). As Zenner has pointed out:

The permanence of the bond of relationship between the monk and the community, between the community and its spiritual father, and between the monk and his

¹³⁸ André Borias, ‘Le moine et sa famille,’ *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 40 (1978), p.216.

physical home which is guaranteed by the vow of stability gives Benedictine monastic life a distinctive domestic character...¹³⁹

No other monastic legislator before Benedict made “stability” the object of a vow.

Benedict’s unique approach in making his monks vow themselves to one monastic community for life speaks of this community as a new, intentional family for the monk to reside in. The concept of the monastic enclosure is another, where Benedict states that:

The monastery should, if possible, be so constructed that within it all necessities, such as water, mill and garden are contained, and the various crafts are practiced. Then there will be no need for the monks to roam outside, because this is not at all good for their souls (RB 66.6-7).

For Benedict, the workshop where his monks are to toil faithfully is the *claustra monasterii* and *stabilitas in congregatione* (RB 4.78). Both concepts speak of an environment and a permanency in which the monastic family can flourish.

From the foregoing, we may conclude that RB contains some elements of family life known in sixth century Italy. The abbot is the spiritual father of his community, the monastery itself is a home, and the monks are bound together in one family by the vow of stability.

As has been the premise of this thesis, the abbot’s title, *abbas/pater*, and his role as spiritual father to his monks, draws from a variety of sources and images. Through his use of these

¹³⁹ Ambrose Zenner, *op. cit.*, p.315.

metaphors, and by taking aspects of the *paterfamilias* from both the early Republic and sixth century Italy, Benedict continues to paint a picture, to offer an inventive framework, to build, and construct a spiritual reality, by adapting metaphors and images taken from the many sources available at his finger tips.

Chapter 8: Summary of Thesis

Benedict of Nursia established a monastic rule for his community which has stood the test of time. Written in sixth century Italy, it embodies traditions stretching back many centuries as I have shown in the course of this study. By the time Benedict was writing his monastic rule, monasticism had already been in existence for some 200 years; its beginnings can be found among the semi-anchorites in the deserts of Egypt. From this tradition the elder, or *abbas* originated – a man who exercised spiritual fatherhood through wisdom born of experience. From these humble beginnings until the emergence of RB, a body of writings had emerged which included biographies, collections of sayings, letters, homilies, monastic rules and overviews of the monastic life, from such authors as Cassian, Evagrius, Pachomius, Basil and Augustine, which Benedict had at his disposal. The Rule of the Master, a forerunner to RB, more than any other work was instrumental in the development of Benedictine monasticism. Other authors, termed in RB “the holy catholic Fathers” (RB 73.4) also had their influence upon Benedict.

During the course of this study we examined Benedict’s devotion to the Scriptures and his considerable familiarity with both the Old and New Testaments, *lectio divina* forming a daily discipline in his monastery. This has had a profound influence on his theological outlook, the Scriptures being one of his most fundamental selective principals. However, like any human being in history, Benedict was a product of his age. It is impossible for anyone to live within a vacuum, shielded from the cultural forces at play around them. Like every other monastic legislator before or since, Benedict was to some extent culturally-conditioned and his perceptions influenced by the pre-understanding he gained from his environment.

The purpose of this thesis was to see whether any or all of these traditions, namely monastic/ecclesial, scriptural and cultural had in any way influenced Benedict in the creation

of his monastic superior. We are told in the second chapter of RB that he is addressed by a title of Christ, *abba, pater* (RB 2.2, 3), a metaphor which establishes him as the “spiritual father” of his monastic community. The abbot, as “spiritual father” must teach the Lord’s instruction (RB 2.4), and in his teaching be as devoted and tender as only a father can be (RB 2.24).

Benedict was influenced by all three traditions: monastic/ecclesial, scriptural and cultural, and this thesis has acted as a counter argument to those monastic scholars who have seen the paternity of the abbot modelled only on one of these. Christopher Butler, in the early twentieth century, was the first to put forward the hypothesis that Benedict was influenced by the example of the Roman *paterfamilias* of Antiquity. Then in the 1960’s Adalbert de Vogüé, among others, overturned this idea seeing the “fatherhood” of the Benedictine superior modelled solely on the kind of fathering found in the Scriptures.

As the title of Benedict’s superior is metaphorical, I began this study with an overview of how metaphorical language is understood and how it works within a Christian context. We saw how metaphor can be used to build or construct spiritual realities and how they can offer an inventive framework to work within. Metaphors are often pregnant with meaning and can speak at many different levels when applied to situations different from their source domain. It is my conclusion that Benedict has intentionally used the *abbas/pater* metaphor to describe his monastic superior in order to paint a theological picture and make connections with the varied traditions which have influenced him. These connections bring us to a new appreciation of the paternity his monastic superior holds and exercises. By thinking metaphorically, we have been able to come to a new level of understanding regarding those

traditions which have come together in the mind of Benedict to form the *abbas/pater* of his monastic community.

Benedict has used the word *abbas* 126 times and the word *pater* only three times in reference to his monastic superior. We have seen how Benedict has largely shied away from too much emphasis on his monastic community being a “family”, the word *familia* never once occurring in RB. This, I believe, does not mean he wishes no analogy between his monastic community and that of a biological family. Rather, he desires this not to be the sole one. Although Benedict prefers a more spiritual model for his monastic superior, a term such as *pater*, also used for the head of a biological family, cannot go unheeded.

This study also looked at the scriptural images of “spiritual fatherhood”, especially as exemplified by Paul in his Letters. Paul’s understanding of “spiritual fatherhood” was seen to be a product of the Jewish culture of which he was a part. The caring and teaching role of Israelite fathers formed the backdrop of Paul’s own use of the “father” metaphor to describe his relationship with his fellow Christians. Paul’s developed sense of “spiritual fatherhood” has clearly influenced Benedict’s understanding of his own superior as a “spiritual father” within his community. Both are teachers of the word of God, a fatherly role found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Both are to be seen as imitators of Christ and hold the place of Christ within their respective communities, reminding us of the community which formed around Christ during his earthly ministry. As representatives of Christ, both became his mouthpiece to those under their care.

As is clear from the opening words of RB, Benedict has placed his Rule within the Wisdom tradition found in the Hebrew Scriptures. An overview of this tradition saw how the Israelite

father was a teacher to his children in matter religious, and the family home became the *schola* in which this teaching took place. Comparisons between the father-teacher of Wisdom Literature and the teaching role of the abbot were made. Clearly Benedict saw the “family” as the context in which instruction and learning primarily took place. The “father” was the primary educator and his abbot was to adopt this role within his monastic community. It was as a father-teacher that the abbot expresses his relationship with his monks in a monastic *schola*.

Benedict too inherited monastic and ecclesial traditions rich in metaphor and images. His use of *abbas* as a metaphor to describe his monastic superior immediately calls to mind the *abbas* of Fourth century Egyptian monasticism. It is no accident that Benedict prefers this title for his superior rather than the Latin *pater* which you might expect from a Latin Christian; it was therefore chosen to establish historical continuity within the monastic. We have seen how this term is linked to Benedict’s reference of Rom 8:15 where his superior is called by a name of Christ, *abba*, *pater* (RB 2.3). The fatherhood of Christ was a tradition attested by the Fathers of the Church and developed by RM, Benedict’s template for his own Rule. Benedict’s superior is to be seen as a Christ-figure to his community, and the use of the *abbas* metaphor as his title confirms his role within his community. Although the concept of “spiritual fatherhood” was shown to be found in varying degrees among the other great monastic writers, Benedict’s return to this earlier metaphor shows how important it was for him to emphasise his superior’s “spiritual paternity”. This was based on the earliest monastic traditions rather than later developments which largely emphasised the functional nature of monastic leaders. As a metaphor, the term *abbas* offers a theological interpretation of the superior’s role within the community; he is a Christ-figure, called to exercise a “spiritual fatherhood” over his community and one which reflects the Christocentric nature of RB,

firmly rooted in the Scriptures and within established understandings of “spiritual fatherhood” in the monastic and ecclesial traditions. Christ remains at the centre of Benedict’s community through the presence of his superior.

Turning to the impact of the social milieu on the paternal role of Benedict’s monastic superior, we examined the arguments for and against any influence taking place. Taking the secular culture of Benedict’s time, together with its surviving social institutions, monastic scholars have argued throughout the twentieth century whether or not the abbot is modelled in any way on the head of the Roman family, the *paterfamilias*. Earlier studies based this comparison on the *paterfamilias* of the early Republic, the one found in classical literature. But a study made by Ambrose Zenner has made significant comparisons between RB’s monastic superior and the *paterfamilias* of sixth century Italy. He hypothesized that Benedict had two models of family life open to him, namely the pagan Roman Family of Antiquity, and the later Christian Roman Family, Benedict opting for the second. However, significant comparisons can be made with both. Certainly the Christian *paterfamilias* would have been the one well known to Benedict from his own childhood, but as a classical education in sixth century Italy was still based on the literature of the early Republic, the ideal of the Roman *paterfamilias* of several centuries earlier would have survived into his own era. It is my conclusion, based on the evidence given, that Benedict has consciously used the title *pater* for his monastic superior knowing full well the image such a title would create in the minds of the monks of his community. As Benedict’s preferred title for the superior of his community is *abbas*, he could have quite easily used this term to the exclusion of the other, but he chose not to. The common traits found between the abbot and the *paterfamilias* of both the early Republic or sixth century Italy cannot be easily dismissed.

Metaphors were a way the Church developed and communicated her theology, and Benedict was part of this tradition. This study of the paternal metaphor used in RB has taken into account the scriptural, monastic/ecclesial and cultural traditions out of which it arose, and has attempted to come to grips with Benedict's own understanding of them. Benedict has been influenced by a wide and varied body of material in his effort to paint a theological picture of the fatherly role his superior was called to undertake.

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