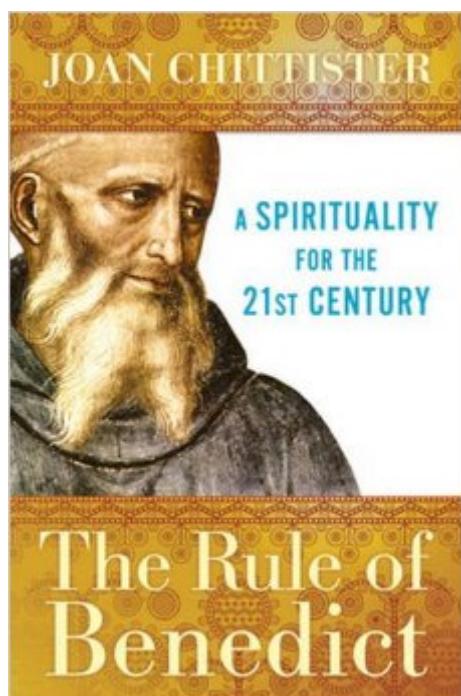


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The Rule Of Benedict: A Spirituality For The 21st Century (Spiritual Legacy Series)



Synopsis

This new edition of a classic religious text combines the timeless wisdom of Benedict of Nursia's Rule with the perceptive commentary of a renowned Benedictine mystic and scholar. In her new introduction to the Rule, the author boldly claims that Benedict's sixth-century text is the only one of great traditions that directly touches the contemporary issues facing the human community—stewardship, conversion, communication, reflection, contemplation, humility, and equality. Tracing Benedict's original Rule paragraph by paragraph, it expands its principles into the larger context of spiritual living in a secular world and makes the seemingly archaic instructions relevant for a contemporary audience. A new foreword, updated content, an appendix, and a recommended calendar for reading the entries and commentaries make this an invaluable resource for solitary or communal contemplation.

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Customer Reviews

As a Benedictine of 41 years, this is the first commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict which I have read (and I have ready MANY) that has made the Gospel lifestyle contemporary and relevant. Chittister has taken the experiences of a lifetime and correlated them with the Rule. Not an easy task, but she has achieved it remarkably well. This book is at once homey and scholarly. Common sense pervades this easy to read guide. It is the only commentary which I have read more than twice. It is the only commentary which seems to have captured the essence of St. Benedict's Rule

and subsequently, the Gospels.

I am relatively new to Benedictine spirituality, and have found this commentary to be extremely helpful in thinking about how the Rule applies to my life as a person in a secular setting in the 21st century. The text is divided into small chunks with commentary between, with dates for when to read each piece. It's helpful to have the dates so that if you are connected to a monastic community you are reading in sync with the rest of the community. I have also found that reading small portions in the way it is set out here is helpful to pace my reading so I take the time to consider the text and the insights offered. Chittister does an excellent job of providing reflections on the Rule that are understandable and applicable to people in a broad variety of life situations. Often when I first read a section of the text I think, "How can this possibly be relevant to me? What does it mean in my situation?" (e.g. sections on the content of particular prayers or where the monks should sleep, etc). Chittister describes and explains these texts in ways that give me a lot to think about and make them relevant to me personally. She tends to extract and explain some of the underlying issues (e.g. what would Benedict have been thinking to write this? What would it have meant in the original context) and then makes ties to the modern world. All in all an excellent commentary for both beginners and more experienced monastics.

The Rule of St. Benedict itself is a fairly short book, usually printed in fewer than 100 pages, with its 73 chapters of a few paragraphs in length at most. However, often a simple reading of the Rule leaves modern readers dis-satisfied; it is a rule in many ways of and for a different world, just as the biblical texts can be so characterised. However, it is also, like the Bible, a text that speaks to us today, and has application and inspiration for modern followers. Benedict's Rule for life includes worship, work, study, prayer, and relaxation. Benedict's Rule requires community -- even for those who become hermits or solitaries, there is a link to the community through worship and through the Rule. No one is alone. This is an important part of the relationship of God to the world, so it is an integral part of the Rule. Benedict's Rule was set out first in a world that was torn with warfare, economic and political upheaval, and a generally harsh physical environment. This Rule was set out to bring order to a general chaos in which people lived. This is still true today, and men and women all over the world use Benedict's 'little rule for beginners' as a basic structure for their lives. The first word of the rule is Listen. This is perhaps the best advice for anyone looking for any guidance or rule of life. While Benedict's Rule is decidedly Christocentric and hierarchical (though not as hierarchical as much popular ideas about monastic practice would have one think), it nonetheless

can give value to any reader who is looking to construct a practice for oneself. Benedict's establishment of a monastery was in fact the establishment of a school for spirituality. In his prologue to the Rule, Benedict even states this as his intention. In drawing up its regulations, he intends to set down 'nothing harsh, nothing burdensome.' He sets forth in this brief rule a guide to individual life within community that will bring one ever closer to the divine. Benedict explores the issues of charity, personality, integrity, and spirituality in all of his rules. From the clothing to the prayer cycle to the reception of guests, all have a purpose that fits into a larger whole, and all have positive charges and negative warnings. Benedict is especially mindful of the sin of pride, be it pride of possession, pride of person, pride of place -- he strives for equality in the community (as a recognition that all are equal before God). Joan Chittister's commentary is brilliant, as always with her writing. This relates the timeless rule to the timeliness of the world today. This is an excellent resource, and an excellent guide.

While the sub-title of this great volume is "Insights for the Ages," it is certainly brilliant material for our time here in the early 21st century. St. Benedict's Rule was originally written in the Sixth Century (A.D.). Furthermore, it is the most widely used life-guide in modern western monasticism. Joan Chittister takes Benedict, word-for-word-intact, and brings him into our contemporary situations. She illustrates the universal and fundamental insights of Benedict and how they are highly compatible with Hindu, Sufi, Toaist, Zen, Jewish and other major thought/values traditions. An added benefit is Chittister's editorial technique of dividing Benedict's Rule and her associated commentaries into specific dates on the annual calendar. This enables the serious reader/reflector to read over each mini section of the rule and this associated, wonderful commentary on three different dates within each calendar/liturgical year.

St. Benedict wrote his rule based upon the spirit of the Gospels and Joan Chittister has captured the true spirit of both. Jesus asked the crowds to examine their motivations and actions and the author continues that skein of query using the Rule of Benedict as a springboard. This is the best spiritual work I have ever read outside of the Bible; it is clear, insightful, and yes, even makes the reader confront the inner self which is what every good spiritual writing should do. Simply wonderful.

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