

# Kingdom Report

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## **“Ora Et Labora” : The Benedict Option for the Church in South Africa**

After the fall of the Roman Empire the world entered into a “Dark Ages”. Out of that collapse St. Benedict laid the foundation for Western Civilization with a monastery movement preaching “Ora et Labora” – Work and Prayer. As the Dark Ages spreads in Southern Africa it is time for the Church to remember its roots.

The charismatic/evangelical church in Southern Africa is the largest and fastest growing church. It famously looks to pattern itself after the New Testament church of Acts. I suggest an additional model....the church of the 6<sup>th</sup> century revolutionized by St Benedict of Nursa.

We have a political and economic problem here in South Africa repeated throughout western Europe and America. It is called “human rights”. This concept was all the rage in the Enlightenment era of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Western nations. What are the rights of man and who provides the people the security of those rights? The French and American Revolution were fought over those rights when it was determined that the state must not only be the guarantor of those human rights but eventually through Socialism and Communism must be the supplier of those rights.

The first rights were the obvious as stated by the American Constitution and its ‘Bill of Rights’ – the right to property, the right to free speech etc.

But then as time progressed these rights were constantly increased as politicians used promises of more and more “rights” to the electorate... the right to health services, education, housing, pensions, security, food, jobs, and on and on.

The deal then became the people have these “rights” and the state has the responsibility to see that the people receive their right to all these benefits. The state does this by taking from some and giving to others. This form of state intervention is as old as all human empires and governments.

The collapse of the Roman Empire was basically: The Roman bureaucracy and army as the instruments of extortion and taxation became too corrupt and bloated taking more for its own enrichment than what it distributed in benefits to the people. This has been repeated in all forms of government. Which is the warning made by the Lord to Samuel and Israel when the people demanded a king to fight their battles for them (1 Samuel 8).

The result for Rome was a transition from organized crime to disorderly free for all chaos and thievery as the Goths and Vandals stole and thieved anything that moved.

The South African government and state regardless of whatever coalition of parties eventually form a government face the same internal economic collapse. The ANC party got a beating at the polls because they have not delivered on all the people have “rights” to as promised in election after election. And now we have new parties and new politicians all promising trust us we will deliver on all your rights.

Over the next 5 years till the next election none of these promises will be met or kept. In the meantime a vast government bureaucracy will increasingly appropriate more and more of the dwindling resources of the economy for themselves with little left to the people. As did Rome and all other failing governments. America famously uses its ability to print up dollars out of nothing and pay companies world wide to keep 120,000 consumer items in 10,000 Walmart stores so Americans can continue their right to the American way of life which is consuming things you do not need with money that you do not have.

To keep this way of life going in Europe and America the thieving is not only done through printing up fiat currency out of nothing but also to steal from their children of the next generation for whom they are leaving massive and unpayable debts. Consume now, the kids will take care of the bill.

### **The Benedictine Option**

In the midst of the collapse of the Roman Civilization which in fact a hundred years before had declared itself to be a Christian Empire in which the Church felt safe and secure enough to let the Roman bureaucracy take care of safety, infrastructure and economy, the Churches job was to pray.

But a hundred years later after the fall of Rome a chaotic darkness of poverty and hunger had spread everywhere. What was the Church to do in the midst of political and economic collapse.

Benedict and his new vision of a new type of church structure was the answer. Sunday morning service of preaching and prayer in the traditional church was not working. He launched a new form for the church.....his monastery movement with the vision of ‘Ora et Labora’....prayer and work.

The ministry of God’s people was to be expressed in both prayer and work and this new vision of mission needed a new way to be accommodated....the monastery.

St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–547) is a pivotal figure in the history of Western monasticism. Born in Nursia (modern-day Norcia, Italy), he was sent to Rome for his education but became disillusioned with the moral decay he observed there. Seeking a life dedicated to God, he retreated to a cave in Subiaco, where he lived as a hermit for three years under the guidance of a monk named Romanus

Benedict's reputation for holiness attracted followers, leading him to establish twelve monasteries in Subiaco, each housing twelve monks. Around 530 AD, he moved to Monte Cassino, where he founded a single, larger monastery. It was here that he wrote his seminal work, the "Rule of Saint Benedict," which became the foundation for

Western monasticism which formed a foundation for the establishment of new cities and a new kind of civilization.....based on the values of prayer and work.

The Rule of Saint Benedict is a comprehensive guide for monastic life, emphasizing community living, prayer, work, and obedience. It consists of a prologue and 73 chapters, covering various aspects of monastic life.

- **Daily Life:** The Rule prescribes a balanced daily schedule of prayer (the Divine Office), manual labor, and spiritual reading. Monks are to engage in communal prayer multiple times a day and dedicate time to work and study
- **Community and Stability:** The Rule emphasizes the importance of community life and stability, requiring monks to commit to their monastery for life. This fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support
- **Moderation:** Benedictine asceticism is known for its moderation. Monks are allowed sufficient food, clothing suited to the climate, and adequate sleep. The Rule avoids extreme austerities, promoting a sustainable and balanced lifestyle
- **Hospitality and Care:** The Rule instructs monks to welcome guests as Christ, showing hospitality and care for the sick and the poor. This reflects Benedict's broader vision of the monastery as a service-oriented community.

The motto "Ora et Labora" (Pray and Work) encapsulates the balanced life Benedict envisioned. Monks are to divide their day between communal prayer (the Divine Office), manual labor, and spiritual reading. This balance ensures that their lives are both spiritually and practically productive.

The Rule of Saint Benedict became the standard for monastic living in Western Europe, influencing countless monastic communities. It was praised for its practicality, spiritual depth, and adaptability, allowing it to endure for over 1,500 years. Benedictine monasteries played a crucial role in preserving Christian faith, culture, and learning during the Middle Ages, particularly through their scriptoria, where monks copied and preserved manuscripts. St. Benedict's legacy extends beyond monasticism; his principles of community, stability, and balanced living continue to inspire people seeking a structured and meaningful spiritual life.

The Benedictine monastery movement was the key to evangelizing the European tribes all who were backward, ignorant and their idea of wealth accumulation was not work but plunder.

The monastery movement became a place of healing, food for the poor, education in skills and literacy for the masses and a sacred place where the gospel was not just preached but it was lived throughl sacrificial giving.

### **Recreating the Monastery Model Today.**

We are not looking to 12 men to live as eunuchs to establish a mission. But what we do need is to start thinking creatively about how do we combine prayer, preaching and work and skills development and education and food production and community

under one umbrella?

How do we get monastery level results in our modern day church? Meaning for instance:

**Payer and Work (Ora et Labora):** The principle of balancing prayer and work can be applied by setting aside specific times for prayer or meditation and integrating mindfulness into daily tasks. This helps in maintaining a spiritual focus while managing everyday responsibilities

**Moderation:** Practicing moderation in all aspects of life, such as diet, work, and leisure, helps in achieving a balanced and sustainable lifestyle. This principle encourages avoiding extremes and finding a middle path.

**Family Stability:** The vow of stability, which emphasizes commitment to a community, can be translated into family life by fostering strong, stable relationships and creating a supportive home environment. This involves being present and engaged with family members and maintaining consistent routines

**Servant Leadership:** Benedictine principles of humility and service can be applied in leadership by prioritizing the needs of employees and fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment. Leaders are encouraged to lead by example, showing humility and integrity.

**Community and teamwork:** Emphasizing the importance of community, Benedictine values can help create a cohesive and supportive team environment. This involves promoting mutual respect, open communication, and shared goals

### **State Proofing Ourselves**

We have a massive discipleship challenge ahead of us. Our people of South Africa are a majority of Christians by far. But the core principle of “rights and responsibility” have not been learned.

Our people are far too gullible about political promises of rights without responsibility. What are the rights and responsibility of the state and what are the rights and responsibility of the people? The state has taken over the role of the Lord who is Jehovah-Jireh...the Lord who supplies.

Just by way of simple illustration. Have you seen all the programs done by Carte Blanche or the media of townships filled with rubbish, toilets that don't work, schools that are dysfunctional, sports and recreation fields untended and crumbling. But it begs the question: Why are the communities waiting for the government to clean up the township? Why aren't the people themselves not doing this? And the same with all the other decrepit scenes of disrepair. Why are whole regions of open veldt not filled with village vegetable gardens or why are no fruit trees being planted in the community?

The great task of the church in Southern Africa over the next 5 years. We are facing extremist political parties who will create division and chaos to get access to state

resources for their own enrichment. Our people need to get their eyes off of the state and politicians as the source of their supply.

We need to find creative ways in which we can combine prayer and work as a new model for discipleship training in the context of a wider Christian community that stretches beyond the usual local church boundary.

We need to begin to see and teach that work is ‘holiness unto the Lord’ it is ministry. And the coming together to work is as important as coming together to pray and worship.

That sort of visionary new Ecclesiology is a church structure that redefines what it means to do apostolic work....where establishing a business in the community is as important as planting a new church.

Where planting a community vegetable garden or planting fruit trees is as important as planting a church.

It is time for a new creative Church community that is able to combine work and prayer in the same community to provide in the spiritual and economic needs of the people. Bigger government and bigger corporations are not the solution....bigger Church communities are.