

# GOOD GOVERNANCE IN THE RULE OF BENEDICT

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## I - INTRODUCTION

Long before the term "good governance" was in vogue, Benedict's community was already practising it using the rule that he wrote. After more than 1500 years, the Rule of Benedict (RB) has proven its timeless wisdom by the still many religious communities using it to regulate their life, and by the increasing number of lay people who find in the rule the treasure of "spirituality of everyday" - the title of a book on the RB written by a lay author. Apparently, this is the reason why the RB can be easily appropriated in the governance of various contexts of community life throughout the ages.

### A. GOOD GOVERNANCE DEFINED

I have copied and pasted an article, below, from the United Nations Economic and Social Committee for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) website to help us understand the meaning of "good governance" better, and to give an opportunity to many of us to learn something new. (*Italics and underlines mine.*)

*Recently the terms "governance" and "good governance" are being increasingly used in development literature. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies. Major donors and international financial institutions are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition that reforms that ensure "good governance" are undertaken.*

#### Governance

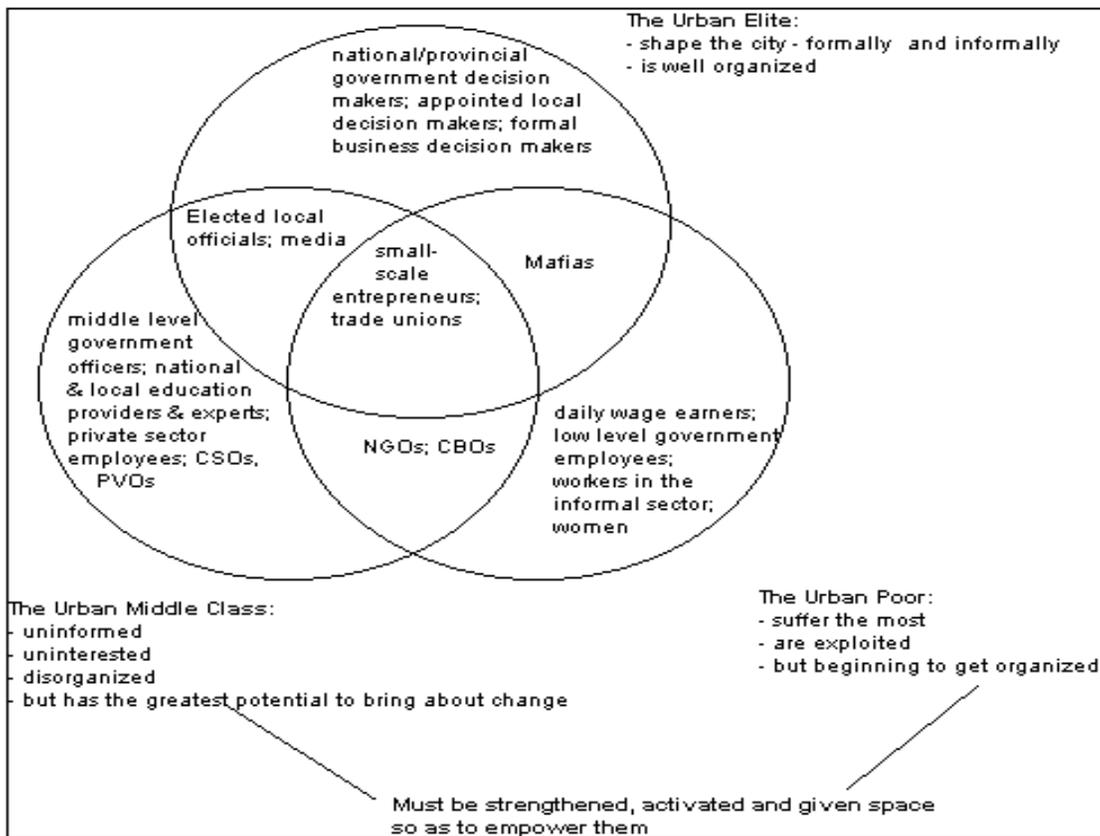
*The concept of "governance" is not new. It is as old as human civilization. Simply put "governance" means: **the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).** Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance.*

*Since governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision.*

*Government is one of the actors in governance. Other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government that is under discussion. In rural areas, for example, other actors may include influential land lords, associations of peasant farmers, cooperatives, NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders, finance institutions political parties, the military etc. The situation in urban areas is much more complex. Figure 1 (below) provides the interconnections between actors involved in urban governance. At the national level, in addition to the above actors, media, lobbyists, international donors, multi-national corporations, etc. may play a role in decision-making or in influencing the decision-making process.*

All actors other than government and the military are grouped together as part of the "civil society." In some countries in addition to the civil society, organized crime syndicates also influence decision-making, particularly in urban areas and at the national level.

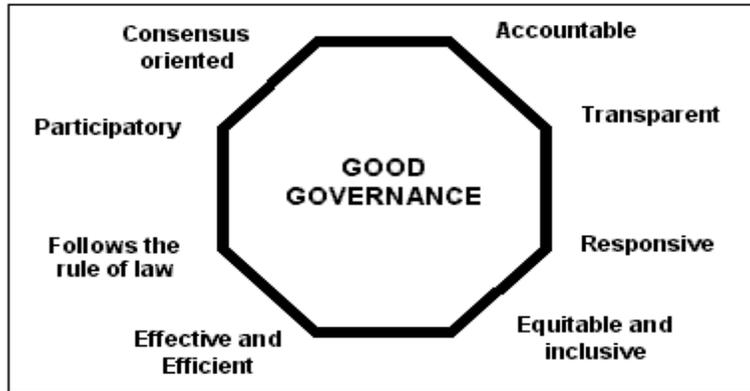
Similarly formal government structures are one means by which decisions are arrived at and implemented. At the national level, informal decision-making structures, such as "kitchen cabinets" or informal advisors may exist. In urban areas, organized crime syndicates such as the "land Mafia" may influence decision-making. In some rural areas locally powerful families may make or influence decision-making. Such, informal decision-making is often the result of corrupt practices or leads to corrupt practices.



**Figure 1: Urban actors**

Good Governance

Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.



**Figure 2: Characteristics of good governance**

***Participation***

*Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision making. Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand.*

***Rule of law***

*Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force.*

***Transparency***

*Transparency means that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in easily understandable forms and media.*

***Responsiveness***

*Good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.*

### ***Consensus oriented***

*There are several actors and as many view points in a given society. Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of a given society or community.*

### ***Equity and inclusiveness***

*A society's well being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being.*

### ***Effectiveness and efficiency***

*Good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment.*

### ***Accountability***

*Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In general an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law.*

### ***CONCLUSION***

*From the above discussion it should be clear that good governance is an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. Very few countries and societies have come close to achieving good governance in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality.*

Careful reading of the article will reveal that the concepts have some similarities with that of some chapters in the RB.<sup>1</sup> But notice too how the terms differ. While the article above uses the language of the technocrats, e.g. institutions, stakeholders, formal and informal actors, resources, minorities, etc., that sound impersonal, Benedict uses concrete descriptions of specific life situations, and identify the persons by their roles, e.g. kitchen workers, brothers on a journey, impossible tasks, etc. Say, we are in a different context and time; but this should, nevertheless, give us a hint on what

matters to Benedict, namely, the individual concern of every community member.

## B. THE GOAL OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

The goal of good governance in societies is the prompt and efficient delivery of goods and services to the people so that they can improve their quality of life. This creates satisfaction; in effect, people become more creative and productive. Prosperity and peace are achieved. When the opposite happens, however, people become disgruntled. They complain; they clamor for change. And when nothing happens, some resort to violence.

In the same vein, Benedict aims for peace in his community. When everyone is at peace in the school of the Lord's service, community members can pray well, work harmoniously, and serve one another and the poor as the Lord serves - that all, together, will have everlasting life. It is within this premise that I will try to expound my reflection on Good Governance in the Rule of Benedict.

## II - THE SCHOOL FOR THE LORD'S SERVICE

VISION	:	To Bring all Members Together To Everlasting Life
MISSION	:	Seek After Peace and Pursue it
GOAL	:	No One Should Be Distressed Or Disquieted In The House Of God.

The Dialogues of St. Gregory gives the hint on how Benedict's enterprise was born. He lived in an era where he was witnessing the moral decay in his society and the disintegration of his country's empire. The first paragraph of the rule reveals Benedict's reflection on what was happening around him. It is reminiscent of the prophets' call of repentance to the Israelites whenever they disobey God's precepts.<sup>2</sup> Only obedience can bring them back to the favor of the Lord.

Disloyalty to God by being unfaithful to God's precepts of love, mercy, compassion and justice in relating with one another results in untold sufferings to humankind in every age. At the core of this unfaithfulness is the insistence to do one's own will. This is what makes dictators who they are! That is why Benedict is adamant and insistent in his instruction, "This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to GIVE UP YOUR OWN WILL,<sup>3</sup> ONCE AND FOR ALL..." (RB Prol. 3) NO ONE IS TO PURSUE WHAT HE/SHE JUDGES BETTER FOR HIM/HERSELF, BUT INSTEAD, WHAT HE/SHE JUDGES BETTER FOR SOMEONE ELSE (RB 72:7).

History tells us of the catastrophic actions of people in power who stubbornly pursue their own will: massacres of their own countrymen in order to stay in power, disregard of the rights of their citizens in the name of progress and development, abuse of natural resources. etc. And let us not forget, too, our actions when we disregard the demands of our vowed life - how they have disturbed community life and caused interior disquiet to our co-sisters.

Benedict continues: "...AND ARMED WITH THE STRONG AND NOBLE WEAPONS OF OBEDIENCE TO DO BATTLE FOR THE TRUE KING, CHRIST THE LORD" (RB PROL. 3). For a people constantly besieged by war, Benedict's image of "weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King" makes sense. But here the battle is no longer between powerful human forces, at war, to retain global economic and political reign, but the battle within the self in making a

choice between good and evil. We can only appreciate the adjectives used by Benedict to describe obedience if we know what it takes to be a soldier who is an embodiment of discipline, stoic courage, loyalty, selfless commitment and absolute obedience to the authority that trained and formed him/her. An anecdote about the exploits of Alexander the Great relates how the total obedience and trust of his soldiers in him resulted in his successful conquests. *Hence, if one desires to become a soldier of the Lord, he/she needs the training of the will for sacrifices and for obedience. Giving up one's own will is not for the weak in spirit. The will is the person's power. Obedience is surrender of power.* It takes a lot of courage, strength, and humble commitment to give up self-will for the good of obedience. And, when one does, can anything be more noble?

Jesus, himself, had attempted to compromise his obedience in the garden of Gethsemane. But eventually, he surrendered it to the Father. As God, there could have been other ways to save the world aside from crucifixion on the cross. But Jesus always had in mind the will of his Father and Our good ... for "there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends," ... "not my will but Your [Father] will be done." Jesus' strong and noble weapons of obedience in doing the will of the Father has won for us our salvation.

The school of the Lord's service is the training ground to educate the will according to the mind of Jesus through obedience to the Rule. *For it is obedience to the Rule that helps community members tame their self-will and form them in the ways of obedience.* Because of this, no one is spared from the authority of the Rule- from the superior to the youngest member of the community.

Giving up one's own will and obedience are complementary virtues. Genuine obedience cannot be achieved unless one gives up one's own will; or else, everything becomes, simply, compliance to customs and traditions. Benedict writes, "In drawing up its [school for the Lord's service] regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. *The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love (RB Prol. 47).* In this regard, strictness should not be understood as curtailing the freedom of others, but a measure needed for the proper exercise of stewardship and protection of the rights and freedom of others by seeing to it that rules and regulations are *obeyed with care.*

### III- NO ONE SHOULD BE DISTRESSED OR DISQUIETED IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD (RB 31)

Because of the varied personalities and background of his community members, Benedict saw the need to formulate guidelines that will regulate the behavior of his community members. These regulations are not meant to "control" but to form his community members, and to help them grow in proper Christian attitudes and behaviors that lead to a loving relationship with God and with one another. Understood this way, the chapter on silence, for example, is not meant to restrict speech but, rather, to form community members to use the gift of speech properly (right time and place) and respectfully "for in the flood of words, we will not avoid sin" (cf. RB 6:4).

The virtuous do not need rules, but those who are not and only beginners (cf. RB 73) do need something to remind them and to guide them of what they need to do. This is to ensure that no one will resolve to murmuring and grumbling that create "unpeace" in the community. Because in reality, the rules are not the real reason why life is difficult in the community but the presence of unhealthy behaviors and attitudes of community members that bring about unpleasant

situations. What makes life harsh and burdensome in the community is the presence of gossiping, slander, envy, jealousy, obstinacy/stubbornness, pride, hatred, backbiting, persecution, murmuring and so forth, as consequences of encounters among human beings with "weaknesses of body and behavior" ( RB 72:5). It is the presence of these negativities that will prevent the realization of Benedict's vision for his school. For this reason, Benedict wants to prevent them to happen in his community, if not eliminate. *By writing a rule, he aims to liberate his community members from their sinful tendencies and occasions that destroy peace in the community.* He will not just give up on this! See, for good example, chapter 34 of the RB.

Human strength, without the grace of God, can bear burdens only up to a certain extent. It is when this limit is reached and the person can no longer go beyond that he/she experiences distress. When one is distressed beyond limit, how can he/she serve like the Lord? Benedict understands that not all in the community have "saintly" dispositions. That is why in as much as he is concerned with the excellent care to be given to the sick, he is also concerned about the emotional well-being of the caregivers, of the kitchen servers who are not strong, of the kitchen workers, of the cellarer of a large community, of the reader who will have to eat late, of the community members who may not benefit from the poor reading and singing, of the field workers when work is heavy or who work during summer time, of the excommunicated, of those who observe that some community members receive more, and so forth. Clearly, the main motivating factor in the governance of a Benedictine community is the great concern for the well-being of each community member "that souls may be saved and the brothers [sisters] may go about their activities without *justifiable* grumbling" (RB 41:5).

In the words of one author, the Rule is an aid in our "joyful pursuit of God within the structures of ordinary life." It is a "spirituality of everyday".The chapters in the RB talk about the day-to-day simple life of the monks in carrying out their vocation to serve as the Lord serves.

#### IV - "WALK THE TALK": EVANGELIZING THROUGH GOOD GOVERNANCE

##### A. Building a Community of Peacemakers

If PNoy's battlecry is "Walang Mahahirap Kung Walang Kurap," Benedict has "Seek Peace Pursue it" (cf. RB Prol. 17). How often do we hear ourselves say, "Di bali nang mahirap ang trabaho, o maraming problema sa apostolate, basta sa kumbento nagkaka-intindihan!" The challenge is: How do we cultivate an environment where everyone is "nagkaka-intindihan?" And , who's task is it? Benedict has this to say:

"This, then, is the good zeal which monks must foster with fervent love: They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other, supporting with greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. No one is to pursue what he/she judges better for him/herself, but instead what he/she judges better for someone else. To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers/sisters; to God loving fear; to their superior, unfeigned and humble love. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ." (RB 72:3-11)

According to the UNESCAP article, "Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance." But, unless this cornerstone is built from an aggregate of giving up of self-will and obedience, it is like "building a house on sand."

Benedict's great reverence for God bears witness in his deep respect for the dignity of each person in his community and his trust in every community member's capacity and capability to bring peace to the community. He is well aware of the weaknesses and shortcomings of each person in the community (RB 64:13, RB 73:7). But the seed of goodness in each one as a child of God (RB Prol. 5,6) drives him to continuously endeavor building a peaceful community by "arranging everything so that the strong has something to yearn for and the weak has nothing to run from" (RB58:19) -- where every one can cultivate virtues rather than "heartaches".

"Sisters, now that we have asked the Lord who will dwell in his tent,  
We have heard the instruction for dwelling in it,  
But only if we fulfill the obligations of those who live there.  
We must, then, prepare our hearts and bodies  
for the battle of holy obedience to his instructions.  
What is not possible to us by nature,  
Let us ask the Lord to supply by the help of his grace...  
We must run and do now what will profit us forever. (RB Prol. 39-41,44)

The mandate of RB 72:3-11 is a herculean feat until we are ready to give up our own will for obedience!

## B. Building a Community of Joy

Last year, Forbes Magazine - a business periodical - started a yearly survey on the Happiest Country in the World. The researchers identify happiness in the following: "It's being healthy, free from pain, being able to take care of oneself, having good times with friends and family. It's being able to speak what's on one's mind without fear, to worship God of one's choosing, and to feel safe and secure in one's home. Happiness means having good opportunity - to get education, to be an entrepreneur, and having a big idea and turning it into a thriving business, knowing all the way that the harder you work, the more reward you can expect." "Happiness is much more than money" and what it can buy.

That is why, even if Nepal has 11% inflation and 46% unemployment, a high 50% of the people say they are satisfied with their standard of living, and 81% have confidence in their banks. This conflicting result made the researchers guess that the Nepalese "could be scared of voicing their true opinion in a shaky democracy, or maybe just endemically happier people." To make things clearer, the researchers made adjustments by adding a variable called "ability to express political opinion without fear." (*RB 68 should also help our satisfaction rating!*) The country of Norway is first on the list, though its people ranked only second to Nepal in the "level of satisfaction with their standards of living: 95% are satisfied with the freedom to choose the direction of their lives and "an unparalleled 74% say other people can be trusted ," despite the fact that only 13% of Norwegians go to Church.

The above data tell us something that we already know: "Money cannot buy happiness." People are happiest when they are enabled and have opportunities to actualize their desires in order to enrich their quality of life; not only in the materials sense, but in all aspects of what defines a person's integrity.

I remember an encounter with a seasoned teacher in one of our schools during the time when there was an exodus of teachers to the public schools. I asked her if she is not tempted to transfer to a public school, with her qualifications, where there are more opportunities for promotion and where the pay is much better than our school. Her reply struck me. She said something similar to this: what she prefers are the opportunities for personal growth from the seminars that the school provide, the camaraderie among employees during outings, and, most of all, the spiritual nourishment offered by the yearly retreats and recollections. They are more important to her than promotions and high salary. I don't know if she is a rare case, but my encounter with her made me think of how can we propagate such kind of disposition among our lay partners.

When was your happiest year/s as a sister? What made you happy? Was it the enjoyable "eat-outs"? The hi-tech gadgets? The good food? The comfort of the convent? The recognitions? The projects? The trips to many interesting places? Yes --- these "blessings" can add to our level of satisfaction, but should these be the gauge of our happiness as monastic-missionaries? Or, was the source of your joy your community that allowed you "to be"? Or, the honest and open communication among sisters? or, the presence of co-sisters who's exemplary lives inspired you to exert more effort in trying to live out our missionary-monastic vocation?

### C. Become A "Model of Action" <sup>4</sup>

In order to build a community of peace and joy, for the n<sup>th</sup> time ... We are challenged to "WALK OUR TALK!" This is a visible proof of a genuine effort of conversatio morum. Let me re-phase RB 2:11-13:

...anyone who vowed to become a religious Sister is to lead those under her care by a two-fold teaching: she must point out to them all that is good and holy *more by example than by words*...if she teaches them that *something is not to be done, then neither must she do it*, lest after preaching to others, she herself be found reprobate and God some day call to her in her sin: *How is it that you repeat my just commands and mouth my covenant when you hate discipline and toss my words behind you?* And also this: How is it that you can see a splinter in other people's eye, and never notice the plank in your own?

Sometimes we wonder why, despite the many seminars and retreats, there seems to be no visible change among many of our lay partners in the quality of their living out the Benedictine values. Could it be that we fall short, as models of action, in giving enough good example for some of our lay partners to make remarks like: "Eh, si Sister nga...!"

For all we know, it is not only our lay partners who are offended by our bad actions. Even our co-sisters can become so disheartened over the way things are in the community because of the lack of zeal in living out the values and demands of our Benedictine life that leaving the convent becomes an option. It is sad to say that when we are at a loss of how to recruit ladies into our congregation, we can be negligent in creating an environment where there is real vocation promotion - the deepening of our appreciation of our monastic-missionary life by inspiring one another with our faithfulness to our vowed life. So, either we lose the sisters physically, or we lose their good zeal, eventually.

## V - CONCLUSION

Good governance is not achieved by the effort of just one but by the participation of everyone. It does not require a love of power but the power of love to convert personal ambition into a common vision. It is the fruit of self-less-ness.

LORD, *Make me a channel of your peace. Where there hatred, let me bring your love.  
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord. And where there's doubt, true faith in you.  
Make me a channel of your peace. Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope.  
Where there is darkness, only light. And where there is sadness, every joy.*

*Oh Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console.  
To be understood as to understand. To be loved as to love with all my soul.*

*Make me a channel of your peace. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.  
In giving of ourselves that we receive. And in dying that we're born to eternal life. Amen.*

**FOR FAITH-SHARING: SHARE WHAT INSIGHT/S STRUCK YOU FROM THE STATIO CONFERENCE. YOU MAY USE, TOO, THE QUESTIONS RAISED IN THE CONFERENCE.**

**NOTES:**

1. The eight (8) characteristics of good governance in the RB.
  - Participation - RB 3
  - Rule of law - RB 2:22, RB 7:55, RB 63, RB 65
  - Transparency- RB 3, RB 7:44, RB 58:5, 8 (The novice should be clearly told...), RB 68:2, RB 66:8
  - Responsiveness - RB 31
  - Consensus oriented - RB 3, RB 61:4, RB 64:3-6, RB 65:14-15
  - Equity and Inclusiveness - RB 2:20, RB 3, RB 71, RB 72
  - Effectiveness and Efficiency - RB 31, RB 55
  - Accountability - RB 2, RB 27:5-9, RB 32: 4-5, RB 36:10, RB 46:1-4
2. See for example, Isaiah 1:2-4,10,17,19
3. Benedict does not ask us to give up our will, but the self-will that prevents us from doing the will of the Father.
4. A phrase coined by Sr. Aquinata, OSB

**REFERENCES:**

RB 1980

<http://www.forbes.com/2011/01/19/norway-denmark-finland-business-washington-world-happiest-countries.html>

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