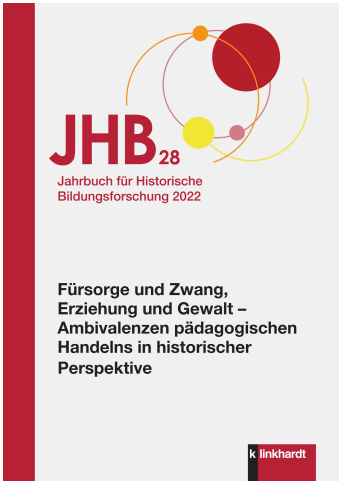
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The Rule for Freedom : The Pedagogical Function of Monastic Rules Between Care and Coercion

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The Rule for Freedom: The Pedagogical Function of Monastic Rules Between Care and Coercion

Zusammenfassung
Der Beitrag schlägt vor, aus einer bildungshistorischen Perspektive das Verhältnis zwischen Disziplin und Freiheit, Zwang und Fürsorge in der Benediktsund der Columbanusregel zu untersuchen. Durch einen Vergleich zwischen den patristischen Quellen und den Regeln selbst werden versucht der Beitrag herauszufinden, inwieweit Fürsorge und Zwang die Regeln prägten und inwieweit sie ein Gleichgewicht zwischen Strenge und Nächstenliebe gegenüber den Brüdern und der Gemeinschaft herstellen.

Geschichte der Erziehungswissenschaft, Disziplin, Regel, Zwang, klösterliches Leben, V.-VI. Jahrhundert

Abstract
The contribution aims to examine, from a pedagogical historical perspective, the relationship between discipline and freedom, coercion, and care, in the Rule of Benedict and in The Rule of Columbanus. Through a comparison between patristic sources and monastic rules, the paper will seek to identify how discipline and freedom, coercion, and care were proposed by these ways of life, and to what extent they strike a balance between rigor and charity towards brothers and the community.

History of Education, discipline, rule, coercion, monastic life, fifth and sixth century

1 Education and Monastic Life

The present contribution aims to examine, through a historical-pedagogical lens, the relationship between discipline and freedom, coercion and care in two different monastic rules. The most widely known monastic rule of the West, the Regula Benedicti, will be compared with a rule that, for a certain historical period, was fairly widespread, the Rule of Columbanus. The relationship between discipline

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and freedom in these two rules will be examined, together with the presence of physical coercion in these texts, as they entailed punishments and, in some cases, even corporal punishments. The contribution will seek to determine whether and how, within these institutions that sought to provide pedagogical teachings both adults and boys, violence was viewed and regulated as a pedagogical tool. The goal is therefore to understand how a balance between freedom and coercion is sought and how, in some cases, the latter is used as a final resort to teach freedom.

The history of monasticism is closely bound to historical and cultural events that marked the European continent as we know it today. The history of monasticism goes hand in hand with the expansion of Christianity in Europe, with the rise of the Carolingian Empire. One of the distinctive features of the monastic world is the fact that it was born and developed as a local phenomenon: it developed from the specific features of a territory, becoming part of already existing entities, i. e. *pievi*, dioceses, parishes. It thus influenced the history of the Church as a whole and much more. Monasticism has made a major contribution to the history of society, as it influenced politics, culture, the economy, customs, as well as education. However, while there have been many historical studies concerning the first matters mentioned, in fact the relevant bibliography thereof is all but endless, a study of the history of monasticism in terms of pedagogy and education is on the other hand a relatively new but undoubtedly promising one, as it features many interesting nuances and studies. These include, for example, studies carried out by Xodo[1] and Giallongo[2] in Italy, or studies that examine monasticism from different angles at a European level, carried out by Ferzoco/Muessig,[3] Sonntag[4] and Larsen/Rubenson,[5] among the most recent.

The starting assumption for this study is that the monastery is a fully-fledged place of education, whose ultimate goal is not merely learning or guarding over knowledge, but rather encountering God. The monastic rules must therefore be interpreted within this context, bearing in mind that at the time, although a cloister was extremely important at an educational level, it was not the only place dedicated to this. In 527, the Council of Toledo determined that those wishing to become priests had to be educated by their master at the episcopal see, thus establishing, albeit in an embryonic form, the episcopal schools. Then the Council of Vaison in 529 established the parochial schools, where under the guidance of a clergyman people were trained in reading the holy Scriptures and in chanting the Psalms. In this case too, the school was made for prospective clergymen, but laypeople were also allowed to participate.

1 Cf. Cafaro 1972; Xodo 1980.
2 Cf. Giallongo 21997.
3 Cf. Ferzoco/Muessig 2000.
4 Cf. Sonntag 2013.
5 Cf. Larsen/Rubenson 2018.

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Education was therefore anything but neglected. One cannot expect to find writings dedicated to specific characteristics of childhood and adolescence, as these are the result of the research and evolution of modern and contemporary pedagogical studies. Nevertheless, the studies carried out by Rouche[6] and Riché,[7] as well as by Giallongo,[8] showed that even in the VI and VII centuries there was some interest in childhood and adolescence. However, the moral, social and consequently also pedagogical and educational models of the time were largely inspired by an anthropological and theological interpretation. This interpretation thus influenced the image of a society that adapted to the principle of obedience.[9] Texts will be the primary source of our historical study as they are, as underlined by Gadamer,[10] the primary means of the hermeneutical experience. This study will also be based upon Bloch's lessons[11] which argue the importance of creating a full historical framework by considering the social and cultural attitudes towards everyday life of the time. Recent studies on the history of violence[12] have examined the nature of and attitudes towards violence but have not analysed violence in the monastic world.

The subject matter of our study could certainly be explored through research studies on childhood and adolescence:[13] the afore-mentioned work by Ferzoco[14] contains an essay by Boynton which analyses the liturgical aspect of the monastic education.[15] However, the essay focuses on the central centuries of the Middle Ages and on musical education as "part of a broader liturgical formation in which reading, singing and writing were fully integrated".[16] Boynton's study focuses on the Cluniac customary of Bernard and identifies punishment as one of the main duties of music teachers. It would be interesting to explore these aspects of monastic life and compare them to the results of our study, but it would fail to match the objectives of the paper, as Boynton deals with a different monastic 'family'. The goal of this study is instead that of comparing two coeval monastic rules and identifying their peculiarities as far as punishment and coercion are concerned.

6 Cf. Rouche 1986.
7 Cf. Riché 1966.
8 Cf. Giallongo 1997.
9 Cf. Ullmann 1983.
10 Cf. Gadamer 1972.
11 Cf. Bloch 1973.
12 Cf. Gordon/Kaeuper/Zurndorfer 22020.
13 Not even fundamental authors such as (Cf. Mitterauer 1986); (Cf. Levi/Schmitt 1994); (Cf. Becchi/Julia 1996) address, if not marginally, the period and context in question.
14 Cf. Ferzoco/Muessig 2000.
15 Cf. Boynton 2000.
16 Boynton 2000, p. 8.

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Both the afore-mentioned Giallongo[17] and the most recent study by Bartoli[18] deal with children in the Middle Ages and more specifically children in monasteries. Bartoli, in particular, attends to oblate children: we could ask ourselves how much freedom these children actually enjoyed. Some of these aspects will be addressed in the final part of this essay. The main research question of the present work will be the extent of individual freedom in monasteries and their inherent tension between care and coercion. This study will therefore try to investigate whether care exercised through punishment and coercion was ultimately aimed at freedom and self-determination.

2 Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri

Listen, my son, to the master's instructions. This is how the prologue of the Rule of Saint Benedict begins. This rule, written around 540, was so popular that just one century later it was adopted as a homogeneous and universal life rule by the entire Latin world, thereby replacing all other rules. Gregory, in his Dialogues, defines this Rule as "discretione praecipuam, sermone luculentam".[19] This text was the result of a long work process with undeniable borrowings from a previous rule, defined by Benedict of Aniane as the Regula Magistri, as it was written by an anonymous monk from whom Benedict obtained his rule of life. Penco, with respect to the similarities between the Regula Benedicti and the Regula Magistri, thus solves the problem: "The Regula Magistri is ultimately the homogeneous yet shapeless block from which St. Benedict was able to yield his masterpiece, which nevertheless allows for the identification of said derivation and personal additions by the saint Legislator".[20] Furthermore, Vogüé also notes that by reading the rule it immediately becomes apparent that there are many educational observations, since the entire monastery is seen as a great *Scola dominici servitii*.[21]

Of course, this is not an institution with the main purpose of educating men to become cultivated men and scholars: the ultimate goal of monastic life remains the pursuit of God in the community of brethren (when it comes to coenobitic life). However, one can find here suggestions and instructions of pedagogical nature, which can be useful for the present analysis. Furthermore, everyone was welcome in a monastery, not only regardless of their social class but also of their age: monasteries in fact accepted both free men and serfs, adults as well as children. Chapter 59 of the Rule of Benedict explains the oblation of boys, with all

17 Cf. Giallongo 1997.
18 Cf. Bartoli 2021.
19 Dialogi 2,36.
20 Penco 1995, p. 62.
21 Cf. De Vogüé 1984, p. 33.

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the implications shown by Giallongo.[22] However, the focus of the present work is more on the previous chapter in which Benedict clarifies the *De disciplina suscipiendorum fratrum*, to understand what educational rules and what pedagogical observations a postulant needed to embrace upon entering a monastery. To do so, one must seek to understand the meaning of obedience. By doing so, one can understand how a balance between care and coercion was being sought, one that had an actual educational value.

The chapter on obedience of the Rule of Benedicti was inspired by chapter 7 of the Regula Magistri.[23] It immediately becomes apparent that the will and promptness to obey is seen as a sign of great humility. Obedience must be shown to the abbot and to the brethren by obeying to the former even for things deemed impossible[24] and by showing mutual obedience among brethren.[25] But how was one beginning this path supposed to behave with respect to obedience? Benedict explains that a postulant wishing to enter the monastery must not be welcomed too easily but must instead be put to the test in terms of patience and perseverance, by allowing himself to be guided by an elder brother entrusted with this task. The elderly monk, according to Benedict, must be experienced in monastic life and be able not only to win over and fascinate the souls, but also to observe them carefully. The only selection criterion envisaged does not concern intellectual abilities or practical skills, a novice must instead be welcomed into the community "Si revera Deum quaerit",[26] if in truth he seeks God.

The discriminating factor that reveals whether he truly only seeks the Lord will be to put to the test his patience in every possible way, [27] always showing him the Rule as his reference, knowing that that will be his horizon and the rule he will choose for his life. If, once he has been thus put to the test "si habita secum deliberatione promiserit se omnia custodire et cuncta sibi imperata servare, tunc suscipiatur in congregatione",[28] the novice decides to embrace the rule, he must be aware that he must persevere in this school and be ready to obey every command, knowing he has freely chosen to embrace monastic discipline. The new monk will indeed promise before God and all his new community that he will not leave that monastery and will permanently remain in that place; he will constantly convert to the pursuit of the Lord, which is the sole purpose of monastic life; and vow to obey his brethren. Thenceforth, he shall be considered by all means a member of the community; he will be aware that he has voluntarily stripped himself of all his

22 Cf. Giallongo 1997.
23 Cf. De Vogüé 1989, p. 133.
24 Cf. Regula Benedicti 68.
25 Cf. Regula Benedicti 71; 72,6.
26 Regula Benedicti 58,7.
27 Cf. Regula Benedicti 58,11.
28 Regula Benedicti 58,14.

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material goods, as well as of his will: he will be aware that even his body no longer belongs to him, as he will be subject to obedience: "ex illo die nec proprii corporis potestatem se habiturum scit".[29] Besides, the prologue of the rule is clear on the use and on the purpose of the Rule: its purpose is for the monk to return, through obedience, to the person he has strayed from owing to disobedience: "ut ad eum per oboedientiae laborem redeas, a quo per inoboedientiae desidiam recesseras".[30] Shortly afterwards, Benedict states once again that the monk is he who decides to renounce his will and embrace the weapons of obedience.[31]

Just like a fully-fledged school, the monastic community is a community of people with an abbot in charge, to whom Benedict specifically dedicates two chapters (2 and 64). The abbot is tasked with presiding over the community, but there is more to it. Benedict does not seem to be interested in determining what an abbot is, but rather in determining how he must behave, which is useful to the present study. He writes that the abbot, he who guides the brethren and presides over the discipline, must impose his authority over his disciples with one teaching that goes in two directions. On the one hand, he must teach through facts, with his behaviour how good and desirable it is. He must offer oral explanations to the disciples who are more sensitive and intellectually capable of understanding his words, that may suffice with them, while his words must be less theoretical and more simplified for the more unrefined disciples.[32] Furthermore, in his conduct, he must avoid what he urges his brethren to avoid, to use his daily actions to demonstrate what he speaks of.[33] He does so because his behaviour must be consistent with the discipline he expects the others to put into practice.

While in the Rule of the Master, which Benedict refers to, there are several instructions that insist on the equality among all monks, Benedict seems to pay much attention to the charismas and to personal needs, so much so that that he states that it is the abbot's personal duty to love everyone equally, but to also take into account the differences of each individual: through his person and his talents, he guides his community. While this is true in terms of valuing each person's personality, so is the fact that the abbot must guide and correct the monks, as he is able to act with the right timing and in the right moment to carry out the correction, showing the strictness of a master, combined with the affection of a father.[34] He also seems to be more specific when dealing with the issue of correction, which shows how interested in education Benedict is. He in fact writes that it is the superior's task to firmly correct the most restless brethren, while he must be able to

29 Ibid. 58,25.
30 Regula Benedicti, p. 2.
31 Cf. Regula Benedicti p. 3.
32 Cf. Regula Benedicti 2,12.
33 Ibid. 2,13.
34 Cf. Regula Benedicti 2,24.

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lovingly rebuke those who are meeker, more submissive and prone to obedience, and at any rate severely punish the negligent and those who despise common discipline. Under no circumstance can he however turn a blind eye on any faults and must cut them off at the roots immediately.[35]

Benedict then makes a list of useful pieces of advice for the abbot for him to decide what type of discipline must be provided to the monks, starting from the simplest cases, namely monks who are more prone to listen and let themselves be guided. In these cases, a simple oral rebuke will suffice to restore order. This type of approach is not always valid and effective, there are also more serious situations and more stubborn characters. In which case, he states: "stultus verbis non corrigitur" and "percute filium tuum virga et liberabis animam eius a morte".[36] For the fool and for he who reiterates his sins, words are useless, so much so that he seems to even suggest corporal punishments for the unruliest characters. Moreover, Benedict reiterates that the abbot has a very difficult educational task, and is called upon, at any rate, to be at the service of the various temperaments, and also to adapt the punishments to the different monks to be effective and achieve his objective: therefore, the abbot must adapt to everyone, he must be able to understand the temperament and intelligence of each individual and adapt the punishments accordingly.[37]

Benedict then dedicates some *ad hoc* chapters, going from 23 to 30 and from 46 to 48, that are specifically dedicated to repression and to the correction of one's faults. Although this part of the rule certainly seems to be the most distant from today's sensitivity, the present contribution will show that Benedict sought to include an educational value to this case too. In chapter 23 he claims that if a brother rebels against or violates the rule, he must first be rebuked up to two times privately, and should there be no improvement, he must be rebuked "coram omnibus",[38] by everyone. Should the fault be repeated, and should the brother not make amends and show no intention of changing his behaviour, he shall be excommunicated, in other words isolated from the rest of the community. This type of punishment could vary and could be an excommunication "a mensa non ab oratorio",[39] meaning a temporary exclusion from some areas of the community for a given amount of time. This punishment, which isolated the brother from a part of the life of the community, was however reserved to those who "intelligit qualis poena sit",[40] i. e. the monks who understand the purpose of the punishment. For those who lack the necessary sensitivity or intelligence to understand the purpose

35 Cf. Regula Benedicti 2,25.
36 Regula Benedicti 2,28–29.
37 Cf. Regula Benedicti 2,31–32.
38 Regula Benedicti 2,23.
39 Regula Benedicti 24,3; Regula Magistri 13,60.
40 Regula Benedicti 23,4.

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of the punishment, "vindictae corporali subdatur":[41] the rule states that they must undergo corporal punishment.
Benedict, in the following chapters, analyses what gradualness must be applied to excommunication. Furthermore, the reference made by both Benedict and by the Master is Scripture, Matthew 18: 15–17, which prescribes to first rebuke the brother who sins when he is alone, then with the community present, and as a last resort to excommunicate him from the community itself. Both Pachomius[42] and Basil,[43] references both of the Master and of Benedict in the writing of the monastic legislation, mention that evangelical verse, according to which the aim of the correction and of the punishments is to modify the customs of the brother at fault and cure him, in order for him to avoid the most extreme solution, i. e. excommunicating him from the community to preserve the group as a whole. Excommunication, i. e. the isolation from certain communal moments, thus becomes a way for the brother at fault to spend time alone to understand his mistakes. Resorting to corporal punishment and beatings seems to be a solution adopted only for monks with such a hard temper that they could not understand any other type of punishment. Nevertheless, this punishment would be less hard, tiring and painful than being radically isolated from the community.
In chapter 24 of the Rule he explains how the punishment must always and solely be reserved to the discretion of the abbot. The monk who is guilty of faults deemed less serious must be excluded from the common table and from some functions of the oratory. It does not prescribe fasting but rather that he must not eat by sharing the food of the community but instead at different times. Instead, chapter 25 states that a monk who is guilty of graver faults shall be excluded not only from the table, but also from the common prayer in choir. It is also prescribed that no brother shall approach him and that he shall remain alone, partaking of his food alone in accordance with the instructions of the abbot, until the necessary correction is carried out. The brethren who will approach him, thus mitigating the punishment, shall undergo the same punishment. The correction for graver faults entailed a radical isolation of the subject at fault and a public punishment that would then culminate with a solemn ritual of reconciliation and readmission into the community.
Benedict stresses that it is the abbot's task to look after the monks who have been excommunicated: he compares the abbot to a doctor who treats patients who, through medicine, can finally heal. All of Benedict's attentiveness can be noted in the prescription to the abbot to ensure that the monk at fault is not overwhelmed by excessive sadness, but is instead helped and comforted by wise, older brethren to recover from his mistake, thus setting out on a path of penitence and

41 Regula Benedicti 23,5.
42 Judicia 1–4.
43 Regula 16.

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of regaining credibility towards the entire community. All of chapter 27 indeed offers suggestions to the abbot to remind him that his task is to always seek the lost sheep, even if this means leaving ninety-nine sheep in the fold and straying to find the lost sheep.

If, despite all these caring actions, the monk stubbornly continues making the same mistake, the monastic legislator establishes that the community must resort to praying, in order to obtain the salvation of the brother from the Lord. If however this option fails too, "tunc iam utatur abbas ferro abscisionis",[44] the abbot, like a good doctor, shall use the instrument of the surgeon to amputate the sick limb, to prevent a diseased sheep from contaminating the whole flock. In this respect, Benedict's attention, in his rule, always has two sides: on the one hand it deals with salvation and with saving a brother who is guilty of some fault, on the other hand the supreme value to protect and preserve is that of common life, so much so that the most severe punishments gradually prescribe an increasingly higher degree of isolation from the rest of the community. To fully understand how much Benedict pays attention to brothers who sin, he prescribes that even the most severe punishment, namely being banished the monastery, is not permanent. He in fact prescribes that if the monk who is banished from the monastery owing to his own fault wishes to return to the community, though as the last of the last, he shall be readmitted to the monastery with the chance to prove his humility. If he then leaves again, he can be readmitted up to a third time, afterwards he shall be denied every chance to return to the community.

Benedict dedicates chapter 30 of the Rule to correcting the younger boys, and in this case the legislator, despite taking into account that "omnis aetas vel intellectus proprias debet habere mensuras",[45] every age and every stage of intellect ought to have its own appropriate degrees of discipline, compares children and adolescents to those who are unable to understand how great a punishment excommunication is, i. e. partial isolation from the community. Benedict seems to claim that a boy or an adolescent will hardly be able to understand, like an adult, the importance of communion with one's brethren in the school at the service of the Lord. In this case, despite maintaining the principle of individual differences, he prescribes rigorous fasts or corporal punishments, in order to correct themselves.

Chapters 43 to 46 cover, albeit in different ways, the matter of faults and of the corrections that can be made within the monastic community. Chapter 43 prescribes the punishments to be undergone with an ascending climax if a brother arrives late at the prayer celebration or at the refectory, and the criteria used by the legislator are the same that have been previously identified and examined.

44 Regula Benedicti 28,6.
45 Regula Benedicti 30,1.

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Chapters 44 and 45 are particularly interesting for the present study. Chapter 44 prescribes that the monk that was excluded from the table for severe faults, to be readmitted, must prostrate himself in silence before the door of the oratory and lie face down before those exiting, he must remain in that position until the abbot deems it necessary. The body therefore acquires a public value also in the penance before the entire community, and it is the entire community that acknowledges the faults of the brother. Benedict explains that if the brother is readmitted to the presence of the community, he shall throw himself at the feet of the abbot and of all his brethren to ask for their prayers. A similar penance is envisaged at the end of all the daily prayers, for the milder faults: the brother must prostrate himself on the ground, at the end of the prayer, and remain in that position until the abbot, the guarantor of the communion of the brethren and of the community, brings him back to his feet. Likewise, when it comes to correcting errors committed in choir, the penance is a public humiliation before the community. In this case, instead, he explains that the younger boys shall only undergo corporal punishment. He therefore seems to believe that they would be unable to understand any other type of penance for these occurrences.

Benedict feels the need to specify, in chapter 70, that the system of punishments and amending one's faults must by no means be left up to the arbitrary decisions of single individuals, everyone must instead abide by their role. He explains that no one is allowed to enforce an excommunication or inflict corporal punishment to a brother without the abbot's authorization,[46] or else he shall undergo the punishments indicated in the rule. Moreover, the younger boys must be carefully watched by the entire community until they turn fifteen, as if to say that the responsibility of educating the younger boys cannot be delegated to a single person but must instead be borne by everyone.

3 Regula Monachorum

De Vogüé, when discussing the Regulae and the Penitential of Columbanus, states that:

> "this disconcerting literature will hopefully appear to today's monks not as a mere jolt that highlights the completely different style of their religious lives, but as the venerable image of a monasticism that is closer to Saint Benedict than it may seem and that is ready to offer the code of Saint Benedict its first field of application outside its land of origin".[47]

Therefore one of the leading scholars of the monastic rules sees these two texts, which may at first seem very different from one another, as a form of monasticism

46 Cf. Regula Benedicti 70,2.
47 De Vogüé 1997, p. 10.

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that is very close to Benedict's spirit. What follows is an examination of this text to find a different sensitivity compared to Benedict's sensitivity on the issue at hand. Columbanus is certainly one of the most famous Irish pilgrims, so much so that he deemed this one of the most important features of his monastic style.[48] His rule and his deeds marked an entire era, although

> "it was completely hidden by the imposing figure of St. Benedict […] and one forgets too easily that St. Columbanus' monastic foundations […] were for more than one century, the VII […], a beacon for all of Europe, before the rule of the patriarch of Montecassino […] took over."[49]

Brunhölzl[50] argues that his character and his temperament of coarse ascetic certainly influenced the writing of his rule, so much so that De Vogüé writes:

> "the conventual rule written by Saint Columbanus is a surprising, or rather unappreciated piece of work. Upon reading his lists of punishments one may think they may well be in prison. This list of punishments offers us, however, a clear picture not only of the observances performed, but also of the generous conversion spirit that animated them".[51]

Fiaich also adds: "Many found him almost inhuman in his severity, both in regard to his own body and in his sentiments toward his companions".[52]
From the first chapter, his *Rule of the Monks* deals precisely with the theme of obedience, and ends by dealing with the discernment, mortification and perfection of the monk. Although in a different style, the content and the suggestions that Columbanus puts forth on obedience seem to be entirely ascribable to those of Benedict; besides, the common source and reference is in both cases Cassian. Columbanus writes: "At the first word of the superior, let all who hear stand up to obey: for obedience is an offering to God, since Jesus Christ our Lord says: He who hears you hears me".[53] Within the monastery, therefore, the first rule to be followed is that of obedience, which teaches the monk to be a good disciple of the Lord. The Irish Saint seems to identify discernment as another fundamental characteristic of education. Here discernment is defined as the discretion that: "[…] derives its name from discerning, for it discerns, in us, between good and evil, and also between means and end. Both, that is, good and evil, are from the beginning separated like light and darkness, after the devil gave rise to evil because of the corruption of good, but with God who first enlightens and then separates".[54] One of the values to which discernment will lead, Columbanus continues, will be

48 Cf. Bullogh 1997, p. 8.
49 Franceschini 1965, pp. XI-XII.
50 Brunhölzl 1991, p. 14.
51 De Vogüé, Adalbert 1997, p. 10.
52 Fiaich 2012, p. 18.
53 Regula Monachorum 1,1.
54 Regula Monachorum M 8,11.

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that of temperance, which allows us to avoid all excesses: "Between little and too much, the right measure lies in the middle; it always keeps us from what exceeds in one sense or another".[55]

Moreover, Columbanus explains the importance of discipline to achieve true following of the Lord and says: "The most important part of the rule of monks is mortification, which is commanded to them by Scripture: Do nothing without counsel. If, therefore, nothing is to be done without counsel, in everything it is to be asked for".[56] He also emphasizes how this discipline may only appear severe at first, but it leads to the certainty in our consciousness of being on the right path. Discipline thus becomes a demanding exercise of educational co-responsibility, and this is also evident in the eyes of the author, who states: "In fact, what is free from the fear of judgment is what has already been examined by the one whose turn it is to judge: it is he who bears the full weight of the burden of the other, and it is he who bears the full responsibility that has been taken".[57] By binding themselves to one another, the monks will thus guard against a proud freedom, as Columbanus calls it, which is the freedom of those who are not aware of being within a community in which one is co-responsible for the growth and progress of the other. He explains why following such a rigid rule and relying on each other is important in the common life: "The monk, in the monastery, lives under the authority of a single father and together with many brothers, to learn humility from one, patience from another; let one teach him silence, the other meekness; let he not do what he wants" because his duty in the monastery is to "obey and fulfill what has been commanded".[58]

Regarding the correction of faults, there is once again the metaphor of the doctor and medicine. Columbanus writes in his Regula Coenobialis:

> Different faults must be healed with the medicine of a different penance. Therefore, beloved brethren, dearly beloved brethren, […] the holy fathers have prescribed that before meals or before going to bed, or whenever there is an opportunity, we are to make confession, for confession and penance deliver from death. Therefore, not even minor faults are to be omitted in confession, because, as it is written, he who neglects small things gradually degenerates.[59]

A larger part of the text ought to be quoted to understand the tenor of the precision of the rules put forth:

> Therefore it is ordered that the monk who is not present at the blessing at the table and does not answer Amen, be corrected with six strokes. Likewise, he who speaks while

55 Regula Monachorum 8,13.
56 Regula Monachorum 9.
57 Regula Monachorum 9.
58 Regula Monachorum 10.
59 Regula Coenobialis 1.

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> taking the meal, if the necessity of a brother does not require it, is to be corrected with six strokes. […] If the lamp is not blessed, that is, when it is lit by a younger brother and he does not take it to an older brother to bless it, six strokes. If one claims ownership of anything, six strokes. Whoever spoils the table with a knife, let him be punished for correction with ten strokes. It is decreed that if one of the brothers, who has been entrusted with the task of cooking or serving, spills something, however little it may be, he is to be corrected with a prayer in church after the office is over, so that the brothers may pray for him. […] If, on the other hand, someone, through negligence or forgetfulness or carelessness, spills a sufficiently large amount of liquid or solid, let him undergo a long penance in church, remaining prostrate, motionless, while twelve psalms are sung at the twelfth hour. Or, if it is much that he wastes, let him know that as many litres of beer or as many measures of any other food will have been lost through his negligence, for as many days he will not be given the usual ration that he would have been entitled to, and will drink water instead of beer. For what is spilled on the table and falls on the floor, we say that it is enough to ask forgiveness at bedtime.[60]

The list goes on in a very meticulous way, indicating rules and punishments for every eventuality that may occur during the common life. Columbanus seems to be anxious to regulate every single aspect of the monk's life, clearly defining every penance to be atoned for. A sort of training with a whip, certainly functional to free from sin, but that runs the risk of being almost impossible to read with a serene mind for our sensitivity, especially if one attempts to see it as an educational context, given the many prescriptions, the punishments devised and the strokes of the whip prescribed. After all, Columbanus and his Irish monasticism typically adopt a very penitential and strict style. Although the greatest part, i. e. the mortification of the body and the beating of the flesh, is there, its purpose is not however, the author always argues, some unhealthy masochistic spirit, but rather a way to free man from that 'superba libertas' that leads to perdition. In this case the *libertas*, if superb, i. e. free from any constraint, is not so much a goal to be achieved, as a risk that must be avoided. Franceschini however, notes how the same author of this series of rules and bleak faults to be punished with the whip is the same author who in other contexts wrote some of the most beautiful and moving pages that Latin literature has handed down to humanity.[61] Nevertheless, the imbalance in the theme of physical correction and beating of the body is equally apparent. This aspect, however, certainly did not create problems for the sensitivity of the time, given that this rule was easily adopted both in Merovingian Gaul and in Lombard Italy. However, although the goal of monastic life identified by Columbanus is that of obtaining great joy that will never fail in time, one can argue that this joy was earned under the constant threat of strikes with the rod and lashes of the whip.

60 Regula Coenobialis 1–3.
61 Franceschini 1965, p. XI.

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4 Benedict and Columban: Care and Coercion?

A first aspect to briefly dwell on is the difference in educational sensitivity in applying Kant's admonition to cultivate freedom in the face of coercion, which is so dear to contemporaries, in a historical context in which coercion and violence were not only tolerated, but were considered fully-fledged educational instruments. Besides, medieval theological writings have almost invariably offered the image of a man who, while on the one hand was clothed with grace through the merits of Christ, on the other hand was also marked by the weight of guilt and sin, which had to be amended and atoned for. In this respect, the core concept reflecting this ambivalence and the references to the consequent doctrinal approach, albeit with some slight differences, are present in both texts at hand. What changes, quite significantly, is the application of these values and the translation into practice in the discipline of the monastic rules. In fact, while Benedict's rule leaves more room and discretion in the application of punishment to individual contexts, to Columbanus, instead, everything is regulated in a much more rigorous and almost obsessive way. Columbanus, with his rigidly penitential way of life, which he translated into his rule, reveals a spirit that was anything but inclined to mediate or adapt to different contexts, territories or sensitivities, something that Benedict's Rule was able to do. This is, perhaps, the greatest weakness that has marked the history of the rule of Columbanus, which in a fairly short period of time, gave way to the more adaptable Benedictine rule.

Regardless, despite their different nuances, both texts view physical coercion, penance and physical beatings not as an exception, but as a rather common event, something that was normally used and that helped teach the sense of responsibility towards oneself and towards others to the boys and men that were being educated. Certainly, while the reference points used to justify the punishments and beatings are the same, in Benedict there is a more vivid sense of the exception to be understood, of the gradualness to be taken into consideration, of the difference of characters to be considered and of the contextualisation of the type of fault and punishment that was devised. It could be argued that Benedict shows an educational sensitivity that is more prone to understanding the soul of the sinner and to grasping the diversity and specific features of each individual. Even when it comes to the thorny issue of physical punishment and discipline of the body, the abbot of Cassino seems to show how to implement these forms of punishment: one must always bear in mind the criteria of gradualness and seek to understand individual characters, refraining from using these punishments in an indiscriminate manner. At any rate, these punishments must be used only as a last resort.

Between the two rules analysed, history has rewarded the greater flexibility of Benedict's rule that, for the above-mentioned reasons, has been able to adapt better not only to the specific features of the person to educate, but has also been able

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to translate the same educational needs in different places and contexts. Benedict was therefore able to create, with his magisterium, an educational environment capable of preserving the dynamics of freedom that give responsibility to the person, albeit within a rule, thus highlighting even more the unique and ultimate spirit of every educational process: making every development process evermore humanising.

It is now necessary to contextualise what has been achieved thus far by analysing coercion and freedom in both rules. It may seem that freedom had nothing to do with monastic education, which was practised in settings that seem to be so disconnected from our common idea of childhood. Bartoli says "it could be suggested that monastic life is the opposite of childish behaviour and one could argue that monastic education aimed at teaching children not to be children".[62] What level of freedom can be expected if violence was so widely used to convince children to obey the rules? And what kind of violence was administered?

On this point, Dwyer and Damousi specifies that "at the core of understanding violence is to understand cultural beliefs and attitudes, which can change over time, sometimes quite dramatically. That means understanding what is and what is not violence in any given society at any given time and then briefly defines violence: criminologist Pieter Spierenburg, limits violence to the 'intentional encroachment upon a person's physical integrity'". More importantly: "The answer to many of these questions depends on who, where and when we are discussing. How people conceive of 'violence' will necessarily vary from period to period and from region to region, but sensitivity to the ways in which contemporaries used the language of violence or, to put it another way, what they understood to be 'violence' is fundamental to our interpretations of it. The difficulty is always balancing what any given society condones as violence, and what we as outsiders condemn."[63] A few lines later the volume argues that the meaning of violence changes through time and cultures and that to understand the concept of violence one has to take into account God, physical coercion practices and the common moral law. To explore the perception of violence further, we should consider Dilley and Smith's studies that show how physical punishment was viewed within the monastic education system.[64] Smith points out that "underlying this tale is a particular way of conceptualising the relationship between physical suffering and redemption that was central to medieval monastic ideals of spiritual progress and community".[65] Smith further argues that physical pain and flagellation could be beneficial, and under some circumstances, flogging could even be considered an act of compassion. In this work we have brought out, from the Rule, when Benedict believed that child-

62 Bartoli 2021, pp. 113–114.
63 Dwyer/Damousi 2020, pp. 3–6.
64 Dilley 2017.
65 Smith 2009.

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ren had to be whipped and explained under what circumstances whipping had to be practised. The contemporary reader may consider these specificities negligible and limited, but it should be remembered that flogging was widely accepted as a necessary method of correction needing little to no explanation.

Smith wonders whether the scant coverage this subject has received is due to the different ways in which such violent practices are viewed by contemporaries and medieval authors. She also underlines that public flogging was a common feature of the penitential sentences issued by ecclesiastical courts and that these rites were designed to humble sinners and readmit them in the community. Certainly, the chasm between contemporary and medieval sensitivities seems unbridgeable, as emerges when Smith explains that "loving one's neighbour sometimes required one to commit acts of violence against him". But monasteries strongly instructed against the excessive administration of flogging.[66] Smith points out that Anselm of Canterbury condemned the excessive use of the whip but did not dispense with this educational "tool" altogether. This reinforces the argument that whipping and a certain degree of violence are perceived as excessive and unjustifiable not only by the contemporary reader but also by the mild Anselm of Canterbury himself, who believed, however, that corporal punishment had to be practised only under specific circumstances. Despite the gap between present and past sensitivities, one should also remember that corporal punishments in schools have been administered up to the present, but it should also be pointed out that the contexts differ greatly.[67] One should not expect from medieval authors to have our sensitivity but rather understand that even within their historical and cultural context progress was made reflecting new educational sensitivities and intuitions which may still seem brutal to the contemporary reader but that may at the same time be interpreted as significant breakthroughs in their context.

One aspect that deserves our attention is the link between coercion and freedom. Even in this case, as Miccoli reminds us, this subject matter must be addressed with specific attention, keeping in mind that questioning the doctrine, life and religious organization of the medieval society means questioning the ideological foundations of a society which knew no other tenets than the religious ones.[68] Freedom should therefore be interpreted not with our contemporary awareness, which is moulded by the concepts of tolerance and natural rights born by the religious conflicts in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. Using Mill's and modern liberalists' ideas of freedom to read the monastic institution in the Middle Ages would be ahistorical.[69] In the Middle Ages, freedom is to be theoretically set against a theological background that defi-

66 Odini 2020.
67 Cf. Skundberg/Thuen 2018.
68 Cf. Miccoli 1974, p. 480.
69 Cf. Mill 1859.

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ned man, his being, his ontological justification and his characteristics, including his *intellectus* and moral behaviour. Even more so, within the medieval historical context, life stages were interpreted along theological rather than biological lines. It should also be pointed out that Benedict, as well as other authors who influenced the canons of patristics in the Early Middle Ages like Saint Augustine or Saint Jerome, viewed childhood only from a theological perspective. Both Saint Gregory the Great and Benedict seemed to understand some of the peculiarities of childhood but believed that the child was not able to rationally comprehend the transcendent dimension of life, which justified their educational methods. Richè argues that even those who adopted a more sensitive approach to childhood did so not much because they had grasped the vulnerability of this stage of life but rather because they wanted to conform to the Christian moral code defined by the Bible and imitate Jesus's compassion for children through his words and actions.[70] Klapisch points out that children were often treated as commodities and, when oblating their children, parents would commit to not supporting them financially in case they decided to leave the monastery.[71] No attention was given to the child's will, as the research conducted in what could be defined as "Pedagogy of Oblation" shows that children were granted no right to self-determination.

If we limited ourselves to drawing conclusions from one fragment of history only, even if we contextualised it as much as possible, we could say the title of this contribution sounds like a provocation: the rule for freedom. In the limits of a research article, the present study endeavoured to compare two coeval monastic rules from what Braudel called a long-term perspective.[72] In these terms the focus can change and we can also gain a higher vantage point by contextualising it within different extended periods of time.[73] If we tried to answer our research question – is it a rule for freedom? – from our contemporary point of view, rules and freedom would hardly be reconcilable, and we would be tempted to draw simplistic conclusions. Freedom, however, is to be interpreted within a long process of re-elaboration, in the context that goes from Saint Augustine, the medieval authority par excellence, to Saint Anselm of Canterbury and his *rectituto*, after whom other influences would gradually alter the structure and lead to the modern world. The concept of freedom, read within the framework of the afore-mentioned scriptural and theological justifications, leads us to conceive of man who, by obeying his own reason, obeyed his own nature and thus determined himself freely. In this respect, freedom of will is to be understood as a primigenial element preceding all creation. It is understandable that children were not able to access consciously this level of freedom. Hence, enforcing rules was necessary.

70 Cf. Riché 1966.
71 Cf. Klapisch 1973.
72 Cf. Braudel 1958.
73 Cf. Goebel 2001, p. 427.

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It is also true that in his Rule, Benedict prescribed a series of specifications which certainly are far from our contemporary sensitivity, but which nevertheless showed a level of care that deserves serious reflection. In his Rule, Benedict prescribed a pedagogical attention that lasted for a lifetime and adjusted to the needs of the different stages of life. Also, within the monastic coenobitic tradition, what is most important is not the individual but the community. Indeed, the common good was to be pursued in and for the community by empowering individuals for life but within certain limitations, which also delimited the rationality of the whole era. From the afore-mentioned long-term perspective, Benedict's rule granted a certain degree of liberty and autonomy, while Columbanus's stricter rule reflected the historical beliefs in which it is set and failed to renew itself through history. If Benedict's rule managed to survive and fascinate those who devote their lives to it to date, it is fair to suggest that it grasped certain pedagogical elements that have still something to teach: not the whip, but the primacy of the community, which sets the boundaries for each individual's freedom and where each person can enact self-determination in the pursuit of the common good.

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