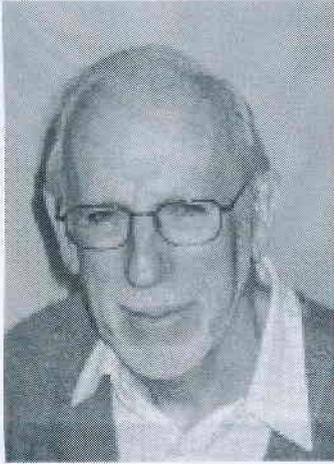


A Commentary on the Rule of Life



Reflecting one day a couple of years ago with Father Fiorenzo Salvi, SSS, our Superior General, I happened to remark that I should like one day to attempt a commentary on our Rule of Life. Some twenty years had elapsed since its official approval by the Holy See and our young men in training had as yet no instrument for understanding or studying it. Father General replied at once, "Do it! Get to work on it without delay. We need it and you are about the only person for the moment in a position to do the job."

Recognizing that he was right and encouraged by his insistence, I set to work, at first with a not very clear idea as to what it would entail.

The first substantial block of writing I was able to get done in Switzerland two and a half years ago, thanks to the hospitality of a small community of retired Sisters - Franciscan Missionaries of Mary - in a pleasant house in the town of La Chaud de Fond in the French-speaking part of the country.

I wrote every day and more or less from morning to night, except for the hours of prayer and meals and the time I needed for a daily walk. When tempted to take more time walking in the mountains, the weather came to my help. For it rained virtually every day, usually for about half a day at a time – but one was never quite sure in advance which half it would be!

I had taken very few books with me but drew instead upon pages of notes and jottings I had assembled over the years for articles, talks and retreats, as well as personal study of the Rule. I began with the very first number, writing down as much as I could about it, and then passed on to the second. And so on.

The first week was hard, but I persevered and by the second week had established a certain rhythm. My writing began to improve too. I would read the next number or two ahead of time and meditate on it during my daily walks. So I was ready mentally for it by the time I had completed the number I was working on.

At the end of the three and a half weeks I had assembled a very thick wad of note-paper filled with my handwriting. On my return to Rome I stopped near the Italian border to have a snack and refill the petrol tank. In a moment of inattention, I placed a traveling bag with all of my work together with the notes that summed up years of study and reflection (not to mention passport, credit card and other articles) in the middle of the busy parking lot and drove off!

Hardly had I got out on to the motorway when I realized what I had done. But it was too later to turn back. Anyone can imagine my state of mind as I tore down the mountain looking for a way to get out and across to the other side. After some twenty or more kilometres I came to an exit, and found my way back. When I eventually returned to the service area there was, of course, no bag in sight. Anxious inquiry at the cashier's desk in the refreshment centre, however, produced the missing bag. It had been handed in intact. Belief in the good offices of guardian angels gained instant and intense credibility in that second of inexpressible relief!

Well, once back in Rome my secretary managed to transform electronically my scribbles into elegant pages of text. I developed a rhythm of rising about 5.00 am so that I can get several hours of writing done before Mass each day; the work of research and correction gets carried out whenever I can find time during the rest of the day. It can be imagined just how much reading and research is involved for me to be in a position to have something meaningful and helpful to say about the large range of questions dealt with in the Rule. I am much heartened in moments of doubt by the encouragement of our young religious around the world who inquire eagerly about the work's progress.

As for the format, I have divided the material into two books. The first contains a series of preliminary elements (foreword, dedication, and so on), followed by an Introduction which sets out my approach and offers some reflections on the nature of a religious Rule. I then have two very substantial articles. The first

is a fairly detailed history of the evolution of the Rule of Life from the time of the Special Chapter mandated by Vatican II to the Church approval in 1984. I try to trace out the way the Rule came into being and reached its present form.

The subject of the second substantial section may cause surprise. It is an introduction to the present era interpreted as the birth of the first truly world-wide civilization, beginning with an overview of the evolution of society from the commencement of modern times. After some background, I attempt a description of four significant aspects of our present world: 1) the new understanding of human being and of our place in the cosmos, 2) the process of globalization and its social consequences, 3) the evolution of religious consciousness proper to our time, and 4) the birth of the electronic era and the emergence of "digital man."

Why on earth, someone may ask, insert such a text into a commentary on the Rule of Life? The answer lies in my study of earlier work on our Constitutions and our spirituality published in the 1950s. I realized with a shock how totally absent the world and its problems and challenges had been from our spirituality and our thinking about our mission. In consequence I resolved to preface the Commentary with such a reflection and seek to point out its relevance for our way of life and mission in this new era.

The second book contains the commentary proper and unfolds according to the arrangement of our Rule, dealing with the general description of our way of life and mission and then going on to the various dimensions of community, vowed consecration, worship and prayer, apostolate, formation, and structures of government. The organization of each section is explained and then its contents, number by number, discussed in detail. The final part of the work contains a series of instruments for further study. These include a glossary of terms, a concordance and a thematic index.

The work is intended for all who are interested but above all for formation directors and young candidates. I attempt to combine a variety of perspectives – theological, historical, spiritual, and practical, hoping that it may serve for use in study, prayer and community discussion. It will be a large book, already about 500 pages, and should appear towards the end of this year as a contribution to the celebration of our 150 years of existence as a religious Congregation in the Church.

Tony McSweeney, SSS

AUSTRALIAN PROVINCIAL CHAPTER 2006

The Australian Province members met Holy Cross Retreat for the four yearly Provincial Chapter from 24 - 29 September.

The outgoing Provincial Leadership Team of Jo Dirks, Peter Collins, Marce Glynn and Graeme Duro were thanked for their service of leadership.

The following elections took place:

Provincial Leader - Graeme Duro SSS
Provincial Consultors - Bernard Canty SSS & Thomas Knowles SSS
Provincial Treasurer - Patrick Negri SSS
Delegate to General Chapter - Peter Collins SSS
Substitute Delegate - Boris Perlaki SSS

Thank you to all our contributors to this issue of "The Vineyard".
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