



CONGREGATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Rule of Life

JHS



nniversary



NOVEMBER 2024



The year of the 40th anniversary of the Rule of Life

1984, 1st August, 2024

PRESENTATION

With this last bulletin we bring to a close a series of publications in which, over the course of a year, we have offered articles that can help us appreciate the richness of the *Rule of Life*, rediscover its relevance and thus celebrate with dignity the 40th anniversary of the approval of this basic document for our Eucharistic spirituality. It was a well-stocked table, carefully prepared and delicately garnished, truly a Eucharistic meal.

After a starter with five testimonies on what the *Rule of Life* means to each of the authors, including three participants in the General Chapters that were at the origin of this document, we had as our first course a look back at the difficult composition of the Rule, followed by a second course offering theological contributions, especially focused on the Eucharist. What we are offering you now is like the dessert of the whole dinner, taking up and combining approaches from previous bulletins, but with a fine touch of conclusion, concreteness and applicability.

Father Anthony McSweeney opens the discussion by giving a summary of the whole process of the composition of the Rule, beginning with the period well before Vatican II, when the need for adaptation, perhaps even change, was felt more and more; through the period of preparation for the Special General Chapter; the celebration of this Chapter itself in two sessions resulting in a first version of a new Rule; the ten years 'ad experimentum' up to the Chapter of 1981 which realised the definitive version that would have to wait another three years before seeing its official approval. He helps us to live again the ups and downs of those fifteen years and makes us admire the commitment, and dare I say it, the tenacity of the confreres for bringing this whole process to a successful conclusion.

In a second article I tried to show the theological richness that is present in our *Rule of Life*. By staying very close to the text (in French) I have shown that all the major themes of post-conciliar theology are present in our Rule, often in a striking and challenging way: Man and God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Church and the world, mission and witness, dialogue and listening, and the time to come. The *Rule of Life* speaks to us of all this in its vision of the Eucharist, religious life and our commitment in the Church for a new world. Truly an inexhaustible source from which to draw our inspiration and strength.

Father Manuel Barbiero, a great specialist regarding Father Eymard, comments on number 2 of the *Rule of Life* with ample reference to our Founder's texts that are now available in the edition of the Complete Works. The four parts of this number 2 form the basic structure for his contribution, beginning with Father Eymard's sensitivity to the signs of his time, followed by the new form of life

he outlined for his religious, marked by the centrality of the Eucharist with all its consequences up to social commitment, ending with an overview of the Founder's pastoral and social activities, culminating in his gift of self. This is a very rich commentary containing so many stimuli to be concretely expressed in our mission, the theme of the following number of the Rule.

In the Jewish Passover meal, the youngest at table asks the 'paterfamilias': why do we celebrate this meal as we do? And the father, as president of this liturgical celebration, responds by outlining the origin of this meal, how God showed himself faithful to his promises by freeing his people from slavery and leading them through the desert to the promised land. And he underlines the present-day dimension of all this: *we* were slaves, *we* are freed, *we* experience God close to us, *we* give thanks to him and trust in his constant protection.

That is exactly what we hope this last bulletin and also the three previous ones would do for all of us: that by commemorating where we come from we actively situate ourselves in the dynamic of this whole history, so that we may continue in our present religious life the leitmotif that we discover there, contributing in this way to the growth of this great project of God: the new world where he will be all in all. This is what we celebrate in condensed and concentrated form in our Eucharists, what we deepen and make our own in our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, and what we try to live in our communities, our parishes, our centres of formation, of accompaniment, of retreat and in all our forms of pastoral care.

We wish you an enjoyable reading, a profound reflection, a good sharing, and above all: a fruitful continuing of this journey!

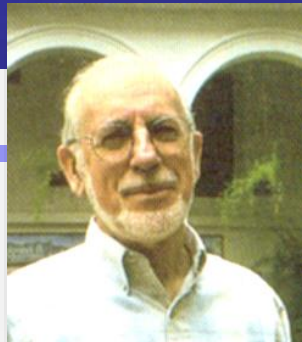
For the International Theological Commission of our Congregation

FATHER HANS VAN SCHIJNDEL S.S.S.
Provincial consultor

Brussels, Belgium
Province of Saint Peter Julian Eymard

Fr Anthony McSweeney, sss

**SSS Community of Melbourne
Australia**



BRIEF CV

Father Anthony was born on 12 February 1936 in Wedderburn, Australia. He made his first profession on 27 February 1962 and was ordained a priest on 16 August 1969 in Rome, where he studied theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

In the 1970s he was involved in the formation of novices and scholastics in the Province of the Holy Spirit.

Elected Superior General, he moved to the General Curia in Rome for two terms from 1981 to 1993. Two years later, he set up the Centre Eucharistia, which he directed until 2007.

The following year he returned permanently to Australia, where he resumed his training ministry until 2017.

“Father Anthony gives a summary of the whole process of the composition of the Rule, beginning with the period well before Vatican II. He helps us to live again the ups and downs of those fifteen years and makes us admire the commitment, and dare I say it, the tenacity of the confreres for bringing this whole process to a successful conclusion.”



History of the Rule of Life¹

Let me share my experience in the 1950's as a 24-year-old teacher who loved to frequent our church St Francis' in the centre of Melbourne. I entered the novitiate in 1960 after being a member of the dynamic very well-informed lay-apostolate at Melbourne University. The closed, culturally narrow and intellectually stifling mental world of the novitiate was a bit of a shock for me: none of priests knew anything about recent thinking.

On the other hand, the prayer-life attracted me: rotating system of adoration: 2 hrs in day, 1 hr at night; daily choral recitation of divine Office (even if in Latin!); silence, except for recreation. My problem was with the unworldly supernaturalism. We were told that only we, this tiny band of young men, were living the real life, saving our souls, anticipating what all would do eternally – adoring God.

I saw this so clearly with unforgettable force in a moment of illumination when returning to Melbourne to go to our scholasticate. Going through the busy city to take the train I asked: what meaning did the ordinary lives of these people, their engagement in family and work, have if what we were taught was true? Vatican II had already begun!

My aim here: to describe the process that led us from the Constitutions to our present Rule of Life.

¹ This article was first presented at a ZOOM meeting for SSS-formators on September 9, 2024.

CHAPTER I. THE BACKGROUND

Pope John XXIII's bold choice of the word *aggiornamento*, to describe the task of the Council – “bringing the church up to date” – startled many. Did the church really have to change? Had it been living mentally, attitudinally, and institutionally in the pre-modern world? To proclaim its message credibly in the emerging culture of our time, it would have to recover its own traditions, then do so with the language and *from within* the coordinates of the present world and not from those of an earlier time. The word announced a vast program and warned us that we were in for a challenging and (for many) painful period of adjustment.

1. A monumental effort to make our own sources available

Superior General Fr Godfried Spiekman (1949-1961) had been feeling a growing anxiety, especially for our students, for what he saw as: a decline in esteem for supernatural values, a weakened respect for the Congregation's traditions, a critical spirit especially in relation to obedience, discipline, self-denial and mortification... Putting it down to the spirit of the times, he saw a remedy in a better knowledge of our Founder, of the Constitutions.

However, we lacked reliable sources, since all we had was the three-volume commentary by Fr Georges Bouffé (1861-1938), not highly regarded by those competent in congregational matters. We knew little of the changes introduced into the Constitutions after the death of the Founder, which had introduced the ideas of Fr De Cuers, Tesniere and others.

So Spiekman charged Fr Eugenio Nuñez with the task of drawing up critical editions of all of our historical documents: the Founder's drafts of Constitutions, personal retreat notes, etc. The result: a Study of spirituality of the Congregation, 460 pp. in 1956; and a *Commentary on the Constitutions*: 624 pp. three volumes, in 1958.

It was excellent historically reliable work, but “a house without windows”: a neo-scholastic theological system lacking any critical reference to the world and church in which the Congregation came to be and our now present context and history.

Meanwhile the first rumblings of the approaching storm could be felt. In just five short years the Second Vatican Council would call for unprecedented changes in every area of church life. The very foundations of our Constitutions were to be put into question. Eventually the Constitutions would have to be set aside and a completely new document drawn up – a Rule of Life.

Nuñez’s works were just becoming known in the Congregation precisely at the time when the Council was being prepared. At least, they gave us a precious gift of reliable access to the authentic texts of Eymard and to the background and immediate context of our Constitutions, as well as the modifications introduced into them after Eymard’s death.

2. The Second Vatican Council and its Aftermath: 1961-1971

Pope John XXIII opened the Council on October 11, 1962. A little under three years later Pope Paul VI would close it on December 8, 1965. It was an epoch-making ecclesial event of the twentieth century responding to the considerable tensions provoked by a powerful historical process long underway. It was meeting entrenched resistance within the church. It drew upon a half-century-long retrieval of ancient traditions, of new pastoral initiatives and of creative theological explorations.

As for the religious life, renewal had two fundamental aims: a return to the gospel roots of all Christian life; the need to bring doctrinal expression and institutional forms *up to date* in relation to the evolution of the conditions of life and culture in the mid-twentieth century.

A sense of unease and even dismay had been growing amongst us through the 40’s and 50’s. One example: a 1947 article on inaccuracies

in eucharistic preaching by Dominican Fr A-M. Roguet, in the most prestigious liturgical review of the time, quoted some embarrassing examples from Father Eymard's writings (published in Tesnière's *Series*).

By the time Fr Roland Huot succeeded Fr Spiekman as general in 1961 a simple return to the Founder would no longer be enough. The Council would soon assign us a task of considerable magnitude. All religious Institutes were called to review their legislation and way of life in the light of the gospel, their Founders, their sound traditions.

It was truly all-embracing: Constitutions, directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies, and similar compilations had to be suitably revised and brought into harmony with the documents of the Council; outmoded regulations to be suppressed.

3. The Questionnaire that wasn't

It would probably be true to say for us, as was the case with most of the priests, religious and ordinary members of the church, that our religious were quite unprepared for the Council. The Superior General and his council, therefore, decided to begin the process with a questionnaire in order to find out what the members of the congregation were thinking.

Two capable religious were assigned to the task: Fr Harrie Verhoeven of Holland, Fr Ephrem Chaignat of Switzerland. They formulated the key questions as follows: "Are we a Congregation of *adoration* of the Blessed Sacrament?" "Or are we a Congregation of *the Blessed Sacrament*?" "Is the system of rotating adoration an essential element of the life of the Congregation?" After studying their complete list of questions proposed for the inquiry, the General Council finally decided to abandon the idea of a questionnaire altogether.

Division reigned in most of our communities. For those unable to see the reason for changes, Harrie Verhoeven distinguished two groups: first, "right-wing" personalities, conservative, attached to order and

stability; and, more often, the elderly, happy up till this time in the Congregation and feeling no need for any deep changes.

As the conclusion of the Council under Pope Paul VI on December 8, 1965, approached, Father Roland Huot got the process of adaptation and renewal under way in accordance with the requirements of *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. He called the provincial superiors to take part in the solemn final session of the Council on Dec. 8, 1965. Later, he invited a number of experts from the Council to give the Provincials a series of talks, mostly – however – on spirituality.

CHAPTER II. PREPARATION OF THE SPECIAL CHAPTER

Before the Chapter was to begin, Fr Roland Huot raised a deeply sensitive question for us: Should we continue *Missa coram Sanctissimo*? He questioned our almost universal practice of celebrating the eucharist at the same altar on which the Blessed Sacrament was exposed (in Latin, *missa coram sanctissimo*). We believed that this practice was necessary to assure the perpetuity of adoration-exposition. Some even went so far as to claim that it was a more perfect form of eucharistic worship that would mean, according to liturgical historian Josef Jungmann, that “the whole liturgy was properly only a decorative framework for the accomplishment of the sacrament”!

Himself a canonist and in the light of his experience as a member of the Vatican Council, Huot became convinced that the practice should be discontinued, since it contravened not only the law but also the spirit of the liturgy. He published a letter on November 1st 1964, informing the congregation of his opinion, acknowledging the very real difficulties the cessation of the practice would entail, and noting that “in our churches, we are tributary to a centuries-long tradition that considers the altar much more as a throne of exposition than as a table of sacrifice.”

The letter provoked a storm which Huot addressed in a second circular letter, on July 3rd 1965.

A few years later Rome would settle the question once and for all with the document, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, published on May 25th of 1967. The practice of the *missa coram sanctissimo* was banned in an absolutely binding way despite long-standing custom.

1. The General Council document: “Principles for the Aggiornamento of our Congregation”

- *Aim:* to help us insert ourselves into the changing world while remaining faithful to the first grace of our Founder.
- *Content:* the principles upon which the updating and renewal of our congregation should be based
- *Purpose:* to serve as a basis for the consultation of the religious of each Province.

The responses were then to be sent to Rome in order for a synthesis to be made.

The absence of historical consciousness was most marked in the way the Founder and his writings had been treated. We saw no significant *difference* between Eymard’s thought and that of our own time; nor had we realised that Eymard’s own thinking may itself have evolved over his lifetime.

It is here that the soon to be published studies of Eymard by Laureat Saint-Pierre (1968) and Donald Cave (1969) were to prove to be of truly incalculable importance. For the first time we discovered a remarkable and genuinely exciting evolution in Eymard’s understanding of the Eucharist and his conception of the congregation’s mission, bringing to light certain remarkable prophetic insights far ahead of their time.

2. Roland Huot’s Two Interventions

Before that, however, on October 1966 Fr Huot then decided to write again to the Congregation in response to the many religious seeking

his guidance. He sets out some of the questions being asked in our communities, reflecting the variety of positions emerging in the congregation. He also intends his text to serve as a working document for the Chapter, stating that he wishes to assist reflection, not impose his own view of things.

Believing that he had satisfactorily clarified the issues, he closed his letter with two questionnaires: the first dealing with the renewal of religious life and whether our Constitutions sufficiently express the vision of Vatican II; the second seeking to formulate our specific end, which he identifies as “eucharistic love”, while inviting his readers to reflect upon our relation to the liturgical movement, the ecclesial dimension of eucharistic adoration, our Christology, our priority pastoral task.

However, these two letters failed to answer the essential question of how to assure a fundamental continuity between Eymard and ourselves in the light of Vatican II. Father Eymard had looked at the Eucharist, in terms of three quite distinct aspects typical of the post-tridentine era – presence, sacrifice and communion. The Council had offered us the unified vision of an action: as the memorial celebration by God’s gathered people of the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

Huot’s mistake was in taking Christology as his starting point rather than the category of *sacrament*. For sacraments are symbolic acts or sign-actions, their nature and purpose being determined by the sign. Huot added to the confusion by using the same term – “Eucharist” – for both the celebration *and* for the reserved sacrament. He had clearly failed to grasp the extent of the change called for by Vatican II requiring much more than adding new elements to our tradition; it demanded, rather, a *new synthesis*, integrating the elements which had been virtually unconnected into a new frame, thanks to new categories such as the paschal mystery and the memorial, both absent from Eymard’s vision of the mystery.

3. Father Liesting's synthesis of the Consultation

Once the responses to Huot's questionnaire by our religious had been forwarded to Rome, they were sent to Father G. Liesting, superior of the community of the Hague for synthesis. Liesting distinguished Eymard's charism from its "clothing" or historical embodiment in which it was given concrete form. However, his work failed to satisfy the General Council. For the waters had now become somewhat muddied by Huot's circular letters.

4. The Immediate Preparation: the Preparatory Commission 1968-1969

The same year (1968) saw the publication of a position paper aimed at setting out in a schematic way the various options available to us in taking up the work of revising the Constitutions. Writing for the General Council, Canadian Fr Gaëtan Bourbonnais outlines three 'ideal' positions between which we would have to choose in considering each of the texts of the Constitutions. Does this number need: a) slight alterations (*retouches*)? b) revision? c) re-casting (*reforme*)?

Once the religious in the provinces had begun to study them in the light of Vatican II, it soon became obvious to most of us that the first two options would simply not be possible. A sixteen-member representative Preparatory Commission was then formed to work, under the direction of Fr Bourbonnais, from October 1968 to the end of January 1969.

The Commission prepared three documents:

- I. The Congregation Today
- II. The Mission and Life-style of the Congregation
- III. The Members of the Congregation, Formation and Government.

CHAPTER III. THE RENEWAL CHAPTER (1969-1971)

1. The Chapter gathered some 60 or so participants and lasted one month and a half

It had, wrote Fr Verhoeven, “a difficult beginning”. At once two currents were formed, one holding that adoration and solemn exposition formed the specific and unchangeable end of the Congregation; while the other affirmed that to be faithful to the Founder we must live the whole Eucharist such as the church understands and lives it today.

A major difficulty to be faced was due to an early modification of the Constitutions. The text of the Constitutions of 1863 had spoken in fairly absolute terms of the *eucharistic* service to which our religious ought “to dedicate all their gifts and virtues, their studies and works.” After Eymard’s death its title had been changed to “The service of *adoration*,” narrowing the goal.

In the end, the Chapter produced some “fairly rich and balanced texts” (Verhoeven) on:

- I. The Charism of the Founder in the Institute Today
- II. The Eucharist in the Life of the Congregation
- III. The Mission of the Congregation Today
- IV. The Government of the Congregation

However, twenty-five capitular members took a stand in favour of the proposition that our first means of apostolate is adoration before the Blessed Sacrament *exposed*. It was decided not to proceed for the moment to the legislative level regarding this question, by taking a legally binding decision. The majority preferred to remain for the time being at the level of general orientations; at a later time, the task of translating such an orientation into a form of life could be attempted. So, they were to be orientations for reflection rather than legislation to be implemented. All were given approval with large majorities as orientations or guidelines rather than a new version of the Constitutions.

2. A fundamental choice we could not evade: Adoration or Eucharist?

We were ineluctably faced with a fundamental choice: our mission was adoration or it was the Eucharist in all its dimensions. To consider the sacrament from the standpoint of the liturgical celebration, we would have to integrate our tradition of adoration into that perspective. Or, if we decided that we existed in the church primarily to promote adoration, then we would be obliged to give the practice of adoration priority over all else and consider the rest as secondary. It seemed obvious to most of our religious that fidelity to our Founder today would have to mean taking the essential purpose of the mystery as understood by the Council as our starting point, whatever difficulties that might entail for us in regard to the rethinking of our tradition.

The Chapter made an admirable effort to avoid a split along these lines, but it was too early to hope at this point for a harmonious synthesis of such opposed positions. Each one's vision of the Eucharist, whether we are aware of it or not, forms part of a larger whole deeply embedded in the matrix of our vital experience; it is inextricably interwoven with our feelings and our memories, with – in a word – our sense of what is real. That is why it is often so difficult to change.

Thanks to a generous willingness on the part of many to arrive at compromise where possible, it was the new perspective that by and large won the day, but in leaving in the minds of a certain number of the members varying degrees of uneasiness and uncertainty.

3. What Form of Life is Proper for the Congregation?

A very central question had to be resolved once and for all: our form of life.

A. Are we *Contemplatives*?

On the one hand, as a Congregation founded for perpetual adoration, it seemed that we were a *contemplative* institute. Yet we claimed that we

were also *apostolic*! How could these two ends be harmonized? For we were obliged to follow the rotating system, as well as the choral recitation of the full Divine Office. According to the express intervention of the Holy See to achieve this we needed communities numbering, at the very least, twenty able-bodied members.

B. Are we, then, *Monastics*?

The only model that appeared to be suitable for such a way of life was the *monastic* one, but that was not Eymard's choice!

C. Or is ours a *Vita mixta*?

For some, it was the category of the so-called “mixed life” (*vita mixta*) that suited us best – a contemplative way of life combined with apostolic activity. This suited Carmelites and Dominicans, since their ministry often involved itinerant preaching. Periods of intense apostolic activity being followed by times of withdrawal and reflection in which the members could dedicate themselves to prayer and study. The ideal here was *contemplata aliis tradere* – sharing with others what one has made one's own in prayer. This could not work for us, however, for the reason that our intense rhythm of prayer was not intermittent at all.

On the contrary, it was *both unremittingly daily and yet constantly changing* according to a progressing weekly cycle, determined by the system of the rotating bands. As a result, our apostolic outreach would have to be either seriously limited or would require frequent dispensations from the rotating system, which worked best only in city shrines manned by large communities.

We lived with this problem for some sixty years, though without ever really resolving it. By the fifties of the twentieth century, it was showing signs of severe strain since more and more communities were falling far short of the minimum of twenty members with little likelihood that they would reach that number in any foreseeable future. In fact, many of the new foundations involved parishes, and the requirements of parish work necessarily conflicted with the adoration

system. Such was the problem: it was there, it was real, and it had to be addressed.

If *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, 14 had spoken of “matters which are now obsolete, or are liable to change in a given historical setting,” *Evangelica Testificatio* was even more forthright: “The time has come to face up with real seriousness to the challenge of forming a true conscience, where this is necessary, and of undertaking a profound rethinking of your whole lives in the interests of a deeper faithfulness to your calling.” (ET 53)

4. Between the Sessions (1969-1971)

The new Superior General, Fr Harrie Verhoeven, personally visited almost all the houses to introduce and explain the Chapter documents. Some of these visits were stormy, even dramatic; at least on one occasion, he was virtually turned away. It was a time of lively debates and of sometimes rather painful conflicts and divisions as well as intense reflection and study. All of us were challenged to take a stand, even if not all felt up to it.

It was also all too often a time of intemperance, of extremes on both sides, and of polarization. Religious discipline had weakened or even collapsed altogether in many places; time-honoured practices like silence and fasting were sometimes mocked. In one province all the records of the Nocturnal Adoration were burnt on the grounds that such activities no longer had any meaning. Underhand and behind-the-scenes political methods were employed by some to oppose and discredit the renewal process.

At the same time, all around us growing numbers were leaving the priesthood and religious life, vocations had plummeted, and formation was in disarray.

5. Second Session (1971)

The task was to draw up a new Rule of Life on the basis of the responses of the Congregation to the four above-mentioned

documents. There were some seventy members present. Two draft texts were prepared by the General Council: a *Rule of Life*, and *General Statutes*. After a whole day was spent on the first five numbers, with numerous amendments being proposed, followed by voting on each new phrase or revised text, a sense of dissatisfaction grew. How could an assembly of over seventy persons compose a unified text that would prove readable, smooth and have a certain inspirational character to it?

The turning point came when young Swiss delegate, Fr Germain Comment made a proposal: let the Chapter concentrate its attention not on producing a finished text, but on taking a set of options. These options can then serve as a basis for a final text, which could be refined by a small team of three Chapter members to be debated in the Chapter.

The options for discussion were to be divided into two groups, one treating of “burning questions” and the other of elements that were generally accepted. The Options were voted on during the whole day of the 17th of August and the morning of the 18th. Once the wording of the Options had been tidied up they were passed to the Redaction Committee (consisting of Fathers Andre Guitton and Jean-Yves Garneau) to be transformed into numbers of the Rule of Life.

The text drawn up by the Commission was presented to the Chapter, discussed and put to the vote on Saturday 21st. Work concluded on the following day, Sunday 22nd with only No 43 needing further polishing by the Redaction Committee; the Chapter entrusted this task to it.

The Rule is constructed now on the pattern of initiation:

After setting out its end and spirit in Part I, we have

- II. A Gospel Community
- III. A religious community
- IV. A Eucharistic Community
 - 1. A Community of Prayer
 - 2. A Community of Service
- V. In response to the Expectations of Men

The same pattern is followed within Section 4, beginning always with the Word of God. While a good climate prevailed in the working groups, in the voting a small but compact bloc voted consistently against the propositions put before the Chapter, or abstained, yet without ever raising their difficulties during the discussions.

CHAPTER IV. “EXPERIMENTAL PERIOD”: FAMILIARIZATION AND TESTING (1971-1981)

It was decided to establish an Experimental Period of some ten years to give all the members of the Congregation a chance to gain familiarity with the Rule, to study it carefully, and to test its suitability in practice. Experience, reflection and study were to constitute the basis upon which a final judgment, a definitive discernment, would be reached.

There was much for us to assimilate since the process entailed: an updating of the horizon within which we were now living and seeing the world and the Church; mastering the new understanding and vocabulary concerning the Eucharist drawn from our ancient sources of scripture and the great writers of the early centuries with categories and terms such as the paschal mystery, blessing, memorial.

The General Council offered religious the possibility of airing their point of view world-wide in a small review called *Forum*. Any religious was free to make known his views on the renewal process provided he expressed himself briefly (not more than four pages) and refrained from using language offensive to persons or groups.

In July 1974 the general council asked Father Ernest Lussier to draw up a balance sheet of the 66 articles contributed by religious to the six numbers of *Forum* that had come out since 1971. Already in 1973, a Commission had been formed to work on possible amendments to be proposed by members of the Congregation. Meeting from September of that year to June of the following year, their consultation involved the whole Congregation and the work was quite detailed. It is

interesting to note that in tabulating the results of their work a computer was used for the first time!

As the 1981 General Chapter approached the preparatory commission also worked on the basis of suggestions coming from the whole congregation.

CHAPTER V. THE “DEFINITIVE TEXT” THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1981

The Amplified General Council of 1979, held in Valcartier, Canada decided that the final revision of the Rule should indeed be put on the agenda of the forthcoming General Chapter.

The preparatory process was planned to take place in five stages:

- a. consultation of the communities,
- b. collation of results by a commission,
- c. consultation of the Provinces,
- d. decisions by Provincial Chapters,
- e. General Chapter revision and approval.

It was to begin with the local communities and then be completed by the Provincial and Regional Chapters.

The Work of the General Chapter: 1981

The General Chapter of the Congregation was held from June 22nd to July 18th, 1981, at “Centro Nazareth” on the outskirts of Rome. It had been decided that a time be given to reflection on the current situation of the world, the church, and the Congregation. The idea was to approach the formulation of the Congregation’s ideal from the standpoint of a sharpened awareness of the larger reality in which we are to work – in other words, in the climate of the “Signs of the Times.” Two were singled out: a desire for communion and a thirst for justice. As regards the Congregation, a series of problems were identified in

different sectors, regarding the gospel basis of our way of life and in the areas of prayer, service, formation and government.

When a proposal to change the order of the sections was made on July 22, after reflection a very large majority voted against the proposed amendment. It was decided that the structure reflecting Christian Initiation was needed. When cut off from their base in evangelization and catechesis, sacraments were always exposed to the danger of being interpreted wrongly. They had been celebrated and lived for centuries, isolated from their full ecclesial and communitarian setting and hence in an individualistic spirit.

The intention of those who composed the text of the new Rule of Life was determined, from the earliest versions, to make our Rule *exemplary* of the church's renewed understanding of the Eucharist, as the "source and summit" of the church's life first of all in Christian initiation.

The final decision of the Chapter approved the existing structure, deciding as well to keep all of the sub-titles, substantially, but leaving their final formulation to the Redaction Committee. Each province would be free to use them or not.

The unanimous approval of the text of the Rule of Life brought the Chapter to its end with the sounds of jubilant applause. The same mood of joyous enthusiasm animated the celebration of the Eucharist as we gave thanks to the Lord with brimming hearts for the way he had led us over these long nineteen years to this historical day, July 18th 1981.

CHAPTER VI. DIALOGUE WITH THE VATICAN (THE CONGREGATION OF RELIGIOUS – SCRIS) (1981-1984)

1. Presentation of the texts to the Holy See

The text of the Rule of Life and the General Statutes were presented to the SCRIS on Saturday 28th November 1981.

A. REMARKS AND REQUESTS OF MODIFICATION

Nothing at all was heard for some ten months until, finally, on 22nd September 1982, the observations of the consultors were communicated to us, the vast majority being concentrated in the juridical sections of the Rule. The Congregation was informed of the new stage and its requirements in a letter by the Superior General dated 29th September 1982. The General Council requested Fathers Harrie Verhoeven, Andre Guitton and Angelo Carminati to assist it in effecting the changes required: The revised text was sent to SCRIS on the 4th of April 1983, accompanied as always by a letter from the Superior General.

The Special Commission of SCRIS reviewed the text and gave their approval on the 10th of June, mandating some further modifications of detail required before the text could be officially approved. Further discussions then took place with the SCRIS, lasting more than a year in all. In the process, revised versions of the text were presented on three successive occasions, only to be returned with remarks for further modification.

Finally, on 24th November 1984, the text received its long-awaited definitive approbation. It was dated on the day of the liturgical memorial of our Founder (as it was at that time), 1st August 1984.

B. WHY DID THE PROCESS TAKE SO LONG?

More particularly, why did it take so long to get the final approbation following the approval by the Congresso – some seventeen months in all? I will attempt here to outline some factors that, in my opinion, contributed to such a long delay.

C. FOUR FACTORS PLAYED THEIR PART

a. A long-established public image

Father Eymard's life and so-called "writings" were rather extensively known to clergy (Priests Adorers) and faithful, especially in Italy. He

was popularly known as the “Apostle of Adoration”. Members of the Roman Curia participated in the monthly adoration for the clergy in our church of Saint Claudio in the heart of Rome. This did not make it any easier to persuade Curial officials of the continuity we saw between the Founder and the Rule of Life.

b. The crisis of Eucharistic Devotions in the 60s and 70s

Our abandonment of the ideal of perpetual adoration and of the rotating system could be interpreted as just one more sign of a general weakening of belief, especially in the Eucharist, a disaffection in regard to prayer and to the more demanding or sacrificial aspect of traditional religious practice.

c. Religious who worked behind the scenes

Furthermore, a small group of our religious, combative and vocal opponents of the Rule of Life, unable to understand the reason for the changes, had for years been feeding members of the Roman Curia with what was often objectively distorted or false information, creating the impression that the consultation process had not been faithfully carried out, the superiors of the Congregation saw the Founder as outdated, a large body of the religious, desiring only to remain faithful to the Founder, had been marginalized and had lapsed into discouraged acquiescence. Such accusations obviously created an impression of a Congregation divided and in disarray.

d. A question of persons

At the time our 1981 Chapter, Argentinean Eduardo Cardinal Pironio was Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, with Archbishop Augustin Meyer, OSB as Secretary. They were two very different personalities. A very human, warm, and open-hearted man, Pironio belonged to the “progressive” current of the time and was admired by Pope Paul VI. Meyer, on the other hand, a traditional Benedictine monk, was very tall and thin, ramrod straight, austere and stiff in personality. My dealings as Superior General were always to be with Meyer, who (it was said) had been named to counterbalance Pironio.

2. The Final Stage: From Stalemate to Approbation

Parameters and positions

Meyer sought to impress upon me that it was now I who must take the decisions, since the discussion was to be conducted between himself, as representative of the Sacred Congregation, and myself as Superior General. I replied at once that I would decide nothing without reference to my General Council, nor could I in conscience acquiesce in changes incompatible with the manifest wishes of the Congregation expressed by the General Chapter.

I suppose that Monsignor Meyer believed that our new Rule of Life did not faithfully express the identity of the Congregation. Yet he would never state openly what precisely it was that he wanted us to change in the Rule. I guess he hoped that by isolating me from the Congregation, and continually sending back our modified text as not meeting his never clearly stated requirements, he would eventually bring us to accept what he wanted. As a last resort, he could withhold approval, thus creating restlessness and discontent in the Congregation. Practically, that is what seemed to be happening.

The limits of compromise

Eventually, I and the General Council felt that we were approaching the limits. For a certain anxiety was growing in the Congregation. I put the matter before the provincial and regional superiors at the 1983 Amplified Council in Rome from the 13th to 18th of September. After explaining the situation, I offered to tender my resignation as Superior General if they felt that I had not conducted the exchanges with SCRIS in a satisfactory manner. Their support was immediate, wholehearted and unanimous.

I then reported this to Meyer, saying that it seemed to me that, if he was not prepared to accept our repeated discernment on the matter, we had reached an impasse. I did not know where we could go from there. To say that he was less than happy with this position would be a considerable under-statement.

However, a short time later Cardinal Pironio reached retirement age and was replaced by Cardinal Jerome Hamer, OP, (former Secretary of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith) while Archbishop Meyer's role was taken over by Monsignor Francisco Errazuriz, from Chile. In a very short time, we were informed that our Rule was approved by the Sacred Congregation!

CHAPTER VII. EYMARD'S STRUGGLES TO FORMULATE HIS RICHER VISION OF THE SACRAMENT

Eymard inherited the Tridentine triad: presence-sacrifice-communion. The best and most appropriate response to Eucharist was perpetual adoration. His Congregations were to be wholly dedicated to providing day and night adorers of Christ in the Eucharist, promote adoration in the whole church.

Several factors were important for stimulating Eymard's insights: the Jerusalem Cenacle project – 1865 his Rome Retreat; his reading of Scripture (especially Galatians); First Communion of street urchins. He came to see more how Christ *acts* in the communicant. "Holy Communion is Jesus *being formed* in you," he wrote to Madame de Grandville in 1867. The Sacrament is not just about Jesus "being there" to be adored, but about what he does in the course of the eucharistic rite – a transformative action not only of the bread, but in order to change the communicant from within: "Take and eat."

In Eymard's mind occurred a re-orientation of his whole way of looking at the Eucharist. We can see it from the hesitations in regard to the well-known Saint-Bonnet text, formulating the end of the congregation. He notes that it is the Mass, the eucharistic action, that has to be the centre of everything. Then he realises that this is not really compatible with his whole approach up to that time, centred in the sacramental presence *after* the celebration. So, he then crosses out the earlier text with a double line. Again, later, he will cancel these crosses and write in the margin: "Good to copy."

Indeed, he went on to cancel *all* of the first numbers of his copy of the constitutions, dedicated to articulating the end and purpose of the congregation. “Until now,” he had already told the Servants in 1861, “the sun of the Eucharist has not yet shown forth. But all the great eucharistic riches are opening before us. It’s amazing! Now we see only a ray. But what will it be like later on?”

However, he lacked the necessary categories (such as the ‘paschal mystery’) and terms (like ‘memorial’) to formulate his intuitions to himself and to communicate them to others. Theologians at the time could not offer Eymard the assistance he needed to formulate his prophetic awareness of “the great eucharistic riches” that he saw “opening before” him.

A whole century of historical research and theological work would be needed before Vatican II could formulate a truly traditional vision of the Eucharist. It was precisely this shift of horizon that Eymard had struggled to realize that finally became possible, a century later, when Vatican II called us to review our way of life and mission.

Melbourne, September 9, 2024

Father Anthony McSweeney, sss

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What caught your attention in this presentation?
2. Was there anything you found difficult to understand or in need of more explanation?
3. What do you think it shows us about God's work in history?
4. How do you see our Congregation as responding to "the signs of the times" today?
5. How could this story help in your formation work?

Fr Hans van Schijndel, sss

**SSS Community of Brussels
Belgium**



BRIEF CV

Father Hans was born on 16 November 1948 in Nijmegen, Holland. He made his first profession on 14 September 1969 and was ordained a priest on 9 August 1980 in Düren, Germany.

It was in this community and then in Retzstadt that he exercised his ministry as treasurer, superior, provincial consultor and treasurer. Elected General consultor and then Vicar, he moved to the General Curia in Rome in 1999, where he remained until 2011, also taking up the post of Procurator General.

He has specialised in bibliography on the Eucharist.

Back in Brussels, he continued his work as a provincial consultor, treasurer, teacher and theological expert.

Since 2024, he has been a member of the SSS International Theological Commission.

"Father Hans tried to show the theological richness that is present in our Rule of Life. Man and God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Church and the world, mission and witness, dialogue and listening, and the time to come: the Rule of Life speaks to us of all this."



The Theology 'underneath' our Rule of Life¹

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

As expressed in my title: I will try to elaborate the theology as I find it present throughout the whole of our RL. So not, for instance, a theology of the eucharist according to our RL, since there are already a number of publications on that issue.² But what at first sight seems a restriction is in fact an enlargement: we are going to discover a theology more general, more complete, more comprehensive and covering a greater number of theological themes, at least the most important ones. Doing so we fill a lacuna existing until this day.

Said just in passing that we should take into account also the context, in which our rule is born: the Second Vatican Council and its immediate aftermath. This implies that we will find in our RL the same theological accentuations which we find in the conciliar documents, especially the one on the church (LG) and the church in today's world (GS). The quotations of the documents of Vatican II present in our rule speak for themselves.³ Part of Vatican II's theology and vision is of course the place given to religious life. Here chapter 6 of LG on "the religious" is significant, as it is placed after a chapter 5 on "the general call to holiness in the church", of which religious life is thus

¹ This article was first presented at a ZOOM meeting for SSS-formators on September 10, 2024.

² See: the special bulletin on the RL of August 2024, the year of the 40th anniversary of its approval, entirely dedicated to this theme.

³ See: on the site of the Curia, the part in French, Textes fondamentaux (basic texts), RV (RL), Commentaire 1987, partie historique, 4: Les citations de la RV (quotations of RL) and 5: Textes de Vatican II sur l'eucharistie (Vatican II on the eucharist).

understood as a specific form, not as an independent way. The decree on “the renewal and adaptation of religious life” (PC) elaborates this vision further.

In this decree the wish for an ‘aggiornamento’ of our religious life is explicitly expressed, as the title of the decree already indicates. The numbers 2 and 3 give the details of this task. The composition of our RL is to be seen as following this wish. As a matter of fact, we were almost the last ones to accomplish this important task, just before the deadline was reached. And we all know how much work has been invested into it: a special general chapter in two sessions, sessions to prepare and sessions to follow up, material for animation, sensitizing of the congregation at large by the members of the general team, ten years of experience with this new basic document, in order to arrive at a final edition in 1981, which with some modifications was approved by the Holy See in 1984.⁴

Mentioning Vatican II and its theological vision means evoking at the same time the theological movements and schools immediately preceding this Council, the results of which are present in the conciliar documents as well as in our rule. It will be enough just to mention about what we are speaking here: the biblical movement from the beginnings of the 20th century with its centre in the ‘Ecole Biblique’ in Jerusalem; the liturgical movement with its going back to the sources of liturgy in the Fathers, the Bible and in Jewish liturgy; Solesmes in France, Bruges and Mont-César in Belgium, and Maria Laach and Beuron in Germany are to be mentioned here; finally the so-called ‘Nouvelle Théologie’ (new theology) around the schools of Fourvière (Jesuits) and Le Saulchoir (Dominicans).

My title indicates equally the method I am going to employ. I will follow as closely as possible the text of the RL. This is a very important hermeneutical principle. It means nothing less than to respect what the

⁴ See: all publications on the history of the RL, especially the special bulletin of May 2024, the year of the 40th anniversary of its approval, entirely dedicated to this theme.

RL itself says, instead of reading into it theological or other ideas one has already in mind.

This method implies that we stay very close to the text as it is now in its final and official edition of 1984 in order to catch the theological accents it wants to convey us. In other words: we let the text speak for itself, we listen to the RL itself.

There is, however, a minor difficulty linked to this method. In order to remain loyal to this principle I have to start from the French text, since the RL is composed in this language and the Congregation for religious congregations and secular institutes has based its approval on this version in French.⁵ It is only in a second step that we can move to translations in other languages, also to see whether their text says the same thing as the French one. So, we have here a criterion for verification and eventually correction.⁶ But for the moment we will not go into further detail.

I come now to the structure of my exposé. I will proceed by some concentric circles that can also be seen as a spiral winding down: from the more general, regarding at some main theological fields in our RL; through theological accents rather typical or characteristic for our rule; to arrive at a very concrete and dense example that makes us really feel an intention particularly dear to the RL. A short finale will conclude my exposé about the theology underlying our RL.

My intention, my objective, to say it right at the beginning, is to give you a feeling for the theological richness of the RL. So, let us start and begin together our journey of discovery.

⁵ See: the decree of approval right at the beginning of our rule, in the English edition p. 7-8, here especially p. 8.

⁶ However, I do not want to go so far as to advocate always a strictly literal translation, as it was done for the new translations of the Roman Missal; with the results we know.

2. FIRST CIRCLE OR CYCLE: THE MAIN FIELDS COVERED BY THE RL

a) The church

‘Church’ should be understood here as the universal or global church as well as the local church. This church in its double sense is seen by the Rule as the natural place where we situate ourselves as a religious family (this counts, of course, especially for the global aspect), as well as a province or even a community (which counts especially for the local aspect without excluding the universal one). What may sound quite normal to our ears merits however to be stated explicitly, since we come from a time where it was not always seen like that. And there is always a risk to fall back into this rather narrow and exclusivist vision of the past, as soon as problems arise, for instance with church authorities. With all due respect for the right proper to our institute, the Rule clearly avoids an overaccentuated position of ‘exemption’, by which we practically quit our solidarity with the church at large, while we as loyal sons of that same church should be characterized by such a solidarity.

A simple information of statistics is already quite revealing: the word ‘church’ in its various forms figures 47 times in our rule. I just quote some telling examples. “*The love of God and our vocation gather us, at the heart of the Church, into living communities...*” (RL 5,1).⁷ “*By our life and activities we share in the mission of the Church...*” (RL 3,4). “*By our profession of religious life... we publicly commit ourselves within the Church...*” (RL 15,1). And finally for all our activities: “*While our mission extends to the whole Church it is carried out within the pastoral program of a diocese or region*” (RL 35,1).

In synthesis: the theology of the RL is an ecclesial theology that wants us to be at the heart of the church and not at its margins.

⁷ This way of quoting means: number 5,1st paragraph.

b) The world

Just as for the first field ‘church’ we have to distinguish here also between a universal world, a global context, and a world nearer to us. And we find ourselves in the world in both senses at the same time. That is our natural milieu, already as human beings, and we do not leave this milieu when we enter into religious life. Quite the contrary: we may very well say that our belonging to religious life makes us more sensitive for the challenges that today’s world and the world of all times are representing, more solidary with our brothers and sisters living in this world just as we do.

And we have to specify still further: we are not just *in* the world meaning being located somewhere; we are also of the world meaning sharing the same challenges and the same problems as all our contemporaries. So, we should not too easily interpret Saint John’s words ‘in the world but not of the world’⁸ in a too narrow sense, which risks to cut us off from our solidarity with others.

Again, simply look at some statistic information. The word ‘world’ or ‘society’ (which can be taken as equivalent) occurs 23 times in the RL. And I quote for you some examples. First of all, the title of section 3 of part IV of our Rule “*As Church at the service of the world*”.⁹ Further in the more formal part of the Rule dealing with the role of our authorities and institutions, as in the chapter where the world figures as the natural field where our mission is realised (see numbers 68, 74, 101). Then in the formula of religious profession RL 102, where the world figures twice as the end of our actions and our commitments. And finally, a central number as RL 33 which describes the eucharist as “*a powerful force of renewal for Church and society*”, followed by RL 34,3 where our commitment is described “*in order that the entire*

⁸ See f.i.: John ch. 17. I don’t enter here into the details of exegetical interpretation.

⁹ It is true that the titles are not really part of the RL, as is explained by Fr. Anthony McSweeney in his Commentary on the RL, see on the site of the Curia: Rule of Life, Commentary by Father McSweeney, Introductory elements, 2 History of the Rule of Life, ch. IV/3/C/a: A matter of titles. Nevertheless...

world may be totally transformed into the people of God, the Body of the Lord and the temple of the Holy Spirit”.

In synthesis: the theology of the RL is a ‘secular’ theology that wants us at the heart of the world, in solidarity with the world and committed towards a world according to God’s project of salvation.

c) Man

I think we can again distinguish two aspects or levels covered by the notion ‘man’ in our RL. First of all, our own humanity, our human nature as individuals. But also, humanity in a more general sense, of which we are part as human beings. This humanity in its full and rich meaning is wanted by God in its integrity and in order that this integrity be realized more and more. This leads to a fundamental orientation for our mission in all senses: to promote full humanity of all human beings marching towards a new world, but living here and now.

So, we look in vain in the Rule for places expressing a contempt of our humanity or a warning against the so-called dangers of human nature. Quite the contrary: the rule encourages us to wake up the sleeping potentialities of humanity and to make grow men (and women) towards their full maturity.

The statistics signalize us 22 times the category ‘man’ in its various different forms. And our formula of religious profession RL 102 commits us twice to “*share with others*” and to “*the service of Christ and my fellow human beings*”. A journey that has started by identifying in our Holy Founder an authentic love for man, that made him ‘dedicate himself to men’ starting from the eucharist in order to ‘lead people to adoration ‘as a starting point for a solution of their religious and social problems’ (cf. RL 2,3-4). Leading to a central point for our mission, following in the footsteps of Father Eymard, “*to respond to the hungers of the human family with the riches of God’s love manifested in the Eucharist*” (RL 3,1).

In synthesis: the RL presents us a ‘human’ theology or a theology ‘of man’ and wants us to be religious accepting wholeheartedly their being human, recognizing in other human beings brothers and sisters with whom they march towards a reconciled humanity.

d) Religious life

Again, we have to distinguish here between the general sense of this notion, which we find 9 times in the Rule, as for instance RL 5,3: “*we make profession of religious life according...*” (see also RL 15); this same religious life lived according to our own charism, which we find 3 times, as for instance RL 71,1: “*the promotion of the religious and apostolic life in keeping with the spirit of the Founder...*”; as well as the way Father Eymard left us his example of religious life, as already is indicated in the Decree of approval of the Rule: “*The Congregation... has inherited from its Founder Saint Peter Julian Eymard, a new form of consecrated life within the Church*” and finally in the Preface of the Rule, second part entitled “*The Rule of Life and the Constitutions*”. The very first number puts us explicitly in this line making reference to our Holy Founder: “*... we are called to live in the Church as brothers...we form the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament...*” (RL 1,1). See also RL 51, where the task of formators is described as “*to initiate them into the charism of the Founder and the life of the Institute*”.

We should carefully notice that a new vision on religious life is here presented as a life according to the Gospel following Jesus and lived in community. The way of life to which we commit ourselves is a common adventure, lived with our brethren with whom we share the same ideal and where we help one another to live our charism day in day out. So, community is seen right from the beginning as being part of our religious vocation and is never considered to be just a simple means by which every single religious individually tries to arrive at his personal perfection. Religious life in the vision of our Rule has nothing of a ‘status perfectionis’, but manifests all signs of a ‘work in

progress', an imperfect state deeply characterized by a dynamic of the provisional. Going towards perfection, but not yet arrived at that goal.

It will be sufficient just to quote RL 6,2: *"The Rule of Life traces out for us a particular way of living the Gospel in the Church. It unites us in a single project of life and mission"*. This very clear accent is repeated in RL 51: *"to form them (the 'formandi') for evangelical and community living..."*, and further in this same number the sharing in the mystery of the cross as being part of this type of life.

In synthesis: the RL shows us a theology of religious life well balanced and full of dynamic, deeply rooted in the model of Jesus, the example of our Founder and the sane tradition of the church.

e) Mission or witness

I am undecided between these two notions, since we have to take the word 'mission' in a very large sense, covering a great variety of pastoral and social commitments, while remaining closely linked to our own charism. The eucharist always remains our point of reference, but it gives rise, inspiration and energy to many different activities by which we try to realise concretely what we celebrate in this sacrament: the pascal mystery of Christ as the centre of the work of salvation, which has the force to transform the world from within. Our mission has the pretention to manifest this transforming force of the eucharist, always and everywhere where it is needed.

So, speaking about 'mission' we cannot limit ourselves to the somewhat restricting and exclusive meaning of a 'missio ad gentes'. Mission goes further and is more encompassing. It covers the whole world, the whole of society and life in all its dimensions.

The statistics, which mention this notion some thirty times, refer us mainly to the more formal part of structures and responsibilities. Quite naturally their task is to advocate and guarantee that we live our specific mission at the heart of the church.

But let us listen finally to RL 37 about ‘Mission of social involvement’ which formulates as its final statement: *“The most telling message of our communities is the witness of their lives”*. ‘Mission’ ‘message’, ‘witness’ in fact tell us the same thing: as religious of the Blessed Sacrament we are sent ‘to give witness to the hope we have in Jesus Christ’ (see 1 Peter 3:15), in words and in action and by our whole life.

In synthesis: the RL presents to us a missionary theology and vision extended to all dimensions of human life: personal, social, material, political and spiritual; and it commits us as totally as possible to the service of the transforming radiation of the eucharist on human life. It is in this sense that we can understand what Father Eymard formulates as the supreme goal of the Institute in his Constitutions number 2: *“that the Lord Jesus always be adored in His sacrament and glorified socially in the whole world”*¹⁰.

3. TYPICAL AND CHARACTERISTIC ACCENTUATIONS

Let us now enter the second cycle where we descend the spiral towards a deeper level in our rediscovering the theology present in our RL.

a) A ‘dialogal’ theology

We could probably better call it ‘a theology of listening’, in order to respect the correct order of priority which is here at stake: first there is a call coming to us from abroad, outside of us, from God, through his church (in the two senses of universal church and local church), and through the signals sent to us by the world and the society in which we live. And then follows our answer to this call, an answer concretised in a promise given, a commitment taken up, in short by concrete and multiform actions forming together a project and reflected in a certain life-style.

¹⁰ Const. 2: “ut sic Dominus Iesus semper adoretur in sacramento et glorificetur socialiter in toto mundo”.

So, right from the start the context where we insert ourselves is much larger than just a private ‘tête-à-tête’ to which we have taken the initiative. We give answer to God’s project for our salvation, as he lances it in a very concrete context, which implies the challenge to scrutinise the signs of the times in order to catch God’s will and to obey to it according to our possibilities, in order to remain in line with the evolution of his project and to foster its progress. A task for all of us, but in a special way for the responsible persons among us. RL 63: *“Superiors shall be attentive to God’s design as manifested in events and interpreted in the light of the Gospel and according to the spirit of the Congregation”*.

So, the world where we live and the society of which we are part are a first instance to which we direct ourselves in order to catch in the hungers and thirst of our contemporaries God’s wish for us today. Let us listen again to RL 42, speaking about ‘Centres of prayer and retreat’, but showing us clearly the basic structure of our attitude. *“Our communities are called”*, notice the call addressed to us; *“to become centres of prayer... that offer places of welcome and meeting”*, that’s for our answer; repeated at the end of the last paragraph: *“Attentive to the modern mentality we want to respond to the expectations”*. Notice the double movement ‘call-response’, and in this very order.

Statistics do not say all; they provide us however with a first indication, to be interpreted and refined afterwards. For ‘call’ and its derivatives we find 14 cases, for ‘response’ and its parallels 12 cases, and for ‘listening’ 2. This dialogue between ‘call’ and ‘listening’, ‘invitation’ and ‘response’, the ‘saying’ (by another) and the ‘doing’ (by us) is typical for the way our Rule sees our being part of the evolution of salvation history. And when we leave aside a fixation on the exact occurrence of the words ‘call’ and ‘response’ and remain open to other expressions showing the same figure and advocating the same attitude, we arrive at a really impressive number of examples.

Each time it is about a balance between two poles, two points of orientation. Towards God it is an attitude of welcoming, humble and

obeying, respecting God's initiative in order to foster his project of salvation, also by us. This does not mean that we should not already look for an answer and try one way or another to respond to his call. But with calm, always ready to be corrected. Towards the world we react twofold: first and for all with empathy and solidarity, touched as we are by the hunger and thirst of others; then with constructive criticism, well distinguishing the real needs within and under the many forms of misery, in order to catch in them God's call and how to respond to it effectively. I quote again RL 51: on the task of responsible persons, who are *"to lead them (the young religious) to understand the human needs of their day so that they might discern in them the call of the Spirit"*.

In synthesis: the RL sees the congregation and wants to be us, as its members, 'in response', not always immediately 'taking initiatives', which will come afterwards, once we see more clearly what God's will for us really is and how we could respect it in practice.

b) An 'integral' Christology

By this somewhat pretentious title I simply like to indicate that the RL speaks about Christ in two ways. First it refers not just to the final stage of the life of Jesus, his passion, his death and resurrection, the pascal mystery as the summit of salvation history. Neither exclusively to the institution of the eucharist in this crucial context. Nor, and even less exclusively, to Christ's presence under the veil of this sacrament, with all its connotations of humility, abandonment and negligence; from which derives the need of reparation. But it speaks to us about Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, sent to proclaim the Good News of the coming of the Kingdom, welcomed and followed, but also despised and refused by his contemporaries, put to death, buried, risen and seated at the right hand of the Father, from where he will come in glory at the end of times to judge the living and the dead. So, a more complete image of Jesus, whom we proclaim as Christ and Lord and whom we are intended to follow on the ways he set out for his disciples.

And then the simple fact, not without importance, that Christ is present a bit all over the RL, from the beginning till the end. RL 1 starts already saying that we are “*Gathered in the name of the Lord...*” and that it is “*our ideal to live the mystery of the eucharist fully... so that Christ’s reign may come...*”. RL 102, the formula of religious profession, recalls succinctly our vocation, saying: “*Summoned by the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ...*” we are intended “*to follow Christ in the way he is calling me...*” and ask that we “*may commit my (our) whole life to the service of Christ and my (our) fellow human beings... so that the Reign of Christ may come...*”. And between these two extreme points there are many references to Jesus Christ, quite often with a quotation from the New Testament that manifests the biblical roots of this ideal.¹¹

What just has been said leads us logically to Christ ‘functioning’ also, and in a quite eminent way to that, as the instance calling us to follow him, as we have already elaborated in the preceding paragraph on dialogal theology of the RL. RL 4 recalls the culminating point in Christ’s life, his gift of self for our salvation, and presents it to us as the supreme model for our commitment as religious of the eucharist, memorial of Christ’s paschal mystery. “*We cannot live the Eucharist unless we are animated by the spirit which led Christ to give his life for the world.*” “*... it was out of love that the Lord gave himself up*”. And we are “*sharing in this gift of himself to us...*”, which causes us to “*place ourselves at the service of the Kingdom*”.

It is along the same line that the religious vows we profess find their ultimate motivation in the ‘sequela Christi’, a life modelled on the example Christ has given us. It is He who calls us to this way of life, it is He again who gives us the grace to remain loyal to our promises. The introduction to the section on the vows has it in a succinct and dense way. RL 15,1+3: “*we respond to the call of the Lord who invites us to leave all things to follow him*”. “*Nourished by Christ, who gives*

¹¹ See in the commentary of 1987, partie 1, the fascicule 4 “Citations de la RV” (for quotations from the NT).

himself to us totally in the Eucharist, we express, in our form of life, the gift of ourselves". This basic model is then taken up further on and specified for each single vow.

For chastity RL 16: *"Jesus remained totally free to devote himself to the Kingdom. Following in his steps, we vow ourselves to perfect chastity in the celibate state"*. For poverty RL 17: *"Like Jesus we wish to live a life of poverty"*. So far for the call and the intended response. Followed by the realization of this intention in a life according to the vow of poverty. RL 18: *"By the vow of poverty, we give up the right to use and dispose of material goods"*. And for obedience RL 19: *"After the example of Christ who, out of love, completely fulfilled his Father's will, even to the giving of his life, we profess obedience in order to serve our brothers better..."*.

In synthesis: we find throughout the whole of our RL a really complete Christology, not falling back into a narrow 'jesuology', but widening the perspective towards a Christ in glory, who attends and attracts us, continuously giving us the strength to follow his example. Past, present and future are linked together in him and through him and we are incorporated into this soteriological dynamic animated by the Spirit of Christ.¹²

c) An omnipresent pneumatology

It may be a surprise to find this theme among the main subjects of the RL, since the Spirit has been for a long time a neglected (and not just a negligible) quantity in Catholic theology. Orthodox theology has always been more sensitive for the role of this third person of the Holy Trinity. But since Vatican II we have gone through a rediscovery and a rehabilitation of the Spirit. Telling sign of it is the insertion of a double epiclesis in the new Eucharistic Prayers.

¹² See on the Site of the Curia, under Rule of Life: Companion or Concordance to the RL, put together by Fr. Justin Sequeira from India in 1993 and published first as a booklet in 2004. Searching under the words 'Christ', 'Jesus', 'Lord', you find a number of references proving how well-founded is what just has been stated.

It is in this vein that the RL signals the Spirit's remarkable influence and action on us throughout the whole rule. An immediate and efficient action, but discreet and respectful; in a great variety of actions through the whole of our religious life in all its domains: personal, communitarian and pastoral. Everywhere the Spirit inspires us, encourages us, motivates us, corrects us, reveals us and moves us in our endeavours to live according to Christ our model.

To facilitate our comprehension of this interesting and important aspect, I would like to distinguish here two complementary movements: a movement 'top-down', from above to below on us, though for the Spirit we should quite often say also 'from deep down more to the surface'; and a movement in the other direction (though not contrary but really complementary) 'bottom-up', from below to above. The first means to say the gift of the Spirit, freely offered to us, with due respect for our liberty to receive and to respond to it. The second one means to hint at the movement in return, where we let ourselves be inspired by the Spirit and follow his indications, thus becoming God's collaborators in the progress of his project of salvation. Let us look at some examples.

RL 22,3: *"This Word, which the Spirit causes to resonate in our innermost being... enlightens us and incorporates us"*. RL 26,1: *"Thus the Spirit of the Risen Lord exerts an ever-increasing influence over all who welcome him. By sowing... he transforms"*. RL 30,3 speaking about adoration: *"this precious gift 'which the Holy Spirit inspires and fosters in a humble and upright heart' (Const. 17)"*. Then for the help the Spirit gives us, RL 9,2: *"The Spirit of God enables the community to discern in the circumstances of life whatever contributes to its renewal"*. And RL 8,1: *"This diversity (of individual religious and their capacities) manifests the wealth of the gifts of the one Spirit"*. And finally for the dynamics that pushes us forward, RL 28,2: *"Risen from the dead, he sent us his Spirit that we might live our mission in that same spirit of love"*. RL 41,4: *"Under the action of the Spirit, who ceaselessly renews the life of the Church, groups and communities are born, grow and take on responsibilities"*. RL 43,1: *"We invite all those*

whom the Spirit directs to the Eucharist... to become associated with our family and share in its mission”.

The Spirit’s action on us bears fruit in our interaction, where we let ourselves been inspired and guided in our endeavours to materialize God’s will for our times and our world. During this process we discover anew ourselves, the others and the world. Ourselves in our capacities and possibilities to respond to God’s impulses by his Spirit. Others in their openness to God’s call and touched by the promises of his project of salvation. And the world with its needs and challenges, waiting for our response. The Spirit is the engine of this movement, we are conscious instruments to set this process in motion.

Let us have a look at some examples. RL 3,5: *“United in the Spirit with those who are poor and weak, we oppose...”*. RL 5,2: *“Open to the summons of the Spirit and attentive to the needs of the human family”*. RL 19,2: *“By the vow of obedience we commit ourselves, in docility to the Holy Spirit, to obey”*. RL 47,3: *“we should know how to discern the prompting of the Spirit and to welcome those who wish to share our way of life”*. Again, an attitude of listening and welcoming is emphasized as an essential part of our life, as we have already seen in part a).

In synthesis: a keen attention for the Spirit who animates us throughout the whole of our religious life and helps us to find concrete responses to his call to be disciples and apostles of the eucharist in the line of Father Eymard.

d) Openness towards the future

I take this formulation to indicate the eschatological perspective that permeates greater parts of our RL. Let us see how.

According to a current distinction in theology, let us start with what has been called ‘consequent eschatology’, used for the attitude and especially the expectation that projects the realization of all hope into

the future.¹³ And here again, we may distinguish between a personalized aspect focusing everything on Christ, as in RL 3,5: *“as we wait the coming of the Lord”*. Or RL 32,3: *“we encourage nocturnal prayer in a spirit of watching and waiting for the Lord”*. And then a rather objective aspect focused mainly on the new world to come, as in RL 15,4: *“Our vows... witness to a world yet to come”* or RL 26,3: *“We journey on towards that new world where God will be all in all”* and finally RL 37,2: *“Every community... is called... to proclaim the hope of a new world”*. We find these two aspects linked together in RL 102,6: *“Grant that I may work at building a world founded on justice and love so that the Reign of Christ may come”*.

This last number, our formula of religious profession, is at the same time a good example for what has been called ‘realised eschatology’, meaning to say that God’s Reign, that new world according to his promises, starts already here and now in and through our commitment following Jesus Christ and in solidarity with so many men and women of good will. As we find it stated in RL 25,2: *“we offer to the Father our own lives along with the hopes and sufferings of all those with whom we are working to build a society based on justice and love”*. We notice as well, that we should not be too fixed on the words ‘reign’, ‘world’, kingdom’, but remain sensitive to the same idea of a tendency towards the future to what is still to come (in an initial stage already there or still completely to come), but expressed by other words.

All these quotations want to open our eyes and our hearts for the fact that our actual life and our commitments are heavy with future. A future we begin to see already, but which at the same time surpasses all our expectations and all our endeavours, while drawing and pushing us forward.

Our RL uses twice an expression I find really extraordinary: ‘urgency of the Kingdom’. RL 20,1: *“attentive to the signs of the times and the*

¹³ These two categories ‘consequent eschatology’ and ‘realised eschatology’ are used especially in New Testament exegesis, and there mainly in the interpretation of the Gospels. I do not enter into technical details here.

*pressing demands of the Kingdom we take an active part... ”; and RL 53: “In this way the novice will be able to discern the demands of the Kingdom and the needs of the Church ”.*¹⁴ A unique and beautiful way to describe this eschatological attitude that should permeate the whole of our religious life, from the beginnings (therefore mentioning the novice) and in all following periods, including our prayer, for which RL 32 uses the words “a spirit of watching and waiting for the Lord” (in nocturnal prayer).

In synthesis: RL’s firm intention is to break with a vision cut off from and closed to the world and to foster a perspective open to the future, while refining our regards for the signs that announce, how this new world is already beginning in the midst of us and just waiting for our commitment towards its growth.

4. AN ENORMOUS RESPECT FOR THE PRIMORDIAL ROLE OF GOD

With this last paragraph we descend even more deeply the spiral of our reflection in order to discover the enormous respect shown by our RL for the quite unique and primordial role of God in salvation history and in our congregational and personal history. Throughout the whole of our rule, we find this remarkable sensitivity by which it shows to be a well-balanced document evoking a well-balanced spirituality as well.

I already touched upon this aspect in an earlier publication dedicated to the eucharist¹⁵, but the phenomenon is much broader, more general and global and present in the whole of our RL. I have also spoken

¹⁴ This is an example where a translation may have a slightly different wording. The French original text has in both cases ‘urgence’, where the English text reads ‘demands’ or ‘pressing demands’. The sense, however, is matched, though not all the nuances.

¹⁵ See: A theology of the eucharist according to the RL A synthesis. In: Ensemble/Together nr. 75 (2001), republished and slightly refurbished in the special bulletin within the year of the 40th anniversary of the approval of the RL, May 2024.

about it in paragraph 3.a) of this exposé under the title ‘A dialogal theology’ or ‘A theology of listening’, from which we will take over at least some examples here.

In synthesis: it is dealing with the question ‘who is doing what in salvation history’, who is the moving engine in our congregational history, who orients, guides and directs primarily our spirituality on all levels. And in which order of priority in this process and in this dynamic the acting forces are placed. And no doubt it is God to whom pertains the first place and the primordial role. Our human acting always happens as an answer to God’s initiative.

A first indication for this sensitivity we find already in the titles of the main parts: I. Captivated by the love of God. II. The call of the Gospel. III. A radical response. Twice a divine action, in order to provoke our re-action.

Then, as we have already seen, the frequency of the word ‘call’ and its derivatives, first of all in a direct relation between ‘call-response’, as in RL 1: *“we are called to live... we form”*; RL 15: *“By our profession... we respond to the call of the Lord”*; RL 47: *“It is the Lord who calls labourers to his harvest... we will be concerned to arouse”*; RL 102,3: *“in order to follow Christ in the way he is calling me”*. Then the ‘indirect’ call, mediated by the sacraments, the Word, the Spirit, the signs, others, the circumstances. RL 5,2: *“Open to the summons of the Spirit and attentive to the needs of the human family”* (see also RL 51); RL 6: *“The Word of God calls us”*; RL 7: *“by making ourselves servants of our brothers. The Lord calls us”*. Finally, the numbers RL 21, 29, 34, 37, where God is addressing his call to us through the eucharist; and RL 37,1: where *“in every instance of injustice (we discover) a call of Christ to share in his mission”*.

The frequency with which the RL uses transitive verbs, often in the passive tense, merits special attention. And it is not just a matter of the specificity of the French or the English language to use this way of expressing, I think we can read here this typical respect for the role

and the place of God which we equally find in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament.¹⁶ Here again we should be very attentive and sensitive in order to catch all the richness of this linguistic figure with a theological meaning, since it concerns a great variety of words (verbs, participles, substantives, even adjectives), all of which tell us God's acting on us or towards us. And we are to interpret them as such, even though the word 'God' does not occur.

The list of possible examples is long; I will give you only some of them, emphasizing the expressions that interest us here. RL 3,2: *"Formed by the sacrament... which frees us"*; RL 8,2: *"Christ breaks down... and creates"*; RL 9,2+3: *"The Spirit of God enables" "Forgiveness transforms"*; RL 15,3: *"Nourished by Christ, who gives himself"*; RL 16,3: *"witnesses to his power to free"*; RL 22,3: *"This Word... challenges us... enlightens us and incorporates us"*; RL 24: *"God has sealed (the New Covenant) which he renews"*; *"Fraternal life is thus sustained...and renewed"*; RL 25,1: by the eucharist *"we are progressively wrenched... the Lord reveals... while drawing us"*; RL 26: *"The Spirit... exerts... by sowing... he transforms"*; RV 33: *"the eucharist as a powerful force of renewal"*; RL 41,4: *"Under the action of the Spirit who ceaselessly renews"*; RL 43: *" the Spirit directs"*.

What sense should be attributed to this constataion, to this reading? First of all, the insight, that God precedes us always, not by lack of confidence in us, but rather in order to provoke our free collaboration with his work of salvation, enabling us to that work at the same time. Then a reassurance and a profound serenity: we are never abandoned but always accompanied by God's acting. That may give us confidence and encourage us during all phases of our religious life. So far for the conclusion of this last paragraph.

¹⁶ Biblical scholars use here the term 'passivum divinum', a stylistic figure particularly dear to the Hebrew Bible.

5. FINALE

In my exposé I tried to show you the richness of our RL and to make you feel its different accentuations, that together build a rather dense and well-balanced theology. We should be able to read the text of the RL as it is in order to catch and to discover this theological and spiritual wisdom, which may have an impact on our life and transform our vision and our attitude. In order to facilitate this intellectual but equally spiritual work I have given you some instruments, that fortunately are actually available on the level of the congregation, thanks to time and energy dedicated to it by some confreres in the past. Do not hesitate to make known these precious instruments to your formandi, as well as to other people interested in our spirituality.

The task, the challenge remaining at the end of our journey together? To love the RL more: yes, certainly. To ‘ruminate’ its text in order to make it one’s own: yes, no doubt. But also, to be able to explain what it says and to throw light on the deep and well-founded sense of the expressions it uses. A bit in the line of 1 Peter 3,15: “always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you”. Put otherwise: to let speak the RL and its message and to give an eloquent, telling, enthusiast and enthusing witness of it. May we become more and more capable of it.

Brussels, July 2024

Father Hans van Schijndel, sss

Fr Manuel Barbiero, sss

**SSS Community of Malmantile
Italy**



BRIEF CV

Father Manuel was born on 16 August 1956 in Sant'Ambrogio di Trebaseleghe, Padua Province, Italy. He made his first profession on 29 September 1976 and was ordained a priest on 3 October 1981 in Sant'Ambrogio di Trebaseleghe.

From 1985 to 1990 he studied Spiritual Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and his doctoral thesis gave him the opportunity to approach the study of the works of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Then in 1994 he coordinated the Italian Province's commission of the Founder's writings. Then in 1999, he became a member of CEFO, the International Commission for Studies on the Founder and his Works, of which he is still a member today.

In 2007, he was appointed superior of the international community of La Mure d'Isère (France), where he remained until 2018. He was thus able to study the life of Saint Peter Julian Eymard closely, becoming a specialist of the Founder and his writings. In La Mure, he created the Eymard spirituality centre.

At provincial level, he was elected Provincial Superior for two terms from 1999 to 2007. Since 2022, he has been provincial consultor, superior of the Malmantile community and director of its spirituality house.

"Father Manuel Barbiero comments on number 2 of the Rule of Life with ample reference to our Founder's texts. He tells us about Father Eymard's sensitivity to the signs of his time, the new form of life he outlined for his religious, ending with an overview of the Founder's pastoral and social activities, culminating in his gift of self."



“God's Love - Response to Human Needs” RL 2

I have always been impressed by the ability of those who composed the Rule of Life to trace the figure of the Founder completely, in an extraordinary synthesis.

In Number 2 of the Rule of Life there is all of Father Eymard, although not all aspects of his life experience are touched upon, but there are other numbers to refer to¹. This number consists of four parts. In the first part we have Father Eymard's personal journey, in the second part the foundation of the Congregation, in the third part his Eucharistic life, and in the final part his apostolate and mission. Through this contribution, in the form of a reflection, I aim to bring out the richness of this number of the Rule of Life.

In response to the needs of his time

The world in which Father Eymard lived was a world on the boil. During the 19th century, France experienced very profound changes in the economic and social spheres². The Revolution and Napoleon had laid the foundations of a secular society that wanted to be free from the influence of the Church (the famous “throne and altar” alliance). The bourgeoisie was anticlerical and believed only in progress, science and its future.

¹ We must not forget the other numbers in the Rule of Life that refer to Father Eymard: 1.3.14.15.29.33.43.44.

² One could speak of three revolutions: the industrial, social and capitalist revolutions.

It is the era of the industrial revolution (the first achievements of the new technology: railway, photography, telegraph, medicine, navigation, steam engine), it is also the era of the abandonment of the countryside which is accompanied by urbanisation with the corollary of the growth of the proletariat (attracted by the great nascent industry) and misery in the large cities such as Paris and Lyon. The workers' living conditions are miserable. They have no rights; they are denied the right to associate to defend themselves; trade unions do not exist at all.

The Rule of Life takes up two expressions found in Father Eymard's writings: "ignorance and religious indifference". Peter Julian Eymard is struck by the spiritual misery of his time. Even with the limitations due to his intellectual and religious formation, which had followed traditional canons, he has the ability to ask himself questions, to let himself be provoked, questioned.

This ability of Father Eymard emerges very clearly on the occasion of the experience he had on 21-January 1851 in Fourvière. In his letter to Father Colin, he shows himself attentive to the spiritual problems of his time. Taking his pastoral experience as a starting point, he emphasises some of the most urgent problems concerning priests, the laity and the place of the Eucharist in the Church³.

From this observation, he tries to find the most suitable response. Two letters bear witness to this: "I have often reflected", he wrote to one of his correspondents, "upon the remedies for the universal indifference which is taking hold of so many Catholics in a frightening way. I can find only one: the Eucharist, love for Jesus Eucharistic. Loss of faith comes in the first place from loss of love; darkness, from the loss of

³ In particular, four problems were highlighted: 1st the spiritual abandonment of diocesan priests in the midst of their ministry and of the devout laity; 2nd the lack of spiritual direction for the majority of the devout, especially with regard to the interior life; 3rd the lack of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament; 4th the many sacrileges committed against the adorable sacrament. Cf. letter to Father Colin, 3 February 1851 - CO 243 (letter not sent).

light; the freezing cold of death from the absence of fire. Oh! Jesus didn't say: I've come to bring a revelation of the most sublime mysteries: but rather, 'I have come to bring fire on the earth, and all I desire is to see it enkindle the whole world.' (cf. Lk 12:49)"⁴.

In 1852 he wrote: "Now we must quickly get to work to save souls by the divine Eucharist, to awaken France and Europe numbed in dormant apathy because they don't know the gift of God, Jesus, the Eucharistic Emmanuel. This is the spark of love which we must ignite into tepid souls who think they are devout, and are not, because they haven't made Jesus in the holy Tabernacle their center and their life... I see that people are wandering too far from the holy Eucharist, that this mystery of love par excellence is not sufficiently proclaimed"⁵.

As the Rule of Life clearly states, Father Eymard found the answer "in the love of God manifested in a special way in the gift of Christ in his Eucharist". Of great importance in his life was the discovery of God's love, which became a strong point of his proclamation; and as a consequence, the discovery of the centrality of the Eucharist, the sacrament of God's love, which is manifested in a special way in the gift that Christ makes of himself.

The grace of the rock of Saint-Romans⁶, if we consider the spiritual context of his era, worked in him like a Copernican revolution. This experience remains fundamental even today. In contact with creation, travelling paths that only the Spirit knows, Father Eymard is led to a life inspired solely by love; penetrating the very heart of God, he discovers there a burning furnace of love. He proposes to everyone this path of discovery of God's love, which he called: the path of royal love, the shortest and noblest path, which gives everyone the "wings of the royal eagle" to reach God (cf. RA 16,2; 18,2).

⁴ Letter to Tholin-Bost, 22 October 1851, CO 286.

⁵ Letter to Tholin-Bost, 11 February 1852, CO 325.

⁶ In Father Eymard's correspondence we find several references to this experience, spanning from 1851 to 1867 (CO 263; CO 832; CO 845; CO 971; CO 1380; CO 1463; CO 2011).

Fascinated, conquered by this love⁷, he found an ever present and true source of this love in the mystery of the Eucharist. “Where does this divine fire reside, where is its fireplace?” - he asks himself. And taking up St John Chrysostom he replies: “This fireplace of love is the Eucharist (...), that’s where the love of Jesus Christ inflames us, penetrates and inflames us” (PG 283,1).

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is love made sensible, love incarnate. Everything he said, he said out of love, everything he did, was the fruit of love. And after showing love to his disciples, Jesus gave love: the Eucharist (cf. PS 321).

Father Eymard is convinced, by the power of the Spirit, that the Eucharist is the great grace chosen by God to restore faith and love to the modern world. “It is necessary to make him loved. It is through divine love that we need to bring people back to virtue, to religion, and to the faith. There is no other more efficient means; it is maybe the only one left to combat the indifference that reigns in the world and to win the hearts of the faithful” (PR 149,11).

He suggests to the Church today, faced with secularisation and diversity of cultures, committed to the new evangelisation, the “way of love” as the “most effective means” to make our contemporaries encounter Christ. The first part of n. 2 of the Rule of Life ends by saying: “Captivated by this love (cf. Phil 3:12), he made it known to his contemporaries”.

A new form of life in the Church

Three months before his death - 6 May 1868 - in a sermon Father Eymard, commenting on the first letter of St John: “*And we have recognized the love that God has for us, and we have believed in it*”

⁷ “*Love!* such is my law, my way, my virtue, my strength, my joy, my happiness, my life, my death, my heaven! Amen!” (NR 44,111).

(1Jn 4:16), says: “We believe in love... What is this love that we must believe in? Our Lord Jesus Christ who is the substantial love of the Father and the Son. Happy are those who believe in love, who believe in the Eucharist” (PO 37,1).

He sought the means to make known, to communicate to others his discovery: the love of God revealed/manifested in the Eucharist. “We have only one thought, one goal, one center: the Eucharist! How happy we would be if we could become those special men, and bring back the indifferent and selfish men of our poor society to faith and love of the Eucharist” (CO 609).

Led by the hand of the Spirit, he first thought of a Third Order of men, still linked to the Marists (cf. the “grace of vocation”, Fourvière 21 January 1851); then he joined a Eucharistic movement in the company of de Cuers, Cohen and others, dreaming of participating in the birth of a religious order dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament (cf. the “grace of donation”, La Seyne-sur-Mer 18 April 1853); finally, he founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament on 1 May 1856.

Faced with Mgr Sibour, Archbishop of Paris, who is not prepared to welcome a purely contemplative congregation, Father Eymard replies forcefully: “But Your Excellency is mistaken about our purpose. It is not a purely contemplative society. Yes, we adore certainly, but we also want to lead others to adore. We must take care of the First Communion of adults. We want to set fire to the four corners of France, beginning with the four corners of Paris which need it so much!”⁸.

The Eucharistic life that Father Eymard proposes is not limited to the contemplative dimension; he wants to take the Eucharist with all its demands; he wants to unite the active and contemplative dimensions, to adore and make adore, to take care of the first communion of young workers; he wants to light the fire in the four corners of France. This

⁸ G. TROUSSIER, t. 1, pp. 552-553.

is a summary of the “new form of life in the Church” that Father Eymard proposes.

As fire has its flame, so the love of God is completed in the love of neighbour. This fire must first fill and burn all hearts. In this way, his religious, having gathered and burned at the feet of the God of love, can go forth to spread his glory and extend his kingdom. Eymard speaks of courageous men, of “the ones who ignite this Eucharistic fire” (cf. PR 149.11).

Number 2 of the Rule of Life, at the end of the second paragraph refers back to a text of the Constitutions: “to provide for Christ the Lord, present in the Eucharist, true and perpetual adorers and zealous promoters of his love”⁹. If we know the historical setting of this text, which belongs to the years 1864-1868 of Father Eymard's life, we understand that it was not easy for him to outline and codify this “new form of life in the Church”. Until the end of his life, he worked to perfect the Constitutions.

The basic idea is that the Eucharist must be the form of life of a religious of the Blessed Sacrament. The Eucharist must represent the centre and the point of arrival. “An adorer, who is also an apostle, should always adore and preach Jesus Hostia”, he writes towards the end of the Great Retreat in Rome (NR 44,136). The idea is clear: everything must flow from the Eucharist and everything must return to it. The Eucharist, says Father Eymard, “is the center of our life, our power of action and apostolate” (PR 107,3).

⁹ Cf. Constitutions No. 2: “The supreme reason for the Institute consists entirely in this, that is, that under the guidance and auspices of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, to God and Our Lord Jesus Christ, dwelling day and night in the Eucharist for the love of mankind, it should consecrate true and perpetual adorers and form courageous zealots of His glory and propagators of His love, that the Lord Jesus always be adored in His sacrament and glorified socially in the whole world”.

A fully Eucharistic life

To understand the “new form of life in the Church” that Father Eymard desired, we must always refer to him. The Rule of Life tells us of one of his convictions: “a life cannot be fully Eucharistic unless it is consecrated to both God and our fellow human beings”. This formulation refers to a letter that Father Eymard wrote to Father de Cuers, his first companion: “A purely contemplative life cannot be fully Eucharistic: the hearth has a flame” (CO 1030).

The Bishop of Grenoble, Mgr Fougerat, in his panegyric on the occasion of the thanksgiving for the canonisation of Saint Peter Julian Eymard (9 December 1962), said: “The originality of Peter Julian Eymard, apostle of the Eucharist, bread of life, consisted first of all in not diminishing anything of the adoring homage, of the transcendent sense of mystery, of the depths of Love. (...) One wished to oblige him to choose between the Eucharist of contemplatives and adorers, and the Eucharist of apostles and missionaries. (...) And the whole spirituality of his Congregation, its entire mission is built on this indissoluble marriage of contemplation and the apostolate. One used to say that he did not know what he wanted, because he was a man of fullness and wanted everything together”.¹⁰

Father Eymard is the man of fullness, he has lived a fully Eucharistic life and proposes that we “live the mystery of the Eucharist fully” (Rule of Life No. 1).

For him, the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ's presence, the mystery that contains the total Christ, the synthesis of his mortal and glorious life. "The Holy Eucharist is Jesus past, present and future" (PG 356.1). He states: “We wish to embrace the Eucharistic idea in all its aspects” (CO 553), “We take the whole Blessed Sacrament” (CO 690).

¹⁰ Hommage à Saint Pierre-Julien Eymard canonisé le 9 décembre 1962. Rome, Maison Générale, 1963, p. 29.

The Congregation unites the active life with the contemplative life: a truly Eucharistic life is actively involved for the salvation of mankind. The Eucharist and the needs of human society cannot be separate realities. He often used the metaphor of fire and its flame. This metaphor expresses his passion for the Eucharist very well. Just as fire has its flame, so the love of God is completed in the love of neighbour¹¹. There is a fruitful tension and not separation between these two poles, just as fire and its flame cannot be separated.

Father Eymard proposed a spirituality that was nourished by the celebration and contemplation of the Eucharist, and committed to the service of the Gospel, giving priority to the most disadvantaged people in life. Considering his intense activity, what he accomplished, the many initiatives he launched to incarnate his charism and Eucharistic grace, despite his frail health, we can understand the passion that animated him. This constitutes for us “an example of contemplation and apostolic action” for a creative Eucharistic mission in our world today.

He gave his whole self to Christ

The last paragraph summarises Father Eymard's apostolic action. First of all, his own life of prayer is recalled. His life of adoration nourished his apostolate and his apostolate nourished his life of adoration. Thus he writes in the notes of his last retreat (1868): “Make adoration the very center of my life. Prepare my adoration as one prepares a meal, an important address. The soul of my adorations: the gift of self” (NR 45,16).

In the last years of his life, mass and communion will become increasingly important.

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (DCE), wrote: “«Worship» itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.”, no. 14.

Father Eymard is convinced that the sacrifice of the Mass and sacramental Communion are the vital source and summit of all Christian religious experience. He writes: “the Eucharistic marvel that summarizes all the others, and that, in itself, is worth all the love, all the sacrifices, all the glory that the Lord has rendered to his Father during his lifetime: it is the Holy Mass, that is celebrated at every moment of the day and night, in all inhabited places, and even in the heart of deserts” (PG 244,4).

A Christian life that wants to bear fruit must start from Jesus Christ and arrive at him, nourish itself and make the Eucharist its centre of life (cf. PG 241,5). A frequent theme in Father Eymard's preaching is: communion as the power of transformation and holiness; he highlights the role of the Holy Spirit who renews man, freeing him from the chains of sin to open him up to the true freedom of love.

The Eucharist is the bond of Christians, it builds fraternity. Jesus came to make all men one family, "the Eucharist is the bread, the common food, the union of all the children" (PP 36,1); it destroys all kinds of jealousy and separation, because we share the same table and drink from the same cup; we have the same Father who is in heaven. The same spirit of charity unites all those who eat the same Eucharistic bread. “Jesus Christ then is all in all” (PG 242,3), and the Eucharist is “the happy feast of the true fraternity, that we can extend forever” (PG 244,7).

If he strives “to lead people to the adoration of the Lord in the setting of the solemn exposition”, it is because he is well aware of the pastoral challenges of his time, in particular the lack of faith, rationalism and materialism. Through adoration, Father Eymard wishes to lead the faithful back to the person of Jesus as their source of life, to make them encounter his love present in the mystery of the Eucharist, because “they are no longer aware that he is their neighbor, their friend, and their God” (PG 241,4).

Faced with the situation of the society of his time: the absence of reference points, the result of the French Revolution, and the growth of individualism, Father Eymard proposed the cult of the Eucharist to rebuild human society. “But society will revive full of life when all of its members come and gather around our Emmanuel. The relationship of minds will very naturally be reformed under a common truth; the bonds of true and strong friendship will revive under the action of the same love; the beautiful days of the Cenacle will return, the Corpus Christi Feast of the family, the festival of the great King” (PG 241,4).

The Rule of Life then goes on to recall his action in the service of all. Father Eymard is aware that God has entrusted him with a mission for the whole world (cf. NR 44,79); he tells his religious: “You are called to set fire to the four corners of the world” (PR 107,3). “His love loves all his children equally. He wants to give himself equally to all, and therefore, we must continue the Eucharistic cenacle, leaving the festive hall of the King always open to all” (PG 294,6).

Two categories of people in particular are mentioned: “the priests and the poor”. This reference refers to the Decree of Approval of the Congregation of the Religious of the Blessed Sacrament, 8 May 1863. In this decree, Pope Pius IX mentions two specific works of zeal: the reception of secular priests who wish to do their spiritual exercises, and the instruction and preparation of poor children so that they can worthily make their first communion to the Body of Christ.

Father Eymard is aware of the loneliness from which so many priests suffer, of their spiritual abandonment and their lack of devotion to the Eucharist (cf. CO 1099), he proposes to commit himself to their sanctification. He writes: “I understand more than ever that to rekindle, nourish and perfect the spirit of Eucharistic devotion among priests is the work par excellence, the most excellent of all” (CO 698).

In his project to return Christian life to its centre, which is the Eucharist, he sees priests as the “multipliers”, that is, those who work for the spread of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Indeed, “To do good to

one priest”, he says, “is to do good to thousands of souls”. He dreams of creating priestly fraternities to help them grow in Eucharistic spirituality. In a word, he wants to “sanctify priests through the Eucharist”.

In addition, Father Eymard had discovered the profound link between Christ present in the Eucharist and Christ present in his brothers and sisters, particularly the poor and marginalised by society. His commitment to the workers on the outskirts of Paris, what he called the: “beautiful and lovely mission, the royal mission of the Eucharistic wedding feast” (CO 1099), “the royal work of the Eucharistic wedding” (CO 1020) found its inspiration in the Eucharist and in the Word of God.

At the end of his life, echoing the final doxology of the Eucharistic prayer, Father Eymard notes: “Grace of the apostolate: faith in Jesus. Jesus is there, therefore everything to Him, for Him, in Him” (NR 45,3). He understood that this presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the source of a dynamism and a mission that is never concluded.

The Rule of Life concludes this issue by saying: “his whole life witnesses to the gift of himself to Christ”. This is a reference to what was the apex of his spiritual experience: the vow of personality, the total gift of self. Like the vase in the hands of the potter (cf. Jer 18:1-6), Father Eymard allowed himself to be moulded by the Spirit so that Christ might live in him (cf. Gal 2:20) and thus become a Eucharist, “tasty bread” for the life of his brothers and sisters.

Here is what he writes: “I must give myself unconditionally, and abandon myself to his good pleasure, giving myself up to his grace, like the clay in the hands of the potter [cf. Si 33,13], so that it might form me and make me a good and true adorer. I must hand over to that grace my mind, my heart, my body, and my entire life, so that it might inspire them, form and perfect them into the holiness of the Holy Eucharist. *O Lord Jesus! Live in me, reign in me, govern me, so that*

you, in all things, may live in me, reign in me and govern me” (PR 150,22).

We can say that Father Eymard realised what Pope Francis said in a catechesis on the Eucharist, he became a “Eucharistic man”. “We must not forget that we celebrate the Eucharist in order to become *Eucharistic men and women*. What does this mean? It means allowing Christ to act within our deeds: that his thoughts may be our thoughts, his feelings our own, his choices our choices too. And this is holiness: doing as Christ did is Christian holiness. Saint Paul expresses it clearly, in speaking of his own assimilation to Jesus, and he says this: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). (...) Christians are men and women who, after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, allow their soul to expand with the power of the Holy Spirit”¹².

1st of July 2024

Father Manuel Barbiero, sss

¹² Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 4 April 2018.

And now ... ?

An invitation and a promise

The jubilee year around our *Rule of Life* and its 40 years of approval is coming to an end. But this fact should not mean that it is the end of all our reflection on this basic document for our Eucharistic and Eymardian spirituality. On the contrary: this journey continues, it is an ongoing commitment to deepen our knowledge of our Rule and to discover its riches and potential in terms of suggestions and ideas for still other ways of living it and revealing possible paths for our pastoral work.

In fact, we still have a few small contributions from the past that have not yet found their way into one of the bulletins we have already published. They have not been forgotten or neglected, and we are going to find a way of sharing them with all of you. To this end, we are making the following proposal.

We invite all confreres and our lay associates to send us a small contribution on the *Rule of Life* or, more broadly, on our Eucharistic spirituality and our Eymardian charism. A reflection, an experience, a suggestion, the result of an exchange, a wish, a project... So many forms are possible. There are just these few conditions: the article should be brief (no more than 4 pages, preferably less), clear in its expression, and positive in tone. So no criticism or offence to anyone.





These contributions will be published gradually in a special section to be created on the website of the General Curia of our Congregation. They will be published as they are, without any editorial work, since they reflect the personal opinion of the author. We exclude from publication only articles where the tendency or tone is judged too negative or even offensive. But we are sure that will not happen.

Here is a cordial invitation to get involved, an open invitation to send us your thoughts, a possible way to continue reflecting on our *Rule of Life* and our charism. Let us make the most of it!

For the International Theological Commission of our Congregation

Father Hans van Schijndel, sss

CONTENTS

Presentation	3
 Anthony McSweeney	7
 Hans van Schijndel	31
 Manuel Barbiero	53
 Final word	67



Ad usum privatum

Printed in November 2024

SSS Generalate
Via G. B. de Rossi, 46
00161 Rome
Italy

