

CALLED TO RULE

A Personal Reflection



Background

Some years ago, the Church gifted me a sabbatical. Its theme was “Praying the Scriptures”. This involved a look at various monastic traditions, past and present, to see how they prayed the Bible. I was especially intrigued by modern “monastery without walls” movements and their “Rules of Life”. Such communities seek to encourage and support ordinary folk to bring their daily lives under the rule of the Spirit. So I was challenged to produce my own personal Rule of Life. This seemed to fit our Methodist holiness spirituality, with its call to a serious, devout and disciplined life. It was also the right time for me as my life was somewhat chaotic and imbalanced at the time.

How?

So, how to go about it? Firstly, I prayed for the help of the Holy Spirit, our spiritual guide *par excellence*! Then I simply drew up a draft rule that sought to bring order, rhythm, discipline and prayer into the whole of my life – worship, quiet, work, family and leisure. The next step was a prayerful consideration of other “Rules of Life”. I looked at our own Diaconal Order’s rule. Googling “Rule of Life” brought up a wealth of information on what a Rule is and how to create one. It was important to consider material from a variety of spiritual traditions and backgrounds, to gain a wider perspective. Devotional reading was also helpful, not least a book on Franciscan spirituality by Brother Ramon SSF. This contains a most useful section on why a Rule and the elements that a personal Rule might contain.

In the light of this study I returned to revise my draft rule. At this stage three things were important. Firstly my Rule had to be pertinent to my life, no-one else’s: it is not something you can “buy off the peg”. Secondly it was helpful to share my Rule with a spiritual director/soul friend, for their critical comment. Lastly, it was imperative to draw up a Rule that was simple, realistic and do-able. No good setting myself up to fail at the first hurdle! Indeed, being flexible and relaxed about my Rule has been very important. A Rule is meant to be sustaining and challenging, not guilt-producing.

What?

So, as a spur to holiness, what elements might a Rule contain? What are the areas to think about? Fundamental will be commitments to prayer: how many times to pray each day, at

what times, and the content of those prayer periods. Perhaps within that there will be thoughts about silence, intercession and the prayerful reading of Scripture. Then there is the wider spiritual life. A Rule might contain commitments to worship, especially the Eucharist (how often to attend?), to retreats and quiet days, alone and with others (how many per year, of what style?), to devotional reading, to art and music – whatever feeds the soul. In our Methodist tradition there perhaps should be a commitment to fellowship, sharing in the life of a small, nurturing group. And setting aside times for penitence and self-examination will be important.

But holiness is wider than that. It concerns a holy life-style and social holiness. So thoughts about the use of time and talents, in the church and the world, might form part of a Rule. There could be specific commitments to justice and peace issues (what are the things that move me and what can I realistically do?). Thinking about ways in which I can walk gently on the earth and seek the wholeness of all creation might also be included. And lastly there might be a commitment to healthy living, to diet and exercise, to times of rest, relaxation and re-creation. In all of these things, a Rule of life is about enabling us to live the whole of life under God, to become the unique person that God has created us to be and to share in his mission to the world.

Why?

So what are the benefits of drawing up a Rule and trying to live by it? At the very least it can engender perseverance in the spiritual life when the going gets tough! But there is more to it than that. It can bring a sense of peace, order and purpose into our walk with God, an awareness of God in all things, a feeling that we are being true to our vocation. Sometimes our Rule might challenge and rebuke us, and bring us back to “the narrow way”. And, although it may sound like a solitary pursuit, it might actually give us a sense of connection with other Christians following their own Rule. This is especially so if using a Rule of life is part of belonging to a monastic community “without walls”.

And finally...

To live is to change! So we need to revisit our Rule at regular intervals, perhaps with the guidance of a spiritual director/soul friend. For our Rule needs to reflect the realities of my life NOW!



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