

The Regula Vitae

Why a Rule of Life is vital for preserving traditional doctrine and values

A presentation for the Society of Tradition - February 8, 2025

The Defining Principle

What is the defining principle that separates Christian spirituality from all others? Is it Christian morality? Perhaps it is a robust Christian intellectualism? No; while both intellectual rigor and moral superiority are characteristic hallmarks of Christian spirituality, they are not the defining principle that makes the Christian life unique. It is Grace that separates Christian spirituality from all others. Grace quite simply is participation in the Divine life. The Christian life is characterized by its supernatural foundation—the elevating of nature into participation in the Divine. That which differentiates the Christian life is our being taken up into the enlivening, rapturous joy that is the love the Father has for the Son, and the same love which the Son has for His Father (that shared love, of course, being the Holy Ghost).

There is much that we can say about Grace (its fundamental unity, the effects of it, etc..) but we only have so long for our meeting today, so I will now move into what a Rule of Life is, and why I believe it is important for every Christian (especially those of us in the Society of Tradition) to have and keep one.

The Rule

What then is a Rule of Life? The word “rule” comes from the Latin *regula*, which means a pattern, example, or model. It is that exemplar which stands behind the life of the Christian, ordering him and governing him as he increasingly becomes more and more like Christ. At this point, one would not be wrong to be thinking about the Rule of St. Benedict. Benedict’s Rule is a perfect example of what I am speaking about. A Rule of life is not simply a list of rules by which one must live, but is a singular way which one’s life is patterned by. The former quickly becomes a henchman of legalism, wrecking spiritual havoc upon the soul; the latter becomes a seedbed where the Grace of God flourishes into Divine likeness. It will be difficult for me to expound at length exactly what qualifies that difference, but I think what I’ve said so far is a good starting point. Thankfully, as I understand it, the

Society book club will be going through Fr. Martin Thornton's *Christian Proficiency*, which is a superb book which outlines this very subject in a manner I simply do not have the space to do at present. So, you can consider my presentation here also as a kind of sales pitch to join the book club (or, at the very least, to purchase the book to read at your own leisure).

The foundation of the Rule is shaped by the "threefold framework" of the Anglican prayerbook tradition, which is characterized by the Mass, or Holy Eucharist; the Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer; and private prayers. Fr. Martin Thornton describes this trifacta in this way: *"So dare we think of the Eucharist as the living heart of the Body of Christ, the Office as it's continual beat, its pulse, and private prayer as the circulation of the blood giving life and strength to its several members according to their need and capacity? Of course this is illustration and not theology, yet I think it gives a fair picture of the facts. At least it demonstrate the certainty that the prayer and life of each member is wholly dependent on the health of the total organism; private prayer is absolutely dependent on the Office and the Mass."* (Christian Proficiency, pg. 17)

Why a Rule is important

The need for the Christian to have a Rule of Life is quite apparent when one considers everything we've discussed thus far. If Christian Spirituality is differentiated from all other spiritualities by the principle of Grace, then the Christian, if he should wish to be proficient in his calling, should seek to live a life saturated by grace. We've already mentioned that Grace is simply participation in the life of God, but it is important to note here that Grace, as the well known maxim goes, does not destroy nature but perfects it. Likewise with the Incarnation, God does not destroy humanity but, rather, takes it up into His own life. It is through our union with Christ that we are united to the life of God, and in this union we, Lord willing, will continue to progress from one degree of glory to the next. What aids us in the day to day life will be our Rule. It will serve as the backdrop for how we go about our day, how we interact with others, how we do our jobs, and how we engage with societies we find ourselves in. The Rule will function, analogously, as Grace does upon our souls. If done right, it will not destroy our spiritual life (as the legalistic approach to the Christian life does) but it will elevate it to new heights, and will be a key means whereby God sanctifies us.

With the Society of Tradition, we have high and noble goals. We want to stand as a bulwark against a torrent of shifting allegiances and convictions—we want to be bold defenders of all that is traditional and good. But what good will we be if the inside of our cups are not clean? If we are living like sons of Hell, to what will we be converting others to if not to our own particular place in Hell where everyone is dressed in traditional menswear, spending our days discussing why women’s ordination is a silly novelty, all the while stoking the coals in our pipes with the ashes of our smoldering souls? Our calling indeed is high and noble (and woman “priests” are indeed both silly and a novelty) which is why we must lay a good foundation in the lives of our Society’s members. If we want to make the impact both in our parishes and in the world around us, we must begin with the greatest gifts of Grace, the highest of all the Virtues: Charity. We must have love of God and love of neighbor firmly ingrained within us, saturated from a life of Grace, regulated by our own Rule of life, if we dare hope to make a difference and serve as the bulwark we so desire to be.

Practical Conclusion

I want to end my presentation with a few points of practicality. I will give my Rule as an example, though it is important to note that everyone’s Rule will largely have the same core (the above-referenced “threefold framework” of Mass, Daily Office, and private prayers) but anything beyond that will vary from person to person. Again, a Rule of Life should not become a legalistic list of rules that one is bound to upon the pains of sin. Rather, it serves as a guide, and any transgression of one’s Rule generally is not a sin to be confessed, but merely a fault to be corrected. Again, I will defer to Fr. Thornton’s book for further explanation on that point.

My Rule is as follows:

- Attend Mass as often as I am able to whenever offered.
- Pray Morning and Evening prayer daily.
- Pray the Litany for Missions every Monday with the men in my parish.
- Follow the Wednesday/Friday fast.
- Go to Confession at least quarterly.
- Pray the Rosary/Prayer Rope 5 times a week.

You will note that within my Rule there is a reference to my parish. This is another point of practicality that should not be overlooked when creating a Rule. For the regular Christian, the Christian life is not one of isolation. We are all connected to a parish community, and if at all possible our Rules should be lived out within that community. In my parish, a group of the men have come together to hold one another accountable to our respective Rules. We meet often, and chat throughout the week in a group chat. I strongly recommend everyone seek out such a community in their parish. If you are not sure whether one exists, go to your Priest and ask him if such a group exists and if it doesn't, ask your Priest for a list of men you can approach about starting one. He will likely already have in mind a core group of men that would be interested in such an endeavor. The Society of Tradition will also serve to aid in this capacity, but ideally it should not be the only community helping you in this.

The particulars of your Rule will vary depending on your personality and temperament, as well as what you are reasonably capable of doing. Most of the men involved in the above-referenced group chat have Rules similar to mine. Some are more specific and lengthy, others are short and sweet (and one that is so lengthy and specific that it very well may be a 21st century Rule of St. Benedict). The point is not to overwhelm and exasperate yourself. Be honest and humble with your Rule, and change and add to it as you grow in your proficiency with it.

Thank you all for taking the time to attend this meeting, and for listening to my presentation. It is my hope and my prayer that our Society will be able to grow, both in numbers and in the quality of each of our members spiritual lives. May God bless us all.