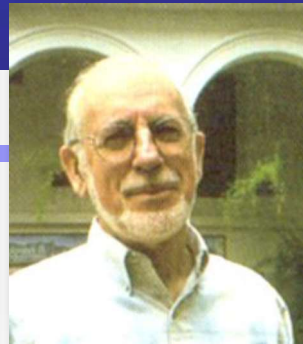


# Fr Anthony McSweeney, sss

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 Life<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

Núñez’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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 1965.

A few years later Rome would settle the question once and for all with the document, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, published on May 25<sup>th</sup> 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 muddled 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 17<sup>th</sup> of August and the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>. 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 21<sup>st</sup>. Work concluded on the following day, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 22<sup>nd</sup> to July 18<sup>th</sup>, 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> November 1981.

#### A. REMARKS AND REQUESTS OF MODIFICATION

Nothing at all was heard for some ten months until, finally, on 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 24<sup>th</sup> 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), 1<sup>st</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 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**