

*Selection from Chapter 16. Structure and Spirituality of the Movement - Liturgy of the Hours and RB*  
*The Liturgy of the Hours & St Benedict's Rule, pp.331-334*

The participation of young boys and girls in the Liturgy of the Hours is a practice of the Movement which greatly helps their growth in faith and holiness. The young are always welcomed to join the adults in the daily celebration of this Liturgy. It is not achieved by the imposition of a rigid regime. Their participation is best if, as is the custom of the Movement, it is free and spontaneous and seen not as an imposition but as a privilege.

It is part of the Benedictine charism of the Movement that the Liturgy of the Hours is always a part of the day at school and at home (for those who are members of the Movement). Through this custom they grow up in the awareness of the prayer of Christ in his faithful (the Church) as a normal part of lay life in school and home. Their attendance and participation depends on their understanding and readiness, although that will grow more quickly when there is a warm welcome (*acogida*) for them in such important occasions in the day. In the homes of Manquehue Oblates the singing of the office of Compline in the family has often been a strong attraction for children ending with the Marian antiphon as a last moment before bed.

The adoption of St Benedict's Rule has been another great source of spiritual strength in the development of the Movement. It is always available and frequently used as an inspiration, with its wisdom and guidance in life, at all levels of the Movement.

The Rule became a strong influence in José Manuel's life and work with the young at an early stage. Although his experience at the monastery had been under the overall influence of St Benedict and the Rule had come into his conversations with Fr Gabriel, the formal adoption of the Rule for his new lay Movement was a more gradual process. It was in the midst of great troubles and problems about many things - about his marriage and the baffling illness of his children, about the founding of Colegio San Benito, about the interminable difficulties which beset the beginnings of Colegio San Lorenzo, about the responsibility for so many young people which fell heavily on his shoulders at that time - that the Rule began to have a formative influence on his life and that of his followers in the Movement.

All the difficulties of that period might well have put an end to his dreams and plans through the sheer pressure of inexorable demands, but he turned at that time to the Rule of St Benedict and quietly but emphatically adopted it for the building up of both communities and schools. It is important to recognize that he adopted it as a guide to lay life in the ordinary circumstances of the laity. He did so because he and the young people working with him came to see the Rule not as essentially clerical but as an application of the wisdom of the New Testament to the lay life of a committed Christian. It became a new source of great strength which was greatly needed at the time. Perhaps he was led to this perception by such words as those in the Prologue, which are almost equally applicable to the lay pilgrimage of a committed Christian as they are to monastic life:

as we progress in this monastic way of life and in faith, our hearts will warm to its vision and with a love full of delight that cannot be put into words we shall go forward on the way of God's commandments. Then we shall never think of deserting his guidance; we shall persevere in fidelity to his teaching in the monastery until

death and so through our patience we shall share in the passion of Christ so that in the end we may receive also a share in his kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

José Manuel needed at the time all the support that the Rule could give him. There can be no question about how much José Manuel had to suffer. Fr Gabriel had got to know José Manuel very well and he remembers those days of trial and difficulty and creativity:

It happened (the founding of the Movement and the Schools) in the midst of very big difficulties. One of the things I really admire in José Manuel is that, if you look at his life, it is all full of trouble. He has always been in difficulties but he never makes much of them. If you look around you will not easily find someone with more problems than José Manuel....and about the big problems - they don't get him down.<sup>1</sup>

José Manuel realized that what he needed – what the young Movement needed – to give them strength and coherence in dealing with all those early difficulties and to give the Movement a way which it could follow was a life-structure of spiritual depth. It must be a structure which would not “quench the spirit”<sup>1</sup> but would reinforce and carry forward the early experiences of *lectio* that had formed the Movement so far. In the Rule of St Benedict he found what he needed and adapted it to the needs of the laity who would always be living, praying and working in the world while always remaining authentically lay – as lay as the early monks had also been.

Having accepted in general that the laity must be authentically lay and involved in the world, it was paradoxical that the monastic Rule of St Benedict should provide the means of putting the Movement's vision into practice in the world. This adoption of the Rule was not a matter of dreaming idealism but of daily application to the mundane problems of life. After an initial period in which they had accepted the Rule but hardly quite knew what to do with it, they began to take it very seriously indeed and to consult it for practical guidance in their everyday life and work. That was a turning point. Perhaps they were surprised at what they discovered, but certainly it greatly surprised experienced Benedictine monks who came to know them, to see how they referred to this monastic Rule for concrete guidance in the problems and perplexities of their lay lives. Perhaps we should not be too surprised. It was, after all, to laity in a world as alien to God as ours is becoming that St Paul addressed his earnest appeal:

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest Christians were called to go on living in the world, from which they could not escape, but to reject its false values and to transform themselves and it through the renewal of their minds by embracing the alternative of Christ. The Rule of St Benedict became the catalytic agent which enabled the Movement to follow in the same way, because it gave them a structure of life and ideals which gave an inner meaning to all they attempted to do.