

**THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE** edited by Tarcisius Van Bavel OSA, translated by Ray Canning OSA. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1984. £2.95 paperback; £6.95 cased.

Here at last is an excellent little book, long desired and fulfilling expectation. The publishers are to be congratulated on making such a work available to the general reader in a pleasing format and at a reasonable price—an ideal preparation for the coming 16th Centenary of St. Augustine's baptism, 1986—87.

We have a translation of Professor Luc Verheijen's critical text of the Rule into alert modern English, and Dr. Van Bavel's Introduction and Commentary open up this 4th century Scripture-based document to 20th century readers. Van Bavel makes the essential point that this rule was intended as a reminder of a wider oral and written teaching given by Augustine to his first communities. This main teaching behind the Rule is now made accessible to us and put forth clearly, with reference to Augustine's other works and for the most part in Augustine's own words.

The reader starts, then, in this perspective and the text, familiar to Augustinians, comes alive. In the commentary past interpretations given to structures and values are corrected and put in their true light, without special attention being drawn to the fact that they have been problems for some. These are things we moderns have inherited from past centuries and now need to confront with good sense and sincerity. Particularly helpful is the significance of these details shown in the perspective of the principles involved. 'Augustine', says Van Bavel, 'was never a man for a host of principles and laws, rather, he was a person always in search of the essential, in pursuit of the inner core of things and of the human heart', (p. 118). Van Bavel himself highlights this 'essential' throughout these pages, though just occasionally he slips into a somewhat cursory dismissal of a ruling which surely expresses 'a much deeper reality', (cf. pp. 87 & 89). Among the many excellent things given to us two passages stand out: community of goods seen as the building up of inter-personal relationships into a community of love (p. 47 sq.), and the chapter on Authority and Obedience. They could on their own merit justify the entire publication. Non-Augustinian readers, however, could well remain unaware of how surely and deftly Van Bavel treads the 'broad space of Charity', Sermon 163, i.

As to the wider application of the principles involved, one reader has already commented: '... a little book for religious most certainly but one which could be helpful to all, providing as it does a bird's eye view of the vast intelligence and understanding of Augustine. Much of it could well be read by politicians, industrialists and Trade Union leaders of whatever persuasion'. And not only by them, we may add, but by all who in our own day seek to live 'community' according to the ideal of the first Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 4) or, as a 15th century Augustinian put it: 'Vita Apostolica in tempore nostro'.

As Van Bavel's commentary in its turn could well become a *Vade Mecum*, enabling the Augustinian ideal to be lived more fully, one could offer the following suggestions in view of a new edition:

- the inclusion of the critical Latin text of the Rule, in smaller print perhaps?
- only one translation (masculine), although the two translations present a facility for religious communities. Do we really need such cossetting?
- an index with appended list of Scripture references, explicit and implicit.
- reasons given more often for the choice of an 'interpretative' translation of the Rule, rather than a more exact one, as for 'ex vobis' (p. 76).

Dr. Van Bavel loves the Rule and has made us more aware of its riches. May all his readers find new depth in Augustine's words: 'Together one, in the One Christ, on the way to the One Father' (Sermon on Ps. 147, 28).

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249