

THE RULE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (1)

Speaking about the Rule

Speaking about the Rule in a magazine which is open to the laity as well as to Brothers, raises a certain number of questions.

In fact on one part, Religious have over the centuries maintained a hermetical reserve concerning the internal life of their Institutes. Further, the Rule is the soul of this internal life: it officially designates what Religious are, what they ought to do, how they should govern themselves, how individuals should be accepted into the community how they should be trained, and what duties they should fulfill throughout their existence.

With regard to this, the laity manifest little interest in these texts, written in a language which is largely foreign to them, making allusions to things of a religious nature, with which they have not been familiar.

The situation changes from the moment when both parties concerned evolve. The "Lasallian reality" is seen today throughout the world. The laity are interested in the spirituality coming from John Baptist De La Salle, and many share in the Brothers' apostolic work: now, it is the Rule which makes this spirituality and apostolate "official". It is then, an *act of confidence* in the Lasallian laity in presenting this Rule in their assembly and leaving to the local Communities of the Brothers the task of eventually presenting a more elaborate understanding to the lay people associated with their spiritual life and mission.

The situation evolves also on the part of the Brothers. At the very outset, they are aware that in presenting the Rule, they are inviting a public judgement, at least within the circle of their friends, who are going to note the difference between the ideal prescribed by the Rule and the reality lived in practice. Still, the Brothers in ever greater numbers are willing to accept this *risk: it is that of the Gospel*. The Rule, in fact, derives its meaning and strength from the Gospel. These practical prescriptions have no other purpose except to help the religious to live their daily lives according to the Gospel. And such deeds should not be hidden under a bushel. The consecration of religious calls upon them to "profess" their vows. In the measure that they accept this challenge in His name, they have the right to call others to account: "Where do you stand in your life, with regard to the Gospel?"

The true challenge is that of transferring the Rule from the static legislative text to the strength of service of the Spirit.

Three Rules in three centuries

Since the time of Saint John Baptist De La Salle, the Brothers have known only three basic Rules, even

though various editions have been presented with minor retouching. These three Rules are those approved by the successive Chapters of 1718, 1967, and 1986.

The Rule of 1718.

This rule was duly voted upon and approved by the second General Chapter, in the presence of the Founder. This Rule had been previously lived experimentally by the Brothers and was largely based upon their views.

This Rule underwent a number of additions and some retouching. The two most notable ones, were those of 1726, after the approbation of the Institute by the Pope, which added a Chapter on the vows; and 1923 when, at the request of Pope Pius XI, a chapter was modified allowing the Brothers to teach Latin thereafter.

Substantially, this Rule would remain in force until 1967. It underwent 13 editions, the last of which was in 1947.

Such longevity can be explained: the Brothers remained (and still remain) very attached to this text coming from their origins, where the source of their original strength, the spirit of the Institute and their own identity, as it was conceived and lived by the Founder and his first companions are expressed.

The Rule of 1967.

However, the source of the Spirit is channeled into practical settings. After three hundred years the letter became archaic. It was paralyzing the Spirit and making the entire Rule fall into desuetude.

It was in 1934 that a General Chapter recognized the desuetude of "several points" of the Rule. It recommended a revision which would be so conducted that it would be finished and presented to the General Chapter which would take place in 1946, right after the war. The revision was too timid, a truly futile attempt. On that point, the following Chapter, in 1956, called for a complete and substantial recasting.

The Rule which we present here in these lines is the *fruit of the impulse given in 1956*, but an impulse which was put in step with, and singularly amplified by, *the orientations of Vatican II*. (The Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* on the adaptation and renovation of the religious life, and the practical guidelines in "Ecclesiae sanctae" of 6 August 66).

In fact, the malady of ageing was general among Religious families. The Council called upon them to hold a *special Chapter* to revise their "Rules" or "Constitutions" and to bring them up to date, but still in accord with the Founder, with the mind of the Church and with the needs of the times. This revised Rule would be provisional and would be submitted to experimentation before being evaluated, rewritten, and presented for the approval of the Holy See.

The 39th General Chapter established this provisional Rule during the two sessions of 1966 and 1967.

The experimentation of the provisional Rule went on until the Chapter of 1986. Moreover, its text will remain in force until the Holy See approves the one established in 1986. Still, since 1982, Brother Jose Pablo, Superior General, launched with all the Brothers the work of evaluation. These Brothers turned out several thousand of notes, which were then collected, classified, and synthesized in 1984. In 1985, a Committee for Revision worked together with the General Council and drew up a "REVISION OF THE RULE". It

was sent out to the entire Institute at the end of 1985 and even to several of their friends, priests and laity, to find out what they thought about it.

The Rule of 1986.

★ *The three contributions:*

It was with the material gathered between 1984 and 1986 that the capitulants worked. As a result, the RULE of 1986 was the fruit of THREE CONTRIBUTIONS:

- *The contribution of the "original" Rule of 1718;*
- *The contribution of the "experimental" Rule of 1967;*
- *The contribution of the experience accumulated between 1967 and 1986.*

The contribution of the original Rule (1718)

The word "contribution" is weak in describing what the Rule of 1986 owes to that of 1718, which is in fact the *Mother Rule*: no one in fact, in translating the contents, can willingly dispose of the heritage of Saint De La Salle. The work required by the Council consisted of restating in today's language the original thought of the Founder, and, in his name and under his inspiration, taking the positions and making the decisions imposed upon us by the new circumstances in which we live.

Three attitudes

Regarding the text considered, the capitulants adopted three attitudes:

1. The Rule of 1718 contains a certain number of *texts replete with inspiration*. They bring out the finality of the Institute, its spirit, and the meaning of the Rule. The capitulants of 1986 preserved these almost integrally, as we shall see a bit further on, whether in adopting a direct quotation, or in expressing the thought in modern terms.

2. A second sector is composed of *texts dealing with regulations*, and it is there that one loved to find the breath of inspiration: community, consecration, and prayer. The capitulants of 1986 did not reproduce these texts. Still, they were inspired by the thoughts of the Founder expressed in places other than the Rule of 1718: they "Lasallianized" these chapters, if I be permitted this neologism.

3. Finally, the Rule of 1718 contained *numerous regulations*, calendars and time schedules for the schools, the prayer life of the Brothers, meals, daily life, as well as guidelines for politeness and personal conduct. All these referred to usages and customs of the Golden Century!

Three Procedures

The *direct* spiritual heritage from Saint De La Salle, gathered from his writings or from the examples of his life, is present in the Rule under three types of procedures:

1. *Quotation:*

★ *The Rule begins by quoting two long and important passages from the original Rule:*

Before even introducing the official text, the Rule presents the Chapter of 1718 on *the spirit of faith and of zeal* which ought to characterize the Institute. This passage does not form a part of the Rule: it is, as it were, the "umbilical cord" which affirms the filiation with the Mother-role of 1718.

★ After this integral passage, the Rule begins with an *exergue*, literally borrowing nine-tenths of the passage from the Rule of 1718. It makes the meaning of the Rule precise: to help those who practice it to live the love of God and neighbor.

★ More often, the *quotation is shorter*, inserted within the modern text. The procedure is frequent in the first chapter, and that is significant because this chapter defines *the purposes and the spirit of the Institute*: here, for example you have the spirit of the Institute (note the importance of the words within the quotation marks) Article 5: "The spirit of this Institute is a spirit of faith" which leads the Brothers "to look upon everything with the eyes of faith, to do everything in view of God and to attribute all to God".

2. *The modern restatement of the text of 1718*

This procedure is used for an essential article, one which defines the finality of the Brothers' Institute. One quickly perceives the reason for the solicitude over affiliation affirmed throughout the literary procedure: it indicates a fundamental aspect.

The Rule of 1718 said: "*The end of this Institute* is to give a Christian education to children; it is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools, that, having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus give them a suitable education".

In 1986, as we shall see a bit further on, it was necessary to remain completely faithful to this finality: Christian education, all the while accepting a certain openness to the principal means: the school. The text attests to this double solicitude in its very literary form: "*The end of this Institute* is to promote a human and Christian education for the youth, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the church has entrusted to it... The Christian School, which has always to be given new vitality, is the preferred field for the activity of the Brothers. The Institute likewise explores other possibilities for teaching and education that may be more adapted to the needs of time and place".

3. *Recourse to the totality of the Founder's thoughts*

The Rule of 1986 did not limit itself to finding its wealth in the Rule of 1718: it was further inspired by the life and other writings of the Founder, either directly or by a clear reference. The solicitude over "lasallianizing" the Rule was ever present and this was manifested in two themes: first by the abundant references to the De La Salle heritage, secondly, by their "*strategic importance*".

It is thus that almost all of the Chapters open with an explicit reference to what the Founder has done or has said, situated in a strategic place: that of definitions. This is true, for example, in the first article, which summarizes the main historical features of the foundation. This is again true of the first article of Chapter two on the Institute's Mission.

The tenor and importance of the preliminary article can be verified in the same way: in Chapter 4, which deals with the Community, and in Chapter 6 on Formation, in Chapter 7 on the General Chapter, and in Chapter 10 on the Vitality of the Institute.

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