

11-O-18

THE RULE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (2)

The Contribution of the Rule of 1967

The Rule of 1967 is then that provisional text, established by the 39th General Chapter, following the resolution of the preceding Chapter of 1956, seconded and confirmed by Vatican Council II. Still, this Rule cannot be considered independently of the historical circumstances in view of which it came into existence: that of a *crucial period* which was going to witness the effects of a considerable diminution of the Institute.

The principal concern of the 1966 capitulants was not to produce new regulations, but *to come to grips with the crisis* which had already begun: it was in 1965 that a considerable diminution in the number of Brothers was first noted in the statistics. Now that the crisis has abated, we can readily see what was then only an intuition: the crisis dealt above all with the *identity of the Brothers*, but this was quite the same generally throughout the Church: where priests, men and women religious all faced similar difficulties: the shock of modernization. The styles of the consecrated life conceived in other cultural and social epochs had to face head-on the full brunt of the secularization of the modern world.

It was urgently necessary *to respond and to undertake a renewal*. The questions were fast and furious: what is the truly essential element of the Brother's vocation? Is he primarily a teacher or first and foremost a religious? Is he committed to a Mission or to Prayer? What is the worth of the school in the evangelization of youth? Should the schools not be abandoned in favor of more effective apostolates? Should the Brothers continue to live and work together or should they not, on the contrary, stress the individual apostolate after the manner of secular Institutes? Only armchair strategists would consider such questions idle and would offer such stereotyped responses as, "it was only a case of...". The crisis was sincere and profound. Those who underwent it are worthy of respect.

The "Declaration" and the "Rules and Constitutions"

The Chapter of 1966 would consecrate two sessions and a fruitful interim session to respond to these questions. With 20 years of experience, these responses remain entirely valid, even if the unfurling of years has seen the affirmation of other elements which we shall consider further on. These responses are found explicitly stated in a document which serves as a ready reference: the "Declaration on the Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today". They were taken up again and codified in the "Rules and Constitutions" published in 1967, "*Ad experimentum*", to be experimented.

Currents which intermingle

Before quickly reviewing the responses of the Chapter of 1967, we must underline several currents which intermingled in the "Declaration". We here cite without

developing: the contribution coming from the Founder which people wished to express in modern terms; the contribution of Vatican Council II on the religious life, on the laity, on the Christian school; the contribution of biblical and theological renovations and their influence or how consecrated life beginning with the evangelical counsels should be conceived; personalist philosophy which places emphasis on the person; the contribution of the human sciences; and the realities of the characteristics of modern society.

The finality of the Institute and the identity of the Brother

The "Declaration" and the "Rules" are very rich in content, but the point of their contribution is manifest under two fundamental aspects: the finality of the Institute and the identity of the Brother.

— *The finality of the Institute*, as we have shown above, is both affirmed and enlarged in fidelity. But, above all, it is no longer referred immediately to the school, but to Christian education, of which the school remains the privileged instrument for the Brothers. That it should be a school put at the service of the poor is recalled with vigor by these texts.

— *The identity of the Brother* is defined in an exemplary fidelity to the Founder. The theoretical discussions gave place to a well thought out consideration of the history of the foundation: De La Salle constantly formed the Brothers in the entire life without any order of priority, a mission received from God, a life consecrated to God, a communitarian existence. Mission, consecration and community became recognized as the basic elements in the Brother's identity, which include the state of lay religious, service to the poor, and the preference for the school. All these elements are integrated into a living unity. There is unity without uniformity, for each practice accentuates one or other aspect, without detriment to the others. *A contribution situated in the heart of the Rule of 1967.*

This double contribution on the finality of the Institute and on the identity of the Brother is at the heart of the present Rule, to the point of controlling its structure:

- Chapter one: the FINALITY and the spirit of the Institute.
- Chapter two: the MISSION of the Institute.
- Chapter Three: the CONSECRATED LIFE.
- Chapter Four: COMMUNITY LIFE.

The structure itself reproduces the elements recalled and fixed in the Chapter of 1967. This contribution nourishes the entire Rule and it appears everywhere in an explicit manner, as in this article 10: "Each Brother takes upon himself the responsibility for integrating within his own person these constitutive elements of his vocation; consecration to God as lay religious, apostolic ministry of education especially of the poor and community life".

Another evident trace of this "trinitarian" definition of our identity: each time that the Rule takes up *one of these elements*, mission, consecration, community, it does not fail to make a *reference to each of the other two*. This creates an impression of repetition, which has been noted by many people, still, it must run such a risk in order to affirm the constituent unity existing among these three basic elements.

1976: Evaluation and corrections

1. *First important innovation* of the Chapter of 1976: the *Annual Community Plan*. The capitulants considered the texts designed for the Community as a perfect model but a bit of a discouragement for those who had to live

with its daily difficulties. Consequently, they proposed that each Community of Brothers, not redesign a new Utopia, but decide together, at the beginning of each year, a practical program with concrete stipulations concerning their apostolic life, their prayer life, and their fraternal life in community. Subject to regular evaluation, this "Plan" would allow for the adjustment of ideals and performances. After the initial misgivings, this method showed itself to be one of the most effective means of renewal. The Rule of 1976 devoted a large section of Chapter 4 do it.

2. *Second corrective: the "communion" of the Institute.* Subsidiarity, which was adopted in 1966 as a principle of government bore fruit particularly in the field of the decentralization of responsibility. It ignored in a rather big manner the lines which should weave all the parts of this "little Church", which is our Institute, together. The 1976 Chapter reminded us that in the bosom of the Church of the People of God, the Institute of the Brothers ought to live the "communion" among its diverse parties. Further, so that this would not remain as a mere vague concept, it reorganized the General Council as a center for promoting this communion. The General Chapter of 1986 took up this spirituality and consigned it to the Rule in such a way that it nourishes all the passages on: the General Chapter, the Central Government, its composition and role, the Region, and the District, as found in chapters 7,8 and 9 of the 1986 Rule.

Currents affirmed from 1976 to 1986

Spiritual and apostolic currents already present before 1976 underwent a significant development after that date. Our Rule 1976 incorporates them. Let us cite:

1. *Care for the Young Churches:* The Rule reminds us that it is the entire Institute which ought to be concerned with the Young Churches and ought to share their resources and personnel with them (Ch. 2; art. 15).

2. *Inculturation:* inspired by Paul VI's famous "Evangeliū nuntiandi", article 18 reminds the Brothers that "the entire culture ought to be evangelized".

3. *Catechesis and evangelization:* It is Chapter 2 which, in its abundant and a bit disorganized richness, gives an account of the interest, attention and experience of the Lasallian world with regard to proclaiming Jesus Christ to today's youth: the role of the school, of its planning, of its community of educators — complementary roles of the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ and of evangelization — the problem of language adapted to the young... the total difficulties and approaches which the Brothers share with the local Churches, problems at the very center of the Brothers' exercise of their ministry and that of the laymen who work with them.

4. *The extension of service to the poor:* The Rule consecrates the evolution begun during the course of the decade in *two directions*: the extension of the service to the poor in the direction of the promotion of justice which invites educators to unite their efforts towards those who in the Church and in society are fighting against the *roots of poverty*, — extension of *direct service* to the poor, in complete fidelity to De La Salle. Chapter 2 on the Mission of the Institute, and part of Chapter 3, devoted to the vow of Association for the educational service of the poor express this double extension.

5. *The "Lasallian Promotion" of the laity: another great evolution of the 76-86 decade.* The sharing of apostolic tasks as well as of Lasallian spirituality is vigorously affirmed by the Rule. Article 17 gives clear orientations for this collaboration. Also, article 116, after reminding us that the gift given to John Baptist De La Salle by the Spirit,

is not limited to the benefit of the Brothers, discerns in the vigorous rise in the Lasallian laity, a grace which renews the Institute's own vitality.

A triple message

Live the Spirit of your Institute more deeply, pray more: the spirit of faith and of zeal, which is presented in the first chapter with regard to finality, is not in anyway less present throughout the length of the work, and it is particularly found in chapter 2 on the Mission of the Institute ((cf articles 11,20, and 21). Still, it is perhaps *chapter 5 on the LIFE OF PRAYER which offers the most original contribution.* The Rule defines the prayer of an educator. As a Minister of God, he is called upon to contemplate the designs of salvation at work in the world and particularly with regard to those confided to his care; he is invited also to communicate with the thoughts of God by the practice of mental prayer so that he might be able to share the word of God with others.

Look at your personal responsibilities. The Rule proposes to the Brothers a "personal plan of life" in order to invite them to enter more freely, vigorously, and consciously into the common plan of the Institute so that they may offer it what is best in themselves (Art 48 b).

Associate yourself in the name of the Lord: from 1691 until 1694, St. De La Salle together with a chosen group of Brothers pronounced the vows of association to establish the Institute for the service of the poor. Later, this vow was reduced to its "economic" aspects by the vow of "gratuity". The capitulants of 1986 deemed it opportune to re-establish it under its original form: "Vow of association for the educational service of the poor", pursuing in that way two principal motives. Firstly, to reaffirm the priority of service to the poor in connection with the obligations taken before God by the vows. Secondly, to invite the Brothers to re-enforce their unity in a world where everything calls for dispersion.

Conclusion: The Vitality of the Institute

Chapter 10, which concludes the rule, does so under an aura of hope in the future willed by God. It does not do so in a triumphal display to the illusory sound of the blare of trumpets. It does so *in an atmosphere of faith*: it is God who raised up John Baptist De La Salle, and the Brothers know that God will continue this same appeal. They see this in the proofs of the blossoming of new vocations, in the emergence of the Lasallian laity movement, and above all in the needs of youth who are waiting for educators: "This Institute is one of great necessity".

The Rule does not hide the necessity of formulating a *worthy response* to this appeal. The total vitality depends upon the quality of each individual response. Yet, it depends also upon the support afforded by the Founder and by the graces which he continues to draw down upon his sons.

It is thus upon this filial appeal to their Founder that the Brothers commit themselves to construct that future which the Will of God is tracing out for them, as it traced out the ways, along which, three centuries ago, St. De La Salle and his first disciples proceeded.

"Today, as in the past, he challenges the Brothers, not only as the one who established the Institute but as the Founder who continues to inspire and to sustain it". (Art. 119).

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