

**A READING GUIDE
TO THE "COMPLETE WORKS"
N° 1: THE RULES (2/2)**

Br. Alain Houry

4. The literary history of the text.

We can consider the literary history of the text by reading first what "the final revision" of 1717-1718 thought it necessary to add to the text dated 1705: RC 34; 2,1; 8,1-3; 13,6-9; 16,1-4. Let us quote only the beginning of Chapter 2: *"That which is of the utmost importance, and to which the greatest attention should be given in a community is that all who compose it possess the spirit peculiar to it...; and those who do not possess it and those who have lost it, should be looked upon as dead members, and they should look upon themselves as such; because they are deprived of the life and grace of their state; and they should be convinced that it will be very difficult for them to preserve the grace of God"*.

This text contains a commentary on the meaning of the Rules which remains valid to this day. Brother Maurice Auguste Hermans uses it as a reading guide in a collection of his talks published in 1954 under the title of *"For a better understanding of our Common Rules"* (CL 5, 323-403). It includes also an examination of the extent to which the RC were inspired by the Rules of other institutes or differed from them.

To give one example only, we find the following in RC 5,1: *"There will be no corporal mortification of rule in this Institute"*. This means, that one could have expected to find time allocated to "exercises of mortification", as in certain monastic rules, during which the discipline was self-inflicted; or a rule prescribing a perpetual Lent. The biographers speak of the "excesses" which certain Brothers inflicted on themselves voluntarily, and which had to be moderated (Cf. CL 7,249 and 429).

The comparison of the RC with the 1705 text shows that expressions that were too absolute have been corrected: "never" is often replaced by "not". The "Rendering of an account of one's conscience" (RC 16,8) gives greater independence to the Brother with regard to his Brother Director. According to the 1705 text, the Brothers *"will render an account of their conscience and of their conduct"*. The amended text says simply that *"they will render an account of their conduct"* (RC 12,9). It is interesting to make these

comparisons, but it is possible only if you have a copy of CL 25.

What was suppressed in 1718 is also interesting. For example, RC 1,4 has removed the mention of "persons who substitute fathers and mothers in teaching children". This would seem to indicate that the parallel text of MR 193,2,2 does not represent the final view of the Founder regarding the role of parents in education.

5. The Rules and Constitutions.

When the Bull of Approbation was granted, introducing the vows of poverty and chastity, the Rules had to be modified accordingly. The 1725 Assembly introduced also other changes in the text, and decided to publish it. The new text appeared in Rouen in 1726. There was a new edition in 1768. The 1787 edition adopted a system of numbering articles. This is the numbering used in RC and explains the interruptions where additions have appeared.

The Brothers made no formal distinction between what came from the Founder and what General Chapters decided. This shows very clearly that the Rule of life is primarily the expression of the awareness of the Institute of what God asks it to be and to do. This is an awareness of what the Brothers experienced both with De La Salle and in the situations in which they were subsequently involved.

The story of the Rule does not end there. Vatican II asked that "the spirit of Founders should be clearly enunciated and faithfully maintained, as should also their specific intentions and healthy traditions, for together they constitute the heritage of each institute" (PC 2). That is why the Motu Proprio "Ecclesiae Sanctae" asked all religious congregations to re-write their Rule. The new interpretation represented by the Rule of 1987 can serve as a study guide to the RC. It will be possible in this way to measure the distance between these two texts which express, in two very different contexts, the charism of the Founder and the tradition of his Institute. And it is up to us to observe the new Rule with a similar fidelity.

**FD THE RULE OF THE BROTHER DIRECTOR
OF A HOUSE OF THE INSTITUTE**

Blain explains at great length (CL 8,146) that, around 1700, De La Salle composed a Rule for Brother Directors, which he immediately sent to all the houses of the Institute in manuscript form. When the 1717 Assembly asked him to revise the text of the Common Rules, the Founder made no mention of the Rule of the Brother Director. And yet, the Brothers at the Assembly were familiar with the text, as is proved by the endorsement of the copy we possess (FD 4,1).

There is no trace in the FD of the "cosmetic" treatment we have noted in the RC: "never" occurs frequently, and the account of conscience is still included (FD 1,32). The reason for this is that the Director is supposed to be a **spiritual director** and not an autonomous superior (Cf. RC 12,1): *The name of Director has been given to the Brother Director of each house of the Institute to indicate to him that his overriding concern should be...to give interior direction to the Brothers in*

his charge, to make them advance in virtue, and lead them to the perfection of their state and of their Institute, by the direction of their conscience (FD 1,2). His primary concern regarding his Brothers will be to establish and maintain them in a true spirit of faith, and to make them look upon the execution of God's will in all things as the rule of their conduct (FD 1,27).

There were, of course, in the 17th century, some laymen who were spiritual directors. However, to entrust this task to Brothers with little training was doubtlessly somewhat risky. In his letters to the Brother Directors, De La Salle is careful to remind them of the practical requirements of their position: "I am well aware that you must have the Brothers make their manifestation of conscience and strive to resolve their difficulties, but there is no need for these long conversations in which numerous external matters are spoken of, even harmful ones, often even without our noticing it" (LA 37,8: To Brother Hubert, July 20th 1709; see also LC 38,25; LI 71).

The very detailed prescriptions that follow regarding the habit of the Brothers (FD 2) and their food (FD 3) seem to date from the beginning of the Community of the Christian Schools (Cf. CL 7,234 and 238). *The Brothers are poorly and simply dressed (FD 2,1), they will eat what is cheapest (FD 3,3):* this was an effective way of tying the Brothers down to the living conditions of the poor people whose children they taught in their schools.

MH MEMOIR ON THE HABIT

Around 1689-1690, Fr. Baudrand, the parish priest of St. Sulpice, wanted the Brothers to wear the ecclesiastical mantle so that their dress would appear less provincial. De La Salle wrote a memoir stating the motives which had led him to give the Brothers the habit they had (CL 7, 299-300). Brother Maurice Auguste wanted to devote a Cahier Lasallien to the study of this Memoir, a draft of which is kept in the Archives. CL 5, 243-311 includes an uncompleted study. The first volume of the new History of the Institute (EL 5, 70-76), coming after the thesis of Br. Miguel Campos (CL 45, 190-201), includes a short study of the MH.

The Memoir can be divided up into five sections:

- The Community of the Christian Schools (1-10)
- The habit (11-18)
- Reasons for not changing the habit (19-32)
- Reason for choosing an "unusual" habit (33-45)
- Disadvantages of an ecclesiastical habit (46-64)

This text has sometimes been used to prove that De La Salle was opposed to changes on principle (19-25). However, to think this is to forget that, at that time, the death of Brother Henri L'Heureux made him change his mind about training a Brother for the priesthood with a view to his being Superior (Cf. CL 7,308). What was harmful was a change imposed from outside or accepted without an internal need for it.

Apart from being an occasional piece of writing, this text reveals clearly the awareness by the Founder of the specific nature of the Community of the Christian Schools (the term "institute" appeared only later). This Community is not

"founded" (2), that is, it has no resources of its own. Life in it is subject to Rules, there is dependence and uniformity (2), and an "unusual" habit (16) is worn, that is, a characteristic one, as in "religious communities" (27). Brothers run gratuitous schools, only in towns (3), so as to be able to form a local community, numbering normally five Brothers: all are laymen (9), because *the exercises of the community and the work in schools require persons full-time* (10).

Together with the Community of Brothers, MH mentions the seminary for country teachers (4-6, Cf. CL 7, 278), the preparatory novitiate (7, Cf. CL 7,279), both of which institutions disappeared shortly after the publication of MH (Cf. CL 7,311).

There are some expressions used which may give the modern reader a mistaken impression:

- the "studies" mentioned in 9 and 10 are studies conducted in Latin, which normally lead to the clerical state (Cf. CL 7,224); "without study and without light" (38) means without extensive academic training.
- "a very mediocre mind" (9) is ordinary, average, more common sense than brilliant intellect; "without an elevated mind" (36) means simple, unpretentious. Certain Brothers reached a high level of competence in the exercise of their profession;
- "coarse" (36) means without elegance, without refinement.

The text says something also about John Baptist de La Salle's feelings regarding the first teachers he invited to live with him in the early days, and about the changes which occurred subsequently (Cf. the Before/After comparison in N 41-45).

EP PERSONAL WRITINGS

Under this heading, the following writings are included:

- the vow of November 21st 1691. We know of its existence and possess the text only from Blain (CL 7,313);
- the vows of June 6th 1694. We possess the signed formula of De La Salle, as well as the signed formulas of the 12 Brothers referred to in EP 2, 0, 2 (Cf. CL 3,7);
- the Rules which I have imposed upon myself, which only Blain has preserved for us (CL 8,318-320).
- the beginning of the Testament of De La Salle, dated April 3rd 1719, of which we have several copies (Cf. CL 26,286).

The "Rules that I have imposed upon myself" (RI) are the subject of a study by Br Miguel Campos (CL 45,250-272). Summarising the work of Brother Jose Arturo Gareis (CL 16,54-102), he shows that 9 of the 20 RI come from the Jesuit Julien Hayneufve (1685 edition of "Summary of Meditations for the time of exercises..."), and of these 9 RI, 8 are to be found in the Collection (R 16, 1, 4 and 7; 16, 2, 9; 16, 3, 9 and 10; 16, 4, 1, 5 and 6). This means two things: on the one hand, De La Salle belongs to the French school of spirituality, which includes Hayneufve also; and that he shares with his Brothers many of the things that have guided his own life. ●