

EACH PART IS ORDERED TO THE WHOLE AS THE IMPERFECT TO THE PERFECT¹

Considerations on the Rule of Life

Introduction

The *La Rule of Life* is human law in which two inseparable elements flow together; on the one hand, it is something ordered towards a purpose and, on the other, it is precisely this, a rule, a measure regulated and measured by a superior measure which, in its turn, has two parts, divine law and natural law. The end of human law is the benefit of humankind with three conditions: it must be in harmony with religion, given that it must adapt to divine law; it must be of help to discipline, given that it must agree, in principle, with natural law; and it must promote the public good, given that it must be ordered to human benefit.

From the harmony of the law with religion there follows its honesty; the law must be honest. From its relationship with discipline derives its possibility; the law must be possible according to the nature and the customs of the country. The law must be in line with places and times; the law must, therefore, be opportune for discipline; this means it must be in line with the circumstances: and since the law is a concept of practical reason that guides human acts, in order to change or modify it there must be two motives: one, that it depend upon reason and, the other, on people whose acts are regulated by this law. In our case, the *Rule of Life* guides our missionary work, determines our manner of proceeding and regulates our organisation.

On the part of reason, the *Rule* can be changed or modified, since it is part of human reason to move gradually from what is imperfect to what is perfect; in fact, we can see that, in human progress, the first researchers made only imperfect discoveries that were later perfected by their successors.

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 234-237; *Laudato Si'*, 141.

The same thing also happens in the practical field, the field of action. In fact, the first people who sought to discover something useful to build up society, unable alone to take everything into account, established norms that were imperfect and full of lacunae, that were later modified and replaced by others with fewer failings in view of the common good. On the part of people, meaning on our part at this moment, the *Rule* may be changed or modified given the change of human conditions which, in their differences, require different treatment² in as much as each *part is ordered to the whole, as the imperfect to the perfect, and the individual is part of the community...*³ Allowing myself to be guided by these basic orientations, I propose to you the following considerations.

0. Our organisation

The fourth part of the **Rule of Life** has this title: **The Service of authority in the Institute**. From the point of view of form, it includes six sections; the first concerns the concept of **Government and Authority**; the second is concerned with the **Local Community**; the third deals with the **Province**; the fourth speaks of the **General Administration**; the fifth is about the **General Chapter**; the sixth establishes the procedure concerning **Absence and Separation from the Institute**. From the point of view of the content, it is sub-divided into 59 articles, from No. 102 to No. 161. This fourth part may therefore be interpreted as a *collective discourse*, still convincing today, both innovative and transforming, *for life together on a journey, for living together* as a distinctive element of its components, undoubtedly still perfectible. From what we have said, therefore, we gather that the organisation we have adopted to accomplish the mission is “cordial” but complex, due to presences, works and services. The presences are the community, united in delegations or provinces. The *works* are the educational, medical, parish and social works etc. that the communities, delegations or provinces, and the *services* are the activities, whether ours or of others, that people carry out within the Institute.

² Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, qq. 90-97.

³ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 90, a. 2.

0.1 In principle made brothers in Christ to continue his mission, in the same furrow as St. Daniele Comboni

The fourth part is born of this principle: we Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus are ordinary, normal men, made brothers of Christ through the original inspiration of St. Daniel Comboni to continue his mission; through our organisation we have endeavoured to consolidate the ties of communion, brotherhood and friendship, by action and sharing. Among ourselves, union and communion are vital, given that we are a body that organises itself in communities who want to live the Gospel and accomplish what we they been sent to do. There is nothing that can be of greater help to this union of ours than obedience to the Superior General and to the superiors who assist him, something we must comprehend in light of the life of Jesus obedient to the father even to the Cross. Therefore, the exercise of authority helps to live communion not as a principle interwoven with norms, but as an ethical style of existence shared and achieved and, for this reason, needful of guide-persons who, with patience, cordiality and hope, remind us that what is important is the evangelical urgency to move, reawaken and evoke the Kingdom in all societies, create processes of Kingdom even in ambits that are apparently satisfied, disoriented and far from God; men with evangelical authoritativeness that persuades, motivates and stimulates towards an identifying conversion of the Institute to the present reality. All this involves forming oneself in humanity, cordiality and gratuitousness, values that require an anthropological predisposition that is born of the virtue and especially of the warmth of the faith for supernatural grace, to open roads for the presence of Good, of Truth and of Justice, embracing with the love of Jesus Christ all who are afflicted by human weakness⁴.

0.2 Modalities of approach

A tree draws nourishment from the damp earth through its roots and its leaves receive light and warmth from the surrounding atmosphere. A broad horizon can be seen from the heights of its crown. Its deep roots are the guarantee of its life. Breath and rootedness, height and depth

⁴ Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

are the two prospective characteristics of the reading and re-reading of a text which, in our case, is the Rule of Life. From this point of view, anyone preparing for this reading and re-reading must try to avoid two extremes: the first is a reading and re-reading that is apparently pious and devout but carried out in an attitude that is individualistic, sentimental and fundamentally weak; the second is a reading that is very studied, that pretends to be very objective but is not accompanied by deep life of spirituality, humanity and mission. Here we have two partial ways of reading and re-reading. To avoid these extremes, those who approach the text must seek to make of it a reading and re-reading that is faithful and creative, both broad and deep. To these two basic orientations that concern the author and the reader, we must add two more: the perspective of the text as a whole and in its depth. These four basic orientations are indicated by four key words: before the text or the actual reading; behind the text, meaning the author or authors; within the text, the text as a whole or that which the text itself says; beneath the text or, in other words, the deep meaning of this message for the community of members who gather to read it, re-read and pass it on like a precious family album, as happens during the postulancy, the novitiate, the scholasticate and beyond.

0.3 The perennially valid spiritual patrimony of humanity

We may consider a people above all as a repertoire of secrets that require an effort to discover and understand them, said Ortega at the start of the XX century in his work *The Revolt of the Masses*⁵. At present, many peoples make up the Institute and so we find in it different repertoires of secrets that intervene in the reading, understanding, interpretation and execution of what is legislated for in a constitutional text of a people, in a given epoch, according to a tradition, in this case mainly European. This is why the revision and re-visitation – returning to visit in a critical spirit – the *Rule of Life* requires the harmonious combination of the repertoire of secrets brought by persons from different peoples but sustained by general and indemonstrable principles that are, of themselves,

⁵ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, p. 247.

obvious and evident to all and which constitute the spiritual patrimony of humanity: *to recognise, despite changing times and progress in knowledge, a nucleus of philosophical knowledge whose presence is constant in the history of thought. We may consider, just as an example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject and of his capacity for knowing God, the truth and the good; consider also some fundamental moral norms that are seen to be commonly shared. These and other themes show that, apart from currents of thought, there exists a block of knowledge in which it is possible to recognise a kind of spiritual patrimony of humanity*⁶. It is, therefore, a question of a kind of *natural grammar*, according to Benedict XVI, on which the most detailed dispositions rest, which must be imposed on the people in harmony with its conditions and this is the reason why, on the part of the people whose acts are regulated by it, the law may legitimately be modified due to the changed human conditions which, being different, must be treated differently⁷. It is therefore legitimate to change a law if changing it contributes to the common good⁸.

1. Reclaiming fraternity

Every law is concerned mostly with defining the limits and the conditions for the exercise of authority but there is no reflection on its meaning or its foundation. Nevertheless, this reflection is necessary because authority is in crisis, both in the family and the school and, therefore, in a number of institutions. This crisis is perceived in different ways: on the one hand, one sees the passage from an idea of authority bound to the sacred, and therefore untouchable, to an idea of authority that finds its place in the ambit of negotiation; on the other, this idea has also been transformed by the affirmation of the *equality* of all people, regardless of their condition, gender or age and the

⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 4.

⁷ Cfr. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 97, a. 1, solution.

⁸ Cfr. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 97, a. 2, solution.

affirmation of the spontaneity of persons who must *think for themselves*. That authoritarianism has – rightly – been condemned which is tied to a kind of manipulation and to the exercise of real violence. However, in this way the door is opened to the danger and the risk of submitting to a further sort of excess which is that of laxity and licentiousness.

1.1 The relational and dialogical model of the exercise of authority

In the document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life – CIVCSVA – “New wine, new skins”, we find this proposal that is radical and, at the same time, simple: let us rediscover fraternity. *In the broader vision of consecrated life elaborated by the Council, we have moved from the centrality of the role of authority to the centrality of the dynamic of fraternity. For this reason, authority can only be at the service of communion: a true ministry to accompany the brothers and sisters towards conscious and responsible fidelity*⁹. It follows from this that *the encounter between brothers [...] and listening to individual persons become the only place for a service of authority that is evangelical*¹⁰.

However, in consecrated life, there has somehow endured a vertical mentality of authority, characterised in these terms: *“Recourse to managerial techniques or the application of spiritually dominating or paternalistic modalities said to be expressions of the “will of God”, are harmful with respect to a ministry called to face up to the expectations of others, to daily reality and the values lived and shared in community*¹¹. *Of course, we cannot but be concerned, the document stresses, by styles and manners of governing that distance or contradict the spirit of service to the point of degenerating into forms of authoritarianism*¹².

Unlike this quite worrying sort of understanding, the invitations of the document quoted are in line with this desire for more horizontality;

⁹ CIVCSVA, *For new wine, new skins*, 41.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Cfr. ib.

¹² Cfr. ib. 43.

they encourage us to become aware of the fact that the mission of our Institute is a common project that necessitates collaboration: *That service of authority is to be encouraged which calls for collaboration and a common vision of the style of fraternity, is to be encouraged*¹³ to convince us that authority is, of itself, a service and not a means for self-affirmation by those who receive it¹⁴; to resist the temptation to resort, in the exercise of government, to authoritarian solutions¹⁵; to practise more the rotation of posts, and to promote inter-generation relationships within the Institute¹⁶. In light of these orientations, I am giving below some considerations on how to actualise the service of authority, drawn from my experience in consecrated life and in other ambits of collegial responsibility, presenting them within the horizon of “fraternity” sustained by the document cited.

1.2 The mentality of the times

The presentation of the considerations proposed here presupposes that the present interpretations of the organisational structures supporting consecrated life are part of the mentality of the times and may, therefore, be subject to the doubts of the surrounding culture of today regarding authority. A heavy relativisation of authority paradoxically exists alongside the demand that this be exercised without hesitation. Those who govern are faced with palpable nostalgia for paternalistic authority that will again respond to individual needs and counteract the anonymity that submerges the restructuring done by the Institute. At the same time, they must attend to the insistent request to empower more participating structures of government.

Between authoritarianism and laxity, we must, of course, seek a *middle term*, or more concretely, we need to define the *meaning*, the legitimacy and the *foundation* of authority, which is an aspect of education and on-going formation. Therefore, the reading, comprehension and actualisation of the content of the fourth part of the *Rule of Life*, dedicated to authority and the exercise of it, demands

¹³ Cfr. ib. 43.

¹⁴ Cfr. ib. 44.

¹⁵ Cfr. ib. 45.

¹⁶ Cfr. ib. 47.

reconsideration that is adequate for the times, especially in light of the growing multiculturalism of the Institute in as much as *a people is above all a repertoire of secrets that require effort to discover and understand them*¹⁷.

Just as the structures of communion— *the service of authority in the Institute* – may be considered from the canonical and theological-spiritual perspectives – two equally important perspective – it is unavoidable to take them into account in a balanced way when revising and revisiting the Rule of Life, even though the canonical perspective is the more difficult in that it requires much effort, hours of patient work and dialogue so as to be able to bring together in the canonical tradition the new things that the Holy Spirit brings about in the Institute, and the structures of government constitute, in communion or the theological-spiritual vision, a purely canonical dimension. Both perspectives represent the leading thread in the fabric of our present constitutional text. In this regard, the following considerations are very important: We must *re-compose a spirituality of the service of authority that contrasts the discrediting it is undergoing, the criticism it is subjected to by default, the exaggerated expectations of competence required of it, the inertia towards individualism that undermines awareness of the common good and the ingenuity of excessively horizontal models of authority. This spirituality would derive from a grace: that of recognising the value of mission that the service of authority has within itself and the potential of life for others that this mission involves*¹⁸.

1.3 Government and authority

The content of the fourth part of the Rule of Life has its roots in this fundamental conviction: action – missionary action in the case of the Institute – is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is like being unable to act. Both action and discourse need the presence of others. In support of this it is worthwhile remembering that Greek and Latin, unlike modern languages, have two different but connected words to

¹⁷ José Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas*, p. 247.

¹⁸ Francisco José Ruiz, *Odres nuevos para el gobierno*, in *Vida Religiosa*. Monografico. 122 (2017), 88 (536).

express the word “act”. To the Greek words *archein* (to begin, guide or to govern) and *prattein* (to cross, realise, complete) correspond the Latin words *agere* (cause to move, to guide) and *gerere* (whose original meaning is “to carry”). It is as if each action were divided into two parts, the beginning, done by only one person, and the end, where many join in “carrying” and “carrying out” the action with the contribution of each one. It is not only the words that are interconnected in a similar way but also the history of their use. In both cases, the word originally referred to the second part of the action, the conclusion – *prattein* and *gerere* – and this became the accepted word for action in general while those that referred to the start of the action assumed a precise meaning, at least in political language. *Archein* came to mean mainly *to govern* and *to guide*, when used in a specific way, while *agere* assumed the meaning of “guiding” meaning “to cause to move”.

In this way, the role of initiator and guide, the *primus inter pares*, became that of the governor.

Authority presents itself under distinct forms. First of all as the charism or natural ascendancy of those who naturally know how to direct. Secondly, as a competence, as for example, that of an expert, the specialist or wise person, according to the Platonic images that portray political authority. Thirdly, as the management of leadership connected to a statute. In all three cases, the concept of authority implies a vertical relationship or at least a certain hierarchy. The first form of authority may appear ambiguous to the degree that, both in education and formation and in politics, it may be exercised for better or for worse. The second, competence, is easily justified in as much as one controls the object and the others agree to its exercise. The third, the statute, is often criticised as arbitrary and artificial, in as much as it is not justified by a real competence at the service of others. Nevertheless, it is in the field of competence that we see a slippage of the concept of authority among the youth and adults, a difference of place and position in time.

It is in this context, we maintain, it becomes necessary to have leadership that is born from listening to the Holy Spirit in a community that shows, with its own life, a journey that is possible and real, without losing that dependence-transcendence that shows in an unambiguous way the light of closeness to God.

It is a matter, first of all, of leadership that knows where it is going; that has an itinerary and knows how to show it, to communicate and to inspire. For this reason it must immerse itself in the real contingencies of the Institute it serves. It must know how to simplify, to generate changes so as to restore life to the community; it must give drive, it must support and oversee changes so that they do not deviate from the charismatic power; it must be the leaders who develop it with the desire that it be evangelical as it has no sense being so out of duty or because there is no other remedy or because it is the only way; it must be capable of building up that plural communion that is the Institute in which, thanks to the mediation of a leadership that is choral and prophetic, initiatives and possibilities coexist, complementarity and novelty. Knowing that the mission is the soul of the community, authority must be exercised by men who discover the joy of guiding a people journeying through the desert with illusions and promises, complaints and memories, with tendencies towards efficiency and excellence as well as signs of death. In this way, therefore, the questions surrounding governance and authority impact on the style of leadership from the point of view of accepting and putting it into practice: *The justification of authority depends very much on the manner with which it is assumed and exercised. Today, just any style whatever is not enough*¹⁹.

In speaking of the ministry of authority, it is necessary to reflect concerning responsibility for third parties, even if just symbolically and in view of regulation. These may be the confreres. Three constitutive elements flow together here which are the concept of governing and being governed, of government and power, and the regulated order that accompanies it, and here we come to personalisation and discernment: *In the Gospel, the person is essential. It proposes no abstract commandments, valid in themselves, without and reference to who proposes them or who communicates them. The Gospel works with reminders and exhortations to people to carry out initiatives for the benefit of others. This is because it is in the person that the mission finds surprising sources of gratuity, of heroism in giving oneself, the creation of brotherly relations, of availability and*

¹⁹ Francisco José Ruiz, *Odres nuevos para el gobierno*, in *Vida Religiosa*. Monografico. 122 (2017), 75 (523).

*solidarity, of adaptability in service above and beyond traditions. [...] Leadership [...] must be convinced of the priority of the [...] cura personalis*²⁰. This, consequently, requires going beyond, going to the roots, in search of an instance before which one may give an account of the exercise of authority, since it is a matter of finding the only thing upon which one may truly base, in its *radicalness*, the meaning of human life and a personal life; characterised, at the same time, by the singularity and the *unconditional value* that derives from it.

In any case, those who govern and exercise authority will have to be rich in humanity and respectful sensibility in interpersonal relations since man's will and reason express themselves, on the one hand, with words and, on the other, also with deeds, given that each person shows that he prefers what he achieves by action²¹. In this regard, it is a help to clarification to read this text of a man who lived in very difficult times and offers this advice: *Good farmers do not only grow trees that are straight and tall but they give those trees whose growth has been somehow deformed supports that help them to become straight; with other trees they trim the branches all round so that they do not prevent tall growth; other trees that are weak due to the dryness of the soil they manure; for other trees suffering due to the shade of intrusive plants they open up the sky*²². Good workers are needed today in our Institute, people who will take care of the straight, tall trees; straighten those that are crooked, prune those that are exuberant, nourish the weak and open the sky for those suffering in their growth due to invasive shadows that deprive them of light.

Conclusion

The exercise of authority demands of those called to this ministry above all else integral humanity, spiritual health and an enterprising style so that the Institute may be a place of mercy, less vertical and more synodic; it demands fidelity and prudence since anger is the principle behind the ruin of good governance. The organisation we

²⁰ Francisco José Ruiz, *Odres Nuevos para el gobierno*, in *Vida Religiosa*. Monografico. 122 (2017), 75-76.

²¹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Teologica*, I-II, q. 97, a. 3, solution.

²² Seneca, *De clementia*, Parte II, cap. 5.

have adopted to carry out the mission, expounded in the fourth part of the *Rule of Life*, is cordial, full of faith but also complex. In this perspective, the content of the fourth part of the *Rule of Life* may be interpreted as the expression of an Institute still under construction, where each one feels accompanied by the Holy Spirit and in fraternity. Anyone called to exercise authority should ask the Lord to grant him the audacity of the prophet, the strength of the witness, the far-sightedness of the master, the certainty of the guide, the patience of a father and the closeness of a brother to commence, in those entrusted to his care, while being founded upon the Holy Spirit and allowing himself to be guided by the wise counsels of his similars, the accomplishment of the humble desire to participate in the redeeming work of Christ²³. To govern is, by definition and in the final analysis, an act of love, the giving of life. Love is demanding; it requires the use of better resources to reawaken passion and start to journey with patience together with one's brothers. In the Institute, anyone exercising the service of authority must of course be competent and qualified, but above all and before all else, he must be rich in humanity, avoiding in all things and with everybody, any improper talk or acts, while caring for unity in diversity, identity in differences and in all things charity, since all are friends to each other in the mandate to spread "the perfume of the Gospel" (EG 39) and guarding with joy and creativity what we have inherited from St. Daniel Comboni.

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The feast of Saint Augustine

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²³ Cf. LG 45.