

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Circular 459
September 23rd, 2008



**Convocation of the Process
for the Revision of the Rule
of the Brothers of the
Christian Schools**

General Council
Rome, Italy

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“It is becoming urgent today for each Institute to take a fresh look at the renewal of its Rule... Greater attention to the Rule will provide consecrated persons with guide-lines on how to become living witnesses in the world of today, whilst never neglecting the ideas which inspired the beginnings of their institute”. (V.C. 37)

Dear Brothers,

We send you our best wishes for your health and we encourage you to continue in the mission you have been asked to undertake “*with open eyes and burning hearts*”.

Our objective in this circular is to set in motion the processes for revising the Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, as has been requested by General Chapters 43 and 44.

Therefore our intention is

- a) To suggest some considerations which will place the work in its context and encourage us in the work we are about to undertake.
- b) To fix a time-table for discussions among all members of the Institute, and for the preparation of written study papers to be presented to the 45th General Chapter of 2014.
- c) To publicize the names of the members of the different commissions appointed for the various steps in the work.

I. Why is a revision of the Rule necessary?

There are several reasons why the Institute is undertaking this revision. We want to point out here some of the more important reasons. It will be the task of the commission working on the different preparatory phases to give fuller details.

We believe that the Institute in general considers that the present Rule is a document of great value and a necessary guide for our lives. With the help of our present Rule a new generation of Brothers has grown up, and we have found that the Brothers consider it the clearest indication of God's will for us in this present age¹. Today, that Rule is fully in vigour and inspires the life of the Institute.

We must always remember that the recipients of the Rule are the Brothers themselves and that therefore the Rule must follow three principles:

- It must show our identity in the Church and Society.
- It must be a guide for the life of the Institute and that of each Brother.
- It must give guidelines for the animation, government and the mission of the Institute.

Our present Rule was published in 1986. It was the result of many draft versions produced after 1960. However since then, we cannot deny that there have been huge changes in the world, the Institute and the Brothers' lives.

- Today there is a widely accepted conviction that we are living at the dawn of a new era. These circumstances urge us to seek new guidelines for interpreting and directing our life and mission, without neglecting all that is best in our

past history.

- We Brothers live in a social and ecclesiastical situation outside of which our life has no meaning. It is evident that our world is totally different from the one in which, three centuries ago, were forged the basic elements of our identity; a world different also from that of the seventies and eighties, when the latest version of the Rule was written and published.
- In recent decades some questions have been asked about the significance of the Brother in the Church and Society. We have cultivated and studied the value and the important role of our Vow of Association. A fresh understanding has led us to place our Vow of Association at the pinnacle of our five vows².
- In recent years, we have also noticed a more and more insistent request from seculars to share our Lasallian mission, charism and spirituality. That is why it is important in this new situation to reconsider the importance of the Brother's life. Moreover, there have arisen in the Institute and even in some Districts new animation and governmental structures which are not mentioned in our present Rule.
- Since Vatican II the Church has identified itself with the expression "*People of God*" and has defined its nature according to an ecclesiology of the "*People of God-Communion*". This ecclesiology is *central and fundamental in the documents proceeding from the Council and is considered the best manner of expressing its divine purpose for the salvation of humanity*³.

One of the most evident results of this ecclesiology has been the recognition that every form of Christian life is based on our common baptismal vocation and the univer-

sal call to holiness, which impels us, lay and religious, to give witness to the one Lord Jesus⁴.

The ecclesiology of communion has wide-ranging consequences for the life of the Church and of Religious life. This is the situation in which nowadays we see our identity and the way we live our charism. Moreover, realising that the communion to which we are called goes further than our own religious families, it urges them to open themselves to communion and collaboration with other forms of consecrated and lay evangelical life⁵; in our case with those who share the Lasallian charism.

- The 43rd General Chapter, of 2000, concentrated its efforts on renewing the sense of our common call to live in association for the educational service of the poor and it invited us specifically to forge our links of association. Aware of the changes in the Church and Institute, the Chapter asked that an “ad hoc” commission be set up “to study the implications of changes in the Church and in the Institute for the present text of the Rule”⁶.

Following that injunction, the Superior and his Council did establish the commission which began its work in February 2004.

As happened with the revision accepted by the 39th General Chapter (1966-67), the members of the commission began their work concentrating on a simple updating of certain constitutions and statutes, without aiming at a complete revision of the Rule⁷.

The Commission, which preferred to be called an “ad hoc committee” in dialogue with Brother Superior General and his Council, managed, by the end of 2005, to produce a document as a basis for a later editing which was titled “referring to the work of the ad hoc committee of the Rule”.

This was sent out to the whole Institute in the preparatory phases of the 44th General Chapter. In that Chapter there was a general feeling that *a few small changes in the Rule just then, would be a waste of time*⁸.

- Some districts were able to convoke meetings to share ideas on the document, but the centre of the Institute had not organised a centralised collection for of these reflections. As the document quite rightly indicated, their intention had been to *initiate discussion, not to bring discussion to a conclusion*⁹.
- At the beginning of the Chapter no one considered it unreasonable for the matter of the Rule to be dealt with at that moment, however, once the members had begun to work on it, they realised that certain other issues should be dealt with first.

Therefore, the 44th Chapter decided on the need to revise the Rule as follows:

“We require that under the authority of the Brother Superior and his Council, a commission be set up to finalise, after dialogue with the Institute, a revision of the Rule. If the Superior General and his Council consider it necessary, they will call for an extraordinary General Chapter or a session of the ordinary General Chapter of 2014, to submit for consideration a proposed revision of the Rule”¹⁰.

II. Aspects to be considered in the revision of the Rule

a) The Gospel is our first and principal Rule

From the very beginnings of religious life the Word of God has been the supreme norm for all communities which follow Jesus's footsteps. Reference to the Gospel is the "*conditio sine qua non*" for Religious life today and yesterday. In them, we Brothers must continue to find the first principles for the discernment of our own vocation and the guide when we make the decisions which best guarantee the fidelity of the Institute to the purposes of its foundation: "*to assure the human and Christian education of young people, especially the poor*"¹¹.

The unique purpose of Religious Life has always been the *constant and passionate search for the will of God*¹². In this search, the Rule is an indispensable map showing the roads indicated in the Gospel and which we must take in order personally to meet God. Like Jesus, we also are invited *to listen and to obey the voice of the Father*¹³ and *to allow ourselves to be guided by his Spirit*¹⁴.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle understood as much when he asked us to show deep respect for Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospel, *our first and principal Rule*¹⁵. Taking as his model the Rule of Saint Augustine, he reminds us that *those who live in community, must above all, love God and next their neighbour*¹⁶.

The commandment of love is the synthesis and culmination of the Law; the personal Law of God is love, because *God is*

*love*¹⁷. This is also our personal law for we are called to be in freedom his living images. *The Rule is an instrument in the service of love. Love is its reason and purpose*¹⁸.

With similar intention Pope Benedict XVI says: “A resurgence of religious life cannot be achieved if it does not attempt to lead a life fully based on the Gospel, or if it does not make everything subjective to Love, to the meeting with Christ, and to finding in his Word a deep understanding of the charism of every new foundation”¹⁹.

The new version of the Rule must always maintain in the first place the radical nature of living according to the Gospel. Therefore the directions of the present Rule remain valid. Let us renew our efforts to find in Sacred Scripture *the fount and fundamental nourishment of our prayer. Let us read, study, meditate and share together the Word*²⁰. This is the best method of preparing ourselves for the work we are asked to do.

b) Revising the Rule: In the best Lasallian traditions and spirit.

We Brothers are the heirs of a tradition which makes us authentic embodiments of our history. An aspect of that tradition is participative community sharing that has evolved throughout the centuries and can be seen in the documents that have given direction to our lives and mission. This common sharing is a way to assure the best possible discernment of the signs of the times and of the will of God.

We are blessed to be able to refer to the example of de La Salle and the first Brothers on how they produced their “*Daily Rule*” in 1681. They made several decisions in “*Assemblies*” from 1686 onwards, and they agreed to consecrate

their lives to God in 1694. Then, in 1705, they decided on the draft of the first “*Common Rules*”²¹.

Our Rule, which had been approved for the first time in 1947, was subjected to unprecedented changes in the 39th General Chapter. The influence of Council documents, the impact of “Lasallian Studies”²² and the notes sent in from communities helped the capitulants to draw up a new Rule. This was to be lived “*ad experimentum*” for twenty years, until its revision by the 41st General Chapter and its full implementation on the 7th April 1987.

We can affirm that up to the present time, the most inspiring documents of the Institute are the result of work accomplished according to the real spirit of our Lasallian tradition: that is *by discernment in community*. For this discernment, there exists no surer method than by prayer, by fraternal dialogue, and by listening to the Word of God and to the voice of people, particularly the poor.

c) Revising the Rule: a responsibility and a privilege of each and every Brother.

The process of revising the Rule requires in the first place a dialogue with every area of the Institute, in which we aim at as many Brothers as possible taking part: “*Each Brother, no matter how old he is, has a responsibility to assure the vitality of the Institute*”²³. Every Brother, no matter what his present mission, is called to give the best of himself so that the Rule can continue to *define what is most significant in the life of the Brothers in interpreting for our world of today the same intentions that were indicated in the Rule of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*²⁴.

Revising the Rule will help us to live “*together and by association,*” whilst living in the present and keeping an eye on the future. That will be the goal of our expectations, in spite of the diversity and plurality that the Brothers represent, and the best guarantee of the success of the labour which the 44th General Chapter has asked of us.

Undertaking this responsibility is a way of living our Vow of Association. There is no doubt that it is a responsibility which each of us should accept as a privilege.

III. Plan of dialogue for the revision of the Rule

The reflection of each Brother in the Institute will be taken into consideration, through this process, to reach its final stage in the General Chapter that will decide definitively on any changes in the Rule.

The Secretary General will receive the suggestions of the various stages, have translations done and documents prepared for the Committees and the Brothers.

The Vicar General will serve as the liaison with the committees and the General Council and will oversee the process.

The reflection will take place in two stages.

Stage One:

- ***November 2008 to September 2009***

The aim of stage one

The first phase will be a reflection on our Rule and our present reality, asking the Brothers, individually, as communities, Districts and Regions to discern if there are gaps between the Rule and our reality and to communicate these reflections to the worldwide Institute.

Process

This will be accomplished with the help of an instrument drawn up by a commission chosen by the Superior General. This instrument will be one that encourages in depth reflection. During this first phase, we hope that the whole Institute will be engaged in the Revision of the Rule process.

The commission will be representative of the Regions and will also be composed of Brothers who have skills in managing processes of reflection and in synthesizing. This committee will receive and synthesize the suggestions and ideas that come from the Brothers drawing up a report that will take note of converging points and points that differ. This report will be presented to the Superior General and the Council.

Upon presentation of this report, the commission will cease to function.

Stage Two:

Aim of Stage Two

The second phase will consist in an Institute-wide reflection on the responses to the reflection from the first stage and creation of a three successive drafts of the revisions to the Rule the final of which would be presented to the Chapter that has the final authority over changes in the Rule.

The second stage of the Reflection will be managed by a second commission composed of Brothers with specific expertise in the Rule, the Founder and history of the Institute, the theology of religious life and some ability in languages of the Institute. The second commission will include two members of the first commission to insure continuity as well as new members to take a fresh look at the ideas.

- ***October 2009 to September 2010***

The Stage Two Committee will draw up revisions in the text of Rule based on the reflections from Stage One and present

them to the Superior and General Council for discussion. Subsequently they will be sent to the Institute for a second in-depth reflection. Reactions from the reflection will be sent to the Secretary General.

- ***October 2010 to February 2011***

The committee will draw the reactions and suggestions of the Brothers and present them as a second draft to the Superior and the Council for reflection and discussion. This draft will be sent to the Brothers for a process of reflection and reaction. Suggestions will be sent back to the Secretary General. These will be studied and synthesized.

- ***May 2011***

These reactions of the Brothers will be presented to the Inter-Capitular Meeting for reflection, discussion and suggestions.

- ***June 2011 to September 2012***

The Committee will draft a third revision and based on the reflections of the inter-capitular meeting, present the draft to the Superior and Council for discussion and then propose the revisions to the 45th General Chapter.

IV. Brothers appointed to the Rule commission

Consultant for the design of the project: Bro. Armin Luistro (Philippines-PARC)

Phase One

The Committee for Phase One

- Bro. Ambrose Payne (ANZPNG-PARC) - Coordinator
- Bro. Michael French (Midwest-USA/T)
- Bro. Edgard Hengemüle (Porto Alegre-RELAL)
- Bro. José Manuel Agirrezabalaga (Bilbao-RELEM)
- Bro. Pierre Ouattara (Afrique de l'Ouest-RELAF)
- Bro. André Pierre Gauthier (France-RELEM)
- Bro. Maurice Lapointe (Canada francophone)
- Bro. Alain Houry (Secretary)

Phase Two

The Committee for Phase Two

- Bro. Edgard Hengemüle (Porto Alegre-RELAL)
- Bro. André-Pierre Gauthier (France-RELEM)
- Bro. Leonardo Tejeiro (Procurator General)
- Bro. Antonio Botana (Central of Spain-RELEM)
- Bro. Michael Valenzuela (Philippines-PARC)
- Bro. Mario Presciuttini (Italy-RELEM)
- Bro. William Mann (LI-NE-USA/T)
- Bro. Bruno Alpago (Argentina-Paraguay-RELAL)
- Bro. François Pennec (France-RELEM)

Bro. Christy Croos (Colombo-PARC)
Bro. Jean Luc Traoré (Afrique de l'Ouest-RELAF)
Bro. Jorge Daniel Vásquez (Ecuador-RELAL)
Bro. André Jacq (France-RELEM)
Bro. Alain Houry (Secretary)

Consultants for phase two:

Bro. Valère Adonsou (Golfe du Bénin-RELAF)
Bro. Esteban de Vega (Valladolid-RELEM)
Bro. Peter Iorlano (LI-NE-USA/T)
Bro. Aidan Kilty (Great Britain-RELEM)
Bro. Ricky Laguda (Philippines-PARC)
Bro. Francis Ricousse (France-RELEM)
Bro. Sean Sellors (Great Britain-RELEM)
Bro. Carlos Gómez (Bogotá-RELAL)
Bro. Luis Antonio Martínez (Valladolid-RELEM)
Bro. Larry Schatz (Midwest-USA/T)
Bro. Santiago Rodríguez (Argentina-Paraguay-RELAL)
Bro. Miguel Campos (Baltimore-USA/T)
Bro. Jaume Pujol (Catalunya-RELEM)
Bro. José Diego Díaz (Bogotá-RELAL)

V. Conclusion

Brothers, this new revision of the Rule should really help us to re-affirm the spiritual nature of our personal life, and give new life to those aspects which assure the reality of our identity. The changes which we hope to consider will help us to read the signs of the times, to make fruitful and further reflection on the Church and on Religious Life and solidify the basis lived by the Institute in its ideal of Association and Mission.

We must in no way ever forget that the central tenet of our consecrated life continues to be *the search for God*, indicated by our undertaking to love and be in union with our Brothers, and, in these day also, with those secular Brothers and Sisters who together with ourselves are intent on the mission of the Institute.

Let us be open to God's inspiration, let us be aware of the needs of our world and particularly of the needs of the children and young people of today, who need salvation.

They, more than anyone, will lead us to where God awaits us and where people and the Church need us most. We were born for them and to be near them, and it is they who will give us the best understanding of our option for our life and mission.

We earnestly desire that the work of revision of the Rule, that we now begin, will be genuinely enlightened by the Spirit of God, who continues to guide our history as He did in the days of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. No person or anything other than the Holy Spirit can *help us better to return once more to our origins, to fill our hearts with the fire of His love and*

renew the face of the Institute. Let us be carried along by the indefinable breath of the Spirit, let us listen together to the Spirit's voice and let us all devote ourselves to discerning His will with the prayerful faith shown by Our Blessed Lady, by Saint Joseph, Patron of our Institute, and by St. John Baptist de La Salle.

Once more, let us give back to our life as Brothers all its *enchantment*²⁵. Let us show with contagious joy and enriching optimism that we are people profoundly in love with God and happy when in His presence. In this way, our Institute will continue to be a sign of God's care in the world, a sign, too, of a way of living according to the Gospel, and a privileged manner of following Jesus.

The fact itself of the revision is of the greatest significance for everyone. We will try to bring about during the next few years a genuine renovation and interior conversion in the Institute. We hope that those who see and hear us will question themselves when they see the strength of our *faith and zeal* as we perform our work of charity. There is no more successful pastoral work for vocations to our Institute than the sincere and enthusiastic witness of a disciple of Jesus and follower of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

Brothers, knowing that *the life and progress of our Institute depend on the mystery and power of grace*²⁶, why not make this an opportunity for real "*Kairos*" in order to grasp with our own hands this Institute, which continues to be *of great necessity*²⁷? Thus it will follow the plans which God, in His Providence, has made for it.

If we do this, we shall be true witnesses of His presence for the children and young people whom we educate, and the

Light which we carry within us will shine bright enough so that all who see our good works will give thanks to the God of Heaven²⁸.

*Superior General
General Council*

Rome, 23 September 2008

Anniversary of the publication of the first extant
manuscript copy of the Rule of
the Brothers of the Christian Schools.
Avignon 23-September-1905.

NOTES

¹ Cf. Rule of 1987 Art. 49b.

² Cf. Circular 455, (Association 1.3).

³ Cf. Chistifidelis laici, 19.4.

⁴ Cf. Lumen Gentium, 41.

⁵ Cf. Consecrated persons and their mission in the School n° 5.

⁶ Circular 447, Proposition 38.

⁷ Cf. Reference to the work of the “ad hoc” committee on the Rule p 6.

⁸ Reference to the work of the “ad hoc” committee on the Rule p 8.

⁹ Reference to the work of the “ad hoc” committee on the Rule p 9.

¹⁰ Circular 455, Government and Animation, IV, p 55.

¹¹ Rule of 1987 Art. 3.

¹² Perfectae Charitatis, 5.

¹³ Cf. Mk 9,7.

¹⁴ Cf. Lk 4,16-30.

¹⁵ Cf. Common Rules, chapter II.

¹⁶ Common Rules, chapter XVI.

¹⁷ Cf. 1John 4, 16.

¹⁸ Cf. Introduction to the Rule, 2002 edition.

¹⁹ Cf. Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Plenary CICLSAL, 5/09/2005.

²⁰ Cf. Rule of 1987 Art. 6,50,67.

²¹ Date of the earliest manuscript of the Common Rules.

²² Created by the General Chapter of 1956.

²³ Rule of 1987 Art. 145.

²⁴ Cf. Rule of 1987 Art. 147.

²⁵ Cf. Br. Álvaro R.E. “Address to the Congress of Religious Life”.

²⁶ Cf. Rule of 1987 Art.142.

²⁷ Rule of 1987 Art. 141.

²⁸ Cf Mt 5,16.