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General and Particular Regulations

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5.

**GENERAL AND PARTICULAR
REGULATIONS**

INTRODUCTION

Reflections on the Past finished with a very painful question. Poullart des Places felt obliged to ask himself whether he had taken the wrong road in beginning the 'foundation for the poor scholars'. He gives the impression that he is quite willing to give up the whole work if God shows him that he has made a mistake. We have no idea whatsoever how this spiritual crisis was resolved. What is certain is that Claude Francis, no doubt on the advice of his spiritual director, continued his work. Six months after his retreat, on 6th June 1705, his patronal feast, he received minor orders. Though he had decided to live as a poor man with poor scholars, he was obliged to accept a very small rent of sixty livres a year so as to advance to the subdiaconate. This was the minimum demanded by the Bishop of Rennes from all his seminarians, even the poorest (*Michel*, pp 182-183). Furnished with this title he was ordained subdeacon on 18th December 1706, deacon on 19th March 1707 and finally priest on 17th December the same year.

He had not waited to be a priest to give a rule to his community. We possess a manuscript of sixty-four pages written in his own hand entitled *Regulations, General and Particular*. 'Several notes have been added in the margin, all of which, with one or two exceptions, are in M. Bouic's hand. On the last page written in M. Thomas's hand is this note: All these rules and regulations were drawn up by the late M. Desplaces, written in his own hand and put into practice by himself and his students' (*Michel*, p. 340). M. Bernard, Grignon de Montfort's biographer, also bears witness to the fact that the founder gave to his community 'rules full of wisdom which he got some very experienced individuals to examine and approve; he was himself the first to practice what he recommended to others' (*Koren*, p. 284).

These pages mirror the daily life of Claude Francis Poullart des Places till the moment of his death at the early age of thir-

ty on 2nd October 1709, scarcely twenty months after his ordination to the priesthood. The document also shows the spirit he wanted to give to his work. As we recently wrote in another place: 'To tell the truth, a Rule never makes gripping reading. As we read the Rule of Poullart des Places, we are reminded first of all that he was a lawyer, that he knew the utility of giving details, of not leaving anything vague, and thus sometimes one gets the impression of *minutiae*. But we must also recall that it was written for students, most of whom did not have at first a habit of life in community and had to be trained in the meaning of common life. At first, the founder directed the community all by himself, and had the students help him with different tasks. . . . Thus, little by little, the very demands of the work which had been undertaken led them to form a true community of *formatores* to direct the seminar-ians. But there was only one rule for everybody, directors and students, and it is by these first rules that the future Spiritan rule was directly inspired' (*Spiritan Papers*, no. 5, 1978, p. 4).

Father Koren published the Regulations in full. In that edition marginal numbers which help to give the references to the different articles were added to the text. These numbers have been retained with the division into chapters and articles as they are in the manuscript. This time it does not seem possible to publish the entire document. We will include only those rules which reveal more deeply the founder's spiritual physiognomy and the spirit he wanted to foster in his work.

GENERAL AND PARTICULAR REGULATIONS

CHAPTER ONE: FUNDAMENTAL RULES

Article One

The House, Its Consecration¹ and Its Directors

1. All the students will adore in a special way the Holy Spirit, to whom they have been particularly consecrated.² To this they will add a personal devotion to the Blessed Virgin, through whose protection they have been offered to the Holy Spirit.³

2. As their two principal feasts they will choose Pentecost and the Immaculate Conception. The first they will celebrate to obtain from the Holy Spirit the fire of divine love;⁴ the

¹ The original word in French is 'dévouement' which in the context means consecration.

² The house had been opened at Pentecost. While the special consecration mentioned refers no doubt to this, it means far more. The research of Fathers Le Floch and Michel has shown that Claude Francis acquired his devotion to the Holy Spirit in his native Brittany. Through the influence of Father Lallement, S.J., a strong current of devotion to the Holy Spirit spread throughout the province during the 17th century and reached Nantes and Rennes. This movement certainly influenced Poullart des Places (*Michel*, pp 147-156).

³ Perhaps there is a reference here to the spot where the inaugural ceremony took place. According to an oral tradition this was the chapel of Our Lady of Rescue in the church of St Stephen. However the formula goes much further than that; the founder counts on the protection of our Lady to make sure that all his students belong entirely to the Holy Spirit to whom he has 'offered' them.

⁴ This is the special grace which Poullart des Places makes the basic principle of his work: charity which the Holy Spirit spreads among souls like a devouring fire and whose source is in God.

second to obtain from the Blessed Virgin an angelic purity.⁵ Their piety will be grounded in these two virtues.

Article Two

Admission of Students

5. In this house we shall only admit students whose poverty, conduct and aptitude for study are known to us.

6. We can never admit under any circumstances a student who can pay for his board in another establishment. However we could admit a few students who, although they are not desperately poor, are not able to keep themselves anywhere else. It will be good to ask these for a contribution towards the ordinary expenses of the house so as to make sure that the number of poor students, who should always be given first preference, does not diminish.⁶

Article Three

Conditions of Residence

11. Generally students will not reside in the house for more than two years after they have finished their theology. They will spend these two years studying moral theology and canon law, in both of which they will be allowed to take a degree.⁷

⁵ In this choice of the Immaculate Conception Poullart des Places shows how he is influenced by the Jesuits, ardent defenders of the Immaculate Conception against the Jansenists and others. It also makes us realize that this 'angelic purity' does not simply involve corporal chastity but is an attempt to imitate as closely as possible Mary who was exempt from the least stain of sin.

⁶ This rule shows that the Holy Ghost Community caters for aspirants to the priesthood who cannot pay their way anywhere else. This echoes very well the intentions of the Council of Trent in Session 23, *De Reformatione*, canon 18. Talking of seminaries the Fathers say: 'The Council wishes that first choice be given to the sons of poor people; the rich are not excluded as long as they provide for themselves and show clearly that they intend to serve God and the Church'.

⁷ Here the word 'theology' means dogmatic theology or doctrine which, together with sacred Scripture, they studied at the Jesuit College of St Louis

20. No one will omit hearing Mass, doing his meditation and spiritual reading and making his examination of conscience every day, except that on Saturday evening a talk will replace the reading.

21. Before leaving the house to go elsewhere, all will meet in the chapel so as to put themselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE DIFFERENT DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS COMMON TO ALL

Article One

Prayer and Other Exercises of Piety

26. Every morning there will be a little more than half an hour's vocal and mental prayer. The first of these will be the same every day and will last half a quarter of an hour so as to allow almost half an hour for the second. The subject of the second may be different each day.

27. Before dinner every day a quarter of an hour will be given to the particular examination of conscience.

28. Three times a day all will recite the Angelus together with the prayer *Per sanctam* to preserve a great purity of mind and body.

le Grand which could not confer degrees; this privilege was reserved to the university. The reason for going to Louis le Grand seems to have been twofold: 1) so as to be certain of an orthodox teaching free from every taint of Jansenism and Gallicanism, and 2) because the expenses involved in taking degrees were very great whereas the new foundation had as its aim 'to train by a hard and laborious life, and in a spirit of disinterestedness, parish clergy, missionaries and other ecclesiastics who would serve in poor parishes and in the most abandoned posts for which the bishops could hardly get any personnel' (Letters patent of 2nd May 1726; *Le Floch*, pp. 574-575). These drawbacks did not hold to the same extent in the study of moral theology and canon law (cf *Michel*, pp 202-204).

30. Before every period of study or revision all will invoke the light of the Holy Spirit to enable them to do useful work. For that they will recite the *Veni Sancte*, adding an *Ave Maria* in honour of the Blessed Virgin to obtain this light from her Spouse. The same prayer will be said before spiritual reading, and the *Sub tuum praesidium* and so on at the end.⁸

31. All will recite the Office of the Holy Spirit every day.

36. Assistance at holy Mass with the greatest possible respect can never be recommended too highly. No one should ever miss Mass unless he is so sick that he cannot leave the house.⁹

37. All will go to Confession every week. As regards holy Communion, individuals are highly recommended to go even more frequently, but always according to the advice of their spiritual directors.¹⁰

42. No one will ever leave for town to go to class or to some other place, even when going out alone on business, without visiting some church or other to adore the Blessed Sacrament. The same rule holds good for the return home.

⁸ Here once again there is question of devotion to the Holy Spirit and to the Blessed Virgin. It is worth while noting that the term 'Spouse of the Holy Spirit' as used here was attributed to Mary by Father Lallement, *Spiritual Doctrine*, Bk 6, sect. 1, ch. 4, art. 2, and by his disciple, Father Le Grand who founded in Brittany an association of Priests of the Holy Spirit (cf *Michel*, p. 150). Poullart des Places's friend, Grignon de Montfort, also used it frequently.

⁹ Already in 'Fragments of a Personal Regulation' we noted the important place the sacrifice of the Mass held in the spiritual life of Poullart des Places. This particular rule must date from the time when there was as yet no priest-member of the community. Father Jean Le Roy was the first of Claude's collaborators to be ordained priest; this took place in 1705, two years after the foundation.

¹⁰ According to the custom then prevailing in the Church the privilege of receiving holy Communion once a week was reserved to very fervent souls. Frequent, even daily, Communion dates from Pope St Pius X.

Article Two

The Study of Holy Scripture, Philosophy and Theology

54. Finally in points of doctrine we exhort them to remain always attached to the decisions of the Church to which they should be faithful in all things.¹¹

Article Three

Liturgical Ceremonies, Sacred Eloquence and Catechetics

Article Four

Meals

67. To ensure greater uniformity nothing more will be served to the superior than to all others. All ought to find pleasure in being considered poor people who receive from providence whatever is put before them in the refectory.

69. No one will eat too quickly for that is gluttony, nor too slowly for that denotes sensuality.

70. All will be satisfied with what is served up without looking for something better. God gave us the sense of taste to help us to eat and not to flatter our sensuality. Anyone who has a taste for the things of the spirit is not so demanding nor so hard to please in the things of the body . . .

77. No one will ever complain that the food is badly prepared or that such and such a seasoning is missing. Feelings of this kind should never be made known by gestures. . . . A slightly mortified person, which we all should be, eats indis-

¹¹ This article taken as a whole shows how serious were the studies in the Community of the Holy Ghost. *Gallia Christiana* (1744) tells us that Poulart des Places used to say: "The zeal of a pious cleric without learning is blind; whereas a learned cleric without piety is always in danger of becoming a heretic and a rebel within the Church" (*Gallia Christiana*, V 11, col. 1043). This solicitude for fidelity to the Church is of prime importance. No doubt it is the main reason for avoiding the University courses which were often Gallican and Jansenist, as mentioned above in note 7.

criminally whatever is put before him. He will find everything agreeable if he considers that his God quenched his thirst with gall and vinegar.¹²

Article Five

Recreation

Article Six

Modesty

95. All will avoid slothful, easy-going postures as well as the tricks of a self-love fully occupied in seeking its own comfort everywhere to the detriment of modesty.

98. All will avoid... letting their eyes linger on well dressed people, on furniture, rich coaches and worldly accoutrements. When our eyes wander easily towards such things we begin to think of pleasure, of the world and of vanity.

113. We recommend that all practise cleanliness carefully. It is quite possible to be tidy in very poor clothes.

Article Seven

Silence

116. All will make the least noise possible wherever they go.

117. No matter what we are doing, or what permission we have to talk to others, we will never speak in a loud voice for fear of disturbing the peace which ought always to prevail in the house.¹³

¹² It was not simply necessity or destitution that made Poullart des Places live a poor life and ask his disciples to do the same. He wanted them to imitate Jesus Christ who willingly chose the poverty and destitution of the cross.

¹³ The rules of silence are always based on this solicitude for the common good of all the members of the community. Respect for recollection is necessary for study and prayer.

Article Eight

Obedience

125. Nothing is more important for the well ordered running of the house than obedience. Nothing can be recommended more highly. It is a very great virtue to submit one's own will to that of another.

126. All will therefore obey promptly and joyfully.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE VARIOUS DUTIES OF INDIVIDUALS¹⁴

Article One Tutors

Article Two The Regulator and Assistant Regulator

Article Three The Librarian

Article Four The Sacristan and Assistant Sacristan

Article Five The Reader

Article Six The Bursar and Assistant Bursar

Article Seven The Steward and Assistant Steward

Article Eight The Lamp-lighter and Assistant Lamp-lighter

Article Nine The Wardrobe Keepers and their Assistants

Article Ten The Infirmarian and his Assistants

185. As soon as he learns that someone is sick the infirmarian will notify the superior. He will try to find out as soon as possible. He will be careful to give the sick all they need. He will encourage them to accept their sickness for the love of Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ Only very few details will be given about these different functions. The rules concerning them show great care for the good running of the house. The basic principle is given under no. 186 in reference to the infirmarian: 'to serve Jesus Christ in his brothers'.

186. He will not allow himself to be upset by the jobs which his function entails, such as emptying the chamber pots, making the beds, etc. He will undertake them in good heart for the love of God. He will serve the sick as though he were taking care of Jesus Christ himself.

Article Eleven The Master of Manual Labour

Article Twelve The Choirmasters

Article Thirteen The Refectorian and Assistant Refectorian

Article Fourteen The Waiters

Article Fifteen The Dishwashers

Article Sixteen The Porter and Assistant Porter

Article Seventeen The Tailor

Article Eighteen The Cook

Article Nineteen The Washroom Attendants

CHAPTER FOUR:

SOME OBSERVATIONS FOR THE SMOOTH RUNNING OF THE HOUSE

238. All will treat one another with uprightness, anticipating one another's needs, as the Apostle says, with all possible respect . . .¹⁵

250. On the way to and from Mass on free days and feastdays no talking is allowed. All should hold an interior conversation with God about the greatness of the sacrifice of holy Mass or about the happiness of receiving Communion if one has approached the holy table.

¹⁵ Cf Rom. 12,10: 'Love each other as much as brothers should, and have a profound respect for each other'. The respect referred to here and under no. 257 is politeness based on honour and good taste in our relations with others. It is an expression of fraternal charity, whatever forms it may take at different times and in different cultures.

256. Whenever we meet one another on the stairs, in the garden or anywhere else we must never fail to greet one another.

257. Likewise whenever anyone gives something to another or receives something from him both must remember to doff their hats and give or receive with the politeness befitting a Christian upbringing.

ALL THESE REGULATIONS WERE DRAWN UP BY THE LATE FATHER DES PLACES AND WRITTEN IN HIS OWN HAND AND PRACTISED BY HIM AND HIS STUDENTS.

*Je vous prie de m'excuser
de ne pas vous avoir
dit que j'étais à Paris
et de vous en dire
maintenant. P. Desplaces*