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Creative fidelity to hundred years of Pauline Charism

Group Work - 4 May 2010

WORKSHEET

Theme: THE NORMS OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PAUL AND THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Objective: Realise the complexity of the issue of the norms of the Society of Saint Paul in the context of canonical legislation and the praxis of the Congregation.

For consideration: the scope of this group work is a general reflection on the character and cohesion of our Congregational norms. Concrete decisions of legislative character can be made successively, during the time of programming for the next six years or through Capitular motions *ad hoc*.

I. MEETING OF THE GROUP

The group starts work soon after the introduction held in the Conference Hall and continues for the whole morning until **12:25**. The results shall be presented at the Capitular assembly in the afternoon at **15:00**. The one reporting must prepare his presentation after lunch.

• STEPS TO FOLLOW

- Given that for this issue the work is developed in groups created *ad hoc*, the meeting can begin, if necessary, with a quick self presentation of the members.
- The group elects a moderator who will guide the work and a reporter who must present to the assembly the results of the discussions.
- Personal reading of the contribution prepared by the “Preparatory Commission” follows. In reading the text, be aware that the contribution does not touch all the dimensions of the norms on religious and Pauline life.
- Each one tries to write on a piece of paper some notes on:

- 1) What is the difference between the *Constitutions* and the other normative rules proper to the Congregation;
- 2) Do our norms need amendments or adaptations; if yes, which amendments;
- 3) How are the following configured within the rules proper to the Society of Saint Paul – the *Directory SSP*, the *Service of Authority in the Society of Saint Paul. Manual*, the *Ratio formationis* and other general and particular norms;
- 4) If the *Service of Authority in the Society of Saint Paul. Manual* needs to be integrated in the *Directory*; if yes, in what way and to what extent;
- 5) If the *Ratio formationis* must be integrated in the *Directory*; if yes, in what way and to what extent;
- 6) What other aspects must be taken into consideration in the eventuality of a revision or amendment of the norms of the Congregation.

— Each member of the group presents the fruits of his personal reflection

— Discussion follows.

— The group tries to formulate its response to the following questions:

- 1) Do our norms need changes? Why?
- 2) What must be changed in the norms?
 - in reference to the *Constitutions*
 - in reference to the *Directory*
 - in reference to other normative documents
- 3) What steps are needed to change our norms?

II. INTRODUCTORY INPUT

1. The results of the pre-capitular questionnaire

Taking into account the operative guideline 4.2.2 of the VIII General Chapter, the pre-capitular questionnaire gathered the opinions of the confreres in virtue of the revision and updating of the legislative body of the Congregation.

In general, responses to the questions in the pre-capitular questionnaire regarding the renewal of the legislative body are lacking. It indicates a certain embarrassment regarding this argument. We can neither do less in observing the great disparity of opinions and expectations that is generally noted, in the area of

governance and laws. This “embarrassment” perhaps depends on the fact that the majority of the confreres do not consider themselves competent or sufficiently familiar with the argument. Comparatively however, there are others who show competence and give accurate counsels.

Results of the responses show that 20.80% do not like updating; 41.45% opt for update only of the *Directory* while 12.33% asks that there be updating only on “some parts”. The intent, as reflected by the first two options which states that the confreres are not in favour of updating the Constitutions, is therefore not to be underestimated. There is much greater consensus in updating the *Directory*. Here one cannot fail to note that the numerous and accurate observations report proposals of eventual modifications to be made either to the *Constitutions* or to the *Directory*. Concretely, the proposals refer to more than 100 articles.

More than 85% of the confreres give favourable assertion on the usefulness, at least partially, of the “Service of Authority in the SSP. Manual”. The possibility of integrating into a single legal rule the *Directory* and the “Service of Authority in the SSP. Manual” obtained a relative, although not an overwhelming, majority (48.38%). Probably it speaks of a question which has not yet arrived at maturity or at sufficient clarity for many confreres.

2. The rule proper to religious life

The Code of Canon Law brings to light two aspects of union and unity among the members of religious Institutes: one that is *more spiritual*, emanating from hearts which are animated by charity¹, and the other *more visible*, which consists «in living in one’s religious house legally constituted» and in «leading common life» through fidelity to the same norms, participation at common activity, and collaboration in common service². The religious community «is part of the organic community of the whole Church, is from the Spirit and always enriched with a variety of ministry and charisms»³. As in the universal Church where the charismatic and hierarchic aspects constitute a single fundamental structure (cfr. LG 4), so the religious, bond in a special way to the Church and her ministry (cfr. LG 44), are united in a body, «each according to his/her part» (1Cor 12:27). They form a community in which the multiplicity of the personal gifts of the Spirit find its expression «properly and in order» (1Cor 14: 40)

The fundamental norms which regulate the life of the Institutes of Consecrated Life are contained in the third part of the second book of the Code of Canon Law (ccc. 573-746). Each Institute is obliged to apply and develop them in its **proper rule** which must safeguard its vocation and identity along the lines of its foundational charism. The same Code of Canon Law refers to such legislation of individual

¹ cfr. CCC. 602.

² cfr. CCC. 608, 665 §1.

³ Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction *Fraternal Life in Community* (2 February 1994), 2.

Institutes at least 20 times. It gives them sufficient autonomy regarding questions of internal discipline and governance.

2.1. The fundamental Code

The most important document of rule proper to the SSP are the **Constitutions**⁴. The Code of Canon Law states that they must contain first of all «the mind and designs of the founders regarding the nature, purpose, spirit, and character of an Institute, which have been sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority, and its sound traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the same Institute » (ccc. 578). Likewise in view of the link between the principal spiritual inspirers of the Institute and its forms of apostolic life, the Constitutions must also contain «the fundamental norms relative to the governance of the Institute and the discipline of members, their incorporation and formation, and also the proper object of the sacred bonds» (ccc. 587). In this way, the Constitutions are the expressions and guide of the spirituality of the Institute and “rule of life” of all its members in the most profound sense of the word. For this the form of profession often contains reference to the Constitutions as in our case: «I vow [...] according to the Constitutions of the Society of Saint Paul Apostle» (*Constitutions SSP*, art. 123).

Considered the general and fundamental character of the Constitutions, the *Code of Canon Law* reserves to the Holy See the faculty to approve them and consent to their modifications (ccc. 587, § 2). It invites to adequately harmonize in them the spiritual and juridical elements, seeking above all not to multiply norms without necessity (ccc. 587, § 3).

2.2. Other norms of the proper rule

Subject to the Constitutions, all the other norms which govern aspects most detailed and changing are established and amended by the competent authority of the Institute itself. The *Code of Canon Law* underlines that these norms «could be reviewed and adapted conveniently according to the needs of the place and the times» (ccc. 587, § 4).

Mention of places and times allude to the fact that the proper rule, other than contain norms of general character to be applied to the whole Institute (e.g. the *Directory of the SSP*), is also articulated in a series of rules valid only in a particular organisational structure (e.g. the Statutes of the Regions or Rules of Apostolic Structure). The particular norms allows for the fundamental principles of the Institute to be specified and to be adapted in diverse cultural, social, judicial and economic situations in which the Institute operates.

The rule proper must be reviewed and adapted periodically. Normativity is in fact not identical with irreformability. The Institutes establish the modalities and define the competence of the organs of authority according to the diverse organisational models.

⁴ ccc. 587 speaks of «fundamental code, or constitutions», recognising the diversity of terms used by different Institutes to indicate this document..

2.3. Rule proper to the Society of Saint Paul

In the case of the Society of Saint Paul, the *Constitutions* give the power to enact and to modify the **general and particular norms** first of all at the General Chapter: «The General Chapter can [...] enact new particular rules and revise the General Directory, in conformity with the Constitutions and common Directory » (Art. 218). The normative character also contains the programming of the General Chapter, even if its value is limited in time «until the following Chapter» (Art. 218). For the validity of the legislative decisions of the General Chapter the majority of two thirds of the votes is needed. The same majority is necessary for the presentation to the Holy See of the requests to modify the Constitutions (Art. 219).

The *Constitutions* and the *Directory* provide various forms of **particular norms**, limited as to a place and sometimes as to time. The Statute of the Region, elaborated in collaboration with the members of the Region, is approved by the Superior General with the consent of his Councilors (*Directory*, Art. 182.2 and 206.2/1). The Provincial Chapters plan the programming of the Province (*Constitutions*, Art. 195). The *Directory* states that the planning prepared by the Provincial Chapter «must guide the action of the new government» (Art. 196.2) and that it must be approved by the Superior General (Art. 196.4). The Major Superiors with the deliberate vote of their Councils approve the rules for the sectors of apostolate and study (*Constitutions* Art. 100, 126; *Directory*, Art. 82.2, 99.2, 206.2/1).

The *Service of Authority in the Society of Saint Paul. Manual* likewise speaks of the general and particular norms issued by the Superior General with his Council (n. 130.2). In this way it clarifies the indications of the *Constitutions* and the *Directory* regarding the service of authority of the Superior General for the benefit of the whole Congregation and the various Provinces (cfr. *Constitutions*, Art. 200; *Directory*, Art. 206.2/11).

2.4. Coherence of the proper rule

Since the growth of the Church is a fruit of an “ordered” charity, the recent documents of the Holy See stress the importance of the proper rule of the religious Institutes so that it may be «most precise in establishing the respective competencies of the community, of the various Councils, of those responsible in sectors and of the Superior», noting that «the lack of clarity in this sector is a source of confusion and of conflict»⁵. The proper rule constitute, in fact, the framework within which «the authority promotes the growth of fraternal life through the service of listening and of dialogue, the creation of a favorable climate to sharing and co-responsibility, the participation of all involving the concerns of all, the service balanced between individuals and community, discernment, and the promotion of fraternal obedience.»⁶.

The clarity and coherence of the proper rule helps members to create unity and communion. It also enables creative adaptations to new situations. Lack of

⁵ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 51; Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction, *The Service of Authority and Obedience* (11 May 2008), 20.

⁶ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 20

coherence and clarity can easily cause uncertainty in the objectives and vulnerability regarding surrounding conditions, cultural currents and apostolic needs, as well as incapacity to adapt and renew oneself.

APPENDIX:

THE HISTORICAL PATH OF THE FORMATION OF THE RULE PROPER SSP

1. The foundational phase and institutional consolidation

Blessed James Alberione started the Society of Saint Paul in 1914 and only in 1921 (after a certain consolidation) did the drafting of the first rules began so as to apply for diocesan institutional approval. In reality these “rules” were a *Report of the Story of the SSP*, which came to be “described” as the new institution with its fundamental characteristics: what type it was and with what ends, what activity it developed, how members would be formed and how they would live. Some years later, around 1927, Fr. Alberione undertook the editing of the first drafts of the Constitutions, developing and organizing various elements of the previous “report”, in view of Diocesan approval. Having obtained this (12 March 1927), he went to complete the draft several times (until 1936) up to obtaining Pontifical approval on 10 May 1941 *ad experimentum*, and on 27 June 1949 in definite phase (in 1956 they were approved with some modifications). Thus, the legislative work of our founder finished. He presented it with the exhortation: «With joy let us take the book of the Constitutions, kissing it, meditating on it, because they indicate the best means, the *“optimam partem”*, for what is paramount, for sanctity» (UPS I, 43).

2. Vatican Council II

Generally, after the first phase of institutional consolidation the religious congregations enter in the phase of the rehabilitation of its proper rule looking at external changes (societal-religious tensions, cultural and technological innovations, soliciting members to review the ends, the means and the structures of the Institution). Yet at the start of the 60s, Vatican II took place which formally asked for “the renewal of religious life”, and also gave precise directives: «return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time». The Council promptly commanded: «The constitutions, the directories, the book of customs, the prayers and the ceremonies, and others as such are to be properly reviewed... and be modified based on the documents issued by this sacred Synod» (PC 3c).

3. The update

The work of renewal and adaptation must be made by a Special Chapter. The Society of Saint Paul held such Chapter, the second of its yet brief story, (coinciding with the expiration of the term of the Founder in his capacity as Superior General), in two long sessions: from April to August 1969, and from April to July 1971. During these months, in light of the prescriptions issued by the Holy See for the application of the Conciliar reforms, the whole spiritual heritage of the Congregation had been passed in review, utilizing an abundant documentation, among which, for the first time, was the well-known “Charismatic History of the PF” (currently “*Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae*”, which then was entitled “*Io sono con voi*”). There, the Founder, in an almost short autobiography, expressed his foundational project and highlighted the principal elements that he himself tried to communicate and developed since the initial phase or at least for around forty years. In the intense Capitular work the whole Congregation was involved through special inquiries and work of animation conducted methodically in each community. The final result was the “Chapter Documents” (published in 1972) which treated the foundations of Pauline life, taking in account also of

the tradition that was practiced in the preceding decades under the direct guidance and attention of the Founder himself: *Pauline Identity* (the document “Objectives and Members”); *Our Apostolic Identity* (the development of the charism from the Work of the Good Press to the use of the Means of Social Communication, with diligent attention to the recipients, the contents of our preaching through the modern instruments and the organization of such activity); *Pauline Spirituality* (including common life, communion in the spirit – or spirituality –, the consecrated community through the vows and the community of prayer); *Integral Formation* – through the various stages of the formative curriculum – and lastly, the *Government of the Congregation and Administration*. From the summary of these Capitular Documents, with slight changes based on the experience of the period of trial given, came the actual Constitutions and Directory, with diverse drafts and lay-out as regards form, before being approved by the Holy See *ad experimentum* for nine years (1975-1984) and then definitively (4 April 1984).

4. Post-adaptations

The successive General Chapters (1986, 1992, 1998, 2004) have made only a few small changes to some of the articles of the Constitutions and Directory. In addition to the change in the expressions “regional/s delegation/s” and “delegate/s” which have been substituted respectively with “region/s” and “regional/s superior/s” (Arts. 10.1, 38.2, 82, 99.1, 120, 126.1, 127.2, 181, 182, 182.1-4, 183, 197, 206.2/1, 206.2/5, 206.2/12, 207.5, 213.1, 215, 215.3-4 e 223), are the changes regarding the five articles of the Constitutions (Arts. 135, 136, 142, 175, 196) and seven articles of the Directory (Art. 180.1, 180.5, 195.3, 196.1, 196.4, 196.5, 209.3). The modifications consisted mainly in the accuracy of terms or in the correction of some contradiction with common law or with other norms of the proper rule.

The most important developments of the proper rule consisted instead in the enactment of two normative documents at the general level: the “Ratio formationis” and the “Manual of Authority” renamed “Service of Authority in the Society of Saint Paul. Manual” by the VIII General Chapter

Ratio formationis had been requested by the V General Chapter (1986) and approved successively *ad experimentum* at the Intercapitular Assembly in 1989. Ratio defines the general and normative framework of the Pauline formation and obliges each circumscription to develop its own concrete program or formation “iter”, to be processed for approval by the General Government.

The *Service of Authority in the Society of Saint Paul. Manual* had been requested by the VI General Chapter (1992) and approved *ad experimentum* by the Intercapitular Assembly in 1995. The Manual has been conceived as «a guide that must be updated periodically» (n. 003) and its normative value «is indicated by the fact that it refers to the norms of the common and proper rule» and that, in reality, «a great part of the notions, information or rules [there] encountered are found spread in the Code of Canon Law, in the Constitutions and Directory [...], in subsequent Capitular deliberations or in the directives of the General Government, etc.» (n. 003). To resolve legal uncertainties regarding some provisions in the Manual, the VIII General Chapter formally ended the period *ad experimentum*, declaring that «it be taken as an instrument binding in the life of the Circumscription and in the exercise of authority». With the same declaration the Chapter also confirmed «its nature as guide» and entrusted to the General Government «the responsibility of ensuring its periodic review».