

THE RULE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

THESE notes are intended to be nothing more than a brief summary of Père Mandonnet's excellent and exhaustive treatise on the origins of the Rule of Saint Augustine, extending over a hundred pages and forming part of the monumental work entitled *Saint Dominique, L'Idée, L'Homme et L'Oeuvre*, published in 1938 (two years after his death) by his disciples and assistants Père Humbert Vicaire and Père Reginald Ladner, in two volumes. This work, with the exception of five valuable *études critiques*, has recently been translated into English by Sister Mary Benedicta Larkin, O.P., of Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, U.S.A.¹ As unfortunately these essays which occupy eighty-two pages of the original book have not been listed by the translator, but only referred to numerically, their titles are here given for the guidance of those who cannot have access to the French edition:—(1) The Chronology of Saint Dominic's Life between 1205 and 1207, by Vicaire; (2) Cardinal James de Vitry's account of the Preacher-Canons of Bologna, by Mandonnet; (3) Paul of Hungary's Summa de Poenitentia, by Mandonnet; (4) The Constitutions of the Order between 1220 and 1227, by Vicaire; (5) The Beginnings of the Order of Penance, by Mandonnet. Admittedly these studies are technical and do not all touch directly on Saint Dominic and his work, but Vicaire's first study, not a very lengthy one, could have been included in the translation with much profit.

The Rule of Saint Augustine, as universally known to-day, is prefixed to the Book of the Dominican Constitutions, and is incorporated in the Institutions of many other religious Orders. Mandonnet holds that this is not the original Rule, but a redaction made by Saint Augustine after his ordination as priest. The first Rule, he maintains, was the one the Saint compiled for himself and his companions when as laymen they dwelt together in community at Tagaste in 388 A.D.; and to this he added a long commentary or exposition when after his ordination to the priesthood he removed with them to Hippo. Towards the end of his life, about the year 423, he sent a transcript of this commentary, adapted for women, to the nuns of a certain monastery over which his sister, recently dead, had presided as abbess. There seems to have been a considerable amount of trouble over the election of her successor and also some laxity in the life of the community, all of which can be

¹ B. Herder Book Company, St. Louis, Mo., U.S.A., and London.

gathered from the reproving tone of the saint's letter; and it was to this document that he appended the transcript of his commentary on the Rule.

For the sake of convenience Mandonnet in his treatise styles the original Rule of the Tagaste days the *Disciplina*, the additional exposition composed at Hippo the *Commentary*, and the transcription of this to the nuns the *Transcript*. In course of time the *Disciplina* became ill-suited to the active, and in many cases apostolic, life led by many of the canonical and conventual bodies who had adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine, owing to the long hours of manual labour therein prescribed, together with the long fasting enjoined, and to the very obsolete form of the choral office required.

These were the three points of complaint laid before the Holy See by the Regular Canons of Springirsbach in the diocese of Trier in Germany in 1118. Pope Gelasius II. listened favourably to them and allowed them to take over the choral office as used in the Roman Rite, but in the matter of manual labour and fasting bade them consider the climate of the country and the health of the community, and in this he directed them to follow the customs common amongst regular brethren. Following the example of the Springirsbach Canons, members of other canonical bodies living under the Rule of Saint Augustine sought and obtained similar modifications, so that the *Disciplina* or primitive rule eventually passed not only out of use but even out of memory. So complete, in fact, was its eclipse that such manuscript copies of it which still exist have been considered either apocryphal or by an unknown author. Attempts have even been made to attribute it to Saint Benedict. With the removal of the *Disciplina*, the *Commentary*, composed, as already stated, by Saint Augustine at Hippo, became in time universally regarded as the only Rule of Saint Augustine; yet if we study it closely as it stands to-day, for example at the head of the Dominican Constitutions, we see quite clearly that in reality it is not a rule at all. It is only a rule when attached to the lost *Disciplina*.

Already in 1930 Dom de Bruyne had written of the Rule of Saint Augustine as we know it to-day that 'it contains excellent prescriptions, gripping and profound remarks; but it must be said, it is not a rule I cannot imagine a man founding a monastery of men and giving them the *Regula Sancti Augustini* as a rule.'¹²

Commenting on these words Mandonnet says: 'Dom de Bruyne is right. This is the truth, the exact truth. Reduced to its present form either as the *Commentary* for the brethren or for the sisters,

¹² *La première règle de Saint Benott, in Revue Bénédictine, Vol. 42, p. 324.*

the Rule of Saint Augustine, as for the sake of convenience we will still call it, would not ensure a common religious life of three persons even for two days, lacking as it does all the essential elements, however rudimentary, indispensable to such a life.'

He then proceeds to point to certain allusions made in the modern Rule, or *Commentary*, to regulations found only in the *Disciplina*. We are told, for example, to 'be constant in prayer at the appointed hours and times. . . When you pray to God in psalms and hymns, entertain your heart with what your lips are reciting. And chant only those things appointed to be chanted; but what is not written to be sung, sing not. Your flesh tame with fasts and abstinence from food and drink, so far as your health will allow.' The *Commentary* is silent on what constitutes the choral office, the *Disciplina* gives *hours and times*, tells which psalms, antiphons and lessons are to be recited, giving them in complete detail. The *Commentary* mentions fasting, the *Disciplina* prescribes one meal a day, after the ninth hour, or about 3 o'clock. The *Commentary* makes no direction concerning manual labour; the *Disciplina* directs the brethren to work from morning until the sixth hour (midday), after which they may read until the ninth hour, and when they have put away their books and had their meal, they shall work in the garden, or wherever it is necessary, until the evening.

As he makes this comparison between the *Disciplina* and the *Commentary* it is little wonder that Mandonnet confesses that during the fifty years and more that he had listened weekly in the refectory to the public reading of the so-called Rule of Saint Augustine, he had frequently asked himself how this venerable document could have been held to be a sufficient guide and rule to any community. As a matter of fact no one has attempted to live the religious life directed by the *Commentary* alone, for in all cases where the *Disciplina*, or primitive rule, was sacrificed, it was replaced by constitutions specially drawn up, or adapted from some other canonical or monastic body.

We may note in passing that whereas the *Disciplina* speaks only of a provost (*praepositus*) the *Commentary* in more than one place mentions the higher superior called 'the priest who has charge of you all.' This priest was none other than Saint Augustine, presumably relieved of the immediate task of governing the brethren, but retaining an authority to which the new local superior could appeal when necessary.

Mandonnet then proceeds to the discussion of the problem how the *Disciplina* and *Commentary* were joined together before their separation in the twelfth century, and offers the solution that they

were united by the skilful passage : ' These things, then, we direct you, who live in the monastery, to observe.' (*Haec igitur sunt, quae ut observetis praecipimus, in monasterio constituti*). These things (*haec*) refer not only to the things that follow but likewise to those that go before. To-day the position of this sentence loses point owing to the loss of all the regulations contained in the *Disciplina*.

This brings Mandonnet to a final point in his examination, the question of the *Transcript* for the nuns, and of the curious tradition which grew up after the twelfth century that the copy of his Commentary which Saint Augustine sent to his deceased sister's convent was his original rule, in other words that this document forms the first Rule of Saint Augustine and that this same Rule was first composed for women. Even modern writers have held this theory, but now Mandonnet claims that after the restoration of the *Disciplina* as head of the *Commentary* ' the women's form of the *Commentary* loses all claim to be considered as the primitive text.' He points out, what is of course obvious on comparing them, that the texts for the men and the women are but one and the same under different forms, and that the one for feminine use was attached to Letter 211, addressed as we have already said to the convent in which his sister had died as abbess.

How the theory came into being is not difficult to understand. Once the *Disciplina* had been discarded there remained but the two texts of the *Commentary*, the one for men now an isolated treatise after its decapitation in the twelfth century, and the other for women, the *Transcript*, with the prefixed letter of Saint Augustine giving it greater authority in the later ages.

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THE TEXT OF THE DISCIPLINA OR PRIMITIVE RULE.

In the first place, most dear brethren, we must love God and after Him our neighbour, for these are the principal commands given to us.

Here we describe how we must pray or recite the psalms. In the morning three psalms shall be said, the 62nd, 5th and 89th; at the third hour first a psalm shall be said and two antiphons, with a lesson and a concluding prayer; similarly at the sixth and ninth hour; in the evening a responsary psalm, four antiphons, another responsary psalm, and a lesson with a closing prayer. At a suitable time after the evening prayer, all must sit and read the lessons, and then before retiring to sleep the usual psalms shall be recited. The night prayers during the year shall be as follows: for the months of November, December, January and February twelve antiphons, six psalms, three lessons; for March, April, September and October