

RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

(OSM adopted translation)

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1. Before all else, brothers, we must love God and our neighbour because these are the greatest commandments..

2. We urge you who form a religious community to put the following precepts into practice.

Chapter 1 The basic ideal: mutual love expressed in the community of goods and in humility

3. Before all else, "live together in harmony," "being of one mind and one heart" on the way to God. For is it not precisely for this reason that you have come to live together?

4. Among you there can be no question of personal property. Rather, take care that you share everything in common. Your superior should see to it that each person is provided with food and clothing. He does not have to give exactly the same to everyone, for you are not all equally strong, but each person should be given what he personally needs. For this is what you read in the Acts of the Apostles: "Everything they owned was held in common, and each one received whatever he had need of.

5. Those who owned possessions in the world should readily agree that, from the moment they enter the religious life, these things become the property of the community.

6. But those who did not have Possessions ought not to strive in the religious community for what they could not obtain outside it. One must indeed have regard for their frailty by providing them with whatever they need, even if they were formerly so poor that they could not even afford the very necessities of life. They may not, however, consider themselves fortunate because they now receive food and clothing which were beyond their means in their earlier lives.

7. Nor should they give themselves airs because they now find themselves in the company of people whom they would not have ventured to approach before. Their hearts should seek the nobler things, not vain earthly appearances. If, in the religious life, rich people were to become humble and poor people haughty, then this style of life would seem to be of value only to the rich and not to the poor.

8. On the other hand, let those who appear to have had some standing in the world not look down upon their brothers who have entered the religious community from a condition of poverty.

They ought to be more mindful of their life together with poor brothers than of the social status of their wealthy parents. And the fact that they have made some of their possessions available to the community gives them no reason to have a high opinion of themselves. Otherwise people would more easily fall prey to pride in sharing riches with the community than they would have done if they had enjoyed them in the world. For while all vices manifest themselves in wrongdoing, pride lurks also in our good works, seeking to destroy even them. What good does it do to distribute one's possessions to the poor and to become poor oneself, if giving up riches makes a person prouder than he was when he had a fortune?

9. You are all to live together, therefore, "one in mind and one in heart," and honour God in one another, because 'each of you has become his temple.'"

Chapter 2 Community prayer

10. "Persevere faithfully in prayer" at the hours and times appointed.

11. The place of prayer should not be used for any purpose other than that for which it is intended and from which it takes its name. Thus if someone wants to pray there even outside the appointed hours, in his own free time, he should be able to do so without being hindered by others who have no business being there.

12. When you pray to God in psalms and songs, the words spoken by your lips should also be alive in your hearts.

13. When you sing, keep to the text you have, and do not sing what is not intended to be sung.

Chapter 3 Community and care of the body

14. As far as your health allows, keep your bodily appetites in check by fasting and abstinence from food and drink. Those who are unable to fast the whole day may have something to eat before the main meal which takes place in the late afternoon. They may do this, however, only around midday. But the sick may have something to eat at any time of the day.

15. From the beginning of the meal to the end listen to the customary reading without noise or protest against the Scriptures, for you have not only to satisfy your physical hunger, but also to hunger for the word of God.

16. There are some who are weaker because of their former manner of life. If an exception is made for them at table, those who are stronger because they have come from a different way of life ought not to take this amiss or to consider it unfair. They should not think that the others are more fortunate because they are capable of something which is beyond the strength of the others.

17. There are some who, before entering the religious life, were accustomed to living comfortably, and therefore they receive something more in the way of food and clothing: better bedding, perhaps, or more blankets. The others who are stronger, and therefore happier, do not receive these things. But, taking into account the former habits of life of the rich, keep in mind how much they now have to do without, even though they cannot live as simply as those who are

physically stronger. Not everyone should want to have the extra he sees another receive, for this is done not to show favour but only out of concern for the person. Otherwise a deplorable disorder would creep into the religious life, whereby the poor begin to drift easily along while the rich put themselves out in every possible way.

18. The sick should obviously receive suitable food; otherwise their illness would only get worse. Once they are over the worst of their sickness, they ought to be well cared for so that they may be fully restored to health as quickly as possible. And this holds good even if they formerly belonged to the very poorest class in society. During their convalescence they should receive the same that the rich are entitled to because of their former manner of life. But once they have made a complete recovery they are to go back to living as they did earlier on, when they were happier because their needs were fewer. The simpler a way of life, the better it is suited to servants of God.

When a sick person has been restored to health, he will have to be careful not to become the slave of his own desires. He will have to part with the privileges granted because of his illness. Those who have the strength to lead simple lives should consider themselves the richest of people. For it is better to be able to make do with a little than to have plenty.

Chapter 4 Mutual responsibility in good and evil

19. Do not attract attention by the way you dress. Endeavour to impress by your manner of life, not by the clothes you wear.

20. When you go out, go with somebody else, and stay together when you have reached your destination.

21. Whatever you are doing, your behaviour should in no way cause offence to anyone, but should rather be in keeping with the holiness of your way of life.

22. When you see a woman, do not keep provocatively looking at her. Of course, no one can forbid you to see women when you go out, "but it is wrong to desire a woman or to want her to desire you. " For it is not only by affectionate embraces that desire between man and woman is awakened, but also by looks. You cannot say that your inner attitude is good if with your eyes you desire to possess a woman, for the eye is the herald of the heart. And if people allow their impure intentions to appear, albeit without words but just by looking at each other and finding pleasure in each other's passion, even though not in each other's arms, we cannot speak any longer of true chastity which is precisely that of the heart.

23. Indeed, if a person cannot keep his eyes off a woman and enjoys attracting her attention, he should not imagine that others do not see this. Of course they see it; even people you would not expect notice it. But even if it did remain concealed and unseen by men, will it not be seen by "God who scans the heart of every man" and from whom nothing is hidden? Or are we to imagine that "God does not see it," because just as his wisdom is far beyond ours, so too is he prepared to be extraordinarily patient with us? A religious should be afraid "to offend the God of love;" for the sake of this love he ought to be ready to give up a sinful love for a woman. Whoever is mindful that God sees all things will not wish to look at a woman with sinful desire. For, precisely on this point, the text of Scripture, "the Lord abhors a covetous eye," impresses upon us that we are to stand in awe of him.

24. Therefore, in church or wherever you may be in the company of women, you are to consider yourselves responsible for one another's chastity. Then "God who dwells in you" will watch over you through your responsibility for one another.

25. If you notice in a brother this provocative look I have spoken of, then warn him immediately, so that the evil that has taken root may not worsen and so that he may promptly improve his behaviour.

26. If after this admonition you see him doing the same thing again, anyone who notices it should consider him a sick person in need of treatment. At that time no one is any longer free to be silent. "First inform one or two others of the situation so that with two or three you may be able to convince him of his fault" and to call him to order with due firmness. Do not think that you are acting out of ill-will in doing this. On the contrary, you would be at fault if by your silence you allow your brothers to meet their downfall, when by speaking you could set them on the right path.

Imagine, for example, that your brother had a physical wound which he wanted to conceal for fear of undergoing medical treatment. Would it not be heartless of us to say nothing about it? Rather, would it not be an act of mercy on our part to make it known? How much greater, then, is our obligation to make our brother's condition known and to prevent evil gaining a stronger hold in his heart, something much worse than a physical wound.

27. If he does not wish to listen to your warning, then first advise the superior so that he and the brother may talk the matter out in private, and in this way others will not need to know of it or be involved. If he is still unwilling to listen, then you may bring in others to convince him of his fault. If he still persists in denying it, then, without his knowledge, others must be brought in, so that "his faults may be pointed out to him "by more than a single witness in the presence of all," for the word of two or three witnesses is more convincing than that of one.

Once his guilt has been established, it is up to the superior or even to the priest under whose jurisdiction the religious house falls, to determine which punishment he should best undergo with a view to his improvement. If he refuses to submit to this punishment, he is to be sent away from the community, even though he himself may be unwilling to go. Here again this action is not prompted by heartlessness but by love, for in this way he is prevented from having a bad influence on others and contributing to their downfall too.

28. What I have said about looking at a woman lustfully holds too for other sins. In discovering, warding off, bringing to light, proving and punishing all other faults, you are faithfully and diligently to follow the procedure set out above, always with love for the people involved but with aversion for their faults.

29. If a brother of his own accord confesses that he has gone so far along the wrong path as to receive letters and gifts secretly from a woman, we ought to deal with him gently and to pray for him. But if he is found out and proved guilty, he is to be severely punished according to the judgement of the priest or the superior.

Chapter 5 Service of one another

30. Your clothes should be looked after in common by one or more brothers who are to see that they are well aired and kept free from moths. Just as the food you eat is prepared in the one kitchen, so the clothes you wear are to come from the one storeroom.

And, as far as possible, it should not matter to you greatly which summer or winter clothes you receive. It does not make any difference whether you get back the same clothes you handed in or something that has been worn by another, 'provided no one is denied what he needs.' If this gives rise to jealousy or grumbling, or if people begin complaining that the clothes they now have are not as good as those they had before, or if they think it beneath them to wear clothes that have previously been worn by others, does that not tell you something? If the external matter of dress becomes a cause of discord, does this not prove that inwardly, in the attitude of your heart, there is something sadly lacking? But if you are unable to do these things and your weakness is taken into consideration so that you are allowed to receive again the same clothes you handed in, even so, keep them all in the one place where they will be looked after by those charged with this task.

3 1. The intention behind all this is that no one will seek his own advantage in his work. Everything you do is to be for the service of the community, and you are to work with more zeal and more enthusiasm than if each person were merely working for himself and his own interests. For it is written of love that 'it is not self-seeking;' that is to say, love puts the interests of the community before personal advantage, and not the other way around. Therefore the degree to which you are concerned for the interests of the community rather than for your own, is the criterion by which you can judge how much progress you have made. Thus in all the fleeting necessities of human life "something sublime and permanent" reveals itself, "namely love."

32. It follows from this that a religious who receives clothes or other useful items from his parents or relatives may not keep these quietly for himself. He should place them at the disposal of the superior. "Once they have become the property of the community, it is up to the superior to see that these articles find their way into the hands of those who need them." But should anyone conceal a gift he has received, he shall be judged guilty of theft.

33. When you want to wash your clothes or have them washed at a laundry, let this take place in consultation with the superior lest an exaggerated desire for clean clothes sully your character.

34. Because bathing may be necessary for good health, the opportunity to visit the public baths may never be refused. In this matter follow medical advice without grumbling. Even if a person is unwilling, he shall do what has to be done for the good of his health, if necessary at the command of the superior. But if someone wants to go bathing just because he enjoys it, when it is not really necessary, he will have to learn to renounce his desires. For what a person likes may not always be good for him. It may even be harmful.

35. In any case, if a brother says that he does not feel well, even though he is not noticeably sick, believe him without hesitation. But if you are not sure whether the treatment he wishes to have will be of any benefit to him, then consult a doctor about it.

36. See to it that there are always two or more of you when you visit the public baths. Indeed, this applies wherever you go. And it is not for you to choose the people who will go with you; you are to leave this to the decision of the superior.

37. Someone should be deputed by the community to care for the sick. At the same time this person ought to take care of those who are convalescing and those who are weak even though they are not running a temperature. The infirmarian may take from the kitchen whatever he himself considers necessary.

38. Those responsible for food, clothes and books should serve their brothers without grumbling.

39. Books will be available every day at the appointed hour, and not at any other time.

40. The brothers in charge of clothes and shoes should not delay in making these available to those who need them.

Chapter 6 Love and conflict

41. Do not quarrel. But if you do have a quarrel, put an end to it as quickly as possible. Otherwise an isolated moment of anger grows into hatred, 'the splinter becomes a beam,'" and you make your heart a murderer's den. For we read in the Scriptures: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer."

42. If you have hurt a person by abusing him, or by cursing or grossly accusing him, be careful to make amends for the harm you have done, as quickly as possible, by apologizing to him. And the one who has been hurt should be ready in his turn to forgive you without wrangling. Brothers who have insulted each other should forgive each other's trespasses; if you fail to do this, your praying the Our Father becomes a lie. Indeed, the more you pray, the more honest your prayer ought to become.

It is better to have to deal with a person who, though quick to anger, immediately seeks a reconciliation once he realizes he has been unjust to another, than with someone who is less easily roused, but also less inclined to seek forgiveness. But 'a person who never wants to ask forgiveness, or who fails to do so from the heart does not belong in a religious community, even though he may not be sent away.

Be cautious of harsh words. Should you utter them, then do not be afraid to speak the healing word with the same mouth that caused the wound.

43. From time to time the necessity of keeping order may compel you to use harsh words to the young people who have not yet reached adulthood, in order to keep them in line. In that case you are not required to apologize, even though you yourself consider that you have gone too far. For if you are too humble and submissive in your conduct towards these young people, then your authority, which they should be ready to accept, will be undermined. In such cases you should ask forgiveness from the Lord of all, who knows with what deep affection you love your brothers, even those you might happen to have reproved with undue severity. Do not let your love for one another remain caught up in self-love; rather, such love must be guided by the Spirit.

Chapter 7 Love in authority and obedience

44. "Obey your superior" as a father, but also give him due respect on account of his office, otherwise you offend God in him. This is even more true of the priest who bears responsibility for you all.

45. It is primarily up to the superior to see that all that has been said here is put into practice and that infringements are not carelessly overlooked. It is his duty to point out abuses and to correct them. If something is beyond his competence and power, he should put the matter before the priest, whose authority in some respects is greater than his own.

46. Your superior must not think himself fortunate in "having power to lord it over you," but in "the love with which he shall serve you". Because of your esteem for him he shall be superior to you; because of his responsibility to God he shall realize that he is the very least of all

the brethren. "Let him show himself an example to all in good works;" "he is to reprimand those who neglect their work, to give courage to those who are disheartened, to support the weak and to be patient with everyone." He should himself observe the norms of the community and so lead others to respect them too. And let him strive to be loved by you rather than to be feared, although both love and respect are necessary. He should always remember that "he is responsible to God for you."

47. By your ready and loving obedience, therefore, you not only show compassion to yourselves but also to your superior. For it applies to you as well that the higher the position a person holds, the greater the danger he is in.

Chapter 8 Concluding exhortation

48. May the Lord grant that, filled with "longing for spiritual beauty," you will lovingly observe all that has been written here. Live in such a way that you spread abroad "the life-giving aroma of Christ. "Do not be weighed down like slaves straining under the law, but live as free men under grace."

This little book is to be read to you once a week. "As in a mirror, you will be able to see in it whether there is anything you are neglecting or forgetting." If you find that your actions match what is written here, thank the Lord who is the giver of every good. If, however, a person sees that he has failed in some way, then let him be sorry for what has occurred in the past and be on his guard for what the future will bring. Let his prayer be: "Forgive me my trespasses and lead me not into temptation."