

Regula apostolica in the Liber de unico baptismo

1. In his work *Liber de unico baptismo* (4, 6 and 5, 7) Augustine uses the expression *regula apostolica*. What does he mean by these words? First we should ask what the meaning is of the word *apostolicus*. According to the dictionaries ¹⁾, *apostolicus* can have two meanings: «of one single apostle» or «of the apostles». The context within which this expression occurs is the following: «The Church's recognition of the validity of the baptism administered by heretics and schismatics, corresponds faithfully to the *regula apostolica*. This apostolic rule prescribes respect for what is good and true in paganism, judaism, heresy and schism; but it also prescribes amending what is wrong and erroneous in them. St. Paul taught this both by word and example. Cyprian followed this rule by borrowing his arguments against idolatry from pagan authors. I too (= Augustine) am following this rule: I find good things even in wicked men; I amend their perversity, but do not violate what they legitimately hold. The truth that somebody holds, can help us to correct his errors, without destroying the truth by the refutation of his errors».

Here it is evident we must prefer the first meaning: of one apostle, because Augustine writes «Nihil aliud nobis demonstrat apostolus, nisi ut in ipsis quoque ita quidquid pravum est corrigamus, ut quod forte rectum est approbemus» (4, 5). Further Augustine cites *Rom.* 1, 21-23; 25; 18. And in chapter 4, 6 he refers to the example of Paul himself: «Et in Actibus apostolorum cum de deo uno et vero Athenienses doceret, quod in illo vivimus, movemur et sumus, continuo subiunxit: Sicut quidam secundum vos dixerunt.» This sentence introduces the story told in *Acts* 17, 22-34 where Paul is the central figure. The expression *regula apostolica* occurs twice: «Huius regulae apostolicae sectator episcopus Cyprianus» (4, 6); «Hanc itaque et nos per maiores nostros traditam nobis sequentes apostolicam regulam» (5, 7). *Regula apostolica* refers in both cases to the apostle Paul and to the rule he has given.

¹⁾ J.W. FUCHS, *Kramers' Latijns Woordenboek*. Den Haag. C. T. LEWIS and Ch. SHORT, *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford, 1962.

Therefore we have to be aware of the fact that *regula apostolica* always means a rule supported by the authority of apostles. In *Contra Faustum* (XXVIII, 4) Augustine speaks about the authority of Paul connected with the authority of all the apostles. Augustine asserts that if Paul after his conversion would not have come into contact with the other living apostles, the Church would never have believed him. Paul discussed the gospel with them, and only because of this was he accepted as one of their circle. From then on everybody was able to recognize that his preaching was the same as that of the other apostles. Paul lived in communion with them, taking part in their unity and performing the same miraculous signs. Only from this moment — and by the recommendation of the Lord — did he receive such authority, that even the Church of our days listens to his words as to the words of Christ speaking in him.

In his *Expositio epistolae ad Galatas* (2) Augustine shows again how all the apostles finally are supported by the authority of God. The first apostles merit our confidence because they are not sent by men, but by God through the man Jesus Christ. The last apostle (Paul) also merits our confidence, although he was not sent by the earthly Jesus, but by the glorified Jesus, completely God after his resurrection.

2. What is the relation between the *regula apostolica* and the *regula veritatis*? I cannot agree with the simplistic opinion that the *regula apostolica* differs from the *regula veritatis* in as far as the first should take its normative power from the second ²). One can just as well assert the contrary. The two rules lean on one another. But the *regula apostolica* is a part of the truth which the *regula veritatis* contains. It is going too far to suggest that Augustine would identify the two rules ³). In my opinion the *regula veritatis* has a richer meaning.

The Church is leaning on the *regula apostolica*. This is so, in Augustine's view, because the Church is begotten by the preaching of the Word of God. In *Enarratio in psalmum* 44, 23 he says: « All the souls, begotten by the preaching and evangelization of the apostles, are daughters of kings. The churches too are daughters of the apostles and daughters of kings. But Christ is the king of kings. The apostles are

²) A.C. DE VEER, in *Oeuvres de saint Augustin*, 31. *Traité anti-Donatistes* IV. Paris, 1968, p. 833.

³) *Ibid.*, p. 839.

kings of whom is said 'You shall sit on twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (*Mt.* 19, 28). They preached the word of truth and have begotten the churches, not for themselves, but for Christ ... 'for in Jesus Christ I have begotten you by the gospel' (*I Cor.*, 4, 15). » According to Augustine, the authority of the Bible is of the highest rank: it is divine (*Epistola* 82, 5) ⁴). Precisely because the truth of the divine Scriptures is supported by the apostles, the Holy Scriptures constitute the supreme authority (*Epistola* 82, 7). A sentence of Paul is, in the eyes of Augustine, more powerful than all the authority of philosophers (*Epistola* 167, 4). What is confirmed by the evident authority of the canonical Holy Books has to be believed without any doubt (*Epistola* 147, 4). In this way the evidence of Holy Scripture determines our faith. One has to believe Holy Writ without any hesitation (*Epistola* 147, 39-40. *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* III, 7. *De civitate Dei* XXI, 6, 1). Doubt about the truth of what is written in the Bible is not allowed (*Contra Faustum* XI, 5). If the authority of Holy Scripture becomes doubtful, faith is undermined: and when faith is undermined, charity weakens (*De doctrina christiana* I, 36, 41).

We are not unjust to Cyprian, by distinguishing his writings from the authority of canonical Scripture. It is not without reason that the ecclesiastical canon of Holy Books has been determined with extreme care; very carefully the books of Prophets and Apostles are fixed in a canon. Therefore we dare not judge these books, but basing ourselves on them, we judge freely all other writings both of believers and unbelievers (*Contra Cresconium* II, 31, 39-32, 40). Augustine does not consider the works of Cyprian as canonical; he judges them in accordance with the canonical Scriptures. He will gladly accept everything in them that is conformable to the authority of the Scriptures, but without insulting Cyprian he will also reject what does not correspond to them. Nobody is unaware that the canonical Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament, is included within very precise limites; the Bible surpasses all the other writings of bishops, even at this point that one cannot challenge or discuss the truth and rightness of its contents. The writings of bishops on the contrary, drawn up after the constitution of the canon, can be criticized by more competent and wiser men, or — in case these writings deviate from the truth — by the greater authority and prudence of other bishops (*De baptismo* II, 3, 4).

⁴) A.D.R. POLMAN, *Het Woord Gods bij Augustinus*. Kampen, 1955, p. 63 ss.

If the Church does not want to get lost in the mist, it has to reject all that is not included in the Bible (*Sermo* 46, 11, 24). From the city that we left for a long pilgrimage, we received Scriptures which exhort us to an exemplary life (*Enarratio in psalmum* 90, s. 2, 1). If we lose our way because we do not understand the Holy Scriptures, we cannot blame them. If we understand them, however, we are on the right way (*Sermo* 23, 3, 3). Augustine calls Holy Scripture *firmamentum in ecclesia* (*Sermo Lambot*, fragmentum 1, 7-9. 5, 7).

Christ told his heralds, the apostles, what they had to declare. When a herald has spoken officially, no mention of him is made in the report, but only of the person who ordered him to speak (*Sermo* 82, 5, 8).

A. Polman declares : « The Holy Scriptures, in the view of Augustine, proceeded from the hand of God, because they are realized by the Holy Spirit working in the holy writers (*Enarratio in psalmum* 8, 7). Therefore Augustine calls these scriptures : the word of God (*De civitate Dei* X, 1, 2), the scripture of God (*Enarratio in psalmum* 144, 17), the divine books (*De civitate Dei* IX, 20), the divine scripture (*De civitate Dei* XV, 8), the holy scripture (*De Trinitate* I, 2), the writ of God (*Epistola* 78, 1), the letter from heaven (*Enarratio in psalmum* 90, s. 2, 1), divine oracles or words (*Epistola* 55, 20, 37. 147, 16, 40). Christ spoke first through the prophets. Later he spoke himself, and then in so far as he judged it necessary, he gave Holy Scripture through the apostles (*De civitate Dei* XI, 3). Thus we find the word of God in the Scriptures » (*De civitate Dei* X, 1, 2)⁵.

According to Augustine, the preaching of the apostles is not only supported by Christ, but especially by the Holy Spirit. The charity of God, poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, heartened the apostles to testify in Christ's favour (*In Johannis evangelium* tr. 92, 2)⁶. Christ made his followers witnesses with an unabated love for preaching, even when they were persecuted (*In Johannis evangelium* tr. 94, 2). In this way Jesus could say that the Holy Spirit was working in the deeds, and particularly in the preaching of his disciples, as appears clearly from *Mt.* 10, 20 : « For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you » (*In Johannis evangelium* tr. 100, 1). In

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39 ss.

⁶ F. SCHNITZLER, *Zur Theologie der Verkündigung in den Predigten des hl. Augustinus*. Freiburg i. Br., 1968, p. 95.

them the Holy Spirit is announcing the word of God (*In Epistolam Johannis tr.* 2, 9).

Therefore the *regula veritatis* and the *regula apostolica* support one another by their common authority. In Augustine there is no opposition between apostolic tradition and apostolic authority on the one hand, and tradition and authority of the Holy Spirit on the other hand. Nor is there any distance. What the Holy Spirit gives does not differ from what Christ gives : the apostles have transformed it into a tradition. This tradition constitutes the inner *auctoritas ecclesiae* ⁷). The Church is at the same time the work of the Holy Spirit and of the apostles. After the ascension of Christ, it was the task of the Holy Spirit and the apostles to accomplish the work of Christ.

In a work directed to his friend Honoratus, a priest of Hippo, Augustine has described how he turned away from the rationalism he had hoped to find in Manichaeism (but which actually lacked it), and how he was convinced by the authority of the Church. From his own experience, he recommends Honoratus to live according to the catholic concept of life which came to us from Christ through the apostles and which will go on from us to our posterity (*De utilitate credendi* 8, 20) ⁸).

On the one hand, so says C. Eichenseer, the Holy Scripture is for Augustine the principal source of the true faith (*De Trinitate* I, 1, 1. I, 2, 4. *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* I, 1, 1. *Contra Julianum op. imp.* I, 22). On the other hand, however, the tradition of ecclesiastical doctrine is a guiding norm that gives directives for correctly understanding Holy Scripture (*De civitate Dei* XV, 7, 1. *De Trinitate* I, 11, 22. *Contra epistolam fundamenti* 5).

The rule of faith is in the first place founded on the Scriptures and at the same time directs the exegesis of these Scriptures, on the basis of the apostolic activity of the living tradition in the Church. (*Regulam veritatis* : *De doctrina christiana* I, 8, 8. *Certissimae fidei et validissimae auctoritati scripturae* : *De Trinitate* IX, 1, 1. I, 7, 14. *Per scripturas disseminata et a doctis catholicis ... scripturarum tractatoribus demonstrata ... canonica regula* : *De Trinitate* II, 1, 2. *Sive anima ecclesiae iam perfecta et sine macula et ruga, digna scilicet occultis Filii, quia introduxit eam rex in cubiculum suum, dicat sponso suo* : 'Sedisti super thronum, qui iudicas aequitatem', quia resurrexisti a mortuis, et

⁷) J.N. BAKHUIZEN VAN DEN BRINK, *Ecclesia* II. 's-Gravenhage, 1966, p. 138.

⁸) *Ibid.*, p. 142.

adscendisti in caelum, et sedes ad dexteram Patris; quaelibet ergo harum sententia placeat, quo iste versus referatur, regulam fidei non excedit : *Enarratio in psalmum* 9, 6) ⁹⁾.

Y. Congar brings out here the differences between modern times and the times of the Fathers of the Church. Their concern is to preserve the unity of three data : Holy Scripture, Tradition and the Church. The 16th century lost this unity ¹⁰⁾. The Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries had the same idea about tradition and traditions as the antenicean Fathers. One cannot make a separation between the Bible and tradition: one can make a distinction between them (and this distinction will become more explicit in the course of time), but one must always join them ¹¹⁾. This association of Bible and tradition, seen as two ways and two fashions by which apostolic teaching comes to us in its fulness and authority, constitutes the very essence of catholic thinking ¹²⁾. The Bible is always considered as supreme and total wisdom. It contains every truth, at least every truth useful for salvation : *veritas secundum pietatem* (*Tit.* 1, 1). From the point of view of the contents of the Bible, it is sufficient. The Fathers of the Church did nothing but comment on the Bible, explain and defend it, and apply through pastoral considerations its teachings to the way of thinking and the practical life of the faithful. All their writings are in connection with the Holy Scriptures; the Fathers are essentially *tractatores*.

In the eyes of the Fathers of the Church, the relation between the Bible and the Church is a relation of reciprocal conditioning. The Holy Scripture without the Church is for them as impossible as a Church without Holy Scripture. Both are the body of the Son of God (Ambrose) ¹³⁾.

3. Thus the *regula apostolica* forms part of the *regula veritatis*. A. de Veer explains how Augustine understands the expression *regula veritatis* : « When Augustine refers to the *regula veritatis* or *fidei*, he does not intend the total contents of revealed faith, but this or that

⁹⁾ C. EICHENSEER, *Das Symbolum Apostolicum beim heiligen Augustinus*. St. Ottilien, 1960, p. 120 ss.

¹⁰⁾ Y.M.-J. CONGAR, *La tradition et les traditions*, I. *Essai historique*. Paris, 1960, p. 52.

¹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹²⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

truth questioned by opponents, such as the validity of baptism administered outside of the Church. The *regula veritatis* (*fidei*) is therefore not necessarily included in a written formula and this is all the more reason to distinguish it from the symbol of faith. In this sense, P. Batiffol is right in saying that, for Augustine, the *regula veritatis* (*fidei*) is ultimately the universal Church » ¹⁴.

This is even more clearly explained by P. Batiffol himself : « The rule of our faith is found in the plain texts of Holy Scripture and in the authority of the Church, which is called to suppress the errors of heretics and to clarify the truth it guards » ¹⁵. This seems to me one of the best definitions of the *regula fidei*.

As a matter of course, Christ is always present with his authority in the Holy Scriptures as well as in the Church. His words lead us through this life (*Sermo* 129, 7, 9). For us his words are the *regula veritatis*, and we have to conform our actions and our behavior to them. « Gressus meos dirige, quos ipse meo arbitrio depravavi. Dirige secundum verbum tuum. Quid est : Dirige secundum verbum tuum ? Ut recti sint gressus mei, quia rectum est verbum tuum. Ego, inquit, distortus sum sub pondere iniquitatis, sed verbum tuum regula est veritatis. Me ergo distortum corrippe tamquam ad regulam, hoc est, ad verbum rectum. Dirige ergo gressus meos secundum verbum tuum, et ne dominetur mihi omnis iniquitas » (*Sermo* 30, 2, 2).

Within this broad scope of the Scriptures and the Church, viz. of the Word and the truth of God, Paul offers us a line of conduct, about which Augustine speaks in *De unico baptismo* (4, 6 and 5, 7).

4. How did Augustine use the *regula apostolica* in his controversy against the Donatists ? That is the question we now have to examine. In the conclusion of his book *De unico baptismo* (18, 32) the subject of the *regula apostolica* is raised again, but Augustine speaks only of the contents of this rule. The term itself is not repeated. Augustine apparently saw in this argument the strongest element of his argumentation ¹⁶). But he does not insist on the notion of the *regula apostolica* against the Donatists in a triumphant and repetitious way. How is this possible in a controversy where Augustine often endlessly repeats himself ?

¹⁴) DE VEER, p. 834.

¹⁵) P. BATIFFOL, *Le catholicisme de saint Augustin*, I. Paris, 1920 ³, p. 42.

¹⁶) DE VEER, p. 658.

It seems to me that the reason for this is that from the year 400 on, Augustine only uses the argument of catholicity against the Donatists. God intended a Church that had to be catholic. The Church indeed is catholic; but not the Donatist Church. Therefore the Donatist Church is not the Church of God. This is a good argument *ad hominem*, but a precarious thesis, as P. Batiffol observes¹⁷. The two Churches were directly opposed to one another. These apologetical and ecclesiastical circumstances kept Augustine from formally using the *regula apostolica* because if someone does not accept the whole *regula veritatis*, still less will he accept the *regula apostolica*. But these two rules are so intimately connected, that it is always a case of all or nothing.

The second reason would seem to be that Augustine's attitude towards the apostle Paul differs very much from his attitude towards men who took part in the controversies of the Church of North Africa. He looked at the North African writers from a historical point of view, and he spared no pains in drawing up and publishing the historical facts of the Donatist struggle. However, in Augustine's view, the apostle Paul occupies the first place on the level of revelation.

The words of Y. Congar may express what I mean : « In our eyes, a text has a date and a meaning ; it is a witness to a localized and dated event. We look for the truth both in the text and in the event, and this truth is an historical one. In this manner we believe that the Church is founded, that the sacraments (e. g. the sacrament of the priesthood) are instituted at a very precise moment. But the Fathers of the Church — and for a long while the Middle Ages — were less interested in this historical relation of origin ; they were more interested in the relation between the exemplarity of the visible aspect of the mysteries and their invisible heavenly aspect. The historical materiality of the manifestations of mysteries was less important to them than its homogeneity with the heavenly reality. In our eyes a text of Isaias was inspired in order to say certain things to the Israelites of the 8th century before Christ ; further, we accept the possibility that this text has a typological meaning. In the eyes of the Fathers, however, even a literary inspiration referred to a supra-temporal and supra-historical meaning, and its truth depended mainly on its value in manifesting the heavenly mystery. But the text could equally well and immediately reveal the truth of a christian reality »¹⁸).

¹⁷) BATIFFOL, p. 209.

¹⁸) CONGAR, p. 90 ss.

5. Here then are my conclusions. First, in the *Liber de unico baptismo*, *regula apostolica* means the rule of one apostle. Secondly, this rule depends on the *regula veritatis*, which in its turn depends on the *regula apostolica*. The latter forms a part of the *regula veritatis* which contains all. Thirdly, the *regula apostolica* is not advanced as a formal principle during the Donatist controversy.

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