Part IV – RULES FOR CONVERSATION AND SOCIAL GATHERINGS

1. There is a difference between meeting people socially and associating with personal friends. The former happens by chance or because of a set of circumstances, whereas the latter is a matter of choice and selection. When meeting people merely socially, the relationship is not lasting; there is hardly any effort at becoming well acquainted, and there is minimal personal commitment. In personal friendships, however, the companionship is more frequent, there is a certain friendly freedom, and there is a personal commitment based on choice. A relationship is developed, the foundation of which is the practice of virtue and mutual support.

2. I will never disdain meeting any person, no matter who they may be, nor will I show any sign of wishing to avoid them, for this earns one the reputation of being proud, haughty, unfeeling, arrogant, snobbish, ambitious, and manipulative. I will be particularly careful on these occasions not to become excessively familiar with anyone, not even with my closest friends, should I happen to meet any in a gathering, for the others there would consider such behavior as frivolous. I will not permit myself to say or to do anything but what is absolutely correct, since I could be considered to be rude or imprudent if I allowed myself to be overly familiar. Above all, I will be careful neither to criticize, nor to mock, not to be sarcastic to, anyone. It is a sign of stupidity to make fun of those who have no reason to put up with such treatment. I will show great respect for all, and I will
not be pretentious. I will speak little but well, so rather than boring my friends I will whet their appetite for further conversation at a later time. If the meeting is brief and if someone else is speaking, it would seem best just to greet the people there in a simple, courteous way, being careful not to be too stiff or formal.

3. I will limit my personal friendships to a few good persons of unimpeachable character, since it is extremely difficult to benefit from too many close friendships, or to avoid the bad effects that proceed from bad friendships, or to maintain a good reputation unless the people with whom you associate are above reproach. With either friends or acquaintances, I will be especially careful to observe this rule: Be friendly with all but familiar with few. But in all circumstances it will be necessary for me to use judgment and prudence, for there is no rule, however general, that does not admit some exception, unless it is this one, the foundation of all others: NOTHING AGAINST GOD! Therefore in my relationships I will be courteous and not overbearing, friendly and outgoing and not cool and reserved, gentle but not affected, compliant and not contradictory (unless reason requires it), sincere and not deceitful, because people want to have a true knowledge of those with whom they are dealing. Nevertheless, I will reveal myself with prudence - sometimes more, sometimes less - according to the kind of company in which I find myself.

4. Since I am often obliged to associate with different types of people, I must not forget that to certain ones I must show only the best, to others what is good, and to the rest what is indifferent or ordinary, but to no one what is bad. To those who are superior to me, either by age or by profession or by authority, I will show only the best; to my equals, I will show what is good; to my subordinates, I will show what is ordinary. To no one should be shown what is bad since this can be offensive to those who see it and render displeasing the person who acts in this fashion. In fact, people of rank and wisdom admire only what is best, while equals would attribute such conduct to affectation, and subordinates to an excess of seriousness. There are certain people of a morose nature who take great pleasure in having people reveal their defects to them. It is especially from these people that faults should be concealed since they are particularly impressionable and will tend to philosophize and speculate on the slightest imperfection for ten years. And what can be accomplished by revealing one's faults? Are they not evident enough in themselves? There is really no good reason to put them on display, but it is good to admit them and to confess them. In spite of all that I have just said, whether I am speaking with my superiors or equals or subordinates, I may vary my conversation somewhat by mingling the excellent with the good and with the ordinary, provided that I do it with discretion. In other words, I have to adapt my behavior to the different kinds of people I am with at any given moment without, of course, doing anything contrary to virtue.

5. If it should happen that I have to deal with people who are insolent, outspoken, or morose, I will take the following precautions: with the insolent, I will be very reserved; with the outspoken, I will be perfectly frank and speak to them freely and openly as long as they are God-fearing people; with the melancholic and morose, I will show myself, as the proverb says, "only at the window," that is, I will reveal myself only partially, since this type of person is very curious about one's interior life, and they become very
suspicious if one is too reserved. But I will not be totally open with them since, as I have already said, they tend to speculate and to examine too closely the qualities of those with whom they associate.

6. If necessity requires that I associate with important people, I will be particularly careful to be on guard, because you have to deal with important people as you do with fire: it is good to approach fire from time to time but do not get too close. And so I will conduct myself in their presence with absolute correctness mixed, however, with a respectful freedom. Important people, as a rule, enjoy being loved and respected. Love certainly breeds freedom, and respect begets courtesy. There is no harm, then, in enjoying a certain amount of freedom in their company, provided that I do not forget the respect that is their due and that I make sure that the respect is greater than the freedom. Among equals, I will be equally free and respectful. With subordinates, I can be more free than respectful; but, with important people and with superiors, I have to be more respectful than free.