

LASALLIAN STUDIES N° 13

**The International Council
for Lasallian Studies**

The Lasallian Charism

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Generalate

Via Aurelia, 476

00165 - ROME

February 2006

LE CHARISME LASALLIEN

First French edition: June 2005

Second French edition: October 2005

English translation by Aidan Patrick Marron, FSC.

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February 2006

Supplemento al n. 2 del 2005 della *Rivista lasalliana*

Aut. Trib. di Torino n. 353 del 26 gennaio 1949

Direttore responsabile: **Secondino Scaglione**

Tipografia:

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Introduction

The International Council for Lasallian Studies offers to all Lasallians this work on the *Lasallian Charism*. The request for this text came first of all from the Formation Commission, aimed at Lasallians in general. Lasallian Studies were asked to coordinate the work and finally, in 2003, the International Council for Lasallian Studies was constituted as a work group, first of all to gather together various pieces of data and written works and then, in 2004, to divide up the tasks among some of its members. It is the results of this work that is offered to you in the collection *Lasallian Studies*.

The study of the semantic field of the word charism was confided to Brother Antonio Botana.

Brother Edwin Arteaga introduces charism as it occurs in the Bible, from Adam up to the New Testament.

Brother Paul Grass has picked out the uses of the word charism in Church texts: pontifical documents, Vatican II, post-synod apostolic exhortations, talks given to Brothers of the Christian Schools during various General Chapters, etc.

In his article: *Discovering, Living, Sharing the gift of God*, Brother Jean-Louis Schneider tells us how the Brothers have understood their charism in the course of their history.

Brother Alain Houry, with the Formation Commission, talks about the manner in which charism is present in recent texts of the Institute (since 1966).

Finally, seven Lasallians from various continents and cultures tell us how they understand and live Lasallian charism today.

Brother Jean-Louis Schneider has written the Conclusion by attempting a final summary around the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.

Besides the texts quoted in the various articles, a bibliography is offered at the end of the work.

I would like to offer my fraternal thanks to all those who made a contribution to the production of this publication. This publication would not have been possible without the support of the Publications Service, with Brother José Antonio Warletta and his assistant, Mr. Luigi Cerchi. This publication in *Lasallian Studies* inaugurates a new format for this collection, or at least for this type of publication. I would like to thank the International Communications Commission for the advice given on this matter during their last meeting.

Jean-Louis SCHNEIDER, fsc
Director of Lasallian Studies.

I. Charism – Its semantic field

To understand the concept of **Charism** it is advisable to consider it in connection with other concepts with which it forms a *conceptual map*. Within this map it can be seen how the idea of charism differs from, conforms to or in some cases even identifies with other terms with which it is related.

- **Charism: a gift or personal quality with a positive social impact.**
- In a **context of faith**: Charism is a **gift** which the **Holy Spirit** gives to a **person** for **community** service or, better yet, to enable the person to contribute to the community's **mission**.
- The **community** is the **framework** in which a charism is developed, in its various manifestations: the small community or the **immediate community**, the local community or the community of **reference**, the **Church** community in a broad sense (beyond the sense of the institutional Church). In the last analysis, charism is at the service of God's Kingdom.

The community (each in its own location), **discerns and authenticates** personal charisms, according to their importance for the community.

- Every charism is at the service of the **unique Church mission**. The charism highlights for the individual a **specific mission or portion thereof** within the great mission of the Church.
- The carrying out of a mission, when dealing with a role which is especially important for the community, can be designated as a "**ministry**". The community entrusts or validates a ministry; the community designates a person as "**minister**", and the community

ensures that the person has charism for that ministry. Charism gives life to the ministry.

Charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit; the ministry is assigned or designated by the community.

Charism and ministry are like two aspects, internal and external, of a church identity as regards mission.

- **Charism** and **vocation** have a direct relationship: when a person comes to see his/her own life as a function of a mission, then vocation and charism identify with one another. Vocation (the orientation of one's entire life) becomes the main charism. Other more concrete or partial charisms can serve the central charism or vocation.
- A **vocational charism** is not only a **willingness for mission**, but it gives the person a **particular way of being** and a **spirituality**. And when that vocational charism is partaken by others, it also gives a type of **communion** (a way of living **fraternity**).
- Charisms are given to a **specific person**, but they may be partaken by others.

A **charism that is participatory** - as is the Lasallian charism - can be enriched by the **particular charisms** of individuals who participate in the main charism, which unites them for a **common mission**.

- The "**Founder's charism**" is a specific charism given to a person for the purpose of founding: to set in motion a collective identity with a participatory charism in service of a particular mission. John Baptist de La Salle had this Founder's charism. He along with the first Brothers set in motion the **founding charism** (or the original Lasallian charism) for the mission of providing a human and Christian education to the children of "artisans and the poor". This Lasallian charism is a participatory charism that gives rise to the **Lasallian identity**.

- The **Lasallian charism**, as the building axis of **Lasallian identity**, imparts an orientation to the whole formation process for that identity, which involves: a style (or way of being), a special sensitivity to certain needs, preferences in selecting those who will be sent on mission, some criteria and options for the approach to responses, a way of evaluating the mission.
- The **Lasallian charism** gives rise to **Lasallian spirituality**, which expresses the sense and human depth of the educational task, and highlights that task as the privileged place of the educator with God.
- A **shared charism** is made visible by means of a **historical heritage** which brings a **culture** along with it.

The **Lasallian culture** refers to the historical journey of John Baptist de La Salle and his Institute, to pedagogical achievements in which the mission has materialized, and to expressions of faith in which Lasallian spirituality is planned.

Antonio BOTANA, fsc.

II. Charism in the Bible

The word charism is virtually a transliteration of the Greek *charisma* which means “free gift” and is linked to the same root as *charis* “grace”. In the New Testament the word does not always have a technical sense. It can describe all the gifts of God which are never withdrawn (Rom 11:23), in particular that “gift of grace” that comes to us through Christ (Rom 5:15) and which blossoms into eternal life (Rom 6:23). Indeed, in Christ, God has “freely bestowed grace” on us (Eph 1:6 - *charitos*) and “he will grant us all kinds of gifts” (Rom 8:32 - *charisetai*).

But if in the New Testament we find, thanks to saint Paul, the outline of a theology of charism in general, and of charisms in particular, it is not the same in the Old Testament. There we do not find any theological discourse on this topic. So we shall have to detect it in the heroic deeds of our Fathers in the faith. It is indeed in what they did that we catch a glimpse of the gifts they received from God. As in the New Testament, these charisms are at the service of the community. The most outstanding one is that of leadership but we also discover within it the charism of universal openness, that of the ability to get started or to start again, and the charism of prophecy. We shall conclude this study with a reflection on the charisms of the Jewish people. Christian charisms are admirably described by saint Paul in his epistles. But before coming to that, we must first reflect on the gift of life as the first charism offered to the first man.

1. Charism is a call to life

At the beginning of the Bible man does not in fact **have** any charism, he is charism because he *is* gift of life in the world and for the world.

He is called to live life in the world as a response. It is this gift of life he is called to build on.

In calling us to life today God sees and says that *“it is good!”* and he repeats it twice in the first chapter of Genesis, then ends this chapter saying that *“it is very good!”*. Further on in the Bible the gift of life is so important that God will claim the life of the man who dares to take it from others (cf. Gen 9:5 and 11).

God gave man the right to name all the animals and other living creatures. In the semitic world it was a sign of power and dominion to know the characteristics of the other and to call it by its name. (cf. the pathetic struggle for the identity of Jacob with a “Stranger”). Curiously, to the man whom he has just endowed with life, God gives no name. It is his decision to leave him respectfully free with his identity of... “mud”: Adam, which is close to “adamah”, clay. So as not to remind him of his fragility and humiliate him God does not give him any name. Later on, Adam, made from mud, will receive the charism of Revelation!

God creates us as subjects of revelation. That is the second charism received by man: *“God in his goodness and wisdom wished to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1,9)... By this revelation the invisible God (cf. Col 1:15), from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and moves among them (cf. Bar 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company”* (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 2).

It is a variable charism dependent on man’s freedom. If life is received in the beginning, it has to be chosen after that (cf. Deut 30:15-20). He who is called to life recognises with the psalmist that God is the source of life (Ps 36:9); his love is stronger than life (Ps 63:3) and the life received is time given for praising (Ps 104:33). In the person of Jesus who received the “fullness” of the Father, meaning all the

charisms, God lives among us so that we may have the charism of life and that we may have it abundantly (Jn 10:10).

Man is not only called to intimate life with God to respond to his loving initiative, he is also called to life through the whisper of two persons who one day received the charism of love and said to each other "I love you". That is why man is called to build up his own story and that of others. When all is said and done, man has received two charisms from the beginning of the Old Testament, the charism of life and that of its potential for Revelation.

*For Adam charism was a capacity for openness
to life and to Revelation.*

2. Charism is the competence to set out.

"The Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you...'" (Gen 12:1).

Abraham was called to start an exodus, to leave behind his geographical place (*your country, your land*), his roots, his nation and his social and tribal focal point (*your kindred*), leave and give up the place where he is establishing his own identity (*your father's house, your name*), in short, leave himself completely... almost a kenosis, empty himself totally of his self. To the Hebrew imperative *'Lekh'* Depart! the Hebrew adds: **lekha** - for you, for your good! It is another characteristic, but an essential one, of the demands of biblical charism: to know how to set out and be capable of doing so. For Abraham nothing or almost nothing more remained. All he has is the path he will tread as he goes on his way.

That path is not reserved only for religious. A lay person can also set out. The Spirit will whisper to him what he will have to leave behind to pass from being a “recipient” of the pilgrim charism to being a guide and instructor. So, the charism of the personal exodus is given before the one which will be given to the whole people in setting out from Egypt.

The word which creates Abraham is the same as the one which chooses him, calls him and sets him on his way into the unknown. It is for us to meditate on and appraise the charism of listening to the Word. It was by listening to the Word of God that “Abraham went out”.

Because Abraham set out, God revealed himself to him at Shechem at the oak of Moreh (the oak of the Master). After making progress in faith and relationship with God, Abraham built an altar to the east of Bethel (House of God). Here the charism becomes richer: it is not only the ability of making a response, it is also that of *dialogue*, which begins with an act of worship on an altar.

For Abraham the charism is the capacity to set out.

3. Charism is capacity for leadership

MOSES

The unusual thing in the life of Moses is that he discovers his vocation through simple curiosity. A burning bush which is not consumed surprises him. It is God calling him through his curiosity. “Here I am” replies Moses to Yahweh’s double call. In an exchange of words, each makes himself known to the other. Moses is the one “saved from the waters” and Yahweh is “the God of his ancestors”.

So he is a familiar God, and not a far-off, Olympian God. It is only in Ex 34:5 that Moses will be able to call God “Yahweh”. He is a God who shares his story and therefore the story of his oppressed people in Egypt. He is a God torn apart by the sufferings of Moses’ people whom he looks upon as “his own”. In spite of everything Moses is a man with contacts, half Hebrew, half Egyptian, and it is in that capacity that God intervenes and gives him his charism; he wants nothing but the life of a people, and his charisms of witness are lost in the oppression.

Thus Moses received the charism of curiosity to draw near to God and receive other charisms. If he had not been curious to draw near the burning bush he would not have had any dialogue with God nor any enlightenment. The first charism of the Exodus is, then, that of curiosity - leaving behind one’s self, one’s certainties for the unfamiliar that God is suggesting to us - then comes an openness to go further. It is the charism that gives the strength for the initial detachment, that from his sandals... People do not walk in the burning desert full of snakes without sandals.

For Moses the charism of the Exodus is that of strength which combats his personal shortcomings which hinder him from devoting himself to his mission. Moses is a stammerer and wants to remain such so as not to change his vocation into a dangerous mission. Let Yahweh send someone else! (Nb 11:11; Ex 3:11; 4:1). And Yahweh answers him in a practical way: “If you have little faith in my charism, rely on the persuasive tongue of your brother”. Moses has yet to grasp that God *listens, sees and remembers*, verbs about God which frame the third chapter of Exodus. When he does grasp it, his charism enables him to respond by means of a liberating mission and it is, in fact, the charism of leadership that he receives.

Moses goes on his way and returns to Jethro, his father-in-law. He says: Let me go back to my kinsmen in Egypt and see whether they

are still alive (Ex 4:18). It involves a return to his own people motivated by the same curiosity he had for the burning bush: he wants “to *see* if they are still alive”. Moses’ vocation springs, first of all from the charism of his curiosity. God burns for his people in the burning bush. Moses finds him there and also through curiosity he will *see* the *seething cauldron* of his oppressed people.

God *comes down to deliver his people* (3:8) in coming again to Moses to *bring them forth from Egypt* (3:10) and God also will bring them out (*will raise them up and cause them to come up* from Egypt to the Promised Land, says the Hebrew text). Moses’ faith is strengthened and completed. He has two credos, the dogmatic credo of Dt 6:4-9 and the historical credo of Dt 26:5-11; one of faith at the *Burning Bush* and the other of faith in God the liberator of his oppressed people. In freeing his people Moses is responding to his charism of leader not without doubts and putting God to the test with seven objections or questions! (1st in Ex. 3:11; 2nd in 3:13; 3rd, 4th and 5th in 4:1; 6th in 4:10; and 7th in 4:13). Finally, God gives Moses the visible sign of his charism of authority: “You shall take in your hand this rod, with which you shall do the signs” (4:17). Thanks to this charism Moses is able to extol his authority and God acting in him (Dt 31:22) and he understands that he has to pass on his leadership (Nb 27:12-18; Dt 31:7) in the meantime suppressing mutinies and rebellions (Num 16:1; 12:1). The ultimate goal of the charism is to make possible the liberation which culminates in the covenant.

There is no theory of charism in the Old Testament. It would be possible to draw up a list of charisms, focussing for the most part on that of leadership, starting from the sapiential literature of Proverbs, Wisdom, Ecclesiastes of Qoheleth and Ecclesiasticus of Ben Sirach. However we shall find the best illustration of leadership in those leaders raised up by God in Israel. Among them are those who were unhappy, victorious, contrite, legislators and sav-

iours of their people. Some are martyrs and give their blood for Israel and Yahweh, others are cowards and some assassins. Sometimes the same leader passes through all these stages in the course of his life; these are the highs and lows of a man who, in his struggle, has to take into account three entities: God, his people and himself.

GIDEON

The negative charism of an inexperienced, distrustful and cynical leader.

Gideon is chosen by God who treats him as *a strong and valiant man* (Jg 6:11-12). Far from appreciating this description by God and showing trust in him, Gideon complains because he does not save him from the Midianites, as before (6:13). What happens is that he ignores the strength of the charism he possesses (11:14). He lacks trust and demands proofs from God (6:17, 36, 39). God is meek towards him to help him grow and become conscious of his charism (6: 17-18, 40). But God's advances in the hope that he will become conscious of it are in vain: He does not want to rule Israel... Let Yahweh be their ruler! (8:23).

In contradiction to his flight from the requirements of his charism, he exercises royal powers without having been invested with them! He accepts the ring, the royal symbol (8:25), organises worship (8:26-27) and even has a harem (8:29).

DAVID

The charism of a humane leader and an organiser.

With David the charism of leadership is subdivided, in a manner of speaking, into other charisms which enable him to exercise it.

The charism of *faithfulness*: David is passionate in his friendships and faithful to them to the end. He is faithful to Jonathan, son of king Saul (1S 20:8) and shows favour to Mephibosheth (2S 4:4) son of his great friend by lodging him in his palace (9:9-12). He weeps for his great friend, Jonathan (2S 1:17-27) and for his generals (2S 3:30-39). His faithfulness extends also to Abiathar, the priest who had saved him (1S 22:22) and to his household, even when he took refuge with the Philistines, the enemies of Israel (1S 27:1-5).

The charism of *respect*: in spite of king Saul's persecution of which he is the object, David has a great respect for him (1S 24:7-12; 26:9-12). He even goes as far as having Saul's assassin (2S 1:14-17) and sons of the king (2S 4:6-12) killed, and, when he was fleeing from his son Absalom, putting up with the insults of Saul's descendants (2S 16:5-13).

The charism of a *sense of the Transcendent*: he wishes to build a sumptuous temple to Yahweh (2S 7). He consults God (1S 23:8-13; 30:6-9; 2S 2:1; 5:17-21) and does not immediately transport the Ark into his capital out of respect for and fear of God (2S 6:8-11)... Tradition attributes many psalms to him.

The charism of *listening*: David listens to strategic advice when he is confronted by his son Absalom (18:1-6). He is the captain of the desperate (1S 22:1). He is just and impartial in sharing the booty with those who had not taken part in the looting (1S 30:21-25).

SOLOMON

The charism of the triumphant and wise leader

It is the same with Solomon as with his father David. His charism as triumphant leader is subdivided, in a manner of speaking, into other charisms which enable him carry out successfully his kingly vocation.

The charism of *organisation and construction*: Solomon is a great builder who, among other things builds his palace (1K 3:1; 7:1), the city walls, the Temple (6:1), the House of the Forest of Lebanon, the Hall of the Throne and the Hall of Pillars (7:2-7). Together with his dozen palace quartermasters (4:7) he organises the building of his Red Sea fleet and the levying of foreigners for forced labour.

The charism of *wisdom*: Bearing in mind the choices God offered him he chose wisdom (3:5-10) and God gave him knowledge together with it (4:20). According to Scripture Solomon would have uttered 3000 proverbs and composed 5000 poems (4:32). These charisms did not stop him from marrying the daughter of Pharaoh (3:1), from having 700 wives of royal blood and 300 foreign concubines who led him into idolatry (11:1-70). He even built temples to Chemosh and Milcom (11:1-8). God put an end to his rule dividing his kingdom in two: his son Jeroboam with ten tribes ruled Israel, in the north, and his other son Roboam remained in Jerusalem with the tribe of Juda (11:29-37).

Other Charisms of illustrious leaders

The judges or chiefs have few common traits. Their names are: Othnyel, Ehud, Shamgar, Debora and Barak, Gideon and Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon and Samson.

Debora was a prophetess who uttered her oracles and pronounced judgement under a palm tree (Jg 4:5). **Gideon** has already been cited. **Jephthah** was the son of a prostitute (11:1) and leader of a band of villains (11:3). **Samson**, a young man endowed with enormous strength, sowed terror among the Philistine enemies of Israel. He succumbed to the charms of Delilah (16:3,17).

The judges have different strategies: **Samson's** strength is in his arms (14:6) but especially in his hair (16:17). **Ehud** acts for his

own ends and can carry out his plans because he is left-handed (3:21). Gideon launches a surprise night attack (7:19). Always apparent in the feats which they achieve is the power of the God of Israel who sustains his people in difficult times and assures their existence in spite of their desertions and infidelities (2:18).

4. Charism is prophetic ministry.

We can learn much from Jeremiah by comparing his “confessions” (11:18-21; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:9-18) with the account of his vocation (1:1-19). Jeremiah like all those “called” is predestined from his mother’s womb to be a prophet for the nations. Faced with the challenge of the messenger, Jeremiah declares that he lacks the ability because he cannot give a speech and he is only a child. His investiture consists in an action of Yahweh who extends his hand and touches his mouth to communicate his Word to him. Henceforth his life will be marked by his charism and its prophetic signs (1:11-16). That is even going to take the form of total participation in the political life of his country up to the time that, having predicted the victory of the northern empires over Israel and counselling flight into Egypt in the south, he is considered a traitor. But whatever may happen God promises that he will be with him to save him (1:8). Jeremiah has the charism of endurance in all the vicissitudes of his life as prophet.

As a prophet, the process of his call is classic: “I knew you, I consecrated you and appointed you to be a prophet. Gird up your loins, arise and speak to them” (1:17-19). All those called experience fear and are conscious of their weakness. With Yahweh’s assistance they *denounce, witness and proclaim* thanks to the charism of prophetic fearlessness.

Other accounts of prophetic vocation, marked by practically the same charisms are just as important such as those of Elisha (2K 2:1-18), Amos (7:10-17 and 9:1-4), Hosea (1:1-9; 3:1-5) and second and third Isaiah (Is 40:1-11; 61:1-6).

The charism of Jeremiah is prophetic fearlessness.

5. Charism is the strength to start afresh.

After fulfilling his prophetic task Elijah was called again (1K 19). We find the story of Elijah in 1K 17-20 and 2K 1-2. The calling of Elijah is directed towards the struggle against the idols of Baal, the fertility god. Elijah defends and proclaims the God of faithfulness, morality, water, fire and social justice (1K 17-18) and of health (2K 1).

He is a prophet who is also afraid when he is to confront queen Jezebel and he flees (1K 19). He feels that he is all alone and defeated (1K 19:4-5). Elijah is a *good* prophet - even though we have no account of his first calling - just as we are *good Christians* without extras. Yahweh's order is clear: "Get up and eat! For the journey is beyond your strength". Strengthened, Elijah is questioned by God on his motivation. The prophet then describes his situation as one of zeal and utter persecution. You could say that after being nourished by Yahweh the prophet is daring to attribute his setbacks to him. But his interior fire, his zeal, will have to be changed into a divine breeze, then he will be able to accept further orders: "Be off, go back, on your way to the wilderness of Damascus!...". That means, take up your task again.

The charism of Elijah is the strength to start again.

6. Charism is a capacity for openness

Jonah has received a calling he refuses; he evades God's order and flees. The order was clear at the start: "Arise and go to Nineveh". However Jonas arises to flee to Tarshish, far from Yahweh. The prophet wants to keep his life for himself. God's call is disturbing, and upsetting and creates conflict. Deep within him there are two Jonahs, one feels he is called and recognises it but flees, the other Jonah is touched by remorse. The sailors recognise it. When the whale vomits him up, God gives him the same order a second time: "Arise and go to Nineveh". A repentant Jonah complies.

The result of the "dialogue" in the belly of the whale is Jonah's revival. Curiously, Jonah corners God, confines him to one line of action, and talks only of the destruction of the people of Nineveh. When these are converted to doing good, instead of rejoicing he becomes angry and annoyed: his vocation as prophet consists in the accomplishment of what "he" predicted for the Ninevites and not in the salvation God has granted them. God who put up with and forgave his flight must not forgive the people of Nineveh! This is pride within Jonah's vocation. The generosity of the repentance of these people offends his somewhat tarnished conversion. The story comes to an end with a third appeal to Jonah to recognise that God is good *towards all*, and not only to those who think they are his privileged ones.

The city, the prophet and God are the three pivots of the story of Jonah. God is calling us to the big metropolis, our city, he comes to meet us if we try to escape and keeps on reminding us of our vocation until we live it in a prophetic manner, without class selfishness, or deviousness, and unconditionally.

Jonah's charism is the capacity for openness.

7. Charisms of the Jewish people

The vocation of the People of God in the Old Testament is their response to various callings which lead to different charisms, the same ones which sustain the calling giving them their identity. So it is that:

1. Thanks to the charism of universality, the Jews are called to come to terms with their election by God in the midst of the nations and to do so despite the ambiguities of the Diaspora which is at one and the same time blessing and chastisement.
2. Thanks to the charism of fidelity, they must accept the “promises” of fertility, of the Promised Land and of the Presence of God amongst them.
3. Thanks to the charism of listening, they are called to observe the Covenant with its commandments. In Hebrew *to obey* and *to listen* are the same word.
4. Thanks to the charism of wisdom and perceptiveness, they will be able to choose Life.
5. Thanks to the charism of memory, they are called to worship God in the Temple and the synagogue recalling all the “*magnalia Dei*”, the presence of God in their History.
6. Thanks to the charism of martyrdom, they are called to be witnesses:
 - a) of monotheism and the absoluteness of God;
 - b) of the epic deeds accomplished by God on their behalf;
 - c) of a linear view of History which became sacred through God’s revelation;
 - d) of the universality of the message of salvation revealed by God;

- e) of the primacy accorded by God to justice and the poor even at the expense of his worship;
- f) of the love and forgiveness of God.

8. Charism in the New Testament

In the New Testament vocation is perceived after awareness that the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us and we saw him in his glory full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14); after becoming aware that, in Jesus, the Word of God and the word of man meet and amount to the same thing in the one person. Jesus is vocation par excellence, the Chosen One by antonomasia. The vocation of the lay Christian is to respond to the call of Jesus to follow him. It is a free gift: *“He appointed twelve [at first] to be with him and [then] to be sent out to preach...”* (Mk 3:14).

Vocation accommodates a renewed sentiment of the presence of God. As for the mission of each one, the text of 1 Cor 12:4-31 is enlightening in its simplicity. Mission feeds on itself and has its origins in the charisms received in baptism. Vocation is only the development of the potentialities of baptism which makes us sons of God, brothers of Christ and of our neighbour... Vocations for mission are a charism, a gift of God to his Church to build it up and give it its legitimacy in the name of Jesus.

Vocations are numerous but they cannot all be equated with consecration. Genuine consecration, fulltime and with all one's powers directed to the work of God, is a special charism which is not given to all.

Many theologians describe vocation in the New Testament as a call to become a disciple. The Christian is simply called to be a “disciple” in following Jesus. The charisms that support the vocation of the disciple are well known but it is good to recall some of them:

1. Blind and confident faith in Jesus and in the Providence of the Father.
2. Humility and simplicity similar to that of a child (cf. Ps 131).
3. Courage to renounce one's own life, readiness to carry each day's cross.
4. Detachment from every possession, family and a cunning ego (cf. Lk 10:20; Mt. 10:9 and Phil 3:7-15).
5. Listening to the purifying and encouraging word.
6. Attention to the Spirit of Jesus who proclaims what he hears from God and prays in us.
7. Practical, universal and unconditional love of the neighbour, with a preferential option for the poor.
8. Pursuit of the loving knowledge of Jesus and the Father (cf. Jn 17:3).
9. Journeying with the Master, without possessions, filled with peace in order to share it.
10. Announcing the Truth without fear (cf. Mt 10:27).
11. Meditating on these things with Mary, the mother and educator of Jesus (cf. Lk 2:51).

The vocation of Christians, Jesus' people, takes over in its own name that of the people of Israel and its charisms seeing that, according to God's plan, its identity stems ontologically from that people. The differences in the two vocations are explained by the presence of Jesus, Messiah and Son of God, in the life of Christians, called to consider their calling to be "adopted sons" and brothers of Jesus Christ. So, Christians will have the charism of sonship and of brotherhood.

1. The promises made to the Fathers are summed up in the promise to send the Holy Spirit. So, Christians will have all the spiritual gifts promised by God.
2. The Promised Land is the Church which one day will be the heavenly Jerusalem. Thanks to it, the new people of God, Christians, will also have all the charisms of Israel.
3. The sacramental presence of God in the Body and Blood of Jesus will offer Christians the charisms of reconciliation and pardon.
4. The celebration of this Presence will be possible by participating in the charism of the memory of Israel. With it we celebrate the Passover, the passage from death to life.
5. The charism of the universality of salvation will henceforth be transmitted through Jesus Christ and will be proposed to all men.
6. The option for the poor already preached and lived by the prophets of Israel will be possible for Christians thanks to the charism of mercy.

The Christian vocation is ontological: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet 2:9). Saint Paul ties the identity of those who believe in Christ to that of Israel. “It is not you who support [Israel] the root, but it is [Israel] the root which supports you” (Rom 11:19). Elsewhere the Christian vocation is defined by the apostle as a calling:

1. To belong, well and truly, to God and the community - Rom 1:6.
2. To be holy and without reproach - Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2.
3. To live in peace - 1 Cor 7:15 and Col 3:15.

4. To be free - Gal 5:13.
5. To hope living with a single hope - Eph 4:4.
6. For the Kingdom - 1 Thes 2:12.

Vocation is a call... *Call* which in Hebrew is *Qryáh*. But “qryáh” also means *reading!* Vocation is, then, a reading of our life by God, for us... It is also a reading of our life by us, for God...

In the New Testament, vocation is maintained and strengthened thanks to charisms. But the first of these gifts is the Holy Spirit himself who is poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5; 8:15). The word *charisma* is used within the perspective of this presence of the Spirit and his free gifts (1 Cor 12:1-4).

In the Old Testament the presence of the Spirit was expressed in the extraordinary gifts in which the prophets rejoiced (1K 22:28; 18:22; Ez 3:12). The Messiah being the greatest of the prophets was granted all the gifts of the Spirit (Is 11:2). The Spirit who was already hovering at the first moment of creation will be the guarantor of a new creation in the hearts of the faithful (Ez 36:26; Jl 3:1). It is the Church which will henceforth gather together all these gifts in the grace of the sacraments and the presence of the Spirit which assists in its magisterium. It may also be said that it was these same charisms that built it up as much in its beginnings as they do today.

In the early church these gifts or charisms were part of everyday experience. So it was that the preaching of saint Paul was accompanied by miracles (1 Th 1:5; 1 Cor 2:4). He had the gift of speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:18), he had visions (2 Cor 12:1-4). These gifts of the Spirit were also sometimes found in the heart of the community so much so that they sometimes became a preoccupation (1 Cor 12:14). The exhilaration caused by a charism of the Spirit was not free of ambiguity extending even to encouraging schism (1 Cor 12).

The gifts of the Spirit are of the most diverse kinds as are ministries in the Church. What constitutes their most profound unity is that they come from the single Spirit. Comparison with the human body helps us to understand more easily their reference to the common good (1 Cor 12:17): they all work together for the good of the Church, the Body of Christ. The distribution of these charisms is at one and the same time a matter for the Spirit and a matter for Christ who gives divine grace as he thinks best (Eph 4:7-10).

Paul was not concerned about giving us a reasoned classification of charisms although he enumerates them several times (1 Cor 12:8; Rom 12:6; Eph 4:1). Firstly, some charisms are related to functions of the ministry: those of apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, and pastors. Others concern diverse activities useful for the community: service, instruction, exhortation, works of mercy, words of wisdom or knowledge, gift of healing, speaking in tongues, discernment of spirits... It is clear that most charisms played a special role in the liturgy and worship of the primitive Church (Act 2:42).

The gift of tongues or glossolalia was a much valued, even highly sought, charism in the liturgy of the primitive Church. This gift was part of the service of the Word before the eucharistic worship properly so called. The first manifestation of glossolalia was undoubtedly on the day of Pentecost (Act 2:4-11 and 15; 10:46; 11:15; 19:6). The fact of speaking unknown languages or uttering inarticulate sounds required, moreover, another gift, that of interpretation of the unknown language by the same person or by others (1 Cor 14:16 and 26). However the teaching ministry was more important for Paul. The Holy Spirit intervened powerfully in the instruction of converted Jews and pagans thanks to charisms that we can no longer describe and recognise precisely today.

The gift of wisdom brings together clear knowledge and a masterly art for expounding the mystery of Christ in all its height and depth

(cf. 1 Cor 2:6-16; Eph 1:2-23). The charism of knowledge gives ease in expounding the ordinary truths and elementary teachings about Christ (Heb 6:1). The charism of prophecy has a privileged place (Act 11:27; 13:1; 21:9). Its purpose was to read hearts (1 Cor 14:24), to foretell the future, to build up, to exhort and console; it was the ministry of *paráclēsis* (1 Cor 14:3). But the most important function reserved to prophets was expounding within the design of Christ all the messianic predictions (1 Pet 1:10-12) and thus bringing to light the saving power of God in Christ (Rom 16:25).

This free and divine profusion of the spirit calls for regulations in its use. It must be borne in mind that all gifts and charisms are essentially “spiritual”. So, the spirit which seems to be at the origin of the charism must be proven. Their authenticity must also be verified (1 Thes 5:19). The grace of this discernment is essential. The first rule of verification is that genuine gifts of the Spirit are recognised by the fact that the person confesses that Jesus is the Lord. Since the use of charisms is ordered to the common good, they must respect its hierarchy. It is in this spirit that Paul gives the Corinthian community instructions to be strictly observed (1 Cor 14:26-38). Whatever be the way they are regulated and their differentiation, charisms derive their value from the role they play in evangelisation.

The particular vocations of Christians are likewise founded on charisms: one is called to celibacy, another receives a different gift. Charity, first among Christian virtues, is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:32-14:1). The charism of charity is presented primarily as the charism of beneficence as *diakonia* “in serving our needs” (Rom 12:7). It is this charism that underpins all the charitable works of the Church, and which serves as a witness to non-Christians. The bond of the charism that presides over the beneficent works of the Church and of the love which goes as far as martyrdom, is the Spirit of Jesus, their first source.

Charism, then, is a circuit within which the goodness of the Lord operates for the building up of the Church: it is given for the common good and this common good, in its turn, is administered and discerned by ministers who have the benefit of the charism of ministry.

Edwin ARTEAGA TOBÓN, fsc.

III. Charism in the Church

*“The Church throughout its history has always been charismatic.”*¹

Like a constellation of stars, the words *Spirit*, *grace*, *gift*, and *charism* express the richness of the created world and the infinite generosity of the Creator. Everything is God’s gift: Creation, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Scriptures, the Church, Tradition, the Magisterium, and the Kingdom of God. The word *charism* can mean a divine gift, a supernatural grace, an extraordinary talent, a temporary or permanent skill, a special influence over followers, an institutional identity, an office or talent to benefit the Church, an extraordinary personal quality, or a miraculous power. The use of the word *charism* in Church documents, especially since the Second Vatican Council, has become almost routine to refer to the gifts that the Spirit bestows on men and women of faith.

The Spirit inspires the Church, the body of Christ, through two parallel and complementary paths: (1) through “a covenant relationship with the Church, guaranteeing the effectiveness of its sacraments and official ministries,” and (2) in “unpredictable and often surprising charismatic interventions.”² The interaction, and sometimes the conflict, between charismatic elements and institutional, or hierarchical, structures is a constant theme in the history of the Church.

Early Christians experience a sense of joy in the midst of suffering: they live in an intense period of unique and abundant blessings in

¹ Karl Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 54.

² Francis A. Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: A Biblical and Theological Study* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1982), p. 47.

anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the heavenly bliss to follow. While experiencing powerful, immediate signs of the Spirit's work in building up the Church, early believers search for language to describe the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the gifts, the graces, the mysteries, and the charisms.

The Fathers and the Doctors of the Church speak often of the Holy Spirit, of the gifts and the counsels, of the powers and the prerogatives of ordained ministers, of the marvels of grace, of the interpretation of the Scriptures, and, above all, of the unfathomable but fascinating mysteries of the Triune God. The terms *Spirit*, *grace*, and *gift* appear repeatedly, but the word *charism* is far less frequent.

The experience of charisms seems relatively universal in the early Church. Whether charisms are rare or universal among believers is a question throughout Church history, but believers never doubt the link between charisms and the Spirit. The tendency to rank charisms according to some system of priority or superiority is also constant in the Church.

In his translation of the Bible, Saint Jerome uses a Latin form of *charism* (*charismata*-Saint Paul's "the greater gifts"³) only once. He describes virginity and marriage as gifts in the context of Paul's expression, "diversities of gifts." Church documents in the twentieth century will apply the word *charism* to all the states of life, including the single state, the married state, Holy Orders, and the consecrated life.

Discernment is another aspect of charism that dates from the earliest period of the Church, for example, the need to distinguish authentic prophets from soothsayers. Discernment and the authority to discern remain priorities since the Church's first experiences with charisms.

³ 1 Cor 12:31.

The word *charism* exists in Greek and in Latin but not in seventeenth-century French. John Baptist de La Salle frequently writes about the *Spirit (l'Esprit)* and the *gifts (les dons) of the Spirit*. He refers in his *Meditations*⁴ to the Trinity as the source of all the gifts that a person requires as a religious educator. De La Salle speaks about *gifts*, not *charisms*, but his *Meditations* are consistent with the meaning of *charism* in the Church since Vatican Council II:

Those who instruct others... are only the voice of the One who disposes hearts to accept Jesus Christ and his holy teaching. The one who disposes them, according to Saint Paul, can only be God⁵, who imparts to humans the gift of speaking of him (Meditation 3.1).

Saint James assures us that every excellent grace and every perfect gift comes from on high and descends from the Father of lights.⁶ (Meditation 3.3).

De La Salle's most explicit teaching on the charism, the vocation, and the ministry of the teacher occurs in *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*:

Reflect on what Saint Paul says, that *it is God who has established in the Church apostles, prophets, and teachers*,⁷ and you will be convinced that he has also established you in your work. The same saint gives you another expression of this when he says that *there are diverse ministries but there are different operations, and the Holy Spirit manifests himself in each of these gifts for the common good*, that is to say, for the good of the Church. *One receives by the Spirit the gift to speak with wisdom, another the gift of faith by the same Spirit*.⁸

You must not doubt that it is a great gift of God, this grace he has given you to be entrusted with the instruction of children, to

³ 1 Cor 12:31.

⁴ John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994.

⁵ 1 Cor 3:5-6.

⁶ James 1:17.

⁷ 1 Cor 12:28.

⁸ 1 Cor 12:5-9.

announce the Gospel to them and to bring them up in the spirit of religion (MTR 201.1).

De La Salle anticipates Vatican II's understanding of charism, vocation, and ministry in the Church: "*Meditations for the Time of Retreat* questions the educator at the very heart of a spiritual way of life: the fulfilment of the ecclesial charism received for the benefit of the body of Christ growing up in the world."⁹

In the twentieth century, *charism* appears frequently in religion, sociology, politics, popular culture, the arts, and business. Catholic Church documents use the word *charism* with greater frequency. Two events in the first half of the twentieth century increase the usage of the word *charism*: the emergence of Pentecostalism in Europe and North America in the early 1900s and the publication in 1922 of Max Weber's sociological theory of traditional, rational, and charismatic authority.¹⁰

Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (The Mystical Body of Christ), 29 June 1943, highlights two expressions of charism whose interaction and equilibrium will preoccupy clergy and laity for decades to come: "hierarchical elements and charismatic gifts" (N° 64).¹¹ The pope's use of the term *charismatic* indicates his interest in the concept. In Europe at that time, the Catholic Action movement and the emergence of Christian Democratic political parties offer laypeople many opportunities to engage in political activity by using their God-given talents and charisms. Pius XII develops the theme of "charismatic gifts and hierarchical elements" in the Church:

⁹ De La Salle, *Meditations*, Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994, p. 431.

¹⁰ *Die protestantische Ethik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus*, 1905; *Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft*, 1922.

¹¹ The excerpts from papal documents, from the Second Vatican Council, and from Vatican Congregations are taken from the English translations on the Vatican Web site www.vatican.va.

The Church, which the Spirit guides in the way of all truth (cf. Jn 16,13) and which he unifies in communion and in works of ministry, he both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with his fruits (cf. Eph. 4,11-12; 1 Co. 12,4; Gal. 5,22). (N° 4).

In the building up of Christ's Body, various members and functions have their part to play. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church (cf. 1 Co. 12,1-11). What has a special place among these gifts is the grace of the Apostles, to whose authority the Spirit himself subjected even those who were endowed with charisms (cf. 1 Co 14). (7)

The second paragraph of N° 12 in *Lumen Gentium*, vigorously endorsed by Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens, places charisms alongside the other basic elements of the Church and provides Vatican II's basic definition of charism:

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, "allotting his gifts to everyone according as he wills" (1 Cor 12:11), he distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church (1 Cor 12:7). These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church. Extraordinary gifts are not to be sought after, nor are the fruits of apostolic labor to be presumptuously expected from their use; but judgment as to their genuineness and proper use belongs to those who are appointed leaders in the Church, to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (1 Thess 5:12 and 19-21). (N° 12).

The Lasallian formula of vows, “as far as I will be able and as you will require of me,”¹² anticipates the expression quoted above from *Lumen Gentium*: “fit and ready” (*aptos et promptos*).

The decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life), 28 October 1965, without using the word *charism*, centers the religious life in the action of the Holy Spirit. The text lists four essential elements of this action: (1) inspired by the Spirit, (2) freely accepted by the individual, (3) dedicated to the good of the Church, and (4) recognized by Church authorities. The spirit (Paul VI will call it the *charism*) of an institute has an indefinite duration, but the institute as an organization either changes or remains static with respect to the force and the effectiveness of its founding spirit.

The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant 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. (N^o 2)

In the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Apostolate of the Laity), 18 November 1965, Vatican II provides the doctrinal basis for the participation of all laypeople in the life of the Church. The Spirit bestows charisms on “each believer”, who is free to accept or to reject these gifts. The Spirit can choose to bestow on believers the charism of an existing religious institute - the Lasallian charism, for example. The text concludes by noting the urgency of the supervisory, coordinating (but not stifling) role of pastors:

The Holy Spirit... gives the faithful special gifts¹³ “allotting them to everyone according as he wills” in order that individuals, administering grace to others just as they have received it, may also be “good stew-

¹² John Baptist de La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), p 204.

¹³ 1 Co 12.7.

ards of the manifold grace of God” (1 P 4,10) to build up the whole body in charity(cf. Eph. 4,16). From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, who “breathes where he wills.” (Jn. 3,8) (N° 3).

The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration (by the Thirty-ninth General Chapter, Second Session, 1967) applies the principles of Vatican II to the particular situation of the worldwide Institute and the Lasallian movement:

Renewal demands a return to the sources to be found in the Gospel and in the origins of the Institute in order to recover in all its vigor the creative principle that gave birth to the Institute. In this way the Brothers will be able to go beyond mere externals to live effectively the charism of the Founder in the world today. (N° 2).

The charism of the Founder involves institutions only through the mediation of persons... Fidelity to the specific goals of the Founder and to the tradition of the Institute is confided to us as living persons. (N° 7.1).

The Church... achieves her mission only through the diversity and complementarity of her ministries and charisms. (N° 10.1).

The invitation to all her members to expand their horizons is a way of recognizing, with respect for the diversity of charisms, that the Holy Spirit dwells in each person. (N° 10.2).

The General Chapter... affirms also the interior liberty of each Brother and the benefits that come from different charisms. Unity is not to be found in uniformity but in harmonious complementarity. (N° 14.4).

Pope Paul VI (pontificate 1963-1978) “is the first to use the term *charismatic* as a usual part of his vocabulary.”¹⁴ In *Evangelica*

¹⁴ Edward D. O'Connor, *Pope Paul and the Spirit: Charisms and Church Renewal in the Teaching of Paul VI* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1978), p. 12.

Testificatio (The Evangelical Testimony of the Religious Life), 29 June 1971, he uses the word *charism* for the first time in a papal document in relation to religious life: “Reawaken hearts to the truth and to the divine love according to the charism of your founders... The charism of the religious life... is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always acting in the Church”. (No. 11). He also mentions the individual charism of the founders, “a constancy of orientation while allowing for internal growth and change.” (No. 12).

Michael J. Buckley, SJ, notes this “categorical shift from religious life classified primarily as a canonical reality,” that is, juridically and constitutionally, “to a charismatic reality,” structured and evaluated according to the new conciliar ecclesiology. “*Charism* has been given a priority over *status*.” Paul VI’s deliberate choice of charism as the defining category asserts “that religious life is directly dependent upon the Spirit, both for its origins and for its continually new forms.”¹⁵

Mutuae Relationes (Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in the Church, 14 May 1978, issued jointly by the Sacred Congregations for Religious and Secular Institutes and for Bishops) includes three topics: (1) what bishops expect from religious, (2) what religious expect from bishops, and (3) what means are to be used to arrive at orderly and fruitful cooperation between bishops and religious.

These directives apply the word *charism* to religious and secular institutes and give considerable attention to the need for the discernment of charisms. Bishops are “entrusted with the duty of caring for religious charisms, all the more so because the very indivisibility of their pastoral ministry makes them responsible for perfecting the entire flock.” (Nº 9c).

¹⁵ Michael J. Buckley, SJ, *The Charism and Identity of Religious Life*, in *Review for Religious* 44 (Sept-October 1985), p. 657.

The *charism of Founders* appears as an ‘experience of the Spirit’ transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened, and constantly developed by them in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth (cf. *Evang. Nunti.* 11). That is why the Church defends and supports the distinctive character of the different Religious Institutes (LG 44; CD 33, 35,1; 35,2...). The resulting “distinctive character also involves a particular style of sanctification and of apostolate, which creates its particular tradition, with the result that one can readily perceive its objective elements.” (Nº 11) Another theme - the inevitable relationship between charism and the cross - recalls De La Salle’s experience.¹⁶

Every authentic charism implies a certain element of genuine originality and of special initiative for the spiritual life of the Church. In its surroundings it may appear troublesome and may even cause difficulties, since it is not always and immediately easy to recognize it as coming from the Spirit.

Genuine charism, with its perspectives of newness and interior suffering, carries with it an unvarying history of the connection between charism and cross, which... is supremely helpful in discerning the authenticity of a vocation. (Nº. 12)

Buckley’s comment on this passage is applicable to the origins of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools:

Concretely and pragmatically, charism implies that religious life will always involve something that the Church has not seen before - or at least seen in this way... Unlike *status*, whose structures can be determined adequately by law, charism presages the new, the creative, and the troublesome.¹⁷

¹⁶ De La Salle, *Meditations*, 121.3; 87.3.

¹⁷ Buckley, *The Charism and Identity of Religious Life*, op. cit., 658-659.

Mutuae Relationes also provides a list of criteria to guide an institute's discernment of its charism and its activities: "fidelity to the Lord, docility to his Spirit, intelligent attention to the signs of the times, willingness to be part of the Church, awareness of subordination to the sacred hierarchy, boldness of initiatives, constancy in giving of self, humility in bearing with adversities". (N° 12).

Mutuae Relationes calls for "apostolic diligence... to devise new, ingenious, and courageous ecclesial experiments under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit... Responsiveness rich in creative initiative is eminently compatible with the charismatic nature of the religious life." (19) Three criteria determine the authenticity of a charism: (1) its special origin from the Spirit, (2) a profound ardor of love to be conformed to Christ, and (3) a constructive love of the Church. (N° 51).

Pope John Paul II's extensive writings over a period of twenty-five years continuously include the concept of *charism*. His many references to "hierarchical and charismatic gifts" demonstrate his desire to foster unity within communion in the Church.

The apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (Catechesis in Our Time), 16 October 1979, stresses the importance of all the charisms in all the believers:

From the Spirit come all the charisms that build up the Church, the community of Christians.¹⁸ "Renewal in the Spirit" will be authentic and will have real fruitfulness in the Church not so much according as it gives rise to extraordinary charisms but according as it leads the greatest possible number of the faithful... to make a humble, patient, and persevering effort to know the mystery of Christ better and better and to bear witness to it. (N° 72).

¹⁸ 1 Cor 12: 4-11.

Religious and Human Promotion, 12 August 1980, issued by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, directs all religious institutes to focus on justice and on human development. The document “very opportunely states the correlation between charism and new forms of ministry.”¹⁹

The Spirit, who constantly inspires new forms and institutions of consecrated life in answer to the needs of the times, also animates the already existing ones with a renewed capacity for involvement in keeping with ecclesial and social changes. (6b)

In the Church’s openness to ministries and in a continuous and orderly communal growth,²⁰ religious are able to discover new forms of active participation, involving the Christian community increasingly in their initiatives and works. In this way they have the opportunity to show what their own particular charism brings to the promotion of ministries which correspond to the apostolic and social purposes of their own institutes. (6c)

One paragraph, both complex and encouraging, blends citations from several Church documents:

Nor should religious fear any obstacle to the generosity and creativity of their projects²¹ from the hierarchical nature of this ecclesial communion, because every sacred authority is given for the purpose of harmoniously promoting charisms and ministries.²² Indeed, on the contrary, religious are encouraged²⁴ to be “enterprising in their undertakings and initiatives”; this is in keeping with the charismatic and prophetic nature of religious life itself. (27)

¹⁹ Bruno Secondin, O.Carm., *Horizons of the Charism of an Institute: The ‘New’ Participation of the Lay Faithful, in Consecrated Life* 17 (1992), 93.

²⁰ *Lumen Gentium* 9-12, 34-36; *Christus Dominus* 33-35; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 13, 58; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2, 6-10.

²¹ *Mutuae Relationes* 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 19; 41.

²³ *Lumen Gentium* 10-12, 27; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 9; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2.

²⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 69.

John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* (To Men and Women Religious on Their Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of the Redemption), 25 March 1984, refers to charisms in four different contexts: the “charismatic choice of Christ as one’s exclusive Spouse” (N° 11), the Church’s “universal mission, which is accomplished through many different charisms” (N° 15), the “particular gift of your founders, which, received from God and approved by the Church, has become a charism” (N° 15), and “the vocations and charisms of the whole People of God” (N° 15).

Following the 1987 Synod of Bishops, **the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*** (The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful), 30 December 1988, celebrates the Church’s dynamic vitality and creativity. The statement on “ecclesial communion”, in what is one of the most comprehensive papal documents on charism, proposes an organic unity among distinctive components:

Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an “organic” communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body... characterized by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms, and of responsibilities...

Church communion... is concretely realized through participation in the life and mission of the Church, to whose service the lay faithful put their varied and complementary ministries and charisms... The Spirit of the Lord gives a vast variety of charisms, inviting people to assume different ministries and forms of service... The charisms, the ministries, and the different forms of service exercised by the lay faithful exist in communion and on behalf of communion. (N° 20)

The Holy Spirit, while bestowing diverse ministries in Church communion, enriches it still further with particular gifts or promptings of grace, called *charisms*. These can take a great variety of forms, both as a manifestation of the absolute freedom of the Spirit, who abundantly supplies them, and as a response to the varied needs of the Church in history...

Whether they be exceptional and great or simple and ordinary, the charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit that have, directly or indirectly, a usefulness for the ecclesial community, ordered as they are to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity, and to the needs of the world.

Even in our own times there is no lack of a fruitful manifestation of various charisms among the faithful, women and men. These charisms are given to individual persons and can be shared by others in such ways as to continue in time a precious and effective heritage, serving as a source of a particular spiritual affinity among persons... (N° 24).

The increasing emphasis in Vatican documents on charism as the source of meaning and identity inevitably leads to new, imaginative thinking about the role of charism in the future of religious institutes:

Perhaps it is time to examine the call to charism first and explore possibilities for future development with that commonality in mind. Rather than have a person choose initially which aggregation of an institute's "family" a person is called to, perhaps we need a paradigm shift in which the first thing for all who seek a formal connection with the institute is to look into what their attraction to the charism (or spirit) of the institute is.²⁵

On 11 October 1992, Pope John Paul II issues **the apostolic constitution *Fidei Depositum*** to announce the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.²⁶ The *Catechism* describes the nature, the reception, and the discernment of charisms:

799. Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world.

²⁵ Deborah M. Cerullo, "Charism and Membership: Surpassing the Institutional Limits of Religious Life", *Review for Religious* 58 (September-October 1999), 516-517.

²⁶ English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church for the United States of America* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1994).

800. Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms (1 Cor 13).

801. It is in this sense that discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church's shepherds. "Their office [is] not indeed to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and hold fast to what is good," so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together "for the common good." (1 Co. 12,7).

Fraternal Life in Community, 2 February 1994, issued by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, applies the concept of charism in more than fifty instances to the founder, the foundation, the present institute, the individual member, or religious community in general. A few examples from the document suffice to display the variety of charismatic references:

Religious community is a living organism of fraternal communion, called to live as animated by the foundational charism. It is part of the organic communion of the whole Church, which is continuously enriched by the Spirit with a variety of ministries and charisms.

Those who enter into such communities must have the particular grace of a vocation. In practice, the members of a religious community are seen to be bound by a *common calling from God* in continuity with the foundational charism, by a characteristically common ecclesial consecration, and by a common response in sharing that "experience of the Spirit" lived and handed on by the founder and in his or her mission within the Church²⁷ (N° 2).

²⁷ *Mutuae Relationes* 11.

[The Holy Spirit] unifies the Church in communion and ministry, coordinates and directs it with various hierarchical and charismatic gifts which complement each other, and makes the Church beautiful by his fruits.²⁸ (N° 9).

Reference to the institute's founder and to the charism lived by him or her and then communicated, kept, and developed throughout the life of the institute²⁹ thus appears as an essential element for the unity of the community. (N° 45).

A deepened understanding of the charism leads to a clearer vision of one's own identity, around which it is easier to build unity and communion. Clarity concerning one's own charismatic identity allows creative adjustment to new situations, and this leads to positive prospects for the future of the institute. (45).

It is therefore necessary to promote an institute's charismatic identity, especially to avoid a kind of genericism, which is a true threat to the vitality of a religious community... a "generic" approach-in other words, one that lacks the specific mediation of one's own charism... The genericism which reduces religious life to a colorless lowest common denominator leads to wiping out the beauty and fruitfulness of the many and various charisms inspired by the Holy Spirit. (46).

John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (The Consecrated Life), 25 March 1996, issued after the Synod of Bishops on this topic, stresses communion and applies the theological and ecclesiological foundations of Vatican II:

Communion in the Church is not uniformity, but a gift of the Spirit, who is present in the variety of charisms and states of life. These will be all the more helpful to the Church and her mission the more their specific identity is respected. For every gift of the Spirit is granted in order to bear fruit for the Lord in the growth of fraternity and mission. (4)

²⁸ *Lumen Gentium* 4; *Mutuae Relationes* 2.

²⁹ *Lumen Gentium* 12; 30; *1 Thess* 5:12,19-21; *Christifideles Laici* 24.

Vita Consecrata describes the contemporary situation of believers who choose distinct states of life while sharing one particular charism:

Today, often as a result of new situations, many institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these institutes. We may say that... a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity. (54)

New experiences of communion and cooperation... can in fact give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality beyond the confines of the institute, which will then be in a position to ensure the continuity in the Church of the services typical of the institute. Another positive consequence will be to facilitate more intense cooperation between consecrated persons and the laity in view of the institute's mission. Moved by the examples of holiness of the consecrated members, lay men and women will experience at first hand the spirit of the evangelical counsels and will thus be encouraged to live and to bear witness to the spirit of the Beatitudes in order to transform the world according to God's design. The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism. (55).

The address of John Paul II to the Forty-third General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 9 June 2000,³⁰ provides a fitting conclusion to these examples of *charism* in the Church. The pope's paragraph on association and participation in the Lasallian charism interweaves the themes of charism, states of life, mission, formation, and identity:

In recent Chapters, you have given thought to the participation of other religious congregations and laypeople wishing to be associated with you in your mission and to live, each in his own way, in accordance with the Lasallian charism. I am particularly interested in this

³⁰ Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools - Bulletin, N° 246 - Rome, p. 63.

form of collaboration, which makes it possible to unite forces to ensure greater missionary efficacy. The presence of laypeople at your side reflects in an appreciable manner the ever increasingly important place they are called to occupy in the life of the Church. This is something I should like to encourage strongly, as I have already in the past, in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (cf. N° 56). It is your responsibility to give laypeople who wish to be associated members the necessary formation for their spiritual life and apostolic service. This will enable them, with the inspiration of the teaching and spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, each according to his state and with all due respect for the respective identities involved and the special nature of the consecrated life, to find ways of developing their spiritual life so as to put it into practice in the educational service that will be entrusted to them as they strive all the while to become model Christian teachers. (3)

Prepare yourself to labor for the Church according to the gift that is yours. (John Baptist de La Salle - Meditation 170,3).

Paul GRASS, fsc.

IV. Discovering, living, sharing the gift of God

An essay on the history of Lasallian charism at the time of the origins

Introduction. Charisms.

Charism: a word unknown to John-Baptist de La Salle.

The word “charism” was never used by John-Baptist de La Salle in any of his writings, for the simple reason that the word did not exist in French at the time of the Founder.

According to the *Robert. Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française (1998)*, this word was a late French coinage (1879), in Ernest Renan’s *Histoire des Origines du Christianisme* from the Christian Greek *kharisma*, “gift, favour, grace of divine origin”, attested to from the time of St.Paul, with the meaning of supernatural gift accorded to a believer or a group of believers, for the good of the community. It is a term from Catholic theology. John-Baptist de La Salle reflects this meaning in MTR 201.1:

Reflect on what St.Paul says, that it is God who has established in the Church apostles, prophets and teachers and you will be convinced that He has also established you in your work. The same saint gives you another expression of this when he says that there are diverse ministries but there are different operations and the Holy Spirit manifests himself in each of these gifts for the common good, that is to say for the good of the Church. One receives from the Holy Spirit the gift of speaking with wisdom, another the gift of the Faith from the same Spirit.

You must not doubt that it is a great gift from God this grace he has given you to be entrusted with the instruction of children, to

announce the gospel to them and to bring them up in the spirit of religion.

The charism of the Founder and Lasallian charism.

“Lasallian charism” should not be confused with “the charism of the Founder”. The latter belongs specifically to John-Baptist de La Salle. It consists of the singular manner in which he discovered what God was calling him to and how he responded to it in his personal story as in the History of the Christian People. Of course “the charism of the Founder” continues to be fruitful today, but its dimensions are those of the life of Monsieur de La Salle. It is nourished by what the Founder lived and wished and what he has left us. Nobody today can claim to possess “the charism of the Founder”. However, these two realities – the Lasallian charism and the charism of the Founder – are not unconnected to each other because, if the manner in which John-Baptist de La Salle is “Founder” is clearly marked by his personality, it is also marked by the choices he made, with other persons, towards the end of the ‘Grand Siècle’ (the age of Louis XIV) in France.

It might be mentioned in passing, still in the area of vocabulary, that the adjective “Lasallian” was obviously completely foreign to the world of Monsieur de La Salle, who would probably have been very surprised to see it formed and used! It is, therefore, one of the paradoxes of the present study that it is dealing with an expression ‘Lasallian charism’ where neither of the two terms existed at the time of the Founder, while wishing to write a history of the reality covered by them!

To try to write the history of “Lasallian charism” at the time of the origins, is to look at the singular manner in which the first Brothers understood the sense of their existence and the significance of their vocation in the world in which they were born. Even the change from the word “Masters” to “Brothers” in describing themselves is

in itself significant. This charism has been transmitted from generation to generation. Each Lasallian today – Brother, Sister, lay person, man or woman – is called upon to appropriate it and to say it with words, gestures, the procedures of his time, of his culture, of his state in life. Let it therefore be very clear here that the “Lasallian charism” is not “the charism of the religious life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools”, even if this “Lasallian charism” strongly colours (or ought to colour) the manner in which the Brothers live their consecration.

“Lasallian charism” is a bit like a coin. It has two sides which are inseparable: one side turned towards the manner of living “association”, which for a long time was almost exclusively community life; and a side turned towards the mission: a way of living and making lived the educational service of children and the young. In thus formulating the dimensions of charism, one can clearly see that the manner of living association as well as the manner of living the education mission is not reserved to “religious”. And the manner of living association as well as the education mission, is “fraternity”.

1. At the beginning of the story

An improbable pair: Jeanne Maillefer and Adrien Nyel.

It is not without interest for us today, to recognise that even before Monsieur de la Salle took the step of accompanying the teachers in Reims, before he embarked on the itinerary of foundation that we know, it was two lay persons, Madame Maillefer and Monsieur Adrien Nyel, who gave the initial impetus. Without them our history would probably have been different. The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was not the result of some reflection in an office, nor did it arrive fully formed from the brain of a holy man of genius. No, its beginnings are to be found in the apos-

tolitic initiative of these two persons who, with different motivations, wanted to start a school for the sons of the poor of Reims towards the end of the year 1679. It was their step which led John-Baptist de La Salle to do what he did.

Madame Maillefer.

Canon Blain devotes all of Chapter 7 of Volume 1, Book 1 of his life of de La Salle, to the story of Madame Maillefer, a chapter entitled: “The hidden way by which Divine Providence imperceptibly led M. de La Salle to the execution of its plans by means of a man sent to Reims by Madame de Maillefer to open Gratuitous Schools there. A summary of the admirable life of this Lady from the time of her conversion”. In passing, one might note that the biographer does not forget to mention the link between “the man sent to Reims” (Adrien Nyel), Madame(de) Maillefer, John-Baptist de La Salle and the opening of gratuitous schools in Reims. Blain has conferred a title (using ‘de’) on Jeanne Dubois who had simply become Jeanne Maillefer through her marriage to Ponce Maillefer, a cloth merchant. It would be their son Simon who would receive a title and become “Maître des Comptes”. But this is not the place to rewrite the story of this lady. It is probable, according to Bros. Léon-Marie Aroz and Yves Poutet, that the sources of the canon-biographer strayed a little.

Jeanne Dubois, Madame Maillefer, (1622-1693), was related to the de La Salle family.

Above all, she took part in the foundation of the schools for the poor children of Rouen, especially that of Darnétal, for girls, which she also helped to run; this school was run by the Sisters of Providence of Père Barré. Thus she was well aware of the school movement for the poor set up by Nicolas Barré and by Nicolas Roland.

Adrien Nyel.

This founding figure of what would become the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, is presented by Canon Blain both as “the first promoter of the Brothers’ Institute”³¹ and as an unstable person - but who would nevertheless spend 22 years working in Rouen in the service of the schools for the poor! - incapable of living in a community with rules.

Adrien Nyel was born around 1621 near Laon. In 1657 he was certainly in Rouen. He died there on May 31st 1687. He was a good technician of school life, in the running of schools and in their organisation. He knew the world of teachers and that of administrative authority, as well as that of the poor and their needs. In his work in Rouen he was in charge of the gratuitous school in Darnétal and thus knew Madame Maillefer and the Sisters who looked after the running of this school.

In fact, the steps necessary for the foundation of Reims, thanks to the Maillefer family, had begun before the death of Nicolas Roland. According to Blain, Madame Maillefer promised 300 pounds pension to Nyel for the foundation in Reims of a school for the poor boys of that city. Adrien Nyel arrived in Reims as, in a certain sense, head of mission; not to found a “community” still less a “Religious Institute”. He came to start up schools for the poor boys of Reims. He was then about 58, an advanced age in those days. He knew his days were numbered and that a single school would be insufficient for the sons of the poor of Reims. Furthermore, he had, it seems, a more personal project: that of establishing a gratuitous school for the children of Laon, his native region.

³¹ Blain, Jean-Baptiste. *The life of John Baptiste de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a biography in three books*. Lasallian Publications, Conference of Christian Brothers, Landover (MD), 2000, Book Two, p. 245. See *Cabier Lasallien* [CL] 7, p. 282.

The development of the schools in Reims led John-Baptist de La Salle to move more and more, with his team, towards a form of community life for the service of the schools, while Adrien Nyel in Laon remained the trail-blazer. It was during one of his absences from Reims that the groups of teachers became a Community of Brothers: dress, lodging meetings... We don't know whether Nyel participated in these steps and became part of the new community, or whether he continued to live on the fringes, attached to his style of life and to his independence. The fact that he kept his distance from Reims from 1682 onwards, is perhaps a sign that he did not wish to become involved in the orientations that were planned for the Community. His life and his role were elsewhere.

Adrien Nyel was to initiate John-Baptist de La Salle in a concrete fashion into the education of the poor: the world of the teachers and that of poor pupils and their families. He pushed the young canon into becoming more committed, not only in a material way, but above all morally and spiritually, by, de facto, taking on the direction of the little group of teachers in Reims.

Charism and its context.

Lasallian charism was born in a certain environment: that of the educational movement for the children of the poor (or of the working classes) of the Church of the Council of Trent, in France. Especially from the second half of the 17th Century, priests, lay men and women, and religious were trying to put in place, for the most part at a local level, that is to say at the level of a diocese or a large town, school structures and permanent pastoral ministries in the service of the education of children of "artisans and the poor". At the same time as they were trying to invent ways of teaching and educating them, they were trying to find a way of being present which would ensure the permanence of their enterprise. The model of association which was in front of their eyes, was acceptable in

their society and which they tried to carry out – more or less – was that of “the religious community”. In a way, the invention of their way of life and their manner of being in the world, went hand in hand with the setting up of an in-depth renewal of the procedures for the instruction and education of the children of the poor.

Our charism was therefore formed in a very specific spiritual and pastoral context, a context which is, so to speak, its appropriate “compost”. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, it was lay people, a rich woman and a man involved in the world of educating the poor, who caused the young John-Baptist de La Salle to face up to his responsibilities, thus causing him to discover his vocation. And that is quite something. The Founder would not forget this when he celebrated a Mass in the chapel of the Sisters of the Child Jesus in Reims, on learning of the death of his friend in 1687. Neither Jeanne Maillefer nor Adrien Nyel knew what would be born of their initiatives, nor did John-Baptist de La Salle himself, who would write in the *Memoir of the Beginnings*:

- I had thought he wrote in a memoir which he composed later on to inform the Brothers about the means Divine Providence had used to establish their Institute, “that the care which I took of the schools and of the teachers would only be external, something which would not involve me any further than to provide for their subsistence and to see to it that they carried out their duties with piety and assiduity.”³²
- “It was”, he declared in the memoir mentioned previously, “by these two events, namely by my meeting Monsieur Nyel and by the proposal made to me by this woman³³, that I began to take interest in the school for boys. Prior to this, I had never given them a thought. The suggestion, of course, had been made to me before. Several of Monsieur Rolands’s friends had tried to motivate me to accept, but

³² Blain. The life of John Baptist de La Salle, Book One, p. 77. (CL 7, p. 167).

³³ *This woman*: Madame de Croyères a childless widow, wealthy and pious. She wished to found a school for boys in her own parish of Saint Jacques: Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p.74 . (CL 7, p. 166).

the proposal had never made any impression on my mind, and I had never considered carrying it out.”...³⁴

John-Baptist de La Salle clearly asserts that the initiative did not come from him, that he was not the “carrier” of the Christian schools project. It needed the fact that the steps taken by Nyel with regard to Madame de Croyères obliged him to come forward so as to get the second boys’ school in Reims up and running (in the parish of Saint-Jacques) to get him to commit himself, almost reluctantly. The reality of the Lasallian charism existed as if outside him! Or rather it was the events, the meetings and the steps taken by Madame Maillefer and Madame de Croyères, as well as those of Monsieur Nyel which got this project moving and led Monsieur de La Salle to take part in it. We also know that Adrien Nyel and Madame Maillefer had been absorbed for a long time in the school movement which had developed in Rouen under the impetus of former members of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament and that they had met Nicolas Barré and doubtless Nicolas Roland when the latter had stayed in Rouen.³⁵

Madame Maillefer and Adrien Nyel were born in the 20s (of the 17th Century). They belong therefore to the period of pastoral effervescence which set up Catholic Reform in France: new foundations, missions, catechism, seminaries, parish renewal... the birth of the spiritual movement around Cardinal de Bérulle later known as “The French School of Spirituality”, won back minds and hearts after the erring ways of the wars of religion and the abandonment of religion noted by the pastors of the period (Olier, Vincent de Paul, John

³⁴ Blain., *op. cit.* Book One, p. 79. (CL.7, p. 169).

³⁵ See Yves POUTET: *Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes. Recherches sur l'oeuvre scolaire et religieuse de Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651-1719). Tome 1. Période Rémoise.* Rennes 1970. p. 494-534 for Nyel in Rouen and p. 628 - 629, note 22 for Madame Maillefer. For the latter see also Brother Léon-de-Marie AROZ. CL 38: *Nicolas Roland, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et les Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus de Reims.* Reims 1972. p. 68, note 1.

Eudes...). Culturally and politically, their youth, in both cases, was spent in the baroque world of the first part of the 17th Century: Louis XIII, the Cardinal Ministers (Richelieu and Mazarin), the 30 Years War, the Fronde rebellion and the war with Spain, Corneille, Saint-Amant, Voiture, Saint-Evremond... and even Descartes. It was a period which favoured somewhat wild individualistic exploits, Utopia (Cyrano de Bergerac), and reasons of State in the political field. It ended with the coming to power of Louis XIV in 1661. From then on, it was notions of rationality and of order which were to dominate in the State as well as in cultural and religious life. One set in motion, organising them, the intuitions of the first part of the century. John-Baptist de La Salle belonged fully to this second period. From which, doubtless to some extent, arose the contrast between his personality and that of Madame Maillefer and Adrien Nyel, noticed by his biographers, especially Blain.

For “running” the schools, a change of model.

Adrien Nyel arrived in Reims in 1679 with the young boy who accompanied him - doubtless an assistant-teacher from among the children of the General Hospital of Rouen. He had been given a mission: to establish one or more schools for the poor boys of Reims, a mission which he accepted and which led him to ask to be relieved of his duties in Rouen by the Bureau of the Poor of the city. It was Madame Maillefer who sent him; she was most probably pursuing the project thought up by Nicolas Roland³⁶. With the latter dead, she approached a person that she knew: Françoise Duval, Superior of the Sisters of the Child-Jesus of Reims, who was capable of linking up with the work of Nicolas Roland. Jeanne Maillefer provided the funds necessary for the opening and running of a school for poor boys in Reims.

³⁶ See Yves POUTET, *op. cit.*, p. 628-632.

Neither Bernard nor Maillefer speak of a letter addressed to John-Baptist de La Salle, since the family relationship between Madame Maillefer was really taken to justify the existence of a 'family' acquaintance between them. Blain insists that Nyel brought with him a letter³⁷ for Monsieur de La Salle. In any case, the duties of John-Baptist de La Salle with regard to the Sisters of the Child-Jesus of Reims led to his being kept informed of the moves being made by his relative. At that time, he had been ordained priest about a year before the arrival of Nyel; he was the executor of Nicolas Roland's will, in charge of the temporal affairs of the Sisters. He had successfully carried through the steps for having the Community recognised: letters patent and canonical recognition. He was still a canon of the cathedral, was still looking after his family (his brothers) and he was also studying theology.

Adrien Nyel was the bearer of a pedagogical project and an organisational model to bring schools for the poor into existence: that of Rouen. The schools were organised and financed by the Bureau for the Poor, an organisation made up of prominent people who were mostly lay persons. In the context of the period they were obviously Catholics who worked closely with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but without being directly dependent on it. The teachers were recruited by this body, which looked after their upkeep and gave them a job. Bro. Yves Poutet thus comments on the achievements in Rouen:

1670! The projects of 1657 had finally been brought to fruition for the boys. Rouen had four schools for its four districts. The teachers chosen by Bimorel and led by Nyel, and who were living in the Hôpital Général, went to the schools each work day. Three of them are known: Hilaire le Maréchal, Le Gaigneur and François Le Vasseur. They were living in community. They were bachelors but had not taken any vows.

³⁷ See Yves POUTET, *op. cit.* p. 631, note 37.

The last-named did not retire until after forty years of teaching. It was in 1707, when the Bureau for the Poor decided to replace him, in the school of St. Vivien, by a Brother of the Christian Schools. “Brother Le Vasseur” had well deserved an honourable retirement³⁸.

They were bachelors and they lived in community; in the socio-cultural context of education at the time, this was the only form of existence possible for persons in this kind of situation. During the 22 years that he spent in Rouen, we can see that Nyel never thought of going beyond this model. His plan seems to have been to maintain the schools that he had been given, to accompany the teachers who taught these classes, teachers that he had not chosen and who, even if they lived in a manner which appears to us today as very ‘religious’, did not see themselves as ‘religious’ or ‘consecrated persons’ and were not perceived as such by the public. These teachers did not collectively run the schools. The educational project was run by others: the founders of the schools, the Bureau for the Poor. In contrast, we can clearly see the novelty of the Lasallian step when John-Baptist de La Salle speaks of the first teachers in Reims in the *Memoir on the Habit*, about ten years after the beginnings in Reims:

- Before the adoption of this special habit, whenever the obligation to observe the Rule was brought up, several said that they had no more reason to do so than ordinary people because they appeared to be no different from them.
- Since the adoption of this distinctive garb, it does not seem that anyone has raised any trouble on this score, for all regard themselves as belonging to a Community.
- Before the adoption of this special habit, those applying for admission to this Community regarded it merely as an employment agency for schoolmasters or servants and had no idea of joining a religious community. Several came to be trained so that they could earn a living

³⁸ See Yves POUTET, *op. cit.*, p. 499-500.

afterward. Some asked for a salary, and others thought we ought to be grateful for their conforming to our way of life and manner of dress.

- Since the adoption of this habit, no one has applied for admission with any thought other than of joining a Community and remaining in it for the rest of his life. Salaries are unheard of, and acceptance is regarded as a great honor. The habit alone produces these results. (MH 0,0,41 to 44 - See: John Baptist de La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents*, Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, Landover, MD, 2002, p. 189).

Furthermore, it was precisely when Monsieur de La Salle tried to give some rules and a certain style of community life to these teachers recruited on a basis other than community life, that this first group broke up:

The first schoolmasters, accustomed to a free and easy life, had initially found the practice of obedience and the observance of a rule easy enough, but little by little, the devil had managed to enfeeble their wills and to extinguish by boredom and ennui the first sparks of fervor which had been enkindled in their hearts. The continual and uniform round of pious exercises had impressed them at first, but later, it seemed too constraining. Feeling their liberty too restricted and their senses too closely restrained, they dreamed only of throwing off a yoke which the evil spirit represented to them as destined to grow heavier, day by day, until it became intolerable.

Men capable of forgetting God could not be expected to remember the benefits they had received from De La Salle and the duties they had assumed in his regard. Men resolved to assert their own will and to prefer their own freedom were not likely to consider as a wise counsellor and a true friend a man who proposed to them nothing but the slavery of the Gospel.

Thus, De La Salle witnessed their desertion after observing their disturbed lives.³⁹

³⁹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 101-102. (CL 7, p. 184).

These teachers did not “run” the schools: they understood themselves to be – and they also looked as if they were – the employees of someone who gave them a mission and in return provided for their keep. Later on, it was because the teachers in Reims had become “Brothers”, because they formed a “community”, that they were perceived as an autonomous body with regard to the social and ecclesial structures.

In Reims, John-Baptist de La Salle did not put the schools created, into the system of the Bureau for the Poor, but put them under the responsibility of the parish-priests; in Saint-Sulpice he acted in the same way; on the other hand, at Château-Porcien it was the municipality which called upon him for his teachers; later in Chartres, it would be the bishop...; in Laon, the Brothers would take over from Monsieur Nyel, in a school accepted, if not requested, by the municipality. This diversity reveals the freedom of the Community in the relations lived between “the authorities” and “mission”. The latter arises from choices determined in the interior of the Community and not from external structures. It is the Community, constituted by its members, which carries its missionary project and puts it into action. It is the community which is called upon, collectively, when a town, a bishop, a parish-priest want to set up a gratuitous school in their town, their diocese or their parish. It is neither the donors nor the founders who choose the teachers.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The steps taken by Nicolas Barré and Charles Démiá with a view to establishing schools for boys, are revealing. Nicolas Barré founded, in Paris, a community of “Brothers of the Child Jesus”. We know that it still existed, in the parish of Saint-Gervais, when Monsieur de La Salle arrived at Saint-Sulpice, with two Brothers, in 1688. This community later disappeared, because Nicolas Barré, who was a Minim, could not share the life of this community. This is why he pressed John-Baptist de La Salle, a secular priest, to live with the Brothers. The community of the Brothers of the Child Jesus remained, therefore, dissociated from its Founder. They (the Brothers and Nicolas Barré) could not carry on together the project of “running the schools”. The choice of Charles Démiá was different: at first he confided his schools for the boys of Lyon, to seminarians still in formation. These were school-teachers for a year or two and these seminarian-teachers were replaced by lay persons who did not live in community. They met regularly for pedagogical or spiritual meetings, they were inspected by the administrators of the schools, but they too did not carry on together the project of “running the

2. A prophetic step brings into existence the Community of the Schools

In the transition from “Teachers” to “Brothers” lived in Reims, the action of John-Baptist de La Salle was obviously decisive. The prophetic gestures which he made - giving up his canonicate, getting rid of his wealth, the decision to live with the teachers - at the heart of his relations with them, caused the “Community of the Christian Schools” to come into existence. To put it another way, the Lasallian movement did not come about thanks to the spontaneous goodwill of some generous young teachers. It was as if crystallised by the personality and commitment of John-Baptist de La Salle. The Lasallian charism, if it is not the “charism of the Founder”, is nevertheless closely linked to the person, if not the personality of Monsieur de La Salle.

One of the characteristics of prophecy is that it is personified: it is not a theory, a utopia or a vision of the future arising from nowhere, unconnected to the cultural, economic, social context... On the contrary, the commitments of John-Baptist de La Salle to give existence to the Community of the Masters of the Christian Schools were profoundly rooted in his personal history, that of his family, the customs of his milieu, of his church and of his world. This is why his gestures questioned and touched those who were at the same time the witnesses and the protagonists.

From external leadership to a personal relationship

The first quotation in Blain from *Memoir of the Beginnings*, indicates that:

schools”. They were like the employees of an administration and disappeared with the French revolution. Unlike the Sisters of Saint-Charles for girls’ schools, they would not re-appear later.

“I had thought” he wrote in a memoir which he composed later on to inform the Brothers about the means Divine Providence had used to establish their Institute, “that the care which I took of the schools and of the teachers would only be external, something which would not involve me any further than to provide for their subsistence and to see to it that they carried out their duties with piety and assiduity”.⁴¹

John-Baptist de La Salle, when he re-examined his development, was clearly aware of his initial reticence. He would have liked to remain in an external position, putting limits to his commitment: providing a living for the teachers and seeing that they performed their work well. But in the end, when he brings this memoir to a conclusion, he is able to write: “Ever since I gave up everything, I have never met a single candidate tempted to leave us on the grounds that our Community was not endowed”⁴²... He has moved on to a personal relationship with these teachers. It is regarding his person that they could make a decision. It is his attitude which leads the Brothers to make choices, because he no longer leads them from outside... “Ever since I gave up everything...” from “only”, “for no other reason”... from such negative expressions which marked his restrictions, he has moved on to “everything”. His personal and total commitment is foundation for the Community: “not a single candidate has been tempted to leave us on the grounds that our Community was not endowed”.

There are his reactions to the actual work of the schools: “Prior to this, I had never given them a thought... I had never considered carrying it out...”⁴³ And with regard to persons, especially the

⁴¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 77. (CL 7, p.167).

⁴² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 307. (CL 7, p. 326). “founded” here means “endowed foundation” in the sense of having stable funds allowing the community to live. The schools of Reims were “founded”: pious persons had provided a sum of money whose interest supported the schools; but the Brothers’ community was not “founded”: upkeep depended on what was provided by the parishes or the municipalities. And when there was a foundation - as in Reims - this was attached to the schools and not to the teachers.

⁴³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 79. (CL 7, p. 169).

teachers: “Naturally speaking, I considered the men whom I was obliged to employ in the schools at the beginning as being inferior to my valet... I experienced a great deal of unpleasantness when I first had them come to my house.”⁴⁴ Monsieur de La Salle saw his refusals as stemming from his education, his background and his prejudices. He also pinpointed the key persons and events: Madame Lévesque des Croyères, Monsieur Nyel, the successive commitments... and the fundamental motives which called and guided him: to take over completely the care of the schools.

The birth of this Community which looks after the schools is the History of Salvation and it is God who directs it. It is one of the fundamental themes of Lasallian spirituality. The work of the schools is not linked to a need, even one as essential as the instruction of the poor: it is “the work of God”, it comes under the History of Salvation. One finds this fundamental trait of Lasallian spirituality in the *Meditations for the time of Retreat*, as well as in the letter to the “Principal Brothers” of April 1st 1714⁴⁵. The concrete, precise need - in this case the education of the children of artisans and of the poor - could cease, change, evolve in its forms, the social and cultural context which had seen the birth of the Christian and gratuitous schools could itself have disappeared; God’s plan for Salvation would remain.

The decisive choices and their consequences

“It seemed evident to him towards the end of the year 1682 that God was calling him to take charge of the schools...”⁴⁶

From the first days of January 1681, his sister Marie de La Salle (who had married Jean Maillefer) had a begun a legal case to recov-

⁴⁴ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 80. (CL 7, p. 169).

⁴⁵ See later on: 1712-1714: The great crisis of the charism, p. 121.

⁴⁶ Blain. *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 114. (CL 7, p. 193).

er her part of the inheritance, which implied the sale by auction of the family home (rue Sainte-Marguerite in Reims). From Lent 1681, the teachers had been more and more introduced into Monsieur de La Salle's home, up to the point of living under his roof: June 24th 1681. On June 24th 1682 the departure of the community for the Rue Neuve took place and on July 24th 1682, the house on Rue Sainte-Marguerite was sold.

If we take literally the words of John Baptist de La Salle "at the end of the year 1682", it was only after he was living with the teachers at the Rue Neuve for several months, that he clearly discerned the calls which God was making on him, that he accepted his vocation and made up his mind. Besides, this fits in with the biographies, which place the questions of the teachers about their future and the discernment made by Monsieur de La Salle, at the Rue Neuve. The attempt by John Baptist de La Salle to buy back the house in the Rue Sainte-Marguerite, at the auction, shows us that he still wasn't sure which path he should follow, that he was hesitating over which solidarities he should live: his family, his past, his living environment, the Rue Neuve, the teachers. He had still not really experienced all the consequences of the exodus on which he had embarked. Blain tells us of the practical difficulties he encountered in his efforts to live in solidarity with the teachers: lack of space in the living quarters, the unhealthy nature of their lodgings, the crude nature of the food (for a man from his background). We must also not underestimate the change in his social relations: from a cultivated environment, open to the world and in a position to make decisions, he went to a limited world: the community of the teachers, the elementary school, with men, some of whom were educated, but who, for the most part, had doubtless a very rudimentary education... a world of people dominated by religious and civil institutions, of people whose advice did not count.

The teachers speak.

John Baptist de La Salle became aware that, in concrete situations, with specific persons, God asked him to make a choice. The change began to affect him deeply when the teachers called into question his solidarity and loyalties. Facing the novelty of the project on which they were embarking, the teachers were worried about the future: there was nothing fixed or stable about their situation, they were sacrificing their youth in the service of a public which would forget them. In old age they would not be assured of a home, they would end their days in poverty.

The teachers had the feeling of being at the mercy of events, of public interest, of the notables in particular, of those who belonged to the world of John Baptist de La Salle. For the moment “these” accepted them, but what of tomorrow? Nothing really solid kept them in the school functions which they occupied. There was no solidarity between them and those who employed them. It was exactly the situation of the poor of the period, depending entirely on the circumstances, being able to count on no one except themselves, even in their old age. Since the soothing response of Monsieur de La Salle did not satisfy them, they called him into question even more strongly. Blain explains very honestly why the first reply of the Founder fell flat:

It was easy for him to speak so eloquently of abandonment to Providence when he was a wealthy man, [...] Tired of simply thinking these thoughts, one day the schoolmasters summoned up their courage to the point of expressing their grievance and gave De La Salle one of those blunt, direct replies that the heart feels is unanswerable: “You speak with inspiration amidst your ease, for you lack nothing. You have a rich canonry and an equally fine inheritance; you enjoy security and protection against indigence. If our work fails you risk nothing. The ruin of our enterprise would not affect you. We own nothing. We are men without possessions or income or even a trade to

fall back on. Where can we go, and what can we do if the schools fail or if people tire of us? Destitution will be our only portion, and begging our only means to relieve it”.⁴⁷

The words of the teachers contained some truths which were still escaping John Baptist de La Salle. Blain found the response neither polite nor gracious! But it did underline the relations which existed between the persons who were present: “You speak with inspiration amidst your ease, for you lack nothing. You have a rich canonry and an equally fine inheritance; you enjoy security and protection against indigence... If our work fails, you risk nothing. The ruin of our enterprise would not affect you”. It is a description of a rich person who is sheltered from economic difficulties. The teachers then go on to consider their own state: “We are men without possessions or income or even a trade to fall back on. Where can we go? and what can we do? If the schools fail or if people tire of us?”. We are back to the preceding situation, the possible failure of the action being undertaken and the manner in which the people involved are linked to this. The teachers conclude: “Destitution will be our only portion, and begging our only means to relieve it”.⁴⁸ They paint a scene showing the social situations of the period, the difference between those who dominate and those who have to exercise a trade from one day to the next without being certain of being able to support themselves. Finally, they question John Baptist de la Salle on the reality of his solidarity with them and the project of the schools for the poor: “The ruin of our enterprise would not affect you, you will remain on your feet.”

Monsieur de La Salle listened to this questioning: “The reply of the teachers gave him food for thought and caused him great confusion... the various thoughts which troubled De La Salle left him

⁴⁷ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 107. (CL 7, p. 188).

⁴⁸ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 108. (CL 7, p. 188).

greatly perplexed” In order to make up his mind, John Baptist de La Salle did some discerning: what was his vocation at this moment? It was necessary to realise that it was a question of the outcome of a process which had developed over a number of years with some moments more intense and more difficult to live; with specific persons and in a concrete world: the teachers, the poor (and their way of life), the Church in Reims, the family and the social life of the period; with the conditions of existence of a school: financial regulations, programmes, the people in charge, the people working under them.

“What I am and what they are...”⁴⁹

Blain puts in the mouth of John Baptist de La Salle the following reflections. He puts them in inverted commas, as coming from his hero.⁵⁰

1. I have been reduced to silence. As long as I am not poor myself, I have no right to speak the language of perfection, as I once did on the subject of poverty. I cannot speak of abandonment to Providence, so long as I am comfortably insured against penury, nor about perfect confidence in God, if my sound investments leave me no reason for worry.
2. If I remain what I am and the schoolmasters remain what they are, their temptation will persist, because its source will continue to be there. I will not be able to remedy it, because they will always find in my wealth an obvious and even plausible argument to justify their doubts about the present and their concerns for the future...
3. Sooner or later, such a temptation, so justifiable in appearance, will

⁴⁹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 111-112. (CL 7, p. 191-192).

⁵⁰ A detailed study of this text, which cannot be developed here, shows that, in fact, Canon Blain introduced, especially at the start of No 8, his own reflections on the life of a canon. Everything in this quotation cannot be attributed to Monsieur de La Salle. Cf. Blain, *op. cit.*, Book One, p. 111-113. (CL 7, p. 191-192).

not fail to produce the effect that the devil hopes it will achieve. The teachers, whether in a group or one by one, will forsake me, leaving my house empty for the second time and the schools without anyone capable of conducting them.

4. This desertion will make a good deal of noise in the city. It will frighten off any who might have entertained the idea of becoming schoolmasters. Their vocation will wither; even before they enter, they will be seized by the same misgivings as those who have just left.

5. Without a dependable staff of teachers, the schools will fail. In this case, the heirs of the foundations will claim the funds contributed for their maintenance.

6. Thus, little by little, the Institution of Christian and Gratuitous Schools will be buried beneath its ruins, and will be useless ever to think of reviving it.

7. Even supposing that all these results do not follow, must I __ can I, even __ act as the Superior of these schoolmasters without giving up my canonry? How can I combine my assiduous presence in the house, so as to be at their head during the exercises of piety and to keep watch over them, with attendance in the choir for the canonical Office? Are these two positions compatible? If not, I must give up one or the other.

8. True, a canon's prebend is not in itself an obstacle to good works, and sedulous attendance at the Office to chant God's praises does not prevent him from rendering other services to the Church or from devoting himself to the salvation of souls. He can divide his time between these two noble functions and prove that a canon does not have to be idle outside the choir. He does not need to seek in this title a plausible pretext to leave the choir, only to enter upon a rest that lasts all day, to grow stout in sweet indolence and to do no work in the Lord's vineyard. But can I at the same time be a good canon and a faithful Superior of a Community which requires my presence constantly? If I fulfill the function of Superior properly, I will have to omit all the duties of a canon, since if I must always be in the house, I can never be in the choir. If these two duties cannot be reconciled, I must

choose between them. Five or six hours a day spent in reciting the Divine Office would make too great an inroad on the assiduous presence which I owe to the house I direct.

9. Now, in the choice I must make, what should be my determining consideration? What should tip the balance? The greater glory of God, the fuller service of the Church, my own higher perfection, and the salvation of souls: these are the ends I must propose to myself and the aims which must govern my choice. If I consider only these exalted motives, I must resign my canonry and devote myself to the care of the schools and to the training of the schoolmasters who direct them.

10. Finally, since I no longer feel any attraction to the vocation of a canon, it would seem that it has already left me, even before I have given it up. This calling is no longer for me. While I entered it through the right gate, indeed, it seems to me that God is opening another door before me today so that I may leave it. The same voice that called me to it seems to be calling me elsewhere. I hear this in the depths of my conscience; this voice speaks when I consult my conscience. True, since the hand of God put me in the state in which I now am, his hand must take me out of it. But is he not showing me clearly enough today another state that deserves the preference and toward which he is leading me by the hand?

N° 1 indicates a first train of thought: on riches, resources, income and their significance with regard to the perseverance of the teachers. John Baptist de La Salle realises that he is still at the discourse level, while he should be confronting his commitment to persons: “I have been reduced to silence... I have no right to speak the language of perfection which I was using on the question of poverty...”

“What I am and what they are...” When he makes this reflection, John Baptist de La Salle has begun the breaks and the commitments: care for the schools and the teachers, leaving the family home, living with the teachers at Rue Neuve. What he is: a canon, a notable, by his ecclesiastical rank and by his family, a man recog-

nised in the social structure of Reims, having easy access to the decision-makers if not to making decisions himself... someone who could accomplish good works without committing more than his money, a little of his time and some credit... What they are: men with little, with no voice, no power, no connections; those whose resources depended on the good will of some generous “haves”; those, above all, whose presence and activity in Reims were connected to the person of John Baptist de La Salle.

If this gap between them was maintained, the entire Mission would be threatened. The Mission, that is to say the Christian schools, that is to say the work of God which they are accomplishing together. The gap between “what I am and what they are”, becomes temptations, specious or even reasonable pretext, defiance, anxiety. The consequences for the work of God: the teachers leaving, the fear over eventual replacement of teachers. John Baptist de La Salle discovers and expresses how much the work of God has also become his work, how much it is linked to his personal commitment with regard to the teachers. Above all, the work of God would be hindered: “The schools, without a dependable staff of teachers, will fail; along with the founding funds. In this case, the heirs of the foundations will claim the funds contributed for their maintenance”. The degrees of collapse announced range from lack of confidence to lack of money via lack of personnel.

From N° 7 on, the questioning changes: no longer “What I am and what they are”, but “Can I even be Superior of these teachers without giving up being a canon?” It is no longer a question of money, nor of comparing the social status, but the possibility of continuing two activities at the same time. It is above all a question of personal vocation and of discernment. Being a canon implies a presence in the choir to recite the office of the canons five or six hours a day, singing the praises of God, rendering other services to the Church and devoting oneself to the salvation of souls. Being Superior of the

teachers means being assiduous to being in the house, in a community which requires residence, being director of the house, taking care of the schools and of formation, if not of the education of the teachers destined to run them. The manner of putting the questions suggests the solutions: “Are these two employments compatible? If they are not, I must give up one or the other. If these two duties cannot be reconciled, I must opt for one or the other.” This discernment would be a clear reflection on his life and on his commitments.

The criteria for discernment appear at N° 9: “The greater glory of God, the greater service of the Church, my own higher perfection and the salvation of souls.” Three of these criteria are turned towards the Mission. Ministry: the greater glory of God (which has a Jesuit ring to it); the service of the Church: care of the schools; the salvation of souls: being Director of the house, educating the teachers. One single look inwards: “my perfection” or how to be good. At the end, Monsieur de La Salle declares that he is determined: “to give up my canonry in order to devote myself to the care of the schools and to the education of the teachers destined to run them”.

N° 10 presents another element of discernment: its confirmation by peace of conscience when the choice is made: “I carry this response in the depths of my conscience and I hear it when I consult it”.

John Baptist de La Salle has covered quite an itinerary: from a discourse on evangelical poverty, on abandonment to Providence, he has come to a decision: to make up his mind, to give himself over to another state and finally to a precise commitment; the care of the schools, the education of the teachers. All this with clear-sightedness about himself and about others: “what I am and what they are” as well as with clear-sightedness about the work of God: the destiny of the establishment of the Christian and gratuitous schools. He moves from discourse to existential commitment: from “I have

been reduced to silence...” to “...devote myself over to the care of the schools...” He moves from one state to another while recognising that he is being led by God. He faces up to a choice of life: “If these two duties cannot be reconciled, I will have to commit myself to one or the other”. The choice now appears clearly: to make the Community of the Christian Schools exist, he must enter it and show solidarity with these men who are risking their lives in the adventure of the schools for the service of the poor. **The Lasallian charism is rooted in the response of the Founder to the call of God heard through the words and the situation of the school teachers.**

3. The teachers become Brothers.

The teachers of Monsieur de La Salle were present in Reims, Rethel, Guise and Laon. In fact, in 1684, it was still Adrien Nyel who was running the school in Laon which he had opened; in 1685 he returned to Rouen and Monsieur de La Salle had to install a community there to keep the school going. There existed perhaps, between the two men, a division of work, with John Baptist de La Salle looking after the teachers and the schools of Reims, while Monsieur Nyel looked after the schools outside that city. The group in Reims started to become more complex: teachers, young men in formation, perhaps the beginnings of a Seminary for Teachers for rural areas, following that of Rethel? John Baptist de La Salle gave away his fortune and began taking steps to give up his canonry. He ran into opposition and criticism from his native area in Reims. His friends and his family felt that he was going too far. The teachers had been living together for at least two years. They knew each other and they were learning to open their horizons beyond their native city. They had the sense of a common educational practice and were beginning to consider themselves as more than simply carrying out an occupation.

An apostolic community: from the feast of the Ascension to Trinity Sunday.

Blain tells us that from 1684⁵¹, John Baptist de La Salle assembled his main disciples, twelve in number. In fact, we should say rather 1686, because in 1684, John Baptist de La Salle had not yet renounced his patrimony⁵². He gathered them together for a decisive Retreat which “began on the eve of the Ascension... to end on the feast of Pentecost; but it was extended up to Trinity Sunday”. Rituals and founding elements were put in place: the principal disciples, the twelve (a number we will find again in 1694), the dates of the Ascension, of Pentecost, of Trinity Sunday. We are back in the time of the Church and its origins. This was obviously intentional on the part of John Baptist de La Salle and the teachers.

The Rules. There is talk of “Regulations” rather than of “Rules”. The practices of the newly-born community are marked out and laid down. Wisely, they are content to fix, by mutual agreement, what is actually being lived.

The table. On this point, it is a question of practising the mortification of a life of poverty lived according to rule. The menus are in line with the practice in the poorer quarters of the cities: bread, vegetables, “grosse viande”, that is to say the poorer cuts of meat, little or no dairy products, fowl, sugar... for drinks there was water and very diluted wine⁵³.

⁵¹ See Blain. *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 173-174. (CL 7, p. 232).

⁵² See Bro. Maurice Auguste, CL 2: *The vows of the Brothers of the Christian Schools before the Bull of Benedict XIII*. Brother Maurice-Auguste (Alphonse Hermans, FSC), p.21-23; 28-29 and CL 11: *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII*, p. 49.

⁵³ See *Rule of the Brother Director of a House of the Institute- The Food of the Brothers of This Institute* in: *Rule and Foundational Documents*, Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, Landover (MD), 2002, p. 215-216. And: *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, Lasallian Publications, Romeoville (IL), 1990, Part Two, chap. 4 : *Food*, p. 57-83.

A habit which distinguishes them. John Baptist de la Salle wanted to distinguish the teachers from other people who were strictly lay. But he did not want to make them into ecclesiastics, or have them look like ecclesiastics. The question was argued about, “they could not agree on the form which their habit should take...they found themselves quite irresolute on this point...” The era of John Baptist de La Salle was very sensitive (much more so than ours) on the importance of dress in characterising persons. In that era, which wanted everything laid down, the habit worn was expected to conform to the social condition of each person⁵⁴.

The question of the habit was put in the hands of John Baptist de La Salle, and responses were given little by little as circumstances demanded⁵⁵. “In the winter of the same year”, (doubtless in 1685)⁵⁶, the Mayor of Reims gave John Baptist de La Salle the idea of providing the teachers with a greatcoat, “to keep them warmer and shelter them a little from the inclemencies of the air”. Monsieur de La Salle “had them made from a very rough wool, coloured black and reaching down to within eight inches from the ground”. Then he had the idea of redesigning the habit they wore by giving them “a soutane of the same black material... closed in front by iron hooks”. Finally he equipped them with a hat which outdid “the one in common use by the extent of its rim and had shoes made for them with two heavy thick soles such as those worn by cart-drivers or those engaged in heavy work”. His aim, according to Blain, was to make them different from people in the outside world.

The *Memoir on the Habit* describes the habit of the Brothers (MH 0,0,11 to 18), while emphasising the desire to be distinguished

⁵⁴ *Id.* Part Two, chap.3: *Clothing*, p. 48-56, especially p. 48: § 4 -5. (Œuvres Complètes - Rome, 1993: RB 203, 1, 163).

⁵⁵ See Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 182-184; 186. (CL 7, p. 238-239, 241).

⁵⁶ Bro. Maurice-Auguste, CL 11. *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines(1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)*; p. 46-47, 103.

both from the lay state and the ecclesiastical state; Monsieur de La Salle wrote “that it would be best for them to have a habit that was neither ecclesiastical nor secular” (MH 0,0,18).

The Vows⁵⁷

Three questions were put to the teachers during the assembly:

1. Should they take vows?
2. What vows should they take?
3. For how long should they take them: for one year, several years or for ever?⁵⁸

After some discussion and on the advice of John Baptist de La Salle, the teachers decided to make vows of obedience, stability and teaching the poor gratuitously, for three years. These vows were taken at Liesse, probably, on the feast of the Trinity. They agreed to meet in Reims the following year, on the eve of Pentecost Sunday, so that those who wished could transform these triennial vows into a perpetual commitment. Eight of the twelve then renewed their vows once again, along with Monsieur de La Salle, for three years.

These same twelve teachers, decided to propose to the other members of the Community: “the neophytes of the House and those on whom one could not rely absolutely”⁵⁹, to make a vow of obedience for one year, to be renewed each year on Trinity Sunday.

The name of Brother. The teachers chose to take the name of Brothers after they had changed their habit; therefore around 1685-1686. Our Rule of 1987 took up again, on this matter, the excellent commentary of Blain:

⁵⁷ See Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 177-181. (CL 7, p. 235-238).

⁵⁸ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 178. (CL 7, p. 235).

⁵⁹ Blain, *Idem*, p. 181. § 3. (CL 7, p. 238).

- The Brothers are determined with one spirit to be brothers among themselves, brothers to the adults they deal with, and elder Brothers to the young people confided to their care. (Rule 1987. Art. 53)
- This name tells them, that as Brothers, they owe each other mutual proofs of tender but spiritual friendship, and that considering themselves as the elder brothers of the children who come to be taught by them, they should exercise this ministry of charity with truly loving hearts.⁶⁰

A movement towards Association.

These first steps accomplished by the teachers in order to institutionalise the identity of their group: name, habit, rules... clearly show the lived relationship between the community and the education of poor children. The vow of obedience goes in the same direction. It tends to ensure cohesion in the service of the mission. In fact, **Association did not arise in order to satisfy the needs of the members themselves, but to respond to the educational needs of children and of abandoned young people who were far from salvation.** It was a call heard in faith and interpreted as a call from God. It was the wish to respond to this call from God which was the motive force behind the drive for Lasallian Association. In the course of this journey the persons involved were gradually transformed. They discovered that they were part of the History of Salvation with real names and faces. They experienced communion with other persons animated with the same spirit. They entered into a ministry which increased their own responsibility before God, the Church and those towards whom their mission was aimed.

The result of this development was a new identity which received the configuration of Lasallian charism: faith, zeal, the presence of

⁶⁰ Blain, *Idem*, p. 186, § 2. (CL 7, 241).

God, interior life, an educational sense, a profession - ministry. The teachers had become Brothers, they had become conscious of their History, of their future, of their symbols and also of their rituals, inscribed in the time of the Church. This itinerary, animated by the charism - the Spirit - highlighted the importance and the necessity of the community as a mediation to carry out the education mission and also as the expression of this educational proposition offered to society.

This community, that is to say the persons who composed it, was now going to face up to the winds of the Mission 'far from the shore', far from the places and circumstances which saw its birth.

4. Up to the completion of the establishment of the said society, let us make a vow of association...⁶¹

A transformation of the Community.

Leaving Reims for Paris in March 1688 and setting up in the parish of Saint-Sulpice, an avant-garde parish of the period, the original Community underwent a transformation Two groups (or even three): Reims with about fifteen Brothers, a centre for formation of rural teachers, another for adolescents who wished to join the Brothers; two or three communities in the provinces: Laon, Rethel, Château-Porcien; 4 or 5 Brothers, with Monsieur de La Salle, in Paris. They had to adapt to a new context: to bring a 'charity school' to life as a 'Christian school' in a powerful parish.

Early on, in 1689, John Baptist de La Salle did a calm interpretation of the situation. In his *Memoir on the Habit*, he describes his community with its diverse elements, its characteristics, its commitments, its status in the Church and in civil society: They are

⁶¹ Heroic Vow. November 21st 1691.

school teachers who remain lay-persons, live in fraternal communities being supportive of each other and devoting themselves to the education of the children of the poor in urban parishes.

2. This Community is commonly called the Community of the Christian Schools and at present rests upon - indeed, is rooted in - Providence. Those who live in it follow a Rule and are dependent for everything, having no personal possessions, and treat one another as equals.

3. The members of this Community devote themselves to teaching tuition-free schools, in towns only, and to give basic religious instruction every day including Sundays and Holidays. (MH 0,0,2 & 3. See *Rule and Foundational Documents*, Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, Landover (MD, 2002), p. 181.

John Baptist de La Salle had been seriously ill for a long time and even at death's door, both in Paris and later in Reims. Brother Henri L'Heureux, on whom he had counted, had died fairly suddenly. He had lost a friend and his anticipated successor. His death called into question the orientation of the government of the Society, its future and that of John Baptist de La Salle. He could no longer think of retiring. Once again he found himself faced with a choice: To what was God calling him? To remain at the head of the Society and consolidate it? Should he let the Society live its destiny, which appeared clear in the context of the time: it would break up into small communities attached to a parish or to a town, which would disappear or become dispersed when persons were changed either among the Brothers or at the head of parishes. If he decided to remain what should he do? The choice of the priesthood for one or other of the Brothers was, at the very least, postponed until later (the time needed to prepare for this by studies). Besides, John Baptist tended to rule it out, seeing in the death of Brother Henri L'Heureux a sign from Heaven. Nevertheless, his own recent illness had shown the dangers of having everything rest on his own shoulders. Whenever he was in Paris there were difficulties in Reims; and vice-versa.

Departures or deaths of one or other of his disciples, the absence of new entries, reduced by half the group in Reims and that in Paris, while hope for renewal through the 'junior novices' disappeared when they were employed in the sacristy of Saint-Sulpice where, for the most part they lost their first vocation. After a period of experimentation then of extension and diversification in Reims and the surrounding region, followed by expansion with a view to more universality, in Paris, all this over a period of ten years, the Society seemed to be in danger. It had not yet found its equilibrium after these changes. Furthermore it was clear that a return to Reims was impossible, unless they were willing to restrict themselves to the conditions laid down by the Archbishop of Reims and to abandon all idea of a mission outside his diocese.

John Baptist de La Salle had to redefine his manner of being present to the Brothers. He had tried at first to be present at the same time in both Paris and Reims. In fact the situation got away from him. This work of God was still too much his personal work. To face up to it, he discovered that he could not remain alone, that his too personalised charism had reached its limits with the developments of the Community.

The birth of Association.

The *heroic* vow counted more for its spiritual significance and the stage which it marked in the Lasallian plan than for its immediate consequences, since it remained secret. At no moment, it seems, did the two associates of Monsieur de La Salle appear as co-superiors or as having power, and certainly not in the eyes of the other Brothers, who knew nothing about this vow until Brother Gabriel Drolin's return from Rome (in 1728). Association, therefore, was situated at a different level than the exercise of "power".

From 1691 onwards, John Baptist de La Salle knew that the work undertaken was shared and was built on a "Community". Decisions

had to be considered as a whole. He wished to ensure the formation of the Community in religious and ministerial identity, by means of a real novitiate with religious, spiritual and professional content, of one year's duration, followed by a year in community. This novitiate was set up close to the Founder, but also away from the big city and in poverty. He first of all made this experience of living the novitiate available to those Brothers who had not yet had a novitiate and who had been members for two or three years, by having the Brothers from the community of the Rue Princesse come to Vaugirard each weekend to get back to their roots and 'recharge their batteries'. At the same time this gave him the means of restoring everybody's health: good air, getting out of the city; we know, in fact, that in the schools of the parish of Saint-Sulpice the classes were overcrowded (100 pupils), that the school buildings were not suitable and that the community of the Rue Princesse lived in a noisy environment which lacked fresh air. He sought to constitute and reinforce community identity by regular meetings and celebrations; annual retreats, the importance of Trinity Sunday; also by means of more regular contact with the Brothers by the monthly *reddition*. Finally he associated himself with Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin.

Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin: the associates from our beginnings.

John Baptist de La Salle leaned for support on specific Brothers, with their qualities and their weaknesses. Companions from the beginning? Certainly, even though we cannot give a precise entry date for either one. These two Brothers are also significant for the place they took in the plan. Gabriel Drolin went to Rome in 1702, to show the opening of the new community to the universal Church, as well as its fidelity to the Pope; something which in the 'Gallican' context of the France of the time, had a special signifi-

cance. Nicolas Vuyart was in charge of the Seminary for Country Teachers, the other part of the Lasallian mission.

Nicolas Vuyart

He joined the group around 1681 or 1682. We do not know either the date or place of his birth. He worked in Rethel, where he ran the school after Monsieur Nyel. In 1688 he could have been in charge of the Seminary for rural teachers, in Reims. In 1690, he was in charge of the school in the Rue du Bac, in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. He was also possibly the director of the Community in the Rue Princesse. In 1699, in the parish of Saint-Hippolyte, in Paris, he was in charge of the Seminary for Rural Teachers. Later when he left the Community in 1704-1705, he tried to continue on his own and became a teacher of the school for the poor in the parish of Saint-Hippolyte. He died in September 1719, in Paris, after having asked to return to the Institute. John Baptist de La Salle was prepared to receive him back, but his councillors (Brothers, priests?⁶²) were opposed to it. He was also, very probably, to a large extent behind the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* and the *Rule for the Formator of young Teachers*.

Gabriel Drolin.

He was born on July 22nd 1664 in Reims and was baptised in the parish of Saint-Jacques. He had studied and knew Latin (see the letters of John Baptist de La Salle). According to the Catalogue of

⁶² The sacrilegious usurper did not however give up trying to continue the schools of the parish; and some time later, whether he had wasted some of the funds which he had appropriated, or whether he wished to appease the bitter remorse of a conscience which was torturing him, he tried to rejoin the body from which he had separated with so much shame and scandal. M. de La Salle as a good father of a family stretched out his arms to this prodigal and unnatural son. This Absolom still found a place in the charitable heart of this tender father and he would have received him into the house with great joy, if the council of wise and prudent persons had not feared the results of such a pernicious example, had not turned him away. (Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 367. (CL 7, p.367).

Brothers, he joined the Institute in 1684. He worked in Laon, with Brother Bourlette, then in Rethel (where perhaps he succeeded Nicolas Vuyart).

In 1702 he was in Rome, sent by Monsieur de La Salle. After lots of difficulties, he succeeded in getting work as a teacher's assistant in a neighbourhood school in 1705; then he became a teacher in one of the Papal schools in 1709 and took the tonsure on that date (*Liber Ordinatio* of the Vicariate of Rome of May 5th 1709, where Gabrieli Drolini figures among those receiving the tonsure). He returned to France in 1728 and died in 1733.

According to the letters which he exchanged with the Founder, he is the only one of the correspondents of Monsieur de La Salle to whom the latter spoke about his plans (the opening of a community) or of the situation of certain Brothers (Nicolas Vuyart). He also questioned him about the organisation of popular education in Rome, the Papal schools... He informed him personally of the holding of the Chapter of 1717 and asked him to accept the choices which would be made⁶³. The tone of this correspondence is altogether different from that of the other letters of the Founder to Brothers.

The Heroic Vow of November 21st 1691.

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable Majesty, we consecrate ourselves entirely to you to procure with all our efforts, the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools in the manner which will seem to us to be most agreeable to you, and most advantageous to the said Society.

And for this purpose, I, John Baptist de La Salle, priest, I, Nicolas Wuyart and I, Gabriel Drolin, as from now and for ever until the last

⁶³ See LA 32, to Bro. Gabriel Drolin, of December 5th 1716, in particular LA 32:10 & 11.

surviving one of us, or unto the complete establishment of the said Society, make the vow of association and union to bring about and maintain the said establishment, without being able to withdraw from this obligation even if only we three remained in the said Society and if we were obliged to beg for alms and live on bread alone.

In view of which, we promise to do, all together and by common accord, everything that we shall think in conscience, and regardless of any human consideration, to be for the greater good of the said Society.

Done on this twenty-first day of November, feast of the Presentation of the Most Blessed Virgin, in the year 1691. In testimony of which we have signed.

This vow was a response to a reading of the situation being lived and at the same time a point of departure. The re-reading of the Society's History leads to changes, commitments, choices, which in their turn make a History, that is to say which permit the History to continue and to go in a new direction. It is important not to cut the vow off from its context: the situation of the Community, John Baptist de La Salle's perception of his vocation and of his future, the persons available: Brothers, priests... It is not an isolated act even if it is unusual. It is in line with a whole series of steps and choices.

Three parts in this formula:

- **Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit**, prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable Majesty, we consecrate ourselves entirely to you to procure with all our efforts, the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools in the manner which shall seem to us to be most agreeable to you and, and most advantageous to the said Society.

“Most Holy Trinity... we consecrate ourselves to procure the establishment of the Society...” Consecration and Mission go together. The Trinitarian mystery leads to a consecration *for*. The step has an

absolute character: “entirely to you... all our powers, all our endeavours... the manner... the most pleasing and the most advantageous...” It consists of a dialogue between YOU (the Holy Trinity) and US (the ‘trinity’ of those consecrating themselves).

- And for this purpose, I, John Baptist de La Salle, priest, I, Nicolas Wuyart and I, Gabriel Drolin, as from now and for ever until the last surviving one of us, or unto the complete establishment of the said Society, make the vow of association and union to bring about and maintain the said establishment, without being able to withdraw from this obligation even if only we three remained in the said Society and if we were obliged to beg for alms and live on bread alone.

“And for this purpose...I, ...I, ...and I...” the vow of association and union is a vow *for*; just as in the first part with regard to consecration. This consecration takes place in a history of community relations, with a plan: to constitute this Society which carries out this educational ministry in the Church. This vow, strange in its formulation, calls upon a double trinity. In the first part it consists of the Trinity of the Divine Persons, who are named: “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. In the second part it is the trinity of those making the vow: “I, John Baptist de La Salle, priest, I, Nicolas Wuyart, and I, Gabriel Drolin”. The *we* who address the Trinity in the first part: “we consecrate ourselves”, is taken up again in the second, “we...bind ourselves by a vow of association and union”.

The consecration of the first part, made explicit (“for this purpose”) by the vow of the second, are both, as we have seen, “for”: “procurring with all our powers and with all our endeavours the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools, ...to effect and maintain the said establishment...”

John Baptist de La Salle and the two Brothers, when they pronounce this vow, avoid linking themselves to any ecclesiastical structure. It is the aim of the work, which they proclaim in a prophetic manner, which will be the object of their creativity. They

refer themselves, collectively (we), together and by association, to a future to be constructed, in fidelity to the call which they have received, which calls for initiative and a spirit of decision. They express their will to invent something better than that which already exists, to respond to the needs of the young, of the Brothers, of the Mission, to reach a greater effectiveness. All this through community discernment.

- **In view of which, we promise** to do, all together and by common accord, everything that we shall think in conscience, and regardless of any human consideration, to be for the greater good of the said Society.

“Wherefore we promise...” the content of the vow of association implies carrying out together, “unanimously and by common consent”. John Baptist de La Salle is not alone, fraternal relations exist. It is not the Superior outside his community but the Brother with his Brothers. Behind the commitment of John Baptist de La Salle and the two Brothers, there is a plan of action: the establishment and the maintenance of the Society of the Christian Schools.

The vow took in the totality of persons: “we consecrate ourselves entirely to you... all that we believe in conscience and without human consideration”. With regard to their action: “all our powers and all our endeavours... to be for the greater good of the said Society”. With regard to time: “as from now and for ever... until the establishment of the said Society is assured... without being able to withdraw from this obligation”. With regard to the Community: “until the death of the last survivor... even should we remain the only three members of the said Society... unanimously and with common accord”. With regard to conditions of life: “should we be obliged to beg for alms and live on bread only”. It consists therefore of a very strong commitment.

Each of the verbs which indicate the consecration, the promises, the vows, are *for*, with an effect, a plan for life, for action: the establishment and the maintenance of the Society of the Christian Schools.

The Heroic Vow: a stage in the foundation of Association.

The *Heroic Vow* was a vow of association and of union, a re-foundation of the Institute on a Community which claimed to risk everything - its life, its duration, its capacities, its relations - in confidence in God, to carry out its work. They were men who gave back to God all that they were, their talents: all our powers, all our endeavours, all that we believe in conscience and without human consideration. They were men who had mutual confidence in each other: I and WE, unanimously and with common consent, a vow of union. They were men who had discovered that they were in solidarity with all which had been done and all that remained to be done. There was a dynamic of human relations and of what was lived, which was profiled behind this “secret” commitment.

It was an act of hope in a faithful God: the formula opened with an invocation to the Trinity and continued with a dialogue between YOU: the Trinity and US, (I, I, and I).

The dialogue with God, the consecration, have for their aim the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools. It is affirmed on two occasions in the text. John Baptist de La Salle and the two Brothers have gone from the “community” of the *Memoir on the Habit*, a term which expressed the “religious” horizon of the group which arrived at Saint-Sulpice, to the “Society of the Christian Schools”, an expression which included, apart from the religious dimension, the school aspect of the Lasallian work.

This dialogue with the Trinity, which continues throughout the vow, is the expression of an experience of God, shared by the three

Brothers. It is a look of Faith at the lived reality, a re-reading of the signs God has sent them through events, what had died and what is alive in their existence and that of their Brothers and their schools also; a look which leads to a commitment, a new creation which is situated in the field of Association.

It is a prophetic gesture which announces that a new reality is present, a gesture which creates a new reality: the salvation of God is moving, it is once again possible. This prophetic gesture is effective. The words arise from the evangelic experience and its history: we consecrate ourselves for... we make the vow of association for... words which generate History.

The vow of 1691 is like the emerged part of the conversation which John Baptist de La Salle is having with God; the visible part of what is happening in his encounters with Him. The community presence and the call to mission prevent this meeting from being transformed into an intimate dialogue and shows that it is not a private dialogue. This vow shows us that **John Baptist de La Salle shared with his Brothers his experience of God, so that the Mission of Salvation to which he was committed, could be accomplished.** It is that which is the foundation of the Society of the Christian Schools.

5. I promise and vow to unite myself and live in Society... to keep together and by association gratuitous schools...

Between Pentecost and Trinity Sunday.

The Brothers were now present in Reims, Laon, Rethel, perhaps Château-Porcien, and in Paris. There were at most 30 Brothers. With the rest of the French population they had just gone through the great famine of 1693-1694. The writings of the biographers of John Baptist de La Salle show that they had put into practice one

of the aspects of the vow of 1691: to beg and to live on bread in order to maintain the schools⁶⁴.

The Novitiate was operating in Vaugirard. It was fulfilling its function of unifying the Society, by re-enforcing its religious identity, by making the Brothers conscious of the bonds which united them, among themselves, with John Baptist de La Salle, around their ministry and their plan, around their way of living Community.

The Community also asserted itself in the struggles to make clear its identity and its autonomy: with the parish-priests of Saint-Sulpice (La Barmondière and later Baudrand)... the *Memoir on the Habit* shows some traces of this; with the Teachers of the 'Petites Écoles' and the Writing-Teachers. Its school and education plan had become original: organisation of classes according to the level of the children, methods of reading, way of life of the school marked by good order, silence, efficiency, attention to the needs of the children and their families, gratuity for all, going beyond the specific.

Since 1691 the Society had advanced. God's plan as lived by John Baptist de La Salle was now shared with two other Brothers. The society had taken on an obvious religious aspect, wished for and assumed by its members. It became important that the founding gestures should speak of and celebrate this reality.

⁶⁴ See Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 318. (CL 7, p. 333-334): The house at Vaugirard seemed to De La Salle a paradise of delights. The fervor that reigned there made it a gratifying place for him. He had to leave it, however - at least temporarily - when famine began to make itself felt with greater rigor toward the end of 1693. Vaugirard was no longer a safe refuge for the Brothers. The house was open to anyone who wanted to come in and was entirely unprotected. Occupied only by lambs, it was exposed to wolves. Their food, frugal as it was, excited the rapacity of the starving. It had already happened that the provisions were stolen from the Brothers bringing them from Paris, and the same miscreants or others like them were ready to pounce upon a meal which could be had already prepared, every day at the same place and time. Hearing of the robberies which were being committed everywhere by force and knowing that the food for the community had also been stolen, De La Salle realized that he risked being cut off from his source of supply and that the meals for the community could no longer be brought in safety from Paris to Vaugirard. So he decided that it would be best to move to Paris.

By making vows with twelve Brothers and by pursuing this religious step by means of a community reflection on the life and ways of acting of the Society of the Christian Schools, John Baptist de La Salle engaged himself, and with him the Brothers, in a community step which is the basis of the existence of the Society of the Brothers. The number *twelve* was not by chance, the reference to the Apostles and the early apostolic times was explicit. This new community, united and animated by the Holy Spirit, claimed to be reliving the steps of the primitive Church, to be inhabited by the Holy Spirit. The dates chosen for this founding act went along the same lines: from Pentecost to Trinity Sunday.

A step well thought-out.

He told them at the beginning of 1694 that he would let them have the four months remaining before the feast of the Holy Trinity to think it over. He also wrote to the senior Brothers who were in the four houses which were in the provinces. The private retreats of the twelve senior Brothers he had chosen and whom he judged to be the only ones capable of perpetual commitments were finished at the end of four months so he called them all to Vaugirard and invited those from the provinces to come also. With them on Pentecost Sunday he began another general retreat which finished on Trinity Sunday. He had the Brothers join him in general discussions, where everyone was at liberty to express his feelings. The vows were the only topic being discussed... the noble ardour of making perpetual vows would be restricted to those of obedience and of stability...⁶⁵

So, the Brothers judged “the only ones capable of perpetual commitments” had several months for reflection. One may note that even the vows, that is to say an essential part of the religious identity, were discussed by the Community. The fundamental choices belonged now to the Brothers, taken as a living body, capable of

⁶⁵ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 332-333. (CL 7, p. 343).

reaching its own decisions, because it was its own life which was at stake, and that its spiritual meaning had been refined over the course of the years.

To become associated does not mean setting out with unknown people. It is always in practical reference to persons who have mutual confidence in each other, because they have shared the same experiences, the same plans. It is important for us to know better the “founders” of Lasallian Association for the educational service of the poor. Along with Monsieur de La Salle, twelve Brothers committed themselves to Association on that June 6th 1694. Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin were the oldest of the group. They had been with John Baptist de la Salle since the beginnings in Reims. Six of those making vows would eventually leave the Institute - this is certain in the case of one or two and very probable in the case of those who do not figure in *Le Catalogue des Frères* (CL 3). At least three would die young: Jean Henry, Jacques Compain and Michel Barthélémy Jacquinot, the two latter during the “purple” epidemic (scarlet fever or measles?) which struck the Community of Chartres in 1705.

With the twelve, reliving the apostolic times.

The heroic vow of 1691 was limited to the three people involved. It would become extinct with the death of the “last survivor” or when “the establishment of the said Society is finally assured”, its object being “the said establishment”. The vow of 1694 concerns all the Brothers who, in the course of the centuries have shared the Lasallian charism and wish to fulfil it in their lives, following John Baptist de La Salle and those who went before them. It is a vow which remains open.

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable Majesty, I

consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me.

And for this purpose, I John Baptist de La Salle, priest, promise and vow **to unite myself and to live in Society** with Brothers Nicolas Wiart, Gabriel Drolin, Jean Partois, Gabriel-Charles Rasigade, Jean Henry, Jacques Compain, Jean Jacquot, Jean-Louis de Marcheville, Michel-Barthélémy Jacquinot, Edme Leguillon, Gilles Pierre and Claude Roussel, **to keep together and by association** gratuitous schools, wherever I may be, even if I were obliged to beg for alms and live on bread only; or to do anything in the said Society at which I shall be employed, whether by the body of the Society or by the superiors who will have the government thereof.

Wherefore, I promise and vow obedience to the body of the Society as well as to the superiors; **which vows of association as well as of stability in the said Society**, and of obedience, I promise to keep inviolably all my lifetime.

In testimony whereof I have signed. Done at Vaugirard, this sixth day of June, feast of the Most Holy Trinity, in the year 1694.

Signed: De La Salle. (Cf. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, Lanndover (MD), 2002, p. 203-204).

The Trinity

It frames this formula of vows: Most Holy Trinity... (at the start) and the feast of the Most Holy Trinity... (at the end, the day of the taking of the vows). The Brothers' vows are included in the central Mystery of Christianity, that into which each baptised person enters on the day of his or her consecration to God. A single God and community of life.

The vow is nourished by faith. It is addressed to the "Most Holy Trinity" which is immediately listed: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It continues with an act of adoration: "prostrate with the most pro-

found respect before your infinite and adorable Majesty...”. It is say *I* and no longer *WE* as in the vow of 1691. It is each one who commits himself and consecrates himself; precisely to live association, and no longer simply to make association be lived; to live in Society and no longer just to make the Society of the Christian Schools exist, even if, of course, *to live Association* is also *to cause Association to be lived*. The latter is only living because persons join it and live it. Thus the first part of the formula of commitment takes the Trinity as the ultimate reference of Lasallian Association, because it is the Trinity which is the model of this communion for the mission which the consecrated persons take as the basis of Association. It truly consists of an act of faith and not simply of the generosity of the members and their capacity for commitment.

There is no intermediary between the Trinity and the Brother: neither priest, nor celebrant, nor bishop nor even a Superior; the relation is a direct one between God and the Brother. The consecrating rite is the free and public word of the Brother at the moment he pronounces it. It is a personal encounter, signified by a single prophetic act, a word which states the relation, the encounter, the mission, in a dialogue between God and the one he has called and chosen: “I consecrate myself... I promise... I promise and vow...” One could say that the vows are the externalised manifestation of the deepest experience of God. The subject of the consecration is the totality of the person, a consecration which identifies the glory of God with Association for “keeping gratuitous schools”. Thus is expressed the unity of life of the Brother.

The aim of the consecration is “to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me”. The stress is put on the glory of God which has to be procured: hence the parallel between “glory of God” and “gratuitous schools”. The glory of God is in the History of Salvation. The glory of God is manifested when the poor are listened to and understood. This method of wording is deeply

Lasallian; we find it especially in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, where we become aware that what procures the glory of God is the salvation of the children who are confided to us. In 1691 it was to procure with all our powers and with all our endeavours, the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools. In a way, the three Brothers were fixing the limits of their consecration. Now, in 1694, they are putting it back in God's hands and under His will. We have changed to a different level and it is truly the sign that the two expressions (that of 1691 and that of 1694) are not on the same plane, even if the vow of 1691 was necessary so that those of 1694 and all that followed could exist.

I... promise and vow to unite myself and live in society WITH...

There follows the listing of the other twelve names. This material presence of the names of the other Brothers making the vow, reinforces the cohesion of the Association. It does not consist of an act done "in general", but of a reciprocal reference to the vow-makers themselves. It is, in fact, with these that I am associating, men who have faces, a history, men that I know, with whom I have shared a part of my life, my hopes, struggles, failures... One is really in the presence of a founding "act", almost in the legal sense of the term. The Society has a recognisable consistency in the social and ecclesial landscape of the time. This second part of the formula thus clearly signals the objective properly so-called of the consecration: "to unite myself and live in society..." The consecrated life of the Brother is incarnated in this Association and establishes there its central core.

This society is "to keep together and by association gratuitous schools..." Its aim is precise. The gratuitous schools refer to a type of school associated with that of the "charity schools", which were well known in the France of the *Ancien Régime*. Usually these "charity schools" were reserved for poor children, those whose parents

figured on the parish lists or those of the Offices for the Poor. To say “gratuitous school” therefore implied a change, that wished for by John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers: they would be schools open to all, which did not wish to separate the poor from other, better-off children. This step carried a force of transformation for the society for which the Great Revolution would be, doubtless, one of the results. The commitment was not established directly with the work of the schools but with Association, that is to say with the “Community for the gratuitous schools”. From the beginning, the centre of gravity, the indispensable mediation which characterises the Lasallian plan, was clearly established. It placed itself in the fraternal communion which united the Brothers. The latter placed itself even in front of the apostolic plan properly so-called, even though the latter was the final aim of their communion. Therefore, it is not by chance that the naming of all those making the vows precedes the final aim of Association. The aim is to keep gratuitous schools. In this aim, the favoured recipients, poor children, are implicitly included. The force of Association is directed towards the poor, without excluding others, but with a strong preference for the former. It is the aim of association and it ought to be pursued by this same Association, and not by each member taken in isolation. “Together and by association”: this reveals the manner in which we ought to carry out the work as well as the fruitful tension which is established between what is being achieved in a concrete manner for precise recipients - which comes under the jurisdiction of the community - and the perspective of universality - which should characterise the institution.

The community dimension is present in this commitment: “to unite myself and live in society with... to keep together and by association”. The formula becomes a lived community missionary plan, the vow coming from life as it is shared. It is a response to persons, to needs. The Brothers give themselves objectives, communi-

ty attitudes, linked to the mission and its continuity: “to beg for alms... to live on bread”. It is a formula which translates a lived and experienced reality before being expressed. The objective is to maintain the reality of this work of God, not to perform ascetic exploits. It is a radical text, that is to say a “root” text.

Association, together, Society: these words keep referring back to each other. FOR a precise apostolic project: the gratuitous schools. Community life associated with an educational plan is the objective of the consecration of the Brothers to God, in response to a choice and to the call from God. In fact, it is the contents of the human experience of the Brother which is consecrated. The vows of the Brothers correspond to their life experience. The accomplishment of the work of God, His Glory to be proclaimed, now rests on a Community.

The formula of 1694 also opens up the fields of the ministry: “or to do anything in the said society at which I shall be employed...” the possible field of activities is not limited to “keeping schools” Some of the Brothers are servant Brothers and will not pronounce the part of the formula which refers to “keeping gratuitous schools”, while others may have other functions, less directly concerned with the schools... Are John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers also thinking of the case of Brothers who will be employed in fee-paying boarding schools such as Saint-Yon? We are not at that stage yet. What can be remarked on is the flexible nature of the formula of vows at the time of our origins. It envisaged right away the possible situations which would arise, in due course, in the life of the Institute and of the Brothers.

Wherefore I promise and vow obedience, association, stability...

In this third part of the formula, the links of consecration, the vows of association, stability and obedience are made more explicit. Each one of them reinforces an aspect or dimension of Association. The

vows, as with every religious vow, are addressed to God. However, they go through the Brothers with whom one associates. They are accomplished by them and with them. One might translate their meaning in the following way: *Association*: I unite myself with these Brothers; *Stability*: I promise to be faithful to them (they can count on me, come what may); *Obedience*: I accept whatever they will decide.

Stability and association have already appeared in “to unite myself and to live in Society, to keep together and by association...” The vow of obedience is made “to the body of the Society and to the Superiors”. It is in the line of the vows taken since 1686. It ensures that the Society will be able to accomplish its mission: to keep gratuitous schools. It seems to me that it is not first of all an “ascetic” vow, in the line of the classic triad, but a vow in keeping with the circumstances of the profession of educator, lived in “association”. They are three vows in reference to the community plan, to the body of the society. They are also vows for the Mission: association in order to keep gratuitous schools; stability: I want to remain faithful to the young, to the children of artisans and the poor; obedience: I accept the work, the ministry which is assigned to me by “the Society”, in the place where it shall send me.

These commitments are to be kept “inviolably all my lifetime...” That is to say for what is within the power of man, helped by the grace of God, which corresponds to the “as far as I am able” of the beginning.

The Vow of Association.

This formula is the ritualising of an experience, a memory and a hope. It is the confession of prophetic faith of a community which professes, in the faith, that God has been with it, that He is with it, that he cannot abandon it because it confides totally in Him in

order to do His work. The radical nature of this step implies a discernment, a movement, an experience of the God of Salvation, in order that it be done in a true manner. The vow is not a ready-made formula or one arising from a sudden burst of generosity. The vow is lived and expressed as a crystallization of the experience of God lived by these men.

The vow of association of 1694 is the authentic threshold of Lasallian Association, since the latter is its essential element. Externally, the vow adds nothing, either to the mission or to the community but inwardly, it places these two realities in explicit relationship with God himself. Thus the people involved will be able to find a greater interior strength to give continuity to the project.

The vow also projects towards the future what the Brothers are in the process of living. It is a prophetic gesture: they affirm that God is present in the work which they are carrying out, and thus in spite of their weakness, they are able to commit their lives to giving continuity to the experience. At the heart of the founding intention of John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers, Association determines both the way of life of the community (to unite myself and live in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools) and the way of exercising the ministry (to keep together and by association gratuitous schools).

It is no longer a case, as in 1691, of establishing a Society, but of giving consistency to the objectives which that Society has set itself: to keep gratuitous schools. In 1694, there exists a constituted project. The formulae employed speak of reinforcing the internal cohesion of the Society, of making oneself available for the mission, of discerning the will of God by means of obedience to *the body of the Society* and to those who govern it.

As a whole, the formula of consecration or of commitment of John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers expresses the link which has been established between the “community” dimension (*together*) and the dimension of “association for the mission”. The link reveals the community style given to their lives, the radical way in which they have assumed the objectives of Association and the priority which they give it among the possible personal options which are offered to them in their lives. From then on this link underlines their absolute solidarity with the other members of the community and with the objectives of Association. It is “Association” and not a single individual, which carries the education project. They subordinate their personal interests and needs. This means to say that the kind of community established by John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers was certainly an *intentional* community.

In the process of community construction, the vow has a vital, existential dimension. It gives body to a community history lived by the Brothers and not just by any Brothers but by those Brothers, the works created, the failures and successes, the lived community experiences. The vow ritualises this commitment in History, so as to go further.

As a result of the Vows and of the Association which we have contracted by their means... the record of the election of the Superior, June 7th 1694.

We, the undersigned: Bros. Nicolas Wiart, Gabriel Drolin, Jean Partois, Gabriel-Charles Rasigade, Jean Henry, Jacques Compain, Jean Jacquot, Jean-Louis de Marcheville, Michel-Barthélémy Jacquinot, Edme Leguillon, Gilles Pierre and Claude Roussel, **after having associated ourselves with Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle, priest, in order to keep together and by association, gratuitous schools by the vows which we took yesterday, recognise that as a result of our vows and of the association which we have contracted by them, we have chosen as our Superior Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle, whom we**

promise to obey with complete submission in virtue of our vow, as well as those who shall be given to us by him as Superiors.

We also declare that we claim that the present election which we have made of the said Monsieur de La Salle as Superior, shall not later have any consequence. Our intention being, that after him, in the future and for all time, there shall not be received among us, nor chosen as Superior, anyone who is a priest or who has received holy orders; and that **we will not even have nor admit, any Superior who is not associated and who has not made vows like us and like all the others who will later be associated with us.** Done at Vaugirard, on the 7th of June of the year one thousand six hundred and ninety four. (Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 339 (Cf. CL 7, p. 347-348 and CL 40.1 p. 101).

While they were at the taking of vows, on June 6th 1694, the assembly of Brothers along with John Baptist de La Salle proceeded to the election of the Superior. Previously, following the assemblies of 1684-1686, Monsieur de La Salle had tried to have a Brother elected in his place and had succeeded, in the person of Brother Henri L'Heureux, but not without having put a lot of pressure on the assembly. In the context of Reims, this state of affairs had seemed intolerable: it did not seem right that a priest, a Doctor of Theology, former canon of the Metropolitan Church, belonging to one of the most distinguished families of the city, should have to submit to a lay person, a simple school teacher. John Baptist de La Salle had therefore resumed his place at the head of the community, and had continued to act as Superior, moving the Brothers around when necessary, and taking initiatives such as that of coming to Paris... He thought and he knew that his Society would never be stabilised until one of its members was at its head. His attempt to prepare Brother Henri L'Heureux for the priesthood failed with the death of the latter. He himself was at death's door while his community seemed to be broken up between Paris and Reims... His response would be the Heroic Vow, with the steps which accompanied it (Novitiate, reddition, retreat, formation of

the Brothers). In 1694, John Baptist de La Salle tried again to have a Brother elected in his place. But there, the Brothers refused to go along with him. In spite of his exhortations, in spite of re-starting voting sessions, they remained unanimous in choosing Monsieur de La Salle as Superior. Finally, one of them spoke to invite him to recognise in their behaviour the will of God. Nevertheless the record which they drew up later shows that they had fully understood the concerns of John Baptist de La Salle: that the Superior of the Brothers should be one of themselves.

The Record of the Election.

At the end of the vows “which we have taken yesterday, we the undersigned...” the list of names of those who had associated themselves the day before is repeated again, from beginning to end. It is in the interior of this Association, and for its benefit, that this step of election takes place. Just as the vow of June 6th was framed by the Trinity, model of all “association”, the step of structuring the Association, which is what the election of the Superior is, takes place within the group of associates. One may note that the Brothers are listed in the same order as for the vows, with Brothers Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin at the head and the youngest (?) at the end. With the naming of the members of the Association and the reminder of the step they are taking in common, it is the body of the Society which is trying itself out.

The step they have taken is presented as flowing directly from the commitment to association taken together: “after having associated ourselves with Monsieur de La Salle, priest...”. Besides, they take up again the text of their consecration to God: “to keep together and by association gratuitous schools by the vows which we have taken yesterday...”. These vows (association, stability, obedience) are linked with the aim, “to keep gratuitous schools”, and the conditions for doing so, “together and by association”.

The text continues by underlining the close link between the vows, association and the record of this election: “we recognise that as a result of these vows and of the association which we have contracted through them, we have chosen s Superior, Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle...” The “as a result” introduces a logical character, of cause to effect, into the decision. The Association ought to organise itself, give itself structures, a Superior, develop all its potential for existing. The mystical intuition ought to take shape through forms of behaviour and structures, relationships, themselves ordained by the objectives proposed and which had inspired the step taken: to procure the glory of God by keeping gratuitous schools for poor children.

The end of this first part, by recalling the person “we promise to obey with entire submission in virtue of our vow”, sends us back again to this formula of vows, and particularly to that of obedience, which - if we are to believe Blain - figured already in the formulae of 1684 - 1686, and included the “neophytes” or those of whom one was not absolutely sure⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ On this question of obedience, one might look at the series of Meditations which are proposed for all the Sundays between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday.

MSF 7. *On the necessity for obedience.*

MSF 8. *On exact obedience.*

MSF 9. *On the faith that should be shown in obedience.*

MSF 10. *On the faith in obedience we ought to have in spite of the most violent temptations.*

MSF 11. *The excellence and merit of obedience.*

MSF 1. *The great benefit produced by what is done through obedience, however insignificant it seems in itself.*

MSF 13 *That persons consecrated to God need to be exercised in the practice of obedience.*

MSF 14 *Three kinds of disobedient religious.*

MSF 15 *Three sorts of persons who obey without gaining the merits of blind obedience.*

See also what is said in the *Collection* (*The nine conditions of obedience* and *The conditions of obedience* in particular; R 9, 1 & 2). This reading should not be taken at face value. Our anthropology is not the same as that of the period in question, and there is a stiffness in the discourse of John Baptist de La Salle which results from the context, his character and his background. The human relations supposed by the practice of obedience are no longer lived in the manner of the 17th Century. As for reading the letters of the Founder to the Brothers, they clearly show us that he did not usually function in the way described by the Meditations.

After him and forever...

The second part is a response to the questions posed by the Founder and the Brothers on the future of their Association, in the context of their time. What is also quite remarkable is that the choice made by the Brothers in 1694, “after him and forever...” continues to affect us, we who are those “other who will be associated later on”.

We declare that it is our understanding that the present election will not have the force of a precedent for the future. Our intention is that after the said Monsieur de La Salle, no one shall be received among us or chosen as Superior, who is a priest or who has received Holy Orders; and we will not have or accept any Superior who has not associated himself with us and has not made vows like us and like all those who will be associated with us in the future. (Blain, *op.cit.*, Book Two, p. 339 - CL 7, p. 348).

John Baptist de La Salle was a priest, but explicitly and deliberately, he remained a unique case for our first Brothers. In the tradition of the Institute, Monsieur de La Salle is designated as the Founder of the Brothers and Brother Barthélémy as the first Superior General.

The reference in this decision is made also in the direction of the vows of association: “who are not associated and who have not made vows like us”. The Brothers were not refusing the priesthood out of contempt, nor because they would not be fit for it. Several Brothers had done ecclesiastical studies before joining the community and knew Latin. John Baptist de La Salle was trained in the context of the restoration of clerical dignity, in the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice. But it seems to me rather that the Brothers had discovered that Association for keeping gratuitous schools for the poor could not be maintained and attain its objectives unless they included in the step a true communion between baptised persons,

without letting themselves be distracted by concerns about the parish or belonging to the ordained ministry in the Church. The only battle which counted for them was to be able to teach, instruct, educate and accompany the children and young persons confided to them.

With a mentality opposite to that of their contemporaries, they refused to regard hierarchies as sacred, even (or above all) if the latter considered themselves as already sacred. In the choice of their Superior, in their way of functioning, they adopted a practice which one could qualify in an anachronistic manner, as *democratic*: open discussions, discernment, the final choice by a secret ballot.⁶⁷

The foundational innovation.

We should be aware that with this community which constituted itself between 1680 - 1690, which determined its aims and chose its structures, which became a Society between 1691 - 1694, around this vow of Association, something radically new with regard to the consecrated life was born in the Church. It consisted of a community of baptised persons who consecrated themselves to God in order to keep together and by association gratuitous schools, that is to say to help advance the Kingdom of God among the young in order to procure for them the Salvation of God. They

⁶⁷ Of course, deviations and distortions could appear in practice: the abuse of power by such and such a Superior, General Chapters made up mainly of Brothers chosen because of their functions (Visitors, Directors of "principal houses")... absence of dialogue. These occurrences were only too real, and the Brothers have not always been up to the standard of the Founder's intuitions. At times they have considered them as 'things', or have interpreted them in a literal manner, or biased towards their own contemporary context. It is also true that the choice of integrating themselves into the classical religious life by the three vows was made very quickly after the death of John Baptist de la Salle, the habit becoming more "ecclesiastic" by making the soutane longer. There were many other examples of 'conformism'. We must realise that a group as singular and new as that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, could not preserve for long - without disappearing or aligning itself with a known model - the charismatic intuitions of its Founder. We may regret this but we can't rewrite History and doubtless it was the price that had to be paid so that the essential - Association in order to keep gratuitous schools - could come down to us.

were persons who were seeking holiness, not by the practice of the vows of religion turned in on themselves, but in an educational service turned towards the society of their time. They were persons who turned their profession of educator into a ministry, a place for meeting God and finally a path towards sanctity, by procuring salvation for children and young people.

Association was born in the community and starting out from the experience of that community, but also in order to make the community solid and strong, both internally and externally. It was born to give root to the community and to direct its internal links in a radical manner towards the mission. The gesture of consecration shows that God is the foundation of the community and that the work of education is the Work of God. It was born to make universal, in space and time, this experience of a community for the education of the poor. Association is the guarantee that the community will continue beyond its concrete existence in a given place and at a given moment.

The Community of the Christian Schools was formed above all, not as a work team, but as a communion of persons who felt themselves called by Jesus Christ and sent to represent Him. Lasallian Association does not rely in the first place on efficient organisation but rather on the interpersonal relations of those who know themselves to be called, and who have been sent to carry out the same mission, to carry out the work of God. Evangelical perfection is to be sought in a community and with it. It is shared between persons who have mutual confidence in each other, just as they have confidence in God.

It is God who, through Jesus Christ, consecrates us for the Mission. This is what is said by the formulae of vows quoted above. It is also what the present-day formula of vows continues to say. John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers experienced the power of the

Consecration which transformed them into disciples capable of participating in the Mission. The insistence on Association is a determining factor for our identity.

This re-reading of our History leads to changes and choices which, in their turn, also build the History, allowing our History to continue and to go in a different direction, giving a new and decisive orientation to the *Society of the Christian Schools*. Because these commitments of 1694 (consecration by Association and the structuring of the Community) were fruitful. In fact, it was then that the period of extension of the Society of the Christian Schools began: Chartres, Troyes, Calais... These new foundations indicated the dynamism of the community, its ability to adapt to diverse situations.

John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers also gave themselves the instruments necessary to successfully carry out the work of God for the children of artisans and the poor. Several fundamental written works: *The Conduct of Christian Schools*, the *Rules of Decorum and of Christian politeness*, the *Duties of a Christian towards God...* marked the Society of the Christian Schools for a long time and built up its identity for the People of God.

At the same time, the Community became more universal: it moved out of Paris. The foundation of Chartres, in 1699, was the signal for a movement which would never cease.

An evangelical Mission which disturbs.

From 1694 on, the Society of the Christian Schools became stronger and developed. The schools in the parish of Saint-Sulpice multiplied, always with a community living in Rue Princesse. In 1697, the Novitiate of Vaugirard was transferred to the Grand'Maison, a larger and better-situated house than that of Vaugirard.

In 1699, a new Seminary for teachers for rural areas was opened (but Blain is unclear on this point... perhaps it referred to the parish of Saint-Hippolyte, in the Saint-Marcel area of the city), as well as a Sunday School opened at the request of the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice, Monsieur de La Chétardie. It took place on Sundays and provided for young people (under 20) a basic formation (reading and writing) as well as a professional formation (drawing and accountancy). It accommodated 200 young men from all over Paris. Unfortunately, the Brothers to whom John Baptist de La Salle confided this task, left the Institute one after the other. The work had to be abandoned and it seems that the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice held it against Monsieur de La Salle. In this house also, from May 1698, for a year or two, there was the *Boarding-school for the Irish*, opened at the request of the Archbishop of Paris, Mons. de Nouailles.

The sending of seven Brothers to Chartres, in 1699, at the request of Bishop Godet des Marets, a seminary friend of John Baptist de La Salle and chaplain at Saint-Cyr⁶⁸ marks a turning-point in the missionary approach of John Baptist de La Salle. To respond to this appeal, he assembled the Brothers of Paris as he wished to have their consent:

Bishop Godet des Marets had been asking for Brothers since 1694 and had frequently reiterated his request. Finally, in 1699, he insisted so strongly that De La Salle could no longer hold back. Before promising to send any of his subjects to Chartres the humble Superior wished, however, to obtain consent of the Brothers. So he called them together and informed them of the illustrious prelate's proposal, and after praising the latter eminent piety and ardent zeal for religion, he let them come to their own decision. The Brothers, conscious of the honour paid to them by a bishop whom the partisans of sound tradi-

⁶⁸ A boarding-school opened by Madame de Maintenon, morganatic wife of Louis XIV, for poor young girls from the nobility.

tional doctrine honored as the shield of the faith in France, vied with one another in offering themselves to their Superior for this mission.⁶⁹

In a decision of importance - to extend the mission beyond known and familiar places - Monsieur de La Salle put Association into operation. It is the Brothers who decide on a more universal mission. It is the first time that such a consultation was reported in connection with the opening of a school and community. This decision in common opens a decisive door in the running of the community; foundations will take place later without Monsieur de La Salle renewing this gesture: Calais, Dijon, Rome (en 1702)... This step and what it involved would not be without influencing the behaviour of the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice, since visibly it meant that the work of the gratuitous schools was no longer a Sulpician work.

Another element appeared: the success of the Brothers' schools, the quality of their teaching, its efficiency, the order which became established in the schools and among the children... attracted a clientele of sons of artisans and small shopkeepers, who were not listed in the Register of the Poor. Along with the Brothers, John Baptist de La Salle felt that the Gospel should be offered gratuitously to all, and that there could be no question of asking for a contribution even from those who could afford it. An important educational change came in with this new clientele. In a way, it was the entire urban society which was beginning to move, and this could only bring difficulties for John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers; because the social distinctions were no longer being respected; which was disturbing in a society which considered *innovation* an evil and where each one had a divine vocation to stay in the position in which he was born.

⁶⁹ Blain. *op. cit.*, Book Two, p.372. (CL 7, p.370).

These gratuitous schools were also competing with paying schools by taking away potential pupils and by dispensing knowledge which was reserved to the corporation of sworn master-writers. The new Community thus found itself confronted, at the turn of the century, by two institutional obstacles:

- The status of education in the Society of the Ancien Régime, the function of education as an instrument of social change. For a significant number of political and religious leaders, instructing people beyond the catechism and elementary reading was a mistake, because it was a source of destabilisation of Society. One can even find traces of this point of view in John Baptist de La Salle himself: “And since the majority are born poor, we should teach them to despise riches and love poverty, because Our Lord was born poor, and loved the poor and liked to be with them and He himself said ‘*blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*’” (MTR 202.2).
- The status of the Community in a clerical Church, where money counted a lot. Who is the leader of this community of lay persons who aspire to working in the parishes and dioceses... with what control of the hierarchy and with what resources? The young Community, composed of lay persons, had no recognised status in the ecclesiastical world of its time: they were neither clerics nor “religious”. They innovated by their life-style and their manner of carrying out their ministry. For a period of about ten years (since the arrival in Paris), it is the parish structures of Saint-Sulpice which have served as the framework of life of this group and this work and now they are detaching themselves from it.

6. The new community in conflicts.

In Paris, conflict with ecclesial organisation.

The crisis of 1702⁷⁰ had its origins in the excessive behaviour of two

⁷⁰ Blain. *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 413 - 441. (CL 7, p. 398 - 417).

Brothers, the Director of Novices and the Director of the Community of the Rue Princesse, who both punished too severely the novices under their care. The latter complained to a priest they knew, who was, it seems, close to Monsieur de La Chétardie.

The result was that the behaviour of the two Brothers was judged as having its origins in the excessively harsh choices of John Baptist de La Salle himself. The Archdiocese was requested to make an ecclesiastical investigation. The Grand-Vicaire, Monsieur Pirot, came to make this investigation among the Brothers of the Grand'Maison, in October-November 1702. At the end of the interviews with the Brothers, held in the greatest secrecy, Monsieur de La Salle went to the Archbishop's House to thank the Cardinal for his solicitude for the community and heard the famous sentence from the mouth of Mons. de Noailles: "Monsieur, you are no longer the Superior. I am appointing another for your Community"⁷¹.

A stormy expression of association.

Monsieur Pirot arrived at the Grand'Maison accompanied by a young priest, Monsieur Bricot, the new Superior. John Baptist de La Salle, on the instructions of the Grand-Vicaire had assembled all the members of the community, including the novices, but without revealing the true motive for this visit. The unvarnished announcement of the removal of Monsieur de La Salle and his replacement by Monsieur Bricot brought about a tumult on the part of the Brothers present and diverse reactions.

One of the principal Brothers respectfully approached Monsieur Pirot and said with modesty that the Brothers had a Superior and they would ask him not to speak of giving them another.⁷²

⁷¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 430. (CL 7, p. 410).

⁷² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 435. (CL 7, p. 413).

Monsieur Bricot tried to move him aside, but “the Brother who was spokesman for all, remained calm for his part and stayed where he was”. Passive and respectful resistance! “The Community’s spokesman repeated in a louder voice what he had just said more softly raising the tone, repeated in a louder voice what he had said more softly”.⁷³ The other Brothers, when the Grand-Vicaire finished speaking and ordered them to receive their new Superior; the Brothers “their patience exhausted and unable to hold back their emotions patience and giving in to the strength of their affliction... They all lifted up their voices to protest the orders given them. They all cried out that they had no Superior than De La Salle and his Eminence (!)”⁷⁴ The novices joined their voices to those of the Brothers and added to the tumult... John Baptist de La Salle tried to convince the Brothers that they had to accept, but they replied that it was precisely because of their vow of obedience that they could not obey him on this point.

A personalised understanding of the vow.

Even if we must take into account the pompous style of Canon Blain’s discourse, what he reports is very revealing regarding the interpretation which the Brothers made of their vow of obedience and of the link it established with John Baptist de La Salle.

Those who had made a vow of obedience to De La Salle, considered this vow as a personal one binding them to him; They did not think they were under any obligation to pay the same submission to a chief who was not a member of their organization, whom they had neither selected nor asked for, who did not possess their unique spirit or ways, who was ignorant of their customs and procedures, who was not fit to

⁷³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two. p. 435. (CL 7, p. 413).

⁷⁴ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two. p. 436. (CL 7, p. 414).

maintain discipline and the Rule, who could not sustain the austerity required of them or give an example of it.⁷⁵

There is here an echo of the Record of Election of 1694 and the reasons for refusing, as Superior, someone who did not belong to the Society. Their reasoning is further developed at the end of Blain's account:

We made a vow to obey you, not someone else. The very authority which wishes to impose a stranger on us to govern us in your place does away with our vow, leaves us free, and opens for us the door of a house where we remained because of our vow. If a vow is a free act and a deliberate choice, we have a right to refuse to obey anyone else as soon as anyone tries to tell us we must no longer obey him whom we promised to obey. And so, we recover our rights and our former liberty and declare that we wish to make use of it by refusing a Superior who is being imposed on us in spite of ourselves and in whose regard our vow no longer obliges us.⁷⁶

In expressing themselves in this way, the Brothers clearly show that their vow of obedience is not that of the classic religious life, aimed at the sanctification of the subject, but that it is prescribed for the ends of Association and those involved in this same association, as it happens John Baptist de La Salle, with whom they are associated to accomplish their mission. For them, it is the Church authority which has come to break the vow of obedience which binds them to John Baptist de La Salle, since it is imposing a person other than the one to which they agreed. They have promised obedience to the Superior they have chosen, to the body of the Society, and not to a Superior who is being imposed on them. For them, the bonds of association have been broken and they have regained their liberty, not by themselves, but through the behaviour of the authority which has undone what they have constructed.

⁷⁵ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 434. (CL 7, p. 412-413).

⁷⁶ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 439-440. (CL 7, p. 416).

The consequence will be their leaving the house, since association has been broken: “our resolution is linked to our vow” the Brothers reply to Monsieur de la Salle, who while leading out the Grand-Vicaire, promises to make the Brothers obey. This departure envisaged through fidelity to the Vow of Association and to the one who makes it coherent, punctuates the entire account by Blain:

- .../... Those who were not bound by vows knew that the door of the house was open for them to leave, and by leaving, they were glad to leave the new Superior a chance to bring in new sheep to make a new flock which might consent to be ruled by his new laws.⁷⁷
- .../... All of them, without having agreed upon any one line of conduct, had resolved to withdraw and leave the new Superior alone in the house if the deposition of De La Salle was carried out.⁷⁸
- .../... Our decision hinges on our vow; the one depends on the other, and by the one and the other, the new Superior is excluded. If they force him unto the house in spite of our opposition, he had better bring with him his own subjects who will obey him; he will find the place empty. We will all leave with the one we promised to obey.⁷⁹

Throughout this account we can clearly see the strength of this Association and the vow which seals it. We can also see how great is the attachment of the Brothers to the person of John Baptist de La Salle, they are ready to call into question the life which they have chosen to live, for him, because **something essential, in their eyes, is in question: the association which they have promised to live in order to keep gratuitous schools, with the persons they have freely and by name indicated, with those with whom they recognise as sharing the same call and wishing to live the same responses freely.**

⁷⁷ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 434. (CL 7, p. 412).

⁷⁸ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 434-435. (CL 7, p. 413).

⁷⁹ Blain. *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 440. (CL 7, p. 417).

The destabilisation of the Paris works.

The crisis of 1702 was Parisian. It concerned the relations of this Community with the hierarchy and the ecclesiastical structures, but it also touched the heart of how the Society of the Brothers was run: who chooses the Superiors, who decides on orientations...?

With this lack of confidence from the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice, crises arose rapidly. Through lack of finance the Brothers had to move the Novitiate of the Grand'Maison, which was transferred, in a precarious manner, to another parish in Paris and later to Rouen (1705). The Writing-Masters and the Masters of the 'Petites écoles' (paying) became bolder and lawsuits began to multiply: with regard to the quality of the teachers (religious? lay? to whom were they answerable?), with regard to the matter being taught, about the social level of the families. On several occasions, John Baptist de La Salle, in solidarity with several Brothers, was condemned to pay fines. School furniture was confiscated, delegates from the Writing-Masters came to check on numbers and disturb the classes... Since the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice did nothing to defend the schools, the Brothers refused to start classes again in October 1706. The parish-priest tried to put up with this but faced with complaints from the parents, he was obliged to recall the Brothers and come to an agreement with them. At the time John Baptist de La Salle was in Rouen.

During this period Monsieur de La Salle tried out other kinds of relationships and ways of working within the Mission. The model of Saint-Sulpice was centred on the parish but in Chartres it was the bishop who asked for the Brothers and who founded the school; in Calais it was the maritime administration; in Troyes it was a charismatic educator-priest; in Rouen the local civil administration... In each case, the Community committed locally to the Mission had to define a new style of life.

John Baptist de La Salle discovered the riches and the limits of the structures which they had given themselves in 1691 and 1694. The model of Association which they were living was rich but the parish framework now limited their autonomy. They could no longer fully live their identity and their mission. Other formulae had to be found. This was the reason for the action of Monsieur de La Salle in Rouen, with the implantation in that city followed by the acquisition of Saint-Yon, where an organisation independent of the government could be developed, allowing this Community to be once again a full Community of Faith, a Missionary Community and an open Fraternal Community. Saint-Yon was also the start of a practical secondary education, without Latin, from which have come our “Modern” and Technical Lycées of today.

In Rouen, conflict with the municipal authorities.

To live according to the spirit of their Institute.

After the episode of 1702, the conflict with the ecclesial institutions of the capital, the Cardinal, the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice... found solutions which were somewhat uncertain... The Cardinal had not withdrawn his order, but John Baptist de La Salle remained effectively the Superior of the community. The ecclesiastical Superiors named had the good grace to not (or rarely) appear in the Brothers' communities except in Paris. Nevertheless the situation remained unstable because a more motivated ecclesiastical Superior could call into question this equilibrium.

John Baptist de La Salle wanted to get away from Paris. It seemed to him that his presence was a cause of difficulties for the Association because of the stir it caused and the susceptibilities which it awakened. In February 1705, he opened a school at Darnétal, an industrial suburb of Rouen. John Baptist de La Salle was attracted to this large city (the third in the Kingdom at the

time), and especially by the memory of Adrien Nyel, the man who had initiated him to the educational service to the poor and who had passed on to him his apostolic fervour. In Rouen, for more than twenty years, Adrien Nyel had run the network of schools belonging to the General Hospital. Monsieur de La Salle wanted to carry on the work. Blain reports that “he had a great attraction towards the schools of Monsieur Nyel, and believed that Heaven had destined them for him.”⁸⁰

Everything would be bound to suffer from this.

Four schools and the care of that of the General Hospital, were confided to the Brothers by the Administrators. To Blain, the conditions were outrageous. At the Hospital they had to supervise the rising and going to bed of the poor, lead the prayers, serve them at table on returning from school at midday and in the evening even before they had eaten themselves. One Brother remained in the Hospital to teach class, while the others went to their schools at Saint-Maclou, Saint-Godard, Saint-Vivien and Saint-Éloi. Each of their classes had about 100 children. The Brothers were lodged and fed in the Hospital, and they received a small sum for their maintenance. Blain thus describes the work imposed on the community of Rouen by the Bureau for the Poor of the city:

They limited the number of Brothers to four and would never agree to increase it. They made them undertake tasks foreign to their state and incompatible with their religious exercises, and they assigned to them an impossible work load. The Brothers were obliged to be present when the paupers got up and when they went to bed, in order to make them say their prayers; they had to instruct the children in the hospice as well as in the four main schools in the city proper. They were forced to come back from the most distant sections of the city in

⁸⁰ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 505. (CL 8, p. 21).

order to take their meals, and they had to serve the paupers at table when they got back from the school, even before they themselves had a chance to eat. The administrators could easily foresee that the Brothers could not endure such stringent and inconvenient conditions for very long and that De La Salle would not delay in withdrawing them from such intolerable slavery.⁸¹

Nevertheless, John Baptist de La Salle accepted these conditions: he wanted to be present in Rouen, partly out of loyalty to the memory of Monsieur Nyel but also because it was a new base for action, for a new departure.

The Brothers came to Rouen on 19 May 1705, and five of them were admitted to the Bureau a few days later. They were given food, lodging and a small salary for their expenses. The school of Saint-Maclou was opened in the same month of May, about three months after the one in Darnétal. Those of Saint-Godard and Saint-Éloi followed shortly thereafter, while that of Saint-Vivien was the last to open. The Brothers were assiduous in getting the paupers up and having them say their morning prayers. About eight o'clock, four of them went off to their classes. They came back at noon, served the paupers at table, and kept watch to make them observe order during the meal. Then they themselves ate, after which they went back to school. Returning to the hospice around six in the evening, they took the paupers to the refectory and ended the day with them, as they had begun it, by having them say their prayers. A fifth Brother stayed in the hospice and taught the poor children there. It would have been desirable that this sort of regulation would find as much strength as goodwill in those for whom it was prescribed, but since it was not tailored to accommodate human weakness, it could not go on for very long.⁸²

This work-rate exhausted the Brothers. Above all, they could not live their vocation of consecrated persons; all their time was taken up by educational and material tasks:

⁸¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 516. (CL 8, p. 23).

⁸² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 517. (CL 8, p. 23).

The Brothers were exhausted by their tasks, and their morale began to falter under the multiple burdens they had to face. Their health suffered, as did their virtue, and it was at the expense of both that they persevered for two years in this state of servitude. [...]. When one of them succumbed to illness or exhaustion, De La Salle sent a more vigorous Brother to replace him, but that could not go indefinitely.⁸³

This situation lasted from May 1705 to June 1707. Meanwhile, Monsieur de La Salle had transferred his Novitiate to Saint-Yon, in July/August 1705. It is obvious that the spiritual life and the apostolic dynamism suffered gravely: “the body and soul, the spiritual and the temporal, health and regularity, all must have suffered from this”⁸⁴ Blain tells us.

The Brothers speak out again.

To get out of this situation, it was the Brothers who spoke out and questioned John Baptist de La Salle. This time it was not in the heat of the moment as in 1702, nor even in reaction to a too unreal sermon on Providence as in 1682, but by means of a report in which they expressed their feelings, their aspirations and their solutions.

While he hesitated and remained undecided in the midst of such reflections, he received from his disciples a memorandum which helped him make up his mind. In their document the Brothers brought out clearly how necessary it was to get out of the hospice, where the spirit of their Institute ran as much risk as their health did. The advantage to the poor, as well as their own, required it. Nor was it difficult for them to prove their case. Since they were too few in proportion to the number of students, they could not do a good job.

The classes were too big; the teachers were overworked, and many of the children were neglected; overwork affected not only the health of

⁸³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 518. (CL 8, p. 23-24).

⁸⁴ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 518. (CL 8, 3, p. 23).

the teachers but discipline, order, silence, and instruction itself. In short, the purpose of the schools could not be attained; fatigue, the multiplicity of their tasks, and the long hours caused disorder in their interior life, so that they had no time for interior prayer and their other exercises of piety.

The conclusion was that they should leave the hospice, find a house in the city and live according to the spirit of their Institute.⁸⁵

The mind of Monsieur de La Salle was “irresolute and agitated by these different reflections...”⁸⁶ In other similar circumstances, he was plunged into great confusion or into perplexity. In their Memoir, the Brothers put forward the spirit of their Institute, the advantage for the poor and for themselves. In plain language, as they made clear later, they could no longer live the interior life, the life of relations with God and with others, which was required by their commitment to the service of the poor. For them, and indeed it is the spirit of their Institute, if their path to sanctity is educational service to the poor, if this path is mistreated, then their salvation and consequently that of their disciples, is in danger. In their memoir, the arguments which they advance (three out of four), deal with the field of the mission:

- Their small number in relation to the multitude of scholars prevents them teaching them well.
- The classes are overcrowded, the teachers exhausted, a number of children are neglected.
- The excessive work, by harming the general good running of the schools, prevents them from producing their fruits.

But this is the very ‘raison d’être’ of their association: to keep gratuitous schools so that children and the young will be able to reach

⁸⁵ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 518. (CL 8, p. 24-25).

⁸⁶ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 518. (CL 8, p. 24).

salvation. If that is impossible, if on the contrary their school obtains opposite objectives, there is no reason to wish to continue. Finally, and only in fourth position, this excessive work damages their interior life; in particular mental prayer and their spiritual exercises. This understanding of what their commitment implies for keeping gratuitous schools, allows them to propose solutions which respect their personal vocation and their mission, even at the cost of other sacrifices, material and financial this time.

They added that if the administrators were willing to give them the income of the capital destined to provide for the teachers in the city's Gratuitous Schools, they would be content with those modest appointments. It would then be possible to increase the number of Brothers in order to carry on the schools' work properly; they feared less to suffer from poverty than to be wanting in regularity⁸⁷.

A new contract was established with the Bureau of the Poor: the Brothers left the service of the poor in the General Hospital. They did not live there any more but they continued to run the schools of the city, including that of the General Hospital. The Bureau imposed on them an increase in the number of teachers (at least 10), something they had refused before, but without increasing the money they were given. The Brothers found lodging in the city and continued their mission to the poor children of Rouen. For them, regularity, which was one of the conditions of their spiritual life, allowed them to accomplish their educational mission: to make the children true Christians.

The intimate link established by the vow of association between community life, interior life and the mission to children and young people was highlighted, it seems to me, by this episode in Rouen. **The Brothers were no longer content just to ask questions of John Baptist de La Salle, as in 1682. Now they brought answers to him**

⁸⁷ Blain., *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 518-519. (CL 8, p. 25).

to help him when he was perplexed, and to help give life to the Mission. They too were personally involved in seeing that the school succeeded.

7. 1712 - 1714: the great crisis of the charism.

In the previous crises it was the manner of living the charism by the Community which came into conflict with the outside world: the ecclesiastical or civil powers. Now, the conflict was to become situated at the very heart of the relations between John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers, not in the field of the mission but in that of association and its significance.

The “Clément affair” and what followed.

Blain sets out this affair starting out, he says, from the memoir which De La Salle wrote to justify himself:

We have before us the memorandum of justification which, before he took to flight, De La Salle wrote about this entire episode in order to justify his conduct. We need only to summarize it; we cannot have a more faithful witness to the truth.⁸⁸

A young priest⁸⁹ of 22-23 years of age, wished to devote a part of his resources to educational good works. His concern and his serious nature seem to have touched John Baptist de La Salle who, after a year of meetings and conversations with him⁹⁰, took on to work on the setting up of a new Seminary for Rural Teachers in Saint-Denis, where there was already a community of two Brothers. Saint-Denis is near Paris but outside the city. Because the Institute did not legally exist, John Baptist de La Salle invested funds by

⁸⁸ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 588. (CL 8, p.72).

⁸⁹ The Abbé Clément was not a priest. He was a cleric who had received the tonsure in order to get the revenues of an ecclesiastical benefice, in this case that of an abbey or priory, Saint-Calais.

⁹⁰ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 587-594. (CL 8, p.72-76).

using the name of one of his friends, Monsieur Rogier. The Seminary started in 1709 with three Brothers working on the formation of teachers while Abbé Clément devoted himself to a boarding-school for boys which was part of his project; the Archbishop of Paris was aware of what was happening and even obtained from the Duke of Maine (legitimised illegitimate son of Louis XIV), an exemption for the house from having to lodge soldiers.

In February 1711, (remember this was in the middle of winter), Monsieur de la Salle left for the south of France to make his visits to the communities of Brothers in the south of the country. He confided the responsibility for the local communities to Brother Barthélémy, Director of the Novitiate, which had been brought back to Paris for economic reasons. But the Founder was recalled urgently to Paris because Abbé Clément's father, who had just been raised to the nobility, was starting a court-case against Monsieur de La Salle, accusing him of having suborned a minor in order to extort money. The accusation was extremely serious and whether Monsieur de La Salle would have difficulty defending himself or because the opposing party had received hidden support or even because the enemies of the work of the Christian Schools were mixed up in it, the signs of a probable condemnation could be seen:

Nevertheless, in order not to be open to the reproach of having abandoned God's cause and of allowing it to be shamefully betrayed by the one who was the real author of the whole undertaking or without opening his mouth to defend himself, De La Salle entrusted to several persons enjoying influence and authority, a number of documents, a memorandum and thirteen letters from the Abbé to justify his conduct. He asked them in their charity to see to it that justice was done him. What these persons did was to send these papers to be examined by some lawyers who were connected with the opponents of the servant of God. For in the report they drew up and forwarded to those who had consulted them, they gave their opinions, not like advocates but like declared enemies of De La Salle. The outcome of this consul-

tation was entirely in conformity with the petition presented to the civil lieutenant. When this report was sent to De la Salle, he was indeed amazed at finding adversaries where he had hoped to find friends and defenders... They thought him guilty because they wanted him to be guilty.⁹¹

Later on in the same chapter, Blain tries to analyse the causes of the malfunctioning of the manner of conducting the court case:

The Servant of God, surprised at such a rapid judgment, was even more amazed that his case had been abandoned by persons whose protection he had implored. It is certain that if they had wished to appear and take in hand the cause of the saintly priest, they could have spare him this blow. the attack. Their influence would at least shielded him from disgrace, if it could not win for him a favourable judgment. Was it due to malice or to negligence that those whom he had chosen as his defenders abandoned him to such unjust treatment? It is not for us to judge, but it is a fact that they were in contact with the one who wished to get the servant of God away from Paris. Why then, we may ask, did De La Salle place in their hands the documents which would have established his innocence? It was because he lacked all other help and support; he had no one else who might be willing to speak for him. He hoped that prejudice might yield to charity on this occasion and that such worthy men - for the persons whose assistance he had requested were indeed worthy - would set aside all human views to uphold the cause of God.⁹²

He speaks also of “the ill will of his lawyers” and of “the inertia of his protectors”⁹³. Above all, he sees a manoeuvre of “his hidden enemy” who for a long time had wanted to oust him from the leadership, at least of the Paris community, so that the latter would depend entirely on the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice and be separated from the other communities in the provinces. John Baptist de

⁹¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 596. (CL 8, p. 77-78).

⁹² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 597. (CL 8, p. 78).

⁹³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 598. (CL 8, p. 79).

La Salle had, it would seem, enemies who wished to take over part of his work in order to have it serve their own projects.

One of the consequences of the condemnation in the “Clément” court case, was the precipitate departure of Monsieur de La Salle from Paris. He resumed the visits which he had been forced to interrupt and headed for the Midi in the first week of Lent 1712 (in February and therefore still in winter). This departure allowed him to escape the arrest which the condemnation included. But a serious faux pas by Brother Barthélémy when he sent him by post the text of the judgment of the tribunal of Le Châtelet which had condemned him, created a deep misunderstanding between Monsieur de La Salle and the Brothers.

After the departure of the holy man, the Brothers received two summonses one from Rogier, who had gone to the other side, although he had been his intimate friend, and the other from Monsieur Clément, the father. In both of these documents, De La Salle was treated with extreme discourtesy. In particular, they made it a point to call him *a Priest of the diocese of Reims and Superior of the Brothers of the said house*, not Superior of the Brothers of Paris and Saint-Denis: clear proof of the evident collusion between his legal adversaries and his great enemy.⁹⁴

Since apparently Brother Barthélémy did not correct this heading by means of an accompanying letter, John Baptist de La Salle thought that the former had taken sides with his ‘enemy’ and was rejecting him:

What affected the founder most keenly was that he imagined that all the Brothers in Paris were on his enemy’s side. It was a false impression, because during his absence, the Brothers in Paris remained in his regard what they had been when he was present among them: obedient and inviolably attached to his person. What gave him this impres-

⁹⁴ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 598. (CL 8, p. 79).

sion was the fact that Brother Barthélémy, thinking that it was the correct thing to do, forwarded to him the two summonses in which the holy Founder was addressed as Superior of the Brothers in Reims and not in Paris. Such terms which could have been dictated only by his rival, made him wonder about the fidelity of his disciples in Paris and fear that they might already have given in to the intrigues of his enemy. For he said to himself, why send me these documents couched in such terms, if not to hint that they no longer consider me as their Superior? His suspicion was ill founded. Brother Barthélémy had sent him the papers in all straightforwardness, thinking himself that he should let him know what was going on in his absence.⁹⁵

Something seemed to have been broken between Monsieur de La Salle and his Brothers. We are in the realm of the affective: ‘affliction’, ‘he imagined’, ‘this idea’, ‘the suspicion’. To describe him as the Superior of the Brothers of Reims and not of Paris, was to deny all that had happened since 1688 and coming to the Rue Princess; in 1694, with the vows and the election of the Superior by the twelve Brothers; the choices made in 1702 and then in 1706 to defend the autonomy of the Community with regard to the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice.

It was very much the “to live in society” of the formula of vows which was under attack. The mutual incomprehension was doubtless increased by the generation gap, and therefore differences of mentality, between John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 598. (CL 8, p. 79).

⁹⁶ John Baptist de La Salle was born in 1651. All his formation took place in the context of the Catholic Reform and in that of the affirmation of the (regarded as sacred) absolutism of Louis XIV. Religion and power were marked by notions of hierarchy and order coming down from on high: the Trinity, the Church, the State; and social organisations functioned on this principle.

Among the Brothers still active in the Institute around 1711, the oldest and the most senior was Bro. Gabriel Drolin, born in 1664, who was present from the beginnings in Reims and was a member of the community of Laon in 1684. He had been sent to Rome in 1702 and therefore was not directly involved in the events which concern us here. Bro. Jean Partois (Bro. Antoine) was born in 1666 and joined the Reims community around 1686. It is possible that he was Bro. Barthélémy's secretary, in Paris, between 1711/1712 and 1713/1714. Bro. Jean Jacquot (or Jacot), was born in 1672 and was

There was a whole area of “experience lived” of Monsieur de La Salle which was lost on Brother Barthélémy. The latter could not imagine the effect of this apparent wiping out of 25 years of the Founder’s life, when he let him be described, without protest, as Superior of the Brothers of Reims. John Baptist de La Salle “no longer wished to correspond with Brother Barthélémy, who, he thought had gone over to his adversary’s party and who wished to receive his letters only to betray him under this appearance of con-

at the Rue Neuve in Reims in 1686. Between 1713 and 1715 he figures on the lists of the Community of Grenoble as Director. These two Brothers were among the twelve who made perpetual vows with Monsieur de La Salle in 1694. Bro. Paul Narra, born in 1677, was in the community of the Rue Princesse from the age of 10/11 (according to the Catalogue). He made his Novitiate in 1695 and took perpetual vows in 1699. There is no document to show where he was between 1711-1713. All we know is that in 1717 he belonged to the community of Reims. He died in 1751. For the period 1711-1713, these four Brothers were the most senior in the Institute. Their dates of birth, especially for the last three, show that they had been formed in a completely different moral, spiritual, cultural and political context from Monsieur de La Salle. Three of them had been there almost from the start in Reims and the fourth had been closely associated with the beginnings in the Rue Princesse. They had also participated in the founding epic of the years 1691-1702, when the “to live in society to keep schools” took shape and showed its fruitfulness.

A whole series of other Brothers could be said to be of the “second generation”: Charles Frappet (Bro. Thomas), entered in 1690 and was doubtless the first of the Serving Brothers. Jean Boucqueton (Bro. Jean-François), entered in 1691 and made his perpetual vows in 1696. Between 1711-1713 he may have been Director of the house in Saint-Denis. Jean Police (Bro. Phillipe), entered in 1692 and made perpetual vows in 1699. We know that he was Director of the house in Moulins in 1716. Poncelet Thisieux (Bro. Ponce), made perpetual vows in 1696. After having been Director of Mende, he became Visitor of the Brothers in the Midi, while at the same time Director of the Community of Avignon. He appears to have left the Institute in 1713, taking some of the community cash with him! François Blin (Bro. Ambrose), entered in 1693 and made his perpetual profession in 1695. He was in Paris in 1704 and we find him in 1716 at Saint-Yon as Director of the Junior Boarders (free boarding). Jean Le Roux (Bro. Joseph) entered the Institute in 1697 and made his vows “for all my life” in 1700. From 1711-1713 he was in Troyes and then in Reims, as Visitor of the Brothers of the North of France (with the exception of Paris). All these Brothers were born after 1670 and were active between 1711-1713. About another 10 Brothers, born between 1672-1684, entered the Institute in 1700. The majority of them were active between 1711-1713. For 1701-1705, we find 25 Brothers and about 30 for the period 1706-1709. Joseph Truffet (Bro. Barthélémy) was born in 1678 and joined the Institute in 1703 after trying monastic life at La Trappe. He made perpetual vows in 1705 and became Director of the Novitiate at Saint-Yon, which he accompanied to Paris following the famine of 1709. Between 1711-1713, he was at the Rue Barouillère, in a certain degree of insecurity with regard to the other Brothers as well as John Baptist de La Salle and the role he had left him for the community when he left in February 1712. He was not responsible for the communities in the Midi, since Monsieur de La Salle was heading for that region himself, and in any case the region had a Visitor (Bro. Ponce). As for the North of France (apart from Paris), it was Bro. Joseph who was Visitor. He was therefore

fidence.”⁹⁷ In other words there is no further communication between the Founder and the “one in charge” (de facto) of the Paris communities. This was a very destabilising situation for Brother Barthélémy but it tells us a lot about the distress and confusion in the mind of John Baptist de La Salle in his relations with the Brothers.

Journey to the Midi region of France.

Having left Paris during the first week of Lent 1712, John Baptist de La Salle arrived in Avignon at the end of Lent. He continued by visiting the communities of Alès and Vans, in the heart of Camisard⁹⁸ country. He went to Mende and then returned to Vans before going on to Uzès - the community of Vans came under the bishop of that city. He went back to Alès and finally arrived in Marseille⁹⁹. Blain emphasises the dangerous nature of this trip, not only because of the Protestant rebellion, but also because of the mountainous character of the country and the harsh climate. Thus, in speaking of the route from Vans to Mende, (this would have been in the month of May or June 1712):

in charge of the Novitiate in Paris and the Brothers in the Rue Barouillère, in a difficult situation in regard to the parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice and the civil and ecclesiastical authorities following the condemnation of his Superior. Guillaume Samson (Bro. Timothée) was born in 1682, entered the Institute in 1700 and took perpetual vows in 1703. He was Director of Mende in 1711 and was called to Marseille by John Baptist de La Salle in December 1712 to become Director of the Novitiate which had just been opened in that city. When all the Novices had left there, he joined up again with Monsieur de La Salle in Mende. In 1714 he was in Avignon where he welcomed, on the part of the Founder, the former officer of the Royal-Champagne, Claude-François du Lac de Montisambert (Bro. Irenée). He was also Visitor for the Midi communities, replacing Brother Ponce, who had fled. (For all this information on the first Brothers see: Augustine Loes FSC. *The First De la Salle Brothers 1681-1719*. 1999. Christian Brothers Conference. Landover, MD. USA.

⁹⁷ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 599. (CL 8, p. 80).

⁹⁸ The Protestants of the Cévennes, in a mountainous region in the middle of France, refused to convert to Catholicism after the rescinding of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. They rose up in 1702 and carried on a guerrilla war which lasted until 1714, with the unrest continuing even beyond the death of Louis XIV in 1715. At the same time, from 1701-1713, France was at war with the rest of Europe, apart from Spain, over the succession to the throne of that country.

⁹⁹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 604-605. (CL 8, p. 83-84).

That part of the journey was dangerous and difficult for him: he risked his life more than once on the way through rugged mountains of the Gévaudan, with their treacherous precipices. He endured bitter and stinging cold and by the time he arrived in Mende his health has suffered.¹⁰⁰

John Baptist de La Salle discovered that it was a rather different country from that which he had known north of the Loire: landscape, climate, but also the way social relations operated, the different mentalities, the language. Is it Blain's feelings which are coming across? (at a distance therefore, in time and space), or is it de La Salle expressing himself some time afterwards about these events?

Thanks to the investments of a certain number of ecclesiastics and prominent people from Marseille, a Novitiate was opened in that city, while some impetus was given for the opening of several Christian schools.¹⁰¹ Up to this point, John Baptist de La Salle's journey had been rather fruitful. In his account of the journey of Monsieur de La Salle in the Midi and towards Marseille, Blain underlines the meetings with the Brothers, the Communities, the wish to come closer to their mission and to support them in this, especially when it is particularly difficult, as in the Cévennes with the young Protestants. He also meets those in charge of the local churches - bishops and parish - priests - and is happy to hear them speak in a very positive way about the Brothers' mission. The reception in Marseille, even if it appears to him too eulogistic, gives him the chance, nevertheless, to implant the Institute in another France that of the 'langue d'oc' (speaking the Midi dialect). According to Blain's account, there is, nevertheless, the feeling that he is being reserved about it: is this a cold cultural reaction of a man from the North, faced with the expansiveness of the Midi? Or more pro-

¹⁰⁰ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 603. (CL 8, p. 82).

¹⁰¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 605. (CL 8, p. 85).

foundly, the spiritual lucidity of someone who knows what it will cost to carry out the work of God and to build it in a way that will last?

De La Salle alone felt some reservations over such rapid success and feared to see everything buried underneath the ruins of such fine beginnings. The reason was that he did not see the work as founded on the rock of Calvary; hence, he wondered whether it would last. Enlightened as he was in the ways of God, the Founder had learned from his own experience and from that of the saints that undertakings which are not founded on the cross and which are launched without difficulties either do not disturb the devil very much or do not last very long. Therefore he did not venture to let joy fully occupy his heart, fearing that the present success would dissolve in the misfortunes that the near future might bring. He worried that some secret motive, hidden under a deceitful mask of apparent devotion, might have taken the place of genuine charity and inspired the notable zeal which seemed to animate some of his backers. As he saw it, that would have been enough to cause the project to fail. God does not bless what is not done for his sake.¹⁰²

Blain speaks of timidity, of fear (three times), ‘he did not dare’, of apprehension, of deceitful exteriors. Above all, his relations with the Brothers in Paris have not been reconciled. He corresponds with the Director of the Novitiate in Saint-Yon¹⁰³, but is silent towards the other Brothers:

... He revealed his presence as little as possible and left unanswered all the letters from the Brothers which reached him from all sides. He did so because he believed that the Institute’s best interests required that he give up all such contacts, so that his enemies might not turn against the Brothers the resentment that they could no longer vent on him personally. Moreover, under the mistaken impression that the Brothers in Paris had not been faithful to him, he did not know whom to trust.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 606. (CL 8, p. 84).

¹⁰³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 608. (CL 8, p. 85).

¹⁰⁴ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 607-608. (CL 8, p. 85).

To explain this attitude, Blain speaks of prudence, in order not to rouse his enemies against the Brothers, but also of prejudice against the Brothers in Paris who “had lacked fidelity to him”. There was therefore a personal bond between himself and certain Brothers (but Brothers who counted in his eyes), which remained broken. “He no longer knew whom he could trust” was the conclusion of his biographer.

In the end, therefore, even if the journey has apparently been a brilliant success, we are in the same situation as when he left Paris, at the end of the first week in Lent 1712: the rift between him and the Brothers remains. John Baptist de La Salle has not recovered his confidence in his “associates”. Better still (or worse), he does not want to get it back. This is what his silence indicates and his refusal to correspond with the Brothers in the North.

The Crisis in Marseille and its results.¹⁰⁵

Without being able to really establish the sequence of events or the length of the developments, a primary difficulty takes place in the relations between the two Brothers who run the school in Marseille and the Novitiate. In fact, once the Novitiate started, John Baptist de La Salle asked the two Brothers to go “every day to the exercises of the Novitiate”¹⁰⁶. Perhaps this “every day” was an amplification on the part of these two teachers to get the founders of the school on their side, because formerly, as Blain writes: “they returned to the Novitiate on the days prescribed”¹⁰⁷. Whatever the case may be,

¹⁰⁵ It is to be noted that Blain never mentions the name “Marseille” in his account. He says “the City”. This does not help the clarity of his account! Neither does he name any of the ecclesiastical or civil personalities of the “City”. One may conclude that this Chapter 10, Book 3 of his Biography is to a large extent, an intellectual and “literary” reconstruction by the author 20 years after the events and without knowing directly the places, persons or facts.

¹⁰⁶ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 608-609 (CL 8, p. 86).

¹⁰⁷ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 609 (CL 8, p. 86).

the two Brothers were not happy with this restraint. However this is the way things were done at Vaugirard and at the Grand'Maison, for the Paris Brothers, and at Saint-Yon, for the Brothers of Rouen.

Blain may very well pour forth about the malice, lukewarmness, cowardliness, etc., of these Brothers (described by him as “two children of Belial”¹⁰⁸) but it seems to me we are looking here at a generation gap: John Baptist de La Salle has doubtless not noticed that the mentalities of his Brothers have changed, and that what was acceptable to men of his generation and to the Brothers of the beginnings in Reims or in Paris, but is no longer so for those who belong to the new century. These Brothers can no longer see themselves in what was practised formerly.

Something even more surprising for someone used to exercising strong authority was the fact that the two Brothers got what they wanted, thanks to the support of the founders of their school: they remained living there, in contradiction to the wish of their Superior, who had to give in. A certain conception of obedience and authority had been called into question. It was also the first clear signal of the gap which existed between the practice of the Rule in the Novitiate and that which was lived in the school communities, showing a kind of schizophrenia between life in the Houses of Formation and the real life of the Brothers... a constant phenomenon in the entire history of the Institute.

John Baptist de la Salle was accused of being too severe for the Novices. There was disapproval of his pious practices and the penances he imposed. Little by little the donors closed their purses. Certain Novices were encouraged to leave by those around them and complained about the austerity of the Superior, which they found excessive. A lampoon about him was circulated. The

¹⁰⁸ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 610. (CL 8, p. 87).

Founder tried to respond but in vain. The Brothers in the Midi region of France were destabilised by these attacks. The Novitiate ended through lack of subjects; Brother Ponce, Visitor of the communities in the Midi, left the Institute taking with him a tidy sum of money. The two Brothers in Marseille told De La Salle “that he had come to Provence to destroy instead of building up”¹⁰⁹.

It was in this context that his attempt to depart for Rome¹¹⁰ was situated, as well as his well-known response to the Brothers who saw him back in the house when they believed him to be on the high seas: “God be blessed: here I am back from Rome. It was not His wish that I should go there. He wishes me to do something else”. Beyond his religious and spiritual motives: a visit to the centre of Christianity, the expression of his fidelity to the Pope, one can detect also in this trip a desire to flee from the Marseille reality which was escaping him.

The accumulation of rebuffs, the difficult relations with some Brothers, the projects which were failing, caused him “He began to ask himself whether his mission really was from God and whether a work that everybody opposed was not, in fact, the creation of his own spirit”¹¹¹. Here therefore was a man who had reached the twilight of his life (he was 62, which at the time was old age), who had embarked on great enterprises, had caused dozens of young men to follow him, had seen several of them die at the work, had struggled against ecclesiastical, civil and corporation powers, to advance what he believed to be the work of God for the salvation of the children of artisans and the poor, and who was now asking himself if he had missed out on life! These reflections were painful and destabilising. They arose after nearly two years of difficulties which had ended in

¹⁰⁹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 619. (CL 8, p. 93).

¹¹⁰ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 620. (CL 8, p. 93-94).

¹¹¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 624. (CL 8, p. 96).

failures. Above all, the communion with many Brothers who were important to John Baptist de La Salle, appeared broken. With whom was he living in Society now? What was the significance of the Vow of 1691? Of that of 1694?

He also fully realised that making a new beginning, “restarting his life” would not make sense. Faith in himself, faith in others, in his Brothers, faith in the Other, had been badly affected. In other words, spirituality, which gives meaning and coherence to life, was seriously affected.

God was no longer speaking to him.

In this existential distress, “God was no longer speaking to him”¹¹². This expression may be understood in two ways: God no longer speaks to him and he no longer has any taste for being with God. John Baptist de la Salle was driven back to pure faith, to absolute confidence. But was it possible to hold on in this way when God remained silent? He chooses to distance himself, thinking that his physical presence was basically the cause of the difficulties encountered in Marseille. He went to the convent of Saint-Maximin (a Dominican convent), near Sainte-Baume, a hermitage and famous place of pilgrimage which may have served as a refuge for Mary Magdalen.

De La Salle withdrew to a hermitage some ten or twelve leagues from the city. There, elevated above himself and all the world, he found himself like a traveler on some lofty peak where winds and storms no longer swirl. There, he discovered a deep repose and sweet tranquillity. Occupied with God alone, he forgot everything else. If his thoughts some times turned to his Brothers or his persecutors, it was to pray God for them and to implore the Divine Majesty to uphold the former and to convert the latter. The injuries and outrages offered him had left in his soul no other traces but those that perfect charity

¹¹² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 624. (CL 8, p. 96).

inspires for enemies whom he loved in God and for God's sake. The saintly Founder had already begun to find his Mount Tabor in this desert, and like Peter, he exclaimed, Lord, it is good to be here! He enjoyed such a peace and calm that he would have wished to end his days in that spot, unknown to men, but he had not yet reached the end of his labors. God had others in store for him which would last until the end of his life.¹¹³

On three or four other occasions, he would experience this temptation to retire, far from the world, far from the problems of life, far from the worries of leading an Institute, Brothers, far from confronting opponents, as in Mende - after this episode at Sainte-Baume - where pious ladies ran an institution for the daughters of Protestants and invited him to stay with them as their chaplain. Blain says that Brother Timothy "found the Holy Founder in a lodging prepared for him by Mademoiselle de Saint-Denis, where he lived as if in a real desert".¹¹⁴ When he was in Grenoble, he paid a three-day visit to the Grande Chartreuse¹¹⁵:

Edified by the silence and the recollection which reigned among these solitaries, he felt his attraction for a retired life grow stronger than ever, and he would have wished to end his days among them.

Among all the devotional places in the holy monastery which M. de La Salle visited, his heart was most charmed by the hermitage of Saint Bruno. His own associations with that saint moved him, and if he had followed his inclination, he would have been the second canon of Reims who hid in the cleft of those rocks. He had to do violence to his piety in order to leave the place, but if he went away in body, his spirit remained behind.

Finally, after having undergone radical and violent treatment for the rheumatism which had been afflicting him, he went for a rest

¹¹³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 625-626. (CL 8, p. 97).

¹¹⁴ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 628. (CL 8, p. 99).

¹¹⁵ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 630. (CL 8, p.100).

and stayed with his friend, Yse de Saléon, at Tullins, a small village to one side of which, on the hill of Parménie (Permeigne), was the hermitage of Sister Louise.¹¹⁶ The latter was to be the means of diverting him from the temptation of adopting the life of a hermit to end his existence:

The holy priest admitted to her that he ardently longed to spend the rest of his days in solitude, which attracted him strongly, in order not to have to think of anything except God and himself. Such is not God's will, replied Louise. You must not abandon the family that God has made you the Father of Labor is your lot; you must persevere in it to the end of your days, combining as you have done heretofore the life of Magdalen with that of Martha.

John Baptist de La Salle seemed to be looking for his vocation far from the Brothers, in solitude, or even in devoting himself "to the conversion of sinners"¹¹⁷. Sister Louise revealed to him that he had already found it: his place was in the midst of his Brothers.

Community and Mission, or God found again.

It was in the community of Grenoble that John Baptist de La Salle found again the meaning of life. It was a community where, it seems, it was good to live:

From Mende De La Salle went to Grenoble, where he thought he had discovered a new heaven and a new earth in the oasis of profound peace he found there. The Brothers in Grenoble realized what a treasure they possessed and took advantage of his presence. Delighted at having with them the father who had suffered so much persecution in Provence on account of more than one of his sons, not to mention outsiders, they tried by their kindness and attention, to make him forget the sorrows he had suffered on account of the ingrates. To show his

¹¹⁶ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 635-638. (CL 8, p.103-105).

¹¹⁷ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 626. (CL 8, p. 97).

appreciation, the Founder resolved to remain with the Brothers of Grenoble as long as he could. Everything concurred in making him decide thus: the good disposition of the Brothers, the peace which reigned among them, the solitude that envelopped their residence, and the hidden, retired life he led there.¹¹⁸

The Director of this community was perhaps Brother Jean Jacquot, one of the twelve signatories of the vows of 1694 and of the record of the election of January 7th 1694, one of the faithful ones from the beginnings in Reims and in Paris. This would explain the above. He (the Founder) replaced in class a Brother who had been sent on a mission to the communities of the North of France. It was an opportunity for direct contact with the children of artisans and the poor and the specific mission of the Institute.¹¹⁹

The continual prayer and meditation of the Founder led to a work for the benefit of the Brothers and the schools, by the composition or revision of written works:

The only distraction the Founder allowed himself was the composition of several works of piety, for the instruction of youth and for the use of his disciples. He also revised his book '*The Duties of a Christian*' thus providing a third and more accurate edition.¹²⁰

Blain concluded this passage by mentioning that calm had returned to the communities in Provence and that Monsieur de La Salle accompanied the Brothers by writing to them and by having the Visitors go around among them.

A stable community, which was living in the proper way its mission to the children of Grenoble, a Director who had shared for a long time the steps taken by John Baptist de La Salle, a very specific (and one-off) mission to the children of the Saint-Laurent parish school,

¹¹⁸ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 629. (CL 8, p. 99).

¹¹⁹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 631-633. (CL 8, p. 101-102).

¹²⁰ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 633. (CL 8, p. 102).

which allowed him to have direct contact with the reality of the work of the Brothers, a service to the Institute at large and its mission by editing books of a spiritual and practical nature; these were some of the ways in which Monsieur de La Salle could again converse with this God who, a short while earlier, was no longer saying anything to him.

To unite myself and live in Society with... for ...

John Baptist de La Salle had been questioning himself about his role and his place in what had become the Institute of the Brothers. But another crisis was superimposing itself on his personal approach to life: that which the communities of Paris and its region were living, with the new way of “uniting oneself and living in Society” which they were trying to put in place.

“I promise and vow to unite myself and live in Society with... for...”: we still pronounce this phrase from the 1694 formula of vows. I would like to underline five aspects: it is an “I” who speaks, an individual person who commits himself; he wishes “to unite himself and live”... these are verbs, actions, not a statute which one ratifies after having participated in a constitutive general assembly; it is a question of “living in Society”, which indicates at the same time both permanence and a kind of common or shared life, in this Society, which again, is not defined by statutes but by persons: with and by means of a project: “for”.

It is on this basis established in 1694, that the Institute, John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers, are going to build the future of those “associated to keep gratuitous schools”. “Association” is an abstract word, full of juridical connotations, “associated” points us towards persons, living beings.

The origin of the crisis lived by John Baptist de La Salle and the Institute from 1712, was to be found in Paris. Blain devotes a whole

chapter to “What happened in France during the absence of M. de La Salle”¹²¹ In fact, he underlines, beyond the Clément affair, what was at stake during this period of the history of the Institute, and he shows how the latter emerged from it with its definitive face. The circumstances of the precipitous departure of John Baptist de La Salle for the Midi regions of France during the first week of Lent 1712, left the Brothers in Paris without a leader and without a sense of direction. Blain picks up on this, while showing his perplexity before such an attitude, at the beginning of Chapter 12 of Book 3 of his biography:

If we were permitted to judge of the actions of saints, who conform to principles so markedly different from those of other people and who, often enough, act outside the ordinary rules of human prudence because they are following the motions of the Holy Spirit, we might be tempted to condemn the precipitate and secret flight of De La Salle to Provence. It occasioned great turmoil in his Institute and came near bringing about its ruin. It would seem, in fact, that before taking this resolution or before leaving Paris - or at least after his arrival in Provence - the holy Founder should have informed the Brothers, let them know where they could write to him, answered them, directed them their letters from his place of retirement, and, in short, appointed the Brother whom he felt best qualified to take his place in Paris, one whom the others would then have honored as their Superior in his absence. The servant of God did none of these things. He went into hiding in the most distant provinces and did not want to let anyone know where he was going. He remained there unknown and did not reply to the letters he received from the Brothers. He did not even designate anyone to replace him during his absence. Finally, as far as the Brothers in France were concerned, he showed no sign of life or movement as though he were actually dead.¹²²

¹²¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 641-659. (CL 8, p. 107-120).

¹²² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 641. (CL 8, p. 107-108).

We also know that the misunderstandings between himself and Brother Barthélémy led to a loss of confidence on his part (temporary) towards this Brother. Blain picks out four bad consequences resulting from Monsieur de la Salle's behaviour:

The first of these was that even though there did not arise among the Brothers any dispute such as had arisen among the Apostles as to which of them was the greatest, there was uncertainty as to whom the Brothers should obey. De La Salle, not having made this clear, there was no certain rule to follow on this point.

The second disorder which followed on the first, was that in the absence of any clearly recognized authority a good many faults remained uncorrected and thus the indocile remained unpunished.

The third difficulty was that some Brothers, weak in virtue and wavering in their vocation considered their state as uncertain and unstable and left it. Others suspecting that the holy Founder himself had abandoned the Institute felt that they had a right to imitate his example.

The fourth source of trouble was even more dangerous, for it gave rise to another form of government which De La Salle's rival, of whom we have so often spoken, finally managed to introduce into the Society. The Institute seemed stricken. Undermined to its foundations, it was threatened with collapse. Its ruin had indeed begun, and it is a sort of miracle that it eventually managed to rise against with brighter prospects and greater success than ever.¹²³

The first three bad consequences referred to the internal life of the community and the relations between its members. But the fourth concerned the core: this was a matter of a "new society" calling into question the choices of 1694 (vows and the election of the Superior). Later, Blain has "the rival" giving precise details of the outline of the organisation which he was proposing:

¹²³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 642. (CL 8, p. 108).

The main point of the proposed organization were these: 1. The Brothers should have Superiors from outside the Community, men capable of directing them something like the external superiors who direct nuns; 2. The house of Paris should form a separate entity and should depend entirely on the ecclesiastical superior; 3. The novitiate should be suppressed as a useless burden; it cost too much to educate and feed all the novices; moreover, there was no need for so many in Paris, since the Brothers should remain fixed in the schools, where they taught, as will be explained below; 4. The Brothers should stay in one place and not to be changed from house to house; 5. To fill the gaps made by those who died or left or who had to be dismissed for misconduct, it was proposed to have one, two, or three novices, more or less, in each house, according to its revenues, and its personal needs.¹²⁴

This system led to the withdrawal of each community into the work to which it was linked and made it an agent in the exclusive service of the parish (or city) which employed it. This was leading to the break-up of the Society of the Christian Schools into as many small entities as there were communities. The Institute, as a social body, was no longer in the service of “the Church”, but in the service of the “local Churches” or parishes. Blain’s analysis makes this very clear:

In short, the scheme tended to make the Brothers’ Society a series of little splinter groups, lacking subjection to a common chief and depending only on the local superiors, something like many communities of schoolmistresses which are being multiplied in France today and which each bishop establishes or allows to be established for his particular diocese.¹²⁵

It is true that the method of working proposed was indeed one of those possible in the ecclesial and social system of the period. But

¹²⁴ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 647. (CL 8, p. 111).

¹²⁵ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 647. (CL 8, p. 112).

the choice of an ecclesiastical Superior, multiplied for each separate house, went against the decision of the twelve on June 7th 1694:

We declare that it is our understanding that the present election will not have the force of a precedent for the future. Our intention is that after the said Monsieur de La Salle, no one shall be received among us or chosen as Superior, who is a priest or who has received Holy Orders; and we will not have or accept any Superior who has not associated himself with us and has not made vows like us and like all those who will be associated with us in the future. (Blain, Book Two, p. 339 - CL 7, p. 348).

Blain comments quite rightly, with regard to the changes imposed by the “rival of M. de La Salle”:

Foreseeing that some such circumstance might arise, De La Salle had bound the Brothers, as we related above, to decide that they would elect as Superior no one but one of themselves after his death. In doing so, what he had in mind, when he wished to give up his position as Superior, was to oblige the Brothers to choose someone from their ranks to succeed him. The point seemed so essential to De La Salle that he wished to see it put into effect while he still lived, so that once he was dead, there might not be any difficulty about it.¹²⁶

The more senior Brothers tried to parry the successive advances of “the rival”. At first they were happy with the status quo, as long as he who claimed to be their “Superior” took no step exercising his authority. But the latter, thanks to the weakness of Brother Barthélémy or his lack of clarity, or because he could not do otherwise, managed to have written into the community register the reality of the power of the new Superior:

You call me your Superior, he told them one day, but you should show concretely that I am really such. And for fear that the Brothers might seem to misunderstand his words, he added *that he wanted a formal*

¹²⁶ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 650. (CL 8, p. 113).

statement drawn up which, after being signed by the Brothers, would be included in the house register. This was an important point which would affect the very essence of the Institute... It was, therefore, very important that the Brothers not yield to the proposal. We must blame the lack of firmness displayed by Brother Barthélémy in agreeing to it.¹²⁷

Since the “Superior” was claiming to be able to make important changes in the organisation of the Institute (so as to preserve his Parisian space, since the other Houses, in other dioceses were out of his reach), the senior Brothers reacted by demanding a consultation of all the Brothers.¹²⁸ They protested also against the very basis of these new orientations, remarking that this was contrary to what they had chosen to live:

A number of the principal Brothers more enlightened than the others and more familiar with the nature of their Institute and with the right way of governing it, complained aloud about the new system, asserting that the service some people claimed to be doing the Society was really a mortal blow to it. What, they asked, is the purpose of this new type of arrangement that is being introduced? Do they want to deprive the Founder of the right to govern the Institute, so that when he returns, he will find the doors of all the houses closed to him, houses that he himself has founded? Is the idea merely to sustain the Brothers during his absence and keep them true to his spirit, to keep watch over the Institute, as it were, so that in his return, he may find it just as he left it? Do they want to give this creation a more appropriate form, correct its defects and consolidate its foundations, or do they want to create a new Institute on the ruins of the old? No matter how these changes are presented, they still amount to pernicious novelties, born of malice or at least dreamed up by mistaken zeal.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 650. (CL 8, p. 113).

¹²⁸ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 652. (CL 8, p. 114).

¹²⁹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 653. (CL 8, p.115-116).

The majority of the local “Superiors” named following the circular letter of Brother to various Houses (Blain was chosen for Rouen), worked to leave things as they were and contributed to avoiding the fragmentation of the Institute. Nevertheless the risk remained, since persons can be changed, death can intervene and this could modify the fragile equilibrium. Certain Brothers also no longer knew who they were and got beyond themselves. Some of them had to be expelled from the Society by an assembly of “principle Brothers”:

The principal Brothers resolved to make an example of them, so that the scandal might go no any further. They had a meeting, therefore, and dismissed those proud religious, who later on might have spread to others the mortal poison of their independent spirit and thus occasioned even greater disorders.¹³⁰

But things had gone much farther than this account in Chapter 12 allows us to see. An assembly of Brothers had started a revision of the Rule which took into account the changes mentioned above. The Grand-Vicaire of Paris was asked to study the dossier and after studying it for seven or eight months, he sent the text back on April 4th 1714, asking the Brothers (and the ecclesiastic Superior) to change nothing:

He kept the documents for seven or eight months, it was during this time that the troubles arose in Paris over the constitution *Unigenitus* and the refusal of Cardinal de Noailles to agree to it. As time went on, Vivant sent the documents to Abbé de Brou with a letter dated 4 April 1714, in which he stated “His Eminence does not think that anything should be decided about the matter or signed in his name with regard to the regulations themselves or to the changes which it has been proposed to make in them. He has full confidence in your wisdom for the good government of the schools which you have charge of, and he

¹³⁰ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 646. (CL 8, p.111).

feels sure that under such wise directions, piety and peace will flourish in them.”¹³¹

The appearance which the Institute would take on with the return of Monsieur de La Salle and the election of Brother Barthélémy as First Superior General of the Society, was therefore not all that obvious for many of the Brothers. The hesitations about the manner in which the Institute should or could place itself in the Church of this period, were permanent. In the end, “the principal Brothers” of Paris, Versailles and Saint-Denis - the same no doubt who had participated in the assembly where the changes in the Rules and the government of the Institute had been proposed - spoke up and decided to address a collective letter to Monsieur de La Salle. It was dated April 1st 1714.

Thirty years after: the words of a community of consecrated persons.

Monsieur, our very dear Father,

We, the principal Brothers of the Christian Schools, having in view the greater glory of God, the greatest good of the Church and of our Society, recognize that it is of the utmost importance that you should again take up the care and general government of the holy work of God, which is also yours, since it has pleased to the Lord to make use of you to establish it and to direct it for such a long time. Everyone is convinced that God gave you and still gives you the graces and talents needed to govern properly this new Company which is so useful to the Church, and it is only just for us to acknowledge that you have always governed it with much success and edification. This is why, Monsieur, we very humbly beseech you and command you in the name and on behalf of the body of this Society to which you have promised obedience to take up immediately the government of our Society. In testimony of which we have signed. Done in Paris at the first day of April

¹³¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 702. (CL 8, p.149).

1714. We are, with most profound respect, Monsieur, our dear Father, your humble and obedient inferiors...¹³²

At the beginning and at the end of the history of the foundation of the Brothers, we find some words of Teachers calling Monsieur de La Salle into question. In 1683 or 1684, it was the Teachers who were calling into question the young canon: it is easy to speak of abandonment to Providence when you are well provided for... and John Baptist de La Salle answered them by having himself share their poverty in a definitive manner. Thirty years after this the Brothers again challenge the Founder to be in solidarity with them, up to the end, in the name of the entire journey they have made together.

Our very dear Father, we the principle Brothers of the Christian Schools.../... In witness whereof we have signed. Done at Paris, on this first day of April 1714, and we are, with a very profound respect, our most dear Father, your very humble and very obedient subjects.

At the beginning and the end of the letter we find: “Our very dear Father”. We are in a context of human relations, in the interior of

¹³² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three p. 657. (CL 8, p.118). According to Blain, the text we are reading is the second version of the letter from the Brothers. He explains thus in *A short life of Bro. Barthélémy, First Superior General of the Society of Brothers*: Monsieur de La Salle, who had been recalled to Paris by the letter from the Brothers of Paris, Saint-Denis and Versailles was still refusing to take up again the government of the Society saying that to oblige him to do this they would need to get the Brothers of Provence to agree to it in writing. Bro. Barthélémy wrote to these Brothers to inform them of the matter and enclosed in his letter a copy of the letter from the Brothers in Paris in which they called M. de La Salle back, so that all the Brothers from Provence could sign it. Only a few words had been changed. Instead of *we beg you to come back*, there was *we beg you to take up again the leadership of the Society*. Having received this letter, the Brothers of Provence immediately sent it back signed to Paris. (See Blain: *A short life of Brother Barthélémy* in CL 8 (as supplement after Book Four, p. 19). Thus the original letter contained simply “we beg you to come back”, instead of “we beg you to take up again the leadership of the Society”. This phrasing helps us to understand the reaction, reported by Blain, of John Baptist de La Salle, when he arrived on August 10th 1714 at the Community of the rue Barouillère: “Here I am, what do you want from me?” (See Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 660. (CL 8, p.120).

these. Those who are addressing John Baptist de La Salle are “the principal Brothers”... a category which does not officially exist, but which, nonetheless all the Brothers are capable of identifying. They are also the “obedient subjects”, in virtue of the vow of 1694. “We” recalls the vow of 1691, which used “we” in addressing God; however, none of these “principle Brothers” had made that vow. All through their letter, the community aspect is recalled by the systematic use of the first person plural: nine times we find “we” or “our”. It is also recalled by Society: twice we find “company”, “body of the Society”. The word community is not used.

We have here a summary of the relations between the Brothers and John Baptist de la Salle: an affectionate relationship, consciousness of being a body, of being committed, responsible for the future of this community; a hierarchical relationship, founded on faith and confidence in he who is the Father. All this because they are associated for the Mission. It is worth remembering that the formulae of vows of 1694 listed the names of each of the *associates*.

Having in view the greater glory of God, .../... This is why, Monsieur, we beg you very humbly and we order you in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society to which you have promised obedience, to immediately take care of the general government of our Society.

The reference to the greater glory of God brings us back to the Mission: the glory of God is not our glory nor our educational achievements nor our success but the victories of God in the lives of the young people who are confided to us. The glory of God is ahead of us and causes us to look towards the future. Expressions like: “the greater glory of God, in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society to which you have promised obedience”, constitute an internalised reading of the formula of vows, pronounced together in 1694. They were bringing Monsieur de La Salle back to

this. This vow constitutes the Community, the “associates”, as a social body of consecrated people. Behind all this, there is the whole history lived together, what they have discerned and shared down through the years, first at Reims and above all in Paris and Rouen. Their words spring from the history of their community consecration and the shared experience of the ministry of salvation lived by the Society. They lived in this way, they were consecrated in this way, to keep schools, to do the work of God, to fit in with His plan of salvation for the young and consequently for themselves. We also know how much the glory of God had many overtones in the spirituality and the expression of the Lasallian project. The glory of God is that all men should be saved, that they should be holy, that they should belong totally to God, that they should reach the knowledge of the truth about God, the knowledge of His mysteries and especially of the gift which God has given us in Jesus Christ.

- You must have the love and the glory of God as your single aim in the instruction of these children God. (MTR 201.2)
- Act in such a way through your zeal that you give tangible proof that you love those whom God has entrusted to you, just as Jesus Christ has loved his Church. Help them enter truly into the structure of this building, and be in condition to appear one day before Jesus Christ full of glory, without stain, without wrinkle, without blemish. This will make known to future ages the abundant riches of the grace that God has given them by procuring for them the help of instruction, and the grace he has given you to instruct them and educate them, so that they may one day become heirs of the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ our Lord. (MTR 201. 2).
- To procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next. (Id. 201. 3).

The glory of God devotes itself to seeing and doing (the “to procure”), in the course of human existences which are the places of the History of Salvation to day. It devotes itself particularly to seeing

and doing in the Christian Schools, through the ministry of those God has chosen to do his work:

God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools, where the teaching is offered free of charge and for the glory of God. (MTR 194.1).

The glory of God is linked up with gratuity, since the gift of the faith (where one teaches gratuitously) is gratuitous. The Brothers have integrated into their vision of their vocation, the terms and the spirit of the formulae of the vows: it is these words which come to their minds when they wish to express their connection with John Baptist de La Salle and set down their relationship with him.

This is why there is always reference to the formulae of the vows. The glory of God leads to a concrete and practical commitment. They take as their own this profoundly Lasallian perspective: the link between the momentum towards God and coming from God, with its accomplishment in the tissue of daily life, in the history of the Christian Schools, in their community experience.

The greater good of the Church and of our Society... we recognise that it is of extreme importance that you take over again the general leadership of the holy work of God which is also your work.../...

Which is of such great usefulness to the Church, and it is with justice that we bear witness that you have always led it with great success and edification.

The Brothers emphasised the place of their Community in the ministry of the Church: “the greater good of the Church and of our Society”. The Community of the Brothers is not isolated from the Church: it has its place in the common work of salvation. The Church is the place and the manner by which God wished to remain present to men. The Church - another essential Lasallian theme:

That the care of instructing youth is one of the most necessary works in the Church. (MTR 199. Title). On what must be done to make your ministry useful to the Church. (MTR 200. Title).

The work, a ministry useful to the Church, the greater good, is the care of instructing youth, such as this Society, this new company has put into practice, under the leadership of John Baptist de La Salle. Because the holy work of God, beyond the leadership of the company, is to instruct youth. It should be noted that ‘take care of’, ‘have care of’, ‘have the leadership’, ‘lead’, ‘the work of God’, ‘his work’, are all characteristic expressions of Lasallian vocabulary. The great usefulness for the Church, the greater good of the Church, are described throughout Meditations 199 and 200:

- To lay the foundation for the building of the Church, when you instruct children in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity and the mysteries accomplished by Jesus Christ when he was on earth... to have been assigned by her to such a holy and exalted work, to be chosen by her to procure for children the knowledge of our religion and the Christian spirit. (MTR 199.1).
- This is why Jesus Christ has sent you and why the Church, whose ministers you are, employs you (to announce the Gospel of the Kingdom of God). (MTR 199. 2).
- This is also what ought to engage you to have an altogether special esteem for the Christian instruction and education of children, since it is a means of helping them become true children of God and citizens of heaven. This is the very foundation of their piety and of all the other good that takes place in the Church. (MTR 199. 3).
- *You should be working in your ministry for the building of the Church on the foundation which has been laid by the holy apostles by the instruction you are giving to the children whom God has entrusted to your care and who are entering into the construction of this building...* You, then, who have succeeded the Apostles in their work of catechizing and instructing the poor, if you want to make your ministry as useful to

the Church as it can be, you must every day, teach them catechism, helping them to learn the basic truths of our religion. (MTR 200. 1).

The specific ministry of John Baptist de La Salle is not identical to that of the Brothers: his ministry involves the animation and the life of the Community or of the Society; for them it is the Christian school, the ministry of salvation integrated with that of the Church.

In defining the work of God, the ministry of John Baptist de La Salle, in the Church, the Brothers are also making an interpretation of the place of their ministry and of their existence as a Society. They are saying to Monsieur de La Salle that for him as well as for them, the existence of their Community cannot be dissociated from the ecclesial mission. They see themselves as a part of the Church, as a place where, in the faith, God speaks, acts, embraces the cause of His people, constitutes a redeemed People.

It is this work which is “the holy work of God”. It is both the charism and ministry of John Baptist de La Salle for the Community and the charisms and ministries that the Brothers exercise in meeting the needs of the young, and of the Church and their Community. The Brothers, looking at their advance together, see and speak of, the place as well as the determining role of John Baptist de La Salle, as the director of God’s plan: this holy work of God which is also yours, you have always directed it with great success and edification. They fully recognise his vocation as Founder and Institutor of the Brothers and the way in which he has lived it with them and for them.

Since it has pleased the Lord to make use of you in order to establish it and lead it for so long.../... that God has given you and gives you the graces and the talents necessary to govern this new company well.

What was lived by John Baptist de la Salle is seen as the holy work of God. God is involved in it, He is its origin and its end: “the

greater glory of God, the holy work of God, it has pleased the Lord to make use of you, God gives you and has always given you..." God is present in this work, in this History, in this company.

"To establish it, to govern it for so long, the talents necessary to govern it well": these are the gifts which God has given to John Baptist de la Salle so that he may accomplish his work in the Church, for this new company for the use and the good of His Church. The Brothers underline the length and the permanence of this gift of God: "for so long, God has given you and gives you the graces". We need to turn again to the Meditations for the Time of Retreat in order to see how and why God acts:

- God wills all people to be instructed, so that their minds may be enlightened by the light of faith. (MTR 193.1).
- It is characteristic of the providence of God... You, then, whom God has called to this ministry. (MTR 193.2).
- Has made you His ministers...(MTR 193.3).
- He has had the goodness to employ you to procure such an important advantage for children. (MTR 194.1).
- Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. (MTR 195.2).
- Since Jesus Christ has chosen you among so many others to be his cooperators in the salvation of souls. (MTR 196.2).
- It is a great gift of God, this grace he has given you to be entrusted with the instruction of children, to announce the Gospel to them and to bring them up in the spirit of religion. (MTR 201.1).

The link established by John Baptist de La Salle, in his meditations, between the ministry of the Brother and the active presence of God in his work, is recognised by the Brothers in the life of their Founder. The foundation of the Society of the Brothers is understood as a salvific act in which God speaks and lets himself be seen.

“Everybody is convinced”.

At the heart of this letter: the Community (“everybody”), restates its confidence in the presence of God in the work accomplished by Monsieur de La Salle over such a long period of time. Because of what has been lived together, for what is yet to be lived, in the view that the community is part of the Church and that it serves in the building of the Kingdom. The Brothers recognise that God has been present and is still present in this work and that John Baptist de La Salle has responded faithfully to what God has asked of him. He has known how to listen to Him, how to recognise His call in the situation of the poor, how to hear His voice in that of the children of artisans and the poor and how to find adapted and coherent answers for this plan. He has answered in faith, discerning the hand of God in this community history of the Christian schools, with the men who have become attached and linked to him.

Throughout their letter, the Brothers show that they have interiorised the spiritual teaching and the vision of their Father, as well as the initiatives lived with him for more than thirty years. Frequently, the expressions they use are very close to the Meditations for the Time of Retreat and the various formulae of vows. If the Brothers are using this kind of language, it is because they are in intimate communion of mind and heart with John Baptist de la Salle, because it is this same language that they have used throughout their itinerary and their community sharing. Thus Monsieur de la Salle can still find himself at home in their manner of living, speaking, praying, thinking, understanding and re-interpretation of the action of God in the Christian schools and in their Society.

God had led John Baptist de La Salle into the Desert, and Monsieur de La Salle found him again in the Promised Land of the Community: Grenoble, the letter from the Brothers in Paris. The

words of the community shed light on the truth in his life. In this the roles were somewhat reversed: those who received light from him in their existence, were now pouring light into the life of the Founder. They had so well assimilated the plan of salvation lived with him that their word could become a sign.

John Baptist de La Salle had begun to have doubts about himself on seeing that the efforts of his entire life to found the Institute appeared to be coming to nothing. He had tried to bring this Body into existence but it seemed to be falling apart. They had vowed association but it was breaking up into isolated communities. More profoundly still, something appeared to have been broken in the relations between John Baptist de La Salle and several Brothers as well as in the work accomplished together up to then. He had tried to be a good Father, and he had been led to believe himself incapable of governing, rejected by his children. But now he could see that the Institute existed in itself: its members were coming together on their own initiative; the Body was alive, it wished to face up to the problems which were confronting it. It showed itself in speaking out. Association had held up: it was in its name that the Brothers were meeting and it was on it that they were relying in calling their Founder back. The Community was capable of reinterpreting and understanding its History, with him, and of telling him this. It was able to understand its commitment and that of the Founder, as a ministry given by God. He was not alone. He was still one of them.

The Brothers, following John Baptist de la Salle, make a mystical interpretation of their History: God, His plan, His action, His will. They recognise how the Founder has corresponded to this: his plan, his action, his manner of recognising the will of God and of putting himself at its disposal. They say, that in a concrete manner, the work of God in being carried out in this Society, by John Baptist de La Salle, because they have lived with him and wish to continue living with him. God is in their personal history as well as in the his-

tory of their Society. This history is also the History of Salvation, in the Church.

To carry out successfully the holy work of God with which I have been entrusted.

The crisis which the Institute was going through during this period affected the person of Monsieur de La Salle in his relations with himself, with the Brothers and with God. It also affected the relations of the Brothers among themselves. It also called into question the place of this new community in the pastoral landscape of the time as well as in the society of the time.

In the course of these three years, John Baptist de La Salle had learned “to let go”: he had become aware of the hiatus that existed in mentality, between himself and several of his Brothers; he had to accept that the Institute was not “his thing”, he had to learn to live without it, without feeling bitterness or rancour as a result. He came out of this trial having found the place and the style of relations with himself, with others and with the Other, which would allow him to bring to a successful conclusion the work of God with which he had been entrusted.

It is certain that the internal wounds which he felt and which showed themselves in his silence towards several Brothers, had not been healed. When Blain wrote his biography, twenty years after the events, and when he questioned the Brothers, he found an echo of what the latter had felt during this period. And it was noticed that their questions remained.

No doubt, a man as wise and enlightened as he must have had serious reasons for acting this way, but it is impossible for us to guess what these reasons were. Did he want to accustom the Brothers to get along without him and thus oblige them finally to choose one of their number for their Superior, a thing they had never wanted to do while he was among them? Perhaps he carried humility and the low sentiments

he entertained of himself to the point of considering himself as a source of malediction and the cause of the troubles which constantly beset the Congregation. Perhaps the thought that some of his own disciples had gone over to his enemies and that he could no longer trust anyone. Perhaps, finally, he wished to persuade his adversaries that he no longer intervened in the government of his Institute, hoping thereby to disarm their ill will. Whatever may be the truth about the matter, we are reduced to mere conjecture, since De La Salle never wished to give any explanations on this score, although he was frequently asked to do so. Yet, his precipitate and hidden flight gave rise to several difficulties which followed.¹³³

He “never wished to explain himself on this subject”: he thus died with his wound and his mystery.

With his Brothers, including those he suspected of being in league with “his enemy”, relations became confident again. We have seen how much the letter of April 1st 1714 was a real mirror of his experience of God. He knew that this had now passed to his Brothers. We must emphasise the role of the Community (that of Grenoble, but also that of Paris, as well as this letter from “the principal Brothers”) in the recovery of equilibrium lived by John Baptist de La Salle. The ministerial dimension of his commitments to the young people of Grenoble, for the Brothers, by a whole program of writing aimed at them, was also essential.

With the events of 1711-1714, the Brothers, coming from different generations and from different experiences, to some extent through force of circumstance, had learned to work together, to imagine their future, while obviously making mistakes in their attempts. It is striking to pick out how often Blain, in his biography, tells us that the Brothers of Paris came together to decide, to evaluate, to speak to each other, to write... Furthermore, that would continue later in Saint-Yon. One must not imagine that the “Lasallian Project” was carried along by the Founder alone. From the beginnings in Reims, the teachers and then the Brothers were decisive actors in the history of Lasallian charism.

¹³³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 641-642. (CL 8, p. 108).

In 1714, the “body of the Society” understood that “to join together and live in Society” was the key to its future. It was in deepening and in living this dimension of its commitments that it had found salvation. The Institute was now ready to put into action the decision of June 7th 1694: to choose a Superior from among its members, someone who “was associated and had made vows like them”. It was also ready to take on all the unique spirituality which animated John Baptist de La Salle and which the latter had transmitted and continued to transmit to it.

Canon Blain devotes several chapters of his 3rd Book to this, in particular Chap. 14.¹³⁴ In 1715, John Baptist de la Salle, having returned from his long stay in the Midi, is still in Paris, but economic difficulties lead him to decide to return to the Novitiate at Saint-Yon, he himself foreseeing that he will join this group. Relations between the Founder and the parish of Saint-Sulpice remained complicated; the intervention of Monsieur de Brou, the priest appointed by M. de la Chétardie, parish-priest of Saint-Sulpice, to watch over the Brothers, delayed his departure.¹³⁵ It still needed the intervention of two Brothers to remove these obstacles.

At Saint-Yon, Monsieur de la Salle tries to get the Brothers to admit that it is time and that it is also necessary to replace him at the head of the Society, in conformity with what had been decided on June 7th 1694. As is often the case with Blain, it is difficult to distinguish, in the reflections and discourses which he attributes to John Baptist de la Salle, what comes from the latter and what comes from the biographer. We must also take account of the fact that during this period, John Baptist Blain was an eyewitness and perhaps even a participant in these events, since he was the “Ecclesiastical Superior” of the Brothers in Rouen.

In 1716, on his return from visiting the communities of Calais and Boulogne, John Baptist de la Salle did his first evaluation of the situation: “One thing worried him: he was afraid of dying while still Superior”¹³⁶.

¹³⁴ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 670-683. (CL 8, p. 127-136).

¹³⁵ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 671. (CL 8, p. 128).

¹³⁶ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 675. (CL 8, p. 130).

Of course, his humility pushed him towards relinquishing first place; but above all there was the whole history lived with the Brothers, a history whose latest developments showed him that he could step down¹³⁷.

- It was in the interests of the Institute.
- The Brothers were capable of leading themselves.
- Brother Barthélémy was prepared.

Furthermore, he was very conscious of how fragile the Society of the Christian Schools would be if he were to die while still at its head:

It was time for the Institute to assume the shape it would have to maintain, and it was important for this to take place while he lived. There were serious reasons for apprehending that after his death, the Brothers might run into serious difficulties in choosing a successor from among their ranks. It was even to be feared that the efforts might be made to deprive them of that right. He knew that measures had already been planned to put a secular priest at their head. Past experience taught him what to expect in the future... If in his return to the capital, he had found somebody occupying his place - acting as Superior, even pretending to give him orders and wanting the Founder to acknowledge him and his usurped authority by a written document - what might they not try to force his disciples to do after he was gone? What was more, all the ecclesiastical superiors appointed in the various provinces still kept the title as regards the Brothers, and it was to be feared that some of them, not content with the mere title, might want to act as such.¹³⁸

The remainder of the reflections attributed to Monsieur de La Salle take up again the line of reasoning of 1694:

A Brother chosen as Superior in due form by a legitimate assembly and by common consent, raise to this position under the eyes and at the behest of De La Salle himself, recognized and revered by the obedience

¹³⁷ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 677. (CL 8, p. 131).

¹³⁸ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 676. (CL 8, p. 131).

of the Founder, and confirmed in his jurisdiction by the submission of the Brothers in general, would inaugurate the type of government which had been envisioned ever since the start of the Institute, bringing and end to the system which had been abusively foisted on it to its detriment.

.../... A man who had not lived with the Brothers, who was unfamiliar to their Rule, who did not understand their customs and consequently did not share their same spirit, a man entirely different from them in everything, was hardly fit their Superior. Would such a person not be, with regard to them a new sort of commendatory abbot? What grave inconveniences would such a form of government not lead to? De La Salle could foresee them; he had every reason to fear that an institution, which he had so much trouble in defending against the intrigues of those who were only waiting for his death to usurp power over it, would quickly come to an end when they got hold of it.¹³⁹

The insistence of John Baptist de La Salle on the Brothers choosing a Superior from among themselves while he was still alive, was the implementation of the founding choices of 1694. It was also part of a history and experiences which showed the urgency and the necessity of this election, if the newly fledged Institute was to preserve the vigour which gave it its novelty and its originality in the Church. Behind this choice there still appeared the mission and the manner in which “association” wished to accomplish it; by a “universal” society and not by the fragmentation of communities enclosed within the horizon of a parish or a city. More clearly still, the biographer underlines this permanent lesson: **it is those who are closest to Lasallian life who ought to decide their future and choose who will be in charge of them...**

This point of view was presented to the Brothers of Rouen and of Saint-Yon meeting together in 1716, and they accepted it.¹⁴⁰ It was

¹³⁹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 676-677. (CL 8, p. 131-132).

¹⁴⁰ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 679. (CL 8, p. 132).

decided to inform all the Brothers and obtain their agreement for the results of the future “General Chapter”. Brother Barthélémy was sent on this mission which took up the end of the year 1716 and part of 1717 (before Pentecost). Obviously in this delicate period of transition involving the change of Superior, all necessary dispositions were taken so that all the Brothers could take as their own the choices which were being made and feel themselves directly involved in the life and the development of “association”. We can also see the importance of the personal relations between John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers and equally between Brother Barthélémy and the rest of the Institute.

With the assembly of 1717, the rituals are once again emphasised: from Pentecost to Trinity Sunday a retreat to prepare for the choice which is going to be made, the invocation of the Holy Spirit¹⁴¹. The discourse attributed to John Baptist de La Salle, on the qualities of his successor and the state of mind in which the capitulants ought to place themselves, does not seem to be textually that of the Founder, since Blain does not put these words in quotation marks and says at the end: “with these words and others of the same kind, the Servant of God led his disciples to the dispositions he desired to see in them”¹⁴². Monsieur de La Salle let the 16 Brothers organise their assembly and deliberate in his absence. After the election of Brother Barthélémy as Superior General, the Brothers also discussed their life and revised and amended their Rules. John Baptist de La Salle had announced that he would remain with them: “The Servant of God removed these difficulties by promising to remain entirely with them and to be towards them what he had always been up to then, to carry them in his heart, to listen to them, to continue being of service to them and to give them all the assistance which

¹⁴¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 680. (CL 8, p. 134).

¹⁴² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 682. (CL 8, p. 135).

a good father owes to his children”¹⁴³. He also had entrusted to him the remarks and observations made by the assembly on the Rules in order to edit the articles on modesty and good government.

Thus the Society of the Brothers, while the Founder was still alive, seemed to have found its definitive appearance, that which the decisions of 1694 intended: a Superior freely chosen from among the members of the association, mastery of its life-style and the participation of the greatest number possible in all decisive choices. To that must be added the quality of the relationship between those in charge and the rest of the Brothers. Thus, in facing up to the departure of its Founder, it would be able to keep its identity.

8. The charism and how the Brothers understood it.

Charism and association.

In the formula of vows of 1694, as in those which would follow, the Brothers said: “I promise and vow to unite myself and live in society with...” The expression “vow” disappeared in 1901 and was not taken up again in the formula of 1987. But, it is one thing to say explicitly in the formula of vows: “I vow to unite myself, etc.” and quite another the understanding which the Brothers had of it.

The formula of 1718 is found in the Rule in the form of a formula for renewal. In this edition of the Rule, the last one produced by John Baptist de La Salle, there is no chapter devoted to the vows made by the Brothers. There are, certainly, three chapters following that on Regularity (17, 19, 20... 18 is missing), which deal with poverty, chastity, obedience, (the latter continuing with the chapter on silence), but nothing on the vow of association nor on that of stability. Neither is there any mention of which vows the Brothers

¹⁴³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 678. (CL 8, p. 132).

make, except in the formula of renewal. It is, it seems to me, a first indication of the place of the vows in the conscience of the first Brothers. What is first with them: the end of their Institute, which is presented at the beginning of the Rule¹⁴⁴:

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a Society in which profession is made to conduct schools gratuitously.

The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children, and it is for this purpose the Brothers conduct schools... (RC 1.1& 3).

The theme of “Society” is noted in the 1st article of the Rule, and the formula of the vows sends us back to this when it envisages the means for procuring the glory of God: to unite myself and to live in Society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Obviously when we speak of “society”, we are in the semantic field of “association”.

It is worth noting, in the formula of 1718, the importance given to obedience, which is repeated twice, to “Society”, five times, to the notion of “body of the Society”, twice; and to “associated/association”, three times. Obviously, this formula served to make effective in the Church and contemporary society and give body to what is contained in Chapter 1 of the Rule: Of the end and necessity of this Institute. It is indeed this dimension which explains the formula, and in a wider sense, lets us see the meaning which the Brothers attach to their consecration to God.

Two texts make clear this understanding of the vows by the first Brothers: what is said in the Collection (of 1711)¹⁴⁵, right at the beginning: “What the vows oblige us to do”; and the text written

¹⁴⁴ The vows taken by the Brothers are also spoken about in the Daily Regulations, in regard to the prayers for dead Brothers. See Rule formula (1705 & 1718): *Rule and Foundational Documents*, Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, Landover, MD., 2002, p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ CL 2 *The vows of the Brothers of the Christian Schools before the Bull of Benedict XIII*. Bro. Maurice-Auguste (Alphonse Hermans FSC), p. 61-62.

by Brother Irénée on the back of his formula of perpetual vows¹⁴⁶, in 1717.

<p>THE COLLECTION: What the Brothers of the Christian Schools are obliged to by their vows.</p> <p>The vows oblige the Brothers to do four things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To keep schools by association, with those who are associated in the Society, and who will be associated in the future, wherever they may be sent; or to do any other thing at which they may be employed by their Superiors. R 2.1. 2. To remain stable in the said Society, for all the time during which they will be engaged, without being able to leave of their own accord, under any pretext whatsoever. R 2.2. 3. If it should happen that they lack everything in the Society, not to leave it for this reason, but to resolve to beg for alms and live on bread alone rather than abandon the said Society and the schools. R 2.3 4. To obey: First of all the Superior 	<p>BRO. IRÉNÉE: What we are obliged to by the vows of obedience and of stability and of keeping schools gratuitously and by association.</p> <p>By the vow of obedience we are obliged to obey:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Superior of the Society and those who will be Superiors in the future. 2. The individual Directors of the Society. 3. The Body of this Society, whether the Body be represented by several persons, whether Directors or others in its name. We are obliged to obey all the above under pain of mortal sin when they command in virtue of the vows. 4. To be very submissive to and united with the Brothers Inspectors or to the principal teachers in the schools according to what is indicated in a chapter of the Common Rule of the Institute which deals with the Inspector of Schools.
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¹⁴⁶ CL 2 *The vows of the Brothers of the Christian Schools before the Bull of Benedict XIII*. Bro. Maurice-August (Alphonse Hermans FSC), p. 63-65.

of the Society, who was chosen beforehand, and later those who will be chosen in the future. R 2.4

Secondly, the individual Directors who are, or will be appointed later, by the Superior of the Society. Thirdly, the body of this Society, whether the said body be represented by several people, whether Superiors or others, assembled in its name. They are obliged to obey all the above, under pain of mortal sin, every time they are commanded in virtue of the vows.

By the said vows they are committed to all the things above, under pain of mortal sin. From which it follows, that after having made these vows, they cannot, during the time for which they have made the vows, either leave or absolutely wish to leave the Society of their own accord, or wish to force their expulsion, under any pretext whatsoever, without violating their vow and committing mortal sin and a sacrilege. (R 2, 1 to 5).

By the vow of association with the Brothers who are associated to keep gratuitous schools we commit ourselves:

1. To keep schools by association with the Brothers who are assembled for this purpose wherever they may be sent.
2. To be employed by the Superiors in the service of the Brothers who will run the said gratuitous schools as it is expressed in the formula of vows.

By the vow of teaching children gratuitously we commit ourselves:

1. To employ all the care needed to instruct children well and bring them up as Christians and to employ well all the time intended for this purpose, whether in the house or in the school.
2. To demand nothing and to receive nothing whatsoever either from the pupils or their parents by way of remuneration either as a present or in any other way.
3. Not to employ the pupils or their parents in any work in the hope that they will not ask to be paid.
4. Not to buy goods from the parents of pupils in the hope that they will sell them more cheaply than to others.

	<p>By the vow of stability</p> <p>We commit ourselves to remaining in the said Society during all the time for which we have made the vow and we cannot during that time either leave or wish absolutely to leave of our own accord or wish to force our expulsion under any pretext whatsoever without violating our vow time for which we have made the vow and we cannot during that time either leave or wish absolutely to leave of our own accord or wish to force our expulsion under any pretext whatsoever without violating our vow.</p>
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The Collection begins with association, Brother Irénée begins with obedience. Times have changed, spiritual priorities are no longer the same, especially if we consider that the Collection, dating from 1711, reflects an earlier period, the end of the 17th Century, while Brother Irénée shows more the sensitivity of a Church rather on the defensive and which has to close ranks in order to face up to the religious, social, cultural and political changes which have come in since the beginning of the 18th Century.

Another difference, this time linked to the expression of the vows themselves: in the commentary of Brother Irénée there is no talk of “if we come to lack everything” and of “resolve rather to beg for alms and live on bread alone in order not to abandon the said Society and the schools”; the Collection links this extreme choice to

the putting into practice and the scope of the vow of stability, which is concerned at the same time with belonging to the Society, the survival of the latter and commitment to the schools. The Society of the Christian Schools and its end - to keep gratuitous schools - are constantly united in the view of the early Brothers. When they speak of “Society”, it seems to me that before thinking of association as a juridical or administrative structure, the Brothers are thinking of an association of concrete persons who have expressed a wish to be together in order to achieve a decisive “end” for their lives and for the meaning they intend to give to them. This was what was behind the listing of the names of those who were committing themselves by vows in 1694. The point of view of Brother Irénée on the vow of stability, is more juridical and is looking entirely at the potential question of leaving the Society, something also considered by the Collection, but for all the vows and not just for that of stability:

By the said vows they are committed to all the things above, under pain of mortal sin. From which it follows, that after having made these vows, they cannot, during the time for which they have made the vows, either leave or absolutely wish to leave the Society of their own accord, or wish to force their expulsion, under any pretext whatsoever, without violating their vow and committing mortal sin and a sacrilege.

A comparison of the Collection and the text of Brother Irénée on the “vow of association” allows us to better determine the understanding of the Brothers with regard to this vow, what they are sensitive to and what they wished to say for themselves; this helps us to better understand the evolutions which occurred later.

THE COLLECTION:

1. To keep schools by association, with those who are associated in the Society, and who will be associated in the future, wherever he may be sent; or to do any other thing at which he may be employed by his Superiors.

BRO. IRÉNÉE:

By the vow of association with the Brothers who are associated to keep gratuitous schools one engages oneself:

1. To keep schools by association with the Brothers who have gathered together for this purpose, wherever one may be sent.

2. To be employed by the Superiors in the service of the Brothers who will be running the said gratuitous schools, as it is expressed in the formula of vows.

By the vow of teaching children gratuitously one engages oneself:

1. To use all the care necessary to instruct the children well and bring them up as Christians and to employ well all the time intended for this purpose whether in the house or in the school.

2. Not to demand or receive anything whatsoever from the pupils or their parents by way of remuneration whether as a present or for any other reason.

3. Not to employ the pupils or their parents in any work in the hope that they will do it without asking to be paid.

4. Not to buy any goods from the parents of the pupils in the expectation that they will sell them more cheaply than to others.

The Collection comes close to the formula of vows, when it speaks of the “vow of association”: ...to unite myself and to live in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who are associated to keep, together and by association, gratuitous schools, wherever I may be sent or to work in the said Society at whatever I shall be employed whether by the body of this Society, or by the Superiors who have or those who shall have the government thereof.

Brother Irénée is explicit: “By the vow of association with the Brothers who are associated to keep gratuitous schools one engages oneself...” He is speaking of a vow of association but we notice that it is not a question of an abstract vow: it is “with the Brothers who are associated to keep gratuitous schools”.

The Collection too sees association as the decision to be associated with those who are associated to keep schools. One important element of the formula of vows is made clear: to “those who are associated in the, Society” are in fact added “those who will be associated in the future”.

In both cases, the vow of association is understood as “association” with named persons, or at least with persons who have received the same call, who wish to live the same response, who see themselves in the same project. At the moment when one becomes an associate, one enters into a process which is open-ended: towards those who already belong to the Society, who are associated, and towards those who will belong to it and will be associated later on.

One aspect, common to both texts, for the vow of obedience, is this wording which refers back to the formula of vows, with regard to associates making themselves available and the role of Superiors in achieving the end of the Society.

The Collection:	Brother Irénée:
Wherever he may be sent; or to do any other work at which he may be employed by his Superiors.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To keep schools by association with the Brothers who are assembled for this purpose, wherever he may be sent. 2. To be employed by the Superiors in the service of the Brothers who will run the said gratuitous schools as it is expressed in the formula of vows.

The formula of vows speaks of the “Superiors who have and those who shall have the government thereof”. As for the question of “the Body of the Society”, it appears in the reflection on the vow of obedience, in the Collection as well as in the text of Brother Irénée. Both texts make clear, with some differences, the eventual composition of what is represented by “the Body of the Society”.

The Collection:	Brother Irénée:
Thirdly, to the body of this Society, whether the said body be represented by several, either Superiors or others, assembled in the said name.	3. To the Body of this Society, whether the Body be represented by several, either Directors or others, in the said name...

Between the Collection and Brother Irénée, the “Superiors” have become “Directors”. But the “several”, common to the two texts is fairly vague. When the “body of the Society” wishes to show itself, it seems necessary that there be a voluntary, identifiable act; those who then assemble have to be “assembled in the said name”.

These quick reflections on the formulae of the vows and to what the vows commit us, show the close relation which existed, for the first Brothers, between their three vows. These vows are at the service of the end of the Society: to keep schools gratuitously, to give a Christian education to children, and for this reason to keep schools. The vows of our first Brothers are to be interpreted, first of all, in the perspective of the Mission. It is for this that they have become associated and are associated, it is for this that they obey, it is for this that they form a Body, it is for this that they express the conditions of stability, in the Society as in the Mission.

It is to be noted that Brother Irénée divides the vow of association. He begins thus: “by the vow of association...”, then, in a second passage distinct from the previous, he continues: “by the vow of teaching gratuitously...”. What he develops on this point will be found in the Rule of 1726, therefore after the Bull of Approbation, in Chapter 18: “What we are required to do by the vows”. With this interpretation of the vow, a separation is clearly brought about between the vow of association and the vow of teaching gratuitously. While it is difficult to pin down the matter of the vow of association, the detailed manner in which the vow of teaching gratuitously is examined shows that we are much more at ease in defining the content of the latter. Brother Irénée makes clear the shape of the vow of teaching gratuitously with regard to persons and with regard to school institutions, but not with regard to the Institute in general. We see practices emerging, to accept or refuse (more of the latter than of the former), but no reflection on the significance of this vow, (if I may take up again the redundant language of the formula of vows) for the Society of those who are associated to keep the schools, together and by association.

The force of the “vow to unite myself and live in Society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who are associated to keep, together and by association, gratuitous schools...” passes to the sec-

ond part of the proposition, on to the “to keep gratuitous schools” ...which even becomes under the pen of Brother Irénée and in the Rule of 1726: “the vow of teaching gratuitously”. Bluntly, the emphasis has passed from a Society which keeps gratuitous schools, to individuals who “teach gratuitously”. The ‘society’ dimension of the initial project has become blurred and faded away (and this is in 1717, two years before the death of the Founder), to be replaced by a more individual, but also more impersonal, perspective. For this is the “command structure” which will from now on regulate the practice of the vow, at the level of the Society, and no longer of the associates.

However, when they live fully, together and by association, the responsibility of the association for keeping schools gratuitously, at all the levels of their lives: personally as school-teachers, locally in a specific school, with a Community of associates, in the Institute considered as the “Society of the Christian Schools”, they have this power. Has this transformation been due to the numerical increase of the Brothers, to the distances between the Communities, or to a change in spirituality both among the Brothers and in the surroundings in which they live? More than thirty five years have passed since the beginnings in Reims and many personages from those beginnings have disappeared.

To sum up, one can say that during the first thirty years of the life of the Community, then of the Society and finally of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Brothers who made vows pronounced explicitly the vow of association “to keep, together and by association, gratuitous schools”. When they tried to make clear the obligations which flowed from the vows, they soon distinguished in the vow of association to keep gratuitous schools, a double commitment: that of association and that of teaching gratuitously. Progressively they came from that to speaking of a vow to teach gratuitously which became the subject of personal and com-

munity details. In a certain manner, **the vow of association, with all the themes associated with “building a Society”, “living in Society”, served more to state the identity of this Community and to assure its cohesion.**

The withdrawal of the vow of association: The charism of the Religious Life invades the Lasallian Charism.

The evolution of the ways of thinking among our first Brothers, led, at the beginning of the 18th Century, to a looseness in the understanding of the “vow of association”. This, together with the steps to obtain approbation of the Institute, the Bull, the Rule and the new formula of vows, was to lead to the removal of the expression “vow of association”, as such, from the formula of vows, while to teach gratuitously became a specific vow.

The Memoir of Rouen 1721.

In 1721, the Brothers of Rouen wrote to the municipal authorities of that city to introduce themselves. The interest of their Memoir is that it is addressed to outside persons rather than to ecclesiastics. One is able to discover under what image, these Brothers, two years after the death of the Founder, wished to be seen. With regard to their ecclesial situation, they thus describe themselves:

7. They cannot be priests nor aspire to the ecclesiastical state. They commit themselves by vow to obedience, stability in keeping schools by association and gratuitously, receiving neither money nor presents from the parents of the pupils.¹⁴⁷

Here the vow of association is founded on an expression which is rather new: “stability in keeping schools by association and gratuitously”.

¹⁴⁷ See CL 11. *The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in search of their canonical status: from the beginnings (1679) to the Bull of Benedict XIII (1725)*. Brother Maurice-Auguste (Alphonse Hermans, FSC), p. 128-130.

Without doubt, the Brothers, deliberately, do not want to alert the public authorities to the existence of an “association” which does not yet belong to any juridical framework.

The petition to Rome (1722).

While the Brothers were advancing in their steps to obtain recognition by the Holy See, they drew up a “petition”, which claimed to sum up the essentials of their Rules in 18 articles. Furthermore it was this text which would be the basis of the “Abridged Rule”, which would be approved by the Bull. With regard to the vows, the official request of the Brothers indicated:

The vows of the Brothers are of chastity, poverty, obedience and stability in the said Institute, and to teach the poor gratuitously...¹⁴⁸

The “vow of association” as such, had disappeared and one spoke of the “vow” of teaching gratuitously. The request introduced, as Brother Maurice-Auguste remarked in Cahier Lasallien 11, the three classical vows: poverty, chastity, obedience (which the Brothers did not take, since their vow of obedience was not the vow of ascetic religion that we know, but a vow linked to the accomplishment of the Mission to teach). The petition took up again the vow of stability, aimed towards the “Institute”, and transformed the vow of association to keep gratuitous schools, into a vow “to teach the poor gratuitously”. It certainly seems that the Brothers (or their councillors?) were polarised by the three vows known as ‘religious’, which would make them, they thought, “Religious”; and that they expressed clearly in the wording of their 5th vow the real understanding they had arrived at for their vow of association: to keep schools gratuitously. It is this latter aspect which carried the day, and it had in addition the advantage of being easy to characterise, in terms of permitted/forbidden.

¹⁴⁸ See CL 11, p. 219, 359; and CL 2, p. 110.

The Bull

Even if the discussions and the report on the petition by the Brothers eliminated at a certain moment any mention of the vow to teach gratuitously (the report of Cardinal Corsini), the vow reappears in the drafting of the Bull. Blain imagines a whole ‘production’ around these discussions in “the courts of Rome”, but the reality, as far as we know, was much more simple: the request of the Brothers was introduced to the Congregation of the Council and not to that in charge of Religious; among the Cardinals who ratified it, only two or three perhaps (the official recorder and the defender of the petition), knew exactly what it was all about. The rest were content to read over the summary and listen to the advice of their colleagues. Furthermore, the petition arrived at the session at the same time as many others.

The Brothers believed they had got the right to pronounce the “vows of religion”, thus becoming “Religious”. An illusion, Brother Maurice-Auguste tells us: the Brothers had the right to make “simple vows”, which did not have anything like the ecclesial or juridical scope of the “vows of religion”. And they did not become a “Religious Order”, but an “Institute” which had a much weaker canonical status. Neither should we imagine that the Cardinals had thought, in approving the abridged form of the Rules¹⁴⁹ of this “Institute”, that they had created a new form of religious life in the Church! For them it was a simple Institute of lay persons, of catechists, like lots of others which existed after the Council of Trent. Furthermore, what was approved was not a new “Religious Order”, nor even a Rule, but the eighteen articles. The Bull does, however, make reference to “association”:

Sixthly That they always be associated to keep schools, and that

¹⁴⁹ Which is the first meaning of the word “Institute”.

there should be always at least two together for the direction of each school.¹⁵⁰

Here it is rather a question of the community practice of the Brothers: never to send someone on his own, therefore at least two, if not three, “to keep schools”. The ninth article deals with the vows:

Ninthly. That the Brothers’ vows be of chastity, poverty, obedience, stability in the Institute and teaching the poor gratuitously.¹⁵¹

This is, literally, a repeat of the text of the Brothers’ petition. There is no longer talk of the “vow of association” in the Institute, but of the “vow to teach gratuitously”, or “to keep schools gratuitously”. The idea of “forming a Society” still exists, since it remains in the central part of the formula of vows, but it no longer gives rise to an explicit vow.

The vows from 1726 onwards.

In the rule of 1726, the formula of vows has become the following:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Most Holy Trinity, Father Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate in a most profound respect before your infinite and adorable Majesty; I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your Glory as far as I may be able and as you will require of me.

And for this reason, **I, N. promise and vow to unite myself and live in Society** with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are associated to keep, together and by association, gratuitous schools, wherever I may be sent, or to do anything in the said Society at which I shall be employed, whether by the Body of this Society, or by the Superiors who have and those who shall have the government thereof.

¹⁵⁰ See CL 11, p. 359.

¹⁵¹ See CL 11 (*op.cit.*), p. 359.

Wherefore, I promise and vow poverty, chastity, obedience, to teach the poor gratuitously and stability in the said Society, in conformity with the Bull of Approbation of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XIII.

Which vows of stability and obedience, as well to the Body of the Society as to the Superiors of the Institute, together with vows of Poverty, Chastity and teaching gratuitously, I promise to keep inviolably all my life.¹⁵²

It is this formula which all the Brothers making vows would pronounce up to 1967, except that in 1901, the possible reference to a vow of association, with the “vow” at the head of the central phrase of our formula of vows, also disappeared. In addition, the vow of stability moved from 5th to 4th position in the list, changing places with the vow of teaching gratuitously; the latter, in passing, saw added (in 1901) the expression “the poor” and became “teaching the poor gratuitously”.

The Rule of 1726 contained a Chapter 18 entitled: “What we are obliged to do by the vows”. There are, first of all, two articles on the vows of poverty and chastity and then the text continues with the vow of obedience:

[3] Firstly to the Superior of the Society and those who will later be Superiors.

[4] Secondly, to the individual Directors who are or who will be appointed by the Brother Superior.

[5] Thirdly, to the Body of the said Society, whether the said Body be represented by several persons, whether Directors or others assembled in the said Name; one is obliged to obey all the above, under pain of mortal sin, when they command in virtue of the vows.

¹⁵² CL 25. *Practice of the Daily Rule. Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Rule of a Brother Director of a house of the Institute, according to the manuscripts of 1705, 1713, 1718 and the 'princeps' edition of 1726*, p. 142 (French edition).

[6] Fourthly, to be fully submissive to and united with the Brothers Inspectors or to the principal teacher in the schools, as is indicated in Chapter 11.

[7] By the Vow of Stability, one commits oneself to remain stable in the said Society during all the time for which one has made the Vows, and one may not during the said time, either leave or absolutely wish to leave of one's own accord, or wish to cause oneself to be expelled, under any pretext whatsoever, without violating one's vow.

[8] **By the Vow of teaching children gratuitously and keeping schools by Association**, one commits oneself to taking all the care necessary to instruct the children well and to bring them up in a Christian manner; to use well all the time necessary for this; to neither demand nor receive any remuneration whatsoever from the pupils or their parents, either by means of a present or in any other way whatever; and not to employ the parents of the pupils in any work, in the hope that they will do it without asking for any payment.

[9] **By the same Vow, the Brother commits himself to keep schools by Association with the Brothers who have come together for this purpose**, wherever he may be sent; or to do anything else at which he might be employed by his Superiors, as is expressed in the Formula of Vows.¹⁵³

This wording of Articles 8 & 9 of Chapter 18 of the Rule, was kept without any change up to 1895: in the editions of the Rule of 1768, 1787, 1809, 1821, 1835, 1852, 1886, 1889, 1895. It should be noted that even though the Rule of 1726 contains a chapter on each of the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, it says nothing positive about the vows of stability and that of teaching gratuitously, or of their content or their spirituality. It simply gives instructions on what these vows oblige us to do.

It is the explanation of the vow of teaching children gratuitously which introduces, *in fine*, the vow of association: "By the same vow, he is committed to keeping schools by Association with the Brothers who have

¹⁵³ CL 25 *op.cit.* p. 69.

gathered for this purpose...” the vow of association to keep schools gratuitously, has now become an innuendo for keeping schools!

This indecisiveness around the expression of the vow of ‘teaching gratuitously’ would also lead to some surprising interpretations. The Bull says “to teach the poor gratuitously”; the Formula of 1725/26: “to teach gratuitously in conformity with the Bull”; we end up (Circular of Brother Agathon of January 1st 1784) explaining the vow of teaching gratuitously, by seeing it as two vows:

The vow of teaching, by which one is committed to taking all the care necessary to instruct the children well and bring them up as Christians and employing well all the time necessary\ for this...

The vow of gratuity: “that the Brothers teach all the children gratuitously... We cannot therefore receive, in return for teaching, any salary, from those who are in a position to pay the teachers”.

9. Charism is in association to keep gratuitous schools.

You must not doubt that it is a great gift of God, this grace he has given you to be entrusted with the instruction of children, to *announce the Gospel* to them and to bring them up in the spirit of religion. (MR 201.1).

The history of Lasallian charism is the history of our understanding of the gift which God has given us: to be associated “to instruct children, announce the Gospel to them and bring them up in the spirit of religion”.

The charism is not linked to the religious life, even if it presupposes a certain style of community life, in keeping with social realities, personal needs and the rhythms necessary to live “associated” in the context in which one finds oneself. The “community”, “association”, **carry the educational and missionary project, closest to its own human and spiritual possibilities, closest to its terrain, to the calls made upon it, to its circumstances.** This implies that when society evolves, whether ecclesial or civil, the practical details of association ought also to change, as well as the ways of living the project.

This charism is also profoundly linked to the person of John Baptist de La Salle. The history of our origins clearly shows this essential link between Monsieur de La Salle and the Brothers. We see clearly how the Brothers, by making their own the experience of God of the Founder, make the Society of the Christian Schools exist, resist those who threaten to cause the break-up of association: the ecclesiastical hierarchy, groups with their own interests, ambitions... The direct link with John Baptist de La Salle is very strong. The Brothers, the Lasallians, make his fundamental intuition their own: to keep schools is to bring the salvation of God, for the teachers, for the children and the young, for the families. One is beyond the simple “teaching a class” or teaching a subject. This relation with John Baptist de La Salle marks the battles of the early days and continues to mark association; from this arises the necessity nowadays to continue to appropriate the Founder for ourselves, not in order to bend him to our ways of thinking or our needs, even though one never really escapes from this, but in order to try and become aware of where his strength came from, and to place ourselves in its continuity.

What constitutes the radical novelty of the Lasallian Community in the Church and the Society of its time, was not the fact that it was a “religious community” made up entirely of lay people - this was the case with all the female communities - but that **this community of baptised persons had taken its destiny in hand, had taken its mission in hand, calling it a ministry, without making reference to an external power, religious or municipal, without making reference to the ‘elite’ of the period.** These Brothers, “simple lay persons without character” as used to be said, decided on their style of life, their organisation, their superiors, kept schools together, invented a way of being with the young (the *Conduct of Christian Schools*), chose to respond to one appeal rather than another and together carried forward their project. Beyond the juridical aspects, it is that which constitutes “association to keep gratuitous schools”, as well as its innovation: **having the education project live by means of these men who consecrated themselves to God while promising and making a vow to unite themselves and live in Society to keep gratuitous schools.** It is there also that one better understands the importance of the shared Education Project in giving consistency to the charism; this Education

Project being at the same time an expression of the charism and the source of a unique identity in the Church and in the world; a manner of being in the service of the People of God to direct them in the History of salvation.

Our history shows the danger of legalism in the life of the charism: to keep up momentum we must always take care that the structures be consistent with the project, refuse to approach the charism in terms of what is allowed or forbidden, know how to restate the basic essentials. **Meetings where there is a deep sharing of “the experience of God”, where it is spoken about and where it is shown, mark the history of the charism.** Right throughout the period of our beginnings, the Brothers, with or without Monsieur de La Salle, lived this way of acting: it suffices to look at the number of times that the biographers note that the Brothers assembled, made decisions together, in talking together and expressing their thoughts on events, on possible commitments, on the persons who ruled them, on their wishes, to question the Founder, to choose what they wished to live, to invent their education project... a course of action towards openness which, when we consider the reduction of these exchanges to a small group of superiors, after the death of the Founder, certainly owes much to his personality and his will.

As far as we can judge, our first Brothers were not clearly aware of the radical innovation of their course of action in the Church of their time: a community of persons consecrated for and by the mission, who refused the priesthood and who, in their existence gave priority to the gift of the Spirit. John Baptist de La Salle himself - when we see his desire and his will to put into practice the choices of 1694 on the Superior and the functioning of association - certainly saw the importance of what was at stake. Very logically also, the formula of vows of 1694 expresses the understanding which the Brothers had of their charism: associated to educate, from which arose stability and obedience, which are the means for acquiring and maintaining association for the mission. It is indeed a question of consecration but not of religious life. **It is a consecration for and by the Mission.** It is also to be noted that neither the Brothers nor John Baptist de La Salle appear to have studied the theology (or the theory) of their consecration. They were content (!) to live it.

We find here one of the characteristic Lasallian attitudes: pragmatism. The Lasallians generally wished to be men of practical experience, living very close to reality and needs, thinking up answers, rather allergic to “big theories”, on the religious and spiritual life, on pedagogy. What was essential for them was to see that “it worked”. The risk, of course, was that you attacked the consequences without calling into question the causes of the situations of injustice lived by the young or their families, or even worse, that you were comforting “the system”.

The charism is expressed in the education ministry, in the way of understanding the reality of the children and the young, of responding to their needs, the way of being “teacher” in relations with children. It is expressed also in and by the structures of association which want to be at its service: vows, elections, assemblies, texts, organisation... It is inscribed in the History of Salvation revealed by Jesus-Christ. It is for this reason that the dialogue with the Holy Trinity at the beginning of the formula of vows, is essential. The charism is to help the People of God to live.

Finally, the Lasallian charism is not one more ideology, spiritual or educational; the Lasallian charism is a story which is being told and which continues to be written. **The Lasallian charism is a response. The Lasallian charism is the way a certain number of the actors in the History of Salvation in the world of education, are writing this History, following John Baptist de La Salle and with him.**

Jean-Louis SCHNEIDER, fsc.

V. *Charism* in the recent Institute documents

1. The *Declaration* (1967) rarely uses the term *Charism*.

In a generic and Pauline sense, the Church “only achieves her full apostolate through the diversity of ministries and charisms which are complementary to one another” (10.1). “Sacrament of the presence of God among men”, the Church is missionary and invites its members to apostolic influence, while “respecting the diversity of charisms” because “she recognizes that the Spirit lives in each one” (10.2). In the same sense the Chapter affirms “the interior liberty of each Brother and the beneficial diversity of charisms” (14.4). It is therefore both a personal and community aim. The gifts, coming from the same Spirit and received by each one, are diverse and, “to each, the manifestation of the Spirit is given in view of the common good” (I Co 12, 4-7).

With the mention of the CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER, we are at the level of the very principle which is at the origin of the Institute and its renewal. The personal gifts received by St. John Baptist de La Salle led him to found “a community of Brothers with whom he shared his apostolic ideal and who in turn passed on this ideal to others”. We are in a process of tradition and it would be advisable then to use the expression CHARISM OF THE INSTITUTE which is not found in the Declaration, doubtless because its priority was to assure fidelity to the spirit of the Founder and to his specific intentions, as Vatican 2 required of the Institutes. (PC 2b).

“This charism of the Founder involves institutions only through the mediation of men... Fidelity to the specific intentions of the Founder and to the tradition of the Institute is therefore confided to us as living men... Although confided to men, it is not given to them

as individuals. Fidelity to the Founder is entrusted to the Institute, that is, to the community of men who constitute it” (7, 1-2).

2. The Rule, editions of 1967, 1976, 1987 and 2002 - and the RG of 1976.

Only the Prologue of the 1967 edition which was not retained by the Chapter, picked up the personal approach of the Declaration.

The Rule of 1967 made explicit one aspect of the CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER: he “knew how to recognize the educational needs of his period and how to respond to them by restoring the popular school and making it accessible to all” (1.b) In 1976, while adding the Constitutions of Chapter 1, we were asked to do research into the ministries, in fidelity to the CHARISM OF THE INSTITUTE (1.2). We will see that the Rule, in 1987, introduces a more pastoral tone: he “gave a new meaning to the school by making it accessible to the poor and offering it to all as a sign of the Kingdom and as a means of salvation” (3).

The Rule - between 1987 and 2002 there is no significant difference - speaks fairly frequently of the CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER (2), “given in (sometimes understood as ‘to’) the Church in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle” (20), “which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators” (20).

When it is a question of Brothers and of the government of the Institute, the phrase used is the CHARISM PROPER TO THE INSTITUTE (103; 18a) or the LIVING CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER (116).

Article 2 shows, in a historic summary, the structuring of the Institute. “The Brothers, in fidelity to the call of the Spirit and the charism of their Founder, consecrate themselves to God in order to exercise, by association, their apostolic ministry of education.” With the passing of time this took the form of “an Institute of pontifical right, composed exclusively of lay religious men.”

Article 20 of the Rule states the aspects of the life of the Brothers which the charism animates: “The Brothers live their faith as a gift to be used for their ministry of Christian education. In faith they contemplate God as the one who chooses them to be workers bringing His salvation to the least and the poorest.” “*Together and by association*’ they labour to accomplish God’s saving work in a profession where ‘the poor have the Gospel preached to them’ and where young people grow as human persons and as children of God. In faith, the Brothers praise God as they see His kingdom being extended.” (20) We may also note the verbs: live their faith - **contemplate** God - work together and by association - **praise** God - see. The spirit of faith and of zeal which he inspires towards the young and especially the poor, is related to this charism.

Article 146 recalls that “The spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St. John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded.” Far from seeing in this a dispersal or a loss, the Institute “sees the existence of the various Lasallian movements as a grace from God renewing its own vitality.” It has a role to play among these “Lasallians”: “It can associate with itself lay people who want to lead the life of perfection according to the spirit of the Institute and who participate in its mission”.

How then is the FIDELITY TO THE CHARISM developed and verified? Certainly not in the mechanical repetition of what the Founder did. Article 18a introduces a dialogue between embodiment of the charism and evangelization of the culture: “Every Lasallian foundation is embodied, together with the local Church, in the culture, the language and the life-style of the place where it is located. Such embodiment ought to be accomplished in keeping with the charism proper to the Institute” (see also 18 and 18c on ‘enculturation’). It should be remarked in passing that this text comes from the Chapter of 1976, whose proposition 20 added two aspects, underlined here, which were not retained: “Every Lasallian foundation

should be embodied, together with the local Church, in the culture, the language and the life-style, *the legitimate national aspirations and the needs of Pastoral care*. Such embodiment should be accomplished in keeping with the charism proper to the Institute.” (Circ. 403, p. 81 = RG art. 267, 1-2).

Article 103 of the Rule underlines the function of discernment and impetus which falls to the General Chapter, to perpetuate among the Brothers, “living fidelity to the special charism to the Institute” (= RG art. 1). For this purpose it proceeds to “a periodic evaluation of the life of the Institute to provide for its continuing adaptation and renewal” (*in responding to the most urgent needs of the young to be evangelized*, as art. 85 makes explicit) and “to set out the main guidelines for future action”: the election of the Brother Superior and of his Council is one of its prerogatives for this. In fact, “Constituted as a community at the Centre of the Institute, the Brother Superior and his Councillors symbolize its unity and work to ensure the fidelity of the entire body of the Institute to the faith of the Church, to the directives of the Holy See and to the living charism of the Founder” (116 = almost RG art. 27.1). “In their style of government”, they “have recourse to the prophetic dynamism which is still alive in the spiritual heritage which has come down to us from the Founder... guarantors of the charism of the Founder and of the mission of the Institute, they never hesitate to bring to the attention of the Brothers those things that they think ought to be changed” (117).

3. The latest General Chapters (1976, 1986, 1993 and 2000).

The Rule often uses expressions taken from recent General Chapters. It is worth while looking at the vocabulary relating to the 40th, 41st, 42nd and 43rd Chapters (Circ. 403, 422, 435 and 447).

3.1 Circular 403, dated October 1976, giving an account of the 40th General Chapter, speaks of the Missions from now on under

the title *“The Institute in the Young Churches”*. “It is no longer just a question of sending missionaries there but also of embodying there THE LASALLIAN CHARISM, with what that presupposes in confidence and fidelity” (p. 49). We have seen that Prop. 20 employs the same terms.

“In the steps of the Founder”, the Circular does not speak of his “charism”, but of the “very look of the Founder”, of his “evangelic intuitions” (p. 26), of “his spiritual teaching” which was rooted in “a lived experience” (p. 27). For *“community life”*, reference is made to “the inspiration coming from the Gospel through the Tradition of St. John Baptist de La Salle” (p. 62). Continuous *“formation”* requires us “to live an *exodus* which joins the experience and the spiritual teaching of the Founder: he abandoned himself to the *Conduct of God* which led him from one commitment to another in a totally unforeseen itinerary” (p. 63-64); the renewal of formation “cannot be carried out except by a return to the demands of the inspiration of St. John Baptist de La Salle, and in a renewed response to the needs of the world where God wishes us to live” (p. 66). The text on the *“government”* of the Institute invites us to develop communication in “the desire to live together our common search for the spirit and the LIVING CHARISM OF ST JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE” (p. 71).

The Propositions voted by the Chapter also use the term CHARISM, even if it is not always in the same context. “So that the Institute may continue to better fulfil the ministry proper to it in fidelity to the DYNAMIC CHARISM OF ITS FOUNDATION, the 40th Chapter asks the Brothers to engage in an active manner” in the perfecting of “forms of ministry in the Church” (Prop. 18, “The problem of secularism and the priesthood in the Institute”). We have seen above the embodiment “in keeping with the CHARISM PROPER TO THE INSTITUTE” (Prop. 20, *Young Churches*, “the local Institute”). For evaluating the Communities, “the criteria of fidelity to the

Founder” sends us back to his “itinerary” and not to his teachings (Prop. 52, “Community Life”). “The criteria of discernment and of decision concerning prayer life” put in the first place “the spirituality of the Founder” (Prop. 58, id.) “the Centre of the Institute has the duty... of coordinating research projects concerning the inspiration of the Founder” (Prop. 72, “Continuous formation”).

At the 41st Chapter (1986) the bulk of the work was concerned with the editing of the Rule. In the presentation drawn up by the new *General Council*, Circular 422 says of Brothers obliged by legislation to leave their direct apostolic commitment: “they must go ahead, delving deeper in the search for an appropriate ministry which is in keeping with the LASALLIAN CHARISM” (p. 11). While sharing our ministry, “we Brothers continue to be the mainstay of the Lasallian experience. In the years to come, we shall have to continue deepening OUR CHARISM and developing our spirituality.” (p. 13).

“We shall make the Lasallian charism more precise so that the groups which are coming to us and those wishing to integrate themselves into our Institute can be more clearly defined.” (p. 14).

The work of drafting the Rule is not foreign to this effort: “The spiritual experience born of the **interpretation** and **updating** of the charism of our Founder, John Baptist de La Salle, this experience which has taken form within the new Rule, the messages, the propositions and the directives, must be **assimilated** and **lived** by all the Brothers” (p. 15). The sentence merits particular attention: the charism of the Founder has been interpreted and updated, and this work is the source of a spiritual experience which all the Brothers ought to assimilate and live.

The Message to all the Brothers returns to this theme: “The slow work of discernment in which we have been guided by the Holy Spirit, has revealed to us the consistency of his action in the Institute. We have become aware of the **amazing relevance** of the

CHARISM OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE for our time: the crucial role of the school in the evangelization of young people, the preferential option for the poor, the promotion of justice and our responses to formation needs of all kinds” (p. 20). One could add to that list “the elements to be found in the whole Lasallian experience: its inspiration from the Gospel; its spirit of faith and zeal; its work in the field of Christian education; its love and its preferential option for the young and the poor; its communion with the Church, especially with the parish and the diocese; its basis in Lasallian spirituality; its relationship with a Lasallian community.” (*Message to the members of the ‘Lasallian Family’*, p. 29-30). *The Message to all the Brothers* invites them “to set out once again in the footsteps of St. John Baptist de La Salle and take on the challenge of giving oneself to God for the service of education for young people” and proposes three means: **the discovery of the Rule**, “both steeped in the CHARISM of the Holy Founder and meaningful for our international Institute today”; a renewal “**in the practice of meditation**”; and “**the use of the personal project**” (p. 22-23).

One may note that the expression ‘Lasallian charism’ is not used in reference to the Lasallian Family: we share a ministry inspired by De La Salle, it would seem that the charism is not shared.

Circular 435, dated June 24th 1993, gives an account of the 42nd General Chapter. The General Council wished this Chapter “to give each of us inspiration, strength and renewed determination to be filled with the CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER in the world of today” (p. 3); eight lines later there is reference to “the founding inspiration of St. John Baptist de La Salle” (p. 4). *The Message to the Lasallian Family* reminds the Brothers that in regard to the mission of the Institute and its living tradition, they are “in a manner of speaking, the heart, the memory and the guarantors of the Lasallian charism” in the shared mission. (p. 15).

In the report *A Community of Brothers associated for the educational service of the poor*, we again find the charism of the Brothers, “the charism we have” (1.3 p. 19), “the charism of brotherhood” which each Brother has (1.4 p. 20) - but also that of the Institute: “the commitments we can make in fidelity to the charism of our Institute and our vow of association.” (2.4 p. 25). In *The Shared Mission*, “Our charism suggests that the gap which exists between the cultural world of the young and the actual situation of the Institute and the Church, is our special field”; the Institute offers to those men and women who wish to be involved in the partnership the opportunity to commit themselves more closely and deeply to the spirit and charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle, who saw educators as Ministers of the Gospel. (1.1 p. 30), recalling (3.3 p. 42) article 20 of the Rule (“a charism which today still animates the Brothers and many educators”) and the *Message to the Lasallian Family* (“In the association for the shared mission, the Brothers are the heart, the memory and the guarantors of the Lasallian charism” (3.6 p. 44) - ‘in a manner of speaking’ has disappeared). “In the light of the charism and the Rule, those who participate in the mission of the Institute - whether they be Brothers or not - feel that they are challenged by the poor and by the situations of distress...” (3.3 p. 41). “*Advancing in age*”, seeing his activity diminish, can lead a Brother to ask himself “whether his life is losing its meaning within the continuity of the Lasallian charism” (2.1 p. 66): spontaneously, the charism is seen from the angle of activity, of the mission - the “charism of brotherhood” seems forgotten here! However, Brothers who have retired can “look back with pride on their lives as educators and in thanksgiving to the Lord for calling them to take part in the Church’s mission of education under the inspiration of St. John Baptist de La Salle” (3.1 p. 68). “*The Government of the Institute*” only mentions Lasallian charism in connection with the Guadalupanas De La Salle Sisters (with whom the Institute has some “affinities” - Prop 40, p. 92) and the Lasallian Sisters of

Vietnam (“who share it with us” - Relations 2, p. 88). Finally, the *Message of the Consultants to the Brothers Capitulants* recalls that the Chapter has been “the occasion of experiencing the presence of Christ and that of La Salle, an example and a charism...” and hopes that “the Brothers will remain authentic witnesses of the Lasallian charism”. (*Appendix 1*, p. 111).

In collecting these sparse pieces of information - since this Chapter had no intention of defining Lasallian charism - one picks up that this expression is never used directly in connection with the prayer of the Brothers, the government of the Institute or financial measures. This is worth noting, since the “contemplative attitude of the Founder” (*Community, sign of hope* 2.1, p. 52) is emphasized, and the “vow of association” of the First Brothers, “essential to their Institute” (*Shared Mission* 3.4 p. 42), without recalling the ‘heroic’ clause of the beginnings, of taking the risk of losing everything. *The Lasallian charism does not cover the totality of the founding experience of John Baptist de La Salle*: the history has, above all, highlighted the apostolic and fraternal aspect in the world of education.

Circular 447, dated October 1st 2000, *The Documents* of the 43rd General Chapter considered directly the manner in which the Partners could PARTICIPATE IN THE CHARISM. “The foundation event which links the Institute today to its origins is that of June 6th 1694, when John Baptist de La Salle and twelve of his followers came together to consecrate themselves for life, to the Christian education of poor boys... the development of the Lasallian Mission requires... so that all can deepen their own understanding of association, in the light of the observations made, the Lasallian charism and the present theology of the Church.” (*Associated...*, p. 2-3). “A shared formation of Brothers and Partners has helped Brothers to rediscover the person of the Founder and his charism” (*The Brothers today*, p. 36).

“There are Partners... who feel a call to deepen the charism, spirituality and Lasallian communion in which they wish to participate. In particular their lives are already marked by a number of distinctively Lasallian characteristics: - a vocation inspired by the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle and his values; - a life of faith which discovers God in everyday life understood in the light of Scripture and, for persons of other religions, in the light of their own sacred texts; - a community experience of some form or other suited to the identity of its members; - a mission of some duration which associates persons with the educational service of the poor; - an openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the individual and his immediate environment.” (*Associated...* p. 4). “Intentional” groups, in fact, exist, “because they have developed links and relationships and have adopted projects between their members and have done so with explicit reference to the LASALLIAN CHARISM WHICH THEY SHARE” (*id.* p. 6); they are associated to the Institute “in order to respond... to the demands of the Lasallian Mission. The charism inspiring this mission was given to St. John Baptist de La Salle, and was authenticated by the Church, for the service of young people.” (*id.* p. 6).

“The Lasallian charism is already a source of inspiration in the context of multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Young people from all cultures and religious traditions have the right and freedom to benefit from, and to live according to the Lasallian charism.” (*The Mission today*, p. 23). Recommendation 2 and **Proposition 2** open up a wide field of research, “set up study groups on our way of SHARING THE LASALLIAN CHARISM with educators and young people OF OTHER FAITHS” (*Associated...* p. 7-8).

4. The Guide for Formation (1991).

The Secretariat for Formation prepared this text, which was later improved after consultation with all the Districts and with the par-

ticipants of CIL 1989, and finally approved by the General Council in September 1990 (p. 9-10). Its status is that of a Directory. Its systematic character led it to compile a section on “*the charism of the Founder and the spirit of the Institute*”. (N° 21-39). The passage which begins this section deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

“Every religious family, inspired by its founding charism expresses its own way of living the Gospel for a specific purpose. St. John Baptist de la Salle presents us with the Gospel as our first and principal Rule. He invites us, following the inspirations of God, to be attentive today to the distress ‘*of the children of the artisans and the poor*’ (R1) and to exercise, by association, the apostolic ministry of education, especially in schools made accessible to the poor, as a sign of the kingdom and as a means of salvation. THIS IS THE FOUNDING CHARISM of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

To make this great gift a reality today (MTR 9), entails rediscovering Lasallian spirituality, which is none other than a development of the Founder’s charism. Like any other spirituality, it has its own characteristic spirit which is expressed in a specific salvific mission.” (No. 21-22). Another element is indicated in regard to the process of formation, which ought to help “progressively to discover and to adopt the special and particular lifestyle, thanks to which, individuals gradually assimilate the spirit of the Institute and the charism of the Founder” (N° 33). “To make the Lasallian charism known” (N° 97) of which the document speaks in reference to the Aspirancy, should not remain at the purely intellectual level.

One can also find another synthesis after N° 283, under the title: CONTINUOUS GROWTH IN THE CHARISM *of St. John Baptist de La Salle*. The Rule underlines four aspects of the life and ministry of the Founder: *De La Salle’s self-abandonment to God, the fruit of the loving presence of God in his life* (N° 284); *Fidelity to the Church* (N° 285); *The apostolic and creative spirit of De La Salle* (N° 286); *The definitive commitment of De La Salle to the Christian Education of the poor* (N° 287).

Since the *Guide* speaks of the formation of *Brothers*, it singles out the role of the Institute in the *bringing up to date* (N° 100) and *the faithful expression of the charism* (the appreciation of the CRIS is cited in N° 41, 134 and 199). This last number, which deals with the *Lasallian core* needed for reaching the objectives of the Novitiate, speaks of “highlighting how, in each historical period, the Institute has tried to live according to the charism of the Founder and how it has met the needs of young people” (N° 199). The community which receives the young Brother, commits him to “reassessing the charism of the Founder according to which he is trying to live” (N° 254). For this the formators need to be an icon, showing “an openness and great docility to the Spirit, a deep and communicative practice of the charism of the holy Founder” (N° 148).

The *Guide* is also aware of the generic sense of charism. The *Pastoral Ministry of Vocations* “promotes the ministries, services and charisms necessary for the development of the Christian community” (N° 59). One expression seems ambiguous: in *preparing himself for his final profession*, the young Brother “will be faithful to the Word of God, to the source of HIS CHARISM, and to the signs of the times discerned personally and by the community” (N° 252). Is this referring to his personal charism? Perhaps, if one links this text with N° 28: “The Brother needs this view of faith in order to be capable of living according to HIS PERSONAL CHARISM”. Since we are talking about the spirit of faith, it is not a question here of opposing this personal charism to that of the Founder, but rather of making the latter one’s own. (cf. N° 33).

5. Perspectives opened by these “official” texts.

In speaking of the sharing of the Lasallian charism with the Partners (p. 4) and with the young - and especially when they are from other religions (p. 7 and p. 25) - **Circular 447** opens up a much wider field of reflection than was done, for example, by the *Guide* for

Formation. Perhaps there is even a certain shift in meaning, in including THE YOUNG - whom we first of all consider as beneficiaries of the Lasallian mission - among those who CAN SHARE THE LASALLIAN CHARISM. It is not “young Lasallians” who are being referred to here, but the young towards whom the Brothers and the Partners are being sent. The boldness of the expression SHARE presupposes that these young are the agents of their own formation and that of their companions (they are also evangelising their educators!), and find themselves therefore in the state of living the “distinctively Lasallian characteristics” enumerated on pages 4 and 5. One could find here a new field for the CHARISM OF BROTHERHOOD (Cf. Circ. 435, 1.4, P. 20) which each Brother - and not just each Brother - carries in him. This is without doubt an entry point for the young and for educators who are from different religious or spiritual traditions than the Brothers.

The Institute, as a community of living men (Declaration 7.2), plays a central role in this EXTENSION of the Lasallian charism, which is in the nature of ENCULTURATION in a world which is from now on multi-religious: it must assume, interpret and bring up-to-date the charism of the Founder (Cf. Circ. 422, p. 15); Guide N° 100), something which the Rule expresses faithfully (Rule 1987 ed. Decree p. 9). Perhaps we ought to put more emphasis, in OUR PRESENTATION OF THE LASALLIAN CHARISM, on the evangelization of culture (cf. Rule, art. 18), on the spiritual experience which arises from the work of interpreting the charism (cf. Circ. 422, p.15), on the renewal of the practice of mental prayer (*id.*, p. 22) and on the “exodus” (Circ. 403, p. 62) to which this work invites us “to set out once again in the footsteps of St. John Baptist de La Salle” (Circ. 422, p. 22).

Alain HOURS, fsc
and the Formation Commission (17. 9. 2003).

VI. Eight Testimonies from Lasallians.

1st Testimony

The Lasallian Charism.

Mr. Dominic NJERU
Lwanga District of Africa

What is a Lasallian charism?

I see it as the **foundational inspiration of the Lasallian family members who are an association, given to the Lwanga District of Africa by the spirit of God in the person of our Founder St. John Baptist de La Salle.** With this description in mind I now give an overview of what I see as the Lasallian charism within the District.

My Predecessor, Ms Joan Haan (R.I.P.) planted the seed of shared mission in the District with her visits, retreats and workshops within the schools. However, due to her health complications and the diverse nature of the District she could not visit all the apostolates. Lwanga District of Africa is relatively very young as it was put in place in the year 1997 with the first District Chapter. The five countries that now constitute the District (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) have always supported and encouraged in reality the Lasallian mission and charism in the various apostolates throughout the District. Historically each of the ministries has had some laypeople involved in the mission for more than 40 years. In the present structure we have created a process of education to ensure that each of the Brothers and laypersons understand and appreciate the role of the Lasallian charism in the vocation of teaching. We are now working towards a common goal - **Giving Human**

and Christian education - even with our diverse vocations (Brothers and Laypersons). Our diversity will be unified by what each one would bring to the mission and by how one would contribute to the enhancement of the charism either through catechesis, apostolic organizations, extra-curricular activities and administrative positions.

The understanding of the Lasallian charism in our District will very much be strengthened by the realization that whether a Brother or Layperson, God is mysteriously working in through and for us. without our knowing but at the same time with our cooperation. This working together as we develop our charism will expose us to certain essential values that will influence little by little our attitudes, aspirations and decisions. That way we will be able to see a change in the meaning of our work as educators and see the hand of God in that work.

Present Reality.

I said earlier that the late Joan Haan had planted the seed in the District. This has not been easy as I say it. The five countries of the District represent a variety of people. cultures, traditions and religions. The reception, acceptance and understanding of a Lasallian mission and charism in the District were not automatic, as the laypeople had varying expectations. The Brothers also resisted any change to their status.

The initial relationship between the Brothers and Laypersons was Employer-Employee (some aspect of this is still persistent). The perspective on human and economic resources was a real challenge to my predecessor and myself as the Laypeople expected an improvement in their economic level with the launching of formation into the Lasallian mission and charism.

However one positive point has been the fact that laypersons are involved in the formation of laypersons into the Lasallian mission. It is easier for the layperson to win the hearts of the fellow laypersons into the mission than it would be for the Brother who would be “selling” his own vocation to the laypersons. I could be wrong on this observation, but I have no doubt in my mind that this fact has helped me tremendously in my work.

Now the laypeople are beginning to realize that, “God is calling each one according to his or her own vocation, to accomplish together the mission confided to St. John Baptist de La Salle and to the Institute he founded...” (C 435. p. 13). We have set up a process that will lead the laypeople into making personal commitment to the Lasallian charism.

- These people are beginning to develop a sense of belonging to the mission and charism of the Institute in their specific schools, as now they are speaking of “our” school, mission, Institute and Founder.
- They are realizing the need of building a community of faith in most of the apostolates. Communal services in the schools are a common phenomenon. Concern for one another is also very evident.
- The District Office is in full support of the formation structures that are in place for both the Brothers and Laypeople in order to spread the Lasallian charism.
- In some of the apostolates, signs and symbols of having some Lasallian charism are evident e.g Potraits and pictures of De La Salle, Lasallian Corner in the school libraries, and Lasallian literature. All these will inspire the Laypeople to aspire to the Lasallian charism.
- The spiritual aspect is also very evident in most of our schools even though some of our schools have very few Catholics. The spirit of common prayer, meditation, private prayer and Christian Religious studies have taken their roots.

- The good character and behaviour of most of our students indicate an aspect of Lasallian charism. The need for pastoral programs in the apostolates is an indication that the Lasallian charism is being built.

The above evidences should not reflect the uniformity and commonality of understanding and acceptance of the Lasallian charism. They are only a glimpse of something distant that is yet to be realized with time.

The laypeople are beginning to catch a glimpse of the charism and are beginning to embrace it. It is challenging as it implies an adventure to the unknown, but at the same time it must be a renewal process for which a sense of revitalization is needed the Lasallian charism as described above calls for change in thinking and attitude. It calls for openness, detachment and the spirit of tolerance. That way the Lasallian charism will grow into a Lasallian Family.

Conclusion.

It is interesting to note that the Lasallian charism is God-willed because its enhancement is directed and guided by the Divine intervention. I believe that God calls and sends His spirit to strengthen the charism among the Laypeople and the Brothers. The spirit of God animates this charism in the Lwanga District of Africa. This is because the spirit of God will lead this charism to where the Laypeople never thought they would be - an inspired Lasallian Family. It is my belief that the God who calls also sends the laypeople into a deeper understanding of the Lasallian charism.

The Lasallian charism is something we receive from the Institute and which we hold as a community of faith in a specific apostolate. Through this charism the laypeople and the Brothers, proclaim their faith both communally and individually.

The Lasallian charism focuses on God Jesus Christ and John Baptist de La Salle. We can as well call this charism, the Lasallian spirituality.

The Lasallian charism brings the people together as a Family and therefore the description of the Lasallian charism in the beginning of this write-up.

This charism inspires the Brothers and the Laypeople not just within an apostolate, but also, beyond the confines of the Institute. It is because of the Lasallian charism that the Laypeople want to lead a life of faith in the Gospels, by living according to the spirit of the Institute and by participating in the mission of Human and Christian Education.

Because of the Lasallian charism in the Lwanga District of Africa **we can now talk of the Collaborators, Partners and Associates** to the Vocation of teaching and educating. I need to emphasize the fact that the Lasallian youth has been borne from the realization of Lasallian charism in our apostolates. The Lasallian youth in the District have begun living as brothers of Christ, brothers to one another and brothers to everyone (outreaching) especially the most needy. These they do through their Faith, Service, Community building and Social Justice involvement.

2nd Testimony

Personal story.

Mrs. Éveline GEOFFROY.
District of France

To grasp how I am now living the Lasallian charism, I have to go back in time some forty-five years.

Already as a girl I was a “praying” Christian, mindful of others, to the extent that it happened that others made fun of me, saying that I was too silly, that “people” were taking advantage of me. I did not care, and the day when the high school chaplain asked me to come and supervise the retreat for the solemn declaration of faith, I said yes, in spite of the doubts I had about my ability to do so (I was 15 years old); I discovered sharing spiritual reflection with “grown ups”, listening to the “retreatants”, silence, and prayer together. At each of the short holidays, I got away from the house early to go and pray at the first mass: I felt a real need for this moment of thanksgiving for the new day which was dawning. When I was a student I taught classes in literacy and in English to young adults at the youth club: it was also my way of saying thanks for all I had received. It was with these dispositions that I began teaching; little by little I started to spend a lot of time with those under my care: those who had not understood remained or came back after class and we went back to the learning again with patience and time. I was teaching in a public high school and my colleagues gave me to understand that I was letting down the profession. However, if these children did not understand, I was responsible in some way.

It was then that I met the Brothers: I took part “clandestinely” in a preparatory day for teachers in one of their schools, with some friends who were teachers there; it was about meeting youths where they were at, accepting them just as they were, and little by little helping them to grow up; it was also about assessment, self-assessment, correctness and justice... I recognised myself totally in this.

A year on, I was no longer a public servant. At Dijon I discovered sharing of ideas, joys, difficulties, heartbreaks, working together always with a friendly and companionable concern; for example, there was difficulty with a Year Eight class and for the better accompaniment of the young folk the class teacher had suggested a

monthly meeting: in turn, we brought the cakes, a little (!) Burgundy and fruit juices. Work was serious but not tense; we were already working together, Brothers and lay people. But I was still not acquainted with John Baptist de La Salle, and I began asking the Brothers what made them tick.

Later, I discovered formation sessions organised on Saturday mornings at Passy- Buzenval, on various educational themes; I was beginning to discover J. B. de La Salle, a man of the Church who struck me as very serious, who, however, had “awakened” men who were warm, considerate accessible... And then there was my reading of Meditation 33, one Saturday, a revelation and confirmation of what I was trying hard to live; at the same time the weight of the responsibility: we, teachers, were educators, we were pastors. In the course of the years, of the discussions and readings of texts of J. B. de La Salle or about J. B. de La Salle, I became aware of the community we formed in our schools; a community more or less closely knit according as we were more or less close to one another in the spirit of John Baptist de La Salle, but we were all working in the service of young people. I became aware of the importance there is in such a community that each one feels recognised and loved, so that he can love and accompany the young ones in his charge.

To pray with others has always been important for me from my early years; to be “pleasing” to God, I learned in the catechism; to be “pleasing” to God by helping young people to find Him, came little by little. I know, now, that by myself, without the Spirit of God, I cannot do great things for the young, but also, by myself and without my confreres in education, (Brothers and lay Lasallians) I cannot likewise do great things. We cannot all alone, quench the thirst of the young, help them to find their place in the metropolis nor in the Love of God: it is through our complementary qualities, it is together, that we can make them grow as human beings.

Brother John Johnston reminded us one time that our schools were “Christian” before being “Lasallian”: it is truly Christ who is within us and He who causes us to turn towards the disadvantaged, the poor, to whom J. B. de La Salle invites us to pay more heed, “more care” than we would pay “to the children of a King” (Med. 133, 2.2).

Now, I am somewhat distanced from the world of the young in my retirement, but I feel that the time has come to pay more attention to my colleagues, to walk with them in the difficulties they are now meeting and to share with them the experience of the teacher formation embarked upon by J. B. de La Salle, so that together, we can continue to procure for the young “the life of grace in this world and in the other eternal life” (Med. 201, 3).

“I thank you Lord, for You have chosen me, to serve in your Presence”
(Eucharistic prayer N° 2)

3rd Testimony

How do we live out and understand the Lasallian charism.

Gery SHORT
District of San Francisco

“God who led me imperceptibly, from one decision to another, without my knowing...”

(De La Salle - Memoir of the Beginnings)

My History

The academic year 2003-2004 marks my 25th anniversary of working in association with the De La Salle Christian Brothers and with their many partners in Lasallian education. When I began teaching

religious studies to high school students at Saint Mary's College High School in Berkeley, California, I could never have envisioned how this relationship would develop in the coming 25 years. I could never have imagined the challenges and opportunities that the Lasallian charism would bring into my life.

Among these have been serving as a consultant at the 1993 and 2000 General Chapters; membership on the International Commission on Association; involvement in creating formation activities, resources, and programs for the District of San Francisco; joining the design team for the U.S.A./Toronto Region's Lasallian Leadership Institute; being the first non-Brother to serve on a standing Regional Education Committee; and eventually becoming chair of the Regional Education Board. In 1995 I became the first lay Director of the Office of Education for the District of San Francisco and a member of the District Leadership Team, and in these roles I have been able to lend a hand as the District established four new schools to serve the poor in just the past five years.

Though I could have foreseen none of this, I can look back at my life and can identify some of the major influences that led me in this direction.

Before I ever encountered the De La Salle Christian Brothers and the Lasallian educational mission, I had what I now see as my first real encounter with God. Living and working as a volunteer in Colombia, I "met the poor" for the first time. I had read about or heard of seeing God in the poor. And it happened for me as it had happened for others: In the faces of the poor, especially in the eyes of the children, in their suffering and in their joy, I truly felt that I met God.

Being very much culturally isolated in Colombia, and trying to make sense of this new world, I often found myself turning to God, to Jesus, as a companion. A vivid memory remains of finding

myself on a dark street late at night in suburban Bogotá and watching a young security guard with a menacing rifle approach me. Do I cross the street and draw more attention to myself? Or do I just keep walking? I just kept walking, but I remember saying something that I would say several more times when I found myself in risky situations there: “Well, Jesus, you got me into this, I’m counting on you now.”

The very first time that I said it I found myself quite surprised - because I had never before had experience of a relationship so intimate and so dependent. During the year I spent in Colombia that relationship grew more intimate, and my turning to God became more and more a habit: Jesus became for me someone I could talk things out with, as I sorted through my new experiences and navigated through difficult situations.

Those encounters with the poor and with the God who loves them, and me, spurred me to take up graduate study in theology on my return home. I needed to understand and to integrate what I had learned in South America, especially the joy and suffering of the poor; and I needed to learn how I might contribute to some relief for them without undermining the simplicity that brought such joy.

What I see now is that I was searching for - in a word - my vocation as a Catholic Christian. This was a time when “vocation” was still narrowly defined to refer to consecrated men and women. But I was fortunate to have the guidance of a spiritual director who told me something that I still hold to be deeply true. He said, “A vocation must ultimately be a freeing experience. If it is not freeing, it is not for you.” Perhaps Latin American theologians might call a vocation of this sort a “liberation.” And I don’t think it is farfetched to suggest that for John Baptist de La Salle (whom as yet I did not know) this would also be a fair definition of the “salvation” he had in mind for his students.

In the fall of 1978 I was hired to teach religious studies at a Lasallian high school. Meeting the Brothers and the Lasallian mission for the first time, I quickly felt at home. Coming into this educational ministry after my experience among the marginalized and after my studies in theology, I felt that the Brothers promoted values that were very dear to me: Service of the poor; education as a liberating force; teachers as “older brothers and sisters to our students”; a high-quality and professional educational program; a spirit of association and community; fraternal and supportive relationships among teachers and administrators; and an approach to religious education and spirituality that I found meaningful and practical for myself and for students.

My feeling of having come home is one that many colleagues share. Over the years, as I have talked to newly hired educators about Lasallian education and Lasallian spirituality, many have come up to me after an orientation or workshop and have said, “this is what I’ve been looking for.”

In essence, my work in Lasallian education has given me the professional opportunity to live out my vocation in a most authentic and liberating manner.

Over the past 25 years I have met with and worked with Brothers and other Lasallian educators in many different areas, in schools and other apostolates, and at district, regional, and international levels. It has long been clear to me that the non-clerical character of the Brothers’ charism has been a tremendous asset in forming the bond of association with lay men and women. The lack of barriers that might arise in a clerical structure is one part of it; another is the positive and vigorous fraternal relationships that the Lasallian charism teaches us to create. The Brothers interact with their Partners and Associates in a powerfully effective way that I think is unique in the Church today. And I know that the opportunities I

have been given - to take part in leadership and governance in the district, the region, and the Institute - are an important consequence of this non-clerical character.

My Challenges

There have been times over the years when I have asked, "Is this what I should be doing? Is this what God wants me to do with my life at this time?" When I didn't know the answer, I tried faithfully to address it, through prayer, some type of study or research, and a spirit of openness. As I look back it is clear that at each such juncture, an opportunity arose or an invitation was offered that kept me involved in the Lasallian mission.

My own continued experience of finding new invitations and more involving opportunities throughout my life in the Lasallian world is the reason that I place so much importance on providing Lasallian educators with opportunities for formation, in such programs as the Lasallian Leadership Institute. The more aware we become of this mission and its spirit - through study, through networking and mutual encouragement, through taking on greater responsibilities, through immersion programs in which we meet the poor in various parts of the world - the better educators we can be. It has been through such experiences that my vocation has been deepened, and I am convinced that it is through such experiences that others' vocations are deepened as well.

Of course, one of the challenges of a vocation that is both demanding and fulfilling is the need to fulfil the commitments of work and the commitments of family. Rosanne and I have been married for 22 years, and we have three children, now 18, 15, and 12 years of age. My vocation as husband and father must be balanced with my work, which sometimes requires long hours, travel, and absences that can extend over weekends or several days. The need for balance

is true in any job - but I think it may be more challenging in a job like mine, in which the opportunities and the needs my work addresses are so compelling. I am reminded by my wife, however, that one fact that helps in finding this balance is that she and our children respect and admire the work that I do and the mission of which that work is a part. Nevertheless, one of the commitments I do present to the Visitor is the expectation that I put family first; and this has not always been easy. I know that my family may suffer at times, and I have also come to know that my soul suffers when I do not keep a balance.

Another challenge is not losing touch with prayer. The challenge of finding - among family obligations and work obligations - a proper structure or routine for a consistent prayer life is ongoing. Among the Brothers in their communities, the internal and external supports for prayer life are established. But with my rather erratic and demanding schedule, and without built-in community structures, I have had to try to create my own routines over the years, and not always successfully. As we develop "association" more formally in the international Institute, I see that one of the biggest challenges for me and other Lasallian educators is the development of effective structures, conducive to a rich spiritual life, that are authentic and meaningful and are reflective of the real needs of family and of one's ministerial responsibilities.

On this 25th anniversary of my association with the Lasallian mission, I am grateful to the De La Salle Christian Brothers for their perseverance in living lives as the animators and guarantors of the mission. I am thankful for their friendship, and for the many remarkable opportunities they have given me to take part in this mission. I cherish my relationships with the many Lasallian educators who, like me, are discovering and embracing their vocations as educators. Together we are working to carry on a mission and a spirit that we have found to be incredibly valuable for the Church

and for the world, so that young people, especially the poor and marginalized, may find what they most deeply need: Salvation, liberation, a vocation, and their rightful place in this world.

4th Testimony

Jon LEZAMIZ, fsc
District of Bilbao

My name is Jon Lezamiz. I was born in Bilbao, Spain, almost a half-century ago. There I studied at the La Salle School over the course of ten years. My grandfather, my father and my two older brothers attended the same school. My younger sister was not able to attend La Salle because schools at that time were not coeducational. I hope that one of my nephews or nieces will be able to be the fourth generation of my family to attend the same school.

After having studied so long with “the Brothers,” as we used to call the school, “Lasallianism” was not an unusual thing in my family. And so, when I finished my secondary education, I considered entering the Postulancy program, attracted as I was by the fraternal and generous dedication of a group of young Brothers whom I got to know in school and with whom I went on trips to the nearby mountains. Beginning then, my formative journey was the same as for many Brothers, until I was officially certified to teach in our schools. Currently I serve as the Auxiliary Visitor in the District of Bilbao (Spain-Portugal/ARLEP Region). Naturally, I was surprised when I was asked to reflect on how I live the Lasallian charism.

I was surprised that I was asked to do this because I had supposed that those who would be called upon to write on this subject would have to have done something extraordinary or would relate something that would draw special attention to their story. And so I had thought that normally one might be asked to do this if he had been

a missionary for a substantial length of time and in particularly difficult circumstances. There is certainly very little of that in my case. While it is certainly true that on more than one occasion I wrote to my Brother Visitor expressing my desire to go to Africa, these letters were archived because those in charge of my District wanted me to work in the field of initial formation of young Brothers. And I did spend a good part of my younger years in this area. I spent two years working in the pre-Novitiate and nine years working in the Novitiate, either as sub-Director or as Director. As regards my dream of spending time in Africa and serving the needy in the field of education, I can only report spending a couple of months in the “African Switzerland,” Rwanda, and another couple of months working in a tiny school with Lasallians in Ecuador in the Prosperina neighborhood in Guayaquil. There was nothing heroic about what I did, but these were just simple activities done in my free time with kids from the area, time spent in construction in one case, and teaching a language class and some involvement in pastoral ministry in the other.

I was surprised that I was asked to do this because I had not participated in any “insertion” project, nor had I worked with any particularly difficult students or young people at risk. I did work with adolescents, but they were not any more or less difficult to work with than any others. I taught them English and Euskara (Basque language) and religion. But, having said that, I would say that educating those young people did present some challenges that needed responses. These were not heroic deeds but there was a kind of calm dedication, a simple and affable approach. Those students are the ones that are talked about today in the Spanish school system, those from the ESO (Obligatory Secondary Education), they are the ones that require our closeness, direction and our listening, even though their appearance might give the impression that the opposite is true.

I was surprised that I was asked to do this because, statistically, I am merely a model like many other Brothers in their formation and life journey. My religious life did not deal in any obvious way with what Jon Sobrino, S. J., another Basque by birth but Salvadorean by adoption, called the “abnormality” of religious life. Jon Sobrino is a department head of UCA (University of Central America) and he emphasized that religious life should be situated “in the desert, on the border, and on the periphery.”

Jon Sobrino said that the “desert” is the place where there are no people, surely because life there is not easy. Obviously, I move among many persons, my personal appointment calendar has an important list of those in charge of pastoral ministry, those in charge of schools, teachers. I go from meeting to meeting.

The Jesuit theologian also noted that the “border” is the place of innovation, creativity, where already known and explored limits are broken. Personally, I do not think of myself as a bold, creative, innovative person. I tend to limit myself to what works. Before enjoying beautiful coasts, for fear of running aground, I tend to guide the boat out to sea in order to be where calm is forecast.

He pointed out that the “periphery” is life away from the center, where power lies, life on the margins, the ditches of the great neo-liberal highways, the garbage dumps of history with their market surpluses. I, for my part, have been chosen to live at the center. Even physically I lived for 5 years at the Center of the Institute, at the Generalate in Rome, and I am in my third year at the Provincialate in San Sebastian. But it is not I who has opted for these places, but I was chosen to be part of an international community (CIL staff member in Rome) and I was asked to serve as Auxiliary Visitor. It could be that the “periphery” might be more an attitude than a physical place. Cannot one serve the most vulnerable effectively from centers where decisions are made?

I remember that after a period of one year in the Liverpool (England) community, Brother Director Bernard said to me: “Your greatest talent is that you have no one, outstanding talent.” This reminded me of a response given to me by the Brother Visitor of the District at the time, when I reached the age of forty and the idea came up that I specialize in something with a view to my work after the Novitiate, where I was working at that time as a member of the staff. He came to me and he said that we were to be good assistants in the places where we found ourselves, proudly teaching our subjects with no need for further specialization. And so I am still without those specialized studies which today we readily offer to Brothers, of whom I have always had a kind of healthy envy. I try to compensate by formative reading when there is nothing urgent requiring my attention. I update myself by reading in other languages (French, English, Basque), by reading Biblical-Theological texts, and by reading Lasallian materials.

About 17 years ago some of us Brothers were asked to write about our vocational stories. These were published so that they might serve as examples for possible candidates and perhaps they would be encouraged to commit themselves to our lifestyle. I did not save copies of these stories but I do remember very well what I said in my story. I refused to write about the typical development of vocation from its awakening in such-and-such a school, with Brother so-and-so by way of example. No. I said that my reason for being was called “Zorion.” Clearly, this was a pseudonym for one of my students. That is how I named that student in my heart of hearts, that student who worried me the most, whom I obsessed over at certain times and whose poor behavior within the classroom caused disturbance. Anyone who has a minimal knowledge of the Basque language will need no translation for that name. “Zorion” means “happy.”

Fifteen years have gone by and I have had many more students, but when I am invited to recall some student to pray for, I always remember Zorion. I continue naming this collective character who represents those who lack parental support, who have learning difficulties, who have habits that need improvement. I do not know what became of that student nor what the future had in store for him. The only reference I have is of his younger brother whom I knew but did not teach. This brother is institutionalized with grave psychological disorders due to drug abuse.

Today, when I need to revive the embers of my youthful dream to devote myself to educating the needy, I appeal to my memory of Zorion. This tends not to happen very often, but it is a feeling that accompanies me and fills my office. I spend many hours there, probably as many as a teacher spends in a classroom. I no longer walk in the schoolyard among students, but they are my support, they give me meaning, they are the targets when, along with others, I take on running the District, when I share responsibilities, when I offer advice, when I get involved in issues of pastoral ministry during hard times, in this change of era, in this new phase.

The ministry I am called upon to carry out always has Zorion in the background and, based on that, I respond to the challenges that the life of the District and pastoral ministry in particular present. I recall that when the idea came up of my being Auxiliary Visitor, I made a list of my weaknesses and shortages. But immediately the two Brothers who lead along with me insisted that we work as a team with many other persons besides. Over time, during these past three years, I have sensed that being in contact with persons who are committed in different ways to the educational service of young people, based on their own very different lifestyles, is very encouraging. My being a religious Brother is pleasantly complemented by the unusual experiences of so many educators of the Lasallian charism whom I see in the courses and meetings in which I partic-

ipate. I am very fortunate to be able to share and talk about my sense of the life journey of John Baptist de La Salle and the formative structures of my District and my Region. There is no doubt that a full 10% of my time is devoted to telling the story of our origins at the Regional Lasallian Center and in other programs. I have to confess that giving presentations on our time of foundation encourages me, excites me, moves me... and I think that those who hear me can sense and appreciate this.

I do not know what the future will bring. Up to now I see that I have marked out a path and that my predictions have not come to pass. According to my initial predictions, I would have been a phenomenal chemistry teacher at the high school level. But today there is no doubt that I can conclude that my story has been a wonderful page in Lasallian history. God, who directs all things wisely and prudently, and who tends not to force human will, has led me step by step, from one commitment to another, to where I had not expected nor aspired to go. And, with a heart on pins and needles, I can say that the pseudonym that gave meaning to my vocation, has also baptized me without my being aware of it. I, too, am Zorion.

5th Testimony.

Michael Gamo

District of the Philippines

I became a “nominal Lasallian when I moved to La Salle Green Hills for my high school in 1982. During my last year in high school, I encountered the Brothers who gave me a larger vision of what it meant to be Lasallian. I was attracted to the mission of “education for the poor together and by association” so I joined the aspirancy program. In 1986, I entered De La Salle University and

took up education. I persevered in my education and aspirancy, and eventually joined the postulancy program.

I entered the postulancy in 1987, left the program the same year, entered again in 1989, and then left for good. At that time, I was a mess of adolescent hormones, idealism and disillusionment. I finished my undergraduate degrees at De La Salle University in 1990 and went in search of the authentic Lasallian Mission.

I volunteered to teach at St. Joseph's High School, a Lasallian school for the children of the working class in Villamonte, Bacolod City. There, I saw the Lasallian Mission fully alive. I stayed for four years until 1994. After that, I thought I had enough of La Salle. I got married and began looking for a "real" career to support my family. I moved back to Manila to work for a non-government organization for a year, then plunged into a 4-year career in banking with the largest Philippine bank.

During this time, I was hearing about changes in the Lasallian Family. In 1997, I heard that my former postulancy director (Brother Armin Luistro FSC) was the new Visitor and they were talking about holding a "Synod" in 1999 to usher in a "new Pentecost" for the Lasallian Family in the Philippines. I was curious. Brother Armin invited me to attend the Synod of 1999 to represent the external sector, which I did. I participated actively, even helped in the drafting of the final output. I found myself working overnights, then weekends to turn the Synod ideals into reality. One commitment led to another, until I was offered a full time job with the Provincialate.

I thought I was finished with all this Lasallian stuff. But here were new signs of change, of progress, of authenticity. I decided to say yes to this God who never gave up hounding me, and yes to this Lasallian calling. I quit my job with the bank in 1999 and became Director of the Lasallian Family Office. In my first year, I helped set

up new structures to reflect the new directions. The office later evolved into the Lasallian Partners Office, overseeing work in justice and peace, volunteers and formation. I also got involved in finances, eventually becoming District Bursar, and in the Federation of Lasallian Institutions as Executive Director. I moved around different jobs during the past five years and am now so deeply entrenched again in all this Lasallian stuff.

My Lasallian life seems to have followed a pattern of searching, getting frustrated, being led another way, following reluctantly, and ending up right where I started, but in a different way. I think I have come around full circle. I have come home. I used to think that I made a lot of sacrifices in my struggle to become a real Lasallian. But looking back, I realized that by following this path, I have been truly blessed.

Perhaps one of the greatest blessings has been my discovery and rediscovery of Lasallian spirituality and how well it resonates with me. I find being Lasallian such a practical way of being a spiritual person:

- Seeing with the eyes of faith,
- Making no distinction between my work and my spiritual life.
- Not striving to be a superstar but doing things “together and by association.”
- Living not just for myself but being of service to others.
- Not worrying about my own salvation but focusing on how I give service, to others whether in the classroom, in the office, or through the exercise of my administrative functions.
- Focusing on relationships, person to person.
- Being concerned for the least, the last and the lost.
- Striving for excellence, not for itself, but for greater service.

These I find very meaningful in my Lasallian life. Many times, I seem to have been running away from this call to be Lasallian. But I realize now that being Lasallian and being myself are inseparable. I am truly convinced that even if I did not become a Brother, I am a Lasallian and a full participant in the Lasallian Mission. In fact, by not becoming a Brother, I am able to contribute more.

In this Lasallian work, I am able to bring in my experience of work in social development, banking and finance, professional skills I would not have gained had I stayed with the Brothers. My experience as a husband and father also “colors” my administrative, management and leadership style, enabling me to temper some decisions made by Brothers according to my experience of family life.

Being Lasallian continues to be a daily struggle. And yet, it is a struggle I choose to engage in because it is a part of who I am and who God calls me to be, wherever I am.

6th Testimony

John is alive!!! My personal history.

Myra A. PATAMBANG
District of Philippines

In 1719, the entire community of Rouen was taken aback and saddened by the news that “**the saint is dead!**” Now in 2003, Lasallians all over the world proclaim, “**John is alive!**” For his enticing story had pierced through the countless hearts of young men and women, whose stories of faith, hope and love resonate the Founder’s. His life and spirituality is alive in many forms and diverse faces today. And I join the voices echoing the song of John’s beautiful music. This essay is an attempt to reverberate that sound as I look into my personal stories.

Nearly a decade ago, I never knew that I was stepping on the grounds of the Patron Saint of all Teachers, neither did I realize that there is such an honored title in the Catholic Church. It was heart-warming to have discovered that my grandest dream of becoming a teacher would find affirmation in the paragon of Christian Education.

The quintessence of teaching ministry had been made manifest in the life and times of John Baptist de la Salle. He exemplified the authenticity of being a servant of God. He constantly sought His divine will, relentlessly responded to His call and unremittingly discovered concrete ways of translating his profound faith in the realm of education. His legacy lives on and the splendid story of John Baptist de la Salle had reached the farthest ends of the world. For over three hundred years now, thousands of his disciples from all walks of life had been moved by the inspiring thoughts and compelling decisions of this so great a man, a servant of God.

His experience of God's compassionate, providential love had been so vivid and that it transcended language and horizon. And it reached and hit me through. I thank God each time I reminisce having heard the story of De la Salle. God is so good to have allowed me participate in the Lasallian Studies Summer Institute of 1997 and 1998. It was then that my own journey in the Lasallian tradition had taken its first pace.

I could very well remember sifting through the thin pages of Alfred Calcutt's biography of the Founder. Little by little, the story of the man behind the saint unraveled before my very eyes. What a wonderful mesmerizing story! O how I got so in love with him! What struck me wasn't his ingenuity, neither his outstanding managerial skills. It was his person, his simply being a man, his sincerity, his sense of abounding sacrifice and his devotion to the Lord. These are just some of his traits worth emulating.

God is omnipresent. This teaching had long been ingrained but only made sense when I learned how the Founder translated it in the parlance of day to day striving. Awareness of and living in God's presence made me entrust even the ride I was hoping for to pass by or to augment the few pesos left for a fare. Entrusting the tiniest or sometimes the insurmountable troubles to the Lord makes me walk in hope and dream of a better day ahead. De La Salle had taught his disciples an unwavering trust in the Lord's wisdom. Truly, amidst all tribulations and crises that were hard to fathom, he simply abandoned his life to the omniscient caring God. It was a life of total submission to the Lord!

It has been six wonderful years now since that summer of getting to know the sage. As I look back, I could sense some bits of personal transformation. I have learned to recognize the Lord's presence in many events of my life. Last week wasn't so good it seemed. A very serious problem was creeping up my entire family, my husband was sick, I had reports to accomplish, our office got badly hit by the heavy rains, papers and other important documents were soaked, my assistant had an emergency leave and meetings await, all these in three days had brought an anxiety of beggar's description. Everything seemed to be getting down the drain. Yet God was there, for in the midst of my exhaustion, generous and caring people came to offer a hand. He provided an immediate ride as I hurried home at dusk. He was there when I was bursting into tears as my friend patiently listened, when a note of consolation was sent by Brother Kenneth, when I woke up the following day suddenly feeling alright. All is not lost after all. I am just so grateful that St. La Salle had taught me to see things in the eyes of faith and to attribute all things to God. True enough the Lord's empowering presence ceaselessly sheds light and conquers the darkest moments. All we need is to pause and remember His ever loving presence. The Lord doesn't just watch from a distance. He is right there and then!

It is by His grace that I have come to embrace this ministry. I don't see myself in any other sphere of work. De La Salle's principles of teaching, effective classroom management, utmost devotion to the sacred duty of bringing the young to Jesus, his careful manners of reproaching the offenders and the zeal he had invested in the formation of his young teachers are only some of the things I could readily cite as I see myself involved in and dedicated to this noble task of teaching. Being in the Religious Education and Lasallian Formation, I'm certain that this is where God wants me to grow and reap some fruits to be offered for those whom I am called to serve. The epitome of a Christian teacher in the person of John is God's gift to the Church. And in which I am extremely grateful about.

Taking on the courage to be a Lasallian teacher, certainly I need to be nourished by God's word and be sustained by a life of prayer, and constancy and integrity. There is a lot of pruning needed, to painstakingly do a lot of introspection, to welcome the dread of losing the things and identity I might have masked myself with, and to go on exposing the self to the purifying heat of the sun. But when time comes that I am tempted to focus on my iniquity, faith would tell me that despite everything and because of what I am, God loves me still (and always!) so dearly. This is one beautiful thing I am confident about. The goodness of the Lord permeates the entirety of every human being and He is patiently bearing with me.

All these years, teaching had become my life. It is a gift yet it isn't easy. Especially nowadays that learning the techniques in the actual setting is far different from merely reading theories. The student ten years ago is not the same as the one we meet now in the classrooms. The technology is far more advanced that it poses a great challenge to every teacher. Students who have access to the internet or who are exposed to the ever-creative media may not be easily

motivated by traditional methods of teaching. Hence, it is even more challenging now than ever.

So it remains not easy (and it won't ever be easy) to be a teacher, if I am serious about being an educator in its deepest sense. More than the challenge of coping with the demands of competence is the challenge to offer genuine service to today's youth, most of them, at risk. They need teachers who are not only equipped with knowledge and skills, but teachers who are willing to listen to their stories and understand them sincerely.

Our students need mentors who can walk with them in their journey toward a meaningful life, teachers who are caring enough to guide them in their search for answers to their endless questions, teachers who can understand what they are going through. Our students today are confronted with the constant dilemma of choosing between right and wrong, between fleeting fashion and maintaining a sense of propriety, between peer pressure and parental approval, between authentic freedom and permissiveness, instant gratification and a sense of sacrifice.

And how does the teacher handle a student who is always absent, impolite and really unbecoming in his/her manners? In most of his writings, St. La Salle would remind his teachers by saying: "*You are God's ministers... you are accountable for the souls of your students...*" So how do I handle a "problem student?" It isn't easy, but the invitation is clear: I have to be God's minister to him/her.

I'd rather say, to be in this ministry is rewarding. Despite the difficulties, there is this joy that comes from within, it comes from the conviction that I take part in *a very sacred mission of teaching minds, touching hearts and transforming lives*. Indeed, every student is a letter to which Christ dictates in the heart of every teacher. Every student is a gem entrusted to our care. How can I just waste such a precious gem?

To be a teacher takes a lot of love, a lot of faith, courage, and hope that somehow, in God's time and by His grace, this world will be a better place to live in. The seeds of goodness that are sown will soon sprout, and the flowers will bloom. Amid the darkness, light may still shine through these young people. We can only do so much. Our efforts may never be enough but I believe that no matter how tiny a pebble is, it shall create ripples when it is thrown into the waters. Teaching, then, is a ministry. It is a mission, a sharing in the life and works of that ONE ITINERANT TEACHER who is the source, the agent and the goal of every meaningful life on earth.

LIVE JESUS IN OUR HEARTS!

7th Testimony

The Lasallian charism as seen and lived.

Yanick Chamberland-Richer
young Lasallian from Quebec

Recently I was asked what I had gained for myself by organizing Quebec 2002 and working so hard on behalf of an international movement of Young Lasallians... It was difficult for me to answer because I am not able to dissociate my Lasallian activity from my own nature. In fact, I cannot understand my life outside the context of the Lasallian Family; I AM now Lasallian, and each day a little bit more so...

Obviously all that has a story behind it... and mine began in 1990 with my entry into St. Raymond's Public Secondary School when I was 12 years old. I was intrigued by a message over the public address system inviting all stamp-collectors to a meeting. It was then that I met Richard Brochu who was in charge of this little group. Quickly the little group became for me much more than a stamp collectors' club. The constant support of the Brothers'

Community of St. Raymond and especially of Brother Richard, his wholehearted love of the young, his tendency to give me responsibility and to have confidence in me, slowly - but surely - developed my feeling of belonging to the Lasallian Family and forged my identity. To pick up the expression of La Salle, there was no turning back...

If my "birth" in the Lasallian Family took place in my native village, one could say that I had a real baptism of fire 5,000 kilometers to the south... In fact, in 1992, I took part in a continental meeting of Young Lasallians in Mexico; where, at the time, I could speak neither English nor Spanish. Handicapped therefore by my tongue, I opened my child's heart... and contact was immediately established with young Lasallians from everywhere, and through them the Lasallian spirit "spoke" to me.

On my return we completely 'renovated' the stamp club in order to give it a mission in the truly Lasallian tradition of "together and by association". Then, quite naturally, the young Lasallian of St. Raymond that I was, contributed to the birth of the Young Lasallians of French-speaking Canada, paired with the Quebec participants in Paris '97; and later, the young Lasallian of French-speaking Canada appealed to his brothers and sisters from all over the Institute to take a further step in association during Quebec 2002.

This short history brings out several aspects of my understanding of the Lasallian charism and how I live it today. First of all, it is undeniable that the movement of Young Lasallians is for me the favoured place where I can express and live the Lasallian charism. The movement expresses itself in many ways, going from the most practical to the most general, as well as from the local to the national and even the international.

Without taking up all the aspects of the movement, I would like nevertheless to lay stress on what is for me a crucial element: com-

munion in diversity. I have had the good fortune to participate in several meetings where young people and Brothers from many nationalities and diverse horizons came together. On each occasion, I was as much touched by the richness of the multiple and diverse gifts, initiatives and responses of the Lasallians to the needs and poverties of today's world as by the extraordinary inter-relationships which were woven, by a fraternity which you felt could be touched, by the same spirit which accorded unity, direction and communion...

This spirit of communion is no stranger to the rich spirituality which has been nourishing Lasallians for more than 300 years. As for me, it is now ten years that Lasallian spirituality has been challenging and fascinating me. I regularly nourish myself from the writings of the Founder and of Lasallians of yesterday and today. The discovery and the deepening of Lasallian spirituality also arrives through exchanges and sharing in community. In this respect, my nearest community at present is composed of young people from Quebec, the Basque Country, Mexico, France and the USA. We make use of all the modern means of communication and the power of prayer and of "being-one", to form a true community of faith, fraternity and service.

These last three aspects, together with general openness, form the consistent and challenging whole for the young of today, beginning with myself. This harmonious co-existence between the spirit of faith and the spirit of zeal developed by St. John Baptist de La Salle continuously leads me to a transformation, to a complete conversion... Sensitive to the cries and murmurs of the children and the young of my world, I am spurred on by the Presence of God and confidence in His holy Providence.

Nevertheless, this does not lead me along a single and solitary path, but, on the contrary, the Lasallian charism opens my eyes to the special needs of each and to the richness of all the possible talents

and responses brought by my brothers and sisters. The Lasallian charism opens my heart and my hands to make my journey together and by association with my brothers and sisters for the construction of the Civilization of Love.

This makes me a happy young man, joyful and full of hope, who feels himself the trustee of a precious gift, the Lasallian charism, and co-responsible for the Lasallian Education Mission.

8th Testimony

A gift in the depths of our hearts.

Karin McCLELLAND-ANDERER

and Michael ANDERER-McCLELLAND.

“As the understanding of charism deepens, ever new ways of carrying it out will be discovered.”¹⁵⁴ As ministers, as Lasallians, and as a married couple, our lives have been turned inside out by our understanding and experience of the Lasallian charism. Before we share our understanding of the Lasallian charism, it is important to share with you our experience: our personal stories and dreams and how they have been woven together in our marriage with De La Salle’s dream and God’s dream for the world.

Associated Together.

Our Formation.

We are Lasallians.¹⁵⁵ In fact, we were Lasallians long before we even

¹⁵⁴ Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ: a Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life*, N° 31.

¹⁵⁵ According to the terminology of 43rd General Chapter (Circular N° 447, p. 5-7), we are non-intentional, unvalidated Lasallian partners. We gratefully acknowledge Julie Michels, principal of Totino-Grace High School in Fridley, MN for leading us to the awareness of the use of this terminology.

knew each other. Karin is an alumna of St. Mary's College in Moraga, CA. Upon graduation in 1990, she became one of the first women to join the Lasallian Volunteer Movement, to share fully in community life with De La Salle Christian Brothers, and to work with the Brothers in the Bronx, NY. Karin continued her formation experience, living, working, and studying in Lasallian ministries in the Bronx for seven years. In 1997, Karin became the Director of the Lasallian Volunteer Program for the US-Toronto Region, a position which she held three years. During this time, Karin completed the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies, an intensive formation program covering the life of De La Salle, Lasallian educational philosophy, and Lasallian spirituality.

Mike is an alumnus of La Salle College High School in Philadelphia, PA. After graduating from college and teaching for a couple of years in public school, Mike received the habit of the Christian Brothers in the Fall of 1992 in the Baltimore District. For the next four years, Mike lived in community with the Brothers, studied theology, taught high school, and worked as a campus minister before entering the novitiate in the Fall of 1996. In 1997, after completing the novitiate and taking temporary vows, Mike joined Brothers William Johnson and Patrick Cassidy in founding the third San Miguel Middle School in Camden, NJ. In the winter of 1998-99, Mike chose not to renew his annual vows, but remained teaching at San Miguel and living in a house in the neighborhood of the school.

Our Commitment to God.

Throughout our 20s and early 30s, many people - Brothers and lay - nurtured our Christian and Lasallian vocations. It was during this time that the Lasallian charism, a gift of the Spirit given to us by God, was activated within us through our encounters with others, especially the poor. We felt called by God as Lasallian ministers. We

struggled with that call everyday, but we could not ignore the charism that burned in our hearts. On a daily basis, we recommitted ourselves to our developing vocations.

Our vocations took on a new character in December of 2000 when we celebrated our wedding in the company of many family and friends including many Lasallians. Our marriage is a sacrament to each other and to our growing family. We experience God's presence everyday in our union with each other and our son. The call to be married is a gift for which we are very grateful. However, we also want to point out that our marriage is also a sacrament to the world, a sign of God's presence and God's love to others. We are fully committed to both aspects of our marriage, as a sacrament to each other and as a sacrament to the world. We witnessed to that commitment at our wedding. In addition to a wedding vow, we also expressed a vow of discipleship:

- *Most Holy Trinity,*
- *We acknowledge before You and Your People*
- *Our responsibilities as Christians,*
- *And we freely choose to live the values of the Gospel*
- *In our home, in our relationships to others,*
- *And in our service to those in need.*
- *We see our particular gifts to be faith, vision and compassion.*
- *Together and by association as Christians,*
- *And in the spirit of John Baptist de la Salle,*
- *We especially wish to devote our energies and resources*
- *To the educational service of the poor*
- *And to the advancement of lay leadership and the role of women within the Church.*

We struggle with our call to marriage everyday, but we cannot ignore the charism that burns in our hearts. On a daily basis, we recommit ourselves to our developing vocations, as a sacrament to each other and a sacrament to the world.

The Form of Our Association Today.

In the Fall of 2000, shortly before we married, we moved to Chicago, IL. Karin studied theology at Catholic Theological Union and Mike began working as a teacher and administrator at San Miguel Middle School of Chicago, founded in 1995. Today, Karin serves on the Leadership Team of the Christian Brothers of the Midwest District as the Director of Shared Mission and Formation. Mike continues to work at San Miguel School Back of the Yards Campus as Director of Community Outreach and Adult Education. After living in an apartment for two years, negotiating the first stages of our marriage, we chose to move into the Lasallian Community associated with San Miguel School in the Spring of 2002. In May 2003, our first son, Jack Edward, was born and welcomed into our community. Currently, the three of us live with 9 other Lasallians: Brother Edwin Dupré, FSC (72 years old), 3 Lasallian Volunteers, and 5 other Lasallians (all former Lasallian Volunteers between the ages of 26 and 45 years old). We are men and women; we are married and single; we are lay and consecrated religious; we are old and young and in between; we are teachers and administrators and cooks and sisters and brothers and mothers and fathers. The community house is located in a low-income neighborhood across the street from San Miguel School Back of the Yards. Among our students and in the neighborhood, our community is known as “the teachers’ house.” While living in community under one roof is not part of every Lasallian vocation, nor of most marriages, it is for us the most authentic response we can give today to God’s presence in our lives and the Lasallian charism that burns in our hearts.

We hope that sharing our stories with you provides a context for our understanding of charism that we have.

The Lasallian Charism.

The word “charism” and all of its related words like charisma and charismatic are problematic for thousands of Lasallians. The word has multiple meanings derived from a variety of fields including leadership, cultural and spiritual movements, personality theory and theology. We believe “charism” in its theological sense might offer a useful category in which to reflect on one’s personal gospel and Lasallian vocation, whatever form it might take.

Charism as Divine Gift.

A charism is a divine gift, tangibly experienced by an individual, a group, or the Church. In our personal vocational journey, a charism does not lie outside of us. It resides in the depths of our hearts and gives meaning and direction to our life. It is in the depths of our hearts that God has given us all that we need. Charism, a gift of God, is a way to describe the spiritual resources that lie in the depths of our heart. When we listen attentively, a charism leads us to our life’s passion and joy.

Activation through Encounter.

Gifts that we receive vary in their meaning and significance. Frequently, a gift may sit unnoticed on a shelf or in a drawer, part of the background of our life. At other times, we infuse gifts with meaning because of particular events, people or changes in our lives that cause us to look at things differently. We may move a particular gift from a drawer to a more central part of our lives, a more significant place in our household.

It is the same with a charism. The Lasallian charism, a gift from God, can lie dormant in the depths of ones’ heart. A teacher can work at a Lasallian ministry for years and not be particularly inter-

ested in or animated by all this “Lasallian stuff.” Then, all of a sudden, an event, a conversation, an encounter with a colleague, student or stranger can spark a fire that activates the charism.

In our own lives and in our accompaniment of others, we have witnessed the activation of the Lasallian charism most often through two types of experiences: an encounter with a Lasallian whose life is a clear witness to the Gospel and to the Lasallian mission or an encounter with a person or persons living in poverty. In both cases, space and time for conversation with others, reflection and prayer about the encounter provides the fuel for the spark to ignite into flame. What was given by God is activated through encounter with others.

The Charismatic Impulse.

What does being touched by the charism impel us to do? What are the visible effects of the Lasallian charism ignited in the depths of our hearts? Again, our personal experience and our accompaniment of others reveals a consistent pattern. It is so predictable that the pattern is easy to miss.

A person on fire with the Lasallian charism is impelled toward three things: a deeper awareness of God’s presence in every person and in every event of their lives, a longing to be united with others touched by the same charism, and a zeal for educational service and solidarity with the poor. Faith, Community and Service. Usually, as the Lasallian charism overtakes the heart, one of these experiences is stronger, acting as a doorway to the other two. One person might be drawn to look for other faith-driven individuals interested in the education of children; another might be zealous for the service of the poor and social justice; yet another might be drawn to a variety of prayer experiences and faith-sharing. Eventually, under appropriate circumstances, all three experiences - faith, community and service - become significant in the life of a Lasallian.

“Mutual Charismatic Esteem”.

Where do we go from here? How can this new understanding of charism enlighten our future as Lasallians? What barriers and pathways lie before us as we navigate the transformation that God intends for our world, the Church, the Institute, and ourselves?

We have two suggestions. First, fully embrace the teaching of Vatican Council II on the role of the laity in the Church. Of course, implied in this suggestion is our belief that we, De La Salle Christian Brothers and Lasallian colleagues both, have not fully embraced this teaching. Specifically, we must recognize that the lay vocation is a complete vocation inclusive of all aspects of one's life whether as a consecrated brother or a consecrated spouse and couple or a single person. The lay vocation is a total “yes” to God's call, a yes that demonstrates a total commitment of one's life “as far as we are able and as God will require of us.” It is not helpful to speak of a Brother making a total commitment of his life to the mission of the Gospel and the Institute in his vocation, while implying that a lay colleague is not making a total commitment of his or her life to the same mission because they have “other” commitments. In our vocations, in response to the charism alive in our hearts, we have made a total commitment of our lives. We are married; we are parents; and we are Lasallians. One part of our vocation does not exclude or diminish another part of our vocation. In fact, each part enhances the other, just as the vow of celibacy or poverty may enhance the vow of association for the educational service of the poor for a consecrated brother. Yes, on a daily basis, we must prioritize, make decisions, act on some things and not others, and try to strike a balance in our lives. But striking this balance is not the work of just married couples. It is the human work of all Lasallians. The Lasallian charism is operative in us, fully and completely though in a different form than a consecrated brother. This leads us to our final suggestion.

In 2002, the Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life published *Starting Afresh from Christ: a Renewed Commitment to the Consecrated Life*. In one section, it comments upon the current context of increasing participation of the laity in the charisms of various founders and foundresses. “In this new climate of ecclesial communion, priests, religious, and laity, far from ignoring each other or coming together only for a common activity, can once again find the just relationships of communion and a renewed experience of... mutual charismatic esteem.” That final phrase - mutual charismatic esteem - holds a critical message for us today. We must continue to strive to cast out fear and suspicion about the future, and rest in mutual charismatic esteem. Charisms are born of the Spirit for the good of all. We invite you to honor the Lasallian charism that burns in the hearts of your fellow Lasallians: the lay person honoring the brother in his vocation, and the brother honoring the lay person in his or her vocation. We promise to do the same.

Conclusion: Making the Lasallian charism live today

*The originality of De La Salle has been to enlighten by theological reflection the concret realities of the existence of the Brothers; to teach them to interpret their real life as the place of the outpouring of the Word, of the adoration of the Mystery, of the creative action of the Spirit.*¹⁵⁶ (Michel Sauvage, fsc).

When one speaks of charism.

Several contributions have shown that the use of the word charism is relatively recent, even in ecclesiastic language. For a long time expressions such as “graces”, “spiritual gifts” or “gifts of the Spirit” were preferred to it. Charism is linked to “community”, “ministry”, “vocation”, “mission”, “identity”, “spirituality”, “itinerary”, “spirit of the Institute”.

It was possible to contrast “charismatic gifts” and “hierarchical elements”, or at least look at the apparent contradictions between the two terms. There is also reference to the charism of the religious life, the charism of the Founder, of the Institute... What is clear is that the charism or charisms are not something that the individual produces himself. Charisms are always received from Another, to be in the service of the People of God, to make them grow or to help them to grow.

The same charism can also be shared by several persons at the same time, as well as at different times in history; it gives life to institutions, animates them. Every human being is in a position to receive a charism.

Charisms are not reserved to the beginnings of the Church, nor the Lasallian charism to the beginnings of the Institute. They are not met solely in the Institutional or hierarchic Church, nor solely among the

¹⁵⁶ Brother Michel Sauvage. Lasallian Studies N^o. 10: *La vie religieuse: esprit et structure*. Recueil d'articles. *Le statut votal*. Rome, May 2002, p. 77.

Religious members of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It is even a characteristic of a charism to “escape” from those who would put it within the framework of structures or an organisation...

The authenticity of a charism in a person or a group can be verified by what it gives to the People of God in its growth.

The Lasallian charism: a gift of the Holy Spirit.

The action of the Holy Spirit does not end. His presence is permanent and His action pushes us forward into the future. His gifts become incarnate in persons, throughout the History of Salvation, from the time of Adam up to the Prophets and going through the leaders of the People such as Moses or Solomon. These same gifts can also be carried by an entire people, such as the Jewish People, when they transmit the values which constitute an essential part of our identity as Christians: fidelity, listening, monotheism, the sense of History, being open to the universal, the sense of God’s Justice which is based on love and forgiveness.

This same Spirit can be heard in the New Testament. It speaks to us of liberty, vocation, new ways of opening up, discovering, arriving at God, by putting us in the schools of Jesus Christ. This action is at the service of the People of God, so as to bring about definitively the coming of the Kingdom of God which was inaugurated by the coming of the Son of God among men. Charisms - and therefore the Lasallian charism - take their place in this history. They are linked to the Body of Christ, that is to say to the People of God on their way towards their full completion in God.

A charism is the choice of the Lord and not the will of the faithful. It is given by God and not “earned” by the person who receives it; it is granted for the benefit of the community, in the service of communion. It does not divide. On the contrary, it builds.¹⁵⁷ Being a gift of the Spirit, the charism always exceeds our expectations and our precautions. It makes us go where we did not expect to go. It makes us look in directions that we

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Ga. 5:22-23,25.

did not anticipate. It imposes itself by the fruits it bears. The story of Peter and the centurion Cornelius¹⁵⁸ is a good example to make us understand its manner of acting in our lives, in those of Lasallians, in our societies, in our Church, in our communities.

The Lasallian charism only reaches its full meaning when rooted in the faith: faith in the Salvation of God, faith in the sense of History, faith in the presence of Christ, faith in his return, faith in the path traced out by the Gospel and shown by Jesus-Christ, but also faith in those with whom we are associated, faith in the young who have been confided to us, faith in the total education of the child as a path of liberation and salvation, both for them and for the societies in which we live.

The charism is fruitfulness and creative strength. It causes new things to be born and to live, things sometimes surprising to our eyes or to our hearts which have got too used to things. It gives life.¹⁵⁹

Our personal, community, educational activity is in line with the movement of the Spirit which has animated the History of Salvation since the beginnings of the world. It is up to us, after having recognised the charism which has been given to us, to make full use of its creativity today, by a concrete commitment. We need to be at the disposal of the free and unpredictable action of the Spirit. It is the spirit of faith which will help us to find the paths of renewed fidelity, starting out from life. This action of the Spirit is not delivered at the whim of each individual, because it is verified by the “Body” of the Society, to use the wording of the early Lasallians. There is no authentic “inspiration” without commitment. Neither is there creativity without interiorization or making it part of our inner being. Interiorisation is liberation from the superfluous, the non-essential, appearances, in order to apply oneself to the essential: to make salvation come about in the children who have been confided to us.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Acts. 10 & 11: 1-17.

¹⁵⁹ See the article by Brother Michel Famrée, in LASALLIANUM. Bulletin Semestriel d'Information. N°6, Mai 1966: *Le charisme de Fondateur*, p. 5-107.

¹⁶⁰ See Cahier Lasallien 55 (CL 55). Brother Michel Sauvage. *John Baptist de La Salle and the Foundation of his Institute. “Consecrated Brothers” in the Church for the World - Our heritage*, p.126-154. Rome, 2001.

The history of this charism down through the years - how John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers with him and after him understood “Lasallian charism” - has led us to the conclusion that the charism was in “association for keeping gratuitous schools”; today, taking into account the changes in society which have come about down through history, we say it is in “association for the educational service of the poor”. But the aim remains essentially the same¹⁶¹: it consists of a specific type of education, of school, of education centre; aimed at a specific and easily recognised public: “the children of artisans and the poor” of Monsieur de La Salle’s day and to day the young and especially the poorest. It is also an education project which takes into account the uniqueness of those for whom it is destined. Beyond structures, which are always incidental, there are persons: educators, the young, children, parents, past-pupils, etc., who come into contact with each other and who work to create a new world, to bring about “salvation”, in circumstances which, at first sight, seem very far removed from those which saw the birth of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The Meditations for the Time of Retreat - a founding story.

It is also “a story of the charism”, become an inspiration for Lasallians, which took on the appearance of a founding story: the Meditations for the Retreat. This story of our origins is the same as the one that could be told by every authentic Lasallian when he re-reads the reality of his vocation as educator and of his itinerary with the young. The fact that these Meditations, when they were printed for the first time by Brother Timothée, were proposed for the use of all persons who are employed in the education of the young.¹⁶² is not without its importance for our present reflection.

¹⁶¹ One can have the impression, it is true, of a dilution of the strength contained in the expression “to keep gratuitous schools” when one changes it to “educational service of the poor” since the word “school” has a ‘concrete’ face which is missing from the expression “educational service”.

¹⁶² Title page of the first printed edition: *Meditations for the Time of Retreat, for the use of all persons employed in the education of youth & especially for the retreat made by the Brothers of the Christian Schools during the holidays.* By M. JEAN BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE, Doctor of Theology, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

One can read the Meditations for the Time of Retreat in different ways: as a reflection of the spiritual experience of John Baptist de La Salle, or as the spirituality of an educator, or yet again as a commentary on the formula of vows from the time of our beginnings. We can equally read them as the story of an exodus: that of the children who are liberating themselves in order to reach salvation, while being guided by prophetic men and women... so many fruitful and inspiring ways of reading them.

The reading which I propose here is rooted in the understanding of the Meditations for the Retreat as a “story of salvation”, a story which we are continuing to write, a story in which the Lasallian charism is at work.

John Baptist de La Salle lives this story starting out from his spiritual, ecclesial, social world... the fruitfulness of his undertaking is that this world is anchored in a spirituality of the Incarnation and a biblical spirituality as well as in his faith: faith in God who wishes all people to be saved, faith in the teachers who are capable of being “the ministers and the ambassadors of God” for the young people who have been confided to them, faith in the young person who “however little intelligence he has, knowing how to read and write... is capable of (achieving) everything”¹⁶³

A history of salvation.

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* start out from the recognition of the God who speaks in the situation of the poor. It is there that He shows Himself and it is from there also that he makes His call. This can be seen in Meditations 193 and 194. They highlight faith (or the spirit of faith), an attitude which consists in knowing how to discover God present in the exercise of the profession, in meetings with the young, with parents, with colleagues. In the opposite direction the profession can be understood as the place where God speaks and calls, and also as the place where one responds to his call. The Meditations end with the presentation of the accomplish-

¹⁶³ *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*: Part two, 6, art. 3, p. 161. (Oeuvres Complètes: CE 16,2,21).

ment of God's plan, thanks to our commitment and our so-operation. In the vocabulary of the period the word used is salvation. It is a salvation brought about on Earth (MTR 207), in the social, human, cultural and Christian realities of the young, *now grown up* and in Heaven (MTR 208), with the vision of a humanity reconciled with its God and with itself.

Thus the human community, divided and dispersed from the beginning (vagabond children are referred to), and which finds itself facing daily insecurity, is gathered together in the end and lives in peace and openness towards others.

This transformation takes place thanks to the zeal of those to whom God has confided His work, that is to say thanks to creativity in the service of the young for this plan of salvation. It is all the intermediate meditations which speak both of structures (the Christian school) and persons (teachers, families, children): Meditations 195-198 and 203-206.

At the heart of this process are Meditations 199 & 200: this work is done in the Church and serves to build the Church, presented by John Baptist de La Salle, with St. Paul, as being the People of God who have grown. This capacity for carrying out this work is a gift of God given to those he has chosen to carry out His work of salvation. Then in Meditations 201 and 202 we have: We are not the owners of the mission which is ours; this mission as well as the means of accomplishing it, does not come from us but from God. Taking up again the words of the Apostle Paul, John Baptist de La Salle calls this mission a *Ministry* (a very audacious expression in the very clerical Church of his time), and again with St. Paul, he defines this ministry as a *charism* in the service of the People of God, especially the children of artisans and the poor.

Monsieur de La Salle presents the History of the Christian school as a path of salvation for the children and the teachers; it is in line

with the History of Salvation: from the Creation to the End of Time. It is a History which still reflects all the tension associated with the coming of the Kingdom of God: salvation in the process of happening, “already there and not yet...”

The History of Salvation, in and by the Christian school, is the place where the Lasallian charism shows its fruitfulness. These Meditations say how this charism transforms the lives of the children, the teachers, the families and the society where it is at work. We find there an essential aspect of every charism: it consists of a dynamism and not a system. The charism is a force which moves, and not a rampart or fortress which provides shelter behind structures.

In the world such as it is.

The Meditations for the Time of Retreat again bring out another aspect of the charism: **it operates in the world such as it is.** For the Brothers at the time of our beginnings, this was the world of the artisans and the poor of the French cities of the end of the ‘Grand Siècle’, the world which is presented in Meditations 193,2 and 194,1 as well as in the first chapter of the Rule, a world which was not able to construct itself according to the wishes of God:

One of the main duties of fathers and mothers is to bring up their children in a Christian manner and to teach them their religion. But most parents are not sufficiently enlightened in these matters; some are taken up with their daily concerns and the care of their family; others, under the constant anxiety of earning the necessities of life for themselves and their children, cannot take the time to teach to teach their children their duties as Christians.¹⁶⁴

Consider that it is a practice only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all

¹⁶⁴ Meditations for the Time of Retreat: MTR 193,2,1.

over like vagabonds as long as they are not able to put them to some work; these parents have no concern to send their children to school because their poverty does not allow them to pay teachers, or else, obliged to look for work outside their homes, they have to abandon their children to themselves.

The results of this condition are regrettable, for these poor children, accustomed to lead an idle life for many years, have great difficulty adjusting when the time comes for them to go to work. In addition, through mixing with bad companions they learn how to commit many sins which later on are very difficult to stop, because of the persistent bad habits they have contracted over such a long time.¹⁶⁵

But **across this world travels the power of the Spirit** who shows himself by means of the Lasallian charism. This world then finds meaning and paths of salvation open for it through the education of children. There is a striking contrast between these two first Meditations which present the situation of the society of John Baptist de La Salle's day: a world where mastery of their destiny was escaping entirely from the artisans and the poor, a world which was heading towards ruin, loss of meaning, division; a world losing itself in a fateful repetition of the same gaps, the same errors, the same impossibilities; and the pacified reconciled world, to which the young, having grown up, accede in the two last Meditations:

...that the children whom you instruct are well-behaved, know their religion well and live a life of piety.¹⁶⁶

...when they grow up and you see them living with justice and piety keeping free from evil associates and performing good deeds... which will maintain them in the practice of good. *Their perseverance in piety*

¹⁶⁵ MTR 194, 1.1 See also the *Common Rules* 1,4 & 6. It will be noticed that thus, the Rule of Life of the Brothers does not begin with "spiritual" or ascetic considerations, but by an analysis of the situation of the families of the artisans and the poor, by a confrontation with this reality. It is not a question of saying how to flee the world but of taking it as it is in order to change its meaning, by sowing forces of hope and of life.

¹⁶⁶ MTR 207, 2.2.

will be a great cause of consolation to you *when you call to mind the results of their faith* and of your instruction, knowing *that this makes them dear to God and places them in the number of his elect...* as will be clearly apparent in the virtuous lives they continue to live... religion and piety are increased among the faithful, especially among the working class and the poor...¹⁶⁷

...A great number of his students in possession of eternal happiness, for which they are indebted to him by the grace of Jesus Christ!¹⁶⁸

In re-reading these texts written by Monsieur de La Salle, one is struck by the strength of how he was affected by this discovery of the reality of the world of the poor, in his soul, his heart, all his being... how much he was touched in the depths of his being by the despair which filled this world and enclosed it, almost in an institutional manner, in failure, while dehumanising it.

This, it seems to me, is **another of the characteristics of the Lasallian charism** lived by the men and women of today. Making the education system function, even in a very conscientious way, is not sufficient to make one a Lasallian. Like John Baptist de la Salle and the first Brothers, **we need to be “seized” in one way or another, by the needs of the children, the young, the poor of our time and of our people** and to have found there the fundamental reasons for our commitment to changing this reality.

In order to lead them to God.¹⁶⁹

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* begin and end with the name of God. This God, qualified as good, is the first word of the two pairs of Meditations which frame this narrative: “God is so

¹⁶⁷ MTR 207,3.

¹⁶⁸ MTR 208,2.

¹⁶⁹ For all this development see the book by Lucien LEGRAND: *Le Dieu qui vient. La Mission dans la Bible*. Paris, Desclée, 1988.

good...”¹⁷⁰ The formation which is proposed in these Meditations, as in all the writings of John Baptist de La Salle, wishes to be an education which takes charge of all the dimensions of the person of the child or young person: human, intellectual, practical, social, cultural, spiritual, Christian (this latter being taken for granted in the world of Monsieur de La Salle). These are valuable instructions for directing the Lasallian charism.

The transcendental dimension of the Lasallian project is essential in putting it into action. In order to **live the Lasallian charism to its full, one must believe that there is something in every person, young person, child, which goes beyond man**; that there is an ‘other-world’ component of his humanity, even if we cannot or dare not name it...

John Baptist de La Salle was a Christian. His spirituality, his writings, his thought, his whole life were permeated with the New Testament and more especially with the Gospels. His vision of the child and the young person is profoundly marked by the Augustinian anthropology and theology of his era; the education project which he put in place with the Brothers, at the end of the 17th Century, for these children and young people, was obviously a project founded on the evangelical values which were in line with the values of contemporary society and culture. Monsieur de la Salle did not in any way foresee the later developments which the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools underwent in other countries, in other cultures, in religious contexts other than that of the Roman Catholic Church.

If we confine ourselves to the doctrinal area, the thought of John Baptist de La Salle is perfectly clear. It is sufficient to re-read the Preface to the 1st part of *The Duties of a Christian* (in continuous prose), in which he presents the signs by which one can recognise a

¹⁷⁰ MTR 193,1.1 & MTR 207,1.1.

Christian and where he defines Catholic identity.¹⁷¹ This is a theme which he takes up again in the 1st Instruction of his catechism by questions and answers.¹⁷² One again finds these criteria of belonging in Instruction 15 of the same catechism: “The *members of the Church*, where one again distinguishes between Catholics, living or dead members (the excommunicated, those who are in a state of mortal sin), heretics, schismatics, but also where one comes across pagans, idolaters and infidels, all those who have never been members of the Church”.¹⁷³ The pagans “are those who live without any practice of religion”¹⁷⁴, the idolaters “those who adore false gods and who give to a creature the honour which belongs to God alone”¹⁷⁵, and the infidels “those who do not recognise Jesus-Christ as the saviour and redeemer of men, such as the Jews”¹⁷⁶; all these people “are not members of the Church, because they are not baptised and because they are not even externally united to Jesus-Christ, since they do not profess the doctrine which Jesus-Christ has taught.”¹⁷⁷ This is an identity which functions both by membership (of the Catholic Church with its rites and its doctrine), and by exclusion: it defines those who do not belong to the Church, and whose salvation, according to the theology of the time, is in doubt.

Furthermore, John Baptist de La Salle in his catechism, in the Instructions on the Judgement and on eternal life, does not speak about the fate of these pagans and other infidels.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷¹ *The Duties of a Christian*. Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, Landover MD., 2002, (in continuous prose) - Vol. 1, part, p. 18 - 22.1. (In *Oeuvres Complètes* DA 0,0,1 to 18).

¹⁷² *The Duties of a Christian* (in a question and answer format) - Vol. 2, part 1, p. 238-239. (In *Oeuvres Complètes*: DB 0,1 in its entirety with the differentiation between Christians, Catholics, heretics, schismatics.

¹⁷³ DB 1, 15, 6 in *Oeuvres Complètes*; In *The Duties of a Christian*, op. cit., p. 264.

¹⁷⁴ DB 1, 15, 7 in *Oeuvres Complètes*; In *The Duties of a Christian*, op. cit., p. 264.

¹⁷⁵ DB 1, 15, 7 in *Oeuvres Complètes*; In *The Duties of a Christian*, op. cit., p. 264.

¹⁷⁶ DB 1, 15, 7 in *Oeuvres Complètes*; In *The Duties of a Christian*, op. cit., p. 264.

¹⁷⁷ DB 1, 15, 8 in *Oeuvres Complètes*; In *The Duties of a Christian*, op. cit., p. 264.

¹⁷⁸ DB 1, 18: On the particular and general Judgement; DB 1, 19: On the eternal life of the Blessed and the eternal death of the damned.

Besides, the accounts with regard to the establishments of the Brothers in Protestant areas (the Cévennes, Alès, Nîmes) after the repeal of the Edict of Nantes (1685) give useful indications about the concrete attitude of John Baptist de La Salle with regard to persons (parents, pupils) of a religion other than Catholic.¹⁷⁹ The story of the young Dutch Calvinist who was helped and converted by Monsieur de La Salle,¹⁸⁰ and that of the Chevalier d'Armetat, a German Lutheran, to whom in the end the Founder gave the habit,¹⁸¹ thus revealing a very open approach to persons who were not Catholics. Here one touches upon one of the characteristics of the approach of John Baptist de La Salle, which was common to many pastors of his period; the difference between doctrinal principles, which were affirmed very vigorously, even to the point of intransigence, and practical attitudes towards persons, which always showed a behaviour thoughtful about personal development and very respectful towards the convictions of each person.

Fidelity to the Founder.

We are well aware that **fidelity to John Baptist de La Salle** cannot be literal.¹⁸² It cannot be a question of simply transposing as they are, into our world of today, the affirmations or the choices of Monsieur de La Salle, which corresponded to his world and his period. He did not know either our secularised cultures, or the

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 554-562 and 581-584 or CL 8 p. 49-54 and 68-69); Maillefer, CL 6, Ms. Reims p. 209-212. During a riot against the Brothers in Vans (the centre of French Calvinism, if such exists!), the latter took refuge in the oratory and prayed together. Later they told Monsieur de la Salle who replied that "he thanked God that the Brothers had recourse only to God in their difficulties, and that they had used only the arms of prayer.": *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, by Dom Élie Maillefer, St. Mary's College Press, Winona, MN, 1963, p. 122.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Maillefer. CL 6. Ms. Reims, p. 116-119: *The life of St. John Baptist de La Salle*, *op. cit.*, p74-75.

¹⁸¹ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 667-670. (CL 8, p. 125-127). See also Bro. Yves Poutet: CL 43, p. 303 to 309.

¹⁸² Cf. THE BROTHER OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS IN THE WORLD TODAY (Declaration of the 39th General Chapter 1966-1967): FIDELITY to the FOUNDER.

multi-cultural or multi-religious contexts in which we live today. For him the only acceptable religion, for the teachers as well as for the pupils, was the Catholic religion.

It is an essential fidelity that the Founder teaches us, a fidelity which transcends space and time: it is fidelity to the Spirit. It is this Spirit which has led the Institute of the Brothers, in the course of its history, to be present in regions totally unknown to Monsieur de La Salle; it is the same Spirit which has led the Institute to adapt to new social, political, religious elements... arising from the evolution of peoples and the changes of history. **Fidelity to the Spirit is, in the case of John Baptist de La Salle, coupled with another fidelity: fidelity to the young people confided to us, such as they are.** This implies respect for their convictions, attention to all their needs and recognition of the presence of God in them and in their destiny. Meditation 37, in particular the 3rd point, is very revealing in regard to this attitude.¹⁸³ This is an essential element of the Lasallian vision of man and especially of children and young people, a vision outside of which it is not possible to claim to be authentically Lasallian.

This fidelity to the Spirit and to the young, leads me to say that to live the Lasallian charism today it is not necessary to be a Christian or a believer or to belong to one of the religions named by Transcendence; but it is necessary to be at least convinced that one

¹⁸³ *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts.* You should look upon the children whom you are charged to teach as poor, abandoned orphans. In fact, though the majority of them do have a father here on earth, they are still as if they had none and are abandoned to themselves for the salvation of their souls. This is the reason God places them as if under your guardianship. He looks on them with compassion *as being their protector, their support and their father* and it is to you that he entrusts this care.

This God of goodness places them in your hands and undertakes to give them everything you ask of Him for them: piety, self-control, reserve, purity, the avoidance of companions who could be dangerous to them. And because God knows that of yourself you have neither enough virtue nor enough ability to give all these things to the children He has entrusted to you, he wants you to ask Him for these blessings for them frequently, fervently and insistently. In this way, thanks to your care, nothing will be lacking to them that they need for their salvation. (Meditation 37. 3rd point).

wishes to go and ought to go with the young people confided to us beyond the earthly, economic, political and cultural horizons or even beyond humanist solidarity. Living this charism implies that we have ourselves discovered the spiritual dimension of man, of humanity, of creation and that we wish to share it with children and young people; that we are capable of “giving meaning” and transmitting it, explicitly or implicitly.

This means that if the Spirit has led Lasallians to where they are today in more than eighty countries, so diverse culturally, religiously and politically among themselves; as with the France of Louis XIV, if the Spirit leads many of our colleagues, non-Christians and even in the case of some, non-believers, to say “our Founder” when speaking of John Baptist de La Salle; if this same Spirit confides to us these children and young people, such as we know them, this must really have a significance which imposes itself on us. The mission itself remains unchanged: it is that we lead these children and young people to God, by paths which are those of the Spirit, while treating them with the greatest respect and not intending to make them like the little French children of Reims or of Paris who went to the École Saint-Jacques or that of the Rue Princesse in the 17th Century!

Fidelity to those confided to us by God.

The approach of John Baptist de La Salle, in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* especially, **underlines the personal relationship established between the teacher and the young.** In his Meditations he rarely calls them “pupils”, still less “schoolboys”, but refers to them as “your disciples”, and especially by the phrase “those who are confided to you”, “those who have been given to you by God to instruct” etc. It is not a question of “youth in general”, but of these young people there, those the educator meets every day, those he

can call by name, those he can put a face on, those with whom he has a bond, those who might figure in his prayers. **It is this kind of educational attitude which belongs to the Lasallian charism.**

It is a question then of “those children there”: those of this time, of this place, of this culture, of this class... those children and young people who are there before me, here and now. **The Lasallian charism, lived by the educators, operates in the direction of this unique group of children and young people.**

Four reasons appear more particularly in the writings of John Baptist de La Salle: these children are in the presence of God, they are the Temple where His Holy Spirit lives, they are the dwelling-place of Jesus Christ and finally even the children of God Himself:

When they wish to train children in practices pertaining to bodily care and simple modesty, they should carefully lead them to be motivated by the presence of God, as St. Paul did when he made the same point with the faithful of his time, saying that their modesty should be known to all because the Lord was near to them. In other words, children should do these things **out of respect for God in whose presence they are.**

When teaching children and training them to observe the practices of decorum that refer to their neighbour, teachers should urge them to show others those signs of consideration, honour and respect appropriate to **members of Jesus Christ and living temples of God enlivened by the Holy Spirit.**¹⁸⁴

Faith, which should animate you, *should make you honour Jesus Christ in their persons*, and make you prefer them to the wealthiest children on earth, because **they are the living images of Jesus Christ our divine Master.** By the care you have for them, show how truly dear they are to you.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, Lasallian Publications, Romeoville, IL. 1990, p. 4.

¹⁸⁵ MF 80, 3, 2 (Saint Nicholas).

You are by your state obliged to instruct poor children. Do you love them? **Do you honour Jesus Christ in their persons?** With this in mind do you prefer them to those who have a certain amount of material wealth? Do you have more concern for the former than for the latter?¹⁸⁶

This saint is a great example of what you should do for the children God has entrusted to you. It is a queen who made her first work to do what is essential in your state. Consider this an honour for you and **look upon the children God has entrusted to you as the children of God Himself.** Have much more solicitude for their education and instruction than you would have for the children of a king.¹⁸⁷

It is significant to note that **the experience of God described by the Meditations for the Time of Retreat is centred around the child**¹⁸⁸ and not around God or the teacher. During the annual retreat, the Founder proposes that the Brothers should concentrate on the person of those who have been confided to them, towards whom their ministry is directed, since their relations with God go through their relations with these children.

These are, generally, poor children, children who have strayed and whose salvation is in danger, because they cannot know God. They give way to dissipation, they mix with bad companions and “a great number of them will be abandoned”.¹⁸⁹ They remain children with

¹⁸⁶ MF 133, 3, 2 (St. Margaret of Scotland).

¹⁸⁷ MF 133, 2, 2 (St. Margaret of Scotland).

¹⁸⁸ In the *Meditations for the time of Retreat*, the children are referred to 163 times: children, pupils, disciples, youth... One needs to add 57 expressions which describe the children as being “those who...”: “those who are confided to your care, those that God has confided to you, those that you have to instruct...” that is a total of 220 occurrences. It is the most frequent “character” of these Meditations. “The children, your disciples, youth, your pupils, those who are confided to you...” are present in all the Meditations and in all the points (except MTR 199.2). The Meditations where they are most present: Meditation 203 on correction (24 occurrences), Meditation 208 on the reward that a Brother should expect in heaven and Meditation 205 on giving an account to God of the work you have done with the young (21 occurrences each).

¹⁸⁹ MTR 193. 2.2.

their limits. Their environment could be an obstacle to their salvation. Their human and eternal salvation is in question: they have no future.

John Baptist de La Salle underlines the poverty of the situation even where childhood is concerned, which arouses this particular worry on the part of God and therefore a response on the part of the persons He has called to do His work. This poverty is the normal condition of these children. It is here that God manifests his goodness by having these children enter the paths of salvation.

The Lasallian school is the place where the salvation of God can reach these children, because it is put within their reach. There they acquire the wisdom of God and learn to live the things which concern their salvation. They change their behaviour, give up impurity, lies, vengeance, immodesty, lack of respect; they seek to do good actions such as loving their enemies, always telling the truth, respecting others and in the first place their parents and their companions. They become detached from riches. They learn profane subjects: reading, writing, arithmetic, which prepare them for useful employment when their parents wish it. The school keeps them away from bad companions, teaches them to occupy all their time with things useful to their salvation. There they learn habits dear to the heart of God. Finally they will be able to appear one day before God without a wrinkle, stain or blemish and thus proclaim His glory and call their teacher to it.

Even more than situations met or lived, **it is these children which set fire to the hearts of Lasallians**, to the point of “being led to sacrifice themselves and spend their entire lives giving them a Christian education and procuring for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next”.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ MTR 201. 3.2.

The features of the Lasallian teacher.

When speaking of the work of the Brothers in his Meditations for the Retreat, John Baptist de La Salle states by means of the different “titles” he gives to teachers, what the special Lasallian charism is. The ‘face’ of the teacher is thus drawn by its signs and behaviour more than by a priori definitions.

The teacher is first of all a “Saviour”, a title which is found in all the Meditations for the Retreat. He is also an “Instructor”¹⁹¹, a designation to be found in fourteen of the Meditations (the exceptions: MTR 202 and 204); and again a “Minister” in eleven Meditations (the exceptions: MTR 194; 203; 204 & 208)¹⁹².

The teacher is a “Saviour” in instructing the children in their religion. His Ministry is at the same time both prophetic and institutional. It fits into the instant by correction and in the long term by the administration of the spiritual benefits which God has confided to him for the salvation of his disciples.

At the heart of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat: the great gift of God.

Here we refer to Meditation 201: *“Of the obligations of those who instruct, to have much zeal to fulfil well so holy a work.”* A priori, this heading does not seem to lead towards the charism and yet the

¹⁹¹ In the language of John Baptist de La Salle, the word “instruction” employed on its own, always refers to instruction in the Christian truths (teaching and practice). See in *Lasallian Themes* N° 3, vol. 1, p. 178, the theme “EDUCATION - TO BRING UP” by Brother Jean-Louis Schneider.

¹⁹² The most frequent identities (more than 60 occurrences) are those of “Saviour” and “Instructor”, reminding us that with John Baptist de La Salle he who “instructs absolutely” is always someone who teaches the spirit and the practice of the Christian religion. The following series (more than 30 occurrences) is equally remarkable: the teacher is Minister, Corrector, Administrator or Steward. The correction and the administration appear as aspects of the Ministry. Of the four other titles (between 14 and 19 occurrences), three of them - guardian angel, leader, watchman - have an accompanying saviour. The other - teacher - is attached to “instructor”.

Meditation begins with an essential reminder of the text of the 1st Letter to the Corinthians on the charisms: the gifts for the common good. Without using the word “charism”, John Baptist de La Salle goes on to speak of the singular gift which he, the Brothers and all those who will be associated with them down through the years, have received from God. It is a gift which is given in two inseparable ways:

- by teaching: instructing the children, announcing to them the Word of God and bringing them up.¹⁹³
- by bearing witness by your conduct with regard to the children who are confided to you.¹⁹⁴

Like St. Paul, John Baptist de La Salle had a charismatic vision of the mission of the Brothers (the Lasallians):

Reflect on what St. Paul says, *that it is God who has established in the Church apostles, prophets and teachers*, and you will be convinced that He has also established you in your work. The same saint gives you another expression of this when he says that *there are diverse ministries but there are different operations, and the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in each of these gifts for the common good*, that is to say for the good of the Church. *One receives by the Spirit the gift to speak with wisdom, another the gift of faith by the same Spirit.*¹⁹⁵

Such an approach rests on an understanding of the plan of God, this God who is so good that He wishes all men to arrive at the truth and be saved.¹⁹⁶ “God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools”,¹⁹⁷ and “it is He who has established you in your work”.¹⁹⁸ God is behind the origins of education

¹⁹³ MTR 201. 1.1.

¹⁹⁴ MTR 201. 1.2

¹⁹⁵ MTR 201. 1.1

¹⁹⁶ MTR 193. 1.1 & 193. 3.1.

¹⁹⁷ MTR 194. 1.2.

¹⁹⁸ MTR 201. 1.1.

institutions as well as the men and women who run them. John Baptist de La Salle speaks of gifts which are accorded for “*the common good*, that is to say for the good of the Church.”¹⁹⁹ It should be noted that the language of Monsieur de La Salle with regard to the Church is very modern, closer to the “People of God” highlighted by the Second Vatican Council than to a hierarchical Church organisation. (cf. The *Duties of a Christian* as well as many Meditations). In listing the gifts, he retains only those which concern the vocation of teacher directly: prophet, teacher, the gift of speaking with wisdom, the gift of faith, while in the complete quotation St. Paul speaks of “*apostles...*”, of “*the gift of healing the sick, of speaking different languages*”, of “*the gift of interpreting them*”.²⁰⁰ His choice is therefore deliberate.

This charism of teaching and of witnessing, is therefore rooted in Transcendence. It is received from Another. The Meditation is insistent on this aspect: “It is God who has called you and destined you for this work and has sent you to work in His vineyard”²⁰¹ echoing Meditation 193.²⁰² **It is also a charism for a service, in order to be useful to the People of God.**

The Charism of Fraternity.

This is how I like to describe the gift which is given to Lasallians: the gift of fraternity, because it is our way of being unique in our relations with the young people who have been confided to us. Towards 1684, when the teachers from Reims and surrounding areas, with whom John Baptist de La Salle was living, began to become aware that they constituted a “body”, that their aspirations were becoming more apostolic, that Monsieur de la Salle had made the choice of being in complete solidarity with their enter-

¹⁹⁹ MTR 201. 1.1.

²⁰⁰ 1 Cor. 12.28: translation of Lemaitre de Sacy.

²⁰¹ MTR 201. 1.2.

²⁰² God kindles a light in the hearts of those destined to announce His word to children (MTR 193.1,1). You, then, whom God has called to this ministry... (MTR 193.2,2); you are the ones He has chosen... (MTR 193.3,1).

prise by renouncing his patrimony, they decided, together, to call themselves “*Brothers*”.²⁰³

Fraternity or Brotherhood is what characterises the relations of the Brothers among themselves, with families, with the young. The Rule of life of the Brothers has happily taken up this perspective in the chapter on community life:

The Brothers are determined, with one spirit, to be brothers among themselves, brothers to the adults they deal with, and older brothers to the young people confided to their care, (Rule of 1987, article 53).

The middle of the 1st Point of Meditation 201 describes **this charism of fraternity. It is made up, first of all, of the gift of teaching.** The terms employed by Monsieur de La Salle: “to instruct the children, *to announce the Gospel* to them, and to bring them up in the spirit of religion” to talk about this aspect of the gift received, all refer to training in the faith.²⁰⁴ I do say “training”, because for him faith is as much practice as speculation and one aspect cannot exist without the other. This tells us the importance he attaches to the spiritual dimension of being.

In the world in which he lived and in which the French youth of the time of Louis XIV lived, this dimension could not be other than Christian, and indeed Roman Catholic. It is for us, led by the Spirit - the same Spirit which has led Lasallians to be present in so many cultures, spiritualities and different countries - to uphold the right, in the contexts which are ours, to the spiritual dimension which is suitable to the young people confided to us and which truly respects them. John Baptist de La Salle calls this “teaching them to live well”²⁰⁵, that is to say “in a manner worthy of God”²⁰⁶, or “living with justice”²⁰⁷.

²⁰³ Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Two, p. 186 (CL 7 p. 240-241): “This name teaches them the excellence of the duty they have assumed, the dignity of their state, and the holiness proper to their profession. It tells them, that as Brothers, they owe each other mutual proofs of tender but spiritual friendship, and that considering themselves as the elder brothers of the children who come to be taught by them, they should exercise this ministry of charity with truly loving hearts.”

²⁰⁴ See for example MTR 194. 3,2.

²⁰⁵ RC 1,3.

²⁰⁶ MTR 198. 2,1.

²⁰⁷ MTR 207. 1.

The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility in general are a good example of this “living well” as seen by John Baptist de La Salle. A passage in the first chapter of the first part of this work shows us at the same time both the grandeur, the scope and the consequences of this conception:

In a person’s deportment there must always be something sedate and even majestic. You should take care, however, that there be nothing in this which suggests pride or arrogance of spirit, for such attitudes displease everyone. What will produce this sedateness is the simple modesty and wisdom that as a Christian you display in all your conduct. You are truly of noble birth, since you belong to Jesus Christ and are a child of God, the Supreme Being. Hence in your exterior there should be nothing vulgar. Everything in you should denote a certain air of nobility and greatness, a reflection of the power and majesty of God whom you serve and who gave you being. This dignified appearance should not flow from arrogance or lead you to prefer yourself to others, for every Christian wishing to act according to the laws of the Gospel should show honour and respect to all others, considering them as children of God and brothers of Jesus Christ and himself as one burdened with sin, for which he should constantly humble himself, placing himself beneath everyone else.²⁰⁸

Such an approach demands “the ardent zeal” of those who wish to live it. A good modern synonym for “ardent zeal” would be, it seems to me, the word “creativity”. When we consider what Monsieur de La Salle indicates as attitudes to be lived, when he speaks of zeal this is really what he is talking about: **being creative so that the formation of those who have been confided to us may be total**, that all the dimensions of their person should be involved. We are inventive and practical, generally, in the areas of profane teaching; are we as much so when it comes to the spiritual lives of the young, such as they are?

That too means being Lasallian.

The other side of fraternity lived as a charism, is personal witness, the

²⁰⁸ *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, op. cit. p. 9-10. (*Oeuvres Complètes* RB 101.1.20).

commitment of one's life to procuring the salvation of those who have been entrusted to us, because, as is rightly said in MTR 202. 3,2:

It is easy to conclude from these examples that your zeal for the children who are under your guidance would be very imperfect if you exercised it only by instructing them; it will only become perfect if you practice yourselves what you are teaching them. Examples make a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words, especially for children, since they do not yet have minds sufficiently able to reflect, and they ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than what they hear told to them, above all when the teachers' words are not in harmony with their actions.

At the beginning of this same point of MTR 202, John Baptist de La Salle stresses that the example of the teacher ought to support his instructions, and that this is one of the principal signs of his zeal. In the first point of MTR 201, he indicates which are the virtues which bear witness to the fraternity lived by the teacher: charity, zeal, patience, the acceptance of contempt and persecution, even as far as giving one's life.²⁰⁹ You have to put into this all *the affection of your heart*. Here again it is a question of zeal. It is not merely a question of spoken witness, but rather of a commitment of the whole person of the educator towards those confided to him by God.

Give tangible proof.

The theme of personal commitment, associated with zeal, continues to be developed in the second point of this Meditation 201:

Act in such a way through your zeal that you give tangible proof that you love those whom God has entrusted to you... By procuring for them the help of instruction, and the grace he has given you to

²⁰⁹ MTR 201. 1,2.

instruct them and educate them, so that they may one day become heirs of the Kingdom of God...²¹⁰

Give tangible proof, is a very strong expression from the pen of John Baptist de La Salle. In a century like his and in a culture as rational as that of “Classical France”, where everything had to be mastered and controlled, especially the display of feelings²¹¹, these suggestions take on a special dimension. **Our fraternity ought to be able to be recognised by *tangible proof*.**

John Baptist Blain, the biographer of Monsieur de La Salle, describes a scene in the life of the Founder which illustrates this approach. John Baptist de La Salle is at recreation with the young pupils of the boarding school of Saint-Yon, during the last period of his life:

In adapting himself in every possible way to win them all for Jesus Christ, he became a child with these children and often joined their recreation. On their part they were delighted to see him and put him in their midst and surrounded him, in order to add to the pleasure of hearing him and looking at him, that of showing him their affection, **because they loved him and he had their hearts.** Then the holy man, after having used the occasion to give them some short instructions appropriate to their age, would, to their regret, withdraw in order not to disturb their innocent amusements.

If one among them was not very docile or had committed some fault, he would take him aside and mixing exhortations, reprimands and affectionate encouragement, would usually leave him changed or affected.²¹²

²¹⁰ MTR 201. 2, 2

²¹¹ See *The Rules of Christian Decorum, op. cit.*, Part Two, Chapter 5: Amusements (P. 84-96); Chapter 6: Visits, especially ‘How to present yourself to the person you are visiting’ (P. 97-108); Chapter 7: Meetings and Conversations (P. 109-135); Chapter 9 (P. 136-138). ‘How to act while walking in the streets and when travelling in a carriage or on horseback’. Everything is marked by reserve, distance, absence of direct contact, even when one “embraces”: it is done ‘by each presenting the left cheek to the other, without touching or kissing it.’: *The Rules*, Part 2, art. 6, p. 100. See: *Oeuvres Complètes*: RB 206,3,439.

²¹² Blain, *op. cit.*, Book Three, p. 725. (CL 8 p. 165).

Canon Blain was a man of the 18th Century, with all that that implies as an expression of a sensibility hitherto restrained. He shows clearly the relations established between Monsieur de La Salle, already elderly, and the young boarders, who were probably closer to his world than the children of the parish schools. One finds expressions such as: “delighted to see him... the pleasure of hearing him... to show him their affection... they loved him and he had their hearts... mixing... reprimands with affectionate encouragement... changed or affected”. In the Lasallian educational approach, in the manner of living fraternity, “the heart” plays an important role:

You can perform several miracles, both in regard to yourselves and your work. In your own regard, by an entire fidelity to grace, not letting any movement of grace go by without responding to it; in regard to your work, **by touching the hearts of the wayward children** entrusted to your care by making them docile and faithful to the maxims of the holy Gospel and to their practice, pious and recollected in church and during prayers and devoted to the performance of their duty in school and at home. Such are the miracles which God gives you the power to perform and which he asks of you.²¹³

To give your life so that they may have life.

The 3rd Point of Meditation 201 begins with a powerful recalling of the Formula of Vows of the Brothers:

Since your ministry has for its purpose to procure the salvation of souls, the first concern you ought to have is to procure this goal as far as you are able.²¹⁴ ...I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me. (Formula of Vows).

“To procure the salvation of souls” and “to procure the glory of God” are expressions equivalent to the same reality. The expression “as far as

²¹³ MF 180. 3,2 Saint Hilarion. See also the excellent article by Bro.Jacques GOUSSIN: *COEUR - TOUCHER les COEURS* in *Lasallian Themes 1*, Theme No. 12 (FSC, Mother House Rome. 1993).

²¹⁴ MTR 201. 3,1.

I am able”, is present in both texts. For a Brother, the Lasallian charism is at the heart of his consecration to God, thus giving him a unique strength.

In this 3rd Point, there is also question of a very modern reflection on God. He is someone who loves, cherishes, has affection. He suffers from seeing men prisoners to sin, without being able to free themselves. He too has zeal for the salvation of men. He is not a hieratic God, who keeps His distance from the lives of men. On the contrary He becomes involved in their lives by sending them His Son.

In this point, which is very consistent with all that has gone before, the Mission is described in terms of its aims and commitment. The aim: the salvation of souls; the commitment: to take care of their conduct and instruct them, the two aspects of the charism met in the 1st Point (but in reverse order): to bear witness in leading the children, to teach them.

The end of the point makes reference to the model of Jesus the Good Shepherd, who gives his life for his flock. This Gospel, or rather these parallels, are found again in MF 33 with John 10: 11-16, MF 56 (Luke 15: 1-10) as well as in MTR 196.1 (Luke 15: 4-5) and MTR 201.3 (John 10: 10). The emphasis of John Baptist de La Salle on this theme is significant in regard to his vision of the teacher and of the latter's relations with God and with the young. **The Good Shepherd definitely seemed to him to be the figure who best expressed his concept of the teacher. This point is a structuring image for the Lasallian charism** and is a key to interpretation both for educational relationships and for the behaviour of the teacher or those in the educational institution itself, as well as for its organisation, its ways of functioning or its regulations.

The conclusion leaves no 'escape route' and confirms the essential position of this Meditation 201 in understanding Lasallian charism:

For this had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you have to instruct, when you were led **to sacrifice yourself and**

to spend your whole life giving these children a Christian education and procuring for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next.²¹⁵

Charism and the education project.

To be a Lasallian, or to claim to be a Lasallian, is often, in the first place, to see oneself in an education project and to try to put it into action. **The lived Lasallian charism is achieved through a unique educational practice.**

Obviously, the *Conduct of Christian Schools* as well as Chapters 7-11 of the Rule of the Brothers (1718) make known to us both the broad lines and the details of this project from its origins. But one finds in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* quite a number of elements from the Lasallian education project, with some fundamental and enlightening points of emphasis.

Thus, Meditation 194 which describes the Christian school as a place of salvation and liberation: there one teaches gratuitously and purely for the glory of God. The children are kept there all day. They learn their religion and how to read and write. Their future is kept in mind: they will be capable of working when their parents wish them to do so. The 2nd point of this Meditation emphasises how much the transcendent dimension of the child is taken into account in Lasallian education. He insists in particular on evangelical practice and behaviour.

Meditation 206 - which belongs to the group of two meditations in which one “gives an account” to God of the work carried out for Him - takes up three various aspects, helping the teacher to examine how he has accomplished his mission, especially in regard to the priorities he has established in his work: the total formation of the child or young person, or simply the learning of things immediately useful; the management of his time, his personal formation.

The rapid glance we have given at these Meditations for the Time of Retreat has also allowed us to pick out some important aspects of the

²¹⁵ MTR 201. 3,2.

Lasallian Education Plan: practical attention to the young, the quality of our relations with them, our interest in those most in difficulty, concern for total formation, taking into account all the dimensions of the person as well as the future of the young person.

Gratuity: a gift of God and a wound.

This gift of God: “to teach gratuitously...” is at the centre of the 1st point of Meditation 194. It transforms a reality of being in trouble, lived by the children: the absence of an occupation, bad companions, bad habits, into a reality of being saved: learning useful things, preparation for life, evangelical habits. The situation lived by the parents in regard to their children and by the children in regard to their future is transformed by the gratuitous sudden emergence of the God of salvation.

The phrase needs to be taken as a whole: “the Christian schools where teaching takes place gratuitously and purely for the glory of God”. First of all we are not in the context of a purely educational service which has to be gratuitous, but rather in that of *the glory of God*, that is to say a domain which goes beyond our human horizons. Furthermore, it is a question of a “Christian school” in which we teach gratuitously. Here it is a question not just of a unique institution but of an educational project recognisable, among other elements, precisely by gratuity.

This gratuity obviously concerns the persons who put it into practice: the Brothers vowed “to remain in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who are associated to keep, together and by association, gratuitous schools...”. They have committed themselves personally to accomplishing this vow, since they added: “even if I am obliged, in order to do so, to ask for alms and to live on bread alone”²¹⁶. This was in no way just a formal commitment, we know; it was filled with a whole history: Paris, Saint-Sulpice, the court-cases, the various foundations.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Formula of vows of the original Brothers.

²¹⁷ The work by Bro. Bruno ALPAGO: *The Institute in the educational service of the poor*. Lasallian Studies N° 7 (FSC, ROME, 2000), is very enlightening on this theme of gratuity as lived by the Institute.

The understanding of this commitment, in varied and sometimes contradictory political, economic and cultural contexts and also the resulting responses, have not always been simple and unanimous, nor have they always been very clear. And yet this remains one of the sources of the spirituality of the Lasallians. This forms part of the heritage because **gratuity for John Baptist de La Salle was not in the first place based on gratuity in the transmission of knowledge but on the gratuity of the salvation of God**, on the concrete possibility for the children and young people of reaching the plenitude of their vocation of children of God. The gratuity of the Lasallian school was not so much concerned with the poor, who in any case had access to the charity school which was the Christian school, as with the rich, or at least those who seemed able to pay a teacher. For Monsieur de La Salle, it was all children, without distinction, who had a right to salvation. And since for him, salvation arrived through the Christian school, lived to the full, it was the entire school, with all its educational opportunities (profane and Christian), which ought to be “gratuitous”.

The Brothers and the Founder were well aware that gratuity in itself was not enough to ensure that the children would have access to salvation by means of the school - they also needed to be present! This is the entire subject for reflection in Chapter 16 “Absences” of the *Conduct of Christian Schools*. This also implies that the school needs to be a quality school: useful and attractive for all, of a good standard, preparing them for life, integrating them into society. The Sunday academy set up by the Brothers in Paris towards the end of the 17th Century, shows that it is this aspect of the Lasallian school - that is to say, giving young people mastery over their lives, another way of saying “getting for them the means of salvation within their reach” - which is the determining factor in the application of gratuity. The latter is not concerned only with one age category (children from 7-13), because those who frequent the Sunday academy are apprentices aged 15-20; nor with the classical type of school institution: the “academy” was not a school. But in both cases the entire person of the child or young person is taken into account, keeping in view the practical details appropriate to each age group since, besides the training which involved trades, the academy also provided a social, human and Christian

formation adapted to these young people. Moreover, the example of the boarding school of Saint-Yon is a clear indication that Monsieur de La Salle did not confine himself to “financial” gratuity as if it were an intangible absolute.²¹⁸

Gratuity is a call and a constant reminder, as well as a requirement which has no meaning except in its truly Lasallian aim: to act in such a way that salvation may be brought within the reach of the children who have been confided to us. This gratuity should also take concrete, personal and collective forms, which cannot be defined once and for all and need to be renewed, redeveloped, reinvented according to places and times, political and social and even cultural and religious contexts. We must not confuse gratuity and poverty; we must also remember that gratuity is only possible when there are sufficient resources for accomplishing the mission²¹⁹, as it presents itself today and in the place where we are (and not as it was in the 17th or 19th Centuries). Gratuity affects both Lasallians and Lasallian institutions.

To see oneself as a Lasallian, to be seen as a Lasallian, in the service of the education of the poor, today, is to take into account, in one way or another, this dimension of our vocation, because **gratuity belongs to the very substance of the Lasallian charism**. Not to be able to give a clear and definitive response to this question is without doubt one of the most difficult to accept of all our poverties. The charism is not a magic effect which will transform reality without our having to worry about how it will happen. And no matter what the manner in which we live it, **this gratuity ought to be an open wound in the heart of each Lasallian, as for all the body of associates, and remain thus**.

²¹⁸ We know also how much the evolution of French society and that of its schools have affected the history of the Institute from the 19th Century onwards. When the school became “an affair of state”, as well as becoming a political and ideological issue, gratuity became a hostage in the debate: when the Brothers came to run public schools, they refused to let the local municipalities make them charge fees for some of their pupils, and when the State decided that the primary schools would become secularised and gratuitous, the Brothers were obliged to withdraw from them and open schools which were free (politically), Christian but fee-paying!

²¹⁹ To speak in a down to earth manner: “if the school is gratuitous, it means however that there I *‘someone’* in the background who pays”.

For this purpose the goodness of God has provided...²²⁰

The Lasallian charism is intimately linked to the education of children and young people, especially the poor; it is deployed in the world such as it is, with its shadows and lights, its baseness and its grandeurs, its appeals and its silences, a world that the Lasallian knows is led by the Spirit towards its completion, a world where this Spirit is at work.

The Lasallian charism implies that one's heart has been gripped by the needs of the poor and the young and that one has a certain vision of the child and of the man: a being greater than he seems, a being who has come from God and who returns to God, a being who is also inhabited by the Spirit, in whom God is present and who ought to be led beyond himself.

Fidelity to the Founder is fidelity to the Spirit and to the young people that God has confided to us, in a personal relationship where the teacher is the model, the witness, the saviour, the "minister" of God in the revelation of his Mystery to children and the young.

This Lasallian charism is a charism of fraternity, constituted by the gift of teaching and bearing witness, of being close to the young, of accompanying them in their own discovery of life, in the mastery of their destiny, in the knowledge of their liberty, in their meeting with God. This fraternity is shown by sensitive signs that we love these young people, such as they are, by the gift of our own life, in the image of the Good Shepherd of the Gospel.

The Lasallian educational project is the path by which the charism shows itself and is lived, a project that the associates run together and which is their responsibility, a project where gratuity is present.

The various accounts which we have read earlier, converge in a very significant manner, in spite of their diversity, towards some essential points, characteristics of the Lasallian charism, as it is lived nowadays: attachment to the person, indeed to the personality of John Baptist de La

²²⁰ MTR 197. 1,2.

Salle, the recognition of his itinerary, to the point of sometimes using the same expressions as he did, and also of quoting some of his “strong” texts, on education, children and the young, the ministry. We can also detect a **great attachment to the “Brothers”**, especially to those who knew how to awaken the “Lasallian” vocation, or who continue to bear witness to it. **The specific place of the Layperson in the expression of the Lasallian charism today** is strongly emphasised. It permits talks and a quality of exchange which would not otherwise be possible. **The concrete Mission to the young**, sometimes even because of one or other unique young person, is an obvious source for the development of the Lasallian charism in each one. **The need for formation**, so as to deepen this charism, is mentioned by several.

The personal relationship with Jesus Christ, in prayer and meditation on His Word, or on His itinerary, appears as a determining factor, as well **feeling the presence of God** which allows us to recognise God at work in our lives, our institutions, our relationships, our ministry.

The charism resides always in the living Body of those who are associated and who continue to associate themselves in order to procure the salvation of children and the young, of the poor and of the little ones far from salvation; those who, in doing this, procure the glory of God by following, with those confided to them, the paths which the Spirit opens before them.

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Lists of publications

Lasallian Studies

This collection is not published periodically. Its main goal is to deepen and spread the living tradition of Saint John Baptist de La Salle by dealing with multiple aspects of the lasallian world, education and catechesis, pedagogy and spirituality, Church and society, History and other challenging questions...

- N° 1 RIGAULT Georges, *Les temps de la sécularisation, 1904-1914*, Rome, 307 p., 1991.
- N° 2 AA.VV. *Les temps de la sécularisation, 1904-1914. Notes et Réflexions*, Rome, 206 p., 1991.
- N° 3 TRONCHOT Robert, FSC, *Les temps de la sécularisation, 1904-1914. La liquidation des biens de la Congrégation des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, Rome, 272 p., 1992.
- N° 4 GIL Pedro María, FSC, *Three Centuries of Lasallian Identity - The Relation between Mission and Spirituality throughout the History of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Rome, 392 p., 1998. [Original in Spanish, French translation available].
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- N° 7 ALPAGO Bruno, FSC, *The Institute in the Educational Service of the Poor*, Rome, 455 p., 2000. [Original in Spanish and French translation available].
- N° 8 SAUVAGE Michel, *Vie religieuse laïque et vocation de Frère*, Rome, 313 p., 2001. [Spanish translation: *Vida religiosa laica y vocación de Hermano*, Bogotá, 364 p., 2003].
- N° 9 BÉDEL Henri, FSC, *An Introduction to the History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. 19th Century, 1805-1875*, Rome, 2004. [Original in French and Spanish translation available].
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- N° 13 Conseil International d'Études Lasalliennes, *Le Charisme Lasallien*, Rome, 1st printing, June 2005, 264 p. 2nd printing, October 2005. [English & Spanish editions sent to press].

LASALLIAN ESSAYS

New collection of short studies, eventually written by several authors, with less critical apparatus than the Cahiers lasalliens or the Lasallian Studies

- N° 1 SCHNEIDER, Jean-Louis, FSC, *Un certain air d'élévation et de grandeur. Société, Civilité, École et Culture dans les Méditations pour le temps de la retraite de Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*. 102 p. Rome - 2002.

Cahiers Lasalliens - Cahiers Lasalliens

It is a non-periodical publication. Its aim is a scholar research on John Baptist de La Salle's life, writings and the origins of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. This collection may be closed with a critical biography and a corpus of all his writings in a CD-Rom with a reasearch engine.

All the writngs of the holy Founder: in *Œuvres Complètes* by the Lasallian Studies office in Rome, 1993. The complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle published by *Lasallian Publications*, Christian brothers Conference (USA/Toronto Region) 1988-2002. The letters LP, below, stand for these publications.

- 1 - F. FLAVIEN-MARIE (Michel SAUVAGE, FSC), *Les citations néotestamentaires dans les Méditations pour le temps de la retraite*, Présentation, examen critique, introduction et notes. XLVIII-106 p. - 1959.
- 2 - F. MAURICE-AUGUSTE (Alphonse HERMANS, FSC), *Les vœux des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes avant la Bulle de Benoît XIII*, Première partie: Les faits et les textes, 141 p. (out of print) - 1960.
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- 4 - F. BERNARD, *Conduite admirable de la divine Providence, en la personne du vénérable Serviteur de Dieu, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle...* Édition du manuscrit de 1721. XXV-105 p. - 1965. LP 1996.
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