



The Fragile Hope of a Witness

The Itinerary of Brother Michel Sauvage
(1923-2001)

LASALLIAN STUDIES NO. 18

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Michel Sauvage
(1923–2001)

Michel Sauvage, FSC and Miguel Campos, FSC

With the collaboration of
Robert Comte, FSC
Paul Grass, FSC
Diego Muñoz, FSC

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS
ROME

2014

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International Council on Lasallian Research and Resources
Lasallian Studies No. 18
Via Aurelia, 476
00165 Rome, Italy

Translation:

José Martínez, FSC
Paul Grass, FSC
Léon Lauraire, FSC

Cover and illustration:

José David Berbesí Botero, FSC

Layout:

Luigi Cerchi

ISBN: 978-99920-70-08-6

DL: AND.173-2014

Published by:

Publicacions Universitat Oberta La Salle
Av. del Través 31, L A-2
AD400 La Massana, Andorra

You can access the digital books published by La Universitat Oberta La Salle at:

publications.uols.org

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*300th anniversary of the Letter of the Principal Brothers
to John Baptist de La Salle
Paris, April 1, 1714*

*For the celebration of the 45th General Chapter
of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools
Rome, Generalate, May 2014*

*I was not attentive enough to those near me
who were hungry, thirsty, imprisoned, and naked.
I do not know how to love enough.
I surrender myself to the infinite mercy that I infinitely need.
I ask those whom I disappointed in any way to pray for me
when they think of the harm I did to them.
I wish those of my family and friends who survive me to understand
that only love matters, that is to say, forgetfulness of self,
the true gift to others, forgiveness.
Having known illness, I want to thank the doctors and the nurses
—especially the staff of the community of Saint Jean at Annappes—
who supported me in the fight for life.
They were close and effective signs
that our God is the God of life who heals and who saves.
At this moment when I take up my life to give it to the Father,
a humble offering united with the Passover of his Son,
I wish to reaffirm my faith in the human, the image of God.
I wish to express my joy in having shared the human condition here below.
In this period of creation in which we see the first outlines of a new world,
a child-bearing with all its promises and risks,
but threatened by the fascination of the powers of death,
I declare my hope in the ultimate victory of the God of Life.*

Words of welcome,
read at the funeral of Brother Michel Sauvage,
Annappes, March 28, 2001

Letter of Presentation

In the year 2000, when I was elected Superior General, I thanked a number of Brothers from various Districts and Regions who had been part of my life at different stages. Among them I expressly mentioned Brother Michel Sauvage, who introduced me to the passionate itinerary of the Founder. Now, at the end of my term in the ministry of leadership that the Lord, in his mysterious designs, has confided to me through the intermediary role of my Brothers, I thought that the book you have in your hands would be the best gift that I could give to the Brothers at the General Chapter of 2014 and to all Brothers and lay Lasallians.

The book's title expresses its purpose, to relate the itinerary of Brother Michel from 1923 to 2001—in other words, the most recent stage of our own history, about which we already have at least some insights. This book recalls the memory of the Spirit's passage in the life of one of our Brothers and invites us to a personal reading that recognizes the Lord's presence in our own itineraries. As we face the future, we can understand and live more specifically what it means to be a Brother today, beginning with our own experience, as Brother Michel did in his life, of the fragile hope that inspires and sustains us in faith and in our association for the educational service and the evangelization of poor children and, with them, other children and young people.

I am convinced that reading this book will allow us to understand more clearly the Institute's history in recent decades, based not on theory but on a life marked by hopes and by crises, a life that, as Brother Michel himself points out, is necessarily seen from a subjective viewpoint that cannot be impartial, for it has not yet passed the test of time. "Reread this page of history that is mine". What a beautiful invitation it is to take another look at our own history in this time of transition that we are experiencing.

This book is not only a history to be recalled; these pages also share the profound wisdom of a man who wanted, with his limits and his weak-

nesses, to live authentically the life of a Brother, always aspiring for something more in an attitude of continual discernment of reality in the light of the Word.

This wisdom, born in his native France and strengthened by his responsibilities as Brother Assistant and at the International Lasallian Center (CIL), expands to a worldwide dimension. History and wisdom, as well as prophecy, are involved, for the insights we can find here invite us to open and to reinvent new paths, creative and incarnate ones, in response to the needs of the poor and in the way we live our lay vocation as Brothers consecrated to the Trinity for the life of the world. We are open to the challenging reality that we are experiencing in union with our lay brothers and sisters through shared association, mission, and spirituality.

I wish to express my profound gratitude to Brother Miguel Campos, who brought this narrative of an inspiring itinerary to completion by his interviews with Michel and by his faithful friendship with him, and to Brothers Paul Grass, Robert Comte, and Diego Muñoz, who together worked effectively as a typical Lasallian team to achieve these results.

I also extend my profound gratitude to the community of Brothers at La Salle University, Philadelphia, who welcomed the team during their long work sessions; to Brothers Francis Ricousse and Pierre Petitjean, of the Service of Lasallian Research and Resources at the Generalate, who worked on the research and on the digital production of the basic documentation for this project; to Brother Richard Buccina, Director of the Jeremy House Community in Philadelphia, and to Brother José David Berbesí Botero, of the District of Venezuela, for their artistic contributions to the final design of the book; to Brother José Martínez, for coordinating the translations, and to Mr. Luigi Cerchi, of the Communication Service at the Generalate, for the layout of the book.

I wish to end this brief presentation by returning to Brother Michel's recurrent theme during his final years, one that also has accompanied me in my ministry of leadership in the Institute in recent years. I am thinking of what Brother Michel calls *fragile hope*. I do so while recalling the words of Bernanos at the end of *Diary of a Country Priest*, which, I can imagine,

Michel would make his own and which I think all of us ought to make our own: “It is easier than you think to hate yourself. Grace means to forget oneself. But if all pride were dead in us, the greatest grace would be to love oneself humbly, like any other suffering member of Jesus Christ.”¹

Fraternally in De La Salle,

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría
Superior General

¹ Bernanos, 1954, p. 231.

Foreword – A “NARRATIVE” THAT EMERGES FROM A CONVERSATION

Brothers Miguel Campos, Robert Comte, Paul Grass and Diego Muñoz

This book is one of the last publication projects of Brother Michel Sauvage. During his final years, he spoke of it as *Mon Projet*. As determined as he was to complete it, he was unable to do so.

It is important to note that this project occupied his complete attention from 1997 until his death. Its originality, like its complexity, lies in the method he chose to use in writing it. Fearing that his increasingly unstable health was making it impossible to work at the rhythm and with the passion that he ordinarily devoted to his publications, he turned for assistance to Brother Miguel Campos, who suggested that they conduct “interviews” to provide the basic content of the book. The idea was to avoid an extensive research project. Instead, they decided to “narrate” the events, so that in the resulting story, they could interpret the facts by highlighting the essential aspects. As far as possible, they would try to identify the central axis of an experience.

The interviews began in 1997 and concluded, at an accelerating pace, after twenty-two sessions. Each one was recorded and later transcribed, and when the audio cassettes were copied on CDs by Sydney McLeod at La Salle University (Philadelphia), both sets of recordings were deposited in the Archives of the Generalate in Rome.²

On December 21, 1997, Brothers Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos agreed on the plan for a book in three parts, as Michel initially had hoped to do. They selected a central axis to encompass and to unify the three stages: the virtue of hope. They also agreed on the central point to which

² Essentially, this book is the content of the interviews. They were transcribed as accurately as possible, with the changes needed to transfer spontaneous conversations into written format. Brother Michel Sauvage reworked some of the interviews (as indicated by the inclusion of footnotes). Some chapters were entirely written by him, independently of any interviews.

Michel's life was directed from the beginning: the Second Vatican Council, 1962–1965, and the 39th General Chapter, conducted in two sessions, 1966 and 1967. All the creative forces surging through the Church of France, along with those of an opposite sign, converged during these events. Without being entirely aware of it at the time, if not perhaps afterwards, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was experiencing a freedom rarely known in the late nineteenth and in the early twentieth century. The central axis of hope was renewing everything: a new Institute was being born.

In approximately the same period as the interviews, between 1994 and 2000, Brother Michel wrote four major texts in which he offered new perspectives for the refoundation of the Institute in the light of a new reading of its origins. The first text is the reflection he prepared for the Christian Brothers Spirituality Seminar in California in 1994, “*The Declaration: Refoundation or Renewal?*” The second, “*Perspectives on Refoundation,*” is the conference given at the Assembly of the Lasallian Latin-American Region (RELAL) in Araruama, Brazil, in March 1997. He gave the third conference, “*A Better Understanding of Lasallian Association,*” at a session in Paris on November 18, 1998. He wrote the fourth article, “*Rereading the Foundation,*” for a meeting in February 1999 in Lima, Peru, to prepare for the forthcoming General Chapter. His declining health prevented him from attending the 1994 and the 1999 sessions.

Keeping in mind the connection between this story that Michel relates and the themes of these four conferences helps us avoid the temptation to consider his itinerary as only a private matter. The conversation ought to lead to a search for perspectives. It is a story that does not simply collect memories; it invites the reader to face the future with clearer perspectives. The story of Brother Michel's itinerary reveals that the major events of his life occurred during a time of major cultural transformation.

A story that emerges “out of” and “in the midst of” a major transition

In the final decades of the twentieth century, the concept of *worldview*

was used by experts in various academic disciplines as a key to describe and to understand the radical transformations that occur at certain historic moments. Although they arrived at no common definition that satisfies everyone, the concept itself of worldview continues to evolve.

Worldview refers to the way people position themselves historically with respect to the world, as an individual and often profoundly personal act and, at the same time, a collective reality. How does that happen? When new approaches and new questions no longer can find a place in a *worldview* that is no longer operational and that is beginning to disappear, some people reject all change, while others help themselves find a place in a new world of meaning, open to a new understanding.

Theologian Hans Küng (*Christianity: Essence, History, Future*, 1995) identifies six major paradigm shifts in the history of Christianity. The passage from the twentieth to the twenty-first century is one of these historic moments during which the transition from one worldview to another makes the symbolic expression of the experience of God especially challenging—but not everyone in the Christian community experiences it in the same way. The transition from one worldview that provided coherence and meaning to another worldview whose initial signs are barely perceived is a challenge for men and women who have a practical faith and who ask questions of themselves. To enter this attitude of searching, they must let themselves be touched by the sufferings of humanity and be capable of compassion.

These transitions affect everyone. They have a profound impact on religious communities, which, in effect, were not created in a vacuum but arose and expanded in specific historical conditions. The language that allows them to articulate the experience of God, the rites that they celebrate, the symbols that open them to mystery, and the rules of conduct that guide them do not float in a vacuum. For when one worldview disappears, its symbolic structure gives way to a new one that emerges gradually. Then it is likely that the religious community experiences “disenchantment” in its community life, in its apostolic works, in its original purpose. The “re-enchantment” with the world is part of the process of passing through a crisis of transformation, but the passage from disen-

chantment to re-enchantment is riddled with fear and anxiety.

It seems that John Baptist de La Salle and his associates traveled on their itinerary at the heart of one of the most dramatic transitions in history. Their itinerary appears to have coincided with the passage from a pre-scientific, medieval worldview, albeit humanistic and influenced by the Renaissance, to a secular, scientific, modern worldview stubbornly committed to its project of discovering new knowledge, freed from the *a priori* preconceptions imposed by authority. In fact, between 1650 and 1700, a fundamental intellectual transformation affected the presuppositions on which Western thought had been based for centuries. De La Salle was born in 1651, and his formative years were guided by a medieval worldview that was already dying and giving way to a new view of human nature, of society, and of history.

Over the course of recent centuries, rapid and abrupt change occurred in Western culture. Indeed, within a few decades, twentieth-century society changed its ways of thinking, of valuing, of knowing, and of feeling and restructured itself on the basis of different values as it created new political, artistic, and institutional forms. Fifty years later, we find ourselves in another world. Those who were born during this transition can hardly imagine the world of their grandparents, even of their parents.

De La Salle lived during a time of crisis and of transformation in the passage from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. Brother Michel Sauvage's itinerary during the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century occurs during a cultural crisis without precedent. The two itineraries, of De La Salle and of Michel, allow us to identify what is essential. Each itinerary is situated in its own vital, ecclesial, cultural, social, and political context and sheds light on our present itineraries. In their writings and in their life experiences, the Founder and Michel do more than recount their personal history; they form part of the living memory of the Institute. Their stories return us to our roots. They also point out the need to dream of a future that does not get lost in fantasies but opens to viable perspectives.

That said, the present book has no purpose other than to provoke a dialogue between the reader and a witness of the changes and the shifts that

occurred in our time of transition, comparable to those experienced by John Baptist de La Salle.

The three parts of the story

The story of the life path of Brother Michel Sauvage begins in the context of a united and Christian family in France, in 1923, and ends in the Saint Jean community at Annappes, in 2001.

Miguel Campos and Michel Sauvage listened carefully to each recorded interview to pinpoint the shifts in the way of understanding both the religious life and the events that were happening in the last half of the twentieth century. Their mutual, critical reflection helped them to assemble the content in a systematic way. They followed a step-by-step chronology of the events in order to narrate a simple, coherent story. In 1997, it was already possible for them to see a certain parallel between the cultural crisis of the end of the twentieth century and the crisis of a Church seeking to understand itself and its mission in the world today, along with the crisis of an Institute that was rededicating itself to the educational service of the poor.

We divided the interviews into three parts:

1. *Hope in a creative but smothered adaptation (1923–1956)*—the beginning of the transition, thoughts and feelings of a disciple who becomes a minister.
2. *Prophetic but contradicted hope in renewal (1956–1976)*—in the eye of the cyclone, passion of a minister who transforms himself through service.
3. *Fragile and vulnerable hope in the refoundation (1976–2001)*—traveling through the dark night, prophetic kenosis while searching for the wisdom of a new vision.

Part One (1923–1956)

Michel Sauvage is born in and awakens to a fragmented world that is undergoing a cultural shift unprecedented in history. People disillusioned by a worldview that led to the horror of two devastating wars, to the dis-

placement of millions of men and women, and to economic disaster are searching for other perspectives. Everything indicates that a cultural transition has begun that is far beyond the ordinary itinerary of any one person. The worldview that until then had provided coherence and meaning has lost its compass.

The personal itinerary of a young man in whom a vocation to the religious life arises, as it was understood at the time, is situated in this transitional stage that Michel experiences in a disoriented world. He is supported by the security of a Christian family and by a fortress Church that is asking itself how to identify with workers and with poor people while continuing to defend privileges acquired over the centuries. Thus he finds himself in an Institute that sustains its passion for educational service by a system of control and of strict observance of the *Rule*, which extols resignation and suffering, radical separation from the world, and unshakable maintenance of practices and customs inherited from the beginning.

In spite of ambiguities in his initial formation and the defensive attitude of ecclesiastical authorities, Michel begins to sense the new signs of adaptation to the contemporary world that he discovers, rooted in the Bible, in patristics, in pastoral ministry, in catechetics, and in education. The awakening of the vocation of a pious youth, in the Junior Novitiate, the Novitiate, and the Scholasticate, as well as in his initial years of professional life, is accompanied by disillusionment and by the questions that emerge in an apostolic religious vocation. He is disillusioned with an Institute that is detaching itself from the history experienced in Europe during the Second World War. This disillusionment grows in the context of the spiritual void within an Institute composed of young men who are hoping for an adaptation that it is incapable of realizing, because it is maintaining an internal climate of repression and of control. Michel succeeds in escaping this crisis, thanks to an unexpected turning point in his own history: Superiors who understand him open the door to his study of theology in Rome.

The election of Brother Nicet-Joseph as Superior General in 1956 is without doubt a glimmer of hope. The General Chapter of that year performs a complete turnaround from what happened in 1946. The Institute

opens itself to history at the same time that Michel advances in his theological studies. This experience introduces him to the major currents in biblical, theological, catechetical, and educational research. In contact with French Brothers who are leaders of this adaptation, especially in initial formation for an apostolic religious life, Michel debuts as theologian and author. From that point on, a long career begins of directing sessions, of giving conferences, and, above all, of writing extensively. Moreover, he has an international impact as a professor of the Theology of the Religious Life at the *Jesus Magister* Institute in Rome. Thus Michel becomes fully involved in the great cultural crisis of history and of the Institute. His doctoral thesis on the role of laypeople in the ministry of the Word demonstrates the breadth and the depth of his thinking and places him in a privileged position to contribute to the culminating moment of the Institute's transformation.

Part Two (1956–1976)

Part Two shows Michel Sauvage as a young adult at the height of his international contribution in the Church and in the Institute. It seems that everything that he experienced in the first stage of his life prepared him to fulfill this new role.

Between 1956 and 1976, the Church experiences radical change. One of the most important shifts concerns its own definition. The fortress Church is now describing itself as the Church, the People of God, who discern the presence of God in the signs of the times. The Church is in solidarity with all humanity, consoles the suffering of all, and rejoices with all who rejoice. It is a lay Church engaged in the culture and in civil society, working for the common good and for justice.

As the Church changes, society also experiences with increasing velocity and intensity the changes and the cultural crisis that tear down the walls of space and of time. Without a compass, many people, especially the young, find no meaning in this Western culture and radically question what previous generations had constructed.

This is the ecclesial and cultural context in which preparations begin for the 39th General Chapter and the Second Vatican Council is convoked.

Michel plays a singular role in a Church surprised by the charismatic irruption of the Spirit and in an Institute surprised by the seeds of prophetic hope in renewal. At Vatican II, he serves as theologian for his brother, Jean, Bishop of Annecy. There he contributes to the composition of *Perfectae Caritatis* (*Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life*), particularly in section 4, and serves as editor of *Gravissimum Educationis* (*Declaration on Christian Education*). At the 39th General Chapter, Michel is the principal editor of *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*. The Chapter elects him as Assistant to the Superior General for Formation for the period 1966–1976.

In this epicenter of the transition, Michel experiences the initial storm in the Institute caused by the conferences presented at the *Centre International Lasallien* (CIL) by the new Superior General, Brother Charles Henry. Michel is the creator of this new form of continuing formation for the Brothers, adapted to the changing times to replace the classic Second Novitiate.

The 1966–1967 General Chapter receives a highly varied reception throughout the Institute. Criticism and threats reach Michel from some sectors. Other aspects of this period include a massive exodus of Brothers, an initial crisis within the General Council, Michel's frequent travels and conferences as Assistant, his role as the thesis advisor of Brother Miguel Campos, and his return as Director of CIL.

Brother Michel rewrote the interviews in Part One and Part Two, because the original recordings were not always sufficiently clear. Thus he could complete and augment the content, although at the risk of losing, at times, the rich spontaneity of the conversations and of not having sufficient time to polish the text.

Part Three (1976–2001)—the transition does not lead to a resolution

During this period, new perspectives appear for the Institute, and new organizational structures give symbolic support to the new vision.

The final years of the 1970s are marked by Michel's search for a formation ministry (*l'École de la Foi* at Fribourg), his stay in the Brothers' community at Neuchâtel, and conferences for communities of Sisters. The decade of the 1980s, when he was elected *Régional* of France, are marked by his travel to Latin America and, in France, by his conferences on the religious life, especially in formation sessions for Sisters and in retreats on Lasallian prayer. After completing his term as *Régional*, Michel searches for a position in direct service of the poor at Loos. He participates in the ministry of the local Church, in national sessions, and at the *Sèvres Centre*, while maintaining contacts with communities of Sisters. From 1987 to 1991, he serves as the Director of Lasallian Studies and participates twice in the International Session on Lasallian Studies (SIEL) in Rome. Finally, in the 1990s, we find Michel at Annappes, at Maison Saint Jean.

Michel was unable to revise the texts in Part Three, including conferences that form a prophetic ensemble that invites every Brother and every community to enter into dialogue with him in the search for new perspectives for the refoundation of the Institute. The perspectives that Michel proposes include the requirement that the refoundation be the movement of the Spirit. His interpretation invites us to be inventive, spurred on by the fragile hope in refoundation. This account of one witness among many other stories of Brothers and of Lasallian associates does not leave us unconcerned; it invites us to tell our own.

Why and for whom do we read and discuss the itinerary of Brother Michel Sauvage?

To some Brothers, it might seem excessive to focus on Michel's itinerary. There have been, and certainly still are, other Brothers in France and in other Regions of the Institute whose itineraries can equally, and perhaps better, evoke new perspectives. Certainly, we must not forget those who were active witnesses of the renewal and of the dream of refoundation.

With Michel, however, we have an incomparable and systematic reflection on the evolution of the religious life in the last decades of the twentieth century, which is continuing in the early decades of the twenty-first.

His narrative clarifies the lay character of the Institute, identifies the characteristics of this charism in the Church, and places the topic of the apostolic religious life within other perspectives.

His itinerary becomes a word addressed to us, that is to say, a critique of our empty and superficial options. It is a word that calls us, because it leads us to the heart of the Gospel, which we read in the current situation of the Institute, in the Church, and in the life of those young people who are among the most abandoned in the world. Nevertheless, telling this story and linking it with many others in the Institute illuminates more clearly the central axis around which a new worldview and a way of living the charism of our foundation crystallize.

The central axis of Brother Michel's story and of ours

The titles of these three parts tell us clearly that Michel did not intend to give us an autobiography, nor did he write a partial history of the Institute, of the Church, or of the changes in the social and political world in which he lived, although these topics are evoked. The central axis does not consist in resolutions that repeat today the creations of yesterday, whether in attitudes, customs, religious practices, or specific devotions of the past, however glorious they were. The central axis of Michel's itinerary is the virtue of hope:

- hope in the adaptation,
- hope in the renewal,
- hope in the refoundation, which surges and resurges like a new spring in our history.

May hope be our companion as we share Michel's story.

Rome, April 2014

THE “MON PROJET” EDITORIAL TEAM

Br. Robert Comte, Br. Diego Muñoz, Br. Paul Grass,
and Br. Miguel Campos

Brothers' Community, La Salle University, Philadelphia

November 2013



Preface³

Br. Michel Sauvage, FSC



Br. Michel Sauvage, FSC
(1923-2001)

What will become of these pages that I begin to write today? They began taking shape in me about seven or eight years ago. Relatives and friends who had known me for a long time encouraged me to do it. Almost at once, but in two closely related steps, its overall plan recently came to mind.

This hypothetical pathway cannot reveal the details of the road that lies ahead. It allows me neither to predict the detours nor to speculate on the obstacles the route will impose on me, any failure of light or energy that might arise, any roadblocks that might oblige me to change the itinerary. Because I have reached an advanced phase of my own human journey, time is short now, even though the waiting is sometimes long. I can imagine neither the fate that befalls the work I am attempting to write nor whether it even comes to fruition. Will its publication be considered useful, or will its hazardous launching be like a bottle thrown into the sea?

All this is of little importance at the moment, for this project lies in my soul. The enterprise I undertake today is a response, above all, to a call that I have carried within me at the deepest level ever since I committed myself definitively in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (1948), even if it only became a conscious imperative in recent years.

* * *

On Tuesday, September 5, 1939, the bell summoning us to begin our retreat before entering the Novitiate also gathered us to bid farewell to Brother Director and to Brother Sub-Director, who had been guiding us

³ *On Pentecost Sunday, June 4, 1995, I returned to these pages written between December 13 and 20, 1994, when I was convalescing at Athis Mons. Before returning to Lille's City Hospital for two major operations, I have read them again. After six months, I think that these pages express clearly enough what I hope to achieve.*

since July 12 of that same year. Now called to serve the flag,⁴ they were going to war. Within a few months, the first would be living in captivity in Germany and the second killed during the Battle of Sedan.

The World War that began would change the fate of millions of people, upset many nations, cause cultures to collide, transform hierarchies of values, and profoundly shake the certitude, if not the structure itself, of the Catholic Church, at least for many of its faithful members and ministers. The earthquake that we Novices, too secure and for the most part unaware, experienced only as some kind of prelude could not fail to affect every Brother⁵ as a member of the human race. Nevertheless, after the war the official Institute—in its language, outlook, organizational structure, and some leaders—redirected itself by turning backwards, seemingly with the expectation that seclusion within its past provides the security required to preserve it from contamination by the “world.”

Refreshing currents were beginning to quicken a number of small cells, including their leaders, within what was not yet known as the *People of God*. The instinctive reaction by those who governed the Institute was one of mistrust. They deemed it necessary to alert the Brothers to be on guard against infatuation with these “fashions” that can never be worth as much as “homemade bread” whose substance is solid doctrine properly seasoned with traditional devotions. Did not John Baptist de La Salle advise his Brothers to “shun novelties”?⁶

The 1946 General Chapter was symbolic of, and today remains a caricature of, this stubborn refusal to recognize the signs of a new world’s irrepressible genesis in the current turbulence. The “Young Turk”⁷ who dared to alert his confreres to humanity’s passage into the atomic age

⁴ The expression, *rappelés sous les drapeaux*, signifies conscription into military service.

⁵ The word *Brother* throughout this work refers to the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

⁶ Under “Principal Virtues That the Brothers Must Strive To Practice,” from the virtue of faith: “Hold fast in all things to what is of faith; shun novelties. Follow the tradition of the Church” (R 15,1,1). John Baptist de La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, Washington, DC: Christian Brothers Conference, 1993, reprint 2007, p. 67.

⁷ It was Brother Clodoald. I think an allusion to this comment can be found in *Circular 318*, July 16, 1946, *Results of the General Chapter of 1946*.

received only the sarcastic remarks or the shrugs that sufficed for the vast majority of the Capitulants. They had no doubt that “the Institute, having undergone these trials,” required an urgent resolve to restore the uniform and rigorous minutiae of observance. Had not strict observance over nearly three centuries assured the Institute’s cohesion, effectively sustained its works, and generated saints such as the humble Brother Benilde, who would be beatified in spring 1948 by Pius XII, so parsimonious in this regard?

A number of Brothers who were between twenty and forty years old in the mid-1940s were forced to be content with the constraints of external regulations. Many of them, however, could no longer accept the system’s ideological justification, which they viewed as an idolatrous perversion. Was it not a sacralization of observance and a violation of conscience to present it as a predefined and sure expression of God’s will? Moreover, was it prudent to make the revised 1947 *Rule* literally more consistent with what the Founder had revised in 1718, and then to obtain its approval, unjustifiably requested, from the Holy See? Many Brothers, sustained by their ministry and renewed by their awareness of rediscovered sources in Scripture, in liturgy, in catechetics, in theology, in pastoral ministry, and in teaching methods, could no longer patiently support the self-sufficient pretensions of an Institute that had barricaded itself. They suffered a kind of schizophrenia that affected their attachment to the Institute to which God had called them to serve young people.

Twenty years later, during the 1966–1967 General Chapter, it was essentially that same generation that engaged the Institute in a completely different direction, although not without disruption. Judged as iconoclastic by a minority of the Capitulants and viewed by some as a personal drama from which they could not recover, this fracture initially seemed to be welcomed by most Brothers as liberating. The irresistible movement that expressed itself in the debates and that crystallized in a collection of new documents arose from the depths of the living Institute as well as from the willing involvement of its members in a world pursuing its transformation and in a conciliar Church recognizing the promptings of the Spirit in the signs of the times.

Unanimously, the Capitulants finally approved in December 1967 the innovative documents that resulted from prolonged, sometimes bitter, debates during two sessions (April–June 1966 and October–December 1967) and the laborious Intersession of fifteen months (July 1966–September 1967). Enthusiastic adoption of the texts did not prevent some perceptive Capitulants from highlighting the difficulty of implementing them. The dynamics that inspired these documents could not be assumed to appear overnight among Brothers accustomed to long-established community practices and concepts, even when they opposed them in theory. The mere publication of texts that required renewal of educational works and audacious creativity to meet new needs had no magical power to transform solidly entrenched institutions sustained by their social setting and supporters.

Many of the 1967 Capitulants realized, with varying degrees of clarity, that it was easier to decree than to achieve the Institute's renewal. Less than six months after the General Chapter ended, the worldwide turbulence of May 1968 certainly confirmed the truth of its major insights (as with Vatican Council II). At the same time, the turmoil shaking so many countries grew to overshadow the urgency and the responsibility implied in the new directions. Carried away by a kind of iconoclastic intoxication, some Brothers, at times influential ones, seemed to retain from the General Chapter only the frenzy of a prophetic slide "to destroy," "to uproot," and "to divide." They forgot that the texts had wanted, above all, "to build and to plant"⁸ and to affirm communion. In panic, other Brothers clung fanatically to the ancient "strict observance." Many no doubt struggled valiantly to put into practice the renewal defined by the texts, but their initiatives, too isolated, most often received only a faint echo and little support.

For many reasons and in many countries, the Institute of the 1970s experienced a veritable hemorrhage of departures of Brothers. Simultaneously, the number of entries of new members declined almost everywhere, at times reaching total depletion. Bogged down by the urgency and the

⁸ Jr 1:10.

overload of daily life, many Brothers had little time or freedom of spirit needed to assimilate the renewal Chapter and the implications of the extensive attrition of members. Irrefutable annual statistics announced that the Institute continued to age and to weaken in number. Those in charge found it extremely painful to make the entire membership of Brothers aware of the magnitude of the phenomenon affecting other religious orders as well as diocesan clergy. But when the majority of Brothers in a country consisted of retirees whose average age approached seventy years, when the few Novitiates remained empty, or nearly so, for decades, it became a question of the survival of an Institute reduced from more than 16,000 members in 1965 to 7,000 in 1993. The 1966–67 General Chapter had wanted to initiate the renewal of the Institute. Instead, a quarter century later, was the Institute not a sinking ship?

Quite unexpectedly, a new resurgence occurred in spite of everything. For a long time in their schools, the Brothers had been assisted by laypeople.⁹ During the 1970s and 1980s, the proportion was reversed. Every year, in many countries, the number increased of Lasallian schools staffed entirely by men and women of the laity, who often wished to maintain a connection with the Brothers to benefit their educational activity. More surprising was the emergence in various parts of the world of their spontaneous desire to share in the inspiration of the evangelical mission of the Institute. Under various forms, a strong Lasallian movement developed in many countries, with laypeople enrolling in the school of Saint John Baptist de La Salle to study his itinerary and his educational and spiritual teaching. Suddenly, the Institute began to sketch an outline of the doctrine of the *shared mission*. Furthermore, these new, developing perspectives increasingly were established in association, including the Institute's official gatherings of Brothers and Lasallian colleagues. Is it, therefore, no longer a question of the Institute's renewal, not to mention its "destruction," but rather a radical development in amazing ways that the 1966–1967 Capitulants had certainly not imagined?

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⁹ The word *laypeople* in this work refers to lay Lasallians, participants in the Institute's educational ministry.

Thus, between 1940 and 1995, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools moved from a closing in on itself and a stiffening and into the utopia of renewal—which was thwarted by the inertia of old habits, by hesitant or timid withdrawal from threatened certainties, by the convulsions of the 1970s, and by the membership decline that ensued—and then to a kind of unexpected resurgence. It was my lot to be a witness, often aware of and at times active in these changes, in this revolution, I would say. The project I am nursing, like this Preface that I am undertaking to write, is above all to reread this page of history. It is my history, certainly, but I lived it in fraternal membership with a group of men who define themselves and are known in the Church as a congregation of lay religious. At the same time, these Brothers consider themselves to be members of the society of their time, for they are professional educators and appreciated as such in the earthly city.

“Reread this page of history...” This book relies on the history of the successive changes in the last fifty years in an Institute that has been living its own course, but within the movements of the Church and of civil society and subject to their mutations and disturbances. I do not pretend, however, to be a professional historian; I have neither the competence nor the impartiality. I cannot encompass in time, in space, or in personalities the entire living reality of this period. My information is fragmented, but I was privileged by circumstances to experience certain events, participants, and locales from a point of view that was mine because of the positions I happened to fill. As for impartiality, my lack of chronological and psychological distance prevents me from claiming any.

Nevertheless, within these limits, it is history that I am attempting to reread here. I am trying, above all, to return to it honestly, and I am fortunate in being able to rely on two personal sources of information. The first is my experience of the events in which I was privileged to participate directly, including the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath, the Institute’s revision of its *Rule*, the revival of Lasallian Studies from 1956 to 1986, and the preparation, celebration, and implementation of the General Chapters of 1966–1967 and 1976. Having participated in these significant events, I retain precise memories about a considerable number of documents. As for certain details of varying import, these pages I am

writing bring some previously unpublished information to light. A second source of information is also important in my eyes: my good fortune in being able to develop and often to maintain close relationships with many Brothers and former Brothers, including my companions in formation and in community between 1940 and 1960 and many Brothers with whom I could walk for a time, whether in Rome at the *Jesus Magister* Institute (where I taught from 1961 to 1976) and at the International Lasallian Center (CIL) or in many countries in Europe, in both Americas, and in Africa, where I made a number of trips for conferences or retreats between 1964 and 1984.

The *content* of this book specifies my plan to *reread this page of history*. The centerpiece, already mentioned, is to recapture the renewal enterprise of the 1966–1967 General Chapter. A unique and most unusual Chapter in the entire history of the Institute, this event remains for me the fundamental reference point in the Institute’s history over the past fifty years. Many chapters in this book take up again the main issues, practical and often fundamental ones, affecting the identity and the mission of the Institute that the General Chapter was inspired to address. These questions retain their topicality¹⁰ and continue to offer many approaches to the identity and to the mission of the *Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*.

This last expression is the title of the major document produced by the 1966–1967 General Chapter, undoubtedly the most original text and commonly referred to simply as the *Declaration*. In a way unforeseen at the outset, the Capitulants became convinced of the need for this overall text. Although its gestation was lengthy and laborious, the end result, the fruit of truly collective work, was enthusiastically endorsed by the Capitulants. In his Preface to the printed edition, Brother Superior Charles Henry stresses that every other General Chapter document must be understood in its light.

¹⁰ I add one huge reservation: the *Declaration* speaks about *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*, that is to say, in the late 1960s. Since then, we have entered what is commonly called the postmodern era.

“In its light” also includes the movement of hope that the *Declaration* outlines and for which, to a certain extent, it provides structure and content. The movement of hope that led to the production of that Chapter text already had inspired many Brothers, especially since 1940. The dynamism of the *Declaration* and the inspiring force of its text continue to encourage and to support the renewal efforts of many Brothers.¹¹ This present work, therefore, will try to recapture the successive approaches to the Brother’s identity and mission that came to light during the three stages of this movement of hope (1940–1966, 1966–1967, and 1968–1995) for which the 1966–1967 General Chapter constitutes the chronological center and the vital core.

“Reread this page of history that is mine...” I find myself too involved in the Institute’s renewal adventure to speak with the detachment of a witness snugly sheltered in a shoreline refuge. Having embarked by my perpetual profession with no intention of ever returning, I found that circumstances often decreed that I be a crew member charged with a variety of positions and tasks. In spite of impatience, bad patches, mistakes, and inconsistencies, I never thought to question my vital membership in and my visceral attachment to the Institute. Thus I cannot evoke this passage of fifty years that has taken us through many storms from one world to another without speaking about what I personally experienced and at times worked with others to achieve.

However, I am not attempting some kind of autobiography here. As far as I am concerned, I have heeded Mauriac’s caution in a February 1959 *Bloc-Note*: “I suffocate in a world where everyone wants to tell me his life story.”¹² That is certainly not the purpose of these pages.

* * *

The insidious temptation that at times surges in me might be today, on the contrary, to consider my entire life history as insignificant. Might I not have “wasted my life” by dedicating my essential energy to the life of

¹¹ An example is mentioned in Chapter 17 of this present work, the Spirituality Seminar sponsored by the USA/Toronto Region that took place in California in February 1994.—Ed.

¹² Cf. Mauriac, 1993, p. 223.

an organism whose tiny influence has even further weakened? Are not the internal developments among a handful of men ever more miniscule when compared with society's formidable changes? I raise the issue of the postmodern, a mutation that seems so enormous, so different from what we have known, that I sometimes wonder what benchmarks can still be valid before this sphinx. At the very least, this is the moment to recall John Baptist de La Salle's image of someone who is totally abandoned to God's Providence, "like a sailor who puts out to sea without sails or oars" (*Meditations*, 134.1–2).

In part, the present work aims to exorcise this temptation. I am deeply convinced that, however modest it might be in society and in the Church, the singularity of the religious organization to which I belong enables it to hope constantly in a possible future, even if it must submit to what seems to be inevitable death to many people. Bravado? Chimera? Incantation? I don't think so. In writing this work, I am attempting to illustrate what appears to me to be both realistic and promising in the identity and in the mission, misunderstood by many, of this social group, this ecclesial cell.

The word *hope*, which I just used with respect to the contents of this book and to the movement that could unify its organization, especially reflects the *spirit* that inspires me as I approach the work. I must try to account for the hope that I have of a possible future for the Institute. This testimony will become evident in the various chapters to follow. Initially, I can point out at least three signs that I think bolster this hope. They occur both in the Institute's founding years and in its actual, recent, and best efforts to renew itself.

"Made aware of the human and spiritual distress of the children of working people and the poor, John Baptist de La Salle devoted himself to form schoolteachers totally dedicated to teaching and to Christian education. He united these teachers in community and subsequently founded the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools." This first article of the *Rule* of the Institute (1987) serves as the working drawing of the project, as it was for the laborious creation of the Institute. In every continent, the human and spiritual distress of young people is no less glaring today than

it was in Reims, France, at the end of the seventeenth century. Does it not call again for teachers and other creative adults to vow their entire being with others to try to apply remedies for all forms of exclusion among young people? Already, especially during the past thirty years, this renewed orientation has been an inspiration in the life of Brothers and communities.

One of the strongest and most vigorously asserted original features of the Society that John Baptist de La Salle was led to create is its *exclusively lay character*. Himself a priest, he followed an unexpected career that up to a certain point, and certainly to a limited extent, we can interpret in one sense as being “practically reduced to the lay state.” At the least, a large number of the tasks that he assumed did engage him in building the earthly city, and he wished to be an equal member of the lay community that he established. The General Chapter in 1966 had to make a major decision on whether to maintain this exclusively lay character of the Institute. The heated debates that preceded the decision and the unanimity with which it was approved seem to me to hold promise for the future of an Institute that is deliberately faithful to its lay identity as an expression of the Church as the People of God in autonomous communities formed on the basis of the personal faith of their members and their one common Baptism. It is a manifestation of the Church’s engagement in global development and in the promotion of justice for the poor by means of communities of people who in service of humanity and in effective solidarity with the poor consecrate their entire life, day after day, to the God of love. Their manifestation of the active presence of Jesus Christ in human communities gathered by his call sends them to live and to proclaim the Gospel in the heart of a secular, pluralistic world and to perform tasks essential for this world’s good order.

Vatican Council II reclaimed *the charismatic character of religious orders*. Often called into existence by the current situation, they emerge also as an unexpected surge, impossible to plan. In these unpredictable bursts of novelty, believers recognize signs, repeated over the course of centuries, of the freedom of the Spirit at work in the life of the People of God as a whole, not just in the institutional Church, always so tempted to place

its trust in the strength of established organizational structures. Vatican II summoned all religious orders to recapture the creative force of the Holy Spirit at their origins, to free themselves from the constraints of obsolete forms, and to open themselves anew to the creativity of the Spirit, who is capable here and now of leading them to revive their founding inspiration.

I freely admit that this conciliar orientation has supported and also challenged, quite explicitly since 1965, my hope in a possible future for the Institute. Thirty years later, this frequently tested hope, repeatedly threatened with submersion, remains alive in me, because henceforth it is also based on the memory of the passings of the Holy Spirit that I was able to experience humbly in the life of the Institute:

- in the collective élan that uplifted the Capitulants of 1966–1967, even in their difficult efforts and in their often tense confrontations to draft the charter of renewal;
- in the generous and resourceful fidelity of the many Brothers who agreed to experience an exodus to enter into the world of the poor, and also,
- in the serenity with which today, during the watchful night, many now humbly continue this reinvention of the forms of ministry and of community while leaving their future to the God of Promises.

Part One

**HOPE IN A CREATIVE
BUT SMOTHERED ADAPTATION
(1923–1956)**



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Introduction – *THE END OF AN ERA*

Br. Miguel Campos, FSC

*What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.*

T. S. Elliot, “Little Gidding,” V, *Four Quartets*

When a vision of the world, of the Church, and of the Institute dies

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools experienced an unprecedented transformation in the last decades of the twentieth and the early years of the twenty-first century. The 1946 General Chapter, directed in the unwavering style of Brother Athanase-Émile and his Council, bolted the door against history and the world. On the contrary, the Superiors who followed—Brothers Nicet-Joseph (France), Charles Henry Buttimer (USA), José Pablo Basterrechea (Spain), John Johnston (USA), and Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría (Costa Rica)—facilitated bold changes, each in his own way and with his General Council, over the course of the General Chapters of 1956, 1966–1967, 1976, 1986, 1993, and 2000.

All these efforts developed for us, Brothers of the Christian Schools, a new way of understanding the purpose of our religious life and of our apostolic work, the meaning of the classic triad of vows, and the increased emphasis on the specific vows. The Institute strengthened its connections with all who work on behalf of the Church’s evangelizing mission, and it encouraged great respect for the autonomy of the components of education related to secular subjects. It expressed pastoral concern for global culture by promoting the common good and by contributing to the transformation of civil society. The Institute acknowledged the role of laypeople, including women, whose participation in the Lasallian world experienced a decisive turn. Essential changes occurred in the initial for-

mation of Brothers and in expanded formation opportunities for lay Lasallians.

Young Brothers of the generation living in 1946 were disenchanted after the General Chapter of that year. Many of them, feeling disillusioned, hopeless, and deprived of their identity, abandoned the Institute. Others, in spite of their disappointment, looked to the future with hope and began to view from a new perspective the reality of this world, this Church, and this Institute that was dying. They accepted this “end of an era.”

Brother Michel Sauvage tells us that he was one of these Brothers who escaped this disenchantment, regaining his enthusiasm through the study of theology and identifying himself with this Lasallian movement in history. His vocation of an adolescent transformed itself into the vocation of an adult. He came out of this first phase of his personal transition in the Institute on a new basis, but not without facing up to a new way of understanding the religious life as the Brothers were living it in the Institute. For Michel, one type, one “form” of Institute had come to an end, and that was the basic condition to enter a transforming transition.

Our context sixty years later

Sixty years ago, the tendency in the Institute was to equalize and to standardize the personal profiles of the Brothers, without integrating the diversity of their countries and their cultures. The Superiors and the organizational structure supported behavior that was approved for everyone, while completely rejecting behavior of too personal a nature. The tendency to level off all behavior by regular observance placed the emphasis on external matters. Regular attendance at exercises of piety, endless repetition of prayer formulas, and daily rituals contributed to the mastery of the self. The Brother’s identity depended on these basic structures that went as far as being considered sacred, with the understanding that they came directly from God’s oracle, Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Fortunately, our history includes Brothers who achieved inner equilibrium and boundless creativity in this environment. For many others, in effect, the practical result was that hardly any differences existed within the same generational group. Moreover, no significant differences were

apparent among the different generational groups by age. Everyone spoke the same language, observed the same rituals, and said the same prayers. Now, sixty years later, each generational group has its unique characteristics and often experiences great dissonance with the preceding groups.

Our use of the term *generation* here risks banality and superficiality and is not valid in all the world's cultures and countries. We define the generational groups of Brothers on the basis of two factors: the calendar year in which they entered the Institute and the dominant type of initial formation at that time. One type of formation focused on regularity, observance of the *Rule*, practice of the vows, and the common life; another type of formation concentrated on the personal development of each Brother, on his reading of the Gospel in relation to his own life, on his consecration for the mission, and on the shared mission.

Characteristics of generational groups

The generation of 1946 is disappearing. Among Brothers in their 80s and older are those who experienced this extraordinary entry into the crisis and into the transition. They remained in the Institute, and they undoubtedly constitute the basis and the foundation for all of us. They, like Michel was, are sensitive to the needs of the world and of the Church, and they are persevering in building God's work.

The next generation, entering the Institute in the 1960s, based itself on the preceding one; in a sense, the Brothers of this generation are a bridge, assuring continuity and accepting discontinuity with the youngest Brothers. However, because they are less familiar with an Institute that smothered creativity—and thereby impeded the renewal—they have to make an effort to understand the contradictory thoughts and feelings of the generations that oscillate between mourning the loss of something that will not return and fearing a return to the forms of the past that restricted freedom. By not being able to take into account what they have lost, they find themselves caught up in a superficial nostalgia that separates them from other generations.

The following generation, entering the Institute between 1970 and 1990 and much smaller in number, experienced their initial formation during

a time of free experimentation that left them empty, sometimes disoriented, and without an identity. They did not have to enter a crisis; they were living in it. That is why they have difficulty understanding what the older Brothers felt about the great liberation of the 1950s. For them, the many restrictions were not a heavy burden; that is why they regret the absence of certain external signs. Their temptation is to lose patience when hearing stories about a past that they did not experience.

Brothers in the most recent generation arrive with the desire to live religious ideals that older Brothers have rejected. In fact, we older Brothers can misinterpret their profound religious thoughts and feelings, but we can help them mature if we learn to listen to them.

Everyone does not enter the crisis in the same way.

The study of the entry into transition gains enormously from an inter-generational reading. We do not enter the crisis in the same way or at the same time. The community is our support, our free space, in which we can mutually help one another “let go of something that has ended” and embrace the unpredictable novelty of the Gospel in the current situation.

Chapter 1 – *A YOUNG RELIGIOUS IN A COLLAPSING CHRISTIAN CULTURE*

THE FAMILY EXPERIENCE

Miguel—Can you describe your views of human nature, of the Church, and of the evangelical life that you learned in your family? Would you also like to say something about your parents and about your brothers and sisters?

*Michel—*As for my parents, I would say first that they were a united couple. It was clear that my father experienced an exceptional love for my mother. It happened that I, without looking for it, was the witness, both embarrassed and delighted, of hidden instances of the tenderness of my father for his wife. He read and reread the life of the Curé d’Ars, Saint Jean-Marie-Baptiste Vianney, by Canon Trochu. How many times I know not, he said with gleeful confusion, that he felt like a poor sinner with respect to the ascetic of Ars: “I love life too much,” he whispered into my ear. Later, he confided to me proudly, “There was only one woman in my life.”

Secondly, my parents were not “devout” people. We were not accustomed to recite evening prayer with the family, which bothered me when I heard this custom presented as ordinary for good Christians. A pious woman, my mother went every morning to the first parish Mass at 5:30; she returned then to get us up and ready for starting school. My father was a good Christian, but his faith always seemed to me more embodied in life than in religious theories.

I worshiped my father: a man of exceptional kindness, most often joyful. He recited long poems with a social coloration; he loved to sing, and it was by listening to him that I first learned by heart a number of Gregorian pieces. My sister, Monique, remembers many operatic arias. His honesty was flawless and without ostentation. He had little interest in money; not enough, according to my mother; she kept the desire to

keep the pot boiling, and she was very concerned about cash flow, so difficult during the Great Depression of the 1930s. My father was selfless, open. Born in 1876, he had lived his youth during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He knew well the history of France. Politically engaged on the right, opposed to the anticlerical governments that had dominated the country during his childhood, he moved more toward the minor party that after war began in 1940 gave birth to the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP). Immediately after World War I, he became a city alderman. According to my mother, this episode was of no help to his business. He ran a small family business of making funeral monuments, working himself as a stonemason and sculptor with some Belgian employees.

From my childhood, the family atmosphere led me, to the extent possible at my age, to interest myself in politics. At quite a young age, I could read the local newspaper, *La Croix du Nord*. For my part, Sunday elections were holidays. In a rented car, I accompanied my father as we spent the day driving elderly people to the polls. I remember, on the evening of the second round of legislative elections in 1932, that my father returned late, his face haggard: the landslide victory won by the union of the left upset him. Then there were the public scandals: the pseudo-suicide of Stavisky and the compromised politicians associated with this crook, the assassination of government counselor Albert Prince, and the public reaction on the right and the extreme right culminating in the violence of February 6, 1934. At the same time, I heard about the alarming rise of Hitler and was concerned about the assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss on April 1, 1934.

These are occasional memories, certainly, but they contributed to my interest in politics. My older brother, Jean, was significantly influential. He was a student of the Faculty of Theology of Lille, where the priests from *Action française* were among his best teachers. But the generation of seminarians in the early 1930s was significantly influenced by the prevailing democratic currents in the Lille clergy, beginning with Bishop Achille Liénart. Later, I would come to know that my brother had subscribed to the magazine *Esprit* since the first issue in 1932.

As for the Church itself, my father spoke very freely about priests. He judged them on their values, without any mythical respect for the clergy. I remember very severe judgments on the dean of the clergy, bourgeois enough. In my early youth I had many contacts with priests. I attended parish youth meetings on Thursday and Sunday, and I was an altar server. For funeral services and weddings, always in the morning, they came to fetch us at school. We were glad to escape, even though these frequent absences hurt my primary education. I was fortunate in meeting a young curate who heard my confession. He introduced me a bit, at the age of 9 to 10 years, to personal prayer. He had me read religious books and pamphlets, explanations of the Gospel, never about pious practices. Later, this zealous priest would become a fervent subscriber of the journal *Catéchistes*.

Before entering the Brothers, I was not interested in pious devotions. My mother had a devotion to the souls in purgatory and to Saint Rita, but it remained discreet. She did no proselytizing on this subject, and we even gently teased each other about it. Without realizing it, I experienced a fairly open, incarnated Church. My father, although morally strict, was not a man, for example, to condemn divorced people, as was common at the time. In no way was he a Pharisee.

I turn now to my brothers and sisters. Our parents were married in 1906, when my mother was nineteen and my father was thirty years old. He had fallen in love with his future wife when she was fifteen years old, and he had waited for her. Before the Great War, they had two children, Jean, in 1908, and Agnès, in 1911. Then came the mobilization for the Great War, my father's departure with the army, and the occupation by the German army of the North of France. My father did not return from captivity until Christmas in 1918. Four more children were born: Étienne in 1920; I, Michel, in 1923; Monique in 1926, and Luc in 1928.

My oldest brother, fifteen years older than I was, had entered the minor seminary at the age of eleven. By the time I attained the age of reason, he was already wearing the cassock of a major seminarian. I admired him, but I did not worship him, and his choice did not give me any notion of becoming a priest. I was very young when I began thinking about becom-

ing a Brother of the Christian Schools. That did not prevent me from being closely linked to the clergy, although not in the least attracted to it by my brother as a model. Perhaps my vocation as a Brother is even related to a type of reaction, although not a conscious one: I did not want to imitate my oldest brother.

My sister, Agnès, an intelligent and hardworking girl, was twelve years older than I was. An accountant in a company, she was a perpetual virtuoso in mental arithmetic and loved to wear beautiful clothes. Having already decided to enter the Daughters of Charity in September 1934, she made sure to dress to the nines the previous June for the priestly ordination of our older brother. I had never imagined her possibly becoming a Sister. I learned about it only when it happened, an ignorance due to the gap in age. But when I saw my sister leave for the community where she was to complete her Postulancy, I could not imagine her entering any other congregation. She chose a strong, energetic, even hard and active, not holier-than-thou community. She selected a solid congregation from the seventeenth century with the strong spirituality of Saint Vincent de Paul. This I came to know later, but I felt the truth of it even when I was a child. My father, so very proud of his children, told anyone who would listen that at least the Daughters of Charity were not *nonnettes*, “good nuns” who were somewhat affected.

During my years at home, we were four younger children. I was closer then to my brother, Étienne, until he entered the boarding school at Estaimpuis in 1932. When I went to Annappes, at the age of eleven, Monique was only eight, and Luc, not yet six. In other words, I barely knew them in our youth.

FAMILY, PARISH AND SCHOOLS

Miguel—You just evoked a memory of the Church that you perceived through your brother, your sister, and your parents. When you think about the diocese of Lille, which you came to know later on, do you see a difference with what you experienced in your family?

*Michel—*There is not much discrepancy, but we had several advantages. First, I was born during the pontificate of Pius XI, which marked some-

thing of a break when compared with the pontificate of Pius X, who was a reactionary pontiff. Pius XI was the Pope of Catholic Action, of the missions, of the laity, and—early on—of ecumenical openness. He was studious, intellectual, and politically open. He condemned Nazism and Communism alike and protested against Hitler's anti-Semitic policies. "Spiritually, we are all Semites," he declared, long before the war. He was also a great Pope, concerned with society.

We were fortunate to have a tradition of social awareness in the diocese of Lille; the North of France had a strong working class. The socialist entrenchment there was steady and widespread, and communism was well established. My father, the owner of a small business, was socially on the side of the workers. Christian trade unionism was vigorous, and a powerful Christian labor movement marked the young diocese of Lille. In 1928, Pope Pius XI had appointed Achille Liénart, a priest of the North, as the youngest bishop, 44 years old at the time, in France. From the beginning of his episcopate, he took specific positions on current controversial issues, including the right to strike and the legitimacy of Christian trade unions. These options, previously denounced in Rome, were officially approved by the Congregation of the Council in 1929. In 1930, Pius XI, with the stroke of his pen, made this young "Red Bishop" a cardinal. Cardinal Liénart especially focused on Catholic Action. Remaining as the bishop of Lille until 1968, he played a major role in the diocese and in the French Church, not to mention his role at Vatican Council II, both in the beginning and throughout the Council¹. Thus I became aware of this type of Catholicism, a social Catholicism.

Some resistance by Christians in the diocese arose from priests in *Action française*, from royalists, and from members of the extreme right. The rallying to the support of the Republic that Leo XIII had demanded of Catholics in France since the 1890s was spreading slowly. Pius XI appointed socially aware bishops in France, adversaries of *Action française*. Nonetheless, Catholics remained divided on political and social issues. The Catholicism in which I was raised was certainly not on the left, but

¹ The decisive episode to which I am referring is Cardinal Liénart's intervention, on the second day of the Council, in which he opposed the immediate election of the members of the conciliar Commissions.

it seemed to me to be both republican and socially aware. However, I must admit that we had no idea then of the intellectual tensions, so violent at times, in a Church seeking liberty. Echoes of these doctrinal conflicts did not affect ordinary Christians. Only in the 1950s did I become aware of their existence, of their violence, and of the issues in play.

Miguel—How was this context of a living Church, somewhat torn by various forces, reflected in the parish where you attended Mass and went to school? How do you view the impact now?

Michel—In the parish, there were more affluent, even wealthy, people who were democratic and not at all supportive of *Action française*. The pastor was, nonetheless, closer to people with money, the business leaders. My father's business was located in front of the residence of the municipal notary, whose son, Father Pierre Bigo, SJ, a "noted Jesuit," played an important social role in Latin America². My father and the notary were friends and members both of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament and of the Confraternity of Saint Vincent de Paul. There was no conflict on my father's part, but because we did not belong to the working class, we did not feel part of the same world. A number of French Brothers in the 1970s wanted to return to their roots as workers. My family, going back a few generations, was mainly in farming (but I did not sense that heredity and remained quite allergic to any work on the land). My roots are instead those of a small, quite modest business and of independent people who are nonetheless aware of the working class and of the struggle for justice. In our parish (although not true for the population at large), I saw no gulf between employers and workers, and the clergy were sensitive to social issues.

The gap was perhaps more marked in school, in the following sense. In France at that time there were two rival schools, the Catholic private school and the city public school. My father was a student in the public school, because during his childhood, between 1882 and 1887, no other

² Father Pierre Bigo, the delegate of Father Pedro Arrupe to the Jesuit social justice projects in Latin America, was made a citizen of Chile immediately prior to his return to France, where he died soon after, in January 1997.

option existed. My father spoke of his school principal, Monsieur Mairesse, with reverence. As for us children, we went to the Catholic school, and the other option never arose.

At noon, when public and Catholic school students were leaving at the same time, fights sometimes broke out, but we all met together at the parish's youth club meetings. No religious instruction occurred at the Catholic school. The parish vicar taught catechism in the church at 11:30 a.m. in preparation for Solemn Communion, which students of the same age from the Catholic school and from the public school attended. During the Solemn Communion ceremony, at age 11, now known as the Profession of Faith, we were seated according to the rank we earned during catechism class. However, all the children from the Catholic school sat first, and those from the public school were second. The separation, although quite obvious, was considered normal, at least on the Catholic side. I did feel in some way that the situation was regrettable.

Miguel—Considering the view of Catholicism that you had in your family, with your brother a seminarian, your sister a religious, and perhaps with the communities in which you first lived, what was the general idea of the religious life?

Michel—I will note just three things. First, to enter a juniorate or a junior seminary was widely regarded as a lifelong choice. Above all, people viewed the taking of the cassock, often at 18 years, and even earlier for the Brothers, as a final commitment. It required courage later on to dare to give up, even before receiving Holy Orders. Popular opinion considered those who changed direction as defectors, even as “defrocked.” Second, the priestly or religious vocation was considered an honor for the family, as a superior state of life but with a sizable nuance: being a Brother was not well understood. A studious boy who entered Orders ought normally to be directed to the priesthood. Finally and most importantly, to choose the religious life was to renounce the world. When we went to the Brothers, to the Junior Novitiate, the obvious perspective was that we would never return home. In fact, Junior Novices did not go home on vacation. That was a major difference with Minor Seminarians, who followed the custom of the boarding schools of the time in having a family

visit about every six weeks. During vacation time, my brother, then a Major Seminarian, lived with us at home.

The difference in schedule for future Brothers was considerable. It seemed normal to have them live that way, cut off from the world at the age of eleven or twelve years. In principle this separation persisted after the years of formation. The separation was even more absolute with the Daughters of Charity, for example, and in general with congregations of women, even those without the cloister. My sister left home on December 8, 1934, but she was 23 years old and had worked for seven years, mainly as an accountant, since leaving boarding school. She returned home only for two or three hours on one Sunday afternoon, in July 1949. Each year she attended the *semaines sociales*, a kind of itinerant summer university of French Catholicism. In 1949, the courses took place in Lille. We took advantage of her stay to settle some family matters, but there was no question that my sister could even have a meal with us!

Miguel—You moved from the family, parish, and school milieu of Marcq-en-Barœul³ to the Junior Novitiate at Annappes. Would you like to speak about the awakening of a vocation that this change seems to indicate?

Michel—Do not forget that all this was happening when I was quite young. The first thing I want to say is that in my mind the awakening of my vocation was radical, even precocious. There was no Brothers' school in the town, although my father had been a student of the Brothers in his youth. My grandfather, who ran a small business, had sent his eldest son, after primary school, to study commerce with the Brothers in Lille, on rue de la Monnaie. The Brothers had opened at the same time an art school in Lille inspired by the Saint Luke Schools of Belgium⁴. My father was a

³ Marcq-en-Barœul is a French commune located in the *département* of Nord and the *région* of Nord-Pas-de-Calais. It forms part of the Lille metropolitan area.

⁴ The Saint Luke Schools were opened by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Belgium for higher education in the arts (architecture, graphic design, illustration, animation, advertising, photography, painting, and sculpture). They continue today to offer an advanced level of preparation and of creativity and technical skill. Many Brothers in the past acquired high levels of proficiency in these areas. The Saint Luke School at Tournai, for example, currently offers six options: interior design, industrial design, fashion design, advertising, graphic design, and photography.

student of Brother Fidèle-Gabriel, who painted the large canvas for the canonization of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.⁵

My father spoke of the Brothers with reverence. He was also quite proud of his eldest son, already at the Major Seminary, whose Superior often came to our house and would have liked me to enter there. At the age of six, however, I had a dream. One night, the happy image inscribed itself within me that I would become a Brother. I remember the exact place in the house where, on the following morning, I told my mother, “*Maman*, I am going to be a Brother.” One explanation for this might be the indirect influence of my father, who often spoke about the Brothers. I already suggested to you that a desire to distinguish myself from my older brother and not to take him as my model had been playing in my mind. For me this vocation of Brother was never a problem. It is strange to say, but that’s the way it is. Of course I experienced crises, struggles, and doubts. I will speak later about the crisis period between 1946 and 1948. Apart from that time, I never called my vocation as a Brother into question.

At the outset, starting at the age of six, what could the Brother’s vocation mean for me? What was it all about? For the most part, as far as I can recall, two realities remain evident. In the first place is God. I left my family to give myself to God, because I felt that God was calling me. Who was God for me then? Doubtless, it was God as presented at that time in sermons and in the catechism. It was not the God of the Bible (although we did learn Sacred History) and certainly not the God of Jesus Christ (but we did study the little catechism called *Emmanuel*)⁶. However, as far as I can remember, for me as well as for my parents, God was a Being; God was dwelling in me; I was in relationship with God, and I felt God calling me. In spite of some sermons and, certainly, of a widespread mentality, this was not a terrible God. The only sentence in a sermon during

⁵ The painting is exhibited in the gallery of the large chapel of the former house of formation, currently the information center of *l'ensemble scolaire Saint Adrien*.

⁶ *Abrégé du Catéchisme de persévérance ou Exposé historique, dogmatique, moral et liturgique de la religion depuis l'origine du monde jusqu'à nos jours*, by Monsignor Joseph Gaume, Lyon: Librairie Catholique Emmanuel Vitte, 1919. *The catechism of perseverance; An historical, dogmatical, moral, liturgical, apologetical, philosophical, and social exposition of religion, from the beginning of the world down to our days*. Translated from the 10th French ed. Dublin: M. H. Gill & son, 1878.

the parish mission (I must have been eight or nine years old) that remained etched in memory is one that the preacher chanted like an actor: "If Jesus Christ were not raised from the dead, he would have betrayed his Father." This certainly rudimentary Christology at least raised the question of the resurrection of Jesus. Thinking now of the image of God that I was then able to have, it seems to me that it was still that of a Father and of Love. The sentiment of responding to a call from God did not include at the time, for the child that I was, any apostolic implications. More precisely, I did not think of becoming a Brother to be a classroom teacher, even if, once I began teaching, I felt like a professor in my soul.

The second reality, equally obvious to me at the start, was the strong awareness that to enter the Brothers was to take a road that did not lead to the priesthood. Many in my circle of friends reflected this by asking, "Why are you giving up becoming a priest?" Most did not understand, and some did not hesitate to share their disapproval or regret. My parents were completely in favor, especially my father. But my older brother and, even more so, my sister who was a religious never directly told me, but they did not agree with my choice. Because they viewed it as somehow deficient, it took them a long time to understand and to accept it. My sister thought that I was more or less bribed by the recruiter, Brother Firmilien. In fact, my father had met him on a train and was so happy to see a man in a robe and a white rhabat, the garb of his former teachers, that he invited him to our home, but that was after my determining dream. As for the pastor of our parish, when consulted he replied with evident clerical magnanimity, "He can enter the Brothers; there already is a priest in the family."

Thus, my entrance into the Junior Novitiate was the culmination of my childhood dream. If it had been possible, I would have entered at the age of seven. However, I remember very clearly that the day before, Saturday, July 28, 1934, I experienced a crisis of inner despair and said to myself, "I am leaving everything. I am abandoning my friends, my parents, my brothers and sisters." This eleven-year-old boy was about to falter, to refuse to leave home. I told no one about my confusion, but I remember the place and the time at home when I said to myself, "I am not going to

go back.” The first night I spent at Annappes, I cried; I had never slept away from home. So I shed real tears, those of a child, of course, but intense.

Miguel—*How do you now compare these two schools: the school in Marcq-en-Barœul, with its friendships, teachers, and classes, and then the Junior Novitiate?*

Michel—First is the difference from the standpoint of the teachers and the classes. At Marcq-en-Barœul I had the opportunity to be taught by a female teacher and then by the school Principal. They used excellent, well-organized teaching methods in the primary grades and had high standards. Students at the age of nine had mastered most of French grammar, spelling, conjugations, rules of agreement, and participles. I also learned arithmetic and mental calculation. We thoroughly knew the chronology of French history and its principal periods. We were less well initiated in geography and very little in science. Memory was queen, but for the rest of my studies this was nothing but beneficial. I must also add that in addition to cultivating memorization, the daily practice of grammatical and logical analysis and writing exercises (descriptive and narrative) contributed to the development of intelligence.

Classes began at Annappes in early September; exercises of piety and manual labor occupied an important part of our school time. We did catch up a bit, because there was no free time spent with our families. The Junior Novices were divided into three classes. Because I was only eleven years old, I was placed in the third class. Unlike the school at Marcq-en-Barœul, we only had inexperienced teachers, who had just finished their Scholasticate. I was first in the class throughout the year, without having to work hard; I already knew everything, and I learned nothing new. The only novelty was English, taught in deplorable conditions. The sequence of courses was rather chaotic.

Through no one’s fault, virtually no classes were available in French, English, history, and geography. All the teachers had their own work to do, and the overall organization was deficient. At the second session of September 1938, I passed the written examination for the first part of the Baccalauréat, with good grades in mathematics, science, and French, but

I failed the oral exam, because of my deficiency in Geography and in English. As an adolescent of fifteen, I was shocked by this inevitable failure that I felt was so undeserved. The Director of the Junior Novitiate did not linger on consolation, for now it was necessary that I focus on preparing for the *Brevet élémentaire*.⁷ I was as easily downgraded two levels in October 1938 as I had been parachuted into the higher class the year before. In my final year at the Junior Novitiate, as in my first, I felt that I learned nothing other than some History and Geography.

Apart from the school schedule, the cultural milieu was a desert. We had little time for personal reading and were not at all encouraged to do so, for books of quality were rare. I had enjoyed reading when I was living at home; in fact, I bought adventure novels written for young readers. At Annappes that ended, with no possibility of choice and no literary or artistic sensibility. They might well have killed our love for reading. The same was true for any openness to the life of the world. As a child at home, I could read the newspaper and follow political events. At Annappes, information was limited to what was impossible to ignore: the victory of the socialist *Front populaire* in 1936, the *Anschluss*⁸ in Austria in spring 1938, and in the autumn the risk of global conflict, the call-up of the reserves, and the suppliant discourse delivered in French by Pius XI, who offered his own life for peace. We heard it on the radio, thanks to the school's Director, who paid for a TSF (*télécommunication sans fil*) subscription that we rarely used.

INITIAL FORMATION

Miguel—What was the religious climate of the Junior Novitiate, and what were your experiences there?

Michel—Now, at a distance, I think that three forces—converged to establish and to maintain a particular “religious” climate that profoundly affected us. I merely state them here, with no emphasis. The basic and obvious axiom we need not discuss: If you are here, it is because God has

⁷ It is the basic diploma required to obtain teacher certification.

⁸ The *Anschluss* is the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany on March 12, 1938.

called you to become a Brother of the Christian Schools. To hesitate would be to look back. To leave would be a desertion that endangers eternal salvation. You have received the grace of the vocation; you must obtain and merit that of *perseverance*.

Therefore, you must *preserve* this vocation, especially the chastity that constitutes its armature. From which follows the distancing from what is called the world, beginning with the family; the practical impossibility of contact with the opposite sex; vigilance and strict censorship in reading and, with greater reason, public performances (practically nonexistent); the practice of renunciation and the spirit of sacrifice. But danger can come from within the group, however well preserved it is. We were often warned about what were called particular friendships, no matter that at our age and in the conditions in which we found ourselves, we could not even suspect what this expression might mean. Although the primary objective was perseverance, those in charge did not proceed any less (often in the spring) with a series of evictions that froze us in fear, as long as it seemed to us that the purge was not yet complete.

Finally, of course, it goes without saying that the religious climate was marked by the importance given to *prayer*. We spent a lot of time reciting vocal prayers, almost as much as the Brothers did in that era. Morning and evening, we recited for a quarter of an hour prayers that combined the usual prayers of a Christian with a formula special to the Brothers, a sort of discourse addressed to God, who is endless and timeless, in which we expressed artificial feelings in a voluntaristic, individualistic, and quite repressive style.⁹

⁹ James G. Clarke, a Brother for many years, in 1987 wrote a book of remembrances, *Les Métamorphoses d'Aberdeen*, deposited in the Archives of the Institute and kindly made known to me by the author. In it he evokes in a picturesque manner the lengthy morning prayer: "One hundred kneeling voices now recite the formulas of morning prayer. These were almost as old as the Institute and in no way adapted to the age of Junior Novices. The prayers encouraged them to praise God, to thank him for his kindness, to confess their faults, and to take heroic resolutions and, at the end, invited them to place themselves under the protection of the Virgin Mary. Like his co-disciples, Aberdeen widened his eyes at passages of the manual which said, 'Destroy, my God, all evil inclinations, and annihilate in me all disordered feelings that would seize my soul,' or again, 'I renounce my own mind and all the pleasure that I could take in using my senses'" (AMG, GE 350.20.9, p. 119).

The recitation of the rosary included three decades, twice daily, preceded by Latin devotional prayers unknown in the ordinary Christian repertoire: in the morning to the Child Jesus and in the afternoon to Saint Joseph. There was no variety, only the stereotypical repetition of the same formulas, weekdays and Sundays, in Lent as well as at Easter. The only variations were by way of additions: for example, many salutations to the Blessed Sacrament; lengthy prayers of consecration to the Infant Jesus, the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, and Saint John Baptist de La Salle; recitation of the Office of the Dead, in Latin, every Monday, and of the Office of the Church (Tenebrae, Lauds, Matins, and Vespers)¹⁰ during Holy Week. We attended daily Mass, of course, all of us responding to the priest in the parts allowed, always in Latin, as was the reading of the Epistle and of the Gospel. The particular examen was customary at midday, when we noted the victories or the defeats in cultivating virtues and tracking down defects.

Miguel—How did you experience this period, and what are your memories of it?

Michel—I was a pious boy, which for the Director was an essential criterion of vocation. Being innocent, I had no difficulty submitting to this prayer regimen. I loved the liturgical celebrations that marked Sundays and feasts. We often sang Gregorian chant and, with the arrival of Brother Iñaki Olabeaga, a Basque and a teacher of Spanish, some excellent polyphony. I have few lasting impressions of the daily spiritual reading. We were given the lives of the saints to read, often without much value. The religious climate, however, was not excessive but certainly austere, for the spirit of sacrifice was often recommended. A certain external equilibrium was safeguarded, because the emphasis was on the religious value of the duties of this state of life.

Overall, the memory I have of those years of the Junior Novitiate is mostly negative. We had to study dry textbooks on dogma or morals. It was impossible to foresee any connection that this abstract, disembodied doctrine might have with the Gospel and, even more so, with the Bible, the

¹⁰ The liturgy at the time predated the reform by Pope Pius XII.

living Jesus Christ, or our own actual human existence. The emphasis was on strict observance of the austere regulations for the young, with no room for any experience of freedom or initiative. Without openness to the world at large, we were out of touch with the major events of political, economic, and social life immediately prior to the Second World War. How, then, could there have been any question of apostolic formation, however embryonic?

We had no teacher close to us in whom we could confide. Our teachers were discouraged from establishing personal educational relationships. Brother Director received us every week for an interview, known as the *reddition*.¹¹ Although he took great care to treat us with kindness, our image of him as a stern man most often deterred us. I reached the point where these weekly meetings seemed like a police interrogation, being that the Director was so suspicious about purity. This is no doubt why I remember to this day the strong contrast with the letter that my older brother, Jean, then a professor at the Major Seminary, sent me, in October 1938, after my failure to receive the Baccalauréat. I had confided my disappointment to him; understanding my pain and with much affection, he replied something like this: “In the kind of life that you wish to embrace, if you do not devote yourself personally to Jesus Christ, you will be building on sand.” For me it was a bugle call that woke me up to the priority of a personal religion.

Miguel—As you recall this period, what are your most vivid memories of your experiences, of your family, and of the Church?

Michel—What remains with me most strongly, and with gratitude, is my father. When I reflect, the image that I kept of my father is still for me the most beautiful image that I have of God. The more I advanced in discovering the fatherhood of God, the more the memory of my own father strengthened within me. It might be naive to say it, but I can easily move from my earthly father to God the Father. I have no difficulty understanding the Gospel’s paternal parables when I think of my father. There

¹¹ The *reddition*, an accounting of personal conduct, is one of the four exterior supports of the Institute (R 4,2; *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, p. 5). It is a term used by John Baptist de La Salle.

was no Jansenism in my father; on the contrary, there was much Jansenism (implying a “moral Jansenism”) in the formation of the Brothers, notably fear of sin, obsession with purity, repression of nature, warning against friendship, and systematically ignoring the feminine world.

As for the Church, I refer again to my vigorous image of Pope Pius XI. I was impressed by his leaving Rome in 1938, because he did not want to be there when Hitler came to visit Mussolini. He was opposed to both dictators. In this regard my older brother’s influence on me was important and beneficial. While a student in Rome between 1934 and 1937, he sent our parents a long letter every ten days, which I later read. He told us about his life but also commented on political events, which allowed us to follow them with a critical mind. He saw what was perverse in Mussolini’s Fascism, in the indoctrination of the young, and especially in the war in Ethiopia. In contrast, he appreciated the great educational opportunities he enjoyed as chaplain at the Lycée Chateaubriand in catechesis and Scouting. His biblical studies, the influence of Pius XI, and his own Christian Democrat convictions made him allergic to anti-Semitism. During the war he was able to help Jewish men and women escape to the free zone.

As I now reflect at some distance, the Church that I knew and experienced back then was still very clerical. Certainly, the Bishop of Lille focused his pastoral activity mainly on the specialized Catholic Action movement;¹² the gathering at the Congress of Young Christian Workers

¹² Too multifaceted and too large to be one specific organization, Catholic Action is a collection of movements; they follow a sort of *idée-force*, or framework, in the contemporary Church that engages the laity in the apostolate for which the Pope and the bishops are primarily responsible. The widely varying movements that have tried to implement this plan were developed mainly under the pontificate of Pius XI. Their growing importance in the life of the Catholic Church was a factor in the preparation of Vatican Council II. The oldest of these movements, *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne*, JOC, or *Jocists* (Young Christian Workers, YCW), in many countries was viewed as the most successful example. The YCW proposed “to make workers the apostles of workers” and to strive to bring entire “masses,” not just individuals, to Christ. Other movements similar to the YCW model emerged, such as Young Christian Students (YCS), young people in agriculture (JAC), and young independents in politics (JIC). Catholic Action movements for adults were created later, often emerging from youth movements (cf. <http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/action-catholique/>).

in 1937 was formidable. But in theory and in fulfilling its mandate, Catholic Action remained heavily dependent on the hierarchy, even though activists in various movements later on became political leaders in France after World War II. I certainly realized since that time that the vocation of Brother received little recognition for its specific value. The Brothers' schools were appreciated for their contribution to Catholic education, but rarely were a concern within the Church itself. People generally esteemed the quality of their teaching, although sometimes contesting the notorious severity. They found the Brothers to be a bit too enclosed within themselves and not sufficiently open to youth movements such as Scouting and Catholic Action.¹³

Miguel—You spoke about the transition from the school at Marcq-en-Barœul to the Junior Novitiate. Can you speak now about moving from the Junior Novitiate to the Novitiate? Was there a different style there? What was the context of this move? How did your understanding of the religious life change?

Michel—The transition occurred quite simply. On Wednesday, July 12, 1939, I was among a dozen Postulants¹⁴ who went from Annappes to the Novitiate at Pecq, about twenty kilometers away. We were a group of friends. During our last year at Annappes, many in our group had left, either sent away or departed on their own volition. This is perhaps one reason why almost everyone remained of those who entered the Novitiate in 1939. The groups that preceded and followed us experienced many more departures.¹⁵ Many of us had the Brevet diploma, which at the time was a respected level of achievement.

I remember my first personal impression on arriving at the Novitiate: a strong sense of liberation. I was leaving a rather imposing “institution” to enter a “house” of modest dimensions, although it was a quite dilapidated chateau. I was passing from a narrow school atmosphere closely governed

¹³ At the same time and in other countries, the Brothers were active in Catholic Action, for example, Brother Victorino in Cuba.

¹⁴ The name “Postulant” was used in the final year of the Junior Novitiate.

¹⁵ As one example, eighteen Postulants in July 1936 (most of them born in 1920) left Annappes for the Novitiate; no more than five remained Brothers.

by strong discipline to a relaxed ambiance with regard to the course of study. I was leaving behind a milieu in which I felt like a number under surveillance and entering a small group where I felt more free and autonomous. Even when we were together in the common room, in the dining room, and in the dormitory, I still felt a personal responsibility that would develop throughout the course of the Novitiate. The style of the Director and of the Sub-Director, compared with what I had experienced before, was truly one of educators who were more respectful of our individual personalities as young people. They listened carefully to us.

The Director of Novices was a very spiritual, very ascetic man. We continued to recite a significant number of vocal prayers, to which were added the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But every morning, the Director took us Postulants aside to introduce us to interior prayer. I quickly became aware of the importance of interior prayer among the Brothers. This was something new, compared with what had gone before. The Director's conferences for the Postulants were also special, although I do not remember much of their content. In different ways, even though we continued to perform the accustomed exercises, our teachers strove to give us the feeling that something new was beginning. For the adolescent that I was, this overwhelming feeling of newness and of beginning was important.

As for reading material, we were placed in rather intense contact with John Baptist de La Salle. We were given the biography by Jean Guibert, less copious and less daunting for young people than Blain's work.¹⁶ We read the *Collection of Various Short Treatises* and memorized many of its articles. We had at our disposal the volume of all the Meditations. Each of us received a copy of the *Rule*, without any solemnity. Thinking back now, I recall two first impressions, strongly felt, on my initial reading of it: first, *it's hard*, and later, *fortunately, no one observes it*. That was my feeling back then, but one in which I was mistaken. That is how the Novitiate began.

¹⁶ Unlike most Novices, we never had the opportunity to read the two volumes of the *Life of M. de La Salle* by Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain. At best, we were given Blain's *Spirit and Virtues*, an extract from his Book Four. This concession was related to the opposition to Blain by the Brother Assistant to the Superior General for France.

It was July 1939. The previous year, in September 1938, we already were seriously alarmed at the prospect for peace in Europe. Reservists were recalled, my brother, for example. We were fearful that war was coming. Pius XI had offered his life for peace; I can still hear his trembling, eloquent voice over the radio. He died in February 1939. Although situated near Annappes, the Novitiate was located in Belgium. When war was declared on September 3, 1939, the border was immediately closed. We no longer even had contact with our District in France. No visits were allowed, either by Brothers or by family members. We were living in a closed house and could see no one. During the Postulancy we had been able to go on walks, but as soon as war came, we remained confined inside, to avoid attracting any attention to a group of young men. We had only one outing every six weeks, to Estaimpuis, where we took a shower (there were none at the Novitiate).

Thus I arrived at the Novitiate with a sense of liberation and, at the same time, a desire to take things seriously. Then the retreat began, prior to the reception of the Brother's habit. On Tuesday, September, 5, 1939, at the moment when the bell rang for the first exercise, we said farewell to the Director and to the Sub-Director of Postulants, who had been summoned to military service. The Sub-Director was later killed at the Battle of Sedan, and the Director became a prisoner of war. Our Brother Director of Novices was 65 years old and had just completed a three-year term as Director of the Sainte-Marie school in Roubaix. For most of the time between the two world wars, he had been a professor at Estaimpuis. He was to have returned there, in retirement, as the Sub-Director of the community. A solid Alsatian, a man of impressive personal dignity, and quite demanding regarding hygiene and dress, he was a serious religious, an educator of rigorous discipline, but at the same time fair, open, and attentive to people. His students loved him.

Basically, as most of us thought later on, the change of Director was beneficial. Our new Director had not set foot in a house of formation since the end of his own Novitiate, back in the nineteenth century. In his daily conferences with us, he explained the *Rule* of the Institute, the text of which remained virtually that of the origins. Throughout this course, he rarely ventured into the realm of spiritual theories, or even of profound

doctrine. He suffered from a stomach ailment and sometimes was in a less happy mood. When he entered the common room, we noticed the decline marked by tenseness in his features and a somber attitude. While we prepared ourselves to experience a deadly presentation, on those days he commented on the official collection of Novitiate conferences published by the Center of the Institute. But most often, after a few minutes, he would say to us, “That reminds me...” Then he would push aside his notebook and begin to speak to us simply about episodes in his real life as a Brother, beginning in the 1890s, before the expulsion (of 1904). He shared his experiences with us, neither gilding the lily nor darkening the view. Thus were we vaccinated against any risk of idealism or of escaping in a spiritual fantasy.

An opportunity for a spiritual opening, no doubt exceptional for the time, was offered to us during two-thirds of our Novitiate year. The preacher selected for the retreat prior to the taking of the habit belonged to the Redemptorist Order. These religious had a reputation as somewhat narrow and severe moralists. Fifteen years later, several of these disciples of Saint Alphonsus Liguori would be at the forefront of the revival of dogmatic theology (including Father François-Xavier Durrwell, CSSR, and his seminal work, *The Resurrection of Jesus, Mystery of Salvation*) and of moral theology (the treatise of Father Bernhard Häring, CSSR, *La Loi du Christ*, a bestseller in several languages in the 1950s).^{*} Our preacher, Father Lansoy, had already encountered this revival, and he dedicated his retreat lectures to explaining the doctrine of the Mystical Body.

This expression was not totally unknown to us, for it was particularly honored and noteworthy in the context of the birth and the development of the Catholic Action movement. The renewal of the entire doctrine of the Mystical Body, however, had not yet become widely known.¹⁷ No

^{*} The English edition, *The Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1961, is an anthology of the theological and pastoral writings of the celebrated moralist. It also recounts his recurring difficulties with the Holy Office and with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.—Ed.

¹⁷ The fundamental works of Father Emile Mersch, SJ, *The Theology of the Mystical Body and Morality and the Mystical Body*, did not appear in French until 1944 and 1949, respectively. Corresponding English editions were published in 1939 and 1951.

doubt the teaching of Father Lansoy was over our heads; we had hardly any biblical or theological foundation. Its value at the moment we entered the Novitiate was to make us sense that the religious life could not be reduced to moralism or to asceticism but must be rooted in Jesus Christ and experienced as a growing participation in his mystery and his virtues. I am not saying that this result was achieved at the time, but at least some foundation stones of expectation were likely put in place. Moreover, because the Novitiate chaplain was seriously ill, Father Lansoy's Superiors agreed to have him be the replacement until our exodus, in May 1940. Father Lansoy gave us a weekly spiritual conference, and the custom of weekly confession was restored, all of which gave rise to a much more personal spiritual formation.

During the fall, winter, and spring of our Novitiate, we spent much time in the garden, because we had to eat. The Novitiate was poor, and it was wartime. For heating the house, we cleared the property of trees. We worked hard during entire afternoons without saying the Office, without spiritual reading. During the initial weeks we became accustomed to heckling one another, just like kids. One day, I do not know what incident occurred, but we received an outburst from the Director such as he would have inflicted on his unruly students. I was upset and said to myself, "Old chap, you're about to waste your Novitiate. Be serious." I was reminded of the remark my brother, Jean, made, without pressuring me, just before I left for the Novitiate: "At one time or another, the Holy Spirit will visit you. Try not to miss his passing." So I interpreted that incident as the moment of the Spirit's passage. From that point on, I took matters, I do not say rigidly, but seriously.

The manual labor to which I was assigned had limited opportunities for conversation; I met no one. I was not searching for it, but that's the way it was. So I prayed a lot, and then I felt a strong sense of the experience of prolonged prayer. In hindsight I realize that this prayer was focused on myself, but I am not saying that it was bad. As an adolescent of sixteen and seventeen, I thought of praying all the time, but it was especially a prayer of ideas, of some feelings, and of much introspection.

Miguel—*During the course of the Novitiate, was any provision made for what we might call an apostolic orientation?*

Michel—There was no apostolic formation, properly speaking, and obviously nothing practical. We lived strictly among ourselves in a vacuum, and we never saw a single other young person. I must add something else. At that time, and for many years to come, the distinction was clearly drawn between the so-called religious life and the apostolate. Religious life was prayer, asceticism, communal and interior life, observance of the *Rule*, and fidelity to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The apostolate, for the Brother, was his scholarly activity related to teaching the catechism, four and a half hours per week, as we were constantly reminded.

It was understood that during the Novitiate year, formation focused exclusively on the religious life, whether by instruction, study, reading, or, especially, practice, by introducing ourselves to the exercise of interior prayer, three times a day; by taking all the time necessary for lengthy vocal prayers recited in common, to which the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary was added; by submitting to the exercises of mortification, humiliation, and fraternal correction that are classic in many religious orders; by learning in detail, from *Catechism of the Vows*,¹⁸ the obligations of the three so-called vows “of religion” (especially the many ways of violating the vow of poverty), and by literal observance of the *Rule*. This *Rule* contained no less than five chapters on school life, but that was not the question then, except for recalling from time to time that the Institute was founded for primary schools and that absolute gratuity remained the ideal, even when circumstances required the use of papal indulgences to accept school fees from families.¹⁹

¹⁸ Cotel, Pierre, SJ. *Le Catéchisme des Vœux, à l'usage des personnes consacrées à Dieu dans l'état religieux*. 28^e éd. Bruxelles: Librairie Albert Dewit, 1922, 126 p. See Cotel, 1924, for the English edition.

¹⁹ Instruction with no financial charge was an essential element in the experience of John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers. According to the *Rule* of 1718, “The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a Society in which profession is made to conduct schools gratuitously” (RC 1, 1). But over time, the laws of secularization forced the Brothers to seek alternatives in order to remain faithful to the official inspiration ratified by the Bull of Approbation of 1725. The *Rule* remained at odds on this point as on others.

The implicit and sometimes formulated axiom was that if you were a good religious, you would necessarily be a veritable apostle. In our case, however, I can raise two positive points about the idea of the religious life that was presented to us. Our Director of Novices came to us after a teaching career of fifty years. His daily conferences often referred to the Brother's educational work. Presumably, his objective was to discuss some of the pitfalls, but more often than not, he stressed the value and the requirements of that activity. From this point of view, we were led to envisage the apostolic dimension as an integral part of our vocation. It was far from nothing and not at all common at the time in the Novitiates.

The second positive point is more specific, and the effect was probably less marked. Catholic Action became a huge success in the Church under Pius XI. In France various Catholic Action movements, known as "specialized," had expanded greatly. The formula is attributed to Pius XI: "The apostles of the workers will be the workers; those of the farmers will be the farmers."²⁰ The Institute's official teaching did not initially grant much importance to this new movement. The transfer of the Generalate from Lembeq-les-Hal (Belgium) to Rome in 1936 might have contributed to a greater awareness among the Superiors of this major thrust of Pius XI's pontificate. In the following year, on May 24, 1937, Brother Superior Junien-Victor issued *Circular 297*, Statement Concerning Catholic Action.²¹ The Brother Visitor of the District of Cambrai at the time was appointed to inspire us Novices to establish among ourselves some kind of Catholic Action movement, evidently involving all of us. It was so difficult and artificial that our Director had no faith in it,²² but he

²⁰ Pope Pius XI issued the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, "On Reconstruction of the Social Order," on May 15, 1931. "So the apostolate for the worker shall be undertaken by the worker or else it will not be undertaken at all. The Pope is aware of that and consequently wishes that everybody be an apostle, and that the organized laity give freely an active and disinterested cooperation to the work of reviving the religious spirit" (*Circular 297*, Statement Concerning Catholic Action, May 24, 1937, p. 11).

²¹ *Circular 297*, Statement Concerning Catholic Action, May 24, 1937.

²² In fact, it is significant to note that *Circular 297* speaks of Catholic Action in the context of the professional formation of the Brother of the Christian Schools. It observes that Junior Novices, at least in theory, and young religious are to be initiated in Catholic Action. The Novitiate seems to be excluded. That said, *Circular 297* does reflect explicitly the Institute's openness to new educational perspectives, inspired in this case by the Pope's teaching. "The educator who wishes to do a worth-

submitted to higher authority. I remember making a presentation to my companion Novices in which I quoted the text of Saint Paul's First Letter to Timothy, "Anyone who does not look after his own relations, especially if they are living with him" (whoever does not carry on his apostolate) "has rejected the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tm 5:8). I remember the convictions that inspired me on this subject at the time, but it was all still theoretical.

In fact, when I arrived at the Scholasticate, I confided to the Director my nagging concern: I felt no apostolic taste or attraction. In sum, the religious life that I had just learned and experienced, at least in the Novitiate, was a religious life of an interior, contemplative type, with no concern for the apostolate.²³ The world did not exist; young people did not exist; the few activities of Catholic Action that we could do among ourselves were nothing more than study circles. Because they did not correspond to anything, they did not last. I realize that I did not feel the passion of the young. The religious life to which I had been introduced was basically focused on myself and on the search for personal perfection, the primary end common to all forms of religious life. The apostolate constituted only a secondary end that varied according to each Institute.

I tried to live an interior life as intense as I was capable of experiencing, but this "interiority" was without doubt in the domain of psychology,

while job must be ready continually to improve his methods by taking into account the experiences of those about him, but above all by heeding the recommendations coming from that authority we all hold to be supreme. Now the Sovereign Pontiff, who is placed by God at the pinnacle of that eminence whence he dominates the world, cries out in alarm and sends forth an order for general mobilization, with a view to making sure that every activity of the army of Christ be concentrated on a measure at once providential and necessary: the Apostolate within one's own environment through Catholic Action" (pp. 3–4). The author of the statement presented in *Circular 297* is Brother Alcime-Marie, who had just been replaced as Director of the Second Novitiate, because of his excessive openness! It is interesting to note that his work is based not only on papal teaching but also on the practices of certain educational establishments. See in particular the two appendices in *Circular 297*, "The Catholic Student Youth movement as applied in a certain boarding school" (since 1929, pp. 45–52) and "A Christian Agricultural Youth: Method applied in a Provincial School" (pp. 52–53).

²³ I have often heard people talk about "a religious life of the monastic kind." I understand the expression, and I share the implied criticism. Nevertheless, what I have seen of the monastic life leads me to think that the practices derived from it and applied to our life as Brothers, because they are divorced from the spirit and the wisdom of monasticism, are but mediocre caricatures of monastic practices; besides, they were revised after Vatican Council II.

introspection, and willpower. Perhaps it even lacked insistence on the essential points: the consciousness of being first loved by the Father of heaven and of attachment to the person of Jesus Christ, nourished by constant study of the Gospel. During the Novitiate year, we were given a manual of *Dogma*, written in the 1890s by “a seminary professor.” Because it was in the format of a catechism, with no explanations, we had to memorize the questions and the answers. The Brother Sub-Director, traditionally responsible for instruction in doctrine, explained to us, two or three hours per week, the manual that we would study the following year, *Morality*, by the same author and from the same epoch.

Moreover, in the religious life to which we were being initiated, the emphasis was on fidelity to the *Rule*, on regularity, especially on the small details of observance. The *Rule* was characterized by meticulous details on practices of piety, exercises of the common life, posture (what was called modesty), and the practice of silence. The will of God, we were sometimes told, was traced out for us in the letter of the *Rule*, and by practicing the *Rule* we were certain to be faithful to the Lord. This view of things marked not only my Novitiate but also my entire youth as a religious. During our formation years, we had no opportunity to apply the chapters of the *Rule* about the school. Moreover, they seemed so anachronistic that we could hardly have taken them into account. Therefore, the practice of the *Rule* extended only to the exercises of piety and to a certain number of community or ascetic practices.

For several years, I was affected by this conception, at once individualistic, interior, and observant, of religious life. Subsequently, I had to travel a well-known road, in my head and in reality, to pass from this idea centered on myself (preoccupation with perfection and, therefore, with the *Rule*) to a personal integration of the apostolate in my search for fidelity to God. I add, and it is important for what follows, that the Founder to whom we were introduced was mostly the one of the *Collection of Various Short Treatises* and of the *Rule*. With regard to the value of observance, no one had any trouble applying the most insistent texts of Saint John Baptist de La Salle on regularity. This is the Founder to whom I was attached. When I later came to discover other spiritual emphases, I expe-

rienced a period of rejecting the ideal of observance. Consequently, I distanced myself for an entire time from the Founder.

Here I must add a correction, however. The criticism that I am making about an overemphasis on regularity was to become a greater concern in the Institute during a later period, about which I will speak. For the Novitiate time that I am evoking, it was mainly a certain personal and rigoristic tendency that preoccupied me in my adolescence. It is fair to remember what I said about our Novice Director's teaching and general attitude. His long experience of a "normal" life as a Brother in class and in an "ordinary" community saved him from any excess in his insistence on minute regularity and on the value of the "inner life" at the expense of the "apostolate." He distrusted the absolute and disembodied spiritual aspirations that could touch any Novice at one time or another in a particular way during this year. I owe him thanks, no doubt, for saving me from escaping into the "spiritual" divorced from reality.

Miguel—What do you recall most vividly about your Novitiate experience?

Michel—Two things especially come to mind, first, the great friendship among us Novices. Beginning in 1959, we have met together to celebrate the twentieth, thirtieth, fortieth, fiftieth, and sixtieth anniversary of our reception of the habit. Most of my life has been spent far from the North of France, in Paris and especially in Rome, which required me to travel frequently. I could have lost my deepest Lasallian roots. Thanks to the attachment to the Brothers of my Novitiate class and my regular contact with many of them, I kept a strong bond with my home District that eased my return when I retired.

Overall, my classmates and I remain pleased with our Novitiate. Compared with other groups, we appreciate having benefited from a type of formation that at least had the merit of not guiding us in a false direction, of not letting us pursue chimerical spiritual dreams. We recognize that our Director spoke to us mostly about real life in a realistic community and also about relationships with students. Thus we knew at the time that the Brother's life is not that of the Novitiate. Personally, I must say that I never regretted my Novitiate. I do not know what the value for me was of those times of very intense prayer, but I do not reject them.

WORLD WAR II

Miguel—*Was it during or after the Novitiate that the war became a more immediate reality?*

Michel—It was during the Novitiate. A special feature of ours was being cut off from life much more so than other classes. No visits from relatives were possible, because not only were we far from our families but also the border between France and Belgium was closed. We saw no one, not even Brothers. Only Brother Visitor had a pass to come to the Novitiate. No foreigner could visit us; we were completely left to ourselves, and we knew next to nothing about the war. That was peculiar about the war for us: nothing was happening. We were all convinced of the eventual defeat of Germany. It was not clear how or why Poland was defeated so quickly, nor did we know about the German-Soviet treaty. We were not well informed and did not sufficiently understand the political realities of Europe at the time.

A thunderbolt struck on Friday, May 10, 1940. At dawn we heard the roar of wave after wave of aircraft, from both sides, streaking over Belgium. The Germans had invaded, and their advance was overwhelming, because of their air and ground superiority. They also entered France and soon broke through the Ardennes and captured Sedan. Panic immediately seized the population in northern France and Belgium, mindful of the terror of occupation in 1914–1918. Many civilians tried to evacuate, and the crowds thronging the roads made resistance by the already overburdened Allied troops even more difficult.

Any contact of young people with the Germans was thought to be dangerous, because of the fear of being conscripted as soldiers or, at the least, as forced laborers. We left the Novitiate, therefore, on Wednesday, May 15, 1940, and remained blockaded in Estaimpuis; the border was closed. The Estaimpuis boarding school was invaded by hundreds of fleeing Belgians, in whose midst we lived. On Monday, May 20, 1940, we were finally able to enter France. It was too late to reach the South, and our evacuation march, impeded by the battle for Lille, ended with a stay at the Saint-Pierre school. Then we had three weeks, all told, of a most

unusual Novitiate: no books, no conferences, no fixed residence—but we never were out on the street! We were uncertain about the morrow and in a more or less well-founded fear of the enemy.

Our odyssey, shorter and less dramatic than many others, ended on Friday, May 31, 1940, with the return to Annappes. We had completed the final four months of our Novitiate, but we had no news about our families. My father didn't come to see me until late in June of that year. I had not seen him since June 1939. He brought the news that my brother was a prisoner in Austria. Food rationing began almost immediately.

Miguel—How did your formation continue during the war years?

Michel—I note simply that the retreat prior to our first profession of vows was no less original than the one before the reception of the habit. The preacher was a Franciscan, originally from the North and fairly notorious for two reasons: his doctrinal and practical expertise in the field of Young Catholic Workers and his writings dedicated to a deeper understanding of the spiritual doctrine of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Throughout the retreat, he commented on the story of Zacchaeus, which for us constituted an original aspect, and he put us in direct contact with how this Gospel episode radiates the mercy of Christ. This choice of preacher shows, at the least, the openness of the Director of Novices who selected him.

We made our first vows on the normal date, Saturday, September 14, 1940, and on the same day moved from one building to another to begin our Scholasticate. The Annappes Scholasticate opened in 1937; thus we were the fourth class. Upon arrival we felt a new impression of liberation. For the first time in my life, I had a bedroom all to myself, a formidable thing for the adolescent that I was and exceptional at the time in the Brothers' houses of formation. The rooms were large and almost empty, with a bed, a cupboard, a small table, and a tiny nightstand, but no sink. At least everyone was *chez soi* in the evening. It was an immense change. I had no difficulty with the courses; I loved them and had already completed a large portion of the curriculum during my Junior Novitiate. We worked diligently, because we had to absorb in one year the courses of the first two years of the *Brevet Supérieur*. At the same time, I retained my

taste for prayer. For example, I continued for a long time to prepare my interior prayer in writing. Interior prayer, following the method,²⁴ was a most important part of my personal experience.

Thus I did not sense a dichotomy between study and prayer; however, I unconsciously began to suffer from the lack of connection between the so-called catechism and the spiritual life. The study of dogma and, later, of morality contributed nothing at all to nourish my interior life. In the dogma of the Trinity, for example, I perceived no impact on my relationship with God in my life. What did make a difference in spiritual nourishment was reading the New Testament, which we did every day, although in a formal manner. We had no access to the Bible. Later, my brother, the bishop, would deplore as scandalous this doctrinal failure. How could religious who want to be apostles of the catechism be cut off from all biblical and theological formation?

As for me, I felt this gap as an emptiness that I suffered unconsciously. Gradually, the malaise grew, because of the contrast between doctrinal and spiritual emptiness and what seemed to me to be ever more intolerable moralizing: the overemphasis on the practice of the *Rule*. A few years later, at the height of my crisis before my perpetual profession, I told the priest to whom I was entrusted, “In this Institute I find no spiritual life.” From that point on, I became obsessed all my life by my preoccupation with the formation of the Brothers.

After one year in the Scholasticate (1941), the entire class was sent into community. Many active Brothers of the District of Cambrai, discharged in Free France²⁵ from service, had remained there. They were praying to return to the North. This explains the reduction in length of formation that I have always believed to be catastrophic. The Superiors at the time were totally lacking in vision and in perspective. The stopgap measures that they chose heavily overburdened the future. Perhaps unwittingly, they caused talented young men, well disposed for study, an injury that weighed on them over their entire lifetime.

²⁴ John Baptist de La Salle describes this method in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*.

²⁵ Free France refers to the part of France that was not occupied by the Germans during World War II.

At the end of this truncated Scholasticate, I was assigned to teach in the Junior Novitiate at Annappes. Barely eighteen years old, I was ignorant in many areas, yet in the early 1940s, the temporary merger of the houses of formation at Annappes and Saint-Omer opened some windows for me, both spiritually and intellectually.

The Director of the Scholasticate at Saint-Omer was much taken with Dom Marmion. Through this disciple I came to discover richness in the books (bestsellers at the time) of this Irish Benedictine Abbot of Maredsous. He published his lectures to the monks, entitled *Christ, the Life of the Soul; Christ in His Mysteries; Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*. Lacking a sufficient background, I found these books somewhat difficult, but at least they helped me to sense what could be a link between doctrine and the spiritual life. Drawn from these works of Dom Marmion, a little book of meditations for every day of the year, entitled *Words of Life on the Margin of the Missal*, offered a page on the saint or the feast to prepare interior prayer that day. I then had something like an obsession for interior prayer that was not intellectual but doctrinal.

Thanks to the merger of the formation houses of Cambrai and Saint-Omer, I was in contact with Brothers who were already attending university; they helped me advance in my studies. I set myself to learn Latin and Greek, in order to achieve the degree of *licence en lettres*. At the same time, these Brothers helped open my eyes to many narrow aspects of Annappes and of my own mindset. A monk of the abbey of Saint-Paul of Wisques accompanied the Saint-Omer group. I am indebted to him for my first liturgical initiation, along with a spiritual opening. A Brother, a few years older, and I organized a few sessions of Bible courses. My brother, Jean, then a professor of Sacred Scripture at the Major Seminary of Lille, gave the group of communities at Annappes a few hours of introduction to the writings of Saint Paul.

Miguel—*Did the apostolic aspect change significantly during this period?*

Michel—No, I was a teacher in the Junior Novitiate, then in the Scholasticate, but in initial formation at the time, personal relationships with the young were reserved to the Brother Director only. By definition, teachers were prevented from this apostolate; they had to limit themselves

to teaching their courses. This kind of ban contributed nothing to foster zeal. I saw my confreres (in other communities) as zealous, but I had no personal apostolic aspirations. My preoccupation was regularity and personal perfection. At the same time, I felt inferior with respect to the Brothers of my Scholasticate class who came to Annappes with their youth groups. I realized how active they were with the young students; they also organized summer holiday camps. All of this was unfamiliar to me, and I suffered because of it.

Miguel—You must have experienced human suffering from the war, including death, separation, danger, and the difficulties of daily life.

Michel—We experienced these difficulties every day, especially on the material level. Because food supplies were insufficient, we suffered increasingly from hunger. Our local Superiors shared our shortages. We were able to survive without any concession to the black market, because the Junior Novitiate accepted boarders whose parents were farmers, who were asked nothing other than to help us. But certain Superiors, who countered our craving for food with facile sermons on abandonment to Providence, were able to stock up endlessly with these provisions, under the pretext that the worst was yet to come. Some of them agreed to be favored by preferential treatment. These differences provoked a mini-revolt in spring 1944. Brother Iñaki Olabeaga had taken the lead in protesting against this unjust distribution of food in which the health of the young was paying the price. His courage earned him a trip back to Spain, where all danger, however, had not yet ended for him.

We were constantly faced with specific hazards. We lived here, in Annappes, where the railroad shops and the major metallurgical plants were fully operational at Hellemmes and at Fives, a few kilometers distant. These cities suffered perhaps one hundred and fifty bombings, every time with victims. On our way to and from the university by train, we would be stopped at times by sirens, have to enter shelters, or suffer taut nerves at the prolonged roar of airplanes. Even so, the main attacks by the British occurred at night. Then we had to leave the residence and to enter the cellar of the main house. To calm ourselves, children as well as adults, and to occupy the time, we recited the rosary. Without sounding tragic,

I think that the sense of being in certain danger of death became a reality in our minds and in our spiritual life, a kind of fear that was simultaneous with confidence and abandonment. Prayers were intense for our country, for prisoners, for deportees, for those in the Compulsory Work Service (*Service du travail obligatoire*, STO), and, in sum, for peace. In October, month of the Rosary, and in May, month of Mary, churches were filled for Mass and for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Miguel—You experienced the war in this very isolated context. What was the political situation at the time and the life of the Church in general? Were you aware of what was happening politically, from the Church’s point of view, because of the Vichy regime and the occupation of French territory by the German army?

Michel—As for the larger context of the war, I can refer to the armistice of June 17, 1940, which cut France in two: the free zone and the occupied zone. The French themselves had difficulty moving from one zone to the other. In the occupied zone, the *départements* of Nord and Pas-de-Calais were declared and enforced as a forbidden zone, even more difficult to access, that was directly attached to the Commandant of Brussels. I remained at Annappes throughout the entire German occupation. We were cut off from the life of the country. Any information that reached us came from the local newspaper, which the Germans obviously censored. We could not trust it, especially at the beginning of the occupation.

Remember that Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain was legally promoted to head of State. The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate gave him full constitutional powers. Initially, most people considered Pétain to be invested with the legitimacy of the Government of France, including the occupied zone. Charles de Gaulle was viewed as a rebel. When the German occupation began, the majority of Brothers, of French Catholics, and of people in general were as much pro-Pétain as anti-German. Bishop Achille Liénart of Lille was pro-Pétain, as were almost all French bishops. In October 1942, the Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops of France obliged Christians in conscience to absolute obedience to the established powers and also condemned “theologians with no mandate” who supported the right to resist the occupying army, including by arms and by sabotage.

Our good fortune at Annappes was the presence among us of two Brothers who were viscerally opposed to the occupiers. Thanks to an Alsatian Brother, the house was never requisitioned by the German army. Especially significant was Brother Iñaki Olabeaga, a Basque who arrived in our midst while fleeing the Spanish Civil War in autumn 1936. He was fiercely opposed to Franco, because of what his own family had suffered. Naturally, his anti-Franco position led him to oppose Germany. He made friends with the parish cantor, Agathon Carrière, whose brother, a Dominican, became Vice-President of Algeria's Consultative Assembly (Gaullist). They would listen to the BBC radio broadcasts. Influenced by these two Brothers, we ended up favoring De Gaulle over Pétain.

Through my brother, I was in constant contact with the Lille seminary, which because of its democratic tradition was on the side of the Resistance. These influences, the Basque Brother, and the seminary meant that I in no way supported Pétain. I did not participate in the Resistance, certainly, nor did I support the established power, which, unlike for some people, posed no problem for me in the religious sphere. Yet I do remember one day being sharply reprimanded by a colleague when I allowed myself to criticize Marshal Pétain. "He is vested with authority," I was told. "We must obey him as God's representative." In any case, I had to be moderate in my comments. We knew nothing at all about the Resistance until the massacre at Villeneuve d'Ascq, near Lille, on the night of April 1–2, 1944. So-called religious separation from the world resulted in our veritable marginalization from people at large. Later on, this separation became more frustrating.

We were completely unaware of the horrors of anti-Semitism. Because I sometimes went to Lille, I saw that Jews, including the young, were wearing the yellow star. I was deeply moved and upset, but like many people, I attributed this segregation to the Germans, unable to think for a moment that the Vichy French laws also outlawed the Jews. Then we saw nothing more of it, because the Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. My startling awareness of the concentration camps came later, when I was mobilized in February 1945 and in April was sent to

Germany. Our train had stopped at the station in Landau. Halted on the opposite track was an oncoming train of deportees. Then I saw the railroad wagons crammed with walking cadavers. Suddenly terrified, I sensed something of what the extermination camps could be.

One aspect of our wartime situation was that the Germans ordered young men of my generation to go to Germany as workers, initially as volunteers, later as forced labor. Beginning in 1943, the occupying powers requisitioned all males in the class of 1942, plus some others born in 1920, 1921, and 1923. I was in this last contingent. Thanks to Agathon Carrière and some municipal employees, all the young Brothers likely to be conscripted into forced labor were provided with false identity cards. We looked upon this serious offense as an amusement.

Miguel—Were you aware of the Resistance and of the political ambiguity? What impact did they have on your spiritual life, on your way of living the Gospel in your community?

*Michel—*We had little awareness of the Resistance. The press considered those who resisted to be terrorists. In 1944, on the Saturday night before Palm Sunday, the Resistance derailed at the Ascq station a train transporting German soldiers on furlough. Enraged, the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, German elite guards) jumped off the train, entered nearby houses, rounded up all the men they could find, stood them along the tracks, and shot them without further ado. A monument commemorates this massacre.²⁶

Some specific problems affected us with respect to certain ideas about religious life, notably obedience, not about the Resistance but about submitting to the orders of the civil authority. On this virtue our Superiors at the time offered us a doctrine of radical absolutism (not at all unusual in the religious world). Some of the slogans they trumpeted without any nuance serve to summarize: “nothing without permission”; “the Superior is always right, for as God’s representative, he speaks in God’s name”; “you never make a mistake by obeying.” The behavior of many Superiors

²⁶ The name of the village of Ascq is remembered in Villeneuve d’Ascq, established to the east of Lille in the 1970s.

was even more consistent with these theories, which strengthened authority that they considered sacred. In 1943, all young men of the class of 1942 were conscripted for compulsory labor service in Germany. The Brother Visitor of Cambrai decided that the two Brothers of the District who were summoned must submit and depart. One of them obeyed, to the considerable consternation of his family, who sustained an intense animosity against the said Superior. The other Brother refused to go to Germany, and he returned to his family and lived with them clandestinely until 1945.

The Visitor condemned this act of blatant disobedience, less to the civil authority than to his own viewpoint and, therefore, to the will of God. He regarded this Brother as having left the Institute, and he refused to allow him to return. The young man, however, took his case to the Brother Assistant Superior under whom the Visitor served. A son of Lorraine and bitterly anti-German, the Assistant required that the so-called fugitive, whose original refusal to serve he had approved, be reinstated without penalty.

This type of episode made us think and awakened our critical judgment. Could the absolute nature of religious obedience dissolve the right of personal conscience? Could the Superior exercise his authority in all areas, including in civic life? How are we to believe that God speaks through the Superior, when two of them hold contrary opinions on the same issue? During these years, other religious and priests had to confront this kind of problem, but on an entirely different scale and with formidable challenges, because human lives, including their own, were involved. Even though our mutual questions focused on specific minor situations, we could scarcely bring them to the surface. These small debates, nonetheless, were important influences on the evolution of our ideas about certain aspects of the religious life.

Cut off from everything, I couldn't think how I might join a Resistance whose name was all I knew. I do not know what I would have done had I found myself in a situation with the Resistance. It was only after the war, in 1945, when I was living in community with an outstanding Brother of Belgian nationality, as were three or four others in the

District.²⁷ He was a member of the Scholasticate faculty, but we knew that this was also his year to finish his Novitiate. Active in the Resistance at Estaimpuis, he had found himself in violent conflict with his Brother Director. He was forced to request his dispensation from vows and found refuge as a teacher at the Jesuit college in Lille. He was readmitted to the Institute without difficulty after the war ended, but because he had been released from his vows, the unavoidable canonical prescriptions forced him to go through the process (although simplified) of reincorporation in the Institute. My own brothers, Jean and Étienne, participated a little in the Resistance. One of my uncles was arrested but escaped deportation, thanks to the German *débâcle* in late summer 1944. At the time I knew nothing about these situations.

THE POSTWAR PERIOD

Miguel—Do you want to speak now about your university studies and about the changes after the war?

*Michel—*My university studies began even during the war, by a kind of curious prelude. Still quite young, I experienced (one of the rare times in my life) the physical impossibility of religious obedience. It was an absolute allergy, not a problem of conscience. Ever since the German occupation, the Brother Visitor of the time, a tyrant, was obsessed with the danger, according to him, that threatened the young Brothers of being conscripted into forced labor in Germany. Thinking that university students would receive some kind of reprieve, he sought at all costs and as quickly as possible to enroll us in no matter what department. To be admitted to a university, the Baccalauréat diploma was required, but I would not finish my Baccalauréat until October 1942. The Visitor had unearthed a School of Agriculture at the Catholic University of Lille (the Catho), which accepted students without the Baccalauréat. He ordered me and some other young Brothers to enroll there in September 1941.

²⁷ Unlike France, Belgium had no government; the king and the prime minister went into exile in London. Belgium was under the direct jurisdiction of the occupying German army, which removed any problem of conscience relative to the principle of obedience to the legitimate government of the country.

With death in my soul, I attended classes all day on the first Thursday of the academic year. As soon as I returned to the community that evening, I went to see the Director, Brother Blondiau, and I told him, "It's impossible; you cannot ask me to do this." (I was 18 years old.) "I'm unsuited for agriculture courses; I've had it up to here!" Theoretically a fan of blind obedience, the Director, without further discussion, must have sensed my utter dismay, for he replied without missing a beat, "That's it; you won't take these courses. I'll take care of convincing the Visitor to listen to reason."

In 1942 I passed the Baccalauréat and enrolled at the Catho of Lille. My personal preference and the subjects in which I had excellent teachers and great success were mathematics and science. I decided, however, to choose the degree then called *lettres pures*, which included certificates in Latin, Greek, French Literature, and Classic Grammar and Philology. Why did I choose the path that required me to start practically from zero in Latin and Greek, subjects I had never yet studied? I must acknowledge that I owe the decision mainly to the foresight of my older brother, Jean. Although he never interfered in my activities unless I first spoke with him, I knew that he was deeply interested in me, knew me well, and was concerned about my psychological and spiritual growth. When I consulted him about my interest in pursuing a university degree, he deterred me from committing myself to the scientific career for which I thought I was best prepared and to which some Superiors were pushing me. "I fear," he objected in substance, "that they will only harden your tendency to rigidity and reinforce the geometric mentality in your understanding of existence and of the religious life. Moreover, by choosing a literary career, you will have at your disposal the best trump cards for your vocation as an educator and a catechist."

I listened to him, and what followed would demonstrate that the benefit of his insight far exceeded the specific topic of the moment. With considerable élan, I devoted the years from 1942 to 1944 to Latin and Greek, while vaguely following courses in French literature at the Catho in Lille. In 1943, because of the more intense bombardment of Saint-Omer than in the Lille region, formation communities from our District came to Annappes. Then I had the good fortune to meet Brother Jacques Serlooten. Still a young man, he had joined the Institute after secondary

school and served as a soldier for more than two years. He had completed at the University of Caen a number of certificates for the same licentiate degree that I was seeking. He helped me considerably by giving me greater confidence in myself, by suggesting some readings, and by stimulating my literary taste. From 1946 to 1948, we were together during all the school holidays to help each other prepare for the certificate in Greek. We spent many hours studying the required texts, including Plato, Sophocles, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Thucydides, but these long hours of study were interrupted by conversations about everything. His influence on me went beyond the intellectual side, for I discovered in him a freedom of thought and of speech that seemed generally well developed, although I did not dare to agree with him entirely, to the extent that it implied audacious criticism.

My university studies properly so called lasted four years, from 1944 to 1948. I had to work hard, and I believe that on several occasions I was lucky during examinations, because I was not as much at ease and as cultured as the seminarians and the young priests who were my classmates at the Catho. Besides, I never stopped teaching class during those years, although I was doing so on a part-time basis. In short, I passed the certificate in Latin in 1945 (before going into the army), in French Literature in 1946, and in Greek and Philology in 1948.

My attendance at the University, with the influences to which I alluded, also occasioned an increase in the intellectual and the religious questions that would continue to trouble me. Initially, the questions that came to mind took the form of a diffused anxiety that I dared not allow to invade my consciousness or, for even greater reason, to be revealed to anyone. Even so, I was also teaching other young people in formation who were almost as young as I was. Some were experiencing feelings similar to mine; we felt a kinship. I formed deep friendships, including one that for fifty years has grown ever stronger, even when our paths totally diverged.

In this state of mind, I was called to the army in February 1945 along with the entire class of 1943. I remember departing with apprehension, certainly, but especially with a great sense of relief. A natural opportunity had been given me to leave a suffocating milieu, although I dared not

admit it to myself. My military service, which lasted only six months, was a significant time for me. Living closely with my regimental comrades, I discovered certain aspects of real life in the “world.” The extent of religious ignorance in most of them and their general indifference about the Church were shocking discoveries. Of course, the intensity of sexual issues stunned me. The soldiers with whom I lived in Germany represented the kind of unrestrained youth that I had no idea existed. Most went out every night looking for girls, and they recounted their exploits in the crudest terms.

What amazed and upset me is that many of my married mates behaved no better. Only a number of young, engaged men demonstrated what the fidelity of a great love could be, and I still marvel at it. I also discovered that my young companions had little faith in the chastity of priests and religious. I was under observation, and some of my companions did not hide the fact that they did not believe at all in my sexual abstinence.

Miguel—This contact with the world during your military service and during your university studies was a radical change from your previous experience in formation. What contrast did you observe between two views of human nature and of life in these two different environments and in the context of the war and of the postwar period?

Michel—The terms of this question seem a little pompous when I now consider my reactions at the time. In fact, however, the shock that I experienced after my military service was both cultural and religious. Returning to Annappes in September 1945, I entered a crisis that shook me for three years and was only resolved by my perpetual profession in 1948. What was disturbing me, in general, was my rejection of the religious world represented by the Institute that I had initially joined with such élan but whose human and spiritual authenticity I had gradually come to suspect. Trying to name the components of this rebellion, this struggle that was first and foremost in myself and with myself, I think I can single out three pervasive words in the religious world that I rejected during my adolescence: constraint, division, and self-sufficiency. In opposition to this deadly path, three terms seemed to me to represent revivifying values: freedom, dynamic unity, and solidarity.

Constraint, division, self-sufficiency: I suffered them in the confluence of the anachronistic austerity of the *Rule*, the heaviness of a continuous common life, and the rigidity of a conventionality that led to a type of unique mindset.

In contrast, both at the University and in military service, I discovered the freedom of faith, the religious liberty, and also the total, simple freedom to have only myself to decide how to organize my life, to choose books, recreation, and relationships. Furthermore, the experience of strong friendships made me realize the importance of human solidarity and of the demands of justice that sometimes require personal commitment and taking risks. I also discovered in practical life that men and women existed and that developing friendships with both was possible. Finally, I discovered some modern writers in particular who became inexhaustible sources of spiritual nourishment: George Bernanos, Paul Claudel, François Mauriac, Charles Péguy. At the same time, the Institute's menu seemed bland, and its pretension to self-sufficiency, intolerable.

A book I happened to discover in summer 1946 somehow crystallized for me all this newness. A dozen other Brothers from the District of Lille and I were sent to the thirty-day retreat held at Louvain for Brothers from South Belgium. The preacher, a Jesuit over seventy years old, had locked himself in a closed system of the *Exercises* of Saint Ignatius. The Brother Director, an excellent man full of common sense, struggled every day to give conferences for which he felt totally unprepared, which did not prevent him from speaking about obedience in terms that were new to me and liberating. But what I may well term a striking revelation was the refectory reading of a work by Jacques Leclercq entitled *La Vie en Ordre*.²⁸

The choice was not a trivial one; the work chosen for reading aloud was not an Institute publication but one written by a well-known contemporary author. This canon of Malines was professor of Ethics at the Catholic University of Louvain. What we heard read was the third of a four-volume work, *Essais de morale catholique*. The first volume was *Retour à Jésus*.

²⁸ Leclercq, Abbé Jacques. *Essais de morale catholique. IV. La Vie en ordre*. Paris. P. Lethielleux, 1938, 527 p. Cf. English editions, Leclercq, 1932, 1959, 1961.

This teaching inspired me by its fresh approach and spiritual depth, which reconciled in a dynamic unity the elements that are habitually separated: adherence to Jesus Christ and ethical requirements, morality and spirituality, ordinary daily life and spiritual inspiration, freedom and the gift of self. This book was decisive during the thirty-day retreat, but it contradicted any conception that I could have of the *Rule*. It was not very biblical, but it was truly an anthropology of freedom, an anthropology of openness to humanity. *La vie en ordre* meant order with oneself, with God, but also with others, with the cosmos, with humanity. These already were intimations of *Gaudium et Spes*.²⁹

This thirty-day retreat took place a few weeks after the Institute's General Chapter of 1946.

²⁹ A few years later, in 1953, I wrote for the journal *Catéchistes* a lengthy review of Jacques Leclercq's *L'enseignement de la morale chrétienne* (Paris: Éditions du Vitrail, 1950), a remarkable historical panorama ... that the author was forced to withdraw from the market!

Chapter 2 – *THE 1946 GENERAL CHAPTER TURNS ITS BACK ON HISTORY*

THE 1946 GENERAL CHAPTER

Michel—The 1946 General Chapter was a huge disappointment *for me*. When I say for me, I think that I am reflecting an entire generation’s situation and reactions. A number of the architects of the “revolution” of the 1966–1967 General Chapter observed and suffered the 1946 Chapter as a missed historical turning point. I must briefly describe my generation before I recall our expectations and why the 1946 Chapter appeared to us as such a disaster.

The generation to which I am referring is mainly that of Brothers who began their initial formation in the Institute in France between 1920 and 1940, mostly young men in each Novitiate class who were born between 1904 and 1919 and in larger Novitiate classes who were born between 1920 and 1924.³⁰ The community of Saint Pierre in Lille to which I belonged for most of the period between 1946 and 1950 was fairly representative of what would become the District’s age pyramid in the immediate postwar period, although some other large communities had a slightly different age distribution. We were seventeen Brothers in the community,³¹ and the Director was 44 years old. The Sub-Director, 75, took care of certain material and administrative services. The Brother Econome was in his fifties; the fourteen other Brothers were between 23 and 30 years old.

³⁰ I was able to verify in the Annappes archives of the former District of Lille one example that was etched in my memory. In July 1936, eighteen Junior Novices left Annappes as Postulants for the Novitiate at Pecq. Most of them were born in 1920; thus, sixteen was the normal age at the time for the Novitiate. Of these eighteen, seventeen received the Brother’s habit in September 1936. The departure of one young man during the Postulancy earned for us Junior Novices, on holiday in Belgium, an incredible outburst from our Brother Director, who portrayed the lone defector as unfaithful to his vocation, thereby placing his eternal salvation in jeopardy.

³¹ After 1924, the groups began declining in number, although still quite large when compared with the decline that would occur in the mid-1960s.

After the war, between April 1945 and September 1946, many Brothers returned to the District after being absent for various reasons, mobilized in 1939, released at the Armistice, or remained in Free France. Many had lived in other Districts, where the experience of communities that had been secularized after 1904 was greater and more prolonged than in the North and where the presence of lay staff, including female teachers, was no longer the rare exception. Fifteen other Brothers returned from captivity.³² Taken prisoner during the campaign in France in 1940, they remained in German prisoner of war camps for five years. Four or five other Brothers of the class of 1942 returned after two years of Compulsory Work Service in Germany (*Service du travail obligatoire*, STO). Twenty Brothers from the classes between 1940 and 1943 who were conscripted in February 1945 rejoined the communities after completing military service that varied from six to fifteen months in duration.

These Brothers had to live the religious life in environments far different than those they had known in the Institute, and the difficulties of all kinds that prisoners experienced were painful. Isolated from any community life, they were plunged instantly into the world, sharing the same conditions as the men with whom they were living, often with overcrowding. They had confronted the significance of even the most basic human realities. Left to themselves with little and, at best, precarious religious support, they had rediscovered the essence of faith experienced as a personal relationship with the living God who lives in them and guides them. They perceived their vocation as a Brother, above all, as an unexpected call to follow Jesus Christ by sharing the shortages, risks, uncertainties, and expectations of culturally and religiously diverse human groups. They had discovered existentially the possible demands on personal conscience when by default all collective religious regulation was lacking. Prayer became for them an inner necessity rather than an obligation of the *Rule*. They had been confronted both by activist Christians and by unbelievers who were at times virulently anticlerical. Above all,

³² I am referring here to all the Brothers of the District of Lille, who until 1946 had belonged to two Districts, Cambrai and Saint-Omer.

they had taken note of the widespread religious ignorance and indifference of the vast majority.

In short, these Brothers were forced to refocus their religious life on the essence of religious commitment: willingness to hear the Word and to discern God's call in the unexpectedness of actual events; maturing in conformity with Christ by enduring scarcity, loneliness, and subjection to guards whom they often feared; experiencing the expanded brotherhood of everyone thrown together by imposed circumstances; needing to listen endlessly beforehand to those to whom they might feel called to announce the Gospel. In addition, the France to which they returned, a country liberated after four years of harsh occupation, was itself experiencing various currents of renewal in a changing society and in a Church in turmoil.³³

It is useless to describe the complete picture of French society's upheaval in the aftermath of the Liberation, first with the government of General Charles de Gaulle, then under the Fourth Republic. I only mention as examples a few critical developments that concerned the Brothers more directly. The birth of the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP) awakened in us a sense of civic responsibility by introducing the possibility of separating political conservatism and Catholicism. Although initially without any future prospect, we could hope for a solution to the troublesome problem of the financing of Catholic education.

A new Christian press was most appealing to us. *Témoignage chrétien*, *Temps présent*, *La Vie catholique illustrée*, and *Esprit* invited us to translate in the social and political realm our Christian aspirations for greater justice, freedom, and solidarity. Christian activists formed in the specialized Catholic Action movements assumed responsible positions in municipal government, in parliament, and in governmental services. Many of them, including Robert Schuman, Edmond Michelet, and Robert Prigent, would play an important role in French politics and eventually in the

³³ The goal of my brief summary is to describe the context in which we Brothers learned about the results of the 1946 General Chapter, the same context of the period between 1944 and 1946. In recalling particular aspects, the features that I remember are those that we experienced at the end of World War II.

birth of Europe. We were discovering to what extent faith and Christian life are embodied in social, economic, and political realities. This movement was reflected in the organization of the *Semaines sociales* (Social Weeks), then at the height of their influence.

The end of the German occupation liberated cultural forces that in most cases had been underground. From 1944 to 1964, five French authors received the Nobel Prize for Literature: André Gide (1947), François Mauriac (1952), Albert Camus (1957), Saint-John Perse (1960), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1964), who refused it. These names of distinguished authors in literature, philosophy, theater, and poetry personify the intellectual ferment and the artistic creativity that were also reflected in painting, music, cinema, architecture, and urban planning.

Rather than listing names, I will only mention two characteristics of the cultural movement of this period that could not help but affect us. On the one hand, perhaps more than at any other time, writers, artists, and intellectuals were engaged in politics, that is to say, as witnesses of their time who were also eager to influence it. Although some of their work was esoteric and restricted to a small readership, they had enormous influence on the way people, including Christians, were thinking. I need only mention terms such as existentialism and situation ethics. Moreover, the post-war period witnessed the development of what came to be called mass culture, in thought, in the arts, in politics, and in social life, thanks to the diffusion of paperbacks, the multiplication of radio and television sets, stations, and transmissions, and the expansion of cinemas and of film production in many countries, not to mention the spread of the press and of major news magazines.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, from 1945 on, a ferment—most often an invigorating and creative one—stirred up the Church in France. It suffices to mention two interrelated energies that took root under the German occupation and later flourished openly. The work of Fathers Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel (*France, pays de mission?*) produced a shock wave that never waned. France was no longer the Christian country that many had imagined. Research inspired by this book focused on the re-evangelization of the country, especially of the working class, and

also inspired the priest-worker movement, the Mission de France and its seminary, and a surge in parish missions throughout the country.

The second energy was in the religious life, which discovered a mystical inspiration and forms that seemed original to us, as in *Au cœur des masses*.³⁴ In cities the development of the Little Brothers of Jesus and of the Little Sisters of Jesus and of many other foundations reclaimed the spirit of Father Charles de Foucauld. The founding of the Missionary Brothers of the Countryside by Father Michel Épagnéul, OP, was successful in rural areas. In labor, student, independent, and rural settings, specialized Catholic Action movements celebrated a new springtime. They were supported by the publication of brochures and literature that sought to renew the presentation of Christian doctrine by showing its practical implications in concrete action to transform society.³⁵

Along with this awareness of the need to re-evangelize the country with new methods, a strong movement also emerged to return to the primary sources of the faith and of the Christian life. Various approaches to renewal asserted themselves. The liberating 1943 encyclical of Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, officially recognized the biblical renewal developed through the influence of *l'École biblique de Jérusalem* and the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. The *Centre de Pastorale liturgique* of Paris sought to promote a revival that was pastoral, adapted to the experiences of Christians, and rooted in Tradition, thanks to the solid historical research conducted at several universities and monasteries. The patristic revival was marked by the success of the latest collection, *Sources Chrétiennes*. The ecumenical renewal was growing and deepening, thanks to Abbé Paul Couturier, Dom Lambert Beauduin, and the monastery of Chevetogne.

These various movements of return to the sources, linked with the renewal of parish missions, also influenced strong theological movements at the

³⁴ *Au cœur des masses*, by Father René Voillaume, was a huge success in religious publishing in 1950. See Voillaume, *Seeds of the desert; the legacy of Charles de Foucauld*. 1955.

³⁵ I am thinking of the pamphlets on spiritual doctrine by Father François Varillon, SJ, in which we discovered the spiritual nourishment that we were lacking.

Jesuit Scholasticate at Fourvière (Lyon) and at the Center for Dominican Studies of Saulchoir. Significant theological collections appeared, such as *Théologie*, published by Aubier, and *Unam Sanctam*, published by Cerf. Authors including Fathers Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, and Marie-Dominique Chenu were symbols of this springtime of the Church. It was also a spiritual springtime for the Bible, the Liturgy, the Fathers of the Church, contacts with Orthodox and Protestant churches, and an urgent activity through parish missions that attempted to overcome the multiplicity of more or less self-propagating devotions developed in the nineteenth century and to focus instead on faith and on prayer, on the essential Mystery of Jesus Christ living today through his Spirit, and on the Father and on human salvation. The works of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, were becoming more widely known, although most often circulated more or less clandestinely in mimeographed form. They nourished hope for a dynamic integration of the advances of science with the core of Christian faith and for a spiritual approach decidedly oriented to the future.

At the time, of course, I had no clear understanding of the renewal along the lines that I just described. I did have some idea, however, but most certainly not from within the Institute. I had close ties with the Lille Major Seminary and its outstanding faculty, many of whom included in their courses the contributions to doctrinal renewal that I just described and their experiences as chaplains with Catholic Action. My brother, Jean, belonged to that faculty and taught Sacred Scripture. I remember his joy in 1943 when he showed me the liberating encyclical of Pius XII. I was aware of his activities as a Catholic Action chaplain, and I had heard some conferences on the Mass that he gave at Annappes during days of recollection for Catholic male and female activists. Furthermore, immediately after the Liberation, Cardinal Liénart wanted to return his Minor Seminary at Merville, formerly occupied by the Germans, back to normal. He appointed a completely new team of professors, and my brother became their Superior. Thus I witnessed the development of a new style of human, spiritual, and ecclesial formation for young people who were considering the priesthood that applied the resources of these various renewal movements.

Miguel—This discovery of freedom and of solidarity coincided with the historic moment when the Institute, at the General Chapter convened by Brother Arèse-Casimir, attempted to reinforce the Rule. What effect did that Chapter have on you?

Michel—This is the context in which we learned that a General Chapter was to begin in Rome on May 15, 1946. The previous General Chapter, in 1934, had elected Brother Junien-Victor, then already 70 years old, as the Superior. When he died in 1940, the Holy See appointed as Vicar-General Brother Arèse-Casimir, the senior Brother Assistant to the Superior and a member of the *Régime* since 1920. This old man had neither the physical strength nor the intellectual ability to lead the Institute during these difficult years. In fact, recent events had forced the division of the Institute; some regional Assistants were, in effect, governing the Districts within their territory, which was particularly the case in the United States of America.

It is understandable that at war's end the Superiors sought to restore normality quickly. The Assistant for France, Brother Athanase-Émile, made it perfectly clear to us during his visit to Annappes in 1945 that he had insisted that there be no delay in convoking the General Chapter. It was most urgent, he believed, to restore strong central authority, to rejuvenate the administration of the Institute, and to strengthen the links among the sectors of the Institute that had been so dangerously strained by the war.

The Institute was not alone in holding a General Chapter so soon after the war. The Jesuits held their General Congregation in 1946. However, for us this decision implied a certain audacity. The Generalate in Rome had served as a military hospital for the Germans and then for the Allies. Because the facilities had suffered considerable damage, quick repairs would be needed to accommodate one hundred Capitulants. International travel was extremely difficult, given the scarcity of available transport and the restrictions and delays in obtaining passports and visas. Shortages of all kinds risked making the lodging a painful experience.

The Brothers of my generation expected much from this Chapter, the first since we entered the Institute. We looked for an *inspirational* Chapter to renew the mission of the Brother in a de-Christianized world.

We expected an *open* Chapter to engage the Brothers in recognizing human values more clearly, in being more involved in human concerns, and in renewing their educational philosophy and methods by applying recent educational research on schools and on youth movements. We wanted a *spiritual* Chapter to encourage us, to help us experience a personal religion centered on faith in Christ and the gift of self in apostolic service, and to invigorate the élan of consecration to God by rediscovered sources in the Bible and in the Liturgy. We expected the Chapter to be resolute in directing its outlook and the efforts of all to the future to be invented. These expectations converged in our insistent demand for a renewal of the initial formation of young Brothers in cultural, pedagogical, theological, catechetical, and spiritual areas.

For my part, I devoured the works of Charles Péguy. My expectations, no doubt too impatient, for the Institute's renewal crystallized in certain sentences I found in *Note sur M. Bergson et la philosophie bergsonnienne* and especially in *Note conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne*. Péguy describes the opposition between the *tout-fait* (ready-made) and the *se-faisant* (self-made), between *hope* and *the habitual*, between *supple morality* and *rigid morality*, and he expresses the unity between *temporal* and *spiritual*:

A dead soul is a soul that has been totally invaded ... where not even one atom of material (spiritual) would be available for freedom and together for grace.³⁶

[Hope] ...is in charge of beginning again, just as the habitual is in charge of ending beings... [It] is responsible for introducing beginnings everywhere, just as the habitual everywhere introduces endings and deaths.³⁷

By hope everything else remains ready to begin again. Hope has no purpose of its own, precisely because everything is its purpose. It is Creation and Creator together. It is the world and God together. It is responsible for applying to everything (certainly not to God, but to everything that comes to us from God and also to the little that we give back to God) its

³⁶ Péguy, 1961, p. 1404 (tr. by ed.)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1406, emphasis added (tr. by ed.)

own particular treatment, whose secret it holds, that is, the treatment of renewal, *of perpetual renewal, and of constant reintroduction of creation's power...*³⁸

It is a prejudice ... to claim that a ... rigid morality is a greater morality and more of a morality than a supple morality... *Rigid morals are infinitely less severe than supple morals*, being infinitely less tight... A rigid morality can allow remnants of sin to lie hidden that a supple morality, on the contrary, will embrace, will denounce, and will pursue through all the convolutions of escapements...³⁹

*In no way can abasing the temporal raise oneself to the category of the spiritual. In no way can abasing nature raise oneself to the category of grace. In no way can abasing the world elevate oneself to the category of God ... this global miscalculation made by the devout. Because they have not the force (and the grace) to be of nature, they believe that they are of grace. Because they have no temporal courage, they believe that they have entered into the penetration of the eternal. Because they lack the courage to be of the world, they believe that they are of God... But Jesus Christ himself was of the human...*⁴⁰

Brothers who were perpetually professed were to send *Notes* to the 1946 General Chapter, but not being among this number, I could not participate. Nevertheless, I remember listing a number of *desiderata* that an elderly friend, Brother Edouardis-Marie,⁴¹ agreed to make his own by sending them to Rome under his signature. My *Notes* focused on improving formation, especially in matters of doctrine and of spirituality, on greater

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1407, emphasis added (tr. by ed.)

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1343–44, emphasis added (tr. by ed.).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1444, emphasis added (tr. by ed.)

⁴¹ Brother Edouardis-Marie was at least sixty years of age at the time. Having been a seminarian before entering the Institute, he had a solid classical education. A member of the Saint-Omer District, he was assigned initially to Lembecq-les-Hal and then, in 1936, to Rome as the chapel organist. He was best known as the author of *Laudemus Dominum*, a collection of religious motets and hymns used in the Institute's French-speaking communities. At the beginning of World War II, he was the Sub-Director of the Saint-Omer Novitiate for the class born in 1923, my same age group, but in the District of Cambrai. This is where our friendship originated. I later met him in Rome during my theology studies (1950–1954), where he was chapel organist while also serving as private secretary to Brother Athanase-Émile (1946–1952) and then to Brother Denis (1952–1954). Brother Edouardis-Marie suffered a stroke on the same day on which I finished my licentiate examination in theology. I was able to attend his funeral before I left the Generalate.

openness to the Church and to society, and on easing a number of points of the *Rule*.

In truth, my hopes for the Chapter were not based on the few personal Notes that I managed to send to Rome. I realized that they would only be a drop in an ocean of other contributions. It seemed to me that many other Brothers shared my impatience with the Institute's adaptation to the new conditions in the world and in the Church. However, my hopes for this General Chapter were based on another source that I thought was incontrovertible, which I just described. We were leaving behind a universal conflict that had turned boundaries upside down, stirred up entire populations, and driven huge numbers of priests and of religious, including many Brothers, to unexpected and at times unusual sharing in the lives of people. We were now living in a world and in a Church yearning for a future based on a new outpouring of sources. It seemed to me self evident that the majority of Capitulants would be open to changes that seemed inevitable to us.

Our disappointment was as great as were our expectations. In my case, I felt shocked and disillusioned at a minor event whose tale might seem implausible, even a caricature. One morning in June 1946, Brother Paul, our Visitor and a Chapter delegate, returned from Rome. (The Chapter opened on May 15 and adjourned on June 7, 1946.) Upon arriving in the community at Annappes, where he lived, he ordered the bell to be rung. At its summons, around 11 in the morning, everyone in the community assembled in the chapel: Scholastics and Junior Novices, with their teachers, and the older Brothers. Brother Paul wanted to relay to us immediately the two decisions of the General Chapter that he intended to put into immediate effect. First, the invocation to the Founder that ended the exercises shall now include an additional phrase: *Saint John Baptist de La Salle, our beloved Father and Founder, pray for us.*⁴² Second, the three decades of the rosary in the morning and in the afternoon had been preceded, respectively, by a prayer in honor of the Child Jesus and by a hymn to Saint Joseph. For the sake of greater literal fidelity to the Founder, they

⁴² This modification was proposed by Commission 3, one of whose areas of concern was Devotion to the Holy Founder (*Circular* 318, 1946, p. 61).

shall be replaced by the Litany of the Infant Jesus and the Litany of Saint Joseph, as was customary during the lifetime of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.⁴³

These are minor details, certainly, but the fact that our Capitulant believed that everything must cease until he offered us these two Chapter decisions made me ashamed rather than angry. Do I dare tell people that in our world and in our Church today, the international general assembly of the Institute gave importance to such nonsense? I readily admit that if these details had been included in a compilation of Chapter decisions, I would not have given them much thought.

But we already had a premonition of a disappointing Chapter with the news of the election of a new Superior General (in the early days of the Chapter, on May 19, 1946). Brother Athanase-Émile was certainly an intelligent man capable of some degree of openness. He readily concealed the generosity of a big heart behind the mask of an inflexible leader, and he repressed his deep sensitivity by at times assuming the brusque appearance of a German officer. He had lived almost his entire life as a Brother in the Generalate, having been the Director since 1923 of the Second Novitiate, whose founder, Brother Réticius, had established that citadel of rigorous observance of the *Rule*. Brother Athanase-Émile was elected an Assistant to the Superior General by the 1928 General Chapter. *Circular 264*, which convoked that Chapter and was signed by the twelve Assistants of the Régime, expressed their opposition to change in principal and in terms that made the past both the obligatory model and the ideal plan for the entire future:

After two centuries, our Institute has no further need of tests and experiments. Most often, any circumstances one might encounter have their analogues in the past, and it is especially in the past that one ought ordinarily to seek the rules of conduct for the future.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Circular 318* on the results of the 1946 General Chapter mentions only the second modification: "That the Litany of Saint Joseph now approved and indulgenced replace the *Quicumque*. This is only a return to the practice of St. John Baptist de la Salle" (*Ibid.*, p. 70).

⁴⁴ *Circular 264*, June 15, 1928, p. 10, convoking the General Chapter to begin on November 7, 1928.

Presumably, Brother Athanase-Émile essentially adhered to this position of glacial clarity. As Superior General, he felt himself called to maintain and to restore more than to innovate. As the presiding officer of the 1946 General Chapter, he was hardly in favor of any freedom of expression that moved in a new direction. A rumor spread, probably well founded, that the Superior was obliged at times to silence the three French Capitulants who symbolized for us any hope of change.⁴⁵

Circular 318, Results of the General Chapter of 1946, was equally unimpressive. Eight of the ten Chapter Commissions had focused on the internal life of the Institute.⁴⁶ Only two Commissions considered the apostolate: Commission 5, Day and Boarding Schools, Gratuity, Catholic Action, and Commission 10, Foreign Missions, Health of Brothers, Retired Brothers. I must note that some Commissions were somewhat concerned about openness. This was especially true of Commission 2, Recruiting and the Houses of Formation, which recommended, for example, taking their progress in school into greater account in the formation of young boys by separating the Juvénat from the Juniorate and by not considering Junior Novices as already being in religious life, properly so called.⁴⁷ The Commission suggested, without imposing it on the entire Institute, that the principle of a Novitiate of two years be retained. It recommended “that the schedule of the Novitiate be remodelled and less broken up in order to give more time for study, reflection and indi-

⁴⁵ They are Brothers Aubert-Joseph, Visitor of Caen; Clodoald, Visitor of Brittany, and Charles Prat, Visitor of Le Puy, who at one point began speaking about formation that is “positive and confronts our challenges.” These words ... were, unfortunately, interrupted by the *Très Honoré Frère Président*. Amidst the silent surprise of the Assembly, Brother Charles sat down... The “psychological shock” that he dreamed for the Institute was not to happen (F. Aubert-Joseph, n.d., p. 62).

⁴⁶ *Circular* 318 lists the ten Commissions: 1) Means and Methods of Formation and Years of Probation; 2) Recruiting and the Houses of Formation; 3) Perseverance, Second Novitiate, Vows, Holy Founder; 4) Catechetical Formation, Religious Studies, Catechism Examination, Pedagogical Formation, Secular Studies of Brothers; 5) Day and Boarding Schools, Gratuity, Catholic Action; 6) Regularity; 7) Administration, Chapters, Superiors; 8) Administrative Questions, Religious Costume, Names of Brothers, Finances; 9) Publications; 10) Foreign Missions, Health of Brothers, Retired Brothers (*Circular* 318, *Results of the General Chapter of 1946*, pp. 10–11).

⁴⁷ “That the Junior Novices be guided in a manly fashion and with kindness; but while preparing them prudently for the Novitiate there be no encroachment upon the strict domain of the religious life” (*Circular* 318, 1946, Commission 2, p. 56).

vidual work.”⁴⁸ It recommended that the horizons of the Scholastics be expanded and that “the professional and pedagogical preparation be effective and that there be added to each Scholasticate without delay a practising school.”⁴⁹ Commission 4, which included Catechetical Formation and Religious Studies, pointed out a basic need when it formulated the following recommendation:

That a center for advanced study in Religion be organized at the Generalate and that in the meantime, some Brothers from each District, selected from among the most gifted and the most religious, enroll in courses in Religion in Catholic universities, obtain advanced degrees in Sacred Science, and become in turn professors of Religious Studies in our formation courses and summer sessions.⁵⁰

This recommendation would soon take effect. Also worth noting is the recommendation of Commission 5, Day and Boarding Schools, Gratuity, Catholic Action:

The Commission in appealing for a preferential development of popular teaching suggests therefore: a) that in each District the majority of Brothers be engaged in such teaching; b) that during the decennial period following the present Chapter, no new schools be opened except by special authorization of the Regime unless they approach as nearly as possible to the gratuity proposed by the *Rule* and the Bull [of Approbation].⁵¹

These indisputable openings failed to erase the overall negative impression of the 1946 General Chapter’s work that became apparent when we read *Circular* 318. Our global impression was that the Institute’s leaders, at a time that we thought was historic, acted in a way that was completely contrary to our generation’s hopes: instead of inspiration, reinforced constraints; instead of opening up, withdrawal; instead of leading the way into the future, the rigidity of the past.

For me, the 1946 General Chapter signified the canonization of the habitual and the ready-made, of rigid morality in contrast with supple

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

morality, and of enclosure within a so-called supernatural world without taking into account human reality. For me the dominant image was a citadel in which issues were kept under lock and key to prevent any stray impulse of future change.

In case this might be considered a subjective impression, reconstructed later as a rereading of 1946 from the perspective of 1966, this assessment by a 1946 Capitulant, Brother Charles Prat, indicates otherwise:

Some at the 1946 General Chapter tried to rediscover reasons for living and ways to revitalize. They failed. Centralization was reinforced; many attitudes, mistakenly deemed traditional, were confirmed and imposed, with the end result of even greater formalism.⁵²

In reading *Circular 318*, we felt, above all, that this Chapter held in the aftermath of a global war had occurred in total ignorance of the earthquake that affected almost the entire planet. In about 120 pages, *Circular 318* refers to the war only twice, both times in a conventional and abstract style devoid of any force and lacking the slightest embryonic sign of analysis. The turmoil of war is briefly mentioned only to insist on the Institute's resumption of its regular customs. The first comment refers to "the extremely important problems resulting from the war, the material and moral ruins to restore," only to emphasize "the spiritual wreckage to renovate and the needs of resorting to greater fidelity in all our religious obligations..."⁵³ The second allusion (by the Superior General, commenting on his election) is both self-satisfying and reactionary:

Another motive of great consolation for us in assuming the Office of Superior General was to ascertain that respect for authority—a Lasallian patrimony—has been in no way lessened in our Religious Family, in spite of certain ideas current in some centers, such as worldly independence, emancipation from all control, disregard for authority and lack of consideration for old age. Your Spirit of Faith enables you to consider the authority of God in your Superiors, and this it is that elevates and sanctifies your respect and submission towards the powers that are established by God.⁵⁴

⁵² Frère Aubert-Joseph, n.d., p. 62.

⁵³ *Circular 318*, 1946, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

We were struck by that fact that the 1946 General Chapter, in referring three times to the presence of women in the schools or in the community services, denounced this abuse and demanded that it cease. Commission 3 had discussed this topic in relation to the perseverance of the Brothers:

That persons of the other sex employed in our houses be removed at the earliest moment and that according to the directives of Canon Law, the laws of the cloister be rigorously observed in places reserved for the Community.⁵⁵

Commission 5, while discussing schools with and without boarders, returned to this same topic, of course, but with two nuances: the Chapter is legislating on this matter only because Notes from some Brothers requested it, and the prohibition must apply to all lay personnel:

Other notes pointed out serious desiderata that the difficulties of the times explain without quite justifying them: such as the employment of female teachers in our primary classes and the multiplication of secular teachers in a number of schools.⁵⁶

The same Commission therefore made the following recommendation:

It is important to proceed to a religious reorganization of our schools; a) By the immediate removal of the female element employed in certain places in consequence of the war. b) By progressive reduction of the lay element and by the Superiors refusing to open any new school which might mean an increase of the lay personnel in a District...⁵⁷

This last prohibition was extended to include all lay personnel, including men. Another decision that appeared to us as indicative of the blockage I described concerned the representation of the Brothers at the General Chapter by elected delegates. Since the origins of the Institute, the members by right were the Superior General and his Assistants, the former Assistants, and the general officers (Procurator General to the Holy See, Econome General, Secretary General, Visitors General⁵⁸), already a large

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵⁸ The Visitor General, appointed by and accountable to the Superior General, was responsible for the canonical visitation of the houses of formation in his assigned territory. The objective was to maintain a uniform system of formation in the Institute.

group. Moreover, to be eligible for election, a Brother had to be a Visitor, a Director of a principal community (one with seven Brothers or more), or perpetually professed for a minimum of fifteen years. At the least, the elected Capitulants were all perpetually professed Brothers. In fact, in more than ninety percent of the cases, the Districts entitled to elect only one delegate chose the Brother Visitor in office. As a result, the representation at the Chapter of Brothers “at the base” was quite low. Following a consultation between the Superiors in Rome and the Congregation for Religious prior to the 1946 General Chapter, another system was established that increased the number of members by right.

[The Congregation for Religious] suggested that there be about an equal number of Members by Right as Elected Delegates to the Chapter. It furthermore suggested that the total number of Capitulants be not more than about 80.⁵⁹

With such legislation the Chapter of 1946 would have had 79 members, 38 by right and 41 elected, which would have corresponded exactly with the desire of the Sacred Congregation.⁶⁰

What shocked us was that the Brothers at the base would be even less represented in the Chapter and, especially, that the Superiors somehow had forced the issue in advance of the Chapter’s decision, by obtaining restrictive directives from the Congregation for Religious. In a world becoming more democratic, it seemed to us that the Brothers would have less and less of a voice. But it was on two fundamental issues that the positions taken by the Chapter shocked us: the lay character of the Institute and the revision of the *Rule*.

THE LAY STATUS OF THE INSTITUTE

At the outset of the foundation of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Founder and his first disciples decided that all its members will be laymen. The dozen members of the Assembly of 1694 (the first General Chapter) did not consider themselves ready or strong enough

⁵⁹ *Circular* 318, 1946, p. 41.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42. In fact, the 1946 Chapter included 28 Capitulants by right of office and 95 elected members (60 Visitors, 21 Directors, and 7 other Brothers), for a total of 123 Capitulants.

to choose a leader from their ranks; twice they unanimously elected John Baptist de La Salle as their Superior General. After the election, however, their deliberations led them to take a strong and unambiguous position:

... the present election that we have made of the said Monsieur De La Salle as Superior shall not have any consequence in the aftermath, our intention being that after him, in the future, and forever, there be no one, neither received among us nor selected as Superior, who is a priest or who has received Sacred Orders, and that we shall not even allow any Superior who has not associated and who has not made vows as we have and as all others have who shall be associated with us in the future...⁶¹

It can be said that for two hundred and fifty years, the absolute nature of this position remained unquestioned, whether by the Brothers or by people outside the Institute. The young who commit themselves know from the start that they are entering an exclusively lay Institute. In a limited number of cases, an applicant learns of it during his years of initial formation. If a mistaken referral happened to occur, it was easily rectified. We all have known companions who after some years redirected themselves to the priesthood.

These rare exceptions did not affect the basic agreement on this subject among all members of the Institute and the Superiors responsible for its administration. The original explicit statement was so clear that no one thought to question its merits, let alone challenge it. In the lengthy battle about Latin conducted for half a century by the Brothers of the United States against the Institute's central government, its members across the Atlantic never raised any question about the lay character of the Institute.⁶²

⁶¹ Maurice-Auguste, 1960, p. 43.

⁶² "The Latin question was truly a drama. It brought many American Brothers and the majority of the American Bishops into conflict with the French Superiors and the Holy See. It required the attention of several General Chapters. It attracted the attention of major European and American newspapers and of the USA Departments of Education and of State and ignited a rivalry between the Institute's American branch and the Society of Jesus. It led to the exile of a number of important American Brothers; moreover, it was settled only by an act of the Holy Father." (Killeen, Peter. *La Pédagogie lasallienne et la Question du Latin: quand la Loi n'est pas adaptée à la vie*, in Pedro Gil and Diego Muñoz, ed. *Que l'école aille toujours bien. Approche du modèle pédagogique lasallien*. Rome: Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, 2013. *Études lasalliennes* 17, p. 172). For additional background, I recommend the work by Battersby, 1967.

This report ... was a very complete and serious study of the question, envisaging all the aspects of the subject and it pertinently considered and adjudged the apparently noble motives of the suggestion, and very specious and human views, which resulted in disturbed vocations yearning for the priesthood. The problem fundamentally is one of religious spirit[,] remarks the Procurator General. Our religious life is a state of total renunciation involving the voluntary abstention from the [sacerdotal] office and dignity.”⁶³

In 1946, calling into question the lay character of the Institute was never one of our demands as young Brothers. *Circular* 318, nevertheless, does address the topic, but in rather vague terms.⁶⁴ The Superior does not give details about the debate that had taken place.⁶⁵ To learn about this event requires looking to *Circular* 320^{bis}, “The Institute and the Priesthood,” dated March 19, 1947, an official communication to “My Very Dear Brothers Visitors and Directors.”⁶⁶ The Brothers in general were not to learn about the content, or even about its existence, no doubt to prevent spreading the contamination of a perverse idea.

In fact, the brief exchange among Capitulants was quite focused on the Brother Procurator General’s conference. He noted that “during the last thirty years, the attraction of the priestly life has been exerting a powerful fascination on some minds.” A “collective trend” would seem to trans-

⁶³ *Circular* 318, 1946, p. 35.

⁶⁴ The dossier in the Institute Archives contains sixteen Notes on the subject of the priesthood, most of them favorable and almost all from Spain. Some are lengthy, serious arguments that are based on the doctrinal and the spiritual formation of the Brothers, on their catechetical ministry, on perseverance, and on recruitment. One Note against, written in French, argues strongly on the basis of the Lasallian origins.

⁶⁵ In fact, the echoes of the “discussion” on the issue in the General Assembly do little to prove that there was an actual debate. The Chapter Register mentions, first of all, “a conference” of the Superior General to the Capitulants in which he speaks about the “trend toward the priesthood.” Under pretext of zeal or of a higher life, “some young subjects increasingly are considering the priesthood.” The Superior recalls the *Rule* and advises clarity in affirming, from the Novitiate on, “a sacrifice, a renunciation added to all the others.” The issue of the priesthood was discussed at the Chapter the following day, during the report of the Brother Procurator General, which concluded by reinforcing the obstacles to prevent Brothers who wish from entering the priesthood. “With this masterly report, everyone agrees,” according to the Chapter Register. All the speakers supported the intent of the report and requested that it be published in its entirety.

⁶⁶ The heading is *réservée aux CC. FF. Visiteurs et Directeurs* (*Circular* 320^{bis}, 1947, p. 1).

form the Institute into a clerical order.⁶⁷ A more recent “individual trend” was leading to the desire “to leave the Institute for the priesthood.” Before the 1946 General Chapter, he said, too many requests for dispensations from vows presented to the Congregation for Religious had too frequently received a favorable reply.

Through Cardinal Francesco Marmaggi, Cardinal Protector of the Institute⁶⁸ and a former student of the Brothers in Rome, the Superiors appealed directly to Pope Pius XII, who commissioned the eminent messenger to signify his “august will” to officials of the Roman Congregations for Seminaries and for Religious. This “august will” was translated into unprecedented measures of a rigorous clamping down. Any authorization by the Congregation for Seminaries of the transition to the priesthood by a perpetually professed member of the Institute must be submitted to the Cardinal Protector for approval, and henceforth any dispensation from vows accorded to a perpetually professed Brother must carry the following handwritten condition: “Elevation (*sic*) to the priesthood without a new indult is prohibited.”

Even now, fifty years later, I remember my mixed feelings of irritation and of disbelief when I learned about these restrictive measures. The apprehensions of Superiors unduly inflated the *danger*. In my surroundings, I knew of no Brothers who supported the introduction of the priesthood in the Institute. The fear experienced by Superiors was unfounded and disproportionate with respect to a phantom *danger*, even if some Brothers might have wished to leave the Institute to be ordained.

This fear was a bad advisor! The coercive measures taken to prevent further exodus were odious. They would prove ineffective, even untenable, because they gravely violated personal freedom of conscience and the liberty of the Holy Spirit, the root of every vocation. It was an unsupport-

⁶⁷ “Nevertheless, here and there, certain individuals are to be found, as you probably know, who through personal ambition dream of some other form of the apostolate, more elevated in their estimation; or who hope for an evolution of the Congregation towards the clerical state, thinking thereby that its mission may be greatly facilitated and extended” (*Circular* 320th, 1947, p. 1).

⁶⁸ The cardinal protector was an intermediary and a facilitator between the government of the Church and the authorities of a religious Institute. This function no longer exists.

able contradiction, in a religious Institute composed in principle of volunteers, to claim to retain by force men who feel called elsewhere. This episode strengthened my personal belief in the *innate freedom* of the individual to respond to any vocation from God.

These ineffective measures were immediately unsustainable; barriers designed to prevent the eventual departure of candidates for the priesthood collapsed once their dispensation from vows was obtained. What former Brother, now available, could not find a bishop to appeal to Rome to remove the abusive interdict? Certainly, in the first place, prominent Roman authorities had approved measures contrary to Canon Law and human rights! But this bullying could not have lasted without the vigilance of its protagonists. After the death of the Superior General (1952), the Congregation for Religious did not delay in explicitly recognizing the illegitimacy of blocking access to the priesthood of a Brother who was dispensed from his vows.

This fear might reveal an unconscious inferiority complex on the part of the Institute's Superiors. They feared that the Brothers were attracted by the priesthood. Their language seems to betray a devaluation of the condition of being a Brother. They speak about *renouncing the priesthood* and consider it a *sacrifice*. For Brothers who become candidates for the priesthood, their words also imply an unworthy concept of the priestly vocation. Apparently noble, according to the *Circular*, their aspirations barely conceal the search for a life less onerous than ours or the ambition of a more honorable career. These words express malevolence between priests and Brothers and an unvoiced resentment of the idea of the priesthood.

REVISION OF THE RULE

By its tendency, a second major decision of the 1946 General Chapter, although not expressed in a vote, brought us literally to despair. We had hoped that this Chapter was going to proceed with a major revision of the *Rule*. Ever since the Novitiate, we had known that such a revision was in the works at the request of the 1934 General Chapter. What some major Superiors said about it gave us the impression that the revision would be a thorough one, so we had great hopes for it.

Our disappointment was extreme when in succession *Circular 318* on the General Chapter informed us of the essential guidelines for the revised text⁶⁹ and *Circular 321* presented the new edition of the *Rule*⁷⁰ with the complete text.⁷¹ Beyond the disappointment shared by an entire generation, I personally suffered a veritable interior disorientation for the next two years. The cause was certainly related to the text of the “revised” *Rule*, but even more disappointing were the procedures used in the revision and also its approbation by the Holy See. Our disappointment was due, last but not least, to the motives claimed as the justification for retaining the original historical text and for requesting papal approbation of the revision, seemingly leading to an ensuing, hopeless blockage.

I am going to stop here with these reasons for our disappointment, but first I can offer three observations. First, I continue to think that with this aborted 1947 revision of the *Rule*, the Institute missed a major turning point in its history. I also realize that this disillusionment’s impact on my own generation explains, in part, the importance of the changes that were to occur twenty years later. Thus my specific comments on the 1947 *Rule* are essential for understanding the evolutionary process that this present work is describing. Secondly, some arguments and reflections offered at the time to defend and to illustrate the 1947 *Rule* appear, no doubt, to many Brothers today as stupefying, even surreal. I do not cite them to provoke astonishment, much less scandal, nor do I intend to pass judgement on anyone. I will have occasion to demonstrate, I think, that the intellectual outlook then common in the Institute was not unique to it. The Superiors offered the Brothers a *Rule* that they declared to be definitive. The justification they offered relied heavily on one or another successful “spiritual” writer whose words today might seem totally delirious but then had all the guarantees of *Nihil obstat* and *Imprimatur*.⁷²

⁶⁹ *Circular 318*, 1946, Part Three, Revision of the *Rules*, pp. 43–52.

⁷⁰ *Circular 321*, May 24, 1947, Nouvelle édition des saintes Règles.

⁷¹ *Règles communes et Constitutions des Frères des écoles chrétiennes*, Rome: Maison générale, 1947. The decree of approbation by the Congregation for Religious is dated March 24, 1947.

⁷² More needs to be said about this. For his development of the *Rule* with the Brothers, the Founder had resorted to various sources, borrowing a chapter from the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus or from the Trappists. In 1946, that was not an issue for my generation of young Brothers. We knew

A third remark is necessary. In essence, my reference to what I call my disorientation in 1946 is not in the light of the changes over the last fifty years. By citing the *Circulars* of the time, I am trying to analyze for myself the thoughts and the feelings that other Brothers and I experienced in 1946 and 1947. It is true, however, that different situations later on led me to look more closely at the history of the Institute's *Rule*. I was then able to expand and to clarify my remarks with precise details previously unknown to me.

The disappointing content of the 1947 Rule

We possess a copy of our holy *Rule* dated 1718, initialed page by page by Brother Barthélemy⁷³ and sent to the communities during the lifetime of our holy Founder. Overall, the 1947 edition retains the same text as this venerable document.⁷⁴

This affirmation by the *Circular* that announces the promulgation of “the thirteenth edition of the Holy *Rule*” conforms, in the main, to the truth.⁷⁵ The new Brother Superior revered this aspect of permanence, which is what shocked us more than anything else. As one who entered the Institute in 1939, I could not comprehend, eight years later, why the new edition of the *Rule* did not bring significant changes to the text to which I had been introduced in the Novitiate. To me and to many in my generation, this *Rule* seemed to display three distinct deviations, which, by the way, it favored: dichotomy instead of unity, external legalism to the detriment of personal inspiration, and a herd instinct rather than the spirit of community.

nothing about those sources. Even had we known them, their anachronistic and ponderous character would not have been diminished by the fact that they were (or perhaps are again) shared. The world had changed, but the texts of another era were preserved.

⁷³ Brother Barthélemy, the first successor of Saint John Baptist de La Salle as Superior of the Institute, was elected by the Assembly of 1717, before the death of the Founder.

⁷⁴ *Circular* 321, 1947, p. 12.

⁷⁵ In fact, the entire *Rule* was in two volumes, the *Common Rule*, concerned with the daily life of the Brothers, and the *Book of Government*, which determined the detailed functioning of the various organizational structures and the people responsible for them. My concern here is only with the *Common Rule*, but the approbation by the Holy See in 1947 covered the Institute's entire legislative Code.

Chapter 1, “The purpose and the necessity of the Institute,” stated bluntly and simply that “the purpose of the Institute is apostolic” and affirmed the need for an Institute whose members devote themselves to the educational service of poor and abandoned youth. Chapters 7 to 11 dealt with the organization of the schools run by the Brothers and described important features of their teaching methods. With typical realism, John Baptist de La Salle had included in a religious *Rule* specific chapters dealing with the professional life of his Brothers. How better could they manifest the unity of their life than by stating that they accomplish *God’s work* through their educational activity⁷⁶ and by proclaiming that their professional activity constitutes an important aspect of their apostolic ministry and of the spiritual sacrifice of their life dedicated to God?

Because a large number of prescriptions in these chapters on their work had become obsolete, the Brothers no longer looked to their *Rule* for educational inspiration or for teaching methods. In contrast, the other chapters (more numerous) concerned the internal life of the communities. Chapters 3 to 6 dealt with life in common, exercises of piety, and practices of humiliation and mortification. Chapters 12 to 15 addressed the relations of the Brothers with their Superiors, among themselves, with the serving Brothers, and with outsiders. Chapters 16 to 23 focused on the virtues (or moral attitudes) so important in all community life: regular observance, poverty, chastity, and obedience,⁷⁷ silence, and modesty. Under the general title, “*Rules concerning the good order and the proper administration of the Institute,*” five chapters (24 to 28) spoke of the sick,

⁷⁶ The chapters about the school in the Lasallian *Rule* correspond to the chapters about the Divine Office in the Benedictine *Rule*. John Baptist de La Salle speaks to his Brothers about God’s work that they do in their ministry: *Meditations*, 59.3, 193.3, 205.1. As far as he is concerned, his activity as Founder is God’s work. “I will always regard the work of my salvation and the founding and governing of our Community as the work of God... I will often repeat these words of the Prophet Habakkuk: *Domine opus tuum*” (EP 3,0,8; De La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 2002, p. 200).

⁷⁷ Chapters 17 and 18 of the 1947 *Rule*, “On the vows” and “On what the vows oblige,” were added to the *Rule* printed in 1726 after the reception of the *Bull of Approbation*. The three chapters on poverty, chastity, and obedience existed since the *Rule* of 1705 and, thus, were in the *Rule* of 1718, which is the reference for the 1947 *Rule*.

of prayers for the deceased Brothers, of travel, of teaching the Classics, and of advanced studies.⁷⁸

Suddenly, the entire *Rule*, in effect, became identified with this interior life. By the sheer weight of things, the concept of regularity focused especially on a limited approach to the *religious life*: the observance of the vows, their related virtues, prayer, and asceticism. The apostolate was of no concern. In practice, however, a significant portion of the Brother's time and of his investment of intense energy, concern, and at times most vivid fears was related to his profession as teacher and educator. In their own eyes, many Brothers saw less value in regular observance, especially when certain prohibitions, on external relations, for example, seemed to be obstacles to the full exercise of the apostolate.

Furthermore, the image of the *Rule* was that of a code dominated by external practices. "The Brothers shall rise always at 4:30 in the morning." This first article could have no exception; it applied on Sunday and throughout the week, during holiday time as well as in the school year, in Rome as in Australia. It set the tone for the chapter on the daily exercises, whose list and schedule were minutely specified. The time dedicated to vocal prayers was even excessive in the eyes of the most pious Brothers, especially because the personal commitment therein was minimal. It was a matter of reciting together (morning, noon, and night, with no variation according to the liturgical season) lengthy prayer formulas dating from the seventeenth century, common Christian prayers, and six decades of the rosary. Over the years and the succeeding General Chapters, the tendency was always to add more vocal prayers. The *Rule* in the beginning stated that the Brothers "shall not belong to any Confraternity and Congregation, however pious it might be." On this point, the text of the 1947 *Rule* sanctioned contrary customs that had accumulated in the nineteenth century:

The Brothers may join the Association of the Apostleship of Prayer and the following Archconfraternities and Confraternities: Holy Child Jesus,

⁷⁸ After Pius XI required the Institute to include courses and instruction in classical languages, this chapter in 1923 replaced the one entitled "On the Latin Language."

Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Most Holy Rosary, Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Victory, and Saint Joseph.⁷⁹

Membership in this multiplicity of pious organizations was automatic; the Brother exercised no personal initiative to enroll. The advantage resulting from this was to obtain multiple partial or plenary indulgences⁸⁰ attached to various forms of prayer; during morning prayer all the indulgences of the day were mentioned. This form of devotion no doubt pleased the Brothers of previous generations. For many of us, it seemed to be a type of religious materialism: performing the rites conferred the announced benefits. The emphasis on this kind of external devotion did not favor in any way (and this is the least we can say about it) the recognition of the priority of the free gift of the Father's love, of the daily gift of God's mercy and forgiveness, and of fraternal union in recognizing God's Name, adhering to God's will, and serving the Kingdom.

The chapters with timetables planned everything in detail, once and for all, leaving nothing to free initiative or to adaptations and adjustments according to time, place, and circumstances. The emphasis placed on the observance of these rules could do nothing but favor legalistic tendencies. The constraint of the *Rule* reflected itself in detailed requirements, often anachronistic, that affected all aspects of life: relations with Brothers, with people outside the community, and with students and matters of clothing and body posture.

Moreover, other chapters accentuated a kind of distrust of personal freedom and of relations with the world. The conception of obedience⁸¹ seemed inhumanly hard. This letter of the *Rule*, the insistence on its strict observance, in no way favored adult maturation; it seemed to keep the Brothers in a certain infantilism. As for the chapter on relations with

⁷⁹ 1947 *Rule*, chapter 4, article 9*.

⁸⁰ An indulgence, the partial or total remission before God of the temporal punishment due to a sin that is already forgiven, is obtained through an act of piety offered for this purpose and in a spirit of contrition.

⁸¹ The expression "nothing without permission" returns as a refrain in the chapter dealing with this virtue, as summarized in the final article, "They shall do nothing without permission, however small or of little consequence it might seem, in order to be able to assure themselves that in all things they fulfill the will of God" (1947 *Rule*, chapter 21, article 8, p. 53).

external people, it tended to restrict them to the utmost, and it strove to limit individual liberty and spontaneity in any necessary meeting with outsiders.⁸²

Finally, the conception of community that the *Rule* presented appeared to be gregarious and standardized. Conveyed throughout the *Rule*, it is especially characterized in Chapter 3, “Of the spirit of this Community and of this Institute and of the exercises that are practiced there in common.” In fact, there was little question of spirit. Instead, the succeeding articles detailed the omnipresent implications of the common life in the various locales: the chapel, the common room, the refectory, the common dormitory. This common life, however, was not for the benefit of communication, because silence, with some exceptions, was de *rigueur* in all these places.⁸³

The Brothers, of course, were alone in the classroom with their students, but the classrooms had to be contiguous and provided with windows so that it was always possible to see what was happening in each class. Moments of relaxation were planned, but with no question of leaving them to the individual’s choice. Recreation took place together, twice a day and during the weekly walk, the only leisure allowed but heavily regulated.⁸⁴ The same readings, in repetitive fashion, were scheduled on certain days of the month or of the year.

⁸² “When they visit someone, the Brother Director shall appoint a confrere to accompany them (1947 *Rule*, chapter 14, article 4*). Any visit made, even to the Brother Director, shall take place in a parlor with glass windows and without curtains, so that the interior can be easily viewed” (1947 *Rule*, chapter 14, article 5*).

⁸³ Initial formation disproportionately emphasized the practice of silence, with particular reference to chapter 22 of the 1923 *Rule* and also to the text on silence in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*. Beginning with Brother Adrien, Superior General from 1928 to 1934, the traditional New Year’s *Circular* commented on the ten commandments of the Institute, year by year. In *Circular* 305, December 8, 1939, Brother Junien-Victor offered a lengthy reflection on the eighth Commandment of the Institute, “The rule of silence strictly keep, and thus in heaven treasures heap” (*Exercises of Piety*, 1930, p. 15). He developed a veritable treatise on *The Virtue of Silence*—moralizing, stunted, paltry, and devoid of any inspiration.

⁸⁴ The *Rule* prescribed the public reading, once a month, of the list of “Topics on Which the Brothers Are (and are not) to Speak During Recreation”!

Questionable procedures in the Rule's 1947 revision and in its approval by the Holy See

Much more than from the actual content of the 1947 *Rule* was the impression of a lockout based on what we could learn about the procedures for this revision and for its approval by the Holy See.

Following the 1946 General Chapter, Brother Superior Athanase-Émile submitted the revised edition of the *Rule* to the Holy See for approbation. The new text was the culmination of a long process, guided in the main by the General Council between 1934 and 1946. The revision prepared for the 1947 edition of the *Rule* was not the first in the Institute, as *Circular* 318 briefly recalls⁸⁵ by citing the General Chapters of 1858, 1861, 1882, and 1884, and especially the major revision extensively prepared during the last decade of the nineteenth century and submitted to a special General Chapter in 1901. In fact, since the mid-nineteenth century, the revision of the *Rule* had never ceased to be on the agenda of every Chapter, with none being able to decide between two mandatory and often contradictory options: a fidelity as literal as possible to the *Rule* of the origins as written by John Baptist de La Salle and an adaptation of its prescriptions to new situations in the Institute in space and time.

No one has yet written the history of these multiple attempts and of what caused the hesitation, the change, the tension, and the disagreements within successive General Councils and between the Councils and the General Chapters. In the case of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, even beyond it, this history could cast a bright light on the concept of the fidelity of religious Institutes to their founders.⁸⁶ More broadly, this history could foster a major reflection by studying the manner in which religious Institutes (long known as “states of perfection”) and the Congregation for Religious perceived and transmitted the values of religious perfection and holiness. Conducting this research in relation to (or in contrast with) the Gospel view of Christian perfection would be instructive.

⁸⁵ *Circular* 318, 1946, Preceding Revisions, pp. 44–45.

⁸⁶ Martin Luther raised this question forcefully; cf. Sauvage, 1973, *Les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse*, *Lasallianum* 16, p. 75.

Not intending to provide a complete history, I can summarize here a study that I did in the early 1990s on this issue and my conclusion that the Institute has experienced four different periods in its history relative to the *Rule* of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

The first period, curiously, was a brief period of transition between the edition of 1718 and that of 1725 (and the papal approbation of the Institute by Benedict XIII), when the Brothers felt relatively free to modify the *Rule* (in some details, but even more so in the sense of greater severity). The Capitulants assembled in 1726 to receive the Bull of Approbation promised God and the Pope to keep the *Rule* in its force and vigor in perpetuity.⁸⁷

The second period, from the Bull of Approbation to the mid-nineteenth century (1726–1858), stressed the firm and serene maintenance of the text that the papal authority, it was believed, had sanctioned in approving the Institute. Firm and serene maintenance, at the least, was applied to the text. Fidelity to observance might have been less certain, judging from the endless catalogue of points of discipline on which relaxation was evident, according to a list by the 1777 General Chapter and another one repeated ten years later. The Brothers did not traverse the Age of Enlightenment without some jolting and yearning for less constraint on the part of more than one of them on the eve of the Revolution.

In the third period, from the General Chapter of 1858 up to 1901, the Institute hesitated from one General Chapter to the next between indispensable adaptation of the *Rule* to new conditions and literal fidelity to the original text. It was a time of firm yet hesitant maintenance of the original text. A somewhat pathetic and at times dramatic scenario repeated itself from one General Chapter to another. The Commissions created to adapt the *Rule* in 1861 and in 1874 got lost in the dust. The Chapter of 1882 evoked for the first time the necessity, even the urgency, for a new edition of the *Rule*. Once again, it created a Commission of twelve

⁸⁷ This text was retained in the successive editions of the *Rule* until 1901, a fact that Brother Miguel Campos brought to my attention in 1972. It is one of two reductionist readings of the Lasallian view of the Gospel, the first one being the use of Scripture by the early biographers (Campos, 1974, *Cahiers lasalliens* 45, pp. 352–58).

members. Brother Irlide, the presiding Superior General, although relatively bold, collided with the heavyweights on the General Council. Nevertheless, he wrote and even had a new draft of the *Rule* printed. Weakened by illness, he personally convoked the General Chapter to choose his successor and to approve the new *Rule*. But as soon as Brother Joseph was elected Superior General, he directed the Chapter not to take up the discussion of the deceased Superior's draft. The Chapter then proposed a revision that was discussed by the 1901 General Chapter. The goal, as it would be in 1947, was to return to the text of 1718. This mission impossible in its radicalism was, nonetheless, substantially maintained. At least the 1901 Chapter deserves the credit for deleting the sinister Preface that dated from 1726. Following a new stage of revision lasting fifteen years and after meticulous discussion of each item, the 1901 Chapter decided to return to the text of the *Rule* of 1726 (the first printed edition, appearing after the reception in 1725 of the Bull of Approbation). Having thus determined the text, the Capitulants firmly believed that they had put an end to the previous half-century's interminable hesitation waltz.⁸⁸

In the fourth period, the Institute might have thought itself finished with the fluctuations of the previous fifty years, now that the new century had commenced. But it amounted to nothing, and the revision launched a period of holding firm but frustrated with the original text, although disrupted notably by the obligation to introduce the study of Latin. This particular point, far from being a detail, symbolized entirely the absurdity of the literalism that in a specific historical situation had ended with utter infidelity to the founding purpose itself. Maintenance of the original text was again contradicted by the need to adapt the requirements of the *Rule* to the Code of Canon Law, which also was done in 1923.

The 1947 revision revealed the same desire to secure a definitive text. It reinforced this perspective by departing from the enterprise of 1901 in three ways. First, because of the wish for strict fidelity to the letter of the

⁸⁸ This 1901 revision deleted the Preface that was introduced when the *Rule* was printed in 1726 and then was reproduced in every edition in the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century; it is a text that in no way can claim any Lasallian inspiration and one that even severely disfigures it.

Founder's text, the edition of 1718 was restored as the basis because of its being the last text defined by John Baptist de La Salle. The norm became to have as little deviation as possible.

Second, under the pretext of respect for the sanctity of the holy *Rule*, any debate by the General Chapter on the text was forbidden. In the 1901 revision, the General Chapter had considered "the drafts of a new edition on which Brother Superior and his Assistants had worked for several months. This review was done with great care, chapter by chapter, article by article."⁸⁹ The revision brought to the 1901 Chapter gave rise to a true debate and therefore was a collective work, even though the eventually approved text was little changed. The matter turned out quite differently during the 1946 General Chapter. We could not wait until all the Brothers were consulted on the revision of the *Rule*, but to our great amazement and disappointment, *Circular 318* reported that in advance of the Chapter several prelates of the Roman Curia were asked whether the General Chapter ought to discuss the *Rule*. They responded:

A General Chapter of a Religious Congregation differs essentially from a parliament and its modes of action are totally distinct. Furthermore complete liberty of intervention will in no way be hindered in reference to the revision of *Rules* since every Capitulant has the privilege of making in writing his personal observations on the proposed new text. Towards the end of the Chapter the Assembly should designate a Post-Capitulary Commission to verify and study the suggestions proposed in these Notes and to retain those judged suitable and good.⁹⁰

It was no consolation to learn what happened:

During the first days of the General Chapter, the new text of the *Common Rules* as prepared by the Regime was read in the refectory; a copy of this text was given each member with the request that he study it attentively and present in writing any observations he wished to make.⁹¹

What we knew about the personality of the Superior General elected in 1946, Brother Athanase-Émile, who presided over the Chapter, left us

⁸⁹ *Chapitres généraux de l'Institut des Frères des écoles chrétiennes. Historique et décisions*. Paris: Maison-mère Oudinot, 1902, pp. 175–76.

⁹⁰ *Circular 318*, 1946, pp. 47–48.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

extremely skeptical about the reality of this freedom of action left to the Capitulants when practically all discussion of the *Rule* was forbidden.⁹²

Third, compared with 250 years of the Institute's history and its *Rule*, there was in 1947 a new twist: the decision to submit the revised *Rule* for explicit approbation by the Congregation for Religious. At first glance, this approach stunned us. From our Novitiate we were persuaded that the Bull of Approbation granted by Benedict XIII in 1725 was valid for the entire *Rule*, although we knew well that the papal text explicitly approved only the eighteen articles of the *Rule* that the Bull summarized. Whether or not all had been approved, we had been formed in the strict observance of the entire *Rule*. We could not comprehend what the Roman approval could add to it after more than two hundred years.

Who asked the Congregation for Religious for this approval? According to the pontifical decree, "The Superior General and the Capitulants have insistently requested of the Holy See an explicit approbation of the said *Constitutions*." In fact, the General Chapter did not make this request, for the simple reason that it did not discuss the text of the *Rule* whose development was carried out by a post-chapter Commission. Documents consulted in the Archives of the Procurator General of the Institute indicate that the steps were carried out by Brother Alcime-Marie, Procurator General, appointed directly by Brother Athanase-Émile, to whom he reported every detail of what he had accomplished.

Once the approbation of the *Rule* was requested, the Congregation for Religious had no choice but to examine it, for which task it appointed two experts. *Circular* 318 cites the report of one of them:

Great indeed was our joy to hear one of the foremost Consultors who had spent part of his Easter vacation studying our *Rules* make the following statement when giving a copy of his remarks on the modifications to be

⁹² I was to discover much later that by the express will of the Founder, the original *Rule* had been the object of discussions that lasted almost until his death. In a century of absolute monarchy, John Baptist de La Salle followed a democratic ecclesial practice ... condemned by Roman prelates of the Congregation for Religious in the aftermath of World War II. (Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle. Expérience et enseignement spirituels. Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1977, "La Règle écrite, œuvre de la communauté vivante," pp. 388–96).

introduced. “Your *Rules* exhale the perfume of authentic sanctity. Keep their actual form as closely as possible, and don’t modify them except with the greatest discretion.”⁹³

The *Circular* says nothing, however, about the otherwise reserved judgment of the second Consultor, “The text is basically very ancient, totally unlike texts in use at the present time; meticulous beyond belief and quite severe, it reflects the legislation of the Bull that it cites.”

In fact, I frequently heard Brother Maurice-Auguste declare that the application for papal approval of the *Rule* was a personal decision by Brother Athanase-Émile, who took it much to heart. At times, Maurice even asked himself whether, because of its overly personal nature, the Superior’s action were legally nullified! In fact, he was only posing a hypothetical question in the 1970s, and after Vatican II, the Institute adopted an entirely new *Rule*.

Motives for keeping the original text and for seeking Vatican approval, with the resulting blockage

Ultimately, the arguments put forward to maintain as much of the text of the 1718 *Rule* as possible and also to seek papal approval were what caused my personal despair. The resulting blockage seemed to have no solution. Fearful of facing vague desires for another revision of everything, Brother Athanase-Émile personally took the initiative to have the 1947 *Rule* approved by the Congregation for Religious. His motive was to place it beyond the Institute’s authority.

The 1947 revision was consistent with the entire history of the *Rule*. What can explain this “obstinate” maintenance of the original text? The explicit reasons appear throughout the *Circulars* and the General Chapter’s official minutes. First and foremost is the will to be faithful to the Founder. This fidelity transfers to other points and other texts.⁹⁴ The

⁹³ *Circular* 318, 1946, p. 47.

⁹⁴ For example, the insistence on reading the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* in community, the recourse to the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, and the continued use of *Conduct of the Christian Schools* and *Duties of a Christian to God*.

fidelity is more marked with respect to the *Rule* because of its normative character. Because the letter of the law is clear, fidelity has clearly identifiable contours. The *Circular* that reported the 1901 General Chapter had noted this same motivation:

Thus have religious Institutes and Congregations whose *Rule* was written in the vernacular always understood the matter. In various editions, they have maintained their Founder's text, with its ancient turns of phrase and obsolete expressions, at times barely intelligible other than within its religious family.

Is this not the most effective way to maintain a *Rule*'s strength and stability and to assure its freedom from arbitrary modification? The alterations would primarily only affect an old turn of phrase or an irregularity of form, but soon they would affect the thought itself.

No one would think of reproducing a text of Saint Francis de Sales or of one of our old writers by clothing it in a modern form. How much more ought we to respect the ancient text of a Founder, especially in his legislative writings?⁹⁵

The Founder, the argument went—an idea not unique to the Institute of the Brothers!—could not have written his *Rule* without divine inspiration. Henceforth, papal authority would nip in the bud any inclination to change, which could not be inspired by anything but laxity.

The 1947 revision 1947 brought to light another motive, more insistent if possible, for maintaining the *Rule* and having it approved. The *Rule*, it was thought, is the expression of God's will in a privileged way. To be sanctified is to fulfill the will of God, as Jesus did. The *Rule* infallibly makes God's will known. In a word, the more detailed the *Rule* is, the more certain the religious is of accomplishing God's will at every moment. If worst comes to worst, the *Rule* suffices. However difficult, demanding, and limiting the *Rule* might be, it is equally beneficial. Moreover, once approved, the *Rule* is sanctioned by the Church and is, therefore, "certain" and sacred.

One cannot help but notice a kind of begging the question in the argu-

⁹⁵ *Circular* 109, 1901, pp. 14–15.

ment. In practice, ever since the Bull of Approbation, the understanding was that the entire *Rule* had been approved and must be maintained because of its approval by the authority of the Church.

But in 1946–47, it became clear that only the 18 articles cited in the Bull were formally approved. That conclusion then led to the request for the formal approbation deemed essential for the affirmation of the entire *Rule*. This concept of fidelity to the Founder, of fidelity to the will of God, and therefore of the role of the *Rule* was quite widespread in the Church and in religious Institutes. In this regard, *Circular 321* cites an entire page of the work of Redemptorist Father Louis Colin, *Culte de la Règle*,⁹⁶ which it is difficult today to imagine how it could have been written, carried such a title, and received the guarantee of *Nihil obstat* and *Imprimatur*. I limit myself to one excerpt (quoted in *Circular 321*), but the others are in the same vein, which today appears as surreal, but at the time it left us with no response:

What is holier than the holy Gospel, the great sacrament of truth? Now, the *Rule* is the Gospel of the religious, both in summary and in substance. The Gospel is hidden in the *Rule*, like Christ in the consecrated species; just as the host is made of delicate wheat flour, the *Rule* is kneaded from pure Gospel maxims.⁹⁷

Moreover, is not the *Rule* the voice of the adorable will of God? What is holier than this will, the supreme rule of all morality and perfection? The *Rule* is the spiritual Ark containing the incorruptible manna of God's beneficent will. In the *Rule* it is God who speaks, commands, defends, and manifests his desires. Not a page or a line does not come from God and is not the sure expression of his most holy will...⁹⁸

This way of thinking substituted the *Rule* for the Gospel and canonized a static vision of the predetermined “Will of God” that a person no longer

⁹⁶ Colin, 1939, *Culte de la Règle. Nature. Ennemis. Sources. Prérrogatives*. The *Nihil obstat* was obtained at Lyon; the *Imprimatur*, at Bar-le-Duc, both in February 1939. The book enjoyed great success and many reprints. One Spanish Brother told me that it was still in use during his Novitiate in the late 1950s and early 1960s. (See Colin, 1957.) On the heels of his bestseller, the same author wrote *Culte des vœux* (See Colin, 1955).

⁹⁷ *Circular 321*, 1947, p. 14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

need seek nor discern, because the *Rule* provides everything ready-made in a text equally applicable to everyone and for all time. It is the will of God manifested primarily in a code of law; were not the teachings of Christian morality frequently constructed on the Ten Commandments and on the Six Commandments of the Church? On the contrary, a morality such as that of Saint Thomas Aquinas was a morality of virtues, of human acts, that is to say, of human freedom with its role in searching for the good and its development that is never achieved.

Ultimately, such sacralization of the *Rule* was not only unhealthy but also proven to be perverse, to the extent that it diverted some generous Brothers from “the fountain of living water, and [they] dug water-tanks for themselves, cracked water-tanks that hold no water” (Jr 2:13). From the moment I entered the Novitiate, I had always heard Superiors insist on the importance of regular observance, but in the context of the 1946 General Chapter and the 1947 papal approbation of the *Rule*, some pushed the exaltation of the *Culte de la Règle* to insupportable heights.

We were told about some Brothers who had made a vow of Regularity. What we were able to discover by chance about any of these impassioned Brothers was enough to protect us from contagion. Absolute and literal fidelity to the *Rule* made them robots. Spontaneous human relations were abolished by intransigent efforts to observe silence as defined by the *Rule*.

Other consequences of this revised *Rule* and of its approbation by the Church appeared tragic to us. Above all was the inevitable contradiction between what was prescribed and what we experienced. Moreover, the Institute was in danger of freezing up, of not allowing itself to face questions about life as it was evolving. More seriously, the valuing of all articles of the *Rule* at the same level and the assignment of exaggerated importance to verifiable external practices ran the risk of formalism and a certain self-righteous pharisaism. At the same time, the emphasis on fidelity to small things risked losing the positive perspective and the spiritual dynamism of the *Rule* that the Founder had developed. Paradoxically, this literalism could even engender infidelity to the text of the original *Rule*, which clearly introduced a hierarchy of prescriptions and highlighted a number of priorities:

- Chapter 1 immediately stated the priority of the Institute's purpose over its legislation, that is to say, its *raison d'être* over its *manière d'être*. In the beginning there was no *Rule*!
- Chapter 2 and the prologue to Chapter 16 forcefully underlined the priority of the spirit over the letter and of charity over observance⁹⁹ and the primacy of the Gospel, the first and foremost *Rule*.¹⁰⁰
- Chapter 4 insisted on the essential importance of the interior approach to prayer and of the practice of interior prayer in relation to the other exercises of piety. The leveling implied in the conception of the entire *Rule* as the expression of the will of God eliminated these fundamental, dynamic perspectives even of the letter of the original *Rule*.

Another consequence of this revision and especially of the approbation of the *Rule* was that the written text removed the *Rule* from the living community. Until 1947, the Institute had retained control over its *Rule*; revisions were continuous, although the purpose always was to return as closely as possible to the original text. Once approved by the Holy See in 1947, the *Rule* became untouchable; like a court jester, no one had control over it. The text of the *Rule* was elevated in relation to other texts of the Founder, notably the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. The written document, ready made, carried the *Rule* away from the living reality of the history of salvation and of the Spirit active today and creative forever.

The intense malaise that we felt with this exaltation of the cult of the *Rule* was extremely difficult to express, the pressure on this point of view being so strong. Much later, I discovered in an analysis written after Vatican II by Father Jean-Marie Tillard, OP, exactly what I had refused to accept at

⁹⁹ This priority is evident in two essential texts that De La Salle introduced in his final revision of the *Rule* in 1718. In the introduction to the prologue of Chapter 2, On the Spirit of This Institute, he states, "That which is of the utmost importance and to which the greatest attention should be given in an Institute is that all who compose it possess the spirit peculiar to it" (*The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Rome, 1987, p. 15). The second text is in the introduction to the prologue of Chapter 16, On Regularity, in which he cites the *Rule* of Saint Augustine, who says that without charity, "regularity is quite useless" (La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 2002, p. 68).

¹⁰⁰ A traditional affirmation, formulated by John Baptist de La Salle in Chapter 2 of the 1718 *Rule*.

the time. While he clearly pointed out the “aberrations” that I remembered, his analysis also confirmed that the detours in the Institute’s experience were not a monopoly, for the problem was related to questionable concepts about the religious life:

Our organizational structures and our administrators have enabled us to live in such human security that we have been tempted, despite ourselves, to forget that God alone is the necessary reference point at the heart of our “project” and to reduce fraternity to a simple matter of living side by side.¹⁰¹

... efforts for an ever greater religious fidelity have tended for many to be mixed up with striving for more complete and more scrupulous observance of the slightest details of the *Rule*, without seeking the core of the Gospel experience itself, which is the encounter with God. The heart’s interior, the precise point where people ought to face themselves in determining their “project” and in meeting God, was rarely involved in the great adventure of religious fidelity.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Tillard, 1967, p. 14.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

Chapter 3 – *CREATIVE FORCES IN THE LIFE OF THE INSTITUTE*

INITIAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Michel—In 1946, I was 23 years old. The disappointment caused by the General Chapter that year led to a period of uncertainty about my future. My perpetual profession was planned for 1948. My rock-solid certitude of being called by God to be a Brother, a part of me since childhood, at the outset of these next two years of preparation suffered a few cracks for a time. Thanks be to God, several changes in my circumstances converged to foster my maturation of a single-minded option to make final vows in the midst of persistent obscurity. In fact, in spite of blockaded texts and an unyielding system, I had the good fortune—the grace—to experience decisively the richness and the potential of the Brother’s day-to-day life.

I continued to deplore internally, and during the first months to criticize openly, the decisions of the 1946 General Chapter, but as I matured, the power of what I came to experience as positive and dynamic in daily life placed in perspective the initial disastrous impact on me of the Chapter’s unfortunate decisions. The Institute in which I was then given to live energized me. The hope about which Péguy sang became for me a tangible reality. I enjoyed the stimulation of educational relationships, the support of fraternal friendship, the promise of a possible renewal in the Institute, and the opportunities for spiritual authenticity in my life as a Brother. I need to explain these aspects, because beyond my own personal experience, it was indeed the case that the Institute’s evolution in fidelity to its identity and to its Gospel mission was already being gradually rediscovered.

Miguel—*After the war, you began a new teaching assignment. Can you tell us about this experience and about your students?*

Michel—It was especially with my students that I initially experienced the life-giving treasure of the Institute. A decisive change occurred at the beginning of the 1946 academic year, when I left the house of formation

at Annappes where I had lived for almost twelve years. Up to that point, I had known nothing in the Institute except houses of formation. I realized then that my actual experience of life as a Brother had remained limited and distorted in comparison with the life of most of my companions of the same generation.

In the formation communities, most of them directed by people I knew, the observance in practice displayed the same rigidity as the texts, and openness to human life was nonexistent. The small number of students in each class, combined with the dominating personality of the Director, was enough to assure discipline. As an instructor, I was called upon to be content with the courses that I was assigned to teach. The domain of personal relationships with the young students was reserved to the Brother Director. I did have some close relationships, but always in a semi-clandestine fashion.

In 1946 I still had to complete two certificates for the *licence* in Letters, one in Greek and the other in Philology, which were the most difficult of all. Brother Visitor, who was finishing his term, sent me to the University Scholasticate at Lille, where I was ordered to devote myself exclusively to study, a most welcome prospect. Then the Director of Saint Pierre, a school adjacent to Sudfec,¹⁰³ asked me to teach French in the second level, in accord with the new Brother Visitor. The request upset my hope of having nothing to be concerned about except my studies, and it also worried me, for I had never had to deal with “ordinary” students. How would I do with them? I quickly realized that the Brothers themselves were asking the same question. Would this “intellectual,” this “pious and regular” Brother (the image I conveyed, hitherto confined in a house of formation), be successful with the older adolescents in the second?

However, from the beginning it worked, primarily because I was successful in teaching French literature. More precisely, I was fascinated by most of the authors I was to present to the young students. I kept them so interested in lively classes that discipline problems usually were a minor concern. At a time when the young were not yet distracted by television,

¹⁰³ Scolasticat universitaire des Frères des écoles chrétiennes.

I assigned a considerable amount of individual written work. With more or less adequate motivation, depending on the person, they acquitted themselves well. I forced myself to correct their papers carefully; marking their assignments became a veritable dialogue with each student. This conversation continued, and I developed personal relationships with most of my students that went beyond academic matters. I must add that only a few years in age separated us. All my students at the time had also lived through the war and the German occupation; we belonged to practically the same culture. Two years later, when I was asked to teach philosophy to students in their final year, I found some to whom I had taught French in their second year, which strengthened our friendship. Fifty years later, I am still in regular contact with several of those who were my first true students.

My students from that period kept a highly important place in my life, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. In the end, I appreciated my good fortune in not having been left on my own to study during those two years that became so decisive for me. That positive experience strongly influenced me. As far as I am concerned, I was never able to separate apostolic activity from the aspects of intellectual influence and human relations. It's not a theory of my own making; it's my history. From that experience I understand better, having lived it myself, at what point the concern for young people constitutes a powerful motive to remain faithful to the vocation of Brother.

We were a group of Brothers from the same generation who were teaching adolescents in their three or four final years at the secondary level. I add an important detail. Saint Pierre was then a school with little prior history. Between 1946 and 1948, I had gone with a Brother friend during the summer holidays to one of the District's boarding schools, to teach Greek texts in the licentiate curriculum. This particular school had existed for more than fifty years, and a large number of older Brothers had worked there for ages. Changes proposed by our group of young Brothers were often a cause of disagreement, because of immemorial "traditions" defended by the ancients. On my return, I would sometimes say to my companions in Lille, "Our great good fortune at Saint Pierre is to have no traditions." Subsequently, I realized more and more that the value of the observation far exceeded the circumstances that had inspired it.

Our similar educational preoccupations affirmed the bonds of friendship that united us since our shared youth. Fraternity lived simply through professional relationships expanded my invigorating experience of the Institute's riches. We stood shoulder to shoulder, and I enjoyed the support of an educational community. Our frequent, informal sharing (there was no question then of community meetings) affected our entire life, often intimately. Specifically, I experienced the primacy of a community of relationships over a community of observance. The minutiae of the *Rule* became a quite relative matter, while a sense of shared educational responsibility rendered fallacious any threat of the "relaxation" feared by Superiors. Serving the young sustained the élan of our gift, renewed daily, in teaching, but also in activities such as Catholic Action, sports, theater, and chorus.

EXPERIENCE OF AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

I was continuing my studies at the same time, and I belonged to the Sudfec community, which had reopened in 1946 after the war and had a dozen Brothers. The oldest was 37 years old; four of us were younger than 25, and the rest were between 26 and 30. What good luck—a grace—it was to experience here the vitality of a culturally active community and the riches of the Institute's international character.

The direction of the University Scholasticate had been entrusted to Brother Paul-Eugène Martin, a man of the North. In his own person he was a model of the successful integration of authenticity and religious depth, along with intellectual curiosity and teaching ability, plus a concern for community experiences and fraternal life. His culture extended to science and to modern languages, religious questions, currents of thought in the modern world, and progressive educational methods in audiovisual and technical areas.

He sought by every means to engage us in our Region, which was rebuilding (he organized various trips, including a memorable visit to the port of Dunkirk), and in the local Church, which was then alive with projects in Social and Catholic Action and in formation in the two major seminaries. My older brother, Jean, the Superior of the Philosophy Seminary and

engaged in this renewal, was often invited to Sudfec by Brother Paul-Eugène. A bold Brother, he did not hesitate even to organize a cinema club to view on occasion the great films that were appearing then, *Quai des Brumes* (*Port of Shadows*), for example. (Of course, we had to go a public cinema to view them!) This initiative and many others, less well appreciated in high places, merited Brother Paul-Eugène's replacement at the end of the 1946–47 academic year. But he had relaunched Sudfec on the road to cultural openness and to confrontation with modern thought, openings that did no serious harm to our university studies.

During my two-year stay at Sudfec, I also experienced the Institute's internationality, both its potential and its demands. Of the twelve student Brothers, seven were French from the North, Lorraine, Lot, Loire-Atlantique, and Haute-Loire. The last three had spent all or part of the war in England or in Germany because of the STO labor law. A final Frenchman and a Slovak arrived from Egypt. To this variety of indigenous Brothers were added, in 1946, a Vietnamese, an Argentine, and a Colombian, and in 1947, a Canadian, a Mexican, and another Colombian. They all perfectly mastered the French language, and we lived together with mutual understanding. In the aftermath of the war, however, the Vietnamese Brother's resentment against colonial powers weighed on our community relations. The brilliant young Argentine expatriate resented the criticism in the French press, notably *Témoignage chrétien* (*Christian Witness*), directed at Juan Perón, newly elected President of Argentina, critiques that we could only deal with maladroitly.

By age and by interests, I found myself particularly close to the two Latin Americans. Our relationship continued beyond their stay in Lille and even after their life as Brothers, for both later left the Institute. Day after day, I enjoyed their adaptability in spite of the cultural differences between us. I discovered in them the vitality of new people, with creativity less burdened by the weight of history and with intelligence that was so intuitive. The appeal that Latin America still exerts on me dates from those years.

Miguel—Can we continue with the broader context of your teaching experience, the French Church after the war, the movement of biblical,

liturgical, and catechetical renewal? Do you want to speak about the people who were most important to you at the time? What kind of Church was being born in France?

Michel—Since 1946, at Sudfec, I was experiencing some frail, almost imperceptible, promises of renewal for the Institute itself. In October 1946, I met Vincent Ayel.¹⁰⁴ Brother Charles Prat, whom I mentioned when speaking about the 1946 General Chapter, sent Vincent and one other Brother from Le Puy to study at Sudfec. In the community we immediately realized the exceptional intellectual stature of both *ponots*. Their course work in philosophy was brilliant; thanks to them, the cultural movement so strong and so diverse in France in these years immediately after the war was no stranger to us. Our conversations included questions raised by Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, and Eugène Ionesco, and we sometimes passionately discussed situation ethics and unbelief. Their human experience was rich; both were involved in Scouting, and they had endured two years of the hard experience of STO labor camps. They didn't flaunt their prowess, but their reactions during table talk, though sometimes heated, were revealing.

Vincent Ayel impressed me with his freedom, which to me seemed far beyond the constraints and the minutiae of the recent General Chapter, which continued to drag me down. He didn't hesitate to criticize; his freedom of speech reflected his total freedom of spirit. He had suffered directly at the launching of the Scout movement *La Route* at the Le Puy boarding school, which met strong opposition. At the end of the school year 1945–46, the main Scout leaders among the Brothers were scattered. Vincent had measured the resistance offered by a certain "Lasallian" tradition against the renewal efforts coming from the outside, but he did not limit himself to bemoaning the present powerlessness. In effect, he was already concentrating his forces on future projects.

¹⁰⁴ After Brother Vincent Ayel's death on July 30, 1991, I was asked to complete and to publish his biography, begun by Brother André Fermet under the title, *La Passion d'évangéliser. Frère Vincent Ayel (1920–1991)*, Lille: Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, Easter 1996, 123 p. Christian Troël, of Vannes, is preparing a doctoral thesis in education about the journal *Catéchistes* and indirectly about Vincent Ayel.

The sudden shock he felt in Germany, caused by contact with the reality of religious ignorance, unbelief, and indifference, led him to reflect on the urgent need to renew in depth the Christian initiation of youth. Many of the young people he met in STO were from traditionally Christian homes, most having made their solemn Communion after receiving catechism lessons to prepare them, and a certain number came from Catholic schools. The introduction of *La Route* at Le Puy had been in his eyes an initial positive response. Without any explicit catechetical viewpoint, the educational component of the movement was seeking to develop a more personal religion.

In Lille, Vincent's thinking deepened, and he shared it with me. While aware of the quality of his commitment to university study, I thought that his reasons for living the Brother's vocation were elsewhere. As of 1946–47, he appeared to me to be the visionary of another Institute, an Institute that could renew itself, he told me, by becoming more faithful to itself by restoring the effective priority of the proclamation of the Gospel to the young through the catechetical mission for which John Baptist de La Salle had founded it.

Now, as he went on to explain, a catechetical renewal is developing in France at Lyon, where Father Colomb has created a school for catechists. This catechetical movement wants to have a pedagogical methodology. Canon Colomb has written a "progressive" catechism. The basic insight is identical with that of other renewal efforts: a desire to adapt the objective doctrine to the world to which it is addressed, above all, to the young. The biblical, liturgical, and other movements are a concern for the Brothers, in principle, but these movements do affect us directly. The Institute is guarding its archaic style of prayer and is carrying on its apostolic work regardless of what is happening in the Church and in society. The Institute doesn't allow itself to initiate anything, it seems, except by individual Brothers, like Brother Honoré de Silvestri, already engaged with the Young Christian Worker movement.¹⁰⁵ If we Brothers involve ourselves in the catechetical movement, how can we not think that it

¹⁰⁵ *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* (JOC), a movement that would become familiar to many Brothers in the mid 1950s, especially at the time of the 1956 General Chapter.

could serve as a fulcrum for renewing the Institute, because the Brothers are catechists by vocation?

This point was new to me, for it completely shifted the focus. The purpose of the Institute was in question, not primarily the details of observance. Buoyed by the mission, a Brother could accept the minutiae or at least not focus and waste energy on them. He could put up with them, reducing their importance internally, once they were no longer a matter of conscience. In contrast, a change of perspective is needed: conquer liberty, certainly, but to dedicate oneself to serving the Gospel.

I eagerly accepted Vincent's viewpoint, although the contours of his projects were still vague to me. Thanks to him, I began to sense the movement inspiring the Church in France that I already mentioned, not just as a frustration or even a challenge, but as a hope: the assurance that the renewal of the Church can cross over to an Institute that I thought had definitively shielded itself against any change. This assurance, I sensed, lived in Vincent, and he invited me from then on to make it my own.

Nevertheless, obscurity remained strong. Three events converged near the end of the 1946–47 academic year to remind me of its thickness. First, the autobiography of Pierre Emmanuel (*Qui est cet homme?*) contained harsh pages, later reprinted in *Études*, that presented a dark picture of a group of Brothers that he, a young monitor at Lyon's Aux Lazaristes boarding school, had known: worldly, old, routine, die-hard, and obtuse celibates. Only one or other young Brother found favor in his recollections.¹⁰⁶ We could not prevent ourselves from realizing that his criticism, as hard and as unfair as it was, strengthened our own yearning for change.

The second event I have already mentioned, Brother Paul-Eugène Martin's imposed transfer after just one year as the Director of Scholastics, an obvious repudiation of a man who had opened our eyes to modernity, to change, and to necessary awareness of the world by educators during their formation.

¹⁰⁶ Noël Mathieu, a poet of Christian inspiration better known under the pseudonym Pierre Emmanuel, was born on May 3, 1916, in Gan, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, and died on September 24, 1984, in Paris.

The third event, which threatened any hope engendered in my budding friendship with Brother Vincent Ayel, occurred at the conclusion of the school year. The two *ponots* received a letter from Brother Charles Prat with news that he was no longer their Visitor and that their year of study at Lille would be their last. We soon learned what caused the shelving of Le Puy's Brother Visitor: the logical outcome of the open positions he had unsuccessfully attempted to defend during the 1946 General Chapter. Clarifications in Brother Charles Prat's biography, thirty-five years later, confirmed the rumor we heard at the time of the events. In a conference to the Visitors during the annual retreat of Superiors in spring 1947, Brother Superior Athanase-Émile had condemned and forbidden "activist methods, campfires, trips, Scouting excursions, holiday camps, and other means that are considered so indispensable today in Christian formation projects and that even the most serious religious approve and administer."

Writing to the Superior General after the retreat, Brother Charles stated:

I feel absolutely incapable of submitting to the verbal denunciation that you delivered. I consider these prohibitions as outrageous and contrary to the spirit, if not to the letter, of the resolutions adopted by the General Chapter after its discussion about Catholic Action. Because of this conference, I believe it is my duty to request that you not renew my obedience as Visitor.

The indecision that I mentioned at the outset still persisted in me, but I understood that my personal choice could not depend only on external eventualities, whether positive or negative, however important they might be. These hazards were evidence that tested my awareness of a long-proven call. It was the authenticity of that inner call that I had to verify.

My older brother, Jean, so respectful, who rarely intervened in my life, in this instance realized my distress. One day he simply told me, "Above all, be free, and do not make your perpetual profession unless you have decided in your innermost thoughts to do so." Thus he liberated my search by opening up a number of possibilities, at the same time suggesting that I consult a priest for help in making a spiritually mature decision. That is what I did.

My main grievance with the Institute was its practice and its teaching that relied on the constraining power of regulations instead of on the person's spiritual élan. "Why ought I commit myself definitively to an Institute in which I find no spirituality?" These are the terms, from our first meeting, that I formulated for this priest about the question nagging me about my vocation. He knew nothing about the Institute, and his liberty of spirit and his humor (often caustic) convinced me that he easily understood my critique of a coercive system. Although he agreed to help me, he immediately asked me to replace the question I was asking myself. "Try, instead, to discover this interior élan in yourself and to cultivate it in the simple, everyday events of your present life. Cling to personal prayer, to interior prayer; take time to nourish yourself spiritually." At the same time, he helped me to reinterpret my journey and to recognize by signs as objective as possible what God was calling me to do and whom he would help me to perceive as a Father.

When I made my perpetual profession on September 5, 1948, the obscurity in the environment had certainly not disappeared. Two of us made our profession that Sunday.¹⁰⁷ The night before, our conversation focused on this fact; we were committing ourselves in the night. But the two years of conversations with the priest had given me self-confidence. My response to the call of the God of love meant my definitive commitment in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.¹⁰⁸

This personal experience reinforced my belief for the future that the question of fidelity to the vocation must be situated primarily in the inner domain of the relationship between a human being and God. My second inner belief was that if I were given the opportunity some day, I would do everything in my power to assist the development of the Institute's

¹⁰⁷ The other, Brother Louis Cabaret, was older by about four years. His profession was postponed because of his participation in the Resistance and his extended military service. He became the Brother Visitor of the District of Lille (1969 to 1978). I was with him when he was gravely ill at Annappes, where I arrived as Director in 1991. He died on May 31, 1992.

¹⁰⁸ The biblical text from the Psalms that I retain as an image of my perpetual profession is reflected in the Communion antiphon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost. "I will come in the power of Yahweh to tell of your justice, yours alone. God, you have taught me from boyhood, and I am still proclaiming your marvels. Now that I am old and grey-haired, God, do not desert me." (Ps 71:16-18)

spiritual élan. This last point was vague and quite modest; I sensed no particular qualities as a reformer in myself.

Its formulation, which I kept to myself, had three implications. I could and I must be aware of the objective weaknesses and their causes in the Institute's spiritual domain. I decided to assist with the remedy, if circumstances allowed me, having then no power at all even to imagine what circumstances might arise. The main implication was that I refused to join the camp of negative criticism. I decided to be obstinately positive and to act within my power to improve whatever was possible to do in the Institute, beginning with my own life. In the dark, stop cursing the darkness; turn on a light, even a simple candle.

Miguel—Circumstances, it seems, soon led you to make a positive contribution.

Michel—Indeed, hope for improvement would quicken its pace, not without some back and forth movements. From a distance, it now seems evident to me that life was welling up from the base of tentative steps for the necessary renewal. People in responsible positions, only a few to be sure, tried to block everything, and their power was decisive. As a young, perpetually professed Brother, having completed my *licence* in Letters, henceforth I devoted myself basically to my full-time task as a teacher and a member of the Saint Pierre community at Lille. My duties were to teach philosophy and religion in the final year and French in the second year, to be the moderator of the Young Christian Students, to direct the annual play, and to edit the alumni Bulletin. The Brother Visitor appointed by Rome in 1948 was the opposite of the one who had preceded him up to 1946. He was a warm, open man who maintained at times a solemn appearance, even pontificating, which could be annoying.

I would have been able to continue this life as a teacher for many years, especially because I felt the need to continue studying and to improve myself in order to master my various responsibilities. A number of events converged quickly, even interfering with one another, and completely altered the course of my life.

In 1947, Brother Vincent Ayel left Lille and was sent to teach in the

Scholasticate at Caluire with Brother Raynaud, his classmate at Lille, and Brother Louis Falcombello. Aware that the Catholic University (Catho) of Lyon had created a degree in teaching religion, they wanted to remedy their lack of theological and pedagogical education. Vincent and his two companions became students especially of Canon Colomb, a pioneer of the catechetical movement in France and author of a progressive catechism. They also obtained permission that some Scholastics already having a bachelor's degree could participate in this course.

Being interested in these initiatives, I stayed in touch with Vincent. He and Louis had organized for the Brothers in community a catechetical session in 1948 that I could not attend. The next year, thanks to them, the District of Lyon organized a liturgical session. I responded to the invitation and left for Lyon, my first "big trip." The experience was a splendid one, attended by some fifty Brothers. The principal course, "The Mass, Sacrifice of the Christian Community," was given by a master of the liturgical renewal, Aimon-Marie Roguet, OP. Abbé Laurent Remilleux, a priest of the province of Lyonnais and long involved in the activity of pastoral renewal of the liturgy, gave us a distressing witness, because he was visibly at his limit; he died a few weeks after the session. Besides the instruction, the session included practical applications, including the renewed Eucharistic celebration as often as possible and the replacement of traditional vocal prayers by the Divine Office in the vernacular.¹⁰⁹

BROTHER VINCENT AYEL AND THE JOURNAL *CATÉCHISTES*

During that session with Vincent Aysel and Louis Falcombello, we prepared the inaugural issue of *Catéchistes*. Vincent and Louis had the insight of the necessity of a catechetical journal for the Brothers. The first issue appeared in January 1950, and the magazine experienced rapid success; it responded to a need. The excellent start, however, coincided with a difficult time for its instigators. Fearing that the Scholastics would be influenced by Vincent,

¹⁰⁹ I was asked to prepare the minutes of this session, which were printed in two issues (December 1949–January 1950 and March–April 1950) of *Entre-nous*, an internal review for the Brothers that was edited at the time by the Institute's *Secrétariat Général* in Paris (*La Passion d'évangéliser*, 1996, p. 13).

Louis, and Raynaud and by attending the Catho, the Assistant Superior, from Rome, ordered the dispersion of the three Brothers in late 1949. Vincent became Director of a technical school in Langogne; Louis, a professor in Voiron, and Raynaud, a teacher in Clermont.

The two Brothers responsible for *Catéchistes* had to perform miracles of cunning with school calendars and railway timetables to assure the journal's publication at the beginning of each quarter. Their new professional duties prevented them from devoting themselves sufficiently to the magazine. The quality level of *Catéchistes* quickly declined, and the initial issues of 1952 were particularly low. Brother Charles Prat, who in the meantime became Director of Ligel¹¹⁰ and with that title, editor of *Catéchistes*, sent Brother Athanase-Émile a cry of alarm, requesting that Vincent Ayel be released from the direction of the school at Langogne and be sent to Paris to enroll in the course at ISPC¹¹¹ and to edit the journal. The Superior made the decision, one of his last before he died in September 1952.

Brother Louis Falcombello was to participate in the Second Novitiate in Rome in 1952–53. Before his departure, Brother Charles Prat, in the face of near disaster, organized a meeting to relaunch *Catéchistes*. I was invited and was able with other participants to commit myself to work on an ongoing basis for the journal. I could make this commitment and was able to keep it, because in 1952 my life had been turned upside down for two years.

Miguel—Quite soon, however, you experienced a different Church. How did it happen that you were chosen to study theology in this Institute dedicated to religious education?

Michel—My move to theology was most curious and quite unexpected. During the war, my brother, Jean, came repeatedly to make his retreat at Annappes. He would spend a few days with me, and we ate meals together so that we could converse. He knew the shortcomings of my doctrinal formation. Besides, with Brother Jacques Serlooten, we then organized several sessions of Bible classes, especially on Saint Paul, which Jean gave

¹¹⁰ *Librairie générale de l'enseignement libre*, a publisher primarily of works in the field of education.

¹¹¹ *Institut supérieur de pastorale catéchétique*, founded at *l'Institut catholique* in Paris in the early 1950s.

to the Scholastics and to other Brothers in the community. It was in 1943, I think, when he ventured to ask Brother Visitor on one occasion a question he had been itching to pose for a long time: "The Brothers have a mission as catechists, as religious educators. Why don't they study theology?" The reply spurted out like a returned volley: "The day the Brothers study theology, they will no longer obey." My brother didn't tell me this until years later. He was stunned and shocked at such an idea, both of theology and of obedience. He realized then that the road to theology was closed to the Brothers.

There was, to be sure, a plan of religious studies within the Institute, but it was pathetic. We were obliged to learn by heart questions and answers from manuals on dogma, moral, worship, and sacred history, all written in the nineteenth century. It was the basic cycle (*cours moyen*) spread over five years, followed by the possibility of choosing among four series (*cours supérieures*): apologetics, ascetical and mystical theology, Scripture, and history. But it was always by memorizing by oneself with no teaching expected. After passing the five examinations of the *cours moyen*, less and less motivated each time, I signed up for the Scripture series but then abandoned it in disgust with the system. Even so, although comfortable enough in teaching secular subjects to students, I felt totally incompetent and out of kilter in the few religion classes that I had to teach. Secretly, I yearned for theological formation but did not dare to expect it, let alone to imagine ever requesting it.

Thus, the General Chapter's blockage on the subject of the priesthood was apparently not done to open the door for the Brothers to attend schools of theology. However, a recommendation to this effect did appear in black and white in *Circular 318*:

That a Centre for Higher Studies of Religion be organized at the Mother House and that in the meantime a few Brothers from each District chosen from the most gifted and most religious be enabled to follow Courses of Religion in Catholic Universities and obtain official degrees in Sacred Science; such Brothers in their turn would become Masters of Religious training in our formation groups and vacation courses.¹¹²

¹¹² *Circular 318, Results of the General Chapter of 1946*, p. 64.

The word *theology* is not in this text, but it is certainly a question of theological formation. The Scholastics in the USA completed the Bachelor of Arts in the four-year colleges¹¹³ in each District, and their university study included courses in theology. In the near future, Brother Luke Salm would become the Institute's first Doctor in Theology, but in Europe we were unaware of this development. The specific opening would come with Brother Guillermo-Félix, elected Assistant Superior for Spain at the 1946 General Chapter. This austere Castillian was possessed by a passion to upgrade the catechetical mission of the Brothers and to provide them with the education required to fulfill it. Since the mid-1940s, he had been haunted by a dream. He envisaged the creation in Spain of an institute for advanced religious studies that was dedicated to the theological and the pedagogical preparation of catechists-teachers.

DECISIVE ACTION OF BROTHER GUILLERMO-FÉLIX, ADVANCED STUDIES IN THEOLOGY

Ardent and even impatient to undertake this project, he had the tactical genius to understand that he could not realize it without well-prepared teachers. He began with the basics, and at the start of the 1949 academic year, he selected four young Brothers, one from each District in Spain. He brought them to the Generalate in Rome to enroll in courses at the Gregorian University and to complete the entire curriculum in philosophy and in theology (a minimum of seven consecutive years), including the doctorate. A new team would begin in 1952, and from then on, the flow of students would be continuous. The Pius X Pontifical Institute opened in Salamanca, Spain, at the beginning of October 1955.¹¹⁴ For his long-term view, for the lucid obstinacy with which he realized his plan,

¹¹³ The word *college* in the USA refers to the university level of education. Scholastics completed this cycle of courses either in a college or a university administered by the District or, as in the Districts of New York and of Long Island-New England, at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

¹¹⁴ See the work of Saturnino Gallego, FSC, *El Hermano Guillermo-Félix de las Escuelas Cristianas*, Madrid, 1996, especially "El Instituto Pontifical San Pio X," pp. 134–43. The author thoroughly demonstrates the breadth and the depth of Brother Guillermo's idea of the Brother's vocation and mission.

Brother Guillermo-Félix deserves the title of “giant” that Brother Superior John Johnston gave him.

In spring 1950, the Visitor of my District, as he did every year, participated in the annual retreat in Rome for Superiors. He noticed the group of young Spanish Brothers and inquired about their university studies. An open man, he was especially concerned in his early days as Visitor to improve the quality of the Brothers’ formation. For example, he favored sojourns in foreign countries to study modern languages. He was also aware of the weakness of the system of doctrinal studies during formation and was looking for ways to improve it. The Spanish initiative was a beacon for him. He easily obtained enthusiastic agreement from Brother Assistant Zacharias, whose audacity in certain areas contrasted with the timid reluctance of his three French colleagues on the General Council. Upon returning to Lille, Brother Flavien-Albert (the Visitor) proposed that I go to Rome to study theology.

I could not have imagined that such an invitation would be addressed to me, but I had sufficiently shared with my Superior my personal frustration and my shame at the lack of religious studies in the Institute that my response was immediately positive. In September 1950, I left for Rome; it was as simple as that. Brother Visitor at the same time assigned two other Brothers to study theology, one Brother two years older, who died prematurely in 1955, and my best friend, who would later follow a different path in life.

In sending me to Rome, Brother Visitor gave me three years of theological studies. “What interests me,” he told me at the outset, “is your formation, not degrees.” He detached me from the District so that, as he explained, he would not be tempted to distract me from my studies with teaching duties. This generous proposal, however, was contradicted after one year. At the end of August 1951, the Superior General informed me that he was counting on me to be a one-year replacement as professor of philosophy at the Missionary Scholasticate in Rome. The promised three years were clipped, but then Brother Zacharias decided to extend my stay in Rome by one year. “You will obtain the licentiate in theology,” he told me in 1952. Two years later, even before the conclusion of that degree,

he told me with no oratorical flourish, “We need doctors, so you will have to prepare a thesis.”

Miguel—*What kind of academic community did you have in Rome? Which university did you attend, and how did you react to the theology being taught at that time?*

Michel—I was fortunate, for once again, everything came to me unexpectedly. I was to accompany the four Spanish Brothers who were students of the Jesuits at the Pontifical Gregorian University. Because they had six or seven years of courses ahead of them, they were following the required first two years in philosophy, but because I had only three years for study, I had to start immediately in theology. The Gregorian did not accept the impasse caused by my lack of scholastic philosophy. Brother Merry-Alphonse, a Canadian some fifty years old and the Director of the small community of students, immediately sensed my bewilderment. He personally brought me to the *Angelicum*, the Dominican University, where I was admitted without any problem to study theology.

So I took all of my courses for the licentiate at the *Angelicum*. At that time, the basic course was two hours a day of classes on moral and dogmatic theology, using commentaries and a systematic study of the *Summa Theologica*. For four years, I ardently immersed myself in Saint Thomas Aquinas. The lectures on dogma and morality, given in Latin, were traditional, indeed conservative, presentations by Father Garrigou-Lagrange.¹¹⁵ The method at the *Angelicum* was advantageous, however, in that we avoided the theological trend at the time of manuals and of “theses” in which one “demonstrated” the truth of faith by evidence from positive theology (scriptural, patristic) or by arguments from speculative theology (theological reasoning). We arrived at the University in the morning, three-quarters of an hour before the start of class. I read the first items of the *Summa* on that day’s schedule, with commentaries from the edition of *Revue des jeunes*. I think that this theology course satisfied my thirst for

¹¹⁵ He merits a brief reference in *Dictionnaire des théologiens et de la théologie chrétienne*, Centurion, 1998: Garrigou-Lagrange, Reginald (1877–1964), p. 179. The allusion to his conservative stance is discreet: “Sa rigueur spéculative s’inquiète de toute forme de modernisme, d’idéalisme ou d’agnosticisme.”

solid doctrine in a dynamic synthesis that was at the same time a spiritual source. For me it was also a return to, and a progressive deepening of, my understanding of the religious life, above all in the explicit teaching of Saint Thomas on the theology of the religious life.¹¹⁶

The primacy of the consecration over the vows, the priority of the historical and specific approach over an essentialist concept in the theology of religious life, and the affiliation of apostolic activity with the religious identity are points of view that were unusual at the time and that, with frequent reference to Saint Thomas Aquinas, became accepted as self-evident. But beyond the *Summa Theologica's* direct teaching on religious life, it is the *Summa's* entire scope that primarily and significantly renewed from top to bottom my own understanding of the Christian life.

Part Two of the *Summa* treats of the religious life, to which some men and women choose to vow themselves. God presents Himself as its ultimate

¹¹⁶ This was not a current topic at the time, but because we were following the *Summa Theologica*, several issues were addressed (Aquinas, 1981, vol. IV): 2a-2ae-q. 186: "Of Those Things in Which the Religious State Properly Consists" (pp. 1964-76); q. 187: "Of Those Things That Are Competent to Religious" (pp. 1976-86); q. 188: "Of the Different Kinds of Religious Life" (pp. 1986-98); q. 189: "Of the Entrance into Religious Life" (pp. 1998-2010). I will briefly mention three of them. First, Saint Thomas presents a sturdy doctrine on religious consecration, which he relates to the virtue of religion, to the exercise of spiritual sacrifice, and, therefore, to the universal priesthood of the people of God. He also demonstrates that the three vows constitute a way of clarifying the consecration, which has priority over the vows (2a-2ae, q. 186, art 1, p. 1965): "Now religion as stated above is a virtue whereby a man offers something to the service and worship of God. Wherefore those are called religious antonomastically, who give themselves up entirely to the divine service, as offering a holocaust to God." He then treats of poverty, continence, and obedience (art. 3, 4, 5) and, finally, of the obligation of the vow (art. 6). This approach provides a path to the unified and mystical élan of the total self-offering of the person to the Father, in Christ, through the movement of the Spirit (the spiritual sacrifice mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans), along with details of legal obligations—and especially prohibitions—for each of the three vows.

Next, Saint Thomas defends the plurality of forms of religious life. Treating this topic in the *Summa Theologica*, he does nothing but summarize three previously written pamphlets. The novelty of the institution of Mendicant Orders aroused fierce controversy. The monks denied to the Dominicans and to the Franciscans the quality of religious, because they were teachers in the Parisian universities. Conversely, the secular clergy, because they regarded them as monks, wanted to deny them the right to teach. Prior to the *Summa*, Saint Thomas had come to the defense of his companions, religious of a new type, in three vigorous pamphlets, *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum* (1257), *De perfectione vitae spiritualis* (1269), *Contra retrahentes [homines] a religionis ingressu* (1270). The argument in the *Summa* is an echo of the pamphlets. Yes, in spite of the seemingly traditional references in the contrary position, "[I]t is not unlawful for religious to preach, teach, and do like things..." (2a-2ae,

end, as its Beatitude, to human beings created in the image of God. God invites humans to return freely to Him by espousing in some way the very morality of God, that is to say, by committing themselves to the road of love, step-by-step throughout their earthly existence. The Thomistic morality appeared to me like a morality of a calling, not of coercion; a morality of virtues rather than of precepts and, therefore, of prohibitions; a morality of dialogue rather than of self-realization; a morality not of searching for impossible perfection but of a journey and of a daily new beginning—in short, a morality of the Spirit instead of the Law.

But in its turn, the morality that Saint Thomas presents is “second” with respect to Part One and to Part Three in the *Summa*, which frame it. The instruction that we received had us walk laboriously through an interminable succession of treatises, questions, and articles, and for each article

q. 187, art. 1, p. 1977); “religious are not bound to manual labor... except when they are so bound by the statutes of their order” (*2a–2ae, q. 187, art. 3, p. 1980*). Because “religious orders differ more especially according to their various ends than according to their various practices,” the monastic life is legitimate, but so are the military orders and the orders dedicated to teaching, such as the mendicant orders (*2a–2ae, q. 188, “Of the Different Kinds of Religious Life,” art. 1, p. 1987*).

What seemed of capital importance to me here is that, contrary to an essentialist conception of the religious life, the primacy is given, in fact, to the concrete, historical approach. As Marie-Dominique Chenu, OP, writes about the foundation of the Order of Preachers, a new religious order, “It is the Gospel” that springs up anew “in a hitherto unknown situation. ... for the Friars Preachers, their life emerges from the rediscovery of the Gospel’s Good News...” (Chenu, Marie-Dominique. “Aquinas and his role in theology,” p. 9.) See Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*. Collection Théologies, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985, 182 pages. What was needed, therefore, was a deeper concept of the life of the Brother, not from religious life in general but from its specific form.

Thirdly, in language certainly of his own era, Saint Thomas gives “the highest rank” among the religious Orders “to those who are ordained to teaching and to preaching (the word of God)” (*2a–2ae, q. 188, art. 6, p. 1992, “Whether a Religious Order That Is Devoted to the Contemplative Life Is More Excellent Than One That Is Given to the Active Life?”*) He acknowledges here that, in the active Orders, apostolic activity is not accidental or secondary but an integral part of religious life. The distinction between the primary end of the religious life, the pursuit of personal perfection, and the secondary end, apostolic activity, was quite commonly proclaimed at the time; the Thomistic thinking fundamentally challenged it. Here the concept of mixed work returns as the activity of teaching that which is contemplated: “*contemplata aliis tradere*.” The order dedicated to this mixed work is superior to the purely contemplative order; the ranking favors the religious order whose activity is external. This hierarchy was still prevailing in the 1950s). He acknowledges here that in the active Orders, apostolic activity is not accidental or second but an integral part of the religious life. Thomistic thinking fundamentally challenged the distinction between the primary end of the religious life, the pursuit of personal perfection, and the secondary end, the apostolic activity, which was so dutifully and commonly professed.

through a maze of objections, of “however’s” (*sed contra*), of the body of the article, and of the answers to the objections. Although I cannot say exactly at what point in the cycle, one day I found myself dazzled, fascinated, and inspired by the simple unity, the exciting dynamism, and the grandiose movement of the Thomist *œuvre*.¹¹⁷

I was struck in an instant by the intimacy of this formula. The unified, complex, and historic viewpoint at the base of the entire *Summa* has always taught me, little by little, to realize that to be in union with God is to be in communion with God’s plan. To trust God is to nourish in oneself, in spite of the apparent victories of the forces of death, a hope in the victory of life for humanity and for the universe. The Yes of perpetual profession to a resolutely positive attitude to life took on a depth that I had not anticipated.

Miguel—*I will ask about your life in the Brothers’ community in Rome, but first, because your academic life seemed to focus on a theological viewpoint from the Middle Ages, what was the impact of the theological questions arising in France about the modern world? Did you experience tension between these questions and the Roman Church’s blockading tendency?*

Michel—At different periods, but almost all under the pontificate of Pius

¹¹⁷ Part One is a vision of a God who is not the unwavering Eternal but rather, moved by love, one who enters history by creating the universe and humans at its summit, a God whose transcendence is not that of a solitary unity and whose love is internally prolific, each of the three persons not differing from the others except by the uniqueness of relationship. Part Three offers a vision of a God of mercy. Seized by compassion, God sends his Son to espouse humanity, making visible the face of the invisible God in the mystery of his Incarnation, of the actions and the sufferings of his earthly life, of his Passover and on to his Ascension and the gift of the Spirit. In the victory of his resurrection, this man possessed by the Spirit returns to the Father, bringing with him redeemed humanity and the regenerated cosmos. Unique sacrament of the encounter between God and humankind, Christ remains present and active in his Mystical Body, especially through the sacrament that recapitulates the Eucharist. At the beginning of the *Summa*’s 2a–2ae, I was also struck by Saint Thomas’s presentation on faith in the initial articles. His expression summarizes it: “Now the act of the believer does not terminate in a proposition, but in a thing” (2a–2ae, q. 1, art. 2, ad 2m). Jean Mouroux, at the time, quoted this text in his little work, *I Believe; the Personal Structure of Faith* (Translation of *Je crois en Toi* by Michael R. Turner. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1959. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959. 109 p.), p. 16. The most important aspect of faith is not the truths to believe but the person in whom one believes—“I know in whom I have put my trust,” in the words of Saint Paul (2 Tm 1:12).

XII beginning in 1950, the various renewal movements that developed in France since the end of World War II were met with suspicion, resistance, and condemnation by Rome.¹¹⁸ The same was true for theological and biblical renewal, the priest-worker movement, the *Mission de France* and its seminary, and the catechetical movement.

At least two of these fights erupted or were continuing during the four years of my studies in Rome (1950–54).¹¹⁹ The most acute period of the priest-worker crisis was from March 1953 to June 1954. The other example is the encyclical *Humani Generis*, published on August 15, 1950, condemning what was known as the “new theology” and taking aim especially at the Fourvière Scholasticate of the Jesuits. Henri de Lubac, SJ, and Henri Bouillard, SJ, were dismissed from teaching, and Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, was forbidden to publish.

I respected the Pope as much as anyone, but not to excess, not being inclined to *papolatrie*. For example, I was shocked when I saw Pius XII change his *calotte* ten times between his entry into Saint Peter’s Basilica and his arrival at the throne for audiences or ceremonies. Although I was not directly involved, it was the Church in France that was being questioned. At least three elements in my situation made me particularly interested in these debates and also internally supportive of the “victims.” Once my brother, Jean, learned that I was a student at the *Angelicum*, he gently cautioned me against any and all temptations to get involved. Cardinal Liénart, of Lille, was at the forefront in the case of the priest-worker dispute.¹²⁰ During his *ad limina* visit in November 1952, he came for the first time to the Generalate. I can still hear him in his smooth voice speak critically and with meritorious humor about the superior attitude that certain minor officials of the Curia showed him. The following year, 1953, the Cardinal appointed my brother to be Superior of the

¹¹⁸ For an overview, see Gerard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, Volume 3, Toulouse: Privat, 1988, including *Les signes avant-coureurs de la crise des Églises: La crise des prêtres-ouvriers et les origines du complexe antiromain*, pp. 221–34.

¹¹⁹ François Leprieur, *Quand Rome condamne*, Paris: Plon-Cerf, 1989, 785 p. For the historical chronology of the case of the Dominicans in the suppression of the priest-workers, see pp. 709–16.

¹²⁰ See Leprieur, 1989, *Index des noms de personnes*, under Liénart, p. 745.

Theology Seminary. Newly arrived, Jean welcomed the envoy from Rome for the canonical visitation of the Seminary, one Father Nicolas, Provincial of the Dominicans of Toulouse, himself about to be removed along with his two colleagues of Paris and of Lyon.¹²¹

The second source of my information and of my interest in these difficulties was Brother Vincent Aysel. We were maintaining regular correspondence, notably about *Catéchistes*. Neither the journal nor the French catechetical movement was then in the eye of the cyclone,¹²² but as a student at *l'Institut Supérieur Catéchétique* in 1950–1952, Vincent had among his teachers two Dominicans targeted by the Roman authorities, Pierre-André Liégé and Henri-Marie Féret.¹²³ As a result, Vincent suffered the backlash of the suspicion to which they were subjected and of the distancing caused by Father Féret's removal. Vincent's critical information was enormously helpful to my understanding the implications of these crises.

I was to some degree cornered by a third aspect of my situation. One protagonist in the attacks against the new French theology was Father Garrigou-Lagrange,¹²⁴ whose classes I was attending at least three hours a week. Since 1946 he had been denouncing the new theology.¹²⁵ He was especially opposed to Jesuit Fathers Jean Daniélou, Henri Bouillard, Henri de Lubac, Gaston Fessard, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, to his fellow Dominican, Marie-Dominique Chenu,¹²⁶ and to the philosophy of Maurice Blondel. He reproached them especially for replacing Saint

¹²¹ Fathers Avril, Belaud, and Nicolas, provincials, respectively, of Paris, Lyon, and Toulouse, were forced to submit their resignation to Father Suarez, Master General, at the beginning of February 1954. See Leprieur, 1989, *Index des noms de personnes, also Notices biographiques*, starting on p. 681.

¹²² The storm would arrive in 1958.

¹²³ Leprieur, 1989: for *Féret*, p. 742; for *Liégé*, p. 745.

¹²⁴ "Vue d'ensemble succincte, mais précise de la personne, de la pensée, des méthodes, de l'influence du Père Garrigou-Lagrange, véritable figure mythique de la théologie romaine," in Étienne Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté. La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II 1914–1962* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998, 325 p.), pp. 47–48; Index, Garrigou-Lagrange, p. 315.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 283–87: *La bombe Garrigou*.

¹²⁶ The work by Chenu, *Une école de théologie*, published in 1937, was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books in 1943. In it Chenu praises the historical approach of Saint Thomas Aquinas, which Chenu had introduced in the formation curriculum for young Dominicans of the Paris Province.

Thomas by citing the Greek Fathers, for giving too much weight to contemporary philosophers, and for minimizing the free gift of the supernatural. In the ensuing controversy, the rector of *l'Institut Catholique de Toulouse*, Bishop Bruno de Solages, highlighted “the misinterpretations of Father Garrigou.”

In these conditions it is clear that the theology I was taught did not sin by an excess of modernity! The treatises on Revelation and on the Church, taught in the first year, did not fall outside the scope of narrow apologetics. Relatively mediocre teachers combated the “heretics” of the nineteenth century, made notorious by the *Syllabus* or by the encyclical of Pius X against modernism. We were barely influenced by these too simplistic diatribes.

As for Father Garrigou-Lagrange, he was no longer the young professor who already in the years before 1914 had “ignited his listeners in metaphysics and even more in mysticism.” The tired old swordsman of the 1950s¹²⁷ had no hold on us, and I personally wondered whether he could retain his prestige. He had been the chaplain for the Brothers at Kain (Belgium) at the turn of the century, and he treated me with *bonhomie*. I must admit that in spite of his limitations, the theology to which I was introduced played a decisive role in my life. It did not inform me about modern trends, but at least it did not block me or lock me into a system. Instead, it seems to me that the textual study of Saint Thomas opened me up considerably for what would happen later.

Moreover, the biblical teaching at the *Angelicum* was provided by Dominican alumni of the École Biblique of Jerusalem. At that time, contrary to the liberating 1943 encyclical of Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, it was not uncommon for the teaching of Scripture, including at the Gregorian, to remain conservative on many points. At the *Angelicum*, the biblical scholarship was more open, especially for the Old Testament. The professor, a Dutchman, expertly initiated us in literary genres and in the symbolism of Scripture. Unfortunately, for the New Testament more than for the Old, the instruction was fragmented. Some extracts of texts

¹²⁷ See the expressions in Fouilloux, 1998, p. 47.

were thoroughly analyzed, but the overall views were deficient, whether about a particular author or, as a consequence, about all of Scripture. Another event during this period contributed to my more advanced study of theology, especially in biblical areas: the articles I was invited to write for two journals published in the Institute.

DISCOVERIES IN BIBLICAL RESEARCH

En route to Rome in September 1950, I stopped at the Brothers' community in Monaco. The Director, Brother Henri Leroy, a great host, had invited me to visit. As a zealous Brother, he published on the 25th of each month a magazine entitled *La Journée de la Vocation*. He was always looking for writers, so before leaving Monaco for Rome, I promised to contribute a few articles. Rather than write "pious" texts or exhortations about the Brother's vocation, I thought it would be more interesting and inspiring for the magazine's readers if I presented a series of articles on biblical vocations.¹²⁸ From an embarrassment of choices, I wrote in succession about Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and then about John the Baptist, Saint Paul, and Mary.

Each article required some serious work, at second hand certainly, but more than a fundamentalist or pious commentary. I sought out the most authoritative recent works on the person I was presenting. This set of modest studies made me discover the immense variety of paths in every vocation as well as the constant elements: God's call, imperative, often unexpected, and sometimes declined; the personal and intimate relationship with the living Lord of the one called; the link between God's call and being sent to serve humanity; the trust, sometimes tested, in a human itinerary with its advances, hesitations, setbacks, and vicissitudes, and throughout, the loving fidelity of God, who often draws people out of themselves and leads them down unexpected paths. A vocation is a listening, a journey, an availability, a starting over and over, and, finally, an abandonment. At some distance now, I realize that these articles were

¹²⁸ This series on biblical vocations appeared in *Journée de la Vocation* between October 1952 and May 1953.

among the most frequently read and the most widely used of the writing that I would later be led to publish. They also helped me to think about the problem of vocations, and of vocation itself, as a critical and recurring issue in the Institute, with respect to some very specific instances.

Before leaving France for Rome at the time of the birth of the journal *Catéchistes*, I had promised to contribute some articles. On no regular and exclusive basis, I collaborated on certain features, “Readings for Catechists” and “The Catechist in the School.” These features, directed to students and also useful for general readers, were side by side with a series of scholarly articles by biblical scholars, such as Fathers Albert Gelin and Jean Duplacy, and by renowned catechists, including Marie Fargues. During the first two years, before the *Catéchistes* crisis, I contributed one article, a review of Jean Daniélou’s *Le mystère de l’Avent*.¹²⁹

Following a meeting at Saint-Étienne in August 1952, my collaboration for a time became more regular. I will comment on just four examples from this period. On the first, I will be brief. “Le catéchiste à l’école de S. Thomas d’Aquin” imperfectly reflected my bedazzlement upon discovering the dynamic unity of the *Summa Theologica*. I commented that if in theology, according to Saint Thomas, one deals only with God, in reality any subject—the most secular, the most current—can enter into the circle of influence of this unique object without violating its own substance. I had already written about my admiration for the Thomistic presentation of morality and for the concept of faith that the *Summa* offers.¹³⁰

I read Father Louis Bouyer’s book, *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture*,¹³¹ and introduced it in *Catéchistes*. This book helped me to begin to enter deeply into the Bible, something that the otherwise solid Old Testament and

¹²⁹ “*Le Mystère de l’Avent* de Jean Daniélou,” in “*Les lectures du Catéchiste*” (*Catéchistes* 4, 4^e trimestre 1950, pp. 53–58); see Daniélou, *Advent*, 1950.

¹³⁰ “Le Catéchiste à l’école de Saint Thomas d’Aquin” (*Catéchistes* 12, 4^e trimestre 1952, pp. 201–11).

¹³¹ Bouyer, 1958. Three other works by Father Bouyer were fundamental for me. For understanding Protestantism, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism* (Bouyer, 1956), and for my understanding of the religious life, *La Vie de S. Antoine par S. Athanase*, Paris: Édit. Fontenelle, 1950, 323 p., and *The Meaning of the Monastic Life* (Bouyer, 1955). The extensive bibliography of Father Bouyer in *Dictionnaire des théologiens et de la théologie chrétienne* (ed. Gérard Reynal, Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1998, pp. 82–83) does not include these last two works.

New Testament courses at the *Angelicum* had failed to do. I remember my excitement in discovering the meaning of Scripture. I had a glimpse of it from Bouyer's double formula: "a contemplation of the great plan here set forth and of the One whose face is found therein."¹³² From that point on, I was impressed with the simultaneously unified and progressive view of the Old Testament and of the New Testament, with Jesus Christ as the living center.¹³³ The meaning of Scripture can be summarized by Saint John's celebrated formula, "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Bouyer's commentary confirmed, it seemed to me, the approach of the *Summa Theologica*, as I came to understand it:

Love, this love which He has thus revealed and given to the world, this is the great light, certain that the darkness can never extinguish it, the light that is life. This is the last word, the last work of the Word, for it is from this love that the Word who created the worlds proceeded and it is to this love that it returns. Saint Paul shows us the love of God coming down to the heart of man, the love of God loving man in this heart, in us, as He loves eternally. Saint John shows us love reascending to God in Christ, and drawing us to love God in return, with Him, with the same love with which we are loved in Him: "Let us love Him, for He has first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). This precisely is the last, the supreme Gospel.¹³⁴

A third book that I recommended in *Catéchistes* was important for my understanding of the Christian moral life. Jacques Leclercq, a Belgian priest, had introduced an approach to renewal in this area well before Vatican II.¹³⁵ In 1950 he published a type of synthesis of his life as a moral

¹³² Boyer, 1958, p. 224.

¹³³ I rediscovered Pascal's famous phrase, "Jesus Christ, whom the two Testaments regard, the Old as its hope, the New as its model, and both as their centre" (Section XII, Proofs of Jesus Christ, #739, in Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Introduction by T. S. Eliot. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958, www.gutenberg.org, p. 223).

¹³⁴ Bouyer, 1958, p. 206. Even so, it is possible that the author includes, by paralipsis, it goes without saying, the love described in 1 Jn 4:11–12: "My dear friends, if God loved us so much, we too should love each other. No one has ever seen God, but as long as we love each other God remains in us and his love comes to its perfection in us."

¹³⁵ In particular, his famous tetralogy, *Essais de morale catholique*: vol. 1, *Le Retour à Jésus*, 1931, 1938, 1946 (*Back to Christ*, 1932; *Back to Jesus*, 1959); vol. 2, *Le dépouillement*, 1938, 1947; vol. 3, *La vie intérieure*, 1938 (*The Interior Life*, 1961); vol. 4, *La vie en ordre*, 1938. I noted earlier how impressed I was when I heard *La vie en ordre* read in the refectory during my thirty-day retreat in Louvain in August 1946.

theologian, *l'Enseignement de la morale chrétienne*.¹³⁶ The author's dazzling historical sketches and paradoxes, which at times appear to be negative, help the reader to understand that this novel approach reconnects with the most authentic tradition of evangelical morality, a moral synthesis whose every detail must relate to the last end of human life: return to God and union with God. This positive morality is a morality of virtues to practice rather than of sins to avoid, a Christian morality of the new human being, incorporated in Christ by the Spirit and living at every moment according to the filial Spirit.

The entire problem of Christian morality is contained in this union with God through grace, which yields to the divine impetus, thus spontaneously modeling its action on the divine Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ.¹³⁷

It is a morality of love: love of God for humans, loving response of humans to God and to their brothers and sisters. This interior dynamic of theological love integrates the renunciation of selfishness, the solidarity with the body of Christ and of humanity, the struggle for justice, and the welcome of the cross. In addition, Jacques Leclercq insists on the fact that morality is an object of instruction only to become, in practice, life itself. He thus outlines a treatise on Christian spirituality, emphasizing the development of love, sacrifice, prayer, and the sacramental life.¹³⁸

One limitation of the theological curriculum at the *Angelicum*, as in other Roman universities at the time, was the absence of any required practical work by students. I felt this gap even more, because in my university studies in France, I had appreciated the demands and the formative richness of the many duties assigned to us by the professors at the Catho of Lille. The basic articles that Brother Vincent Ayel invited me to present extensively in *Catéchistes* partially overcame this deficiency while providing a contribution to the journal's readers.

¹³⁶ *L'enseignement de la morale chrétienne*, Jacques Leclercq, professor, University of Louvain. Paris: Collection Les livres du Prêtre, Éditions du Vitrail, 1950.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³⁸ F. Michel Sauvage, "L'enseignement de la morale chrétienne", *Catéchistes* 15, 3^e trimestre 1953, pp. 179–90.

In the third or fourth year of the licentiate, I was required to participate in a seminar and to provide a personal research project for it. I enrolled in 1952–53 in a seminar on Saint Augustine to commemorate the sixteenth centenary of the birth of the Doctor of Hippo (354–430). I wrote an essay on his *De catechizandis rudibus* that found its place quite naturally in *Catéchistes*.¹³⁹ At the end of my Roman studies, this unpretentious article gave me an opportunity to emphasize the unity between dogma and morality in the person of Jesus Christ, encountered, known, and loved in himself and in the members of his body. In this article, as in most others, I ended with a request for the formation of catechists, specifically, the formation of the young Brothers. I had not forgotten that this was the purpose for sending me to Rome.

For two years, while pursuing my studies, I was a member of the faculty of the Missionary Scholasticate at the Generalate. In 1951–52 I replaced the professor of philosophy. When the position opened again in September 1952, I was kept on the faculty of an institution that was set to close in June 1953. When asked to provide doctrinal instruction to the Scholastics, I naturally proposed an introduction to the Bible. This course was completely new to them, although they had completed two years of a Novitiate devoted almost exclusively to religious studies! But the Bible did not enjoy a good press, and the Superiors could not see what role it could play in the spiritual formation of Novices! Without my especially intending it, the quite rudimentary introduction that I offered to the Scholastics constituted for them a substantial input.

POSITIVE CRITIQUE BY BROTHER VINCENT AYL

Throughout this period, I remained in regular contact by mail with Brother Vincent Ayl, who was then following the two-year formation course at the recently founded *Institut supérieur de pastorale catéchétique* (ISPC). In particular, we were continuing to share our concern for improving the doctrinal and the catechetical formation of the young

¹³⁹ F. Michel Sauvage, “Le catéchiste à l’école de saint Augustin. II. L’objet de la catéchèse”, *Catéchistes* 21, 1^o trimestre 1955, pp. 19–28; III. “Réflexions sur la méthode”, in *Catéchistes* 22, 2^o trimestre 1955, pp. 107–20.

Brothers. *Catéchistes* 15, which appeared at the beginning of the 1953–54 school year, contained a veritable bomb. In a 16-page *Supplement*—printed for discretion’s sake only for subscribers who are Brothers of the Christian Schools—Vincent tackled two problems, vocations to the Institute and catechetical renewal. He outlined his thesis:

Good recruitment of vocations to our Institute (in number and in quality) depends primarily on the plan for carrying out the apostolate and for our realistic efforts in the field of catechetics... This strong conviction stems from a set of reflections and of observations made over several years: reflections on the mission of the Church, on the thinking of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, and on the significance of the present catechetical movement... If we want to slow down the decline in vocations, there are better things to do than to confide in the hazardous success of tiny advertising agencies. We must, other than by fine phrases, upgrade our status as lay religious in the eyes of our students and of Catholic opinion... We are essentially men who by profession in the Church are delegated by the hierarchy to the sacred and fundamental ministry of catechesis as religious-catechists.¹⁴⁰

Everything was written in that same ink: vigorous in its critique, bold in its vision, positive in its proposals for the primary role of better formation for the Brothers, especially for the young Brothers. The vast majority of readers would have approved the lucidity and the courage of the editor of *Catéchistes*. The Roman Superiors thought otherwise: to his analysis and his proposals, they voted *inadmissible*.¹⁴¹ This rejection was in keeping with the noticeable blockade by the 1946 General Chapter. Vincent’s first mistake was to have published this scathing article without prior authorization. He made reference, of course, to John Baptist de La Salle, but in speaking of the Brother’s vocation, he focused primarily on his

¹⁴⁰ Sauvage, 1996, *La Passion d’évangéliser. Frère Vincent Aysel (1920–1991)*, p. 20: “Un problème interne à l’Institut FEC, clairement posé.”

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22, “Une fin de non-recevoir” The Roman Superiors are Brother Denis, Vicar-General, a Belgian, the interim Superior General between the death of Brother Athanase-Émile (September 1952) and the 1956 General Chapter, and the French Assistants. The biography of Brother Vincent mentions the negative reaction of the “four French Assistants,” but I can testify that Brother Zacharias, the Assistant on whom I depended, did not share the position of his colleagues, as the ensuing events would show.

apostolate, not on what the official mentality considered a priority, the so-called religious life of the Brother: prayer, observance of the *Rule*, and the vows. In addition, Vincent was calling attention to a catechetical movement that was outside the Institute. Honored by Pius X with the title, Apostles of the Catechism, the Brothers of the Christian Schools certainly had no need for lessons from anyone on this matter. A 1954 summer session of liturgical catechesis that Vincent had planned for the Brothers in France, to be led by faculty of the *Centre Pastorale Liturgique* (CPL), was virtually banned.

Personally, I sympathized with the veritable anxiety about the Institute that had inspired Vincent, and I admired his courage. As the occasion arose, I would defend him with one or another Roman Superior¹⁴² at the time. I took to heart the basic ideas that Vincent developed in the *Supplement*, as well as his words, so new at that time, about the ecclesial ministry of the Brother's vocation. They would soon be at the core of a reflection that I did not envisage pursuing at the time. However, it did seem to me that Vincent "was going at it a bit too strong." As his friend, I was trying to moderate him in his language, which he readily agreed to do, while at the same time claiming the freedom of the children of God and the fidelity to the Gospel expression, "Let your yes be yes, your no be no."¹⁴³

Another aspect of my reluctance touched a more basic level. I fully agreed with Vincent on the priority of the catechetical dimension in the mission of the Brothers and on the need to upgrade their formation, but from my own personal experience, above all, I resisted what seemed to be a risk of disparaging secular education. We had some beautiful wrangling on this matter.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² I remember, for example, saying to one of them whom I met in a corridor that we in the Institute lack an apostolic spirituality. His immediate reaction was virulent. "When I hear such language," he retorted in effect, "I fear that whoever holds that opinion has lost a sense of true religious values. I fear that this link between spirituality and apostolate is only a pretext to promote the activism that is causing us so much harm."

¹⁴³ Sauvage, 1996. On this dialogue, see *La passion d'évangéliser*, pp. 17–18. The exchange of correspondence with A. Fermet cited there does not concern the *Supplément* but occurred several months earlier.

¹⁴⁴ Sauvage, 1996. See "Quelques traits de la physionomie du Frère Vincent Ayel," part 4, *Vincent Ayel: un Lasallien*, pp. 117–18, about our different points of view; p. 119, about a change in Vincent near the end of his life.

Miguel—Your formation was open and dynamic, at least in your conversations with the youngest students. How did all this play out in your life, and how did you experience these tensions in the Generalate community of Brothers?

Michel—In Rome I had other occasions to experience the tension between an official Institute that continued to reject any opening and a number of Brothers who wanted to live their consecration, the mission that could be theirs in the Generalate, and their fraternal life in simple human truth and aware of the realities of the times.

I can offer three examples of this tension. The first is the contrast between the literalism of the observance practiced in the Generalate and the innovative approach to the study of the *Rule* of Brother Maurice-Auguste. The second is the climate of freedom that was characteristic of the Missionary Scholasticate, although its precarious existence reflected the abuse by an authority that wished to be absolute. The third example is how my study of theology led me to understand more deeply the ecclesial significance of my vocation as a Brother and a layman. Several people in my surroundings worried about what they saw as an orientation to the priesthood that this theological path seemed to foreshadow.

The *Rule* approved in 1947 was observed to the letter in the Generalate. Rising at 4:30 in the morning meant that we students arrived at the University almost an hour before classes began and returned late for lunch, scheduled at 12:15 even though Romans extended their morning's work until 1:30 in the afternoon. On November 1, 1950, the ceremony of the definition of the dogma of the Assumption was to take place in Saint Peter's Square and then inside the Basilica. To arrive at Saint Peter's by 6 in the morning, we had to rise at 3:30 to attend the Solemn Mass of All Saints at 4:30! Brother Leone di Maria, the Postulator of the causes for beatification in the Institute, spent most of his time as Inspector of Religious Education (in State schools) in Italy. He usually drove the car that took us to and from the University. I can still hear him railing against the Casa Generalizia's failure to adapt its schedule to Italian life. He spoke often about the recent International Congress on the adaptation of the

religious life, held in Rome in October 1950, to deplore that it found no echo among our Superiors.

Silence during meals was another point of *Rule* that was observed to the letter. This monastic observance was normal in abbeys, but active communities of Brothers could not keep it, the meal being the only moment of encounter in an often-surcharged existence. But at least in the first year of my stay at the Casa, the seven or eight Italian Brothers who taught in the school attached to the Generalate took their meals with the larger community. They also had to endure the public reading during meals in a language that was foreign to them. After midnight mass on December 24, it was customary to take a light snack in the refectory. The major Superiors met elsewhere, which enabled the Director of the community to allow the Brothers to break the rule of silence. But at Christmas 1952, after the death of Brother Athanase-Émile, Brother Denis, deeming this irregularity to be intolerable, arrived to preside over this nighttime gathering, and he made us stand in silence during the “festive” collation.

FRIENDSHIP WITH BROTHER MAURICE-AUGUSTE

This formalism, which many supported with difficulty, helped to accentuate the unwieldy, artificial environment of an international community of some fifty members. Arriving in Rome around September 20, 1950, I remember spending part of the day on October 1, the date when schools in France opened, crying in my room because I missed the students so much, and this atmosphere seemed so false and stifling! I was at the point of asking to return to the District to resume an active life. My first stroke of luck upon arrival, which proved decisive for the future, was my friendship with Brother Maurice-Auguste, Sub-Director of the Second Novitiate since 1947.¹⁴⁵ He approached me and invited me, before the academic year began, to accompany him on a day of preparation for a proposed excursion of the Second Novices to Ostia. Our conversation

¹⁴⁵ See *Frère Maurice Hermans (1911–1987) et les origines de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*, présentation de Michel Sauvage, FSC, *Cahiers lasalliens* 5, Rome: Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, 1991, 468 p.

quickly took a personal turn during the hours we spent together, and our strong friendship began.

That first year, in addition to theology classes in the morning, I went twice a week to the *Angelicum* to follow courses offered by an Institute for Spirituality designed for the preparation of future Masters of Novices. Brother Maurice-Auguste also followed these courses from 1959 to 1961.¹⁴⁶ We traveled to class together. I knew that I could speak with Maurice in confidence and freely tell him my criticism of the shortcomings of formation, of the system of stifling constraint, of the lack of spiritual fresh air, of the literalism of the cult of the *Rule*. He often calmed me down, and I felt him to be sympathetic and even close. In fact, after he was made Sub-Director of the Second Novitiate at the end of the first session, which he had followed in the wake of the war (1946–47), he was entrusted with teaching the *Rule*. Breaking the usual and edifying routine of habitual commentaries, he began to treat the *Rule* as a document and not primarily as a “sacred” text, this *Rule* that would, nonetheless, receive the “consecration” of papal approval! From the outset, he rejected the facile and simplistic fundamentalism often found in such presentations.

When I met Maurice, he had behind him three years of this innovative teaching. His listeners had urged him to publish it, so he took pains to write a series of articles for the Brothers’ quarterly journal, *Entre-Nous*. He composed them with difficulty, and on repeated occasions I saw him on the verge of quitting. I often visited him and by my insistence encouraged him. Reading his drafts, I found a new discourse with an appealing style, and I expressed my unbridled enthusiasm. I had finally discovered an interpretation of the *Rule* that agreed with the expectations, hitherto

¹⁴⁶ We were attending two courses, one in ascetical and mystical theology by Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, a universally recognized specialist, but I found it, as with dogmatic theology, too abstract and remote. (His major work, always the basis of his teaching, *Perfection chrétienne et contemplation*, was published in 1923; the English edition, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, in 1937.) The other course, which seemed to us more interesting and accessible, was excellent, based on the actual experience of a Master of Novices and given by Professor Paul-Pierre Philippe, OP. Brother Maurice-Auguste greatly admired him—until the day he had to face him during discussions at the 1966 General Chapter on the lay character of the Institute. By then Archbishop Philippe was the Secretary of the Congregation for Religious.

stifled, of a young Brother who was twenty years old at the end of the Second World War.

Brother Maurice-Auguste's approach was cautious, and yet he did not lack courage. Deliberately breaking with the usual style of fundamentalist, exhortative, and devout commentaries, he applied himself to search for the sources of this text, the result of human labor before being inspired. His painstaking research led him to distinguish several levels in the text of the *Rule*. He recognized, therefore, a hierarchy among its chapters and articles. Some major texts expressed strong spiritual principles: the priority of the spirit over the letter and of charity over observance, the primacy of the Gospel as the principal *Rule* (Chapter 2, on the spirit of the Institute; prologue to Chapter 16, on regularity). These brief fragments with respect to the ensemble had a permanent, inspirational value. The same was not true for the multiple, detailed regulations and, even more so, for the codified community practices. Related to their historical and cultural context, they had neither the same force nor the same lasting quality.

Although Brother Maurice-Auguste could not push his reflections to their logical conclusion, his work made untenable the equal attention to a literal observance without discernment. He opened up the fundamental Gospel dynamism and broke the yoke that by legal compulsion too often stifled the spiritual élan of faith, zeal, and love. More importantly, Maurice challenged, without saying so, both the outdated 1946 revision and, especially, the obstinacy of obtaining the approbation of the *Rule*.

His interpretation seemed liberating; his approach filled me with hope.¹⁴⁷ Nothing had budged yet in actual practice, but I felt that the blockade would soon cease, because it was also being questioned fundamentally in the Generalate itself. Because Maurice's research was rooted in tradition, it finally provided for me an interior respect for the *Rule* and was already preparing me for my reconciliation with the Founder.¹⁴⁸ In Maurice I dis-

¹⁴⁷ *Cahiers lasalliens* 5, pp. 323–403, reproduces Maurice's study, "Pour une meilleure lecture de nos Règles communes", the collection of his articles in *Entre-Nous*.

¹⁴⁸ I more fully described the innovative nature of this study of the *Rule*, along with the limitations due to its context, in *Cahiers lasalliens* 5, 1954, "Pour une meilleure lecture de nos Règles," pp. 76–80, and "L'étude du Frère Maurice sur la Règle," pp. 318–21.

covered the truth of this paradox of Father Henri de Lubac: “The conformist looks at things—even things of the spirit—from the outside. The obedient soul sees things—even things of the letter—from the inside.”¹⁴⁹

THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY SCHOLASTICATE AND BROTHER ADRIEN

During the first and the final years of my theological study, I lived in community with the Spanish student Brothers. We got along well and shared the same intellectual fervor, the same concern for the human, doctrinal, and spiritual formation of the Brothers. We discussed many of our courses, and in the last year organized among ourselves some structured conversations on one or other topic in turn. For the two years in between, I belonged to the Missionary Scholasticate community, an international group of Scholastics and professors. I became a good friend of the Director, Brother Adrien Valour, with whom I would later work extensively. A man of brilliant intelligence, logical and well educated, he exercised firm leadership and was attentive to every person. He was a serious scholar and introduced the young Brothers to the wonders of archeology and Roman art. He did not hesitate to call on the best specialists on ancient and Christian Rome or on the generosity of the French Ambassador to the Holy See¹⁵⁰ to improve the Scholasticate library significantly.

In the rigid world of the Casa Generalizia, the Missionary Scholasticate was an oasis whose freedom Brother Adrien defended with as much skillful flexibility as courageous firmness. He was criticized, but he maintained his approach with quiet courage. At the beginning of Lent 1952, Pius XII announced that the Easter Vigil could be restored, but without obligation to do so. Immediately, in a typical reaction, Brother Athanase-Émile let it be known that as long as he lived, the Office of Holy Saturday would continue to be celebrated in the morning. That is

¹⁴⁹ Lubac, Henri de, 1987, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ At the time, it was Vladimir d’Ormesson, a noteworthy ambassador who played a significant role in various crises between the Holy See and French Catholics during these difficult years near the long end of the pontificate of Pius XII. (See Leprieur, 1989, for the many references to the ambassador in the Index of names of persons, p. 746.)

what was done (from 6:30 to 9:10, on April 12, 1952). But I was dreaming of not missing the first Easter Vigil. Understanding my desire, Brother Adrien encouraged some Scholastics to accompany me. We went by public transport to Saint John Lateran, where the celebration began at 10 o'clock that evening. For this first experience, the vigil rites were exactly those of Saturday morning, including, for example, the twelve prophecies. The blessing of the water took place in the magnificent Baptistery of the Basilica, which meant a long procession. In addition, the celebrant, Cardinal Clemente Micara, Vicar of Rome, proceeded during the vigil to ordain subdeacons, deacons, and priests. We left the Lateran at two o'clock in the morning and walked, but with what cheerfulness, the eight or nine kilometers from the Basilica to the Generalate. There was no question this morning of rising at 4:30. Brother Adrien had taken it upon himself to allow us what at the time was such incredible freedom.

But the days of the Missionary Scholasticate were numbered, and its brief Roman history highlights the risks and the limitations of the absolute power of a Superior General at the time. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Generalate had traditionally housed the three formation communities of Junior Novices, Novices, and Scholastics. The young men, volunteers in principle who entered from various European countries, were destined mainly for the foreign missions. After the 1904 expulsion of the Brothers from France, these young men in formation were transplanted, along with the Generalate, from Paris to Lembecq-lez-Hal, near Brussels. When the Generalate moved to Rome in 1936, the formation groups could not do so, although space was provided either in existing buildings or in those being planned. As soon as he was elected, Brother Athanase-Émile wanted to restore these missionary formation communities, but the majority of the General Council, now more international in scope, did not share his view. He imposed his will, and the Missionary Scholasticate re-opened, in Rome, in September 1948.¹⁵¹ As soon as he

¹⁵¹ The Novitiate—of two years—was replaced as a Second Novitiate of three months in the buildings of the former Saint Charles College at Bordighera. A Junior Novitiate was established at Saint Maurice l'Exil, in Isère, for young students, 13–14 years old, not only from Europe, notably from Spain (French students were few in number there), but also from Mexico and Colombia in Latin America.

was confirmed in office as Vicar-General, in October 1952, Brother Denis, with the support of the General Council, decided to close the Missionary Scholasticate. Some Scholastics were sent to Scholasticates in France in November 1952; the remainder left Rome in June 1953.

At the University, my closest fellow students were young Assumptionists. At that time, their Superiors preferred to send them to the *Angelicum*, because of the Augustinian tradition of their congregation. As the only Frenchman, a Brother, I was assigned to their French-speaking group, and it is with them that I ended up discussing theology after certain classes. They were somewhat younger than I was, and they appreciated my teaching experience. At the same time, they were more knowledgeable about modern issues. Thus it was through them that I had access to certain writings of Teilhard de Chardin, which were circulating as handouts on the sly.

Being the only Brother in theology, I often had to answer a question at one time or another asked by almost every professor (starting with Father Garrigou-Lagrange): “So, is the Institute of the Brothers going to introduce the priesthood?” This repeated question stimulated my thinking. Why, then, does male religious life seem so tied to the priesthood that whenever a Brother studies theology, people conclude that he will become a priest? What notion of the religious vocation of the Brother do priests, and the Church in general, harbor? Do they think that those who profess it do so in a negative sense, because they do not have the capacity to study theology? Why is the study of theology, undertaken in fact only by candidates for the priesthood, deemed to have become their sole prerogative?

I was amazed to discover that a number of my student companions had no taste at all for theology. They seemed to suffer it as the indispensable precondition for advancing to the priesthood. Indeed, for them the cycle of four years of the licentiate was marked by the conferral of subdiaconate, diaconate, and priesthood. However, the studies interested me in themselves; they nourished my faith, sustained my prayer, and also illuminated the meaning of my lay religious consecration. The more I advanced to the degree, the more I realized the importance of the theology courses for the exercise of the ministry of catechesis. At the same

time, the collusion in practice of “theology-priesthood” intrigued me. If it had not been true in itself, it had not always needed to be the rule. I began to develop an interest in historical research on the subject.

I eventually shared these thoughts with my Assumptionist companions, among others, and they were quick to realize that my situation was not abnormal. If there was an anomaly, it was rather in its singularity. Moreover, I experienced a kind of internal wounding when I was asked the question at the Casa, “When are you going to leave us for the seminary? When will you be ordained?” The most concerned about the matter were three of the four French Assistants, on whom, fortunately, I did not depend. My response was at first indignant: if I did want to become a priest, I would have had every opportunity before my perpetual profession. I did not accept that anyone could doubt the loyalty of my commitment in the Institute from the moment my Superiors assigned me to study theology.

Beyond this personal reaction, perhaps the result of excessive susceptibility, I asked myself a number of basic questions. Why were major Superiors afraid? Why did they not have greater confidence in the deep attachment of their Brothers to their lay religious vocation? At one time, not so long ago, there was a reluctance to promote advanced study in secular subjects among the Brothers for fear that they would leave the Institute. Why this recurrence about the study of theology?

In the final analysis, did the Superiors themselves have a genuine esteem for the vocation of the Brother? Could it be that a Brother made a commitment by mistake and remained only because of helplessness? What idea did they have of the competence needed by Brothers who are responsible for catechesis and for the religious education of many adolescents? I recalled here the arguments of Brother Vincent Ayel in the *Supplement* that had so frightened them.

ORIGIN OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS IN THEOLOGY

Ban by some Spanish bishops on the teaching of religion by lay Brothers

During these years, I had no direct relationship with Brother Guillermo-

Félix, the Assistant for Spain, who indirectly was a factor in my being directed to study theology. Before my departure from Rome this time, a difficulty had arisen in Spain that would raise in a more direct way the question of the link between theology and priesthood. After the Spanish Civil War, priestly (and religious) vocations flourished in the peninsula's Seminaries and Novitiates. Soon, some Spanish dioceses found themselves with a superabundance of priests. The idea came to several bishops to use them as religion teachers in all the schools, including those staffed by teaching Brothers, who themselves were not lacking in religious personnel. Necessity making law, the bishops challenged the right of the Brothers to teach religion at the middle school and secondary levels. They did not call their competence into question, only their *lay status*.

Faced with this challenge in Spain and elsewhere to the value, even to the legitimacy, of a lay, male, religious life that exercises a form of ministry of the Word of God, eight Institutes of Brothers decided to bring the matter to the attention of the Holy See in 1953. They obtained in reply the papal letter, *Procuratores Generales*.¹⁵² Dated March 31, 1954, this document reaffirms the legitimacy of the lay, male, apostolic religious life. Apparently, this clarification was insufficient. In a letter dated October 15, 1958, and addressed to the Congregation for Religious, the Brother Assistant for Spain complained, with less than carefully chosen phrases, that “the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in some regions, were collectively denied the right to teach religion in their legitimately established schools.” Again, a letter from Cardinal Valerio Valeri, Prefect of the Congregation, brought him every reassurance. As for its legal import, it demonstrated that the lay character of the Brothers can-

¹⁵² See Gallego, 1986, p. 71. Citing *Circular 344* of Brother Denis (June 25, 1954), which made *Procuratores generales* known to the Institute, Brother Saturnino attributes to Brother Guillermo-Félix the idea in the *Circular* that the lay religious expresses better than the cleric what constitutes the essence of the religious state. Although this point of view might be appealing, and Brother Vincent Ayel later repeats it, to me it seems fallacious. I have described the history and analyzed the content of *Procuratores generales* (Sauvage, 1962, pp. 818–22). Read again forty years later, *Procuratores generales* seems banal, verbose, ambiguous, and unconvincing. The *Adnotationes* (to *Procuratores generales*) of Claretian Father A. Gutiérrez (in the Roman canonical journal *Commentarium pro religiosis et missionariis*, 1954, pp. 153–61) highlights the official and public *missio canonica* that the Church confers on lay religious by pontifical approbation (Sauvage, 1962, pp. 821–22).

not be said to prevent them from teaching religion in their educational establishments.¹⁵³

It is in this context that Brother Assistant Zacharias told me in January 1954 that my study of theology is not to terminate with the licentiate and that I must prepare myself for a doctorate. “We need doctors,” he added without further comment. I had only to comply and to search immediately for a thesis topic. In truth, if “the Institute needs doctors,” I was not expecting anything because of that statement. Obtaining an academic degree was not enough in itself to motivate me. “Because a thesis is necessary,” I told myself, “I will occupy myself with issues of concern to the Institute.” In 1951 the Institute had celebrated the tercentenary of the birth of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, and in 1952 an article appeared in *Revue d’Ascétique et Mystique* by Father André Rayez, SJ,¹⁵⁴ entitled “Études Lasalliennes.” The author drew up a complete plan of research to be accomplished. Initially, I made contact with Father Rayez to see whether I could contribute something to promote Lasallian Studies. His response, although interesting, discouraged me, because he was proposing scholarly research, especially on the sources, for which I felt neither attraction nor competence.

That was when the idea came to me to contribute, by this thesis I was being asked to do, to the defense and to the illustration of the vocation of Brother and to contribute to the current discussion of the identity of the teaching Brother, especially of its lay character. The debate in the Institute on the lay status of the Brother had been blocked during the 1946 General Chapter, but within a few years would experience developments then unpredictable. I had no premonition; the issues that I just mentioned and my own inner questions were enough to convince me that it was worth trying to establish at least the state of the question. My initial starting point was global in nature; my collaboration with Brother Vincent Ayel’s projects had opened many avenues in that regard. At this point, a friend of mine, Pierre Spriet, was studying for the licentiate in

¹⁵³ On this letter, see Sauvage, 1962, *Catéchèse et laïcité*, pp. 823–25.

¹⁵⁴ I will speak about Father André Rayez, SJ, in the next chapter in connection with the relaunching of Lasallian Studies by the 1956 General Chapter.

theology in Lille. He had to select a dissertation topic. We agreed to divide the task. He would study the topic of the teaching of secular subjects in the mission of the Brother.¹⁵⁵ I would devote myself, therefore, to the participation of the Brother, through catechesis, in the ministry of the Word of God.

What was being challenged in the 1950s was the right of Brothers, lay religious men, to teach religion. The situation defined the angle of attack in my research: to base this right on theology, to show its significance, and to situate the lay ministry of the Brother within his religious vocation and his teaching profession. Father Yves Congar, OP, had just published “Lay People in the Church; a Study for a Theology of the Laity.”¹⁵⁶ It was my breviary for months. His description of the prophetic function of laypeople¹⁵⁷ served as my starting point for the proposal that I presented in October 1954 to my thesis advisor, Philippe Delhay, of Lille.

¹⁵⁵ He completed this study, which was published by *Cahiers du CEREC (Centre de recherche en économie)* of the Catholic University of Lyon as *l'Église et l'enseignement des disciplines profanes*. By the time his dissertation was published, in 1958, the author had left the Institute.

¹⁵⁶ Congar, 1957.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Part Two, Chapter III, “The Laity and the Church’s Prophetic Function,” pp. 258–308.

Chapter 4 – *UNNOTICED BUT DECISIVE SEEDS OF THE 1956 GENERAL CHAPTER*

THE MOVE FROM ROME TO ANNAPPES

Miguel—When you leave Rome and move to Annappes, you begin something quite new. What happened when you returned to Annappes? What were your responsibilities? How did you begin work on your thesis?

*Michel—*The result of four years of study in Rome was my licentiate in theology, and I returned to my District in June 1954. On my Superior's orders, I was to prepare for the doctorate, but first I had to complete some required courses, a quite simple process. I had to follow five specialized courses, each one an hour a week for one year. I chose two primary options. Canon Didier, a professor of sacramental theology, lectured at length on infant Baptism among the early Christians. He showed that from the time of the Acts of the Apostles, infant Baptism was significant in relation to the living faith of a Christian family. This question would return to me as a burning issue when I helped prepare parents for the Baptism of their children at Loos between 1984 and 1987. Canon Delhayé refreshed the instruction that I had received on the theological virtues, by emphasizing their rootedness in human dynamics. As the subject for what was then called the inaugural lesson for the doctorate, he suggested the title, "Human Aspirations and Theological Life." Always on the lookout for articles for *Catéchistes*, Brother Vincent Ayel reproduced it in the journal a few years later.¹⁵⁸

The path to a doctorate had a second condition: find an advisor, a thesis director. In fact, preparing the thesis would take six years, because it would progress slowly from 1954 to 1957 and not take a complete form until I was released from teaching between 1957 and 1960. I will speak

¹⁵⁸ Frère Michel, "Aspirations humaines et vie théologique," *Catéchistes* 37, January 1, 1959, pp. 25–37.

about it later, including about my advisor and his role. For the moment, I was absorbed in my teaching duties at the Scholasticate in Annappes, where I was appointed Sub-Director upon my return from Rome. This function made me once again experience the tension between the blockage affecting the institution and the people and the vital currents of renewal that were leading me beyond my own concerns. I found roadblocks from the outset in the operation of the Scholasticate, and they would intensify during the immediate preparations for the 1956 General Chapter. Mixed in with these difficulties, the renewal movement launched by Brother Vincent Ayel in 1950 was experiencing new developments that affected and stimulated me in my teaching of religion and beyond.

Since 1947, the Scholasticate in Annappes had been bringing together the young Brothers from the Districts of Besançon, Lille, and Reims. For the current school year, nothing was “new.” The 1946 General Chapter had voted in principle for a two-year Novitiate but left the various Regions of the Institute free to adopt the plan or not. The preference in France was to have three years in the Scholasticate. Because the Brother Assistant for Reims—the only one out of four French colleagues—decided that the Novitiate will be two years for applicants who enter from 1953 on, a small number of Scholastics began the 1954 fall term.

The style of formation was quite different from what I had known in Rome. The Director, Brother Edmond de Jésus, was 45 years old. Possessing brilliant intelligence, he achieved at a young age the *licence de sciences* and then during the war took courses in Philosophy at the University. He believed in education and in culture, and every week he used the free afternoon to visit a bookseller where he was sure to find titles at bargain prices. He never bought mediocre works but preferred books of proven worth. He did not yield easily to advertisements for recent publications. His persistence, his culture, and his care in being well informed enabled him to amass within a few years a university-level library.

Some Scholastics with a Bachelor’s degree had begun working on a licentiate in science or in letters. The previous year, Brother Edmond had preferred to have their courses offered at the Scholasticate, an approach that

was unsuccessful. But the motive for his reluctance persisted; a progressive in his youth, but an adult of the absolute, Brother Edmond seems to have been turned around by the Second Novitiate he made in Rome in 1946–47. He became an adept of strict regularity, and to preserve it, he wished to avoid as far as possible any contact by the young Brothers with the outside. Those who were studying at the University were driven there in a van. As soon as they entered the gate to the property, they were to begin the rosary (as required by an article of the *Rule* largely fallen into disuse). Two locations at the University were authorized: the classroom for the duration of the course and the library, if they had any free time before returning to the van, which followed the same scenario as when they arrived.

As Sub-Director of the Scholasticate, I was and still remain baffled by Brother Edmond's complex personality. He governed alone and did not associate in the formation of the young Brothers in any way with the professors. He requested that they be extremely observant and effective teachers. Strict discipline reigned in the community; any Scholastic who lingered a few moments at the end of a class to ask the teacher for further explanation was quickly spotted and asked to return to the common room. Most young Brothers bowed to the discipline, because it fostered their education, and the rigor of silence avoided any clashes among them. Brother Edmond was faithful to receive them weekly, and those who wished could also meet with him every evening at the beginning of spiritual reading. Many were open with him. Those who placed their trust in him—the majority—found in him a sensitive psychologist and an understanding educator. The few individuals who could not accustom themselves to his style were skillfully and rapidly sent to community before the end of their time at the Scholasticate. He exerted a spellbinding effect on some Scholastics that to me seemed worrisome.

The Scholasticate was functioning well, and in general, Superiors who did little more than pass by were pleased with it. One of the keys to this “success” was, nonetheless, an emphasis on the enclosure of those in formation. Contact with the outside world, even with Brothers in community, was nonexistent. The time was occupied, with nothing unforeseen, and the Scholastics were almost always together, whether in the chapel, in the

study hall, in the classroom, during recreation, or in the refectory. Reading during the meals knew no more of a break than at the Generalate. I must admit that the selected readings were serious and usually interesting, but without any reference to current events. It was difficult to see how any outdoor air could penetrate to cause trouble among the Scholastics.

Yet those were politically and culturally intense years, and although without realizing it, the last years of the ephemeral Fourth Republic. Events happened *pêle-mêle*: the end of the war in Indochina after Dien Bien Phu, a strong but short-lived experience of government by Pierre Mendès-France, the crises in Morocco and in Tunisia, the beginning of the war in Algeria on All Saints Day 1954, the Poujadist Movement, the dissolution decreed by Edgar Faure at the end of 1955, the elections giving the majority to the *Front républicain* and Guy Mollet as head of the government, and France's historic retreat, on February 6, 1956, in Algiers. This was also the time when a mass culture developed, accelerated by broadcasting that reached an increasingly large audience. Between 1945 and 1951, the number of radios in France increased from 5 to 7 million, and as of 1958, to 10.5 million radios, as an audience developed for Europe 1, Radio Monte Carlo, and Radio Luxembourg. Although the television revolution was not yet on the agenda, the live broadcast of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953 was a huge success. The broadcast of the thirteen ballots needed for the election of the second President of the Fourth Republic, René Coty, did not contribute to strengthen the esteem of the country for its system of government. As for the life of the Church, the crisis situation that I mentioned earlier continued, and soon the debates provoked by the war in Algeria—especially about torture—began to intensify.

The Scholastics, however, citizens and future educators, perceived hardly an echo of this life, having no access to any newspaper, radio, or television. One day during a conversation at recreation time, I allowed myself to ask a question, more or less in these terms: "Are we thinking enough about these young Brothers who in a few years will be in military service? How are we preparing them for that?" Brother Edmond's reply was swift and sharp: "At that point I will no longer be in charge." One of his obses-

sions about regularity concerned the wearing of the *calotte*. At the origin of the Institute, it was a matter of protecting the head in cold weather. Curiously, as its size shrank, its symbolic character expanded, even to the point that some distinguished fervent from lukewarm religious by their fidelity or their neglect in covering the head with the *calotte*.

I was sorry that a person as intelligent as Brother Edmond was obsessed by a point that seemed to me only a detail. The experience confirmed me in my persistent criticism of a formalistic and pharisaic concept of regularity. The 1956 General Chapter removed the requirement to wear the *calotte*.¹⁵⁹ I can still see Brother Edmond, upon hearing the news, literally shocked and despairing; “Everything is going away,” he said. Strictly speaking, I could understand that he felt compelled to observe a detail of the *Rule*. But I was worried to see that he had so internalized this minimal obligation that he could not accept to have it disappear.¹⁶⁰

REFORM OF THE BASIC CYCLE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES FOR THE BROTHERS

Fortunately, this negative aspect of the situation remained marginal for me, even though I remained concerned about it. I was assigned to the Scholasticate when I returned from Rome especially to teach religion. Incidentally, but always with great pleasure, I was also told to teach the first-year class in French literature from 1955 to 1957. When I arrived at Annappes, the system of religious studies, in effect, was the same as before. The Scholastics had to learn by heart the old manuals of moral theology and worship. Before leaving Rome, I had obtained from Brother Assistant *carte blanche* to renew the religious studies curriculum. On this point Brother Edmond encouraged and fully supported me. With Institute examinations scheduled for the end of December, I had only a

¹⁵⁹ This minor decision, to which I will return later, was the 1956 General Chapter’s lone decree, the highest level of legislation at the time. Being an article of the approved *Rule*, the decree had to be submitted to the Congregation for Religious for approval.

¹⁶⁰ After this spontaneous reaction, Brother Edmond’s common sense quickly recovered. After the 1966–1967 General Chapter, however, he went from one extreme to the other, and he became hypocritical about the things he would be obliged to defend or to order.

few months to establish a different system. Thus began a new and lengthy stage in my collaboration with Brother Vincent Ayel in accord with the movement launched by the creation of *Catéchistes* and with the position he took in the famous 1953 *Supplement*.¹⁶¹

We worked relentlessly and between October and Christmas constructed a five-year cycle: Introduction to the Bible, The Mystery of Christ, The Sacraments, The Mystery of God and of Creation, and Grace, Morality, and Catechesis. We kept in close contact with the eager, motivated, and competent staff of the two-year Novitiate. The renewal included a transformation in teaching methods by the introduction of personal work and quarterly examinations. Of course, most important was the instruction for the Novices and the Scholastics. The course was introduced in the new term of January 1955. All the Novices and the Scholastics began with Introduction to the Bible. I remember my own enthusiasm in presenting more extensively certain personalities and major texts in the history of salvation. A basic introductory volume—solid, appealing, and well structured—made the students aware of the context. Their writing assignments brought them into personal contact with Scripture.

For two years, the new system functioned only in the Assistancy of Reims. After the 1956 General Chapter, the Assistancies and the formation houses were reduced to three. The change in Assistants allowed for the generalization of the new system throughout France, with one restriction that annoyed us but was accepted. The Directors of Novices refused to introduce the study of the Bible in the Novitiate; they did not find it sufficiently spiritual. We, therefore, reversed the first two years of the curriculum, The Mystery of Christ first, followed by Introduction to the Bible.

Published works suitable for the course on the Bible were not lacking. The first one-volume edition of the *Jerusalem Bible*, published in 1956, was an inexhaustible mine of research. The type of books that we wanted to offer to the young Brothers in the other years of the curriculum did not

¹⁶¹ On what follows, see Sauvage, 1996, “La refonte des études religieuses des jeunes Frères et l’organisation des sessions d’été pour les Frères en activité,” in *La Passion d’évangéliser. Frère Vincent Ayel (1920–1991)*, pp. 24–26.

exist, at least at the level and in the literary genre that we preferred. Brother Vincent Ayel used his network of contacts to obtain the assistance of Sulpician Father Paul Faynel, for *The Mystery of Christ*, and Canon Aimé-Georges Martimort, for *The Sacraments*. The former, however, did not complete his book until the 1960s.¹⁶² In the meantime, we began to prepare for several more installments. The essential work of François-Xavier Durrwell, CSSR, *The Resurrection, a Biblical Study*,¹⁶³ restored Christ's Passover as the central point of the Christian mystery and profoundly renewed its viewpoint. He wrote that the Resurrection is an assuredly historical fact, but no evidence is available to demonstrate the mystery itself, which is accessible only to faith and is far beyond the scope of historical fact. The Resurrection of Christ is a mystery of salvation, because the risen Jesus is the first among the saved and because it is only through his resurrection, his glorification, and the sending of the Spirit that the Passion and death of Christ save us. The presentation I wrote for *Catéchistes* also served temporarily as one of the study booklets for the course on *The Mystery of Christ*.

Canon Martimort¹⁶⁴ also wrote his course on *The Sacraments* initially in booklet format. They arrived, month by month, during the 1956–57 school year. For the young Brothers it was a wealth of material from the writings of one of the co-directors of the *Centre Pastorale liturgique* in Paris, the expert who would be the linchpin of Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)*. At the end of this course, the material in the booklets became volume one of *Horizons de la Catéchèse*, launched by Brother Vincent Ayel as an extension of *Catéchistes*.¹⁶⁵ The title, *The Signs of the New Covenant*, clearly indicated the characteristics of this theological study. The author did not consider

¹⁶² Paul Faynel, *Jésus-Christ Sauveur, initiation à la christologie. Horizons de la Catéchèse*, Paris: Ligel, 1964, 431 p.

¹⁶³ Durrwell, 1960. See *Dictionnaire des théologiens et de la théologie chrétienne*, article Durrwell, François-Xavier (1912–), p. 153.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, article Martimort, Aimé-Georges (1911–2000), p. 309.

¹⁶⁵ The series *Horizons de la catéchèse* offered doctrinal biblical studies, analysis of psychological and social aspects, and articles on instructional methods. Its stated purpose was to contribute to the advanced formation of catechists.

the sacraments in an abstract and speculative manner but deepened their meaning in light of the Bible, the mystery of Christ, and the rites of their celebration in the Church. The author's foreword in the revised, postconciliar edition emphasized the book's original and pioneering character:

This work was first drafted at the request of the Christian Brothers to provide a theology course on the sacraments for junior religious... These students, destined by their vocation to the work of religious instruction and general education, needed a tool which would help them gain the right basic outlook together with clear and solid ideas... To the extent to which this expectation has been satisfied, the credit should be given ... to the whole team ... who met together periodically for the research sessions... This new edition takes into account the teachings of the Second Vatican Council...¹⁶⁶

Vincent remained the editor-in-chief of *Catéchistes* without interruption from 1950 to 1967.¹⁶⁷ Beginning in 1954, he surrounded himself with a team of Brothers who met twice a year to plan the topics, articles, and writers for future issues of the magazine. To monitor the new cycle of religious studies for the young Brothers, this team became the Religious Studies Committee after the 1956 General Chapter, an official authority recognized by the Superiors. At the end of the 1950s, Vincent asked this Committee once again to collaborate in the preparation of texts for the fourth-year course, *The Mystery of God and of Creation*. That is when I became involved in writing booklets on creation, original sin, evil, and other topics. I worked at second or third hand as I tried to support the clarity, the strength, and the modernity of the various chapters.

Vincent and his team wanted to schedule for the young Brothers an additional year of formation after the Novitiate and the three years of Scholasticate. In our thinking, the need was to create a novel period characterized by freedom, by a concern for depth and integration, and by openness. Freedom meant the introduction of a complete break of one year between completing an academic degree and beginning a teaching

¹⁶⁶ Martimort, Aimé Georges. *The Signs of the New Covenant*. Revised 2nd edition, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1963, "Author's Note," p. v.

¹⁶⁷ The longer he served, the heavier Vincent found the burden to be. He once remarked that he was the only editor of an important religious journal to have such a long tenure.

career. Depth and integration required that most of the time be devoted to completing basic theological formation in the new approach to the study of Christian ethics, enabling the young Brothers to internalize personally the Christian commitment of their consecrated life. Openness, strange as it may seem, addressed the fact that the young Brothers of France had thus far not received any professional teacher training,¹⁶⁸ in France a long-sought innovation. The curriculum in this final year would fill the gap with theoretical courses and teacher training that were seriously constructed and accompanied. In addition, the year would include adequate theoretical and practical formation in catechetics. The word *openness* also indicates that for young men destined for the Christian education of children and of adolescents, the style of this additional year ought to promote the maturation of freedom, responsibility, initiative, and sympathetic knowledge of the realities of today's world, along with resolute communion in the life of a Church undergoing total renewal.

Such a project was not an obvious one in the Institute at that time. The 1946 General Chapter had hoped that the Novitiate would extend to two years, and this recommendation had been followed immediately in a number of countries. Its application met resistance in France, where the

¹⁶⁸ Until 1940, the degree obtained in the French Scholasticates was the *Brevet Supérieur*, designed for the preparation of future teachers. In the Normal Schools of the State and in those organized by certain dioceses for Catholic educators, this degree required three years of study. The curriculum was the equivalent of two parts of the Baccalaureate, but with a different approach, directed to the teaching profession, that gave it a more practical basis; for example, it required long hours of laboratory practice in physics, chemistry, and plant and animal biology. In addition, courses in psychology, sociology, and teaching methods occupied an important place. Finally, the Normal Schools of the State had established primary schools where students were gradually initiated into their future profession. Unfortunately, in the Scholasticates of the Brothers, graduation was achieved by holding to the absolute minimum: the first and the second year courses were completed in just one year, and the practical teacher training was often reduced to the minimum. Yet, the creation of the Normal School was attributed to John Baptist de La Salle, along with his attempts to establish seminaries for country schoolteachers. As for the Brothers, their tradition from the beginning called for a two-year Novitiate, the second year being devoted to the teacher preparation of the Novices. The letter and the spirit of this tradition were gradually abandoned during the nineteenth century and were totally lost in France after World War I. The creation of the Novitiate of two years to which I am referring, beginning in 1946, pointed to a completely different conception of the identity of the Brother, placing the emphasis on a concept of "religious" that no longer included the professional educator. During the same period, young Belgian Brothers had the benefit of four years of professional education, because their formation followed the model of the official teacher training colleges and bore the same name.

typical age of Novices was 16 or 17 years old. We thought that adolescents at this young age, kept enclosed, lacked the perspective and the experience needed to assimilate thoroughly the doctrinal instruction that was so bookish. We also thought that extending the Novitiate would reinforce the regrettable trend to reduce the area of the “spiritual” to that of the explicit “religious” and to engage young Brothers in a schizophrenic concept and practice of their consecrated life that is apostolic, lived in community, and engaged in human history. Personally, my previous years as a teacher at the Missionary Scholasticate had put me in contact with younger Brothers who had come from a Novitiate of two years. I had observed that, after a few weeks in Rome, many suffered a crisis, sometimes a violent one, of rejection. They felt that they had wasted their time and had become trapped in blind alleys.

Brother Zacharias was the only French Assistant who established a two-year Novitiate for young candidates; it opened in 1953 and served two classes, 1953–1955 and 1954–1956. I owe it to the truth to say that the Scholastics who came to Annappes in 1955 and in 1956 did not regret their two years of Novitiate. They had the benefit of an ensemble of favorable conditions: the openness of the Director of Novices, the theological competence, spiritual depth, and apostolic enthusiasm and experience of his staff charged with teaching doctrine, and the coinciding of their Novitiate time with the implementation of the new system of religious studies. Nevertheless, I completely supported the plan to create an additional year at the end of initial formation.

After the 1956 General Chapter, the three French Assistants, not without debate and hesitation, accepted the proposal of the Commission for Religious Studies, and a year of formation under the new design opened in Caluire in 1958 as the *Centre de Préparation apostolique* (CPA). Brother Albert-Charles gradually developed a treatise, on grace, not lacking in originality.¹⁶⁹ Brother Patrice Marey, Director of the Juniorate at Lyon and of the school of *La Croix-Rousse*, took charge of the course in teaching methods and of the practice teaching for the young Brothers. In

¹⁶⁹ Albert-Charles, Frère, 1961.

addition to this important innovation, the formation provided at CPA was noteworthy in France for the spirit of freedom, responsibility, and dialogue that Brother Vibien-Charles Lapierre, its Director, knew how to foster. This formation produced results far exceeding the original objective. I will have occasion to speak about it in connection with preparations for the 1966 General Chapter and with its aftermath.

The new system of religious studies for the young Brothers was designed for France, but after the 1956 General Chapter, a Latin American Brother who had been my companion at Sudfec in Lille in 1946–1948, Roberto Maria Olivera, succeeded in introducing the new system in his District of Argentina. He did not shrink from the work, for he provided the translation of all the texts published in succession, including Canon Martimort's work, which thereby was made available to the Spanish-speaking public. The District of Antilles also adopted the French texts.

REFORM OF THE ADVANCED CYCLE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES FOR THE BROTHERS

This revision of the fundamental cycle did not exhaust Brother Vincent Ayel's courage. Always consistent with the creation of *Catéchistes* and with the cry of alarm in the 1953 *Supplement*, he also attacked what might be called the continuing doctrinal formation of Brothers engaged in the apostolate. Certainly, the journal delivered an initial response to this need by its basic studies and, especially, by articles by Father Albert Gelin that introduced the Old Testament and the New Testament in succession¹⁷⁰ and by Father Jean Duplacy.¹⁷¹ Vincent returned to his idea, blocked in 1953, of summer sessions in doctrinal study. The most urgent need was to provide courses for those responsible for religious education in the Novitiates and in the Scholasticates, who were often assigned without special preparation to teach courses whose content and, especially, spirit

¹⁷⁰ Albert Gelin, "À la découverte de l'Ancien Testament", *Catéchistes* 21, 1^o trimestre 1955, pp. 3–10. He repeated and expanded these articles in two works published by Vincent Ayel (A. Gelin, *Hommes et Femmes de la Bible. Horizons de la catéchèse*, Paris: Ligel, 1962; *L'homme selon la Bible. Collection Perspectives catéchétiques*. Paris: Ligel, 1962; see Gelin, 1968, for the English edition.

¹⁷¹ Duplacy, "À la découverte du Nouveau Testament", *Catéchistes*, N^o22, 2^o trimestre 1955, p. 93-105.

were new to them. In July 1956, the first session of ten days was held for them and also for other Brothers who volunteered. The general theme, The Economy of Salvation, was newly minted by three specialists, all excellent teachers. Father Albert Decourtray,¹⁷² professor of Scripture at the Seminary of Lille, spoke about God's plan in its historical development. Canon Martimort offered an Introduction to the Liturgy, and Father Brunet, SJ, condensed the essence of his treatise on the Church from his course at the Jesuit Scolasticate at Enghien. The following year, for the same audience, the subject was The Mystery of God, with Fathers Michel Saudreau¹⁷³ and Pierre Fichelle.¹⁷⁴

Two other sessions of the same kind took place in 1958, The Christian Dimensions of Man, with Fathers Albert Gelin, Christian Duquoc, and René Le Trocquer. The 1959 session was on Christian Morality, with Father George, a biblical scholar; Father Danet, one of the translators of Bernhard Häring's *The Law of Christ*, and Father Russo, SJ, an expert in scientific matters. Having provided for all interested parties some type of revision of the new fundamental cycle, Brother Vincent Ayel then reorganized several of the Advanced Series of Institute courses: Sacred Scripture, Church History, and The Theology of Social Issues. Specialists offered these courses during the summer session, and the Brothers were invited to complete a personal research project.

There can be no question here of a complete report on this renewal enterprise of doctrinal studies for the Brothers, a basic commitment since 1950 in the wake of the journal *Catéchistes*. From a distance, the magnitude of the work done and its coherence deserve recognition. We wanted to give the catechetical renewal a solid foundation by returning to biblical and liturgical sources, by substituting a historical view of the Christian message for the notional system that had hitherto prevailed in abstract textbooks. We also wanted to present the image of a God who is concerned with human life and with the life of the world, consistent with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We wanted to highlight the spiritual riches

¹⁷² Future Cardinal Archbishop of Lyon, deceased in 1994.

¹⁷³ First bishop of Le Havre, from 1994 to 2003.

¹⁷⁴ The contents of the two courses were published in a series of booklets, thanks to Brother Vincent Ayel.

of Christian doctrine, even in the midst of the reigning and harmful dichotomy of a notional presentation and multiple, rootless devotions. The doctrinal formation given to the young Brothers of that era was more than a step ahead even of the classical teaching of theology. More precisely, it benefited from the contribution of the top specialists at the moment (whose names I listed) in Sacred Scripture, in dogmatic and moral theology, in Liturgy, and in the social sciences. Without boasting, the observation is true that the spirit of such formation would not be contradicted by the Second Vatican Council.

I could perhaps discuss the extension of this formation plan up to the 1966–1967 General Chapter and even beyond. For example, I must say a word, whose summary nature I do not conceal, about another daring enterprise, in the District of Egypt beginning in 1950. The Brothers had been conducting several schools there since 1847. As with many other religious congregations, these schools were “foreign”—in the case of the Brothers, French schools. The cycle of studies, the language of instruction, and the standard examinations were the same as in Paris. Egyptian and immigrant *bonne bourgeoisie* sent their children to the Brothers’ schools. “One hundred years of presence in Egypt crowned the Brothers with an indisputable reputation as Christian educators.”¹⁷⁵ In 1950 Brother Aubert-Joseph was appointed Visitor of Egypt at a time when the country was in search of identity, of leadership in the Arab world, and in declared opposition to the young state of Israel. (Colonel Nasser would seize power after the collapse of the monarchy in 1952).¹⁷⁶

PREPARING FOR THE 1956 GENERAL CHAPTER: THE ISSUE OF THE INSTITUTE’S VOCAL PRAYERS

In the context of the renewal in which we were working, we felt some excitement about the forthcoming General Chapter. In principle, our

¹⁷⁵ James G. Clarke, 1996, p. 231. For this entire account I am indebted to the excellent description by someone who had extensive experience in the Institute’s schools in Egypt and who supported Brother Aubert-Joseph’s activity as much as he could, before leaving the Institute because of his serious misunderstandings with the Superior.

¹⁷⁶ In spite of a strong conservative movement among the Brothers, Brother Aubert-Joseph took the part of young Brothers who wanted a different future for the Institute in Egypt: “This future, in his

participation would be limited to writing Notes, which had to be individually written. The ill-advised *Circular* 351 of Brother Denis, Vicar-General of the Institute, would have a significant but completely unpredictable effect—in fact, an opposite one from what the author intended when he wrote it a few months before the 1956 Chapter.

The liturgical movement was continuing to develop in France, in Germany, and in other countries, including Canada, for example. One of its strongest manifestations in the mid-1950s was the publication of the Divine Office in the vernacular. For the faithful who could not force themselves to recite the breviary but who were eager to nourish themselves with the official prayer of the Church, specialists were providing prayer books with Matins, Lauds, Vespers, and the Little Hours. One of the most successful in France was the Little Office of En-Calcat,¹⁷⁷ which included all the Psalms over a four-week period, a number of hymns that the monks composed or translated from the Latin, and a selection of readings from the Bible and the Fathers of the Church.

Several religious congregations of women had adopted this or a similar version of the Office. Brothers throughout the Institute were using similar volumes for their private prayer, and a significant number began to express the hope that the Institute's traditional vocal prayers could be replaced by a more liturgical style of prayer, in particular with the Psalms

eyes, was conditioned by the mastery of the Arabic language and the establishment of new schools at the heart of the Coptic population. Nobody knew at the time what would happen to the Christian communities that had justified the establishment of foreign schools in the country. Only the native church, spanning over fourteen centuries, had a chance to survive once again in the current situation, he thought. With remarkable lucidity and unflinching courage, Brother Aubert followed the path of the young Brothers who had decided to become like the Egyptians" (Clarke, 1996, p. 283). Brother Aubert-Joseph knew that they would not succeed unless they immersed themselves in the Arab milieu. A small community of young Copts was created in the Coptic Seminary of Tantah, after a year of preparation in the milieu of Zizinia. Their leader, a young Polish Brother, was authorized by his Superior to attend classes at Fuad University. This bold attempt at acculturation, opposed by many, including some Brothers of the District, withered because of numerous departures of young Brothers (*Ibid.*, pp. 284–86). Moreover, Brother Aubert-Joseph left Egypt rather quickly when he was elected to the General Council of the Institute at the 1956 General Chapter. It cannot be said that the experiment was short-lived, for a core group of Brothers never ceased looking for ways to immerse themselves in the reality of Cairo's neighborhoods or to work in the Coptic area in Upper Egypt.

¹⁷⁷ So named because it is the work of Benedictine monks of the Abbey of En Calcat, in the Tarn, France.

as the centerpiece. Others were fiercely opposed; for example, I had vigorous discussions about this, during my years of study in Rome, with Brother Denis and Brother Edouardis-Marie, Brother Athanase-Émile's private secretary. Forty years my senior, this Brother from the North of France, an excellent Latin scholar and musician, had composed a collection of Latin hymns, *Laudemus Dominum*, for use by the French Brothers and their students. Thus, he had taste and skill in liturgical matters. A man of considerable finesse, but passionate, Brother Edouardis-Marie's opposition to the Psalms was matched only by his loathing of the interpretation of Gregorian chant by the Benedictines of Solesmes. He did make use of Solesmes, nevertheless, for the Gregorian section of *Laudemus Dominum*.

Brother Edouardis held the Psalms up to public ridicule, not only because they belonged to the Old Testament, but even more so because, in his eyes, their excessively poetic and symbolic language appealed far less to the Brothers' rational and positive mentality than did the prayers proper to the Institute. Never, he thought, could the piety of the Brothers be fostered by texts so marked by such a different culture. The objection was disconcerting to me, for I personally found great flavor in the poetic language of the Psalms as a constant source of inspiration in their formulas of praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and trust in a faithful and merciful God. The at times violent cries that the Psalmists addressed to God supported me in my difficult moments. The dynamic perspective of their references to the history of salvation seemed easy enough to actualize, whether in the Mystery of Jesus Christ or in my daily life and in human history.

Brother Denis was not unaware of the desire for change in the vocal prayers that, although not a groundswell, was evident across the Institute. Thinking to prevent this trend from developing and even hoping to discourage its expression in Notes to the Chapter, he had one of the Generalate's archivists prepare a study of the history of the Institute's prayers.¹⁷⁸ His plan was to show that the texts recited daily by the Brothers

¹⁷⁸ *Circular 351, Our Daily Prayers*, Rome: Maison saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, December 8, 1955, 96 pages.

came essentially from the Founder and therefore must be retained. In addition, today as well as for two and a half centuries, they best expressed the thoughts and the feelings most suited for the Brothers. Replacing them with more up-to-date prayers, even with the Psalms, would produce no better results.

The author of *Circular 351* went a step too far. His thorough historical study failed to present conclusive evidence that the vocal prayers in use from time immemorial in the Institute had a Lasallian origin. Instead, this scholarly work proved that the amount of vocal prayers had been increasing throughout the Institute's history. During the nineteenth century, successive General Chapters had invited the Brothers to adopt various devotions, and the number multiplied. The Chapters decided to register automatically all the members of the Institute in all kinds of confraternities and archconfraternities¹⁷⁹ that assured a countless supply of indulgences. As the months went by, Brothers were compelled to recite multiple consecrations in common.

In short, to the attentive reader, a *Circular* written to defend the *status quo* offered instead arguments in favor of adapting the vocal prayers to current trends. Most importantly, many viewed as a provocation the publication by the highest authority of such a text on the eve of the General Chapter. The purpose of *Circular 351* was to discourage in advance any Notes from Brothers eager for a change in vocal prayers.¹⁸⁰ The introduction set the tone:

This study will demonstrate that in their current form many elements in

¹⁷⁹ The original *Rule*, however, stated that the Brothers shall have no devotions other than those that are common and ordinary in the Institute and that they shall not take part in any confraternity. See the text of the 1947 *Rule*.

¹⁸⁰ The conclusion of *Circular 351* resorts to a biased citation from the encyclical *Mediator Dei et hominum* (November 20, 1947, placing a high value on the liturgical prayer of the Church, focusing on its Liturgy, and acknowledging the role of classic exercises of piety) and challenges in advance the substitution of liturgical prayers for the exercises of piety in use in the Institute: "That is why it would be pernicious and completely deceitful to dare recklessly to undertake the reform of these exercises of piety solely to turn them only into liturgical ceremonies. It is necessary, however, that the spirit of the liturgy and its precepts influence the prayers to ensure that nothing is introduced that is inappropriate or lacking in conformity with the dignity of the house of God or that is harmful to sacred functions and healthy piety" (*Circular 351*, 1955, p. 96).

our daily prayers come from the Holy Founder himself and, therefore, from the Institute's origin. As such, they are part of our family heritage, which is the value that we must attach to them.

If other elements have been added over the years, it was only for reasons justified by the circumstances and by the constant goal to bring our texts closer to those of the liturgy.

Also, as they exist today, these texts constitute a beautiful ensemble, substantial and coherent, harmonious, well balanced, well suited to satisfy and to nourish an all-inclusive piety... Moreover, ... almost all texts of our community prayers are attached to indulgences, often plenary, that result in a valuable spiritual treasure and that can only increase their value in our eyes...

Do not easily believe that there would be any advantage in adopting new forms. According to the happy expression of our beloved historian, Georges Rigault, they are like "the family liturgy" of our Institute, a liturgy that for us serves as a complement to that of the Church and to which we cannot subscribe with too much heart.¹⁸¹

In short, it was ultimately the appropriateness of the revised 1946 *Rule*, approved in 1947, to current life that the Brothers were questioning in advance of the 1956 General Chapter, some going so far as to request a

Suddenly, many supporters of liturgical renewal were quick to react. Many of them wrote veritable essays, arguing in particular from *Circular 351* itself, but also on the basis of the developing liturgical movement. (On this movement, see, for example, A. G. Martimort et al., "La réforme liturgique de Saint Pie X jusqu'au 2^e Concile du Vatican (1903–1962)," especially pp. 85–87, in *L'Église en prière, I; Principes de Liturgie*. Édition nouvelle, Paris: Desclée, 1984). In total, four hundred Notes on this subject alone arrived in Rome, most of them in favor of introducing a more liturgical prayer, some only defending the *status quo*.

The effect of *Circular 351*, however, far exceeded its purpose. Consciously or not, the Brothers, especially those 25–40 years old, feared that a similar attempt was being made to block the coming General Chapter as had occurred in 1946. Therefore, they multiplied Notes requesting a necessary adaptation of the Institute in other aspects, for example, the Brothers in relation to society at large, initial and continuing formation, flexible schedule, diversification of regulations depending on the location, abolition of obsolete practices in a world undergoing secularization (for example, the continued use of the religious name, whereas in real life the Brothers were constantly using the legal name). More fundamentally, many Notes demanded that the priority of the poor be strongly reaffirmed and applied. They also questioned certain official spiritual accents that moved in the direction of repression instead of élan, of dichotomy instead of unity. They also questioned their effectiveness in the medium term and, more importantly, the ethical authenticity of some recruitment procedures.

¹⁸¹ *Circular 351*, 1955, pp. 3–4.

new and drastic revision of the Institute's legislation. These last Notes being so few in number, it seemed unlikely to most Brothers that the Institute could, only ten years later, so fundamentally reverse its course. How could anyone imagine, in any case, that the Congregation for Religious would approve a new text of the *Rule*?

In the preparation of the 1956 General Chapter, the process by which some Notes were being written proved to be more significant and more important than their actual content. I cannot speak of a worldwide movement but only of what happened in the District of Lille. The Visitor who had been leading it since 1948 was an open man in spite of the many disappointments about which I will comment later. Sensing the yearning of many Brothers for change, he took it upon himself to gather a group of volunteers to work together to identify the issues to be addressed and then to distribute them in writing. For a given topic, one Brother was responsible for developing a substantive text and an argument; all the others merely wrote a brief Note that simply asked for the desired change. In this way, the Visitor, our District's delegate to the General Chapter, arrived with extensive documentation from the Brothers.

The collective writing of Notes to the General Chapter was contrary to the letter of the *Rule* in force, because it was considered to be a *cabale*, automatically making null and void any Notes so produced and also threatening sanctions against the perpetrators. The purpose that determined this working together, the spirit in which it was done, and the texts of the Notes prepared were considered to be so positive that no one took offense. Moreover, it was the Visitor himself, an elected Capitulant, who took the initiative, encouraged the freedom of the Brothers, and was so pleased to have attracted such active participation in the life of the Institute. Admittedly, *Circular* 351 on vocal prayers might not have been enough to provoke this movement, but it did strengthen it. Examination of the results of the 1956 General Chapter will indicate that its scope indirectly extended far beyond what might have been imagined, whether by the author of *Circular* 351 or by those who reacted against its letter and its spirit.

Chapter 5 – *RESULTS AND ORIENTATIONS OF THE 1956 GENERAL CHAPTER*

RESULTS

Michel—Opinions are far from unanimous about the results of the 1956 General Chapter. Not immediately, certainly, but in view of later developments in key areas between 1956 and 1966, I defended the conclusion that the Institute’s “great” Chapter before that of 1966–1967 was its immediate predecessor. I do not underestimate the paradox of presenting things in this way, and I will demonstrate that it is not lacking in merit. First, however, I must call attention to the fresh disappointment arising from the publication of the results of the 1956 Chapter,¹⁸² whose initial reports were promising, at the least, a new climate.

A change in the composition of the central government

Early and promising news included certain changes at the head of the Institute¹⁸³ and the quick announcement of one or more significant modifications. Personally, the 1956 General Chapter gave me immediate hope, because of its election of Brother Nicet-Joseph as Superior General. From time immemorial, the head of the Institute had been chosen from among the members of the departing *Régime*, or General Council.¹⁸⁴ This

¹⁸² *Circular 354*, July 16, 1956, *Results of the General Chapter*. Rome: Maison saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 125 pages.

¹⁸³ After a week of retreat (May 9–15, 1956), the General Chapter officially began on Friday, May 18, 1956. The election of the Superior General occurred on Saturday, May 19, 1956, and was immediately announced to the Institute. The Assistants were elected on May 22 and 23; the Vicar-General, on May 25, 1956.

¹⁸⁴ “Since 1822, the custom was to select the head of the Institute from among the members of the *Régime*. They know all the workings of the administration; they have proven skill, have personally led a large number of Brothers, and have dealt with civil and Church government” (Georges Rigault, *Histoire générale*, vol. 5, p. 225). History confirms this “unwritten rule” (the first date is the election as Superior; the second, the earliest election to the *Régime*): Denis, 1952—1932; Athanase-Émile, 1946—1928; Arèse-Casimir, 1940—1920; Junien-Victor, 1934—1923; Adrien, 1928—1913;

was not to be the case this time. The Chapter chose a man whose reputation in the Institute was certainly significant, for he had directed the international Second Novitiate in Rome from 1946 to 1956. Because of his amiability and his language skills in this role, he developed close ties with some six hundred Brothers, many of whom exercised important responsibilities and were Capitulants in 1956. Such an election in the Institute was significantly positive. The Chapter had preferred a spiritual director over an administrator, a man of relationships, reflection, and learning over an authoritarian leader. Coming from the same Region of France as Brother Vincent Ayel, Brother Nicet-Joseph had always encouraged the *Catéchistes* enterprise and supported the movement it represented. He wrote for the journal on occasion. What is most evident is that this General Chapter could break with established tradition by refusing to place at the head of the Institute a member of the previous team.

The election of the other members of the central government was less indicative of a will to change, for the Chapter retained seven of the previous twelve Assistants. Among the five new ones, however, several could be viewed as supporters of a certain modernity, including Brother Aubert-Joseph (one of the three *mousquetaires* of 1946), as he had demonstrated in Egypt. Brother Philipp-Antoon, a “competitor” of Brother Nicet-Joseph, also conveyed the same image,¹⁸⁵ and his election as Vicar-General

Allais-Charles, 1923—1905; Imier de Jésus, 1913—1907; Gabriel-Marie, 1897—1882; Joseph, 1884—1874; Irlide, 1875—1873; Jean-Olympe, 1874—1858; Philippe, 1838—1830; Anaclel, 1830—1822; Guillaume de Jésus, 1822—1816.

Before the French Revolution: Brother Barthélemy, the first successor of John Baptist de La Salle, elected in 1717, enjoyed the Founder’s confidence. The Brothers elected two Assistants for him, but at Barthélemy’s death in 1719, Brother Timothée, Superior of the Brothers of the South of France, succeeded him. Resigning in 1751, he was replaced by Brother Claude, Director at Avignon. Brother Florence, elected in 1767, had been appointed by the Superior as Procurator at Paris and Rouen. Brother Agathon, elected in 1777 when he was Director at Angers, was imprisoned during the French Revolution; Pope Pius VI provided for the government of what remained of the Institute by naming Brother Frumence, Director of the San Salvatore in Lauro school in Rome, as Vicar-General in 1795. He returned to France (at Lyon) in 1804 and presided over the reconstituted Institute until his death in 1810, when Brother Gerbaud, Director of the school of Gros-Caillou in Paris, succeeded him.

¹⁸⁵ *Circular* 354 reports without commentary that the election of the Superior required three ballots. In fact, the account in the Chapter Register of the voting shows that during the first two ballots, competition was close between Brother Nicet-Joseph and Brother Philipp-Antoon, with other votes distributed among various candidates. The same day of the election, Brother Flavien-Albert, Visitor and

followed the normal custom in that case. A reflective man and an ardent supporter of openness to certain movements in the Church, he especially seemed to be a protagonist for highlighting the apostolic dimension of the Brother's vocation.

A specific new departure from custom was the publication, soon after the Chapter ended and before the official *Circular* communicated its results, of a letter of ten pages signed by every member of the General Council. Entitled "Our Vocation as Religious Educators,"¹⁸⁶ it was the work of Brother Philipp-Antoon. The message it conveyed possessed a certain novelty in emphasizing the elements of the Brother's identity. Curiously—the expression was hardly noticed at the time—this letter invited the Brothers "to work for adapted renewal, to use an expression dear to His Holiness Pius XII."¹⁸⁷

In light of this expression, *Circular* 353 included a number of significant overtures. Although it urged the Brothers not to separate "religious life" and "apostolate," the language employed was dichotomous, especially in understanding the religious life as the exercise of the evangelical counsels to be realized through the vows¹⁸⁸ and the *Rule*. As for the apostolate, the *Circular*—and the General Chapter—requested the Institute to make a decided shift to the service of the poor without reducing its commitment to primary education. It re-emphasized the importance of catechesis in the Brother's ministry while expanding the meaning of Christian formation:

delegate of the District of Lille, wrote to me with some news, notably the following: "Today we elected Brother Nicet-Joseph as Superior General; next Friday, we will elect Brother Philipp-Antoon as Vicar-General, and that will be an excellent pair." In those prehistoric times, the post sent from Rome arrived in France within 48 hours. Today, a minimum of a week is needed for a letter to follow the same route!

¹⁸⁶ *Circular* 353, *Our Vocation as Religious Educators*, June 17, 1956, 11 pages, signed by Brother Superior and the twelve Assistants.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4. It always seemed to me that the key word used with respect to the evolution of religious life under Pius XII was *adaptation*. The expression "adapted renewal of the religious life" would appear later in Vatican II's Decree, *Perfectae Caritatis*. *Circular* 353 provides no reference to show that the expression was "dear to Pius XII." One can only take note of it.

¹⁸⁸ For example, *Circular* 353 writes about the vows: "Although the vows concern only certain aspects of this life (of the Brother) ... it is the entire religious and apostolic life that the Chapter hopes to see take on a new spirit" (p. 4).

In the domain of Christian formation, new problems are evident about which we have to form our young people: sports, travel, illustrated magazines, books, radio, film, television, social questions, and so on. We cannot ignore these issues, nor does it suffice to give one or other theoretical counsel in the course of a religion lesson... Practically and concretely, what have we achieved in view of their *Christian education* in these domains that necessarily influence them?

Is there not, moreover, a danger of considering the Christian formation of youth under a purely individual and “defensive” aspect, that is, ensuring that students are virtuous in their private life and resting content that they “preserve” themselves from the harmful influences of their milieu? That is far from enough. It is essential that a Christian be an apostle, a missionary...

We will not forget that with regard to formation in general and to Christian education in particular, the role and the influence of the school as such are diminishing more and more in relation to influences and organizations outside the school.¹⁸⁹

Compared with that of the previous General Chapter, the language was completely different. A climate of openness to the modern world seemed to have replaced the blockade and the fear of 1946. *Circular 353* concluded by speaking of “the breath of Pentecost that inspired the General Chapter.”¹⁹⁰ *Circular 354*, July 16, 1956, Results of the General Chapter, did not leave quite the same impression. Its content was much more mixed, and it would have required keen insight to detect the announcement there of what the Capitulants, in effect, fundamentally changed.

A TIMID GROOMING OF VOCAL PRAYERS

I remarked that one boomerang effect of the earlier *Circular 351*, on vocal prayers, was the multiplication of Notes on the subject. The 1956 Capitulants were at once impressed and overwhelmed by the unusual number of four hundred Notes. The relevant Commission’s position was far from the most open-minded Notes; in particular, the Commission had no intention of replacing the traditional community prayers by rec-

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

ommending the recitation of the liturgical Office. That would not solve the problem of routine recitation, the members of this Commission surmised. Curiously, they challenged the terms of the question posed by the Brothers:

Moreover, what is of primary importance is not whether our formulas for vocal prayer are the right ones, whether they are arranged in their proper order, whether they are sufficiently liturgical, but rather whether they are really *prayed*, attentively, slowly, respectfully; in a word whether they are truly an *act of worship* springing manifestly from a fervent spirit.¹⁹¹

Nevertheless, the General Chapter admitted the need for some “tidying up” of the Institute’s vocal prayers, but there was no question of doing so during the Chapter itself. A competent Commission was to undertake this update, following the Chapter’s directives:

That the task of bringing a certain precision to our vocal prayers be confided to a committee of qualified Brothers designated by the Chapter and working together with the Regime, the following directives guiding them:

- a) lessen the amount, avoid repetitions;
- b) draw approximately nearer to the prayers that were in use during the time of the Holy Founder, in so far as this be possible and desirable;
- c) adapt our prayers more to the liturgical seasons, for example in the matter of hymns, aspirations, even occasionally taking inspiration from the divine offices of the Church.¹⁹²

The project outlined by the Chapter could be interpreted in a more or less open manner, depending on the Commission’s composition and on the duration of its work. Brother Nicet-Joseph, however, believed that he had to respond urgently to the Chapter’s decision. He even wanted the Commission’s work on the topic included in *Circular 354* on the results of the Chapter. As the author of a carefully considered Note on that topic, and being known to the new Superior because of my time of study in Rome, I was invited at the end of the Chapter to come to the Generalate and to be a member of the Commission on the revision of the vocal prayers.

¹⁹¹ *Circular 354, Results of the General Chapter*, July 16, 1956, pp. 81–82.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

Arriving in Rome around June 20, 1956,¹⁹³ I certainly did not expect to cooperate in an upheaval. The General Chapter, having no intention of ordering the entire Institute to adopt the liturgical Office, was content with a uniform, centralized approach to vocal prayer. Summoned to membership on the Commission, I did not at all imagine it to be monochromatic and was ready for some tightly fought debates. I assumed that it would number from six to nine members, “qualified and designated by the Chapter.” I was soon put to right and brought down to earth: in fact, the Commission was reduced to a tandem.¹⁹⁴ The best part of it all is that the other member of our minuscule team was none other than Brother Henri, archivist, the author of *Circular 351 (Our Daily Prayers, 1955, signed by Brother Denis)* that had triggered all the commotion that I already described. We could not have been a more disparate pair in harness; if we both remained fixed in our positions, we could achieve nothing but a *status quo*.

Brother Henri, obviously, had read the Note that I had written; he certainly was aware that I had expressed my disagreement with the position

¹⁹³ The General Chapter ended on June 14, 1956 (*Circular 354, 1956, p. 115*).

¹⁹⁴ In his “*Note Concerning Vocal Prayers*,” which I describe further on, Brother Nicet-Joseph explains, “On June 9 [1956], we wrote to a dozen Brothers in various sections of the Lasallian world asking them to send us a plan that would conform to the directives just mentioned. The twelve we wrote to were among those whose notes on the subject of vocal prayers were considered uncommonly thorough. As soon as the plans came to hand a special commission, here in the Mother House, was appointed to study and then draw up such projects as seemed desirable. These projects were duly given the test of experience. When further adjusting was finally effected certain formulas were found to meet with approval... A booklet containing the texts that will be in use from now on is in preparation” (*Circular 354, 1956, p. 130*). On several points, this report verges on the edge of objectivity regarding the facts it claims to report. The Brothers approached by Brother Nicet-Joseph on June 9, 1956, could not possibly have sent any well-developed projects to Rome by June 20, 1956, the date on which the Commission began its work. Reduced to two members, the Commission mainly used Notes sent by the Brothers, some with interesting suggestions, others fiercely hostile to any change, especially if it were “based on French notions” (the general liturgical movement in the Church being particularly strong in France). Upon the completion of the Chapter’s work, the members of the Régime had scattered, five having completed their term, five others still being in charge of a District or of some other responsibility. Collaboration between the Commission and the “Régime” was reduced to a dialogue between it (in fact, myself) and Brother Nicet-Joseph. The conditions were not favorable for a broader review. Later, the *Manual of Piety’s* revision would be mainly the work of Brother Aubert-Joseph, a partisan of the Office of the Church in the Institute. He prepared an adaptation of the *Manual* for the 1966 General Chapter.

he defended in *Circular* 351. He was not rigid, however, and he explained that he was following an “order” from Brother Denis and had wanted to do as objective a job as possible. He held no personal positions and was, therefore, open to my suggestions. His irenic attitude was agreeable to me, in one sense, but it was also more troublesome, because ultimately all the responsibility for the changes was now at my door. I had to censor myself frequently, so that Brother Nicet-Joseph could find the result acceptable. He was spontaneously open, overall, but his timorous temperament often regained the upper hand when he had to decide on specific changes.

A few days sufficed before Henri and I chose two types of changes. The reduction of morning prayer and night prayer could be done only by removing some of the prayer texts. One especially lengthy prayer, which had the more solemn tone of a discourse with God that expressed conventional thoughts and feelings, contained one or more expressions whose pessimism about human nature seemed excessive. We deleted these passages, so that the text could be much improved. To introduce variations according to the liturgical season, it was relatively easy to replace the hymns repeated morning and evening throughout the year with hymns specific to Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. At Brother Nicet-Joseph’s request, I wrote a short text for inclusion in *Circular* 354 on the Chapter’s results, to explain briefly the spirit of these changes. The emphasis was on the desired objective; it was a question not of reducing the amount of time devoted to prayer but of seeking to enhance the quality of our vocal prayers.¹⁹⁵

As I left Rome, my disappointment about the feeble results we had achieved outweighed any satisfaction for having been able to work posi-

¹⁹⁵ The “*Note Concerning Vocal Prayers*” appears as an appendix in *Circular* 354, 1956, pp. 130–34. Its content is in accord with the limitations of the so-called Commission. However, it takes the opposite point of view of *Circular* 351, by Brother Denis on vocal prayers, which had argued that the substance of our community prayers dated back to Saint John Baptist de La Salle and that the additions made over the years were consistent with the Founder’s text. The “Note” recalls that since the origin of the Institute, “morning prayer has been doubled in length without its taking practically any more time.” The hurried recitation, therefore, “has been effected only at the expense of dignity and proper pacing; to the prejudice likewise of spiritual efficiency” (*Circular* 354, p. 131). Thus did the Commission justify the reduction in quantity.

tively for a change, however modest. Moreover, during the ten days that I spent at the Generalate, I had many conversations with Brother Philipp-Antoon, the new Vicar-General. He had been elected the Assistant for Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Congo in October 1952, when Brother Denis became Vicar-General and, in effect, the Superior at the death of Brother Athanase-Émile. With his doctorate in Education, Philipp had taught for many years in the training schools for primary and secondary teachers of North Belgium before becoming the Visitor of the District. I did not know him then, but after his election at the Chapter, we became friends. During my last two years of study in Rome, he often invited me for long conversations on the rooftop terrace. His confidential conversations never ceased to amaze me with his ideas, his plans, his colleagues on the General Council, and the life of the Institute—all without too much censorship, it seemed to me, for he was assured of my discretion.¹⁹⁶ For my part, I willingly talked about ideas and concepts of religious life, but I was quite careful to avoid topics related to issues of government;¹⁹⁷ I had no taste for playing the power broker. During my stay in Rome in June 1956,

¹⁹⁶ For example, he was in favor of relaxing the absolute ban on smoking in the Institute, because he witnessed the difference between the prohibition in principle and the practice among the Dutch Brothers. During his first trip to the Belgian Congo, Brother Denis had published an uncompromising *Circular* on the subject (*Circular* 347, June 15, 1955, *The Institute and the Use of Tobacco*). I had left Rome, but Brother Philipp-Antoon shared his discontent with me. Before leaving for the Congo, he had expressly requested Brother Denis not to publish the *Circular* until after the visit. Between the election of the Superior General, on May 19, 1956, and his own election as Vicar-General, on May 25, 1956, Brother Philipp-Antoon was visited by Brothers Adolphe-Marie (then finishing his term as Pro-Vicar-General), Damien-Georges, Visitor General, and Damien-Louis, also finishing his term as Assistant. They urged him to make a formal commitment not to favor any easing on tobacco: "You are going to be elected Vicar-General. It is your duty to oppose any relaxation of the Institute's discipline in this matter." Brother Philipp-Antoon refused to give in to this blackmail, as he himself told me in June 1956.

¹⁹⁷ Even so, there was one exception. I shared with him my astonishment, a bit shocked, to find out that in the Institute Brothers are not being prepared to fulfill important functions. Between 1952 and 1954, I spoke with him about the position of Sub-Director of the Second Novitiate. Brother Maurice-Auguste had served in that capacity since 1947, but Brother Denis, after his election in 1952, decided to send him to study Canon Law in autumn 1953. Between 1953 and 1956, three Brothers succeeded Maurice as the Second Novitiate's Sub-Director. After 1956, I spoke with Brother Philipp-Antoon about the preparation of the future Director of the Second Novitiate; everything depended on Brother Clodoald, the Director. In fact, when he was rendered helpless by an automobile accident in Canada on July 26, 1964, it became necessary to improvise. His successor's failure would be enough to end the Second Novitiate.

our exchanges were even more confident and intense.¹⁹⁸ I brought away a mostly positive impression. He said that he was happy and comfortable working with Brother Nicet-Joseph. He saw in the brief letter signed by all the Assistants—aside from its open content that I mentioned earlier—the promise of a closer collaboration within the Council. One of his surprises and disappointments upon arriving at the Casa four years earlier had been to witness the divisions that existed among the Assistants and the paucity of information that circulated among the Regions of the Institute. “Elected Assistant,” he told me, “I was delighted at the thought that I was going to learn about the life of the Institute in its various Regions, thanks to the sharing among the members of the Régime. What a surprise it was to find this exchange to be almost nonexistent!”

What I could learn about *Circular 354*, then in preparation, did not impress me. It seemed to me that the results of the 1956 General Chapter, although certainly less negative than those of the 1946 Chapter, were mediocre, often timid. The few advances—for example, about the religious habit—were minor,¹⁹⁹ and the Chapter maintained the *status quo* in other details, justifying them with arguments that sometimes seemed almost stupid.²⁰⁰ It would take me a long time (and events then unpredictable) to realize that in reality, this 1956 Chapter had been a turning point in at least five areas: the importance it gave to reflections and positions on the mission of the Institute and to the theological and catechetical formation of the Brothers, plus the three decisions, at first almost unnoticed, whose implementation would prove to be revolutionary, especially when confirmed by the upheaval of Vatican Council II, which they chronologically preceded.

¹⁹⁸ Our relationship grew in confidence, especially during the revision of the *Rule* between 1956 and 1966. The positions on the *Rule* that I was led to make public early in the 1966 General Chapter strained our relationship, but it remained strong until Brother Philipp-Antoon’s death in 1996.

¹⁹⁹ *Circular 354*, 1956, Resolutions of Commission 8: Religious habit, p. 99.

²⁰⁰ One example is the refusal to abolish the religious name, as many Brothers requested. “Finally the argument in favor of suppressing religious names goes so far as to contend that changing one’s name is in a way equivalent to denying one’s Baptism! The day on which this discussion took place was the Feast of Saint Eugenius, Baptismal patron of His Holiness, Pope Pius XII. It was impossible not to remember how His Holiness changed *his* name on the occasion of his elevation to the Papacy” (*Circular 354*, 1956, pp. 97–98). The logic of this condescending smile continues to escape me.

RENEWING THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE POOR: THE ROLE OF BROTHER HONORÉ DE SILVESTRI

The importance that the 1956 General Chapter gave to the Institute's mission was mainly due to the action in the relevant Commission and in the Assembly of one Brother whose influence on the Institute's evolution was significant, especially although not exclusively, in France in the preceding three decades. This is the moment to introduce Brother Honoré de Silvestri, who appears several times in this work. I first met him in the early 1950s when he was, in a way, a "rising star" sought for conferences during annual retreats in some Districts. As with Brother Vincent Ayel, but by different paths, Honoré's experience as a Brother had evolved in a radical direction because of the unforeseeable events that he experienced outside the Institute.

Brother Honoré's family emigrated to France from Italy after the First World War. Like many of his compatriots, Monsieur Silvestri worked in construction as a bricklayer. The family lived with far less than modest means, as Honoré later wrote:

I am from a working class, foreign, and immigrant family. My life was profoundly influenced by my father's life as a laborer, by his absence (he was working abroad), and by our belated arrival in France, where I felt deeply racist attitudes in our reception and in the difficulties of integration.²⁰¹

My reading this again is no doubt also belated. After joining the Brothers in 1933, Honoré experienced a normal path of Junior Novitiate, Novitiate, and Scholasticate (but reduced to one year). At the age of eighteen, he began his teaching career at the boarding school at Hachy, in the Belgian Ardennes. In 1940 he was assigned to the Saint Joseph School at Troyes, where he remained for 23 years. He was an excellent teacher: "Students did not misbehave in his class, for he demanded strict order and discipline. His apostolic zeal was so strong that he would have preferred to send everyone to the Junior Seminary or to the Juniorate."²⁰²

²⁰¹ Brothers Émile Noirez and Étienne Michalet, *Frère Honoré de Silvestri*, Notice biographique polycopiée, p. 3.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (STO) Act of February 1943 found in the Brother Visitor of Reims at the time, Brother Armel-Félix, a determined adversary. To escape any possibility of requisition, he initially sent Brother Honoré to a carpentry shop as an apprentice, then to a specialized public school in Toulouse for teachers to earn a diploma for working with delinquents. In January 1944, Honoré became the “manager” of the rehabilitation center situated in Aisne, first at Saint-Michel’s Sougland foundry, then at Verdilly.

During his months of living among these particular young people, Honoré discovered a reality and a living condition that he also had known. They are the origin not only of his development of teaching techniques but also of his entire future direction.²⁰³

Honoré returned to Troyes with a different perspective. Not without some hesitation and reticence, he then discovered the Young Catholic Worker movement, which led him to deeper trust in young people while preparing them for participating in Catholic Action. He became Director of Saint Joseph School in 1952 and embarked on a vast construction project. His primary concern, however, was bringing the Gospel to young people, with an awareness of their social situation and environment, and forming them in preparation for an activist commitment, not to mention his care for young people in difficulty. As Director of the community, he became known as a motivator of the Brothers. Every week he met with the Brothers responsible for catechesis to explain and to distribute the lessons he had prepared.

When Brother Honoré participated in the Second Novitiate in Rome in 1951–52, he and I had some excellent conversations. Beginning in 1953, Brother Zacharias appointed him to direct the thirty-day retreat prior to the perpetual profession of Brothers of the Assistancy of Reims. This was something of a revolution, for the Director of the “Great Exercises” was usually a Brother in the position of major Superior or Director of the Novitiate or Scholasticate. In an important and sometimes decisive time, when the young Brother must consider the definitive option, Honoré’s

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

youth and ability to listen and his attention to the life of people enabled him to establish strong personal relationships with several Brothers. In addition, those who heard his conferences appreciated the impact of his strong and direct language, his approach to the Brother's life, and his personal renewal based on contact with the lives of the young, the preferential service of the poor, and openness to the Church, especially concerning the approach and the pedagogy of the Young Catholic Workers. All this did not keep him from proposing, early on, a rejuvenated, vibrant, and more apostolic reading of the works of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. The influence of Brother Honoré was such that he was often invited to give conferences at District retreats.

Although I recognized the promise of renewal in Brother Honoré's activities, I was somewhat annoyed by his conferences. I found him to be partisan at times; he appeared steeped in certitudes, which my critical sense could not help but suspect. Even our similar interest in John Baptist de La Salle did not make us more close at the time. Then—I am speaking about the years 1950–1957—I was still cold with respect to the Founder, marked as I was by the ascetic rigor of his teaching, which was particularly emphasized, and by his being used to justify the *status quo* of the *Rule*. It was also the most intense time of my relationship with Brother Vincent Ayel, my collaboration with *Catéchistes*, and our efforts to renew religious studies. I was less appreciative of Honoré's priorities.

It is not surprising that he was elected to the 1956 General Chapter, his District being entitled to two delegates. As the youngest Capitulant, he chose to join Commission 5, on the Mission of the Institute, and became its secretary, which probably helped obtain endorsement of some of his ideas. In *Circular 354*, Results of the General Chapter, Brother Nicet-Joseph paid tribute to the Commission's young reporter, who was so capable of impressing his audience.²⁰⁴ Honoré made himself the advocate of restoring the priority of the educational service of the poor and the working class. He closely linked this renewal of the purpose of the Institute with the development of technical education, bringing to a vote

²⁰⁴ *Circular 354*, 1956, p. 75.

this unique resolution of the Chapter:

That wherever it is possible and opportune an effort be made to establish and develop technical or vocational schools for the Catholic training of prospective young wage earners, and this because we bear our share of the responsibility for rechristianizing working classes and inasmuch as the Holy Father and his representatives have repeatedly called attention thereto. That these schools be especially on the elementary and intermediate levels and that they be accompanied by such necessary and relevant apostolic activities as occur during or after the training period. That qualified teachers be prepared for this work and that they be thoroughly conversant with that body of doctrine governing Catholic Action among the working classes.²⁰⁵

Honoré was able to link the renewal of the service of the poor with the recognized place of Catholic Action in the Brother's apostolate. It is intriguing to see how brilliantly he, as the Commission's reporter, focuses on "real" Catholic Action. The report initially discusses an early trend reflected in the major devotions proper to our Institute and in their related organizations: The Congregation of the Holy Child Jesus, the Union of the Most Holy Crucifix and Mary Immaculate, the Marian Congregations, and the Legion of Mary.²⁰⁶ *Circular 354* then continues:

The secretary of the Commission took particular pleasure in reading before the General Assembly that part of the report having to do with *Specialized Catholic Action*. Since 1946 there has been an evolution in our apostolic activities. Our experience regarding the social work of the Church has been greatly increased. It is now possible to speak to the Brothers of Catholic Action and find them ready and willing to adopt its methods... It is of the highest importance that our schools contribute to preparing the way for this specialized Catholic Action laity...²⁰⁷

These suggestions prompted some important resolutions that the Chapter adopted enthusiastically.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.

²⁰⁶ Brother Philipp-Antoon, a friend of Bishop Suenens, then auxiliary of Malines, was a fervent supporter of the Legion of Mary.

²⁰⁷ *Circular 354*, 1956, p. 75.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

In fact, these recommendations insist

- 1) That ... one of the principal preoccupations of our houses be the furthering of ways and means towards the formation of an adult Catholic Action laity...
- 2) That everywhere our Brothers ... enter positively and to the fullest extent possible into this directed, co-operative movement.
- 3) That in our houses of training aspirants be made familiar with the spirit and methods of Catholic Action.²⁰⁹

Brother Honoré's pen is evident in all these texts. The General Chapter expanded to the entire Institute a decisive option with respect to its mission, based on the experience of some Brothers, because this renewed life had found a resounding voice at the Chapter. In the Assembly there was no Capitulant who was a direct witness on behalf of the catechetical movement or the renewal of religious studies, which I spoke about earlier. But the team that worked with Brother Vincent Ayel had provided an ample and strongly constructed dossier on the whole issue. The report of Commission 4, Religious and Profane Studies, and the recommendations it formulated are characterized by the realism of a diagnosis without complacency, instead of the self-satisfaction that was so often the case. The proposals were also precise and urgent, reflecting in an obvious way the perspectives of the work undertaken in France since 1950.

Among the reports that greatly impressed the Chapter must be mentioned this one on studies. Not without a certain anxiety it urges the Chapter to observe that there is a pressing need to reorganize our entire system of studies; especially our religious studies... The Fourth Commission began its work by analyzing a voluminous, serious, carefully thought-out dossier; this it did in a manner that was both painstaking and brilliantly penetrating. The finished report proved itself a splendid, solidly constructive synthesis.²¹⁰

CONCERN FOR THE DOCTRINAL AND CATECHETICAL FORMATION OF THE YOUNG BROTHERS

The following observation is easily recognized as an almost literal echo of

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

the Supplement that Brother Vincent Ayel wrote in 1953, which was so negatively received at the time by the Institute's officials in Rome:

“I believe,” writes one Brother, “that before we begin to look for vocations it is only proper that we ask ourselves what we propose to do with them. I am persuaded that if our religious formation were first-rate from every point of view; that if to become a Brother meant to become a witness to Christ, a well-informed specialist in education and particularly in the catechetical apostolate—then the problem of vocations would no longer be the crucial one it is...”²¹¹

With regard to basic formation, the most denounced deficiency is that of religious instruction in the houses of formation, particularly in the Scholasticate. It is fragmented and poorly situated, and the teachers lack specialized training. Moreover, this inadequacy exists also in the religious education of students in the upper levels of educational institutions:

We have to admit ... that when it is question of a course of religion for our classes, little account is made of the doctrinal competency of the teacher. Generally, and in a way that is quite automatic, the assignment is confided to the “titular” of the class. But very often this man is a “titular” only in the sense that he has ability for imparting a knowledge of the profane subjects. So it happens often enough that such Brothers, perfectly at home in their courses in philosophy or literature or mathematics, are decidedly ill at ease and inferior when it comes to exercising their mission as catechists. For such men the teaching of religion is often a nightmare. They want nothing to do with it.²¹²

The resolutions of Commission 4 include measures already taken in the Reims Assistency that were discussed: religious studies in houses of formation under the direction of competent professors; spiritual formation in Novitiates based on doctrine, Scripture, and liturgy; decentralized organization of curricula, and examinations on basic doctrine.²¹³

The recommendation of the 1946 General Chapter to establish in Rome an Institute of Advanced Religious Studies had matured during the

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58–59.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 62–63.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–68.

decade. The Union of Women Religious in Rome had established the International Institute *Regina Mundi* to offer graduate courses in Theology for various congregations of women. A letter from the Congregation for Religious invited the lay Institutes of men to take the same initiative. The 1956 General Chapter considered the matter and approved it:

The General Chapter approves the plan to establish in Rome an Institute of Higher Religious culture imparting knowledge in those branches useful for the promotion of the apostolate of the lay religious, teaching Congregations. The Chapter of 1946 gave thought to this matter. It has recently been recalled to our attention in a letter (dated May 15, 1956) from His Eminence Cardinal Valerio Valeri. The Chapter leaves it to the Most Honored Brother [Superior] to see to it that the project is adequately studied and carried out.²¹⁴

The surprise came from the speed with which Brother Nicet-Joseph responded to this decision. The *Jesus Magister* Institute, established under the patronage of the Lateran University in October 1957, developed a cycle of four years and continued until the end of the Second Vatican Council. Thereafter, the multiplication in many countries and dioceses of Institutes of Advanced Studies in Theology, coupled with the decrease in vocations, led to the disappearance, in effect, of *Jesus Magister* in the early 1970s, not that some attempts were not made to renew it.

As the reporter of Commission 4 said, in concluding his presentation to the Assembly, “This wise, enlightened and zealous interest in religious studies is a sign that the grace of Pentecost is being given us anew.”²¹⁵ This preoccupation with catechetical renewal and doctrinal formation, which sprang from the life of the Church and from human needs in certain sectors of the Institute—Italy, France, Spain, and some Latin American Districts—between 1946 and 1956, was confirmed by the 1956 General Chapter and extended to the entire Institute. This movement, given new impetus, also contributed to the preparation of the 1966 General Chapter. The same was true for the implementation of the guidelines

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63–64.

adopted for the service of the poor, for Catholic Action, and for technical education. On reflection, the 1956 Chapter was definitely neither mediocre nor of minor importance.

Three decisive orientations of the 1956 General Chapter

In contrast, the three issues that I am going to cite and that in the medium term proved to be almost revolutionary might have remained a dead letter, because their inclusion in Brother Nicet-Joseph's *Circular 354* leaves room for various interpretations. The three topics are the assumption about the revision of the *Rule*, the innovative decision on the preparation of future General Chapters, and the relaunching with renewed energy of Lasallian Studies. I can best describe these three decisions of the 1956 General Chapter as *return the Rule to the Institute*, *return the Institute to the Brothers*, and *return the Founder to history*.

Return the Rule to the Institute: a revision of the Rule

When I discussed the revision of the *Rule* at the 1946 General Chapter, I pointed out that, for fear of ending henceforth with vague desires for a revision of everything, Brother Athanase-Émile took the initiative to have the *Rule* approved by the Congregation for Religious. He thought to remove it from the Institute's authority from that time on.

Now, less than ten years later, the 1956 General Chapter noted the influx of Notes of the Brothers about regular observance:

This Commission received a total of 1,400 notes, nearly as many as all the other Commissions together. These notes, whether pleading for a more faithful observance or seeking a better adaptation to present-day conditions, prove that for their authors regularity is not a meaningless word.²¹⁶

The Capitulants were forced to admit that the 1947 text of the *Rule* did not achieve its goal:

The magnitude of the work was such that the final product could not but be imperfect. Obscurities remained, even some slight contradictions lingered. Here and there the modifications brought to the text of the Holy

²¹⁶ Commission 6, Regularity, Spiritual Exercises, *ibid.*, p. 81.

Founder were not altogether happy. Moreover, especially in so far as the *Rule of Government* is concerned, the work of adaptation and of keeping abreast of present necessities must continue to go on especially in this age of rapid evolution.

These considerations induced the Regime to undertake the completion of the work of 1946. But to render the work valid it was indispensable to secure a mandate from the General Chapter. This present Chapter was good enough to ratify the undertaking...²¹⁷

The terms employed are discreet, not to say diplomatic, because the work that the General Council was to have done between 1946 and 1956 seems to have left no traces. Barely nine years after the papal approbation of the 1946 definitive legislation that it was hoped would be irreversible, Commission 6 of the 1956 General Chapter observed that the recent revision had missed its goal and then invited the Assembly to open the door to a redesigned work to be completed in the next decade:

(a) The Regime shall submit its work for approval to the General Chapter of 1966.

(b) But in order that the Regime make use of wider experience and of the best opinions, it shall forward mimeographed copies of the first draft, as soon as this is finished, to the Brothers Visitors. These Superiors together with their councils shall study it, annotating their copy as they proceed.

(c) The Regime shall summarize all these remarks and make use of them for drawing up a second draft, which shall be duly submitted to canonists and to the consultors for the Sacred Congregation of Religious.

With a revision thus prepared and supervised it is expected that the new texts will be enthusiastically approved by the next General Chapter.²¹⁸

The text is confusing, even contradictory, what with the hesitation of the Assembly and its simultaneously strong and new resolve. It is strange, above all, that neither the 1946 revision nor the one envisaged to be undertaken makes any reference to the 1947 papal approbation. The Capitulants ordered the Régime to launch a revision as if it depended only on the Institute. One might think that the trusting relationship of

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

the Procurator General with officials of the Congregation for Religious or of the Vicar-General with one or other authoritative consultant assured them of no difficulty on their part. What had to be assured prior to 1966 was the endorsement of the experts in Canon Law and of the consultants of the Congregation for Religious.

A second big surprise, given the history before and after the events, was the type of criticism addressed to the 1946 revision, that it sinned by its lack of fidelity to the literal text of the Founder: “Here and there the modifications brought to the text of the Holy Founder were not altogether happy.” Such a remark seemed to join the criticism addressed to their predecessors in the nineteenth century by the drafters of the 1901 revision, as well as those directed, in their turn, at the authors of the 1946 revision. Therefore, the question arose whether literal fidelity must still be the basis for the future revision. That would be hopeless and useless.

In fact, that was the only Note about this Chapter decision relative to the content of the proposed revision of the *Rule*. The bulk of the project that was outlined concerned the method and even the calendar. In this case the quiet audacity of the Capitulants of 1956 was striking. Their mandate to the Régime extended over the entire decade; they were to submit their definitive text to the 1966 General Chapter. There were at least two stages, however, in preparing this text. First, an initial draft was to be submitted to the Visitors and their Councils. Recalling the confidentiality and the secrecy of the 1946 revision and the restrictions on its discussion at the General Chapter, the 1956 Capitulants evidently distanced themselves from this timorous attitude. The entire process they envisaged involved, if not all the Brothers, at least the Districts (Visitors and Councils). The 1946 General Chapter removed the Institute’s mastery over its *Rule*; the 1956 Chapter returned the *Rule* to the living Institute.

At that point, the question of content comes to the fore. By advocating such a broadening of the “editors” of the project, without formulating any directive on the matter of its text, did the Capitulants of 1956 not give *carte blanche* to the Superior and his Council to write a new text on a new basis without tying them to literal fidelity to the original *Rule*? The 1956 General Chapter introduced no significant modifications to the

Rule. It went much farther; because the requests from everyday life could not be ignored, the Chapter had to proceed with a true and substantive revision. The Capitulants took action, then, by envisaging a postponement of the *Rule* during the project. In addition, after one hundred years of the hesitation waltz that twice, in 1901 and in 1946, had led to a return to the text “of the origins,” this General Chapter had the lucidity to suggest that it would be good to reconcile itself to having some distance with respect to the Founder’s text.

The Chapter invited the living Institute to live up to its responsibilities regarding a text of the *Rule*. If the *Rule* to be constructed obtained the agreement of the entire Institute and of the competent editors, the hope was that the next General Chapter would enthusiastically approve it (after having complete freedom to debate it). Once again, observe that in the eyes of the Capitulants of 1956, approval of the Institute’s legislation was, first and foremost, by the Brothers themselves. They did not mention the possibility of papal approbation.

The difficulties, even impasses, of such an undertaking appeared at the outset. It did not happen—and continue—except by the will of Brother Nicet-Joseph, aided no doubt by the cards dealt with the accession to the pontificate of Pope John XXIII in November 1958 and his unexpected announcement of Vatican Council II in January 1959. The credit goes, nonetheless, to the 1956 General Chapter for giving the green light to this long-awaited change, never before dared.

Return the Institute to the Brothers: Notes to the 1956 General Chapter

A second new decision, at first sight of an especially practical nature, could significantly change in the future the conditions for the preparation of a General Chapter. From now on, writing collective Notes would no longer be prohibited as a *cabale* but encouraged, with the right to personal Notes remaining intact. In fact, the 1956 Capitulants were overwhelmed by the abundance of individual Notes, four hundred alone on prayer. The decision of Commission 7 neither prohibited nor discouraged them, but it established a kind of intermediate stage. Brothers could send their Notes to

their District office; local commissions organized by the Visitors and their Councils could study them, make a synthesis according to the theme, and send them—with the Notes themselves—to the Secretariat of the Chapter.

Thus far, the idea of a *collective Note*, strictly speaking, did not seem to appear. The most evident desire of the Capitulants initially was to maximize the free expression of the Brothers in this procedure. The organization of the calendar was important:

Two years before the opening of the General Chapter the Most Honored Brother Superior General shall notify, by letter, the Brothers professed with perpetual vows that they may prepare notes for the General Chapter... Within a period not exceeding four months ... these notes shall be forwarded to the District administration... Brother Visitor shall call together the members of the District Council and proceed to the opening and classification of the notes... A period of eight months shall be allotted for these preparatory labors.²¹⁹

Thus, the Brothers who wished could place themselves “in the condition of a Chapter” two years before the date of the Assembly. The work of synthesis in each District’s central office must be circulated among the Brothers. The Notes they supplied individually could be amplified and possibly supplemented or amended as needed, thanks to partial syntheses achieved at close range. This was not yet the restoration of the District Chapter—almost stillborn in the eighteenth century—but promising in its own way.²²⁰ It was not yet an implementation of the principle of sub-

²¹⁹ *Circular* 354, 1956, pp. 119–20.

²²⁰ The Bull of Approbation made possible the holding of provincial Chapters, and Brother Florence decided to do so. A *Circular* dated July 26, 1771, announced the Institute’s division into three Provinces, with a Chapter to be held in each one (in Avignon, Paris, and Maréville in 1771), whereas the next General Chapter did not occur until 1777. “Brother Florence observed that their work was what he had desired” (Georges Rigault, *Histoire générale*, vol. 2, pp. 344–49). Nevertheless, the General Chapter of 1787 decided to suppress them: “The Provincial Chapters indicated in the Bull, Article 15, and prescribed by the General Chapter of 1777, having been judged of little use and subject to several drawbacks, have by unanimous vote been suspended, and every three years, counting from the present year, a Commission shall meet that is composed of the Superior General, his Assistants, the Secretary General, and the Procurator General, all others of the Régime, and four delegates from each province of the Institute, namely, two Directors of principal communities and two senior Brothers (*Chapitres Généraux de l’Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes. Historique et décisions*. Paris: 1902, pp. 55–56; see Rigault, id., p. 621).

sidarity, then a concept foreign to all minds. Nevertheless, it anticipated the fact, because the Brothers, the communities, and the Districts, each in its place, were thought to be responsible for the Institute's progress. It was not yet time to announce decentralization; the word was not spoken and did not enjoy a good press, but it was like an application in advance of the letter of the law.

This decision in 1956 might be considered situational; in fact, it was triggered by the General Chapter's failure to respond adequately to the unusual influx of Notes, including those about vocal prayers. Also, a reading of a number of reports of the ten Commissions suggests that the Capitulants were impressed by the quality of many Notes, some of them dossiers, that the Brothers prepared. The Capitulants deemed it necessary to encourage their active participation in the preparation of the Chapter. In so doing, the Chapter undertook "to return the Institute to the Brothers" by insisting that they not hesitate to speak, long before Vatican Council II enacted such an obligation. The change was Copernican, an adjective not excessive in the context of the Institute's usual practices and, especially, of the consequences of this decision.

Return the Founder to history

Miguel—How did the 1956 General Chapter reach its decision to renew Lasallian Studies?

Michel—I have already spoken about Brother Maurice-Auguste and his original approach to the *Rule* since 1947. He had discussed and presented it as a historian, as the human work of Monsieur de La Salle, at a time when the papal approbation had just made it sacred. He had studied the stages of its composition and had sought its sources in various forms of monastic and religious life. He focused particularly on the *Rule* while not ignoring other Lasallian writings. He was also equally interested in the first three biographers of Monsieur De La Salle—Bernard, Maillefer, and Blain—the latter having been published only in the Institute and enjoying a virtual monopoly of original information on the Founder's history. The booklet, *Pour une meilleure lecture de nos Règles communes*, published in 1954, offered all the Brothers the substance of this new teaching.

In 1951, the Institute had solemnly celebrated the tercentenary of the birth of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. The event considered at the time as most significant for the knowledge (and the recognition) of the Institute and for its subsequent influence was the proclamation by Pope Pius XII of Saint John Baptist de La Salle as Patron of Christian Teachers.²²¹ From a distance, I do not have the impression that this new distinction had much of an impact on its potential listeners or that it contributed much to raise the awareness, including among the Brothers, of the thought and the educational inspiration of the Founder.

Also connected with the 1951 celebration of the tercentenary was the article by Father André Rayez, SJ,²²² that he published in January 1952 in *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, under the commonplace title, “Études lasalliennes.”²²³ Rayez was Professor of Ascetical and Mystical Theology at the Scholasticate of Enghien (Belgium) for the Jesuit provinces of Champagne and Toulouse. He also taught at the Gregorian University in Rome.

Previously the chaplain for the students at Nancy, Father Rayez had become a friend of Brother Émile Lett, a teacher of philosophy at the the Collège des Frères, whose hobby was Lasallian research, which he pursued by personal taste in solitary, if not maverick, fashion.²²⁴ Although the identity of the sources of Father Rayez’s article has not been researched, Brother Émile Lett is a likely inspiration. Whatever the case, I think that this article by Father Rayez was the major contribution offered to the Institute on the occasion of its Founder’s tercentenary, both in its content and in the continuing influence it would have.

²²¹ Brief Quod ait, in Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 1950, p. 631.

²²² André Rayez, SJ, an expert in the French School of Spirituality and a member of the editorial team of the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* since 1948, was its editor-in-chief from 1952 until his death in 1979; see A. Derville, Rayez (André) Jésuite (1905–1979), in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 13, columns 163–65.

²²³ Rayez, SJ, “Études lasalliennes,” in *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 109, janvier–mars 1952, pp. 18–63. Three years later, he published another article, equally substantial but less influential, “La spiritualité d’abandon chez saint Jean Baptiste de la Salle,” *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 121, janvier–mars 1955, pp. 47–78.

²²⁴ Brother Émile Lett’s notable publications include *Les premiers biographes de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, Paris: Liget, 1956, and the text of De La Salle’s *l’Explication de la Méthode d’Oraison*, Paris: Liget, 1957.

Father Rayez began by assessing the state of research on Lasallian spirituality. He observed at the outset that the Founder of the Institute was better known for his pedagogical contributions than for his spiritual teachings. However, Rayez judged that his works on spirituality, influenced by the French School, lacked neither strength nor originality. More radically, Father Rayez expressed his regrets at the paucity of scientific Lasallian studies. He lucidly analyzed the causes of this deficiency and proposed an outline of work that included the biographers, the context, and the sources, as much as De La Salle's writings themselves. The recommended paths that Rayez outlined for research that will be both critical and theological must lead to what he calls the *Monumenta lasalliana*.²²⁵

The influence of this article was enormous, especially because it was the origin of the decision of the 1956 General Chapter. On several occasions after this article was published, Brother Nicet-Joseph and Brother Maurice-Auguste invited Father Rayez for conferences at the Second Novitiate in Rome. They discussed with him the specific terms for the renewal of Lasallian Studies.²²⁶ On the basis of Father Rayez's article and the conversations that clarified certain points, Brother Maurice-Auguste wrote a Note to the 1956 General Chapter that constituted a veritable charter of Lasallian Studies:

For the publication in the manner of a *corpus* of all the texts attributed to the holy Founder, of all the documents relating to his life and his activities, and of the most important documents about our history in the eighteenth century.²²⁷

The goal of publishing indispensable critical editions of the biography and of the writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle requires the initial

²²⁵ This expression was inspired by the publication by the Society of Jesus of *Monumenta historica Societatis Jesu*, 76 volumes of which were published between 1894 and 1955.

²²⁶ It is a renewal, because the effort was not starting from zero. Brothers had always been interested in learning more about the Lasallian history, scholarly research, and writings. Especially since the nineteenth century, *Rivista Lasalliana*, the journal created by a group of Italian Brothers of the District of Torino, had produced work of high quality—more, it is true, in educational and catechetical areas than in spirituality, which supports Father Rayez's main contention.

²²⁷ "Aux membres du 38^e Chapitre général de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes," Sauvage, 1991, *Cahiers lasalliens* 5, pp. 433–38.

task of publishing the works of his first three biographers and the *éditions princeps* of his own writings. Brother Maurice-Auguste, to be sure, did present a sound argument in support of the project. The General Chapter endorsed his Note by voting to create a *Centre d'études lasalliennes* at the Generalate.²²⁸

²²⁸ The 1956 General Chapter received two masterful Notes on Lasallian Studies, by Brother Maurice-Auguste and by Brother Raymond Brisebois, District of Montréal. Two Commissions discussed the matter; Commission 3 (Perseverance, Second Novitiate, Vows, Holy Founder) called for a “permanent Commission to be established at the Generalate to promote devotion to the Founder and to pursue and to coordinate research and work on his history and his spirituality” (*Circular 354*, 1956, p. 55). Commission 9 (Institute Publications) proposed that “critical studies be pursued on all the writings of our Holy Founder and that publications and writings continually seek to understand and to make known his spirituality.” The renewal of Lasallian Studies at the 1956 General Chapter and the results that followed are detailed in a report that Brother Maurice-Auguste wrote a few months before his death (cf. Sauvage, 1991, *Frère Maurice Hermans (1911-1987) et les origines de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes. Cahiers lasalliens* 5, pp. 424–444).

Chapter 6 – *VITALITY AND TURMOIL IN THE INSTITUTE BETWEEN 1956 AND 1966*

EVENTS AFTER THE 1956 GENERAL CHAPTER

Michel—During the years from 1956 to 1966, it seems to me that the evolution of the Institute was linked in many cases with the changes in society in various countries where the Brothers were living. Without pretending to replace our history with that of the world, I offer a few examples to highlight this link.

Miguel—*No doubt we ought to discuss the climate in the life of the Institute after the 1956 General Chapter. The ten years between the 1956 and the 1966 General Chapters were marked by an intensification of the vitality that characterized the previous ten years.*

Michel—According to the statistics, the Institute during these years experienced moderate but steady growth. In the late 1950s, large Districts in a number of countries were divided into two or three Districts. The Districts took this action because the number of Brothers was increasing, thanks to an influx of new vocations and the hope for extra momentum from recruitment, especially in Brazil, Mexico, the United States, and French Canada.²²⁹ The specific places and times could be researched more precisely. The creation of these Districts did not happen without posing problems that some Brothers perceived. Anticipating my next chapter somewhat, I can mention here some mixed, even alarmist, reactions that I collected during my Second Novitiate in Rome (1960–61).

²²⁹ Examples include the District of Porto Alegre, divided from São Paulo in 1959; the two Districts of South Mexico and North Mexico, in 1959; in the USA, the division into two Districts of New York and LINE (Long Island-New England) in 1959, with Brother Charles Henry as the first Visitor of LINE, and in 1960, three Districts from the Saint Louis District, Winona (later, Saint Paul-Minneapolis), Central States (later, Chicago), and Saint Louis; in French Canada, the District of Québec in 1958 became two, Québec and Trois Rivières; Montréal, three, Longueuil, Montréal, and Ottawa.

In spite of the restrictions on communication during that year of retreat, I developed some strong friendships. Two in particular made me think about the Institute's policies and about its future. I immediately found myself in tune with the youngest member of our group, who was 28 years old when he began the Second Novitiate and had just completed three years of study at *l'Institut Supérieur de Pastorale catéchétique* in Paris. He belonged to the District of São Paulo, created two or three years earlier with about one hundred and eighty Brothers. The separation of the two Brazilian entities, with most of their Brothers being from the South, that is, the state of Rio Grande do Sul, did not have a balanced result. The Visitor of the original District, once he became Visitor of São Paulo, brought in his wake a much too high proportion of young Brothers and too few experienced administrators.²³⁰ More than half of the Brothers were under 25; three-fourths, younger than 30. Brazil was darting into its future with formidable dynamism while building its futuristic new capital, Brasília, in the forests.

The Visitor of the District of São Paulo followed this same movement; he opened one or two new schools annually, which immediately filled to overflowing with young students. Communities consisting of three or four young Brothers energetically faced a daunting task: two, even three, shifts per day to accommodate as many students as possible. The formation of the Brothers was often rudimentary. "I fear," said Brother Cristovão Della Senta, the Benjamin of our Second Novitiate class, "that we are going to harness the enthusiasm of the young Brothers, and when they wear out prematurely in a few years, we will experience a huge crisis." His prediction came true beyond his fears. Beginning in 1966, the departures of Brothers multiplied to such an extent that the District's membership declined to forty Brothers. My friend and his Visitor were swept away in that storm.²³¹

My second friendship was with my common room neighbor, an

²³⁰ At the time of the 1965 election for General Chapter delegates, only 90 of the 180 São Paulo Brothers were perpetually professed and eligible to vote.

²³¹ The crisis that suddenly arose in the mid-1960s took the Visitor and Brother Cristovão, a Capitulant—again the youngest—at the 1966 Chapter, where he attended only the first session.

American who was born in Philadelphia. At that time, many young Brothers were entering after their graduation from high school. The vaunted success of recruitment methods in the USA during the already difficult years in France somewhat annoyed us, because of a certain triumphalism that was less of a problem with our American colleagues than was a kind of collective, uncritical euphoria. In particular, we had a hard time putting up with the contrast, too often emphasized by some of our French Superiors, between the growth of vocations and the loyalty of American Brothers to the *Rule* and the irregularity of French Brothers and their shortage of vocations.

One day, I couldn't help remarking to my neighbor, who, like 25% of the five hundred Brothers of the Baltimore District, was a native of Philadelphia, "You will see what crisis confronts you within a few years." When the event occurred in the 1970s, my friend recalled my words and said to me, "You were a prophet." In no way was this true, but I did witness what happened in France since the end of World War II. Alerted also by the rapid decline in number in many countries, I could not but fear that the same causes were producing the same results. In particular, I was concerned about the concept of the Brother's vocation underlying recruitment methods that often bordered on touting.

I was also bothered by what seemed to be an undue survival of an Old Testament mentality, that an increasing number of subjects is the sign of God's blessing and the recompense of virtue, whereas the cause of a shortage of recruits is the Brothers' infidelity. A flagrant contradiction was evident between a religious theory of vocation, a supernatural gift of God that had to be obtained by prayer²³² and merited by regularity, and the practice of recruiting with methods that sometimes were at the limit of honesty with respect to the young who were being encouraged to "enter" the Institute.

²³² One of the many "novenas" proposed to, or rather, imposed on the Brothers for vocations to the Institute, with additional vocal prayers, was in honor of the Child Jesus, from the 16th to the 25th of each month. Ever since I joined the Brothers in 1934 and until now, I have not ceased hearing about the "vocation crisis" of the Brothers and about their need to employ all kinds of means as a remedy. A comprehensive, collective reflection on the matter was always lacking.

The events that occurred in two countries of the Americas suffice to demonstrate the fragility of situations that seemed strong and also the futility of certain debates. I want to mention here the Cuban crisis and Québec's *révolution tranquille*.

Our Second Novitiate class was unusual in having three Brothers from the District of Cuba. The country was quite prosperous at the time of the Castro revolution. The French Brothers who had introduced the Institute on the island nation had quickly placed their trust in local recruitment. In addition to the solid education in their schools, the Brothers there had developed Catholic Action youth groups that became a source of serious vocations, motivated more by apostolic dynamism than by motives of personal perfection or salvation. A Mexican Brother shared with me at the time his concerns about the policy of the USA *vis-à-vis* Fidel Castro. "If they maintain their opposition to his movement," he told me, "they will throw him to the USSR, whereas for the time being, Castro is not a Marxist." At any rate, during the first weeks of the Second Novitiate, the talk was more about the election of the new President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, a brilliant candidate. His victory was short, but it brought much hope to the American Brothers, traditionally mostly Democrats, especially because he was the first Catholic to become President.

As for Cuba, the Superiors in Rome had decided to remove all the Brothers, now that they were forbidden to teach. Only a few French Brothers who chose to do so remained on the island. No doubt this radical option was motivated by the desire to avoid an outcome similar to what happened after 1946 to Brothers in countries behind the Iron Curtain. Some in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria were imprisoned. All were subject to constant police surveillance; because they could not find work, many were reduced to misery, not to mention loneliness, because they could meet one another only with great difficulty.

The decision taken in Cuba can be explained, for it was no less fraught with dramatic consequences. On the one hand, once they left, the Brothers would not be allowed to return to their country. On the other hand, for many of those forced into exile, the plunge into a different cul-

tural environment would cause shock or severe psychological damage. Faced in 1975 with comparable uncertainties at the fall of Saigon, the General Council at the time left the Vietnamese Brothers free to choose exile or to remain in the country.

The other major crisis in 1960 was related to what was called *la révolution tranquille* in Québec. The national takeover of the schools, the quick passage of the Brothers from primary to secondary education, and the lower birth rate led to a rapid decline of entries in congregations of teaching Brothers and to a hemorrhage of departures. I remember a fact from my first trip to Québec, in 1964. A few years before, the various Institutes of Brothers (Christian Schools, Marists, Saint Gabriel, Sacred Heart, Ploërmel) decided to combine their young students in two “intercommunity” Scholasticates, one near Québec, at Cap Rouge, and the other in the Montréal area. The purpose was to save space, equipment, and staff by consolidating classrooms, laboratories, library, and faculty on one campus, each Institute having its own house for its students. “Reasonable” expectations when the plans were made called for accommodations for as many as 200 Brothers of the Sacred Heart, the largest group. When the buildings were completed, that Institute’s Scholastics were reduced to a few dozen, and the same was true for all the congregations; soon these facilities were being used, by public colleges (CEGEP),²³³ for young lay students.²³⁴

In France, the number in houses of formation was declining from year to year. At that point, some French Districts undertook a courageous reconversion of many secondary schools into technical schools, while in the same vein, many Brothers undertook lengthy studies in engineering at ECAM in Lyon and HEI in Lille.²³⁵

Between 1956 and 1966, Brother Honoré de Silvestri and some of his companions kept alive the Institute’s concern to return to the poor. One

²³³ CEGEP, *Collèges d’enseignement général et professionnel de Canada*.

²³⁴ Cf. Brother Donatien-Marie, “Scholasticats intercommunautaires au Canada”, in *Orientations* 11, July 15, 1964, pp. 85–96. The author discusses various aspects of the changes.

²³⁵ ECAM, *École catholique d’arts et métier*; HEI, *Hautes études industrielles*.

of his confrères from the outset, dedicated to the Catholic Worker movement and to updating teaching methods in technical schools, also belonged to my Second Novitiate group. Our relations were cold at first; he distrusted me, as he told me later, because I appeared to him to be an intellectual, out of touch with the concerns of the ordinary world. In fact we became good friends, and thanks to him, I became aware of the renewal of the service of the poor in the Institute.

Between 1948 and 1960, the District of Lille, the only one in this instance in France, had a hemorrhage of departures of Brothers, especially those with advanced degrees. Each year saw several perpetually professed Brothers leave, not to mention Brothers with temporary vows. Being a close friend of one of them, I was intimately involved in the crisis and in his departure. I did my best for him at the time. These experiences led me to think long and hard about injustices in the system of recruitment (children too young being accepted in some instances, attracted by questionable motives), about the idea of the vocation of children and about mistakes in formation, such as confining the young, cutting them off completely from their families, depriving them of vacation time, keeping them ignorant of the feminine world. They were treated too much as future religious, and the religious practices imposed were too heavy for adolescents. I remember a typical case, a caricature, but significant. At the University Scholasticate in Lyon, where I taught for two years, 1957–1959, a group of Scholastics arrived in September 1958. Among them was a young Breton of twenty years who had entered the Juniorate at the age of eleven. In University classes he suddenly found himself sitting beside girls. For him, the shock was such that three months later he asked to be dispensed from his vows and left the Brothers while remaining on good terms with his friends.

In this regard, I cannot fail to mention here what for me was a veritable scandal. In Saint-Maurice-l'Exil, a small village in Isère, near Vienne, the Brothers had long held a property that included a house of formation. It was kept open in 1904, at the time of the expulsion, because of the “missionary” destination of the young men enrolled. Beginning in 1948, adolescents “recruited” in Castile, in the province of León, and intended in virtue of this geographical origin to go to distant countries, were housed

there. The largest number followed a Spanish-style pre-Juniorate, Juniorate, and Novitiate experience before being sent to Central America. Some were sent to Saint-Maurice-l'Exil, and after a Novitiate in Bordighera and a Scholasticate in Rome, they became missionaries in the Middle East, in Egypt, and elsewhere. From the age of twelve to twenty years, they were cut off from all contact with their families, and those who came to France were uprooted from their cultural milieu. What was perhaps even more serious is that youngsters of fourteen were made to cross the Atlantic from Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, and Argentina. Arriving at Saint-Maurice-l'Exil, these adolescents, often with brilliant intelligence, were soon familiar with the language; they easily earned French diplomas. After the Novitiate at Bordighera, they completed their Scholasticate at Rome. Deeply shocked by such recruitment methods and formation, I allowed myself one day to say to Brother Assistant Aubert-Joseph, "When I think of Saint-Maurice-l'Exil, I feel in a state of the Institute's mortal sin." Some years later, when I became the Assistant for Formation in the Institute, I would severely confront certain consequences of this injustice.

Miguel—We will speak about your thesis later, but from the time you began (1954) until you finished (1961), significant changes occurred in France. What effect did they have on the Institute?

Michel—During the years 1956–1966, major political, economic, and cultural changes were taking place in France that affected the Brothers and the Institute. In 1954, the French army suffered a severe defeat at Dien Bien Phu. The President of the Council, Pierre Mendès-France, managed to terminate this colonial war by recognizing Vietnam's independence in July 1954. The war in Algeria almost immediately took over and carried off the Fourth Republic, politically undermined by the party system and by the transient period of coalition governments. However, during the twelve years of its existence, France recovered, redeveloped, and modernized economically. General Charles de Gaulle came to power in May 1958, and the Constitution of the Fifth Republic was approved overwhelmingly by referendum on September 28, 1958. The war in Algeria continued until the Évian Accords (March 1962), approved by French voters in France on April 8 and in Algeria on July 1. The general

decolonization of French-speaking African countries, the germ of an idea in the Fifth Republic's Constitution, went into effect beginning in 1960. The decisive influence of General de Gaulle on French public opinion during the difficult years of radical transformation was supported by the coincidental development of television. In 1958, 9% of French households had a TV; in 1965, 42%. What we know as mass culture was at hand.

These events and disruptions had repercussions on the life of the Brothers. A certain number fought in Algeria when the government decided to send a drafted contingent. Like their fellows in arms, some Brothers directly confronted the issue of torture. It seems to me that little has been said about these specific cases of direct confrontation. Nothing was said about it during the retreat session of two weeks for "conscripted" Brothers that I was directed to lead, against my will, in 1958. The few Brothers who were witnesses and whom I had invited made no allusion to it.

The Brothers shared the shifts in public opinion on this point as on others. I remember writing a review of Pierre-Henri Simon's novel, *Portrait of an Officer*.²³⁶ The author vigorously denounced torture. Not without some hesitation, the Visitor agreed to publish my review in the Monthly Bulletin of the District of Lille. The reactions I received were generally positive; the Brothers were keeping up with the news. Contrary to what happened when radio was beginning, before World War I, the reluctance of Superiors about television was short-lived. In the case of France, the officials elected to the General Council by the 1956 General Chapter showed openness in this regard. Moreover, the three projects for the revision of the *Rule*, which I will discuss later, were more restrained and liberal on the matter.²³⁷

²³⁶ Simon, Pierre Henri. *Portrait of an Officer*. Translation of *Portrait d'un officier*, by Humphrey Hare. London: Secker and Warburg, 1961, 154 p.

²³⁷ Project 1 (1961) retained an important restriction: "Without an exemption provided by the regional directives, the use of radio and television during the time of the grand silence and of spiritual exercises is prohibited." Given that the most interesting TV offerings were broadcast in the evening, the ban was harsh, but the regional directives could lighten it. In Project 2, regulation of the use of radio and of television was left entirely to the regional directives. How could anyone legislate worldwide on such a subject? (See *Directoire*, article 578.)

To the important changes just mentioned I must add the famous baby boom that in France occurred during a few years immediately after World War II. Larger classes of young people entered into the cultural life of the country and, of course, enrolled in the schools, which directly affected the Brothers and the evolution of the Institute.

After World War II, the situation of the Catholic schools became more precarious than ever, because their teacher salaries were not reimbursed and schools were no longer receiving subsidies that the Vichy government had granted sparingly. In 1944–45 many had dreamed of the merger within a large “Labor” Party of Socialists and Christian Democrats. The school question was then the main bone of contention between the two groups. The SFIO²³⁸ remained largely committed to secular education (*laïcité*) as it was lived and defined during the Third Republic. The promise of the MRP²³⁹ provided for the legal recognition of the national character of Catholic education, including the financial implications. The Barangé and Marie Laws²⁴⁰ had avoided immediate asphyxiation without solving the problem of the future of Catholic education in France. After becoming President of the Council following the victory of the *Front républicain*, beginning in 1956, Guy Mollet engaged in talks with the Holy See to resolve, eventually by a concordat, the entire dispute between the Church and the French State. The school issue was to be addressed, but Guy Mollet’s project was cut short.²⁴¹

The new conditions created by the advent of the Fifth Republic, notably the ability to legislate by decree, allowed the government of Michel Debré to pass through Parliament, among other reforms, a law on edu-

²³⁸ SFIO, Section Française de l’International Ouvrière.

²³⁹ MRP, Mouvement Républicaine Populaire.

²⁴⁰ On the Barangé and Marie Laws, see René Rémond, *Notre siècle, Histoire de France*, tome 6, Paris: Fayard, 1991, p. 401. For the first time, private schools received grants from the State. The Marie Law enabled students of private schools to receive State grants, and the Barangé Law granted an allowance each school term for each child attending a public or a private primary school.

²⁴¹ On this plan envisaged by Guy Mollet for a concordat, see *Notre siècle*, p. 452. The projected law in this framework was based on the idea of contracts that Catholic schools would have with the State. The project failed, because the bishops of Alsace-Lorraine refused to give up their unique status (in their territory, the previous rules more favorable to the law of separation of church and state continued to be in force).

cation.²⁴² In January 1959 the Berthoin Act extended universal compulsory education to 16 years of age and gave access, in principle, to young people beyond the age of 12 to various kinds of secondary education.²⁴³ At the end of that same year, the issue of Catholic education was addressed and to a large extent finally determined by the Debré Law (December 31, 1959).²⁴⁴ Catholic primary and secondary schools now had the right and the option to sign one of three different types of contracts with the State. The *simple* contract assured the payment by the State of teacher salaries. The *integration* contract, as the name suggests, moved a private school into the State-sponsored, public sphere, with all the consequences that the change implies. The *association* contract added to the State's payment of teacher salaries its payment of operating expenses. Construction expenses, however, were paid by the school. In return, the school became subject to the educational jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The schools under contract had to be open to all young people without discrimination, but they did have the right, specified in the law, to maintain their own *particular character* of instruction and of educational style.

Miguel—*In this respect, the 1956 General Chapter failed to place the Brothers in the context of the world, but is it true that the contract system forced the Brothers to situate their religious life, their evangelical life, in that context?*

Michel—Absolutely, but I would add a nuance. The 1956 General Chapter neither did so nor blocked it. The CPA²⁴⁵ did not emerge from the contracts; it was prior to them and originated because of the wishes of the French Brothers. I cannot discuss comprehensively the evolution of school problems in other European countries. Yet I must at least mention that the Netherlands, several years earlier, had solved the school problem

²⁴² Cf. René Rémond, *Notre siècle*, pp. 520–23: “Une œuvre réformatrice, entre juin et décembre 1958.”

²⁴³ This extension was envisaged in the many educational reform projects during the Fourth Republic that were proposed but never adopted. See Brother Clodoald, “Un demi-siècle d'évolution scolaire,” in *Orientations*, October 15, 1962, pp. 28–54.

²⁴⁴ The text (Loi No. 59–1557, December 31, 1959, on the relationship between the state and private schools) was published years later in *Orientations* 13, January 25, 1965, pp. 161–64.

²⁴⁵ CPA, *Centre de Préparation Apostolique*.

ideally, by granting parents the freedom to choose the school for their children and by providing the corresponding funding. In the same period, after an intensification of the war between the two school systems, Belgium established the school agreement that also allowed Catholic schools to develop normally.

In France, finally, after a brief period of hesitation relating more to the bishops than to the religious congregations, the contracts became widespread. In secondary education generally, as well as in technical schools, the association contract was most often adopted.²⁴⁶ Forty years now after the Debré Law, I think it is possible to say that the introduction of the school contracts brought to the Institute, and to its members, significant changes in behavior, mentality, and consciousness of identity.

I will have occasion to speak about the changes caused by Vatican Council II, which I think in many ways were less decisive for the Brothers than those caused by the implementation of contracts. The contracts affected the Brothers at the root of their professional work, and from that point on, everything changed. The modification of their status in the world of education and of the school fundamentally transformed many realities of their so-called “religious life,” even without their realizing it and even if the dichotomy persisted of a dissociated, if not opposite, traditional language that in any case prioritized religious life and apostolate, secular education and catechesis. In fact, I am touching here a central question that in different forms runs throughout this book. The new situation created by the two school reforms that I just recalled leads me now to try to identify some aspects of this change in the identity lived by the Brothers and in the evolution of the Institute. I will list four of them.

BROTHERS WITH SALARIES: POVERTY

I begin with the most immediate and also the most material consequence, considering only the *association* contract. The adoption of a contract by

²⁴⁶ However, statistics compiled as of June 30, 1962, present another idea of the proportions: of 575 *association* contracts requested, 461 were granted and 114 were denied; of 11,808 simple contracts requested, 9,585 were granted and 2,213 were denied (“Où en sont les contrats?” *Orientations* 5, January 15, 1963, p. 117).

an educational establishment made the teachers salaried employees of the State. In practice, this meant that every Brother from that point on received his monthly salary in a personal bank account that he had to open and maintain.

For many Brothers, this situation was completely new. Up to that time, the community had directly received the meager salaries from the diocesan Catholic education authority. Brothers usually remained unaware of their community's financial situation and had to ask for whatever they needed. Many of them had never in their life even written a check. At first, the aspects of the problem might have seemed to be only superficially modified. The salaried Brothers were to deposit in full to the community whatever amount they received. In most cases, this change was viewed as self-evident, yet some reluctance did become apparent, and it often seemed easier to let the Brothers personally manage a minimal portion of their remuneration. In fact, people were not sufficiently aware that for the Brothers, contracts had changed the given facts about the vow and about the practice of poverty. Unfortunately, no serious reflection took place on this question.

This gap manifested itself later in a particularly acute manner in the vigorous discussions and the diversity of positions taken in the 1970s about the situation of the Brothers with regard to Social Security. Health insurance and pension benefits of diocesan priests and of Sisters engaged in pastoral work were covered by a special official agency known as the Saint Martin Mutual Fund. The French bishops thought that the same organization ought to provide for the Social Security of all religious personnel. They viewed the question as a matter of Church solidarity.

On this point, the Visitors of France adopted different positions and practices over the years. Some Districts, such as Bretagne, with many well-financed, eminent schools, opted for the general plan of Social Security, because the Brothers were employees of the State. Other Districts accepted the position of the bishops, and registered their Brothers with the Saint Martin Mutual Fund. The controversy was at its peak when I was elected Regional of France in 1978. The majority of the Brothers, whatever the position of the District to which they belonged,

supported the State's general retirement plan. They felt themselves primarily in solidarity with all teachers, the occupational category to which they belonged. Their primary reference was to the city, not to the Church.

INCREASING PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

The second important consequence of the Debré Law in the life of the Brothers was not long in coming. Increased access to secondary education after primary school, along with the contracts signed by schools with the State, required that the teachers possess higher academic credentials through university degrees.²⁴⁷ In principle, membership in a religious Institute of teachers ought to have led the Brothers and their leaders to do their utmost to achieve professional competence. It is clear that the Debré Law caused a certain number of active Brothers to return to the classrooms at Scholasticates and universities to complete a Bachelor's or advanced degree or licensure.

Initially, this *aggiornamento* occurred more often with secular courses than with religious instruction, and for some years, the momentum of the catechetical renewal that was so strong in the 1950s subsided somewhat, at least for Brothers already engaged in teaching. The early 1960s witnessed the successful results of the renewal of doctrinal instruction and of catechetical formation for the young Brothers. The CPA began to operate in September 1958, and its golden age, so to speak, occurred with the classes enrolled in 1961, 1962, and 1963. As for the Brothers teaching in the schools, for whom various sessions were organized, beginning in 1961, to deepen their theological preparation, it is true that after some success at the start, their effectiveness quickly melted away.

²⁴⁷ In the District of Lille's reply to the late 1963 questionnaire from the Superior General on the topic of burnout, the effect of the State contracts is apparent. "Even in the profession that is often interested only in immediate, practical matters, the contract system and the official inspections have been pleased to cause what 'the spirit of faith and zeal' could not initiate: a heavy routine for many" (Report preserved in the Archives of the rue de Sèvres in Paris, tr. by ed.).

ORIENTATIONS: THE JOURNAL'S CONTRIBUTION TO SHARED REFLECTION

This need for professional development found both expression and sustenance in the creation of the journal *Orientations*, which is the third important change that I have singled out.

The first issue of this new quarterly journal that the Brothers published was dated January 1, 1962. Its appearance was chronologically linked with the Debré Law and with the implementation of compulsory education in France up to the age of sixteen, a time of significant change for all teachers, including the Brothers.²⁴⁸ The remarkable editorial in this first issue showed this connection and its multiple meanings. Society was experiencing tremendous changes that cannot help affecting the field of education:

The field of education has just experienced exactly two shocks requiring that it be upended from top to bottom... especially, the school reform of 1959...

... initial legal status has been given to private education...

Thus the field of education in the 1960s has been transformed from top to bottom as though by an immense geological tremor. On this new terrain ... [it is] impossible to use old recipes, equally impossible to make long-range plans... We are perhaps living in an era where stability will be forever impossible, where normal structures and institutions will be precisely a constant evolution...

Aware of these requirements and of this necessity, aware also of their responsibilities in a country where they teach nearly 100,000 children, the Brothers of the Christian Schools thought that they can make their contribution to this research through a journal that focuses on these problems.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Other reforms in the educational system occurred throughout this period (and from then on). *Orientations* analyzed them by reflecting on their contributions and their risks. For example, *Orientations* 4, October 15, 1962, published an editorial of Brother Didier Piveteau entitled, "Autour d'une réforme" (pp. 1–2), and Brother Clodoald offered an illuminating article on successive reform plans since the Liberation, "Un demi-siècle d'évolution scolaire" (pp. 27–54). In *Orientations* 9, January 15, 1964, Brother Adrien posed the question, "Où nous mènent la Loi scolaire et la réforme de l'enseignement" (pp. 25–40).

²⁴⁹ Editorial, *Orientations* 1, January 1, 1962, pp. 2–3, tr. by ed.

Read again forty years later, this language retains its prophetic resonance. Its author, obviously, is the creator of the magazine, Brother Didier Piveteau, an exceptional personality.²⁵⁰ His previous career, a typical and classic one for a Brother in his generation, was nevertheless marked by two original features.

The first feature, although circumstantial, was of great import. Born in 1924, Didier joined the Brothers in the District of Nantes in 1936, went with his Novitiate class to Great Britain in 1940, and remained there until 1945. His resulting command of the English language and the strong imprint of Anglo-Saxon culture never ceased to be valuable and useful. A highly intelligent person, he was a brilliant teacher gifted with great talent, and he captivated his students. Extremely competent, he certainly stayed close to the young by listening to them profoundly. Having a certain flair, he was able to feel, sometimes far in advance, the cultural currents that the students manifested, and so it was that he could so quickly begin a dialogue with them.²⁵¹ He was preoccupied with developing critical thinking in the young about the values of Christian humanism that were so important to him. He also adhered fundamentally to the modernity whose accepted methods he challenged, and he refused to speak in slogans. To that extent, his wealth of insight and his capacity for change constituted a second notable and original quality.

At the outset, *Orientations* presented itself as a “journal of Christian pedagogy in the educational milieu.” This subtitle, which remained unchanged for seven years until number 28, clearly indicated the purpose from the start of the new magazine.²⁵² It directed itself to teachers in Catholic

²⁵⁰ See his biography, written by a friend and co-worker, Brother Léon Lauraire, *Jacques Piveteau, Frère des Écoles chrétiennes (1924–1986); La passion de la liberté*, Paris: Frères des Écoles chrétiennes, Secrétariat C.F.V., March 28, 1988, 121 pages.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35, Jacques Piveteau, the teacher, “was not content just to teach, to act habitually. Angered by routine, he would chomp at the bit... Early on ... he was fascinated by innovations” (tr. by ed.).

²⁵² Brother Didier was the editor of *Orientations* until issue 26, April 1968, when Étienne Verne and Michel Sauvêtre replaced him. With issue 29, January 1969, the subtitle became *Essais et recherches en éducation*, a change that resulted from a significant evolution of the journal and of the movement by the *Bureau pédagogique*. See Léon Lauraire, *Jacques Piveteau, Frère des Ecoles chrétiennes (1924–1986). La passion de la liberté*, p. 45.

schools, the Brothers foremost, but also their lay colleagues, to help them exercise their human profession, which is also a ministry in the Church, although this later Lasallian expression was not yet in common use.²⁵³

Orientations and the movement it symbolized helped, first of all, to reassert the value of the teaching profession. The journal also led to a deeper understanding of the originality and of the uniqueness of the Christian school. Paradoxically, this twofold qualitative effort led quickly to some fundamental questions about the identity and the mission of the Brother in the world and in the Church of the time. This recalling of *Orientations* in its early years will lead me to speak about the fourth aspect—the most radical—of the change caused by the educational reform of the 1960s in the Brothers' awareness of their identity and in the Institute's evolution.

NOTES ABOUT THE JOURNAL *ORIENTATIONS*

a. The importance of the teaching profession

In presenting itself as a “journal of pedagogy in the educational milieu,” *Orientations* delivered the goods. Between 1962 and 1965 (issues 1 to 16), the period to which I am referring, education was the dominant theme in three ways. First, *Orientations* published many technical articles, either in the teaching field²⁵⁴ or on specific aspects of

²⁵³ “The subtitle of this journal will in itself be justified as an expression of its purpose and its spirit. *Orientations* will be a journal of Christian pedagogy in the educational milieu. More than ever before, it is important to distinguish the two domains clearly and to be aware of what might be the specific aspects of a Christian pedagogy; furthermore, the time has no doubt arrived for some needed rehabilitation of the educational milieu... To believe in the school in 1961 is not to be 20 years behind the times; it is without doubt to be five years ahead... *Orientations* will deliberately focus on the unique academic aspect of Christian education” (Editorial, *Orientations* 1, January 1, 1962, p. 4, tr. by ed.). I do not intend to retrace the history of *Orientations*; however, in the perspective of this present work that is considering the evolution of the Institute over sixty years, I cannot fail to cite the important influence of this journal and of its creator—and more generally of this educational evolution—on the changes that would occur in the “religious life” of the Brothers.

²⁵⁴ Examples (translated) include “Our physical chemistry laboratories” (No. 1, January 1, 1962, pp. 28–52); “Teaching arithmetic in primary school” (id., pp. 54–62); “The moment for school libraries” (No. 2, April 15, 1962, pp. 53–61); “Rational instruction on elements of the calculus” (No. 3, July 5, 1962, pp. 77–86); “Revolution in teaching modern languages” (No. 5, January 15, 1963, pp. 111–19); “On educational theatre” (No. 16, October 20, 1965, pp. 51–66).

school life.²⁵⁵ This professionalism certainly helped the journal get off to a good start. Readers facing the daily realities of teaching found practical contributions; their work was valued, and the editor and the majority of his colleagues demonstrated their belief in the school and in educational pedagogy, especially in secular subjects. Brother Didier's profession of faith in issue 2 (April 15, 1962) remains worth reading.

Some correspondents would have wished that the new journal emphasized from the outset the Christian character of the schools where the Brothers are engaged. With the eloquence of his conviction, Didier replied positively to the question posed in the editorial's title, "Must we be concerned with secular subjects?"

What kind of effort could it be for Christianity and for pastoral ministry to focus on poorly conceived, poorly assimilated, awkward, and interchangeable structures? To undertake to "Christianize" secular education without being interested in it, without investing in it to give it our particular form, is to reduce our efforts to a simple project, a phantom, a notion constantly repeated but never realized. It is to deprive the concept of Christian education itself of its substance. History, even spiritual history, is made only by those who live it, not by those who describe it or judge it. We cannot know in depth what specifically Christian education must be in 1962. We will learn something by launching ourselves into action, trying day by day to educate in a Christian manner the people of our time, advancing boldly in our century with all that we are.²⁵⁶

A school will only be "Christian" if it is basically and truly a "school" that is sound and up-to-date in the secular domain. Brother Didier and others often repeated this assertion by illustrating it in various ways.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ For example, No. 1 deals with school counseling and guidance; No. 2 offers three articles on boarding schools, and No. 15 (July 15, 1965) focuses on transition classes.

²⁵⁶ *Orientations* 2, 1962, p. 3, tr. by ed.

²⁵⁷ *Orientations* ardently believed in the value of the school, in the relevance of the teaching profession, in the actual life of the vocation of the teaching Brother. This "défense" of their profession was an encouragement for readers, but the emphasis was placed on the continuing formation of teachers: "The real problem of the school" is that of the teachers (cf. Léon Lauraire, "Le vrai problème de l'école, in Jacques Piveteau, *Frère des Ecoles chrétiennes (1924–1986)*." *La passion de la liberté*, pp. 77–79). Whoever engages in this career does not stay on track easily but increasingly also has to clear the way through the darkness of a thick forest. The quality of the school depends on the freedom of the person, whose creativity assures it. Didier spoke of a school to be invented. Certainly, the first

b. The specific characteristics of the Christian School

It was also a matter, therefore, of enhancing the Christian School. In fact, Brother Didier had created this new magazine at the end of two years of advanced study at the *Institut supérieur de pastorale catéchétique* (ISPC). He was a close friend of Brother Vincent Ayel and from the beginning affirmed the relationship between *Catéchistes* and *Orientations*. The two editors never missed an opportunity to work together, until Didier, later in 1971, became the editor of *Catéchistes*, a position Vincent had filled without interruption from 1950 to 1967.

Their proximity was more than a coincidence, as a comparison shows between the appearance of *Catéchistes* in the early 1950s and the launching of *Orientations* in the late 1960s. The logic itself of the vocation of Brother teacher demands that the stronger development of the dimension of explicit proclamation of the Gospel must result in—and do so effectively—a greater appreciation of professional activity, pedagogical aspects, and educational point of view, which was certainly Brother Didier's primary insight. *Catéchistes*, in its turn, enabled the Brothers to be more in tune with the significant catechetical renewal in the French Church during the late 1940s.

In its early years, *Orientations* extended this movement by providing reflections on the *special character* that the Debré Law recognized in Catholic education without defining it. In the preceding period, it had become increasingly clear that the Catholic school made no sense unless it recognized, in principle and in practice, the importance of excellent catechesis. When the Debré Law was adopted, the French bishops came to recognize the legitimacy of the multiple options that Catholics had for the education of their children; entrusting them to public education was a legitimate option.

and fundamental freedom that the Christian school offers is that of educational inventiveness. In his editorial in *Orientations* 2, Brother Didier was angry that anyone could think that the contracts with the State could put an end to the need for creativity: "...The conscientious exercise of our profession is inseparable from the spirit of inquiry... It is by having forgotten this ... that our profession has at times in recent years perhaps lost its taste. Cooking that is not ours is always bland" (*Orientations* 2, 1962, pp. 1–3, tr. by ed.).

The Church likewise recognized the positive significance of the engagement of Christians as teachers in the public sphere. It also claimed the right for the young people attending public schools to have chaplaincies where religious education was provided; therefore, having an explicit catechesis of high quality that depended primarily on the special character of the Catholic school was not enough to define it.²⁵⁸

c. The Brother's identity and mission in the world and in the Church today

For two years, this original reflection on the Christian teaching of secular subjects was intense, at least in the journal *Orientations*.

Initially, the Debré Law might seem to have strengthened the position of the Christian school and of its teachers. Catholic education had experienced such financial uncertainty that the relative calming of the financial situation with respect to the teachers gave it some time to breathe. Being officially “recognized” by the state contracts brought along with it some basic security. Released from somewhat of a besieged status, Catholic education could think of clarifying its own values in practice and in reflection, as the previous developments showed.

²⁵⁸ In what, then, does this *special character* consist? During its early years, *Orientations* would deepen the reflection on the nature of the Catholic school and on its implications. Ever since the initial issues, various authors discussed the conditions for a teacher's spiritual life. In the first section of *Orientations*, January 1, 1962, entitled “Our Spiritual Life,” Brother Didier announced that he will present to readers each time a “mirror held by others” in which they can consider what idea people around them have of the spiritual life of the Christian educator, of the teacher's journey to holiness (pp. 7–12). As the First Epistle of Saint Peter (1 Pt 3:15) advises the Christian teacher, “always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have.” This is the theme that another priest, Father Jay, developed in the next issue (*Orientations* 2, April 1962, pp. 5–14). The same author went further by evoking the difficulties with respect to the hope of the Christian educator, in No. 6, “Fatigue and Despair of the Apostle.” Not until issue no. 13 did the section “Our Spiritual Life” reappear, when the editor announced under the general title, “Milestones for a Spirituality of the Christian Teacher,” a series of four articles written by Father Dassonneville, chaplain at the time of the Brothers of the District of Lille. Three articles appeared in a series that sought to describe the core of the specific spirituality of the teacher, by laying the foundation for a pastoral ministry of intelligence and by defining the conditions for the Christian educator's exercise of human intelligence.

If, as Brother Didier wrote, the real issue about the school is the teachers, then the Christian inspiration of the teachers can be seen as the most crucial component to achieve a Christian school, the point from which this section was derived at the outset—yet on the whole short-lived and somewhat disappointing. Quite soon, *Orientations* tried to analyze other aspects of this famous special character, simply recognized by the Debré Law, and followed by denouncing the facile recourse to an empty slogan, to superficial, even infantile, responses. Admittedly, *Orientations* could never succeed in pre-

As for the teaching Brothers, they could also feel more recognized, whether by their professional status, by a kind of reevaluation of the lay religious life that was developing as Vatican Council II drew near, or by the hierarchy's recognition of the originality of their ministry. In my own case, this new climate motivated me to pursue my theological study of the Brother's vocation. As for the essential part of my research, I included it in my courses at *Jesus Magister* while continuing to cooperate with the editorial teams of *Catéchistes* and *Orientations*. I was becoming increasingly involved in the renewal of the formation of young Brothers in France.

The final UFE (*Union des Frères Enseignants*) Congress in 1962, on the Christian teaching of secular disciplines, bore witness to this upgrading of the vocation of the Brother teacher. Invited to give the concluding conference, I found it possible, soon after the publication of my thesis, to discuss in depth the specific nature of the identity of the Brother teacher. In spite of the somewhat grandiloquent title, (The Brother teacher) "Man of

senting a complete overview of all the components of the specific nature of the Christian school. The journal did not even try, but it listed various elements over a number of issues, with no concern for synthesis or even depth. The distinctive character was evident in the organizational structures, the atmosphere, the environment, the personal attention to young students, and the style of the educational relationship, especially with adolescents, in an effort to create educational communities, with particular concern for youth with learning difficulties.

Two aspects of the distinctive character were, however, the subject of a number of studies, whether fundamental or particular: what was called at the time the Christian teaching of secular subjects and, more generally, the renewed significance of the Christian school.

The expression itself, "the Christian teaching of secular subjects," was then experiencing a certain vogue. Yet hardly any profound study of the significance of the formula occurred. Until the 1960s, Catholic education was more preoccupied with defending its right to exist than with illustrating its specific content. It was the Debré Law that put the issue on the agenda, as in the study I developed for *Orientations*. It then became a subject for actual fundamental development, as shown in my two lengthy articles in *Orientations* and as the theme chosen for the study days of the Union of Teaching Brothers (*Union des Frères Enseignants*) in July 1962. Insofar as all sectors of Catholic education were searching for clarification and deeper understanding of the expression, it did seem suspect in itself. Upon reflection, to speak about the Christian teaching of secular subjects could not fail to come up empty-handed. Obviously, there is no "Christian mathematics." But, more broadly, how can the disciplines of human knowledge be called "Christian"?—not in their origin, their content, or their purpose; the reflection must be broader with respect to the education of the faith.

I attempted, first, to examine how a secular subject could be *propaedeutic* (introductory) to the faith, in a subjective sense, because of its contribution to the person's maturation, objectively speaking, in a premonition of the "truth," the object of faith. Then, in a second article, but in the opposite sense, I tried to show how the faith of Christian teachers can lead them to engage in the task of teaching

the earth and man of heaven,”²⁵⁹ this text remains a good testimony of the enhanced value of which I am now speaking. Not without some difficulty, I admit, I attempted to describe the inner relationship between the “religious life” of the Brother and his “ministry,” especially in its secular aspects. At the same time, it seems to me, instead of defensive apologetics, I brought a positive illustration of the lay character of this vocation, the starting point of my thesis, *Catéchèse et Laïcat*.

As intense as it was during the first two years of *Orientations*, the reflection on the Christian teaching of secular subjects did not last beyond 1964. This research especially focused on a detail related to the more radical questions soon to emerge, both on the relevance of the Catholic school and on the identity and the future of the vocation of Brother teacher.

The renewal of the initial formation of the Brothers in France had led, in 1958, to the opening of the *Centre de Préparation apostolique* (CPA) at Caluire. This new structure, with no prior model, had been “caused” by the *Catéchistes* team. At the end of the Scholasticate, after qualifying to teach (with the *baccalauréat* and often the first stage of a *licence*), the young Brothers were brought together for an additional academic year. The plan combined theoretical courses and practical teaching experience, staffed by well-qualified, open-minded Brothers. What ought to have happened did occur. The CPA soon became a locus of spontaneous reflection for the young Brothers. Some who had already pursued extensive studies in philosophy in the Scholasticate became natural leaders of their groups. The class of 1960 had already published a journal that the following classes continued. Soon, in January 1962, a number of young Brothers who had completed the CPA created a focus group that they named REPS.²⁶⁰

secular courses with greater intensity, freedom, and confidence, as corroborated by modern doctrinal reflection on creation, on the Mystery of Christ, on eschatology. A second aspect of this reflection I did not develop. I had hoped to explore further “... the illuminating role of faith in teaching secular subjects, starting with the demands of what surpasses the human mind, which is implied by faith, and the need to be open to realities other than earthly ones” (*Orientations* 8, p. 33, tr. by ed.).

²⁵⁹ Michael Sauvage, “Homme de la terre et homme du Ciel,” *Orientations*, special issue, pp. 211–67; *Études lasalliennes* 8, pp. 267–307.

²⁶⁰ For a summary presentation of the *Recherche en Équipe pour une Pastorale du Monde Scolaire* (REPS), its purpose, and its activities, see *Reims*, the District Bulletin, January 1966, p. 16 (Archives of the rue de Sèvres).

• *Notes about the REPS group*

This group remained informal while retaining its consistency. Members corresponded by letter among themselves and with older Brothers, especially those involved with *Catéchistes* and *Orientations*. These young Brothers were fortunate to be accompanied “officially” by open-minded Visitors (Brothers François Balagué, Rodez; Raymond Daudé, Le Puy, and Jean Peyer, Lyon), and also supported by Brother Assistant Aubert-Joseph, not without some stormy episodes. REPS also organized meetings²⁶¹ on a confidential basis, but also with the attractiveness of “conferences” attended by speakers chosen in advance on selected topics and featuring vigorous small-group discussions.²⁶² I can offer here only a schematic view of the group’s thinking,²⁶³ limiting myself to its impact on some articles in *Orientations*.

In 1962, these young Brothers were raising the question of the Christian school in relation to the mission of the Church: education in the faith. All young people are entitled to it, and the Church must be concerned to make it available to all. In contrast with the period of the Institute’s foundation, we no longer live under a Christian regime. In its schools at different levels, the State makes education available to all young people, and many Christian parents, for various reasons, send their children to State schools. In the French context, the bishops now recognized the legitimacy of this freedom of choice and, therefore, were logically concerned to make sure that young Christians have effective opportunities to nurture and to develop their living faith. This was the task entrusted to the chaplaincies

²⁶¹ “On a beautiful day, when the need arises, we find ourselves with 40 or 50 members for an expanded discussion in broad daylight. This type of meeting is our second type of dialogue. Each meeting takes place with the agreement of the Superiors, but the style is decidedly ‘democratic’” (*Reims*, January 1966, p. 16, tr. by ed.).

²⁶² A session at Caluire in August 1963 discussed “The problems of the Christian school in today’s world.” One at Le Puy in September 1964 was entitled, “For our integration as Brothers of the Christian Schools in a joint pastoral effort in the world of education.” A third session occurred in Troyes in early September 1965 (*Reims*, January 1966, p. 16).

²⁶³ The presentation that REPS provides in *Reims*, cited above, makes no secret of the fears that created this movement or of the resistance it met from some who opposed it. “They want to go into the lycées [State secondary schools]... They no longer believe in the Christian school... They always criticize Superiors, have no experience, and pretend to teach lessons to others. They are a sort of *club*, very closed, a tiny chapel of intellectuals...” (*Reims*, January 1966, p. 16, tr. by ed.).

at the lycées and to the specialized Catholic Action movements such as the Young Christian Students. Moreover, the bishops explicitly recognized the positive significance of Christians who are engaged in public education.

At this point, these young Brothers obviously were questioning their identity and the various possibilities for fulfilling the vocation that they have begun to experience. Because the primary mission of the Brother is the explicit proclamation of the Word of God in catechesis, they defended the hypothesis of the possibility, at least for some Brothers, of working in the chaplaincies of schools that are not sponsored by the Church. They did not reject the Christian school, but they no longer saw the need for requiring that parents send their children to religious schools.²⁶⁴

• *Notes about articles in Orientations*

The articles in *Orientations* that I mention now cannot be linked solely to the influence of REPS, for the issues addressed and discussed in them were hot topics everywhere. Nevertheless, the conversations within the REPS group of young Brothers and colleagues were a good indicator of the fundamental issues of the time. At any rate, three types of articles provided clarification, depth, and sometimes a new perspective on the entire set of issues.

The first type of reflection referred to the situation of Christian institutions in our secularized world. In October 1961, Father Pierre-André Liégé, a Dominican theologian, published an article that caused quite a sensation.²⁶⁵ He distinguished between *ecclesial* institutions (necessary and essential to

²⁶⁴ An outline of this issue that I just described can be found in the agenda of the “Meeting on the Christian school” organized at Caluire, August 4–6, 1963. The first day was devoted to “A View of the Modern Reality of the School,” with conferences on “Education and School Reform in France” (Brother Adrien) and on “School Social Class” (Brother Didier). The second day addressed the issue of “The Church and the Modern Reality of the School,” with conferences on “Ministry to the Entire Educational World” (Canon Théon, of Séz) and on “The Place and the Role of the Christian School in This Overall Ministry” (Brother Michel Sauvage). The third day was dedicated to examining “The Situation Faced by the Institute in the Current Context,” with conferences on “The Institute in the Modern Reality of the School” (Brother Assistant Aubert-Joseph) and on “The Institute in the Pastoral Ministry of the Church” (Brother Jean Peyer, Visitor of Lyon).

²⁶⁵ P.-A. Liégé, OP, “La mission contre les Institutions chrétiennes?” in *Parole et mission* 15, October 1961.

the life of the Church, for example, its sacramental system), *ecclesiastical* institutions (related to the first category but more contingent, for example, sacramental rites), and *Christian* institutions (born as a “supplement” in a specific historical context, Christianity, and therefore temporary). These distinctions caused a stir among leaders of Catholic education.

The second theme was “The Place of the Christian School in the Church’s Pastoral Ministry,” the title of a lecture by Bishop Jean Sauvage, of Annecy, reprinted in *Orientations*²⁶⁶ and summarized by Brother Didier:

... the increasing socialization of the modern world requires that the private school and public education engage in dialogue to be of greater service to the common good of the State;²⁶⁷ similarly, the Christian school can no longer think only of itself while ignoring other forms of the apostolate.²⁶⁸

A third type of article deepened the “theological” reflection on the Christian school, which is what I attempted to do in an article in *Orientations*, “The Christian School and Pastoral Ministry.”²⁶⁹ I recognized the benefit of the controversy about the Christian school:

The facts already demonstrate that insofar as the debate leads the Christian school to reflect more deeply on its *raison d’être* and on its nature and to integrate itself more firmly with the work of the Church, the controversy definitely appears to benefit the Christian school. It obliges the school to rediscover, to formulate more precisely, and to experience more profoundly in daily life the most authentic foundation of its “insurance.”²⁷⁰

As a meaningful contribution to this rediscovery and improved development of “the *raison d’être* and of the nature of the Christian school,” I expressed the hope that serious theologians would interest themselves in the question:

²⁶⁶ *Orientations* 9, January 1964, pp. 91–119.

²⁶⁷ Today, the expression would probably be the *common good of the Nation!*

²⁶⁸ In a fairly novel way, Bishop Sauvage emphasized “the Christian school’s missionary character,” in harmony with the missionary orientation of all pastoral ministry in France (“Missionary Role of the Christian School,” article cited, pp. 110–17). On this same topic, he spoke about “the orientation of the Christian school to those who are poor.”

²⁶⁹ *Orientations* 11, July 1964, pp. 3–29.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7, tr. by ed.

“There is not one serious theologian who believes in the Christian school,” a teacher, a young man and a Religious, once told me, not without sadness. This abrupt and excessive judgment, at face value, at least indicates that Christian educators perceive and deeply deplore the lack of serious thought of which we are speaking.

From this young teacher’s statement, we can imagine, in the abstract, two solutions to remedy this deficiency: either serious theologians begin believing in the Christian school and develop the applied theology, or among those who believe in the Christian school, serious theologians work to develop this theology. Without excluding the first hypothesis, we are forced to recognize that serious theologians are not numerous, that they are asked to get involved in innumerable issues, and that they are more than likely to be interested in the Christian school if they perceive in it a “theological object,” which amounts almost to assuming that the issue is resolved...

Thus, in the short term we turn to the second hypothesis.²⁷¹

The reflection that I had to make in view of the questions of the young Brothers and the evidence of current developments then led me to present and to analyze briefly three shifts in emphasis in how the Church’s teaching on the Christian school is presented. In recent years the topic passed from *the rights of the Church and the duties of parents to the vocation of the Christian school*:

... the Christian school seems to be considered less as a ready-made reality, some kind of acquired possession that the Church must defend and help prosper, than as a vocation that requires day-by-day efforts to answer.

The animating cell of ... this work of the “Church” ... is the educational community. Furthermore, the fidelity of the educational institution to its “vocation” is increasingly emphasized, above all, as the living and dynamic fidelity of a community of Christian educators who are aware of their vocation in the Church and tirelessly seek *together* the practical ways to work throughout their entire educational project as Church, in the Church, and for the Church.²⁷²

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10, tr. by ed.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13, tr. by ed.; the expression “in the Church” refers to the Christian school’s fidelity to the Church’s major pastoral objectives and its concern to involve itself in that total pastoral effort.

I lingered a bit more on a second, even greater, shift with richer implications and far more serious consequences. I used the title, “From the Christian school as *effective* to the Christian school as a *sign*.” Henceforth, the Catholic hierarchy ceased to consider the Christian school as the “better” milieu for the education in the faith of young Christians. Parents could legitimately prefer the system of government schools and their chaplaincies. Today, the Christian school must become a sign for everyone and be seen, above all, as a visible expression, a notable manifestation in its people and in its human organization, of the invisible Spirit’s presence and action.

I observed that this is a rich theological vein to be tapped, and I was using it in a way to highlight the “necessity” of the Christian school in the Church and in society, as well as its catholicity and its missionary character:

... the Christian school perceives so much more clearly the need to evangelize that it more faithfully and more loyally performs its secular task of discovering a new world. Perhaps we find here another dimension of the sign of the Church that the Christian school constitutes. The love the Church has for her Spouse, the knowledge she constantly deepens of the inexhaustible riches of his Mystery, and the certitude she has that everything in existence is ultimately explained through Jesus Christ stimulate the Church to discover this world, assured that all progress in understanding the “secular” realities is of a nature to enrich her own knowledge of Christ, and to concentrate on proclaiming Christ to this new world, knowing that only in Jesus Christ are found the ultimate explanation and the salvation of the world.²⁷³

The third shift is logically consistent with the first two: passing from *private school education* to *pastoral ministry in the educational world*. I remarked that Christian teachers were among the first to accept this change, which by all appearances removed the seemingly “privileged” position they enjoyed in the Church. Their last national convention requested the publication of a Directory of Educational Ministry and stated precisely, “We are calling for a directory of pastoral ministry in the entire educational world, not a directory of Christian educational min-

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 20, tr. by ed.

istry.”²⁷⁴ This third shift meant:

... specifically, that dialogue must exist within the Church among people who are living different vocations. This requires thinking and speaking less and less about hierarchy and about ranking and more and more about community and about complementarity.²⁷⁵

IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE VOCATION OF BROTHER

The article, “The Christian school and pastoral ministry,” in *Orientations* 10, 1964, provided a modest contribution to the renewed theology of the Christian school that I was seeking. Vatican Council II’s *Gravissimum educationis* (*Declaration on Christian Education*) later drew inspiration from this perspective. In spite of its seriousness and its relative novelty, however, this viewpoint and the positive action that accompanied it in many respects did not end the identity crisis of the Brother’s vocation.

This crisis, expressed especially by the young Brothers of REPS, extended beyond their movement; in fact, it was basically a real-life crisis. The Debré Law helped to accelerate some of its manifestations but did not provoke it, nor has this crisis ended. The rest of these present pages bring to light ever more radical questioning of the meaning of the Brother’s vocation.

A conference by Archbishop Pierre Veillot in 1964 constituted more than a portent of it.²⁷⁶ Under the title, “The Vocation of the Brother Teacher,”²⁷⁷ Veillot proposed several elements of a diagnosis while attempting to indicate some therapeutic remedies of the crisis that was developing in this original form of the religious life. The decline in recruitment and the lessened esteem on the part of the clergy that the Brothers were enduring were only effects, no doubt the most visible ones,

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22, tr. by ed.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23, tr. by ed.

²⁷⁶ The conference was unusual in two respects: the theme of the UFE (*Union des Frères Enseignants*, Union of Teaching Brothers) meeting that year did not reflect the content selected by the author. The young Coadjutor Archbishop of Paris emphasized the official nature of his text by announcing that he was speaking in the name of all the bishops of France.

²⁷⁷ *Orientations* 14, April 1965, pp. 119–34.

of a crisis that is situated at a deeper level, a crisis of identity. By financially enabling access by all laypeople to positions in Catholic education, the contract system made the contribution by teachers who are lay religious seem to be less “necessary.” Many members of the clergy who are heavily involved in missionary activity are tempted to consider as old-fashioned the men who dedicate their lives to maintaining institutions that appear to them as remnants of a moribund Christianity. The teaching Brothers must not wait for outside remedies in this crisis.

On the other hand, because choices must be made, teaching Brothers ought to resolve to choose missionary projects,²⁷⁸ to rediscover the priority of serving the poorest,²⁷⁹ and not hesitate to envisage other ways to exercise the apostolate of education and of youth evangelization. He was aware of the boldness of his language:

... events are teachers that God sends us...

This dictates two duties. On the one hand, never think of our Christian schools as enclosed within themselves and as satisfied with the Christian formation of a minority of children. Our schools are intended, directly or indirectly, to serve everyone. On the other hand, can your mission as catechist, inherent in the vocation of Brother teacher, limit itself only to young people in your schools? Do you not think that if the Founders of your various Congregations were with us today, they would be haunted, as we are, by our obligation to catechize the young?

... insofar as the teaching of the faith is the ultimate objective of all your teaching and educational work, do you not think that teaching Brothers have their place among valuable lay auxiliaries in the various chaplaincies of public education?²⁸⁰

The conclusion of Archbishop Veillot’s conference dealt at some length with the improvement of relations between teaching Brothers and clergy. The Brothers must not hesitate to make known the value of their voca-

²⁷⁸ Quite naturally, Archbishop Veillot decided to remind his listeners, educators from various Institutes of Brothers, “that about one-fourth of the youth of France live in the Paris region.” This “tactful” reminder certainly left them free to choose, provided that the choices were “apostolic, guided by service to the Church and by trust in God” (*ibid.*, p. 130).

²⁷⁹ See “Le service des plus pauvres,” *ibid.*, pp. 125–26.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 128–29, tr. by ed.

tion, and they must commit themselves resolutely to work with the clergy. His final development of the complementarity of the two vocations ends with a reflection that will not err by excess of clarity this time:

Some recent Institutes, not those of teachers, were able to find ... a profound and steady harmony in the joint exercise of the two vocations, Brother and Priest. Is what is now occurring in these favorable conditions not a lesson for other forms of this necessary collaboration?²⁸¹

Some could read in these lines a thinly disguised invitation addressed to teaching Brothers to consider introducing the priesthood in their Institutes. This interpretation is neither obvious nor proven, but it is plausible. Archbishop Veillot had spent many years in the Roman Curia in the Secretariat of State. He was quite involved in the conciliar activities and knew that this question was in the air at Vatican II.

To conclude my overview of his conference, I can say that the determined invitation of the Archbishop to renew the life and the mission of the Institutes of Brothers can be better understood in reference to the conciliar context that influenced it. Vatican II was then at the halfway point, and the excitement of change seemed to have surmounted the still powerful forces of conservatism during the preparatory period and even during the first session. When I speak later in these pages about certain moments of the Council and also discuss the renewal General Chapter of 1966–1967, most of Archbishop Veillot's suggestions will reappear.

But how were they welcomed at the time? Immediately after he spoke, a certain stir occurred among those attending. His invitation to consider the inclusion of Brothers in the chaplaincies in government schools stuck in the craw of many listeners. It would take Vatican II and the 1966 General Chapter before any Brothers would move in that direction. That being said, I do not think that his conference, known only to those present, had any immediate major impact on the Institutes of Brothers, with one notable and predictable exception, the young Brothers of REPS. I noticed the significant delay—ten months—between the conference and its publication in *Orientations*, probably due in part to the reluctance of

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134, tr. by ed.

the Institute's French Superiors to provide a new circulation of a text that could provoke disputes among the Brothers. In fact, the archival record of REPS that I researched reflects the intense discussions in this group of young Brothers, including with certain Superiors.

It will not be a distortion of the debate to cite only one episode, in fact, a clear one. During the first term of the 1964–65 school year, the REPS Brothers were holding their own discussions based on Archbishop Veillot's conference. They quickly decided to have REPS take a public stance in the form of an Open Letter to the editor of *Orientations* to appear in number 13, January 1965.²⁸² Brother Didier agreed with this procedure; Bernard Ginisty was responsible for drafting the text. A young man of twenty-three years, exceptionally bright and solid, already with an amazing cultural background, he was experienced in every aspect of argumentation.²⁸³ The archived dossier of REPS preserves a twelve-page proof of this Open Letter. Bernard Ginisty began by recalling the current malaise that young Brothers are experiencing about the Christian school. Recognizing that serious thinking on the topic had already developed, he wrote about

the great joy experienced by the participants in REPS in seeing the hierarchy, in the person of one of its qualified representatives, take our concerns seriously, not to reassure us artificially, but instead to invite us to research, to courageous adaptation, to dynamic invention... This language appeared to us quite new. It also seemed to authenticate the research that we as a team have been conducting for several years.²⁸⁴

The Open Letter offered to the readers of *Orientations* the reflections of this REPS team on Archbishop Veillot's text, in the hope of contribut-

²⁸² Thus it was before the publication of Archbishop Veillot's text.

²⁸³ Bernard Ginisty's subsequent career proved his worth. Later on, he prepared a thesis for an advanced degree based on the thought of Gaston Berger. After leaving the Institute, soon after 1968, Bernard Ginisty was active in the field of the sociology of education. For a time he was on the staff of René Lenoir, Secretary of State in charge of these issues during the seven-year term of Valéry Giscard d'Estang, 1974–81. In his later years, he reluctantly accepted the call to succeed, in difficult circumstances, Georges Montaron as editor of the weekly *Témoignage Chrétien*.

²⁸⁴ All the quotations come from these page proofs, but because they were never published, I cannot provide a reference.

ing to the dialogue that Brother Didier wanted to promote, thanks to the magazine he edited. The Brothers of REPS obviously identified the strong points of Veillot's conference, and Bernard Ginisty listed them before developing them at some length: openness to the entire educational world, pastoral and qualitative establishment of the Christian schools, closer collaboration with lay teachers, the recruitment problem in teaching Institutes, and attention to the poorest students. The connection between this analysis and the one that I tried to develop above is obvious.

At the last minute, however, after the proofs were corrected, Brother Didier withdrew this Open Letter of REPS from the January 1965 issue of *Orientations*. He explained himself bluntly in a letter to Bernard Ginisty, dated January 17, 1965. Before deciding whether to print the Open Letter, Brother Didier showed it to Brother Adrien, an ardent supporter of the REPS research. The National Secretary, however, for reasons of expediency, advised against publishing it, because some Visitors, echoing Brothers engaged in the Christian school, had already challenged the positions of REPS; therefore, publication of this document would be detrimental to its authors. Bernard Ginisty responded to Brother Didier on January 25, 1965, saying that he is not surprised by the controversy but wants a dialogue with his opponents. The next day, he wrote at length to Brother Adrien, asking him, to the extent that discretion allowed, to inform him of "the principal complaints made about our group or about our writings."

Dated January 26, 1965, Brother Adrien's letter crossed Bernard's in the post and, therefore, did not respond directly to his request. Brother Adrien spoke of the protests that a number of passages in the Open Letter would provoke, of which he mentioned several: accusations made about the lack of dynamism among the Brothers, about the decline in quality of their schools, and about the focus on recruiting Brothers more than on the Kingdom of God. As for himself personally, Brother Adrien especially challenged the Open Letter's lack of balance in describing the issues raised by Archbishop Veillot:

You analyze in the first place and for three pages the suggestion of being catechists in public schools and then, very briefly, list problems that are

much more fundamental. The “care for the poorest,” in particular, would merit an entire letter.²⁸⁵

One Visitor wrote to the Brothers of REPS in January 1965 in a less moderate tone:

Catechesis in the public lycées? A myth in the current state of French educational legislation... What we have so much trouble achieving even under conditions as optimal as those in the Christian community as such..., will we do better in the open air? I doubt it.²⁸⁶

In retrospect, it seems to me that these debates and the various positions of the protagonists could not possibly have helped to resolve a vital crisis of any magnitude. This crisis manifested itself in the world and in France from the late 1960s and during the 1970s and 80s. No doubt it remains unresolved. The most visible symptom of this crisis would be the decline and the aging of the workforce due both to numerous departures, especially in the 1970s, and to the drying up of new vocations. The single French Novitiate, established in 1966, would be closed in 1972. Since that year, no one can speak about Novitiate “classes.”

A certain “necessity” for the presence of Brothers as teachers in Catholic schools could still be felt when the salaries paid were acceptable only with difficulty by laypeople with families. The argument lost its relevance once the contracts with the government guaranteed the staff of Catholic schools normal salaries and, later, pensions. Also, it’s not a matter just of intellectual arguments; it’s an evolution documented by the facts.

Since the 1960s, the number of staff in Catholic schools—as in all schools—did not stop increasing. Lay teachers, therefore, were increasingly hired, and soon they also occupied administrative positions. In France, the Institute multiplied its efforts to “transmit” Lasallian educational values to laypeople. There remained no doubt that the “survival” of the Brother’s vocation was being called into question by the facts. It became possible to accept as inevitable the disappearance of a way of life that has had its day in Church and in society. But with the examples of

²⁸⁵ All the documents cited here are in the archived REPS dossier to which I referred.

²⁸⁶ See the previous note.

Brothers' vocations that in their diversity shared the common feature of not being linked to an educational institution, a possible "re-foundation" could be imagined that carried with it a reflection on the plausible but renewed characteristic of the Lasallian identity of the Brother.

Chapter 7 – *TWO MAJOR DECISIONS OF THE 1956 GENERAL CHAPTER*

REVISION OF THE *RULE* BETWEEN 1956 AND 1966

Michel—It is surprising enough that the 1956 General Chapter took the three decisions of such major importance mentioned in Chapter 5. It is even more surprising that these decisions were implemented under the leadership of Brother Nicet-Joseph. This apparently timid man had the lucidity and the courage to undertake projects pitted with ruts that an experienced administrator probably would have declined. However, the application of these three directives of the 1956 Chapter played a key role in the further development of the Institute. Two of them required immediate action: the revision of the *Rule* and the renewal of Lasallian Studies. The third decision concerned the preparation of Notes for the 1966 General Chapter, the topic of a later chapter in this present work.

The Capitulants of 1956 ordered the Régime to prepare a revised draft of the *Rule* to present to the 1966 General Chapter. In 1958, Brother Nicet-Joseph began the work of the revision, which was supervised by a Commission of four members of the General Council: Brother Aubert-Joseph, Assistant for northeast France; Brother Pius, Assistant for Canada; Brother Dominikus, Assistant for Central Europe, and Brother Philipp-Antoon, Assistant for Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Belgian Congo and Vicar-General of the Institute, as chairman. With Brother Aubert-Joseph, he is the lynchpin of a radical revision of the *Rule* that will come to pass, in effect, at the 1966–1967 General Chapter. The General Council, however, will upset every aspect of the issue.

Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon, who became the “pen” of the final draft of the *Rule* during the second session (October–December 1967) of the 39th General Chapter, wrote a background history of this revision.²⁸⁷ In

²⁸⁷ Jourjon, 1969, pp. 13–53: “Historique de la Composition et des révisions successives des *Règles* et *Constitutions* des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes.”

spite of the limits of a summary presentation,²⁸⁸ although sufficiently informed,²⁸⁹ his outline has sufficient points for my purpose. I will emphasize here the audacity of the enterprise begun in 1956, the *impasses* it encountered, and the *decisive breakthroughs* it achieved. In each case I will consider the sustained commitment required to achieve this revision, its content, and the process of implementation.

AUDACITY OF THE WORK OF REVISION

The decision to proceed with a revision of the *Rule* could go almost unnoticed in *Circular 354*, the report of the 38th General Chapter.²⁹⁰ Yet, on reflection, the Capitulants of 1956 made a bold decision of hitherto unprecedented audacity. In three ways they broke radically with the 1946–47 option and even, to some extent, with the entire history of revisions of the *Rule*. The 1956 Chapter's decision meant that the body of the Institute dared to consider itself free, in spite of the approval that Rome gave to the 1947 *Rule*. By accepting, in advance, that the proposed revision will deviate from the letter of the original *Rule*, the Capitulants crossed a threshold that the Institute in two hundred years had never had the courage even to approach. Finally, and no doubt still timidly, they believed that the entire Institute must take part in the work of revision.

To begin with, the deliberations of the Chapter Commission strangely and simply ignored the approval that the Institute sought and that the Holy See granted of the 1947 *Rule*. Attempts by the General Council between 1946 and 1956 to perfect the 1947 work were not based on a

²⁸⁸ The author, more philosopher than historian, wrote a *Commentary* on the 1967 *Rule*, not a history of the text's composition.

²⁸⁹ In particular, *L'historique des révisions des Règles des origines à 1956* (A, pp. 14–22), succinct but accurate, is the work of Brother Maurice-Auguste. The evocation of the *Rule*'s revision between 1956 and the Second Vatican Council (B, pp. 22–31) is clear but relies on a small number of responses, whereas the first draft project (P1) had more than 3,000, which means that the story of this revision is yet to be told. *L'historique* has three additional sections: Vatican Council II and Project 4 (C, pp. 31–39) and the work in the first session of the 1966 Chapter (D, pp. 39–45) and during the Intersession (E, pp. 46–53).

²⁹⁰ In *Circular 354*, the future revision of the *Rule* is not listed among the six decrees that the Chapter approved (pp. 119–22) nor among the five resolutions of Commission 6 that the Chapter approved (pp. 88–89).

mandate from the 1946 General Chapter. How could they be, if the work of that Chapter on the *Rule* had been considered so definitive that it was sent for ratification to the Congregation for Religious? Furthermore, the 1956 General Chapter declared itself to be the only competent body to engage in a revision of the *Rule*. Implicitly, therefore, it believed that the papal approbation did not change the Institute's primary right to own its legislation. When Brother Athanase-Émile submitted the *Rule* for ratification by the Holy See in 1947, he wanted to prevent any subsequent revision. The fundamental, even improbable, audacity of the 1956 General Chapter was *to give the Rule to the living Institute*.

The Chapter's invitation, nonetheless, had to be translated into action. The decision in principle, as bold as it was, might have remained a dead letter; only the determination of the Superior General, Brother Nicet-Joseph, put it into effect. The Brothers might have feared some hesitation and procrastination on the part of this man more inclined to study than to government, often hesitant or even fearful, doubting himself because of his humility. Yet he did not hesitate to launch the revision, eighteen months after his election. This courage is less surprising in light of the profound psychological strength and the prior history of this austere, fundamentally grounded religious.

As a young Brother, he had lived for some time in communities in the United States of America, where he could observe the negative consequences of the centralization and of the uniformity that fidelity to the *Rule* required and nourished.²⁹¹ In select company, he was emboldened to denounce "rule by the iron rod,"²⁹² that is to say, the system of constraint that too many Superiors maintained to defend the intransigence of a regularity always threatened by the aspirations of young people more open to the needs of the world of the 1950s. As Director of the Second Novitiate in Rome from 1946 to 1956, his teaching was in sharp contrast

²⁹¹ The entire time that Brother Nicet-Joseph spent in the USA, in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, coincided with the end of the ostracism of the USA Districts by the Institute for studying and teaching Latin, a severe and prolonged crisis for the Brothers there (cf. Battersby, 1967).

²⁹² I often heard Brother Nicet-Joseph use this expression. His whispered confidences with close associates made them understand how much he had suffered from this system.

to the conventional and supposedly edifying language about the *Rule* that was then in use in the official literature of the Institute and in the habitual pronouncements of its Superiors.

This true man of God drew from the sources of the flourishing biblical and theological renewal. By earning the trust of his audience and by also mastering English and Spanish, he earned the confidence of many Brothers worldwide who were disappointed or discouraged by the archaic and myopic character of the 1946 General Chapter. He had appreciated the new approach to the *Rule* offered by the courses of his Sub-Director, Brother Maurice-Auguste. As a compatriot, friend, and companion for a time in community with Brother Vincent Ayel, he immediately saw the promise of renewal that the catechetical movement was bringing to the Institute. At a time when the journal *Catéchistes* was at odds with the Roman Superiors, Brother Nicet-Joseph had contributed several articles. Brother Honoré de Silvestri, the inspiring voice of the return to the poor and of the involvement of the Brothers in the Catholic Action movement of workers, had participated in the Second Novitiate in 1951–52. These two men profoundly agreed on these issues.

Ultimately, the tranquil audacity that Brother Nicet-Joseph demonstrated by translating into action what remained a vague orientation of the 1956 General Chapter was not at all surprising from a man at once cultured, open, experienced, and deeply spiritual. Not that the General Council elected in 1956 was unanimously in favor of this revision. As soon as its Commission had prepared an early draft, Brother Nicet-Joseph faced the open and relentless opposition of the Mexican Assistant, Brother Antonio María, an impassive stance that he would maintain throughout the decade.²⁹³ He expressed his critique in a six-page Note,

²⁹³ In the 1960s, Brother Philipp-Antoon often spoke to me about the absolute opposition of Brother Antonio María to the entire enterprise. Hearing the objection that many items in the *Rule* had become impossible and had fallen into disuse, he retorted, “In my Districts, observing these items is not a problem.” Brother Philipp-Antoon pointed out to me the realistic openness, in contrast, of the Spanish Assistant, Brother Guillermo-Félix, certainly a proponent of rigorous austerity while agreeing with the urgency of distinguishing between the important and the unimportant. Concerned to the point of anxiety with the serious formation of the Brothers, especially in theology, he defended with visionary intransigence the lay character of the Institute. On this last point, note his cry of alarm in

dated May 15, 1959. I cite a brief extract that I think is symptomatic of a trend of refusal and of an argument that will persist, among a minority certainly, but vigorous and unsubtle:

Is this a project that meets our spiritual needs, that will help all the Brothers to rise, to become better, more fervent, to keep or to return to the original spirit of our Father and Founder?... About that I have an agonizing doubt... I do not want to appear before the Brothers of the Districts for which I am responsible as having worked for, or given my assent to, the many mutilations and significant cuts that have been made ... and that, while giving our Holy *Rule* a more human, more modern aspect, remove the true Lasallian character that is proper to it, its perfume of asceticism, somewhat archaic if you will. Some mediocre Brothers, with little fervor, always will find to be heavy the most watered-down *Rule* we can propose, because oftentimes they lack generosity and have never acquired or have lost the spirit of their state.²⁹⁴

However, the revision of the *Rule* initiated by Brother Nicet-Joseph did enjoy the approval and the unconditional support of Brother Philipp-Antoon, the mainspring of the enterprise. This Flemish man of Brussels was elected Assistant to the Superior in October 1952 to succeed Brother Denis, who had become Vicar-General full-time after the death of Brother Athanase-Émile. Having earned the PhD in Education, Brother Philipp-Antoon was sensitive to the apostolic dimension and to the importance of a professional *métier* in the Brother's life. He had experienced in Belgium and in the Belgian Congo the urgent need to adapt to the current time and place the Institute's legislation dating from the early eighteenth century. A friend of Bishop Leo Joseph Suenens, then Auxiliary Bishop of Malines and an ardent supporter of the Legion of Mary, Brother Philipp-Antoon especially wanted the Brothers to take part in this new movement, its spirituality, and its evangelizing methods.

a letter he sent to Brother Nicet-Joseph, February 21, 1963, following a meeting of the General Council in which, during the discussion of an article of the *Rule*, it was thought appropriate to approve a Brother's wearing of the surplice. A detail, certainly, but knowing the trend in favor of the priesthood strongly manifested in some Spanish Districts, Brother Guillermo-Félix cried "Wolf!"—perhaps with some haste and excess. See Gallego, 1996, p. 89.

²⁹⁴ Document in the Archives of the Generalate, Rome, tr. by ed.

Some had reservations about his keen interest in an organization marked by Irish origins and a certain Marian emphasis.

In exercising his office as a Superior, Brother Philipp-Antoon often remained rigid, even narrow, but his openness to modern trends in the Church predisposed him to address with a certain freedom the revision of the *Rule* that he would pilot. He was wise in seeking the advice of open-minded specialists in Canon Law (often Flemish), Redemptorist Father Van Biervliet, Oblate of Mary Father Guay, and Jesuit Father Beyer, who instead of applying the brakes, encouraged his audacity.

The audacity of the 1956 General Chapter and, even more, of Brother Nicet-Joseph, Brother Philipp-Antoon, and the General Council appears even stronger in relation to the thorny problem of the *content* of the *Rule* that was under consideration. In fact, the Capitulants had certainly not measured the magnitude of the change entailed by this revision to keep it consistent with the objectives detailed by the report of the Commission (unpublished, but summarized in the Chapter Register):

The Assembly wishes that the next edition of the *Rule* separate, in a very clear way, the complete text of 1718 and the various editions required by successive adaptations. Fidelity to the spirit of the Founder! To differentiate carefully in our *Rule* what is truly of obligation from what has the character of directives or of counsel is also desirable.

Such an orientation was vague enough to allow for various interpretations. From the beginning of its work in 1958, the General Council's Commission adopted a clearer, more resolute, but quite unique position:

To achieve these objectives [defined by the Chapter], it appeared very clearly: 1) that we could not introduce these changes while trying to retain as much as possible of the "letter" of the original *Rule*... 2) that we *must abandon the current binary presentation, Common Rule and Rule of Government*, in favor of the grouping, *Constitutions and Directory*.²⁹⁵

In one sentence, the new General Council in 1956 recognized the obvious. All its predecessors had increasingly become aware, for over a centu-

²⁹⁵ "Les grandes étapes du travail de révision des Règles," a presentation by Brother Philipp-Antoon to the 1966 General Chapter, 12 pages (Archives of the Generalate, Rome).

ry, that developing a *Rule* adapted to the current observable world required a distancing from the original text. But up until then, once the point was made, the leaders of the Institute immediately beat a retreat. Their understanding of fidelity to the Founder resulted in a stubborn maintenance of the letter of the original text and swept away any thought of a consistent, coherent adaptation. The solutions adopted to attempt the impossible reconciliation between uncompromising loyalty and inevitable adjustments to changing places, times, and customs could be nothing but lopsided until the 1947 *Rule*, in which an “asterisk” contradicted what had once again been declared inviolable.²⁹⁶ The successive projects of the *Rule* (P1, P2, and P3) resolutely abandoned the letter of the Founder’s text, hitherto preserved to the maximum even to titles, sequence of chapters, and wording and number of prescriptions.

The 1956 General Chapter made the third audacious decision by defining the process for drafting the *Rule*. The Capitulants took a decisive step to return the *Rule* to the living Institute by ordering the General Council to initiate a revision without regard to the barrier of the 1947 papal approbation. Resolutely, the Chapter did much more:

- (a) The Regime shall submit its work for approval to the General Chapter of 1966.
- (b) But in order that the Regime make use of wider experience and of the best opinions, it shall forward mimeographed copies of the first draft, as soon as this is finished, to the Brothers Visitors. These Superiors together with their councils shall study it, annotating their copy as they proceed.
- (c) The Regime shall summarize all these remarks and make use of them

²⁹⁶ Here are two random examples: a) “All shall sleep in the same dormitory, or in shared dormitories if more are required” (1718 *Rule*, Chapter 3, Article 3). “The Brothers may sleep in individual cells that open as much as possible onto a common hallway or corridor. These cells shall have doors with a glass transom that can be opened. The Brothers shall occupy the cells only during the nightly rest. Outside of that time, they shall not stay there, and they shall never receive there any confrere, student, or outsider” (1947 *Rule*); b) “All books, whether catechisms or spiritual and other books, shall be given by the Brother Director or by the Brother whom he shall place in charge, without anyone’s assuming the liberty to select them or, even more, allowing himself to read anything other than those books given to him” (1718 *Rule*, Chapter 21, Article 6). “Books of the Institute, manuals of religious studies, and works relevant to the Brothers in preparing their lessons and for their personal formation shall be made available to the community” (1947 *Rule*).

for drawing up a second draft, which shall be duly submitted to canonists and to the consultors for the Sacred Congregation of Religious.²⁹⁷

This change in procedure was radical and in contrast to the ceremonial that the 1946 General Chapter employed to avoid any discussion of the text of the *Rule*. No public discussion was authorized in 1946; those Capitulants had to settle for listening during meals to the reading in French of the draft of the *Rule* created by the Régime. They were allowed to submit individual written comments that a select commission of Assistants might judge to be relevant. This time, however, the 1956 Chapter launched a consultation of the entire Institute. In retrospect, one might assume that the “base” of Brothers was not invited to participate in this review, the opportunity being restricted to a small group of “notables”—the Visitors and their District Councils, who at that time were appointed, not elected, and usually were chosen from among the most important Directors of the District.²⁹⁸

Even so, I think that this instruction of the 1956 Chapter was revolutionary in three respects, compared with all previous projects for revising the *Rule*. Although the step was timid, it broke with the elitist view that unless they were major Superiors, the Brothers could not have a say in the *Rule* of the Institute. It also broke with authoritarianism, in the sense that the review of Project 1 of the *Rule* by the Visitors and their Councils occurred in total freedom and that, far removed from the General Council, they had complete latitude to make critical judgments. Finally, and most importantly, the instruction of the 1956 General Chapter broke with centralized control, because the opinions about the *Rule* project would come from sixty Districts of the Institute in eighty countries.

IMPASSES DURING THE WORK OF REVISION

The most important breakthrough in the long run was no doubt the ini-

²⁹⁷ *Circular 354, Results of the General Chapter*, 1956, p. 87.

²⁹⁸ This is Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon’s critique: “The study of the Project of the *Rule* was entrusted to the Visitors and their Councils. God’s authority seemed to manifest itself only in the Superiors and reached the Brothers only through them and, in sum, from the outside. That was the mentality of an era...” (Jourjon, 1969, p. 25, tr. by ed.).

tiation itself of a process. As soon as the General Council sent its Project 1 of the *Rule* to the Brothers, it lost absolute control over the process. The logical outcome of this consultation was an ever larger expansion and a risk of letting free criticism bring to light the need for changes of a totally different nature. This is what happened, although initially in an apparently negative manner. It quickly became apparent that by engaging the Institute in this revision, the 1956 General Chapter had initiated a process without knowing the result.

First, if it was relatively easy for the 1956 General Chapter to decide not to take into account the approval granted by the Holy See to the 1947 *Rule*, it soon became evident to those responsible for the redrafting that their freedom to innovate was severely restricted in advance by the Roman authorities. Rome accepted the text of the 1946 General Chapter because it essentially considered it to be the work of a saint and in a way “proven,” because of being nearly untouched for more than two centuries. But from the moment the Institute frees itself and claims the authority to prepare an updated and “modern” *Rule*, it must take into account the Roman requirements for drafting *Constitutions*, which were draconian and constantly posed insoluble problems for the authors of projected drafts.

The phenomenon of the proliferation of new religious congregations throughout the nineteenth century is well known, as is the fact that many sought the Holy See’s recognition and approval. Gradually, the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, then responsible for overseeing the religious state, released a set of procedures for recognition, along with the criteria for drafting new *Constitutions*. These procedures became sufficiently established and universal to become an official Code, published in 1901: *Normae quibus Sacra Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium procedere solet in approbandis Novis institutis votorum simplicium*, Rome, 1901, 59 pages, 320 articles.²⁹⁹

The moment the project to revise the Institute’s *Rule* began in 1958, its authors could not ignore this Code, which for the most part³⁰⁰ remained

²⁹⁹ *Normae secundum quas S. Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium procedere solet in approbandis Novis institutis votorum simplicium*, Rome, 1901, 59 pages, 320 articles.

³⁰⁰ “For the most part” is true, because many members of the Congregation for Religious, being also members of religious Institutes, knew that changes in society would require significant adaptation in

in effect as a canonical force for uniformity of the internal legislation of religious Congregations with simple vows. I cannot include here a comprehensive study of the relationship of the successive projects of the *Rule* with the *Normae*, which are divided into two sections, the procedure for approving new Institutes and the *Constitutions*. The section on the *Constitutions* (the chapters to write and in what order) is itself divided into two parts, the nature of and the way of integrating and living in an Institute and the Institute's governance and organizational structure. Some significant examples suffice here³⁰¹ to illustrate the *cul de sac* that confronted editors who embarked on an inextricable project and faced a mission impossible.

For the sake of balance and to tell the truth, on one point or another (quite rare indeed), the writers of the revised *Constitutions* of the Institute could find support in the *Normae* for proceeding with necessary simplifications. Two examples suffice.

The first example, not a minor one although seemingly a mere detail, is that the *Constitutions* are not to include "detailed schedules of daily occupations for the Institute's communities and works."³⁰² Such a prohibition was an obvious one for a worldwide Institute engaged in educational work. Nonetheless, even in 1947 the *Rule* still contained lengthy chapters detailing the daily schedules for ordinary days and for many special circumstances³⁰³ that date back to the origins. It was well understood that these texts were only indicative, but they continued to impose themselves everywhere, always on such matters of discipline as the hour of rising, the schedule of exercises of piety, and even the schedule for Holy Week.

The second example of the support that a new edition of the *Rule* might

the religious life. The Congregation even held in Rome in 1950 a major "Conference on the Adaptation of the States of Perfection." The Institute's 1956 project of revising the *Rule* was influenced by this meeting, although without an immediate effect.

³⁰¹ I confine myself here to the section of the *Normae* pertaining to the religious life, without entering the domain of Institute governance, except for one point that is not just a detail.

³⁰² *Normae*, art. 30.

³⁰³ Chapters 29 to 35 of the 1947 *Rule* contain detailed schedules for daily exercises on Sundays and feasts, on school holidays, on certain days of the year—such as the last three days of Holy Week—and during vacation time and the annual retreat.

receive from the *Normae* concerns a point of government of long standing in the Institute and yet an anomaly: how to understand the function of the Assistants. As a Councilor to the Superior General, each Assistant also represented at the Center of the Institute a certain number of Districts. Because the Institute was highly centralized, many decisions and most of the appointments to positions of authority were reserved to the Superior General. In many instances, however, the Superior left each Assistant free to make these decisions and appointments for his associated territory. In fact, the practice had gradually taken hold, and the Assistant was considered to be the Major Superior of the Districts for which he was responsible. The *Normae* prohibited this confusion, and it was obvious that the Congregation for Religious would no longer approve this way of doing things.³⁰⁴

More numerous, and certainly more fundamental, are three examples of prohibitions that impeded the writers and forced them to abandon some positive Lasallian traditions. The first example concerns the interdiction of any quotations of a “spiritual” nature in the *Rule*.

Quotations are excluded, whether from Holy Scripture, the Councils, the Holy Fathers, or theologians or from any book or author. Ascetical instructions, spiritual exhortations properly so called, mystical considerations, and anything from ascetical works shall have no place in the *Constitutions*.³⁰⁵

Such ostracism was in exact accord with the narrow, juridical, and legalistic approach of the Roman Curia to the design of religious *Constitutions*. The purpose was to avoid the excessive pious rhetoric and vapid devotional language that was so fashionable in the nineteenth century; however, contrary to the spirit of the great *Rules*, what might be inspirational was also prohibited. One treasure from maintaining the Institute’s origi-

³⁰⁴ This point is what Father Guay developed at length in his observations on Project 3 of the revised *Rule*. He said that the Congregation for Religious would never agree to consider as a Major Superior anyone who does not have the advice of a Council. This point touched a fundamental, disastrous ambiguity in the system of central government that the Visitors denounced but that the Assistants wanted to maintain. On this point, however, the successive draft Projects of the *Rule* did not alter the custom and the model.

³⁰⁵ *Normae*, art. 27, 33.

nal *Rule* was the presence of a number of solid, serious texts whose spiritual quality remains powerful. Especially noteworthy is Chapter 2, On the Spirit of the Institute, which recalls that the first and foremost *Rule* is the Gospel and which invites the Brother to surrender to God in the manner of the Book of Job. Also, the Prologue to Chapter 16, On Regularity, referring to the *Rule* of Saint Augustine, stresses the priority of charity over the external observance of positive prescriptions.³⁰⁶ I will speak later about the way in which the writers of successive Projects of the *Rule* tried to escape this impasse.

The second example relates to the vows: “New Institutes shall not be permitted to add a fourth vow.”³⁰⁷ In the event that the revision of the *Rule* undertaken in 1958 would lead to Roman approbation, it is conceivable that the Congregation for Religious might not consider the Institute as “new.” Nevertheless, Projects 1 and 2 of the revised *Rule* were forced to keep only the three vows of religion and to remove the vows of stability and of gratuity in education.³⁰⁸ This position certainly agreed with the personal viewpoint of Brother Philipp-Antoon. He could not agree to retain a vow that defied a clear definition as to what the vow required and what it forbade. I will return later to the limits and to the internal logic of this approach to vows, which Vatican Council II had to exorcise by restoring the primacy of religious consecration. Here I simply add that Brother Philipp-Antoon’s idea was only strengthened by the position of the *Normae*, repeated in the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*.³⁰⁹

The third example concerns an obligation to distinguish between the two ends of religious Institutes:

³⁰⁶ *Rule*, Chapter 2; see Sauvage, 1991, “Pour une meilleure lecture de nos Règles communes,” by Brother Maurice-Auguste, pp. 318–21; for an English translation, see La Salle, 2002, Appendix 1, “For a Better Understanding of Our Rule,” pp. 217–55.

³⁰⁷ *Normae*, art. 102.

³⁰⁸ The initial draft that was discussed only by the Régime retained the five vows. The Institute’s reactions to Projects 1 and 2 led to restoration of the specific vows in Project 3, but the two vows of stability and of gratuity in education were not placed in separate chapters.

³⁰⁹ *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 1917. On this question of specific vows, see the detailed study by Brother Maurice-Auguste, *Cahiers lasalliens* 2, 1960, pp. 54–55. The Council of Trent recommended that religious observe their vows, especially the specific vows... The position of the *Normae* was at odds with the Tradition of the Church.

The first and general end of every Institute, which is common to all congregations with simple vows, is the sanctification of its members by the observance of their three vows and their constitutions. The secondary and special end, which is specific for each Institute, is constituted by the particular works of charity, to God or to neighbor, for which the Institute was founded. These two ends must be carefully distinguished and clearly expressed in modest terms without exaggeration.³¹⁰

The language clearly indicates the extent to which the official conception of the religious life emphasized the uniformity of religious Institutes. By separating “personal sanctification” from “exercise of works of charity,” the text risks encouraging a narcissistic preoccupation in a search for individual perfection that is divorced from the lengthy itinerary of the gift of self. It implies a dichotomous view of the religious life by distinguishing between two purposes and by establishing a hierarchy that does not favor the apostolate of the religious. That is the least that can be said about it.

In the Institute, at least, the instruction usually given to the Novices (and often repeated to the Brothers at large) uncritically assumed this dichotomy and tended to reinforce it in the common understanding. It was classic, for example, to remind the Brothers that they must, above all, be vigilant about “religious life,” that is to say, about exercises of prayer, observance of the vows, separation from the world, and community practices. The apostolate (the ministry) was not integrated with the “religious life.” It could even happen that a Brother was warned about the danger posed by his ministry! On the negative side, this dichotomy did not prevent an overload of work. Positively, many Brothers realized that their gift of self in apostolic activity supported their spiritual life, inspired their prayer, and stimulated their search for God, who calls them into union and sends them to serve humanity.

This is the essence of the spiritual teaching of John Baptist de La Salle. The original *Rule* speaks with vigorous clarity: the purpose of the Institute is one, and it is apostolic.

³¹⁰ *Normae*, 42–43. The 1917 Code of Canon Law also includes this prescription.

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a Society in which profession is made to conduct schools gratuitously (RC 1, 1).

The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children, and it is for this purpose the Brothers conduct schools, that having the children under their care from morning until evening, these teachers may be able to teach them to live a good life by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and inspiring them with Christian maxims, and so give them a suitable education (RC 1,3).

The necessity of this Institute is very great because the working class and the poor, being usually little instructed and occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their children, cannot give them the instruction they need and a respectable and Christian education (RC 1, 4).

The literal maintenance for two and a half centuries of this rigorous text³¹¹ had the merit, if not of preserving the Institute from a dichotomous drift,³¹² at least of contributing to the future discussion. From Project 1 to Project 2 to Project 3, persistent discomfort was apparent in authors torn between the twofold requirement of the *Normae* and the simple, unified text of the original *Rule*. Project 1 expressed this dual purpose:

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a lay religious Institute of pontifical right whose general end is the glory of God and the perfection of its members and whose specific end is the Christian education of children and young people, especially the poor.

The modified text introduced by Project 2 and by Project 3 demonstrates how unsatisfactory this formulation is, but it also reveals the Institute's inability to free itself completely from the *Normae*. The degree of freedom taken with the *Normae* seems quite definite, for the statement of the

³¹¹ The *Rule of Government* did not maintain the unifying language of the original *Règles Communes*; those who drafted it felt compelled (or were they forced?) to adopt the dichotomous formula. A study about the various ways in which successive editions of the *Rule of Government* formulated this dual finality of the Institute would be interesting.

³¹² These deviations appear in a shocking manner in the *Preface* written for the first printed edition (1726) of the *Rule* of the Institute. For example: "It is of great importance that all those whom God has had the goodness to call to his service, to live in community, are fully convinced and persuaded that they must strive for the perfection of Christianity; therefore, it is necessary that they have the means proper to do so. Now, religious are excellently equipped with these resources, which are, primarily, the *Rules* and *Constitutions* of their Institute and, secondly, the three vows of religion" (La Salle, 1965, *Preface*, art. 6, 12).

specific purpose comes first, as though to indicate that it is the primary one.

The specific purpose of this Institute is the instruction and the education of the young, primarily of the common people.³¹³

Then the draft lists the general purpose of the Institute and attempts to restore the unity between the two ends by making the specific end the particular aspect of the Institute's general end. But the wording does at least suggest that the general end goes beyond the specific purpose. Although the apostolic dimension clearly belongs to the religious life of the Brother, other dimensions of this religious life are not concerned with the apostolate.

This last example already touches the impasse in which the writers of the draft found themselves with the content of the *Rule*. I view it as a triple impasse: a difficulty in being totally free of the original *Rule*, a conception of the *Rule* as a code of obligations, and a certain negative tendency in the approach to the *Rule*. I can only touch on some of the difficulties that the critiques sent by the Districts frequently highlighted about the series of Projects created by the center of the Institute.³¹⁴

The difficulty associated with being free of the text of the original *Rule* appears in the fluctuations from one Project to another with respect to that original text. Project 1 even strives to keep the original letter of the *Rule*, but in modernized chapters, with a result that lacks character or flavor. The end result in Project 3 is a reproduction of the entire edition of the *Rule* of 1718. At this point, the text has no legislative scope but is sup-

³¹³ I observe here, without insisting on it at the moment, a major difference in wording between the original *Rule* and the Project 2 and Project 3 drafts. The text maintained since 1705 is "The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a Society in which profession is made to conduct schools gratuitously" (chapter 1, article 1). In the most serious manner possible, it indicates that because the Institute is founded for the education of abandoned youth, the emphasis is on gratuity in the schools. The Founder did not refuse to make the free schools available in a subsidiary way to students who were not poor, but it was not for them that the Institute was established. Project 2 and Project 3 speak initially of the Christian education of youth in general, then add "primarily of the common people." The perspective was reversed. This essential debate on the purpose is still not resolved in practice.

³¹⁴ Jourjon, 1969, "Le premier projet et les remarques des conseils de Districts," pp. 25–26; "Le deuxième projet," pp. 26–30; "Le troisième projet," pp. 30–31.

posed to serve as a reference to recall the spirit of the legislation formulated elsewhere. This stiffens and complicates the text of the *Rule*, ignores the close connection between the letter and the spirit, and, above all, forgets that in the original *Rule*, the meticulous details of the regulations outweigh the most inspiring passages. The same problem also occurs in the hesitation about the texts adopted successively by Projects 1, 2, and 3. Project 1 changes the sequence of chapters; Project 2 returns to nearly the same order as in the original *Rule*, and Project 3 follows a plan closer to Project 1 than to Project 2.

In fact, what is at play here once again is the concept of the religious life of the Brother. In the original *Rule* and in Project 2, for example, the vows do not appear until after texts that deal with the specific life of the Brother: the spirit of the Institute, prayer, community life, and the duties of employment. This order is reversed in Projects 1 and 3, where the emphasis is on the religious life in general before any attention to specific aspects of the Brother's life.

Project 1 is presented as a code of articles described as regular observance, stated accurately and dryly. Nothing seems inspirational or points to the meaning behind these obligations. The Bible is not mentioned, not only because quotations from it are forbidden, but also because it is not clear how the Gospel might apply to this accumulation of prescriptions, described often in great detail and giving an impression of severity.

The chapter on the *exercises of piety* is a model of this genre, with no attention to their importance, their value, or the meaning of prayer in relation to the Father who calls, to Christ who consecrates, to the indwelling Spirit who gathers and sends—only a sequence of acts of prayer to be completed together, daily, along with the required length of time. Because the Institute's legislation is now being presented in two books, the *Constitutions* and the *Directory*, the list of obligations is even heavier, not to mention the contradictions that were criticized in the 1947 *Rule*. Thus, the *Constitutions* seem to retain the wise reserve of the original *Rule* regarding the multiplicity of devotions, but the *Directory* salvages all the confraternities in which, throughout the nineteenth century, all the

Brothers were enrolled, with no personal component other than their being members of the Institute.³¹⁵

Worst of all was not the proliferation of these often ponderous details, but the spirit that displayed the persistence of such an approach. To sustain the élan of the religious life, the person's spiritual life and interior motivation and the local community's creativity were not called upon, only the constraint of legal prescriptions uniformly imposed on everyone throughout the Institute. The changes in the various Projects in the location and in the contents of a chapter entitled, "The Obligation to Observe the *Rule*," are significant. It is the first chapter of the Régime's initial draft; the final chapter of the first section, "The Congregation," in Project 1; chapter 16 in Project 2, and chapter 3 in Project 3. This last text rightfully uses the beautiful quotation from Saint Augustine on the priority of charity (in the Prologue to chapter 16 of the original *Rule*), which had disappeared from Projects 1 and 2. These various chapters, however, all insist on the juridical nature of duty in the *Constitutions* and in the *Directory*. These are not counsels but "laws."

The situation remained even more deadlocked with respect to the *Rule*'s contents, in that many "laws" had the negative character of bans, which contributed to the general impression of not trusting the Brothers³¹⁶ and, in any case, of ignoring the human dimension of their life.³¹⁷ As for government, the Roman centralization remained strong; ultimately, it seems,

³¹⁵ "Brothers who have belonged, before their entry into religion, to a pious association shall no longer be required to observe its practices. No Brother, under the guise of private devotions, shall disturb the common life or dispense himself from the exercises of the *Rule* or neglect the duties of his employment" (Project 1, *Constitutions*, 92). "The Brothers may belong to the Association of the Apostleship of Prayer and to the following Archconfraternities and Confraternities: Holy Child Jesus, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Most Holy Rosary, Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Victories, Saint Joseph, and the Missionary Union of Saint John Baptist de La Salle" (Project 1, *Directory*, 362). Liturgical openness, however, was granted a minute dosage; Lauds and Compline are allowed to replace morning and evening prayer on six days of the year: Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, December 8, August 15, and May 15! (*Directory*, 364).

³¹⁶ A negative attitude of distrust is evident in everything concerning relations with the world, with travel, with education, with the use of media, and even with the vows and asceticism.

³¹⁷ For example, in the chapter on the sick (*Directory*, 639–43), four out of every five articles focus on the Christian attitude to suffering, on the reception of the last sacraments, and on prayers for the dying.

uniformity in the Institute will be maintained by the Assistants,³¹⁸ who retain their dual role as Councilors and as Major Superiors to whom many immediate powers are reserved, to the detriment of the Visitors of the Districts. In actual circumstances, the supposed centralization is somewhat misleading, in the sense that although every sector of the Institute must refer to Rome many details of life, the Brothers are dealing with twelve different officials, the Assistants. This summit of the absurd is reflected in an article of Project 2:

In important matters [the Assistants] shall not decide for themselves but shall obtain the advice of the Brother Superior and, if applicable, shall request him to bring these matters to the General Council.³¹⁹

In this upside-down world, the Superior General can at times become an advisor to his own Council. This latest example brings to the fore the extent to which the successive Project drafts revealed the impasse that the entire process of adaptation was facing.

From another perspective, it became clear that in the world and in the Church as they were evolving rapidly in the 1960s, consultation with the Brothers cannot be limited only to the few notable ones who are members of District Councils. A few Districts also took it upon themselves to distribute Project 2 to all the Brothers, but this openness was rare. In general, the authors of the draft Projects—and the Brothers themselves—were overwhelmed by their lack of practice in working together and by the divergent multiplicity of all these observations. Moreover, the reactions from the vast majority of Districts to Project 1 were extremely negative. The General Council was surprised by it, even somewhat offended. In spite of the goodwill with which it went back to work, the Institute as a whole saw no real progress between the General Council's initial draft and Project 2. The deadlock here revealed a kind of divorce between the mentalities of the central government and of the base. Perhaps more importantly, the total impasse also proved to be the result of history's acceleration.

³¹⁸ The *coutumier*, the customary schedule of each community, remains subject to the approval of the Brother Assistant (Project 1, *Directory*, 31; Project 2, *Constitutions*, 35).

³¹⁹ Project 2, *Constitutions*, 288.

The decision to proceed with the revision of the *Rule* was made (in 1956 and again in 1958) during the pontificate of Pius XII. When Project 1 appeared, in June 1961, Pope John XXIII was almost three years in office, and preparations for Vatican Council II were under way. By the time Project 2 was sent to the Districts, in April 1964, it was obvious that Vatican II was going to be a kind of revolution. When Brother Philipp-Antoon, in September 1965, submitted Project 3 to Father Beyer, the Dean of the Faculty of Canon Law at the Gregorian University in Rome, the latter declared bluntly that in view of the Council's orientation, the Project 3 text was outdated; a completely different revision was needed.

DECISIVE BREAKTHROUGHS, THANKS TO REVISION WORK BETWEEN 1956 AND 1965

As negative as the work accomplished by the General Council and by the entire Institute on three successive Projects might appear, Father Beyer's opinion did not call into question the fundamental advances made in the process that the 1956 General Chapter had initiated. Vatican Council II's mandate for the "renewal" of religious Institutes would confirm and accentuate these moves. I will limit myself to citing three essential aspects.

First, a literal approach to the fidelity to the Founder was gradually being abandoned. After more than two and a half centuries during which the Institute had sought in vain to reconcile adaptation to a changing world and maintenance of the letter of the original *Rule*, its decision to liberate itself from the literal interpretation led to a more profound understanding of fidelity to the Founder.

Second, by the sheer force of events, the result of becoming free about whether to maintain the letter of the original *Rule* was to place it in a more relative position in the Brother's life. The cult of the letter of the *Rule* had served to elevate the importance of this text and to sacralize it. Setting aside the letter of the Lasallian *Rule* now required greater attention to other major texts of the Founder, a process that would be assisted by the contemporaneous renewal of Lasallian Studies.

Third, without apparent concern for all the Brothers, the revision process decisively rejected another disastrous consequence of the sacralization of

the *Rule* that was shown in a particularly distressing way by the method of implementation at the 1946 General Chapter. Now, in a new start, the *Rule* was given to the living Institute. Without being fully aware of it, the Institute in effect restored the Founder's custom at the origin of the Institute. At one stroke, the role of papal approbation in the *Rule's* development became relative. The first and fundamental "approbation" of the *Rule* is by the Brothers, whose role is to "recognize" in a new text the living fidelity to the identity of the Institute and to its mission.

RETURN THE FOUNDER TO HISTORY: RENEWING LASALLIAN STUDIES BETWEEN 1956 AND 1966

Miguel—*What were the results of the renewal of Lasallian Studies, the second decision of the 1956 General Chapter that you consider most important?*

Michel—The 1956 General Chapter's decision confirmed an important Note on this topic that Brother Maurice-Auguste had sent to the *Chapter*. In *Cahiers lasalliens* 5, I published this entire visionary *Mémoire*,³²⁰ and I explained in detail how Maurice was able to begin immediately and to achieve the desired results when Brother Nicet-Joseph appointed him Director of the Institute Archives and of the *Monumenta Lasalliana*, a function that Maurice continued as Director of *Lasallian Studies* until his death in July 1987.

A few months before he died, Brother Maurice-Auguste presented a kind of balance sheet, which is also reproduced in *Cahiers lasalliens* 5.³²¹ A comparison of these two reports, written thirty years apart, documents the quantitative importance of the work that the 1956 General Chapter initiated. I will confine myself here to a brief statement before recalling some specific works related to the renewal of *Lasallian Studies*. In this same context, I will later discuss my thesis, which was published in 1962 under the title *Catéchèse et Laïcité*, and its aftermath, when Brother Nicet-Joseph

³²⁰ *Cahiers lasalliens* 5 (Sauvage, 1991).

³²¹ "Conseil général élargi. Session du 19 décembre 1986. Premier essai d'une présentation sur l'histoire et les réalisations dans le cadre des *Cahiers lasalliens*," in Sauvage, 1991, pp. 424–31.

asked me to contribute to this same effort by teaching at the *Jesus Magister* Institute beginning in 1961.

The Cahiers lasalliens and the research completed particularly between 1956 and 1966

The most impressive ensemble of research was published in *Cahiers lasalliens* 1–42, of which Brother Maurice-Auguste was the editor. According to the plan envisioned for the collection, he published all the basic Lasallian texts, a set of hitherto unpublished and mostly unknown documents, and some fundamental studies.

The *texts* are primarily the first editions (*éditions princeps*) of the writings of John Baptist de La Salle, reproduced at an almost breathless pace between 1962 and 1966 (*Cahiers lasalliens* 12–15 and 17–25). There followed the works of three early biographers: an edition of the manuscript of Brother Bernard (*Cahiers lasalliens* 4, 1964); a comparative edition of two manuscripts by Maillefer, before (1723) and after (1740) the publication of Blain’s work (*Cahiers lasalliens* 6, 1966), and the photomechanical reproduction of the original 1733 edition of Blain (*Cahiers lasalliens* 7–8, 1961).

Brother Louis-Marie Aroz is practically the only one who published *documents* in the series between 1966 and 1981 (*Cahiers lasalliens* 26 to 37.1 and 39 to 42). A tireless researcher, he discovered in various archives that he systematically canvassed a number of previously unknown documents about the family of John Baptist de La Salle and about the different stages of his life. One example is the account that De La Salle, the eldest son, made of his guardianship of the family property after the untimely death of his parents. This prodigious work particularly made it possible “to get a more authentic picture of the human personality of De La Salle that had long been obscured by the conventional—and obfuscating—halo with which Blain had been so bent on surrounding him.”³²²

Compared with the impressive series of *texts* and *documents*, the *Cahiers*

³²² Sauvage and Campos, 1981, p. xv.

lasalliens produced a rather limited number of *studies*. Examples are my research on the scriptural quotations in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (*Cahiers lasalliens* 1, 1960) and Brother Maurice-Auguste's research on the vows of the Brothers at the origin (*Cahiers lasalliens* 2–3, 1960), on the sources of De La Salle's Collection of Various Short Treatises (*Cahiers lasalliens* 16), and his thesis on Canon Law.³²³ Other examples include the doctoral thesis of Brother Miguel Campos (*Cahiers lasalliens* 45–46, 1974), which I will describe later, and a study by Brother Aroz of Nicolas Roland (*Cahiers lasalliens* 38).

As important as the series of *Cahiers lasalliens*, much other Lasallian research that was completed because of the 1956 General Chapter's initiative was published elsewhere. In his summary report, Brother Maurice-Auguste estimates that "the best works published over the past twenty years (1966–1986) and dedicated to the person and to the work of John Baptist de La Salle are greatly indebted to the *Cahiers lasalliens*." He mentions the doctoral thesis of Brother Yves Poutet;³²⁴ *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*,³²⁵ and *Vida y Pensamiento de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*.³²⁶

Miguel—*These last two works were published in the 1970s. During the 1956–1966 period that we are discussing, was any Lasallian research published before the advent of the Cahiers lasalliens or without their assistance?*

Michel—In his 1986 report, Brother Maurice-Auguste spoke about Lasallian research that was directly indebted to the *Cahiers lasalliens*. To be just, I must recall that Italian Brothers were pioneers in Lasallian research. As early as 1934, they founded in Torino the *Rivista Lasalliana*, in which works of excellent quality appeared, not to mention the remark-

³²³ Maurice-Auguste (Alphonse Hermans, fsc). *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son status canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)*. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1962. *Cahiers lasalliens* 11, VI–414 p.

³²⁴ Yves Poutet, FSC. *Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes*, Tome 1, *Période rémoise*; Tome 2, *L'expansion (1688–1719)*, Rennes: Impr. Réunies, 1970, 787 + 447 p.

³²⁵ Sauvage and Campos, 1977.

³²⁶ Gallego, Saturnino. *Vida y pensamiento de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*. Madrid: Editorial católica, 1986, 635 p.

able bibliographies that were included.³²⁷ Several important works that appeared or were developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s were not able to make use of the *Cahiers lasalliens*.

I want, above all, to refer again to the three fundamental research studies that Brother Maurice-Auguste published in *Cahiers lasalliens* 2 and 3 (1960) and 11 (1962), which unfortunately have not received the full attention they deserve. His research on the vows at the origin of the Institute and on its legal status ought to be of interest to anyone who reflects on the religious life beyond *clichés* and beaten paths.

In the case of the vows pronounced in the Institute before the Bull of Approbation,³²⁸ Brother Maurice-Auguste's work points out that the total consecration to the Lord of the Brothers and of De La Salle himself did not follow the route of the three so-called vows of religion. Their vows were functional and demonstrated the Institute's specific originality. Within the spirit of their consecration to the Trinity, the vow of association to keep free schools reflected an outpouring of the Gospel in the "economic situation,"³²⁹ a total giving of oneself to the living God for the salvation of abandoned youth. Brother Maurice-Auguste's study on the legal status of the Institute³³⁰ amplifies this reflection by showing that the Bull of Approbation by Benedict XIII did not define the identity of the Brother in an external, legal category, but from the Brother's own being, that is to say, based on an end and on a spirit that seem to me to be revolutionary perspectives.

In the wake of the renewal of *Lasallian Studies* since 1956, the theses of some Spanish Brothers deserve mention. In the late 1940s, as I said earlier, Brother Guillermo-Félix designed a project to create a Pontifical Institute for theological and pedagogical formation for the Spanish

³²⁷ Sauvage, 1962, p. 532, for the bibliographies of 1935 and 1958; Sauvage and Campos, 1977, p. 489, for the bibliography published in 1974, and Sauvage and Campos, 1981, Bibliographical Notes, pp. 241–47.

³²⁸ Maurice-Auguste, Frère, 1960, *Cahiers lasalliens* 2 and 3.

³²⁹ The expression is from Marie-Dominique Chenu, OP, speaking about the birth of the Dominican order, in *Aquinas and his role in theology*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002, p. 8.

³³⁰ Frère Maurice-Auguste, 1962, *Cahiers lasalliens* 11.

Districts. In October 1949, an initial group of four young Brothers began the cycle of Theology at the Gregorian University in Rome. A second contingent entered in 1952. Because they were to be the initial professors at the proposed Institute, they completed the doctoral degree. Brother Guillermo-Félix strongly encouraged those who specialized in theology (the most numerous) to focus their research on Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

In spite of difficulties of various kinds,³³¹ on December 25, 1959, he was able to obtain approval from the Congregation for Religious to create the Pontifical Institute “San Pío X” in Salamanca, Spain. At that time, Brother Saturnino Gallego had finished and defended his doctoral thesis on the theology of education of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.³³² Several other Lasallian theses followed, among them an excellent one by Brother Luis Varela, *Biblia y espiritualidad en San Juan Bautista de La Salle (Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle)*,³³³ in which he highlights the biblical richness of the *Meditations of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, expanding to all the Meditations the type of research I did on scriptural citations in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat (Cahiers lasalliens 1)*, my first work, designed when I was preparing my thesis on the role of the teaching Brother in the ministry of the Word of God.

CATÉCHÈSE ET LAÏCAT

Miguel—*You mentioned your thesis. Why did it take you seven years to finish it?*

Michel—I began its preparation in October 1954. I remember precisely that I undertook this thesis as ordered by Brother Assistant Zacharias and that the topic was directly inspired by the intention of some Spanish bishops in the early 1950s to prohibit Brothers from teaching religion to their secondary school students. So I decided to explore the issue of the canon-

³³¹ Cf. El Instituto Pontificio “San Pío X,” in Gallego, 1996, pp. 134–43.

³³² The title of this thesis.

³³³ Varela, Luis. *Biblia y espiritualidad en San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Salamanca: Tejares, 1966, 362 p.; Varela Martínez, Luis. *Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000, 351 p.

ical mission of catechesis conferred on congregations of teaching Brothers. From that point, I proposed to contribute to solid theological reflection in general about the vocation of the teaching Brother in the Church. It seemed to me that this lay religious vocation was in the main unappreciated. The position of the Spanish bishops provided a striking illustration of this lack of comprehension. I wanted to contribute to the recovery of appreciation by reflecting on the ecclesial significance of this form of consecrated life.

I still had to find a thesis advisor, which though not a drama was somewhat difficult. At the outset I had to overcome a triple handicap. The climate of relations between the Church in France and Rome did not favor the reception by the Faculty of Theology of Lille of a graduate from a Roman university, not to mention a former student of Garrigou-Lagrange. This reticence was further complicated by an unspoken but nonetheless strong tension. Since Easter 1953, my older brother, Jean, had been the Superior of the Major Seminary of Lille. Relations between that institution and the Faculty of Theology were often strained, even conflicting, which of course inspired additional reluctance. Finally, the precise idea, although still in general terms, that I wanted to address—a study of the vocation of the lay religious teaching Brother—caused several professors to wonder what theological domain could possibly relate to such a topic.

Good fortune, however, quickly smiled on me. The Librarian of the Catho, Jules Delhay, father of a Brother of my age, directed me to a namesake, Canon Philippe Delhay, a brilliant Belgian priest and professor of moral theology in the Theology Department at Lille, totally up to date and open-minded about the various states of life. Later, I would always be thankful for having been directed to him,³³⁴ because he agreed

³³⁴ Father Delhay, originally from Namur, taught moral theology at Catholic universities in Lille, Lyon, and Montréal. An expert at Vatican Council II, he later held the chair of moral theology at the Catholic University of Leuven and at Louvain-La-Neuve, where he became Dean of the faculty. At the creation of the International Theological Commission in 1968, he became a member and held the position of secretary until 1985 or 1986.

See *Dictionnaire des théologiens et de la théologie chrétienne*, Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1998, for the notice about Philippe Delhay (pp. 133–34). Unfortunately, there are serious errors and omissions.

straightaway and simply asked me to write a summary presentation of my project as I then conceived it. I recently reread this handwritten manuscript of some thirty pages from the beginning of autumn 1954, annotated by Philippe Delhaye.

Three points came to mind upon rediscovering this written presentation. First, my angle of attack for the thesis was the legal and theological question of the participation of laypeople in the ministry of the Word of God, although an extension to the ecclesial significance of the Brother's vocation was repeatedly suggested. Second, as I already said, these pages were extensively influenced by my profound study at the time of the recently published, masterly book by Yves Congar, OP, *Lay People in the Church; a Study for a Theology of the Laity*.³³⁵ I read it carefully, especially the chapter on the prophetic function of the laity. Third, I have to admit that these pages made no reference to John Baptist de La Salle.

There were, in fact, two periods in the preparation of the thesis, 1954 to 1957, when I worked only sporadically, and 1957 to 1960, years devoted exclusively to the thesis. In 1957–58 in Lyon, I worked every day in the library of the Jesuit seminary of Fourvière. I also arranged for a stay of several weeks in Rome. In 1958–59, I was asked to direct a group of a dozen Brothers studying at ECAM (*École catholique d'arts et métier*) or at the university in Lyon. It was an excellent experience of direct contact with Brothers working in difficult conditions, especially the future engineers. I regularly met each of them and gave a weekly lecture. I accomplished little on the thesis that year, but I did continue writing booklets for religion courses, on *l'œuvre du Dieu Créateur*, with considerable élan. In 1959–60, once again at liberty and living in the North of France, I had lengthy stays at the Jesuit library at Chantilly, making use of its splendid facilities for research.³³⁶

Philippe Delhaye, born in 1912, not 1902, was at the time of publication of *Dictionnaire* deceased for eight years. Lastly, why not mention that the activities of Monsignor Delhaye on the International Theological Commission were those of Secretary (that is to say, workhorse), a post he had held, almost until his death, since the creation of this commission by Paul VI?

³³⁵ Congar, Yves M. J. *Lay People in the Church; a Study for a Theology of the Laity*. Translation by Donald Attwater of *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957, 447 p.

³³⁶ I had direct access to the book stacks, a great time-saver.

Miguel—Initially, you did not plan to include John Baptist de La Salle in your thesis. Why does the central section, nearly 300 pages, of *Catéchèse et Laïcat* describe the Institute’s founding and De La Salle’s theological and spiritual teaching on the Brother’s vocation?

Michel—It was Canon Delhaye who initially pointed me to the Founder. This excellent moral theologian was also an advocate of, and an expert in, the historical method, both in his discipline and in theology in general. In accepting the project that I submitted to him, he invited me to dedicate the first part of my thesis to the history of participation by the laity in the ministry of the Word of God. Because the subject is enormous,³³⁷ he suggested that I focus on three key periods in the life of the Church: the origins of Christianity, up to the sixth century; the turning point from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, with the reform of the Church at that time seen especially in the movements of lay preaching in which the Dominican and the Franciscan orders (the latter being lay at the start) were born, and third, the intense catechetical movement, following the invention of printing, that developed, initially in Italy up to the Council of Trent and then moving to France with the Catholic Reformation. This last period leads to the founding of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools by John Baptist de La Salle, which in my mind was simply the conclusion of the historical study.

The second part of the thesis is doctrinal, as originally planned, but far more vague; it entails a profound theological questioning of the participation of teaching Brothers in the ministry of the Word of God. At the time, I was anxious to focus my initial reflection on the theology of the Word of God, an issue that was then being extensively researched, especially in the biblical, catechetical, and liturgical movements.

Between 1954 and 1957, I was working piecemeal on the historical portion of my thesis as opportunities arose. First, I prepared a study on the Waldensians and on the Franciscans and also considered the Italian catechetical movement. Yet, it was at the end of this period that a true intel-

³³⁷ Congar, 1957, provides a good starting point for this historic research; see Part Two, Chapter III, “The Laity and the Church’s Prophetic Function,” pp. 258–308.

lectual and spiritual conversion to John Baptist de La Salle occurred in me. I was enthusiastic about his *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* during my Novitiate and in the early years of religious life. Other spiritual writers seemed to me more nourishing, more current, and more open to the post-war and contemporary biblical, liturgical, and apostolic renewal (for example, Dom Marmion, Father Plus, Father Godin, the pastoral letters of Cardinal Suhard, Father Voillaume, the writings of Canon Jacques Leclercq of Louvain). Of course, I include the Bible itself, and what I call modern prophecy that touched me in writers such as Péguy, Bernanos, and Emmanuel Mounier.

In contrast, the Institute's usual presentation of Lasallian "spiritual" teaching repelled me from a triple point of view that I can summarize, without elaborating, in three words: negative, static, and narrow. *Negative* refers to unilateral insistence on denial, separation from the world, depersonalizing understanding of obedience, sacralization of authority, mortification, emphasis on regularity, observance of details and minutiae, and gregarious conception of community. *Static* means that I found in it neither mystical inspiration nor apostolic spirit, neither taking into account the world today nor linking with my own activities, relationships, and interests. *Narrow* signifies the absence of vision, perspectives, and dynamism. One cause of this stunted portrait was that the works of the Founder most frequently cited, in practice, were the *Rule* and the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, writings in which prescriptions and prohibitions dominate. Furthermore, the 1946 General Chapter fostered the tendency to regard them as sacred.

So I hardly ever frequented the Founder, and I believed that I had become allergic to him. In 1956–57, I taught a doctrinal course on the Sacraments at the Annappes Scholasticate. One of the Scholastics asked me, hesitantly, whether he could write an essay on Baptism by commenting on the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. Knowing the seriousness of this student, I agreed without difficulty. I was intrigued, however, and in one sitting I read these sixteen *Meditations* in consecutive order, something I had never done before.

Because John Baptist de La Salle had written these *Meditations* "especially

for the retreat that the Brothers of the Christian Schools make during the time of vacation,” they constitute a set and ought to be considered in sequence. In the Institute, however, they were read publicly and in a fragmented way, once a week, on Tuesday at the beginning of evening prayer unless replaced by another exercise. I think that I had never even heard the complete reading of the sixteen individual *Meditations*, for in a single school year we could never finish them, so we would start again early in the following year.

At any rate, this complete reading for me was like a bedazzlement, a lightning bolt. I discovered a realistic, dynamic, theological, mystical, apostolic, and—in a nutshell—deeply spiritual text. There was no question that it spoke of the daily life of the Brother, the exercise of his “ministry of the Word of God,” according to the expression of Saint Paul that the Founder applies to the Brother. In short, this was a completely different Founder whom I met: positive, open to human life and to the Mystery of the Living God and the salvation of humanity. From that moment on, I thought that the teaching in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* ought to hold an important and even a central place in a thesis that was seeking to understand more deeply the ecclesial and spiritual significance of the ministry of the Word of God exercised by the Brother, a layman consecrated to God in a religious Institute. Not without astonishment, I discovered that this language was exactly that of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Miguel—Even before your thesis, you published a study on the Meditations for the Time of Retreat. Were you answering Brother Maurice-Auguste’s request, or was it a painstaking, marginal research project, a trial run, or a kind of infatuation in an enthusiastic neophyte?

Michel—I had discovered the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* in a copy of the 1922 edition of the *Meditations of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* then in use by the Brothers. I was struck by the abundance of biblical references in this edition and by the convergence and the relevance of the many scriptural citations, most of them focused on the ministry of the Word that the Brother exercises in his catechesis with children. Many are from major Pauline texts on the ministry of the Word: 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy. This use of

Scripture gave great strength to the Lasallian teaching of these *Meditations*, one of the main reasons for my enthusiasm.

Since June 1956, Brother Maurice-Auguste had been preoccupied with launching the *Cahiers lasalliens*. When he suggested that I work with him, I agreed in principle and offered to prepare a volume on a detailed study of the scriptural citations in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Now free to do my thesis as of September 1957, I took advantage of a visit to Rome in early 1958 to begin my exploration by accessing a copy of the first edition, preserved in the Archives of the Institute. I quickly had the good fortune to discover that John Baptist de La Salle literally cited a specific contemporary French translation of the New Testament, one published by the Oratorian Denis Amelote in 1666. Further research revealed that the Founder used the revised translation that Amelote made in 1707, which, without my having to look further, proved that the text of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* was written after 1707.

This critical research took a long time but was fascinating to me. In fact, it was like identifying the precise way in which John Baptist de La Salle worked. He was so steeped in Scripture that his citations from it were imbedded in his text. This perfect integration often made it difficult to identify the scriptural text. Sometimes, at the twentieth or thirtieth reading, I would suddenly recognize as Pauline language a short sentence fragment that I had not previously distinguished. At the same time, the more literal scriptural citations showed that, contrary to what has sometimes been alleged, De La Salle was not quoting Scripture from memory. He probably had a copy of Amelote's New Testament close at hand.

I completed my work in summer 1959. Maurice minutely scrutinized my successive drafts, and as Boileau recommends, "He made me redo the work twenty times to perfect it." In fact, this research inaugurated the *Cahiers lasalliens* as No. 1, which rolled off the press in the early days of 1960.

Miguel—How do you now view this somewhat austere, critical presentation of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat in Cahiers lasalliens 1? What echo and what practical repercussions did it have in the Institute?

Michel—To answer this question, I think that I must situate this particular work within the entire thesis that I was preparing.

Personally, my discovery at the age of thirty-four years of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* completely changed my thinking about the Founder. I discovered myself admiring and being interested in him. I viewed the Brother's apostolic activity situated within the dynamic perspectives of God's plan (from Genesis to Revelation),³³⁸ of the Mystery of Christ (manifested in the ministry of the Brother), and of the charisms of the Spirit (for the completion of the body of Christ). The specific existence of the Brother and his humble tasks make sense as vocation and mission: a person consecrated to the Trinity to procure God's glory by the commitment and the total gift of self for the liberation on earth and for the eternal salvation of abandoned young people, estranged from God's promises.³³⁹

John Baptist de La Salle reread in faith the itinerary of the founding of the Institute as the gift that the Holy Spirit gave to the Church: an apostolic community with an original face, dedicated to manifesting the reality of the Kingdom and of the transforming power of the Gospel by the human development of the poor, the proclamation of the Word, and the Christian initiation of the young.

The *Cahiers lasalliens* series began with the publication of these *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. It was a way to attract the Brothers' attention to the central importance of this Lasallian text, and it changed the approach to the Founder and the understanding of his message by replacing what was previously based on ascetical writings, such as the *Rule* and the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, with a work like these

³³⁸ La Salle, 1994; the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* begin with an evocation of God's creation of light (Book of Genesis) and end with the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem (Book of Revelation).

³³⁹ The Apostle Paul had received "the grace of unveiling to the nations the incomprehensible riches of Jesus Christ, so that those who previously were deprived of Jesus Christ and were strangers to the covenant of God... now belong to Jesus Christ and are strangers no longer. They have become fellow citizens with the saints and servants of God's household... Thank God for the grace he has given you in your work of sharing in the ministry of the holy Apostles... Honor your ministry by becoming, as Saint Paul says, worthy ministers of the New Testament" (*Meditations for the Time of Retreat* 199.3, citing Ep 3:3, 8; Ep 2:12, 19, 20, 22; Rm 11,13; 2 Co 3.6, in La Salle, 1994, p. 448).

Meditations. Without controversy, I think that is what the Introduction to *Cahiers lasalliens* 1 demonstrates. Obviously, this long Introduction presents the results of the critical analysis of the Lasallian text, but I conclude with a sketch of a synthesis of the Lasallian doctrine of the Brother's ministry in the light of the New Testament citations in these *Meditations*. Subsequently, I speak about the origin of the ministry, about its purpose, about its object, and about the milestones for an apostolic spirituality. Oddly enough, the part dealing with the object of the ministry, with its content, provides the crowning touch:

This aspect ought to be kept in mind to some extent; it would merit a special research effort to do a more thorough study of all the writings of the holy Founder. The moral teaching that he wishes the Brothers to offer to their students has nothing to do with moralism. It is based on the New Testament as its source, its spirit, and its letter.³⁴⁰

I also explain how the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* outline a baptismal morality, one of new life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This is a morality of membership in the Body of Christ, an eschatological and, therefore, dynamic morality. It is not a morality of prohibitions or of fidelity to a certain number of highly circumscribed precepts, but a morality that embraces everything in actual daily life.

I was amazed to find in this Lasallian text the novelty of the moral teaching that had excited me in discovering, at Louvain, Jacques Leclercq's *La Vie en Ordre*, and when I studied, in Rome, Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas,³⁴¹ and, in Lille, Canon Delhaye's course on the theological virtues. It seemed to me, therefore, that absent any reference to the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, the usual presentation in the Institute on Saint John Baptist de La Salle was fundamentally flawed.

³⁴⁰ Sauvage, 1960, p. XLIII, tr. by ed.

³⁴¹ Brother Michel Sauvage, "Le Catéchiste à l'école de saint Thomas d'Aquin," in *Catéchistes* 12, 4^o trimestre 1952, pp. 211ff.; "Le Catéchiste à l'école de S. Augustin, 1. Le De Catechizandis rudibus de S. Augustin," in *Catéchistes* 20, 4^o trimestre 1954, pp. 281–90; "II L'objet de la catéchèse," in *Catéchistes* 21, 1^o trimestre 1955, pp. 19–28; "III Réflexions sur la méthode," *Catéchistes* 22, 2^o trimestre 1955, pp. 107–20.

Miguel—What impact did your doctoral thesis have on the renewal of Lasallian Studies?

Michel—Forty years later, I consider that my discovery of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* constituted my main contribution to the renewal of research on Saint John Baptist de La Salle. I also see how my thesis enlarged this contribution, but from a distance, I do see several limitations of this study.

As for the further development in *Catéchèse et laïcité* of the research in *Cahiers lasalliens* 1, I see three approaches there concerning what we might call the identity of the Brother or the specific aspects of his religious vocation according to Saint John Baptist de la Salle: the importance of the historical approach, the enhancement of the lay character of this vocation, and the dynamic unity arising from the apostolic dimension. It is also in these three approaches that I still see today certain gaps, even some lack of coherence.

• *Importance of the historical approach of Catéchèse et Laïcité*

It was after the detailed research for *Cahiers lasalliens* 1 that I wrote the last four chapters of the historical section of my thesis, which deal with the foundation of the Institute. Everything seemed to flow naturally, and as I continued with the story of the foundation, it seemed obvious to me that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* provide the interpretation that John Baptist de La Salle, in faith and in the light of the Word of God, derived from this history. The distressful situation of abandoned young people that he describes simply and the events that he implicitly evokes by which the foundation of the Institute sought to meet this need appear as the *human story of God*.³⁴²

The Founder's charism took form and meaning in the flesh and blood of life in the world. It is always in its rootedness in the current situation, not in the abstract theology of the religious life, that renewal of the Gospel nature of the Brother's existence must originate. In *Catéchèse et Laïcité*,

³⁴² Schillebeeckx, Edward. *Church: the human story of God*. Translated by John Bowden from the Dutch, *Mensen als verhaal van God*. New York: Crossroad, 1990, 268 p.

however, I was far from being as explicit as I am now about the relationship between the history of the foundation and the teaching of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. On the contrary, my chapter in the doctrinal section of the thesis, entitled “The Religious Teaching Brother, Apostolic Ministry and Religious Life,” remains too deductive. I laboriously tried to illustrate with Lasallian texts an *a priori* conception of religious life that was still based, for example, on the three vows!³⁴³

▪ *Enhancement of the lay character of this vocation*

My thesis focuses on the participation of laypeople in the ministry of the Word of God. The historical section demonstrates how Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers so clearly and insistently established and maintained the Institute’s lay character. In recounting this history, I tried to highlight its ecclesial significance.

It was to be able to maintain their position in the Church that the Founder wanted his disciples to remain laymen...

To judge the significance and the value of the lay “vocation” of teaching Brothers, it is indispensable to view it primarily not in and of itself alone, but within the total life of the Church, in the light of Saint Paul’s teaching on the diverse and complementary roles of various “members” of the ecclesial body. It is precisely in such an apostolic and ecclesial perspective that the Founder situated himself while insistently defending the lay state of his sons. Furthermore, the actual life of the Church undoubtedly helps to prevent underestimating a state of life that seeks to employ to the maximum the apostolic potential of the Christian laity.³⁴⁴

By writing this, I think, I clearly linked the theological significance that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* give to the Brother’s vocation and mission. The application to this vocation of the major Pauline texts on the ministry of the Word of God relates well to the lay status of the Brother, even if the Founder never made this link explicit. Perhaps I ought to have asked myself more about this lack of a formal connection.

³⁴³ For example, in Sauvage, 1962, on the “evangelical counsels,” p. 728; see also, “separation from the world, retreat,” pp. 734–35.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 524–25, tr. by ed.

The doctrinal section of the thesis contains two chapters on the lay state of teaching Brothers. The first tries to answer the question, “Are teaching Brothers laypeople?” It employs the dual principle of distinction of members of the Church, based on their hierarchical position (from this point of view, the Brothers are laypeople) and on their relationship to the world (and from this angle, their quality as religious distinguishes them from secular laypeople engaged in the earthly city). Writing before Vatican II, perhaps I was content with too simple a distinction. However, I did express some reservations about the formula by which Bishop Bazelaire summarized the position of Father Congar: “Priests and religious are the people of the sacred. The laity are the people of the profane to save.”³⁴⁵ My reaction starts, here again, with the historical approach to religious life.³⁴⁶

What can strictly be said about monks does not apply to teaching Brothers, whose vocation engages them in the work of global development and terrestrial human progress. But this reservation remained hesitantly expressed. Moreover, the developments on rooting the Brother’s consecration and ministry in the sacraments of Baptism and of Confirmation, in the universal priesthood and the offering of spiritual sacrifice, always seemed to me to be present, even if they required further analysis.³⁴⁷ In particular, I think that more emphasis ought to be placed on the significance of the teaching Brother’s *secular* commitment.

The second chapter in the doctrinal section of *Catéchèse et Laïcat*, concerned with the lay state of the Brother, might initially and in retrospect seem situational and quite outdated. It was situational; between 1957 and 1959, circumstances had brought me many opportunities to meet with Father Michel Epagneul, the founder of the Missionary Brothers of the Countryside, who had wanted to establish a congregation with lay members equal to the religious clerics. He seemed to understand clearly the Lasallian creation, and he encouraged my efforts to enhance the value of the lay vocation of the Brother. At the same time, Father Epagneul was

³⁴⁵ Bazelaire de Ruppierre, Louis Marie de. *Les Laïcs aussi sont l'Église*. Paris: A. Fayard, 1958, 160 p., p. 21; cited in Sauvage, 1962, p. 850.

³⁴⁶ Sauvage, 1962, p. 850.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 857–863.

an ardent supporter of the restoration of the permanent diaconate within the Church in general and particularly in his congregation. He invited me to consider the issue in the case of teaching Brothers.

At that point, I studied the literature on the subject, thoroughly developed by various authors from different approaches.³⁴⁸ My criticism was too negative, no doubt, and the sequence of events proved me wrong, because Vatican Council II restored the permanent diaconate. Yet I remain convinced that the introduction of the diaconate is unnecessary in the case of teaching Brothers, and I also have a number of questions about the function and the future of the permanent diaconate in the Church.

▪ *Dynamic unity arising from the apostolic dimension*

Ultimately, what amazed me most in studying the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* of Saint John Baptist de La Salle is that this text never envisages the religious life of the Brother as separate from its apostolic dimension. In fact (here I am using language that was classic, but not his own), the Founder's thinking on this subject is so unified because it stems both from the reality of the Brother's life and from the biblical texts, especially from Saint Paul, that appear to shed light on it.

I remember the room in the community at Annappes where I developed the section of my thesis dedicated to John Baptist de La Salle. I remember the joy with which I wrote these pages. I was composing them with an élan I rarely experienced since. I had the feeling of having discovered something in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* and that I could deepen this insight.

The simple discovery is that the religious life of the Brother is apostolic and that everything is organized around that fact. But I understood apostolate as a total reality, not only external activities but also the idea of mission: called by God the Father, consecrated in the Son, sent by the Spirit in the Church, in communion with the Church, and engaged in the world for the purpose of making these young people succeed in the world. So it was truly from this mission that everything was unified, provided

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 868–81; see note 1, p. 819, for a bibliography on the topic at the time.

that mission signifies a spiritual totality as an apostolic totality, an interior totality as well as a totality of activity and of commitment.

The word *apostolic*, for me, was very strong, but not just about activities, as has too often been understood. This has created many misunderstandings that still exist among the Brothers. If the primacy of the apostolate is mentioned, someone will still object: no, the inner life comes first. As for me, or rather from what I discovered in John Baptist de La Salle, it was this profound, dynamic unity of an experience that he had known above all: the experience of a call, of being sent, of companionship, of salvation, of communicating this salvation. In other words, when addressing the Brothers, John Baptist de La Salle never separates the personal relationship with God and the commitment to human service. He does not give priority to the latter, nor, even more, to a union with God that would be disconnected from relation to neighbor. I am thinking of simple statements such as Mark 3, 14–15, “He appointed twelve that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons,” or Galatians 1, 15–16, “But when [God] who from my mother’s womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, *was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles...*”

These perspectives have become commonplace, but reading the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* led me to the reversal I was seeking. At the beginning of my religious life, I had accepted as self-evident the usual teaching on the dual purpose of religious life: personal perfection and apostolate. The insistence frequently was on the primacy of the first over the second. Ready-made formulas seemed to stand out, such as: *First be a good religious* (that is, apply yourself to prayer and to observance of the Rule), *and you will be a true apostle*. Or the formula of Joan of Arc, repeated without critical reflection, “Messire Dieu premier servi!” Or again, *Your primary apostolate is prayer*. Through its simple and dynamic unity, the Lasallian language in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, and also in the entire collection of *Meditations*, transcends these dualistic formulations that claim to prioritize, if not to oppose, the activities and the directions of the Brother’s life.

John Baptist de La Salle never spoke of God's call, of consecration in Christ, or of the gifts of the Spirit without adding a note about the objective. I was struck by the importance of the preposition *for* in his language, also often repeated in Scripture:

But in calling you to [*for*] this holy ministry, God demands that you fulfill it with ardent zeal *for* their salvation, because this is the work of God...

Jesus Christ has chosen you among so many others *to* be his cooperators in the salvation of souls.

Reflect on what Saint 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. ... there are diverse ministries ... the Holy Spirit manifests himself in each of these gifts for the common good, that is to say, *for* the good of the Church.³⁴⁹

I select these fragments from among others I cited in the first chapter of the doctrinal part of *Catéchèse et Laïcité*, entitled "The Apostolic Finality of the Institute" (according to Saint John Baptist de La Salle). Chapter six, "Apostolic Ministry and Religious Life," analyzed a number of the implications of what we might call the apostolic spirituality presented in the Lasallian *Meditations*. For example, the Founder certainly does not minimize the importance of prayer in the Brother's life, nor does he reduce it to a means for the apostolate. His approach is more anthropologically and evangelically accurate, because he places prayer more fittingly in the sacramental order of the Brother's life, associated in some way with the mediating action of Christ.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ La Salle, 1994; *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 201.1, citing 1 Co 12:5–9, p. 452; 196.2, citing 2 Co 2:6, 439, and 201.1, citing 1 Co 12:28, p. 451. The French text focuses on the preposition *pour*: "*pour* ce saint ministère...; *pour* leur salut...; *pour* être ses coopérateurs...; *pour* l'utilité commune, c'est-à-dire *pour* l'utilité de l'Église" (*emphasis added*).

³⁵⁰ La Salle, 1994; see, in particular, *Meditations*, 195, on the Brothers as "cooperators with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls" (p. 436). Each of the three points concludes with an invitation to prayer. The same applies to the companion *Meditations*, 196, "What must be done to be true cooperators with Jesus Christ for the salvation of children" (p. 438). Note also in *Meditations*, 198.1, with reference to Jacob's ladder. Angels "were going up to God to make known to him the needs of those for whom he had made them responsible... They were coming down to teach those whom they were guiding the will of God... You must do the same thing for the children entrusted to your care" (p. 443.)

Another aspect of the dynamic unity of the Brother's life struck me to the core, and I was pleased to be able to show that John Baptist de La Salle did not fail to understand it. I am referring to the place of teaching so-called secular subjects in the Brother's life.

For John Baptist de La Salle, certainly, the ministry of the Brother was first and foremost the explicit proclamation of the Good News through catechesis. But he does not prevent me, either in his writings or in his own experience, from stressing that all the educational activity of the Brother is relevant to this ministry. That is the topic of the fifth chapter in the doctrinal section, "The Apostolic Purpose of the Christian School and the Secular Tasks of the Brother."³⁵¹ This unified perspective was already featured in the historical section, "For the School to 'Do Well'; the Christian School and the Ministry of the Word of God,"³⁵² and was extended and updated in a more personal reflection on expanding the mission of the teaching Brother.³⁵³

I do not deny what had so impressed me in the Lasallian spiritual teaching on the unity of the Brother's life, but today I want to give more emphasis to three additional aspects. The first, its rootedness in the Founder's existential experience, would be the fundamental contribution of the thesis of Brother Miguel Campos, published in 1974.³⁵⁴ Second, I wanted to show to what extent in Lasallian experience and teaching these two expressions are united: I consecrate my life, but my life consecrates me.³⁵⁵ Third, my approach to John Baptist de La Salle in *Catéchèse et Laïcité* was marked by the contemporary catechetical renewal. Later, another priority would appear to me as something more determinant in Lasallian spiritual experience and teaching: the service of the poor, a topic we will return to later.

³⁵¹ Sauvage, 1962, pp. 668–707.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 485–487, 489–493.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 838–843.

³⁵⁴ Campos Marino, 1974.

³⁵⁵ Expressions borrowed from Michel Rondet, SJ, and profoundly expressed in *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 201.3.

COMPLETED THESIS, SECOND NOVITIATE

I finished my thesis in July 1960, and after submitting it to the university jury, I went to the Second Novitiate in Rome. The date for the thesis defense was January 9, 1961. The day before, on Sunday, January 8, the referendum was held in which General de Gaulle wished to obtain the French people's consent for self-determination for Algeria. The next day, the thesis defense was lengthy. The keynote presentation that I was obliged to make also served as my introduction to the printed thesis. The question that I pose at the outset remained valid until the Council, which I must speak about later, but at the same time, I introduced some nuances in the formulation:

People sometimes ask whether [the vocation of teaching Brother is not] a hybrid form of life, incomplete in some obvious respects: religious-apostles who are neither true clerics nor authentic laity, catechists who spend most of their time teaching secular subjects, men whose religious consecration removes them from the world and the earthly city, but who return to it in some way to exercise a genuine profession.

[...] Their statement [of these issues] in itself conveys all the reality of the form of life of the teaching Brother. In fact, it describes the convergence of several trends that in our time both attest to and intensify the vitality of the Church: the lay apostolate and the renewal of religious life, the catechetical movement and the reflection on the significance of the Christian school.³⁵⁶

Today, I would hesitate to write that *religious consecration removes them from the world*. This expression shows signs of a somewhat negative view of both the consecration and the world. I would probably give more emphasis to the lay character of this form of male religious life, not only from a juridical point of view, but also with respect to the exercise of a secular profession that includes a commitment to the human city. But these nuances are secondary to another radical change: this type of vocation of teaching Brother seems endangered, at least in developed countries. This does not mean that a charism such as John Baptist de La Salle's no longer has a *raison d'être* in the world's societies and in the Church,

³⁵⁶ Sauvage, 1962, pp. 1–2, tr. by ed.

but a different angle of attack is required than the one I used forty years ago. As in the time of the Institute's foundation, the multifaceted needs of marginalized youth ought to make it possible to reply with the same charisma. Obviously, this new outpouring cannot be deduced by reason.

Miguel—How remarkable that you were allowed to leave the Second Novitiate! Did the Second Novitiate have any effect on your personal life as a Brother?

Michel—The Second Novitiate for me was a period of quiet retreat, silence, and peace after six years of intense activity. Ten years had passed between the time I went to Rome for the licentiate in theology and when I returned there for the Second Novitiate. Initially, I had decided not to criticize anything about the instruction offered there, even though I did not agree with a number of points of view. More importantly, to me the overall formula seemed worn out: bringing sixty Brothers from around the world to have them live a reclusive existence where personal discussions were virtually impossible, forcing these adults to relive a fussy, minute regulation—for example, prohibiting them from working in their rooms; requiring all Brothers, regardless of their mother tongue, to listen at least two hours a day to lectures in French, not to mention the reading in the dining room. Everything to me seemed totally outdated.

The Second Novitiate was surviving only because of the prestige of its Director, Brother Clodoald. When he was injured in a near-fatal car accident in July 1964 that left him paralyzed, his improvised replacement could not overcome the impact, and it was evident at the beginning of the General Chapter in 1966 that the formula had outlived its role.

What did the Second Novitiate do for me? I spoke earlier about the strong friendships that I formed there in spite of restrictions on communication, including with Brothers I mentioned in the preceding chapter. As for the content, not much happened. I was already familiar with the essential points in Brother Maurice-Auguste's conferences. I did develop a greater interest in the international Institute.

What was most striking for me during the Second Novitiate was the new direction that my life took. The new Visitor of Lille, Brother Alfred

Duhameau, had told me that when I returned, he would appoint me Director of the Sainte-Marie community and school in Roubaix. I was looking forward to a fresh start in my profession as a teacher. When I finished my thesis, I believed that I now had completed a period of twelve years in serving the Institute. The thesis was going to be published; I had taught in houses of formation, and the religious studies curriculum had been renewed. I longed to find a life as an ordinary Brother. My friends in the District warned me, “You are deluded; you will remain in Rome,” but I defended myself. In January 1961, in fact, when all the Second Novices were having their personal interviews with the Superior General, Brother Nicet-Joseph warned me, “I am going to ask you to remain in Rome as a professor at *Jesus Magister*.”

The Jesus Magister Institute and its context

It was truly a new twist for me. When I look back on my life, I sometimes have the feeling of not having accomplished much, of having worked too long at the Institute’s interior. What then comforts me, however, is the following reflection: the unexpected turns in my life—studying theology, the doctoral thesis, teaching at *Jesus Magister*—were requested of me, even in a sense imposed on me.

When Brother Nicet-Joseph told me that I was to be a professor at *Jesus Magister*, I understood the statement of Brother Zacharias, “We need doctors, so you will have to prepare a thesis.” The 1956 General Chapter had wanted to establish a university in Rome for the theological formation of teaching Brothers. The Italian Brothers were at the forefront of this project whereby Brothers could earn degrees that are recognized by the Italian government for religious education, which was then compulsory in schools nationwide. The project, endorsed by all the congregations of teaching Brothers, was then expanded. The belief was that the courses in existing schools of theology included academic fields that lay religious did not need and that courses in casuistry could be advantageously replaced, for example, by more specific courses in catechetics.

A similar theological formation institute, *Regina Mundi*, had already been created for women religious. In autumn 1957, the *Jesus Magister* Institute

was established for teaching Brothers in the facilities and under the patronage of the Lateran University. A four-year cycle made it possible to obtain a Bachelor's degree in religious studies. Initially, the academic authorities refused to allow non-clergy any access to the canonical rank of the degree in theology. In fact, when the question arose, in 1962 or 1963, whether students at *Jesus Magister* could continue their studies as far as the doctorate, the religious studies licentiate was considered as the equivalent of a licentiate in theology. The curriculum was solid, and the principal professors in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and in dogmatic and moral theology were excellent and open-minded.

Here I must add a quick reference to an aspect of the ecclesial context of the period that would directly affect my debut as a professor at *Jesus Magister*. This was the time at the end of Pius XII's pontificate, the advent of John XXIII's, and his announcement of Vatican Council II, its preparation, and its first session. Overall, the Roman Curia was thought to be vigorously opposed to the reformist perspective launched by John XXIII.³⁵⁷ This opposition crystallized especially in the Theological Preparatory Commission, chaired by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani. Among the experts of this Commission was Archbishop Pietro Parente, former professor at the Lateran University,³⁵⁸ a close friend. He was in close contact with the rector, Monsignor Antonio Piolanti, and with certain professors of the "Pope's University" and officials of the Congregation for Universities, fierce adversaries—and in the case of Monsignor Roméo, truly hysterical—of the "new" theology in general and of the teaching of the Biblical Institute in particular.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ The opposition is highlighted in Komonchak, 1995–2006, in vol. 1, "Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II; Toward a New Era in Catholicism." Note especially chapter III, "The Struggle for the Council During the Preparation of Vatican II (1960–1962)," pp. 167–356, and all of volume 2, "The Formation of the Council's Identity; First Period and Intersession, October 1962–September 1963."

³⁵⁸ The Lateran was not the only university in the mix; far from it. The Secretary of the Theological Preparatory Commission was Dutch theologian Sebastiaan Tromp, SJ, of the Gregorian University. The Angelicum also had influence; Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, remained active, in spite of his age, and was supported by Marie-Rosaire Gagnebet, OP.

³⁵⁹ The names mentioned here can be found in the Index, in Frère Maurice-Auguste, 1960, 1962, and in Étienne Fouilloux, 1998.

Although *Jesus Magister* had been linked with the Lateran University, the professors of *Jesus Magister* were remarkably open and free. It does not appear that they were ever bothered at the time when the rector and some professors at the Lateran University were defending ultra-conservative positions and waging war against several professors of the Biblical Institute. Supported by the Holy Office and by the Congregation for Universities, they engaged in hostilities immediately after the death of Pius XII and were openly critical of his liberating encyclical on exegesis, *Divino afflante Spiritu*. At the beginning of the Council during the pontificate of Pope John XXIII, they succeeded at the opening of the 1962–63 academic year in prohibiting Biblical Institute professors Fathers Stanislas Lyonnet and Maximilian Zerwick from teaching. The cause that seemed so huge at that time was simply their support of the thesis of Father Lohfink, SJ, on Deuteronomy,³⁶⁰ which gave rise to a triumphant demonstration of opposition to the troublemakers at the Lateran University and at the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities. The defense of that thesis took place on November 22, 1962, before a large audience of cardinals, bishops, and experts who came to show their support of the Biblical Institute and of its unfairly punished professors.³⁶¹

The decision was revoked early in the pontificate of Paul VI, who came to preside at the ceremony for the opening of the academic year at the Lateran University on October 31 1963. I attended, because of the thesis I just mentioned, and I remember the thunderous applause that broke out in the hall when Paul VI, evoking with severity the fight against such impeccable scholars, ended his tirade with the words, “Never! Never must it ever happen again!”³⁶² When I later visited Father Lyonnet at the Biblical Institute, I found him beaming with joy. His friends had given

³⁶⁰ A six-page abstract summarizes this thesis: *Pontificium Institutum Biblicum—MANDATUM MAGNUM (quaestiones Litterarium Introductoriae in Deut 5–11) Thesis Defendenda a R. P. Norberto Lohfink, SJ, ad lauream in re Biblica consequendam, die 22 novembris 1962*. The thesis is on the text considered to be the introductory discourse to the Deuteronomic law.

³⁶¹ On this episode, see Fouilloux, 1998, pp. 270–71; Komonchak, 1995–2006, vol. 1, pp. 245, 280.

³⁶² Häring, 1992, p. 99; Fouilloux, 1998, p. 271.

him the recorded tape of the Pope's remarks and of the reaction of the Lateran's students.³⁶³

PROFESSOR AT THE *JESUS MAGISTER* INSTITUTE

Miguel—Do you want to speak about the *Jesus Magister* Institute? I remember your classes, but it is different speaking about the courses than about you and your experience offering them. Can you also comment on the context of the Church prior to Vatican II?

Michel—From the beginning, some specific courses for teaching Brothers were organized at *Jesus Magister* and entrusted to Brothers, including Brother Paul Grieger, psychology; Brother Anselmo, catechetics, and in religious education, Brother Sigismondo, who ceased teaching early in 1961. When I asked Brother Nicet-Joseph what he expected of me in *Jesus Magister*, he replied, “You have *carte blanche* to do whatever you want over a three-year cycle.” Brother Anselmo, the Vice-Rector of *Jesus Magister*, was no more explicit. This freedom was stimulating. Reflecting on the type of students there, I thought it would be good to pursue with them, along the line of my thesis, a reflection on the theological significance of the vocation of the teaching Brother.

The only restriction Brother Anselmo imposed on me, not without some piquancy, was that at the Lateran, a lay Brother could not include the term “theology” in the title of his course (the only exception being the one by Brother Anselmo himself, his course on the Theology of Catechesis). Succeeding Brother Sigismondo, I was teaching a course on Religious Education, but Brother Anselmo assured me that once the label was safe, I was free as to the vessel's content! For me, it was indeed a matter of teaching the theology of the life of the teaching Brother. The only restriction imposed on me was to include in my mimeographed course materials the title, “Religious Education,” which I placed in quotation

³⁶³ Häring, 1992, pp. 97–98, describes the wariness of Monsignor Piolanti, Rector of the Lateran University, and of Father Hermenegild Lio, moral theologian of the Lateran, about the new ideas of the author of *The Law of Christ* (during the preparation of the Council). Later, Häring recalls the struggle that the Lateran University led against the Biblical Institute and the liberating encyclical on exegesis, *Divino afflante Spiritu*.

marks. When each school year began, I explained to my students that this title made no sense! It was not any less paradoxical that, having done a thesis on the participation of laypeople in the ministry of the Word of God in various ways, including theological education, I saw myself being refused the *appellation contrôlée* reserved for clerics!

Dealing with members of a dozen congregations of teaching Brothers, I could hardly speak about Saint John Baptist de La Salle. In this regard, I quickly realized something whose evident power had first escaped my notice. I said to myself that the multiplicity of Institutes of Brothers had no reason other than historical circumstances and that a progressive unification of congregations that have the same purpose might be possible. I was quickly undeceived when I realized that many students were eager to write their dissertation on their own founder. I discovered one more sign of the historical specificity of the various forms of religious life. Although the various Institutes of Brothers might have the same purpose, their history had forged their consciousness of an irreducible identity different than those of other apparently analogous societies.

Knowing that the students would be in my course for three years, I designed a syllabus with three components. The theology of the life of the teaching Brother would be considered successively by reflecting on the religious life, on the ministry of the Word, and on Christian education in secular fields, the theology of earthly realities. The lay character of the Brother's life was underlying all three years. Thanks to my doctoral advisor, I had developed the historical dimension in my thesis. It seemed natural to teach the first component, the religious life, in light of this same method. Little by little, the conviction grew in me that there could be no theology of religious life other than historical. I also maintained my conviction, from my own university education in secular subjects, of the importance of putting students in touch with the great inspirational texts. At the beginning of the term, in October 1961, I had no other guiding principles.

As for the focus on the religious life, I must point out two situations that coincided chronologically with the period of my most intense work on my thesis.

The first is the fact that the District of Lille had experienced since 1948 a crisis manifested by the departure annually of several perpetually professed Brothers, often among the better prepared academically. Other Districts in France at the time did not experience the same phenomenon. In 1957, after a particularly difficult school year in this respect, one that had severely shaken me personally, the Brother Visitor of Lille asked me to offer five conferences on the religious life during two retreats for Brothers. I had just discovered the little book of René Carpentier, *Témoins de la Cité de Dieu* (*Life in the City of God; an Introduction to the Religious Life*).³⁶⁴ This Belgian Jesuit completely renewed the moralizing approach that characterized the *Catechism of the Vows*, which his little book replaced. He insisted on religious consecration as an expression of the baptismal life. From that starting point, I developed my lectures successively on the five aspects that I think are central to the religious life and all the rest of baptismal life: on its theocentric character (a matter of vocation as a history), on its Christocentric aspect (consecration), on its ecclesial dimension (participation in the life of the Church, separation from the world, presence in the world, and community life), on its apostolic value (as a sign and in the apostolic activity proper to the Institute), and on the importance of fidelity, an illustration of its eschatological significance (God's fidelity first, the fidelity to God).

At the age of 34, my speaking for the first time to one hundred and fifty Brothers intimidated me. I presented these conferences while trembling, confining myself to reading a previously prepared text. Yet these conferences impressed some Brothers, the language being so new, and they certainly affected me. Brother Maurice-Auguste later published them in *Lasallianum*.³⁶⁵ This experience also led to my course on the religious life at *Jesus Magister*. Already, without planning to do so, I was speaking less about the vows and more about the dynamic elements of the religious life.

³⁶⁴ Carpentier, René. *Témoins de la Cité de Dieu: Initiation à la vie religieuse*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1957, 204 p. *Life in the City of God; an introduction to the religious life*. Translation of *Témoins de la cité de Dieu*, by John Joyce. A completely recast edition of *A catechism of the vows*. New York: Benziger Bros. [1959]. 192 p.

³⁶⁵ In a collection of articles by Brother Michel Sauvage, "La vocation du Frère-enseignant," in *Lasallianum* 2, March 1964, pp. 7–93.

The second experience in the same period of time caused me to deepen my thinking about the religious life. There were in France various Unions of Men and Women Religious, grouped according to their specific apostolates (Union of Teaching Brothers, Union of Teaching Sisters, Union of Religious in Health Care, and so on). Foreshadowing the future Conferences of Major Superiors, a Standing Committee of Male Religious in France was led by its quasi-permanent Secretary, Father Jean-François Barbier, former Provincial of the Franciscans of Paris. He was a skillful diplomat, a man who, without being a specialist, accurately sensed the current issues. Representing the Union of Teaching Brothers, whose National Secretary he was, Brother Adrien Valour held an important place on this Committee. I had been his close friend since being his Director at the Scolasticate in Rome from 1951 to 1953. I admired his strong intellectual ability, clarity of mind, exceptional capacity for work, and gift for synthesis. I appreciated his urbanity, attention to people, equanimity, and ability to deal with huge challenges. He had supported our efforts since 1954 to renew the religious studies and the formation of the young Brothers, and he played an important role in the 1956 General Chapter. In 1959, he recommended me to Father Barbier to be part of a small study group of theological reflection on the religious life, set in motion in view of Vatican II by the Secretary of the Standing Committee of Male Religious.

This small working group included representatives of monks (Dom Ghislain Lafont, Abbey of Sainte-Marie-de-la-Pierre-qui-Vire), of Canons Regular (a Norbertine from the Abbey of Saint-Martin de Mondaye), of Mendicant Orders (Father Bonduelle, OP), of Clerks Regular (Father Rouquette, SJ, who would become an outstanding chronicler of Vatican II for the journal *Études*), of clerical congregations (a Redemptorist), and of teaching Brothers, whom I represented. Belgian Father Hamer, OP, then Director of Studies at Saulchoir, guided the group. He asked us to document our reflections and our discussions by writing two monographs, one on our type of religious life, based on a questionnaire used by everyone, and another on the comparison of our form of religious life with that of monks and of secular Institutes.

This work was of considerable interest to me, and it also marked me in the sense of historical approach to the theology of religious life. Thereafter, our exchanges were particularly concerned with celibacy. Then the question arose of developing a kind of “Treatise on Religious Life” for inclusion in a series of theology manuals then being published with Yves Congar, OP, as one of the main editors. The members of the study group agreed that I be the author of this work of synthesis. I accepted in principle, and for several years my name appeared on the cover of the booklets that gradually became a set of manuals. Almost immediately, the Second Vatican Council, on the one hand, and the magnitude and the diversity of the subject, on the other, convinced me of the impossibility of continuing with this project. We in the study group hardly spoke about it again, everyone being now preoccupied with preparing material for the impending Council.

This experience prompted me to organize my first-year course at *Jesus Magister* on the life of the Brother, comparing it with the origins of the monastic life represented by *The Life of Saint Anthony* by Saint Athanasius and by the *Rule* of Saint Benedict, with the birth at the turn of the twelfth and the thirteenth century of the clerical-apostolic religious life, such as the Dominicans, and with the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas on the religious life. Then I dealt with the appearance of the lay, apostolic, male religious life with John Baptist de La Salle. I organized this last part of the course as a synthesis based on the five themes that I developed in my 1957 conferences. The religious life is *theocentric* (vocation as call and response), *Christological* (consecration), *ecclesial* (the place of religious in the Church, relation to the world, community life), *apostolic* (the ministry of the Brother, the topic of the second year), and *eschatological* (not because it adopts a lifestyle anticipating the other side, but because it is an itinerary en route to the future, which also applies to the other four characteristics mentioned).

I repeated this pattern of five points for the conferences on the religious life during two retreats in the District of Lille in 1957 that I just mentioned. Previously, my study of monasticism and of the Dominican foundation led me to observe how the same five elements are present there,

but made specific by the basic orientation of these two particular forms of religious life. At the end of the semester at *Jesus Magister*, I was shocked to realize how far I had moved away from the usual presentations on the religious life. Having over 120 students, I could not speak with them individually during class. To compensate for this lack, I used the last three or four hours of the course to answer their questions. The first question came from a well-known Marist Brother.³⁶⁶ “Your course on the religious life is very interesting,” he told me, in effect, “but according to this approach, what becomes of the questions about double merit and double sin?”

It took me a moment to realize what he was asking, but then what I had learned in my youth quickly came to mind. A presentation on the vows that emphasized almost exclusively their obligations and the sins committed against them had indeed constructed the theory of double merit when an act of loyalty to the vow occurs: the merit of the good deed and the merit related to the vowed commitment to God. The same was true for sin: to the sin against the virtue was added a “sacrilege,” because of the failure to observe the vow to God.³⁶⁷

I then realized that I had been able to discuss the religious life and its various forms without even mentioning the three vows (but I had developed an approach to religious consecration in the line of baptismal consecration). This “omission” was not a deliberate one, but I became aware of it thanks to the student’s question. This dialogue helped to convince me that we must speak of the religious life in its dynamics of an existential dialogue of the human person, the Triune God, the Church, humanity, and the world. In other words, situate it in an anthropological approach

³⁶⁶ Brother Jean-Paul Desbiens, under a pseudonym, had written a brilliant book, *Les Insolences du Frère Untel*, that was perceived as incendiary in the context of Québec’s Quiet Revolution. The somewhat startling notoriety of the author led his Superiors, with his agreement, to send him from Québec to attend courses at *Jesus Magister*. He remained there one year and then went to the University of Fribourg in Switzerland.

³⁶⁷ In the Institute, the *Catechism of Vows* was replaced in 1950 by the *Petit traité de l’état religieux à l’usage des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*, Paris: Ligel, 333 pages. This treatise was intended to be more doctrinal as well as more positive. It repeated the same theory of two sins—for example, about breaking the vow of poverty. “It often is a sin against justice... In addition, as with any offense against the vows of religion, it is a sacrilege ... because it is a breach of a commitment with God” (p. 170).

(the awakening, the commitment, the relationships, the becoming human) and from a theological viewpoint, but a theology that is relevant to the economy and the history of salvation (God's presence to humanity, Christ's increasing presence in the world, the innovative freedom of the Spirit) and that has the perspective of an ecclesiology that is both relational (in communion) and incarnated (the Church in and for the world).

These perspectives were, no doubt, not as explicit then as I have just described them; however, I did go a little off the beaten track. In truth, the first time I offered this course (in 1961–62), before Vatican II began, I found myself with an insufficient bibliography on the theology of the religious life.³⁶⁸ Just ten years later, a huge bibliographic collection appeared in Spain.³⁶⁹ These publications that appeared *en masse* were then of unequal value. I offered this course again in 1964–65.

In 1964, I devoted a major part of the course to *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, and to the place of the religious life in it. The main authors of *Lumen Gentium* had been firm in placing the section on the religious life in the Church after the chapter on the universal call to holiness, not without encountering some strong initial resistance from a number of religious at the Council. I devoted the course in 1967–68 to *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life. I simply addressed two questions, the first asking what is significant about how the title of this decree evolved. What began as a preconiliar draft entitled *De statibus perfectionis* was succeeded by *De accommodata renovatione vitae religiosae* and ended as *De accommodata renovatione vitae religiosae*. The second question was also historical in nature,

³⁶⁸ During the 1958 Easter holiday, I directed a session on the religious life for the Brothers of the District of Lille. The keynote speaker was René Carpentier, SJ, whom I mentioned earlier. All the conferences were published in a booklet (*Pour une Catéchèse de la vie religieuse*, April 8–10, 1958; R. Carpentier, P. M. Bailleux, J. Audinet, Frère Vincent Ayel, Frère Michel Sauvage, Commission des Études religieuses, Paris, 120 pages). The bibliography on the last page indicated the lack of studies on the subject. We reproduced the text of an introduction to a workshop that I had led at the Second Congress on Religious Education, in Paris, April 1957, "Religious Education and Religious Vocation." I conducted an analysis of what the religious education materials from different collections for secondary schools had to say about the religious life. I found the same deficiency there.

³⁶⁹ Joaquín Beltrán, OFM, *La Vida Religiosa y el Concilio Vaticano II; Orientación bibliográfica, 1960–1968*, Madrid: Verdad y Vida, 1969, 186 p.

but with some important theological significance. It was also a controversial question at Vatican II, about the two ends of the religious life, resolved in No. 8 of *Perfectae Caritatis*, which states that in apostolic institutes, the apostolate is an integral part of religious consecration. I need to return to this topic later.

In my course in the second year at *Jesus Magister*, on the Ministry of the Word of God, I had insisted on the personal aspect of the faith. I also organized an optional parallel seminar on Saint Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus* and *De doctrina christiana*. The essay that I required of the students in the seminar also served as their final examination. This type of instruction suited most students, but some were confused by not being able to foresee what subject matter they needed to master in order to pass the final examination. They were still accustomed to reciting the course content from memory. In 1965–66, I repeated this course on the Ministry of the Word of God, but my schedule was somewhat disrupted by the immediate preparation for the 1966 General Chapter.

The third year included a course on teaching secular subjects that gradually expanded into the Theology of Earthly Realities. This course was repeated in 1963–64 and in 1966–67. In the latter year, I offered a course on Vatican II's *Declaration* on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*), a text that I had helped to write during the Council.

I directed a number of student theses required for the Licentiate in Religious Sciences, several of which were published in *Lasallianum*, including "The Relationship between Religious Life and the Apostolic Ministry of the Brother in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* of Saint John Baptist de La Salle," by Brother Carlos Lorenzo Gonzalez Kipper, Mexico;³⁷⁰ "Father Albert Peyriguère, Witness of Christ and of the Church," by Brother Jean-Pierre Lauby, West Africa;³⁷¹ two important works, "The Charism of the Founder," by Brother Joseph Famrée, South Belgium,³⁷² and "The Ministry of the Word of God in the Church of

³⁷⁰ *Lasallianum* 3, November 1964, pp. 98–103.

³⁷¹ *Lasallianum* 5, November 1965, pp. 147–49.

³⁷² *Lasallianum* 6, May 1966, pp. 7–104.

Vatican II,” by Brother Gabriele Maria Mossi, District of Torino;³⁷³ “Fidelity to the Charism of John Baptist de La Salle,” by Brother Giuseppe Giosmin, Torino,³⁷⁴ a lengthy but ultimately disappointing study of the genesis and the content of “The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A *Declaration*”; “In the Service of Man, under the Sovereignty of God,” by Brother Valerio Lopez,³⁷⁵ and “The Transcendental Factor in the Renewal of Community Life,” by Brother Lucio Tazzer.³⁷⁶

I also directed several doctoral theses in theology, the first being that of an Italian Marist, Brother Ligabue, on celibacy, if I remember correctly, and others by Brothers of the Christian Schools, including “The Theological Foundations of the Christian School According to Vatican II,” by Brother Joaquín Carrasco, Andaluca,³⁷⁷ a study of the conciliar *Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis)*, later published in the Spanish collection BAC, and “The Apostolic Finality of the Religious Life,” by Brother Alberto Ayora, Ecuador,³⁷⁸ with interesting historical highlights on the theory of the objectives of religious life. During the defense, I mentioned a text of Ghislain Lafont, OSB, the exact reference for which I could not find, that I had used in the second part of my own thesis:

Historical criticism is needed of notions with which we peacefully walk or near which we place ourselves when we want to outrun them. Where do they come from, and what are they worth, these categories of primary and secondary ends, evangelical counsels, three vows, and so on?... I have the impression that we are using material that was valuable in its time but has become more or less distorted, adapted, broken, and worn out by theological controversies, juridical procedures, and more or less passionate conflicts...

I directed the doctoral thesis of Brother Miguel Campos, to which I will return later. I think there were one or two others that I did not record. I

³⁷³ *Lasallianum* 6, May 1966, pp. 111–294.

³⁷⁴ *Lasallianum* 12, November 1969, pp. 9–162.

³⁷⁵ *Lasallianum* 12, November 1969, pp. 210–12.

³⁷⁶ *Lasallianum* 14, November 1970, pp. 127–57.

³⁷⁷ *Lasallianum* 9, May 1968, pp. 190–97.

³⁷⁸ *Lasallianum* 12, November 1969, pp. 180–204.

participated on the thesis jury of Brother Julian Villalon, Cuba, “The Sacramental Character” (published in France in a collection by Beauchesne). Brother Antonio Temprado, Spain, wrote a thesis on “Silence and the Word in Saint John Baptist de La Salle.”

The academic year 1964–65 marked the apogee of the *Jesus Magister* Institute, at least for that year’s graduating class, the largest and certainly the best. Difficulties, however, had already emerged. On the one hand, in the wake of Vatican II, Institutes around the world were offering advanced degrees in religious studies, and there was no more need to travel to Rome. On the other hand, in the reform of theological studies at seminaries and universities initiated by the Congregation for Education, then led by Cardinal Gabriel-Marie Garrone, a specific place had to be found for *Jesus Magister*.

Appointed by the Cardinal as a consultant to the Congregation, I was specially delegated by it to lead a commission of international congregations of Brothers to consider the possible future of *Jesus Magister*. This research began at the end of Vatican II, during the last months of Brother Nicet-Joseph’s term. I was in a delicate position, because the President of the Institute *Jesus Magister*, Brother Anselmo, voluntarily remained on the sidelines of the commission. When I became Assistant for Formation during the first session of the 1966–1967 General Chapter, I continued the research, and the commission worked in tandem with the Claretians, who also wished to transform their canonical institute on religious life into a theological institute attached to the Lateran University. We agreed to work together, but the difficulties that arose within the General Council beginning in November 1968 led to the failure of the talks and to the termination, in effect, of *Jesus Magister*.

In 1967 I continued teaching a course on the theology of the religious life as a faculty member at the Lateran University. The students included Brothers, ordained religious, and some women religious. A seminar course on celibacy in 1957 gave rise to the publication of a special issue on this topic.³⁷⁹ Among the student theses was the especially noteworthy

³⁷⁹ “Le Célibat consacré,” *Lasallianum* 10, November 1968.

research of Brother Gabriele Maria Mossi on Vatican Council II, “Genesis of the Conciliar Texts on Chastity and Celibacy.”³⁸⁰ The 1969–70 seminar course was published in *Lasallianum* 16, “The Evangelical Foundation of Religious Life,” in which I developed a number of original aspects.

OTHER COURSES: QUÉBEC, BRUSSELS

Miguel—*At this time, did you offer courses other than at Jesus Magister?*

Michel—I was invited once to Québec, in the winter quarter, January–March 1964, to a Catechetical Institute for Brothers. At the time I had completed one cycle of courses at *Jesus Magister*. My course at Laval University on “Lay Ministers of the Word of God” was well received, but I declined to return the following year, because it seemed somewhat artificial. I was also invited to offer a course on the same subject at the Oblate University in Ottawa. In addition, the Visitor of Québec, Brother Philibert Garneau, asked me to give a series of conferences on the religious life, each well attended, because Vatican II was still in session. I did not keep the texts of those conferences.

During this stay in Canada, I had the opportunity to give a conference at Montréal on fidelity, the central idea being that there is but one fidelity: fidelity to the Spirit. From that idea I tried to situate the role of fidelity to the Founder within this fidelity to the Spirit. The work on the revision of the *Rule* was in the doldrums, and this conference is where I advanced the idea that if we find ourselves at an impasse, we might need to change our perspective. It might not be the text itself of the *Rule* that needs amending, which we seem unable to do, but instead our way of thinking about the *Rule*.³⁸¹

For the record, I will add that during this stay in Canada, I was invited to an interview on television in Montréal. The interviewer, a Dominican

³⁸⁰ *Lasallianum* 10, pp. 115–76, with three synoptic tables of the texts on celibacy from *Lumen Gentium* 42, *Perfectae Caritatis* 12, *Optatam Totius* 10, and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 16.

³⁸¹ “Fidélité,” in *Lasallianum* 3, pp. 9–28.

whom I recall as appearing to be from India, questioned me about my particular position relative to the lay state of the Brothers and their possible accession to the priesthood or to the diaconate. My answer was negative, and later I received a letter from a Brother of Saint Gabriel who vehemently protested at considerable length. This stay in North America allowed me to spend a few weeks in the USA. I spent most of the time at the Washington Scholasticate, which then had more than one hundred Scholastics from the LINE and New York Districts. I realized then with great admiration how seriously the Brothers in the USA met three times a week to respond to the questionnaire sent by Brother Nicet-Joseph in preparation for the 1966 General Chapter.

Every year from 1968 to 1973, I taught at *Lumen Vitae*, the International Catechetical Institute led by the Jesuits in Brussels. Because many religious attended, the Director, Jean Bouvy, SJ, asked me to offer a two-week course on the apostolic religious life. I went to Brussels the week before the course to collect questions from the students. Based on those questions, I constructed a course that included a significant portion on the lay religious life, on the apostolic dimension, and on the commitment to the world of men and women religious.

EDITORS' NOTE

Thus ends this chapter. Brother Michel's description of the renewal of Lasallian Studies was also an opportunity for him to mention his personal contribution in this domain, including the publication of his thesis, and his subsequent teaching career, especially at the *Jesus Magister* Institute. In particular, during this period he refined his specific approach to the religious life, rooted in history and attentive to the uniqueness of each form of the consecrated life. This will be a constant theme in his thinking and also in his refusal to speak about the religious life only in general terms.

The theological research that Brother Michel undertook during this period will bear fruit and expand in an entirely renewed context with the unexpected arrival of the Second Vatican Council and during the 1966–1967 General Chapter.

Part Two

**A PROPHETIC BUT CONTRADICTED HOPE
IN THE RENEWAL
(1956–1976)**



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Introduction – *AN IN-BETWEEN*

Brother Miguel Campos, FSC

In Part One we accompanied Brother Michel Sauvage as he cast off the moorings of the past and directed his attention to new demands emerging on the horizon.

In Part Two we learn something about the logic of a transition during Michel's itinerary. We continue to view with him the current reality based on a system of ideas—good or bad—that provided meaning for life's experiences up to that time. However, in the here and now in which we live, we are attempting to read the signs of the times as authentic signs of God's passage in our history. This experience, this "in-between," touches us profoundly by uprooting us and inviting us to continue our journey.

At some point during these years, we Brothers of the Christian Schools moved through a mysterious portal and into a new era.

In his own itinerary, Brother Michel Sauvage emphasizes without any doubt the two most significant events in his life, Vatican Council II, 1962–1965, and the 39th General Chapter, 1966–1967. About fifty years ago, we Brothers experienced profound changes, especially after Pope John XXIII convened a Council to let fresh air into the Church. In a climate of freedom and of creativity unknown until then, a monolithic view of our religious life that had been reinforced since the nineteenth century collapsed in a short time. These were new times to escape from inertia and to explore, to search, and to experiment.

In a certain way, this mentality was emerging throughout the new culture being forged in Western society and calling into question many uncritically accepted presuppositions. It was also a time when we witnessed political revolutions in Cuba and in Vietnam, the Quiet Revolution in Canada, the student strikes at Kent State University (USA), and the appearance of new pacifist and environmental cultures. Everything was subject to scrutiny. We experienced all the new proposals that were

appearing with incredible speed and were especially influential with young people. Everything seemed to emerge from a new wellspring, a new source. Perhaps the May 1968 unrest in France, with its special characteristics, symbolized the expected transformation.

It was a time of hope, of a prophetic sign that nourished hope in the renewal—a new world, totally new.

The Brothers speak up and take charge of their life.

This is the climate during the ten-year term of Brother Superior Nicet-Joseph, who, in spite of his diffidence, had the audacity to resume John Baptist de La Salle's habitual practice at the time of the foundation of consulting all the Brothers. They never put in written form what they had not experienced, a practice that our superiors had abandoned for two centuries. With this decision, Brother Nicet-Joseph gave us back the word. Whereas the previous government of Brother Athanase-Émile favored secrecy and manipulation, this new approach made us the protagonists of our history.

In addition to the personal Notes addressed to the 1966–1967 General Chapter, communities and groups of Brothers were encouraged to meet and to send Notes in common. This word rising from every region of the world was a prophetic movement that took into account the signs of God's Providence and the call to a more radical conversion.

Little by little, step by step, from individual Notes to community Notes, an Institute constrained to obey laws and regulations of the past that no longer made sense in the new world was disappearing. The Institute without the right to speak was relegated to the past. This was the climate when the Brothers who gathered at the 1966–1967 General Chapter seized the reins by rejecting the regulations imposed on it. Setting aside the draft text of the *Rule* that had been prepared, the Chapter proceeded to search for an axis, a backbone, that would provide coherence for a new vision.

Thus the desire to work together, having in view a *Declaration* about our identity and our mission in the world today, preceded *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World Today, and other

Council documents. Nevertheless, the desires of the Chapter and the later publications of Vatican Council II were coherent and in harmony.

The Institute before the Declaration

In 1965, we were almost 17,000 Brothers spread throughout the world. At that time, what were we saying about our identity and our mission?

No document similar to a declaration exists prior to the 1966–1967 Chapter. Some documents, however, on the identity and on the mission can be found that were used in the initial formation of different generations of Brothers. This group of texts—whatever the country of origin or the historical period of those who read them—offered some constant terms to support a uniform model of Brother, of community, and of mission.

Two specific texts can help us reconstruct this view of the Brother's life before the 1966–1967 Chapter: the *Catechism of Vows* and, even more fundamentally, the *Preface* to the *Rule* of 1726, which was published after the Institute received the Bull of Approbation in 1725.

In these texts we assume that we Brothers are “religious” first and “apostles” second and that the purpose of the religious life is, primarily, personal perfection and, secondarily, the salvation of others. The classic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience place us in a state of life superior to that of laypeople. The *Rule* and the vows of the three evangelical counsels serve as a double rampart to separate us from the world and to protect us from sin. Central to everything, in consequence, are regularity and obedience in the smallest details, including the most incredible wishes of superiors.

This system, apparently so effective in assuring the unity and the cohesion of the community, plus the perseverance of every Brother, became in reality a system of coercion that was used to dominate and to make decisions without the Brother's participation as a subject responsible for his own life.

During initial formation before the 1966–1967 General Chapter, we were deprived of speech and of the responsibility for discerning. Any impulse of passion for the world was extinguished by the vows.

Understood in that way, these evangelical counsels destroyed love and freedom, drying up passion for the mission and love for others. They also supported a life with no clear commitment to this world. This anthropological view, as negative as it was false, was contrary to the Gospel and to the purpose of the mission. It was difficult to reconcile with the Gospel itinerary of John Baptist de La Salle, in spite of some artificial attempts to show the correspondence between what the Founder experienced and what the Brothers were living in this era.

On the eve of the 1966–1967 General Chapter, the Institute could be the dream—or the nightmare—of a Superior obsessed with order and with perfection, far from accentuating the need for conversion and for fidelity to the demands of the Gospel.

The fact is that we must also recognize that many of our Brothers became saints and were veritable heroes in the educational service of the poor through this coercive system, but how many others were injured, were incapable of love?

Although the generations formed before the General Chapter 1966–1967 retained an ambivalent memory of radical obedience and regularity, the new generations of Brothers formed since that Chapter continued to consider the Institute that emerged at the end of the 1960s as having a possible future.

The Institute of the Declaration: new questions

The 1966–1967 General Chapter, more than Vatican Council II, was the decisive portal by which the Brothers entered a new era. We owe a great debt of gratitude to those Brothers, who with Michel Sauvage worked tirelessly to offer us the *Declaration* that we know.

In 1965, the Church had more than 216,000 male religious in the world, among them nearly 17,000 Brothers of the Christian Schools. The key ideas of the *Declaration* are in line with the specific questions that the Brothers of that time were asking themselves about the religious life in the Church in general and about our specific identity. The Institute was relatively young.

Presently, we Brothers number around 4,600, with an average age of 61.4 years. Inevitably, today's questions are different than those of a half century ago in an aging, but not finished, Institute. Paradoxically, the educational mission is now spread worldwide in a larger number of educational institutions than ever before, serving nearly one million students. More than 70,000 laywomen and laymen participate in the Institute's mission, and in many parts of the world they exercise leadership that is evident to all.

Today, nearly 2,000 Brothers are active in the Institute's educational mission. They probably began their initial formation in the last three decades of the twentieth century. They know no other Institute than the one that the *Declaration* proposes. Even if, certainly, many Brothers and colleagues have not often read the *Declaration*, its content is likely to be part of their religious culture and a means of expressing their own experience. Nevertheless, today's questions are not the same as those of fifty years ago; they urge us to search for a language and a narrative to situate us as Brothers in the Church, in history, and in the world.

In 1967, certainly, following the invitation of Vatican Council II, we tried to return to the sources, that is, to the Gospel and to the Founder. In that process we were not fixated on the origins, but we were inspired by De La Salle. We paid attention to the "signs of the times" and to the needs of the Church and of the world. The persistent desire of the Brothers was to make the service of the poor through education known as the principal characteristic of the Institute.

In naming the constitutive elements of the Brother's life, the *Declaration* highlights community, consecration, and mission as dynamic qualities that everyone must integrate in his life, not as static components. The *Declaration* emphasizes in particular the inner freedom of each Brother and supports the diversity of charisms in the Institute. The integration of vocation and consecration in community and for the mission, according to the *Declaration*, presupposes attention to a lifelong project, avoiding any dichotomy, especially an opposition between spirituality and work.

In the *Declaration*, the educational service of the poor becomes an integral aspect of the Institute's mission, so much so that every new founda-

tion or the evaluation of an existing work must take into account this fundamental option of the Institute. The Institute's purpose continues to be apostolic, because it consists in offering a Christian education to children and to the young. As Brothers, we retain our identity as educators and as catechists.

The Capitulants of the 1966–1967 General Chapter, having chosen these options at the time, were aware that renewing the educational institutions would be a demanding task, especially because they knew that tensions would arise between loyalty to existing works and the need to respond according to the Gospel to the needs of today's world. The road to renewal would be difficult in the present and in the future. At that moment, however, they completely trusted in the possibility of a future that would be in our hands.

Beyond the Institute described in the Declaration

The *Declaration*, like a new dream, was formulated nearly fifty years ago for an Institute that was very different than ours is today. It was addressed in particular to Brothers in charge of schools.

Today, however, we ask ourselves:

- Is the school the only organizational structure for ministry today that responds to the new types of poverty that affect a significant number of families and young people?
- Can the *Declaration* also speak to the majority of Lasallian school leaders who are not Brothers but are laypeople committed to the mission?
- What story motivates us today as Brothers?
- How important are the documents of Vatican Council II in our thinking and in our daily life?
- Do the documents of our General Chapters up to 1966–1967 still have the power to transform us as individuals and as an Institute? Are there new narratives that reflect more closely what we are experiencing and that transform themselves into new directions for our religious life?

It is an opportune time to respond to these questions to identify the narrative that is most coherent with what we are experiencing and that describes our actions and our values, individually or as a community.

A prophetic voice

The *Declaration* can also be considered as a prophetic voice that surges throughout the entire Lasallian world with the joy of serving the poor, of fighting against despair and inertia. This word is not Michel Sauvage's or that of the team of Brothers with whom he wrote the *Declaration*. It is the word of the people of God who base their hope on the action of God, who continues to create all things new.

It is a prophetic word that transmits happiness and hope as well as disappointment and contradiction.

Part Two of this book offers an "in-between," a tension between two visions that inevitably leads to the dark night and is capable of purifying hearts and of transforming anew the outlook on global reality, where we proclaim the Kingdom of God, who transforms everything.

Brother Michel Sauvage is a witness of this Kingdom and is able to experience in his personal itinerary the death that leads to life.

Chapter 8 – VATICAN COUNCIL II

THE COUNCIL EXPERIENCE

Miguel—We must now speak about Vatican Council II.

*Michel—*The Council was announced when I began teaching in Rome, in October 1961. I spoke earlier about the theological research group created by the *Centre Permanent des Religieux de France*, to which I belonged, and its discussions about the religious life in its various forms. The Council's approach was increasingly stimulating our research and our exchanges. I was also, indirectly, quite interested in the preparatory documents, thanks to my thesis advisor, Monsignor Delhaye, who although not yet appointed as an expert, was receiving them from Bishop Charue, of Namur. What he was showing me was not at all reassuring. It seemed to me that the Council wanted to discuss everything; in a period of two or three years, Monsignor Delhaye had received about thirty draft documents.

I was particularly worried about the general tone of the preparatory documents, to the extent that I could formulate an idea of them. It was a question of many warnings and condemnations and of a rejection of the modern world. Yet, I was an optimist, telling myself that this reactionary stance could not be imposed in the face of the direction given by Pope John XXIII to the Council, which he had announced just three months after his election. Furthermore, a general anti-Curia reaction was then active in France and in Belgium. But I need go no farther into the history of the preparation of Vatican II, which has been done so masterfully.¹ Volume 1 demonstrates that the Council did not proceed as expected at the start and that many officials and experts of the Curia were opposed to the spirit that John XXIII wanted it to have.²

¹ Komonchak, Joseph A., ed., English edition. *History of Vatican II*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995–2006, 5 vols.

² *Ibid.*, “Conclusion: Preparing for What Kind of Council?”, vol. 1, *Announcing and preparing Vatican Council II, toward a new era in Catholicism*, pp. 501–08.

The situation unexpectedly changed for me when, at the end of September 1962, my brother, Jean, was appointed Bishop of Annecy. I prolonged my stay in Lille to help with the preparations for his consecration, as it was called then, which took place on Saturday, November 3, 1962, in the Cathedral of Lille. Cardinal Liénart had returned from Rome to ordain him. Because I was living in the Major Seminary during the final days of preparing for the ceremony, I heard the new Superior, a member of the Episcopal Council, tell how the Cardinal had intervened at the moment scheduled for the election of the Council's Commissions, in order to prevent the automatic election of preparatory commissions composed of members selected by the Curia. To hear and to speak familiarly, with anecdotes, about an event that was so crucial to Vatican II allowed me to be involved in a straightforward but still quite intense manner.³

On Sunday, November 4, 1962, my brother and I left Lille to travel to Annecy. The next day, Monday, November 5, 1962, he took possession of his See, and early that afternoon, we traveled by plane from Geneva to Rome. Because this was my baptism in flight, I was especially curious, but not at all worried. This euphoria did not last, however, and an irrational fear of flying took hold for the next thirty years. God only knows how many flights I had to take.

My brother stayed with us in the Generalate, along with four Latin American bishops, Bishop Etges, of Santa Cruz do Sul, Brazil; Bishop Manrique, of Oruro, Bolivia, and later, Archbishop of La Paz; Bishop Gutiérrez-Granier, Auxiliary Bishop of La Paz, Bolivia, and later, Bishop of Cochabamba, and Bishop Anasagasti, OFM, a Basque by birth, Vicar-Apostolic of Trinidad in Bolivia. The *Rule* still in effect prohibited the presence in the Brothers' refectory of "foreigners" to the Institute. In many communities, this ostracism was no longer valid, but in the Generalate, compliance on this point, as on many others, was rigorous. Without question then, the bishops could not take their meals with the

³ *Ibid.* The episode is recounted and analyzed at length in "The Extraordinary Second Day of Vatican II; The Meeting on October 13; Importance of the Postponement; The Background of Liénart's Action," vol. 2, Chapter I, "The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council" (pp. 26–32).

community.⁴ A private dining room was provided for them. Because a Brother was needed to coordinate the service with the kitchen, I was quite naturally chosen to accompany the bishops during their meals.

Such simple and daily proximity during the four sessions of the Council gave me a unique opportunity to share in the conciliar life in an informal but effective way. On occasion I served as a translator for these Latin Americans who understood French but did not speak it easily. The bishops, at ease among themselves and with me, teased one another in a friendly manner. I heard Bishop Manrique frequently address my brother gleefully, “Sauvage, *Decem Sacerdotes*”—“ten priests” he demanded from the Bishop of Annecy, then certainly richer in priestly vocations. The bishops would often comment on the interventions of the morning session or on the commission meetings they had attended in the afternoon.

At least once each session, my brother invited to a meal, on the one hand, the Savoyard bishops (Chambéry, Tarentaise, and Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne), to whom were added bishops originally from Savoy, including Archbishop Duval, of Algiers, and his auxiliary. On the other hand, he also hosted the Lille bishops, Cardinal Liénart and his auxiliary (Bishop Dupont, who submitted vivid accounts of the Council to the Lille weekly paper, *Semaine religieuse*), and, from 1964, his coadjutor, Monsignor Gand; Bishop Huyghe, of Arras; Bishop Renard, of Versailles, and later, Cardinal Archbishop of Lyon, and Bishop Desmazières, of Beauvais. The same was true for the Latin American bishops, who invited some of their compatriots.

Thus, gradually and almost without knowing it, as if by osmosis, I became aware of the issues and the positions of the Council Fathers. I discovered various mentalities, and I sensed their difficulties, concerns, and expectations. In short, I followed the progress of Vatican II step by step, at least to some extent. More and more frequently, my brother handed me the texts that were being discussed and asked me to react, to prepare my reactions, and to review an intervention that he was preparing. That

⁴ Practical reasons also played a role. The Council's schedule was not that of the *Casa Generalizia*, and it was best to give the bishops their leeway in this regard.

made me work harder and get my feet wet. In this sense, I think that I can say that I became his theologian more and more intensely as the Council progressed. I continued teaching in *Jesus Magister* at least three mornings a week.⁵ My brother obtained from Bishop Villot, a member of the Council's Central Secretariat, the opportunity for me to attend the general Congregations for several consecutive weeks. I remember in particular having followed many sessions of the debate on the religious life during the third session. I retain two vivid memories of them, including the first intervention of Father Arrupe, elected General of the Jesuits in spring 1965. He spoke insistently on the Church's universal mission, but rather awkwardly, it seemed to me, because he suggested making available to the Pope a sort of priestly militia, always available for the most difficult missions in the entire world. His generalship was of a different missionary scale! The other memory is the intervention of Father Van Kerckhoven, a Belgian, who spoke so passionately about the integration of the apostolate with the religious life.⁶ This is a theme that also interested me:

The apostolate is part of the essence itself of the religious life of active communities and, therefore, cannot be considered secondary or a superfluous accessory. This is a unique vocation that calls religious to consecrate themselves to God and, at the same time, to the young, the sick, the workers, the missions, to all forms of apostolate... Therefore, a true theology of the active life and of its spirituality must be developed...⁷

Miguel—What other experts of the Council did you meet at this time?

Michel—I had a strong rapport, which I treasure to this day, with Monsignor Martimort. I had met him in the context of the renewal of religious studies in France and his work, *The Signs of the New Covenant*. Moreover, my brother and I had attended the annual sessions at Vanves

⁵ I found among my personal papers the authorization (signed by Monsignor Pericle Felici) to attend the general Congregations on October 12–30, 1964; November 6–20, 1964, and October 11–November 12, 1965.

⁶ This issue was discussed extensively throughout the Council, especially during the third session in 1964. See *Les Instituts voués aux œuvres d'apostolat et de bienfaisance (Perfectae Caritatis 8 and 20), L'Histoire de ces Numéros du Décret*, in Tillard, Jean-Marie Roger, OP. *L'Adaptation et la Rénovation de la Vie Religieuse; Décret "Perfectae caritatis."* Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967, pp. 229–40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, intervention cited, p. 237, tr. by ed.

on studying aspects of the liturgical renewal. During the Council, Martimort was the expert theologian for *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), the only preconciliar text that the Council accepted. Later, when the principle of concelebration was restored, several preliminary “test” examples of concelebration took place under the direction of Canon Martimort with bishops and priests living at the Generalate and, of course, the assembly that we constituted.

I think that Canon Martimort, after demonstrating his expertise with the Liturgy, was a mainspring of the Council. He seemed to have every aspect in hand, without being a politician in the pejorative sense of the term.⁸ His competence, the scope of his international relations, and his urbanity suffice to explain his influence. I observed it during the discussions on *Gravissimum Educationis* (*Declaration on Christian Education*) and on the lay state of the Brothers. Through Canon Martimort, I met Archbishop Garrone, of Toulouse, one of the leaders of the French episcopate and an architect of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, who was intensely interested in the problems of education. (He had published a book on the Catholic school.) Immediately after the Council, Paul VI appointed him to take charge of the Congregation for Catholic Education, which he quickly renewed in spirit and in practice. At that time I again had the opportunity to work with him.

Thanks to Canon Martimort, I also came to know Monsignor Charles Moeller, a Belgian priest who worked in the Secretariat for Christian Unity.⁹ A great humanist, he had written extensively on the relationship between modern writers and Christian thought. His help was also invaluable during the discussions on education. I readily met various people during the general congregations that I was allowed to attend.¹⁰ There were other contacts also, but on fewer occasions, including Superior General Father Lalande, Congregation of Holy Cross; Superior General Father Hoffer, Marianists, with whom I frequently worked on education,

⁸ Komonchak, 1995–2006, Name Index: Aimé-Georges Martimort, vol. 1, p. 515; vol. 2, p. 591.

⁹ This Secretariat was headed by Cardinal Augustin Bea, SJ, whose influence during the Council was decisive.

¹⁰ Two bars set up at Saint Peter's provided continual places for meetings and appointments.

and experts such as Fathers Schillebeeckx, Congar, and Tillard, a French Dominican living in Québec.¹¹

In a more direct way, I was especially involved in the final drafting of two conciliar documents, *Perfectae Caritatis* 10 (in the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life) and *Gravissimum Educationis*. In the case of *Perfectae Caritatis*, I participated in drafting the amendments that were proposed by the French commission that I mentioned earlier. My brother and I developed an intervention that I will explain later. I was also in contact with Father Tillard on this matter. He was the principal author of the conciliar text on obedience (*PC* 14) and on the common life (*PC* 15).

PERFECTAE CARITATIS AND GRAVISSIMUS EDUCATIONIS

I was mainly involved in the discussions and then in the drafting of number 10 of *Perfectae Caritatis*, on the lay religious life. My commentary on *Perfectae Caritatis* appeared in the *Unam Sanctam* collection.¹² This topic was important for the Institute, but for me it was also a unique adventure at the Council. This text, with no history in the prior draft of *Perfectae Caritatis* that was approved during the third session, suddenly appeared in the fourth session. It consists of two paragraphs: the first recognizes that the lay religious life (male or female) is a complete form of religious life; the second paragraph declares that lay male institutes ought to consider whether it is opportune to introduce some priests. Here I must go a little beyond the Council itself and speak about the discussions, more or less underground at times, that took place on the subject in Rome in 1963 or 1964.

Some Italian Brothers of the Christian Schools of the District of Rome and a few Marist Brothers were strong advocates for introducing the priesthood in the Institute. They led a campaign to have Vatican II

¹¹ It was Father Tillard who asked me to write a commentary on 10.1–2 (lay religious life) and 15.2 (community life) for *Unam Sanctam*'s volume on *Perfectae Caritatis*.

¹² Michel Sauvage, FSC, *La vie religieuse laïque* (commentary on numbers 10 and 15), in Tillard, 1967, *L'adaptation et la rénovation de la vie religieuse*, *Unam Sanctam* 62, Paris: Cerf, 1967, pp. 301–74.

approve this option. They circulated a number of mimeographed publications, in one of which my thesis, *Catéchèse et Laïcité*, was used as a source of arguments in favor of the priesthood for the Brothers, which to me was at least curious. During the academic year 1964–65, about thirty students at *Jesus Magister* who had taken my classes took the initiative to prepare—and to sign—a text that stated the truth about my position. This was a prelude to the heated discussions that would mark the entire first session of the 1966–1967 General Chapter.

Meanwhile, these Italian “activists” laid siege to a number of Council Fathers, especially members of the Curia. They had the ear of the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti. The former nuncio in Spain—where a movement in favor of the priesthood was evident in one or more provinces of teaching Brothers—was convinced that these lay congregations ought to introduce some priests into their ranks. On the opposite side, Pope Paul VI had appointed Brother Superior Nicet-Joseph as an expert at Vatican II for the second session and for the remainder of the Council. The Vatican was trying to repair an anomaly; while all Superiors General of clerical congregations with at least one thousand members were conciliar Fathers, no representatives of the congregations of teaching Brothers (50,000 religious all told!) had been admitted to the Council, not even as observers, unlike a number of Superiors General of clerical congregations. Brother Nicet-Joseph, well aware of the Italian intrigue, actively worked on his own side to maintain the integral lay character of the congregations of teaching Brothers. He was the spokesman for the other Superiors General with whom he remained in close contact. He had on his side most of the Conciliar Fathers of religious orders, including the vice-president of the Council’s Commission for Religious, Italian Archbishop Perantoni, former Minister General of the Friars Minor.

Brother Nicet-Joseph shared all the information with me as we went along, and he often requested my collaboration in preparing texts to justify our position. Moreover, every morning he went to Saint Peter’s Basilica in the small bus that transported the bishops who were living in the Generalate. He developed in this way a true friendship with them, especially with my brother, who had always respected my personal voca-

tion, although in the first years of my life as a Brother, like many, he did not understand the absence of the priesthood in the Institute. Fifteen years separated us, but when I was able to talk with him as an equal, I explained my views, and my arguments had totally convinced him. As I learned later, as the Superior of the Major Seminary of Lille, he came to appreciate the value of the lay apostolic religious life of the Brothers. This means that Brother Nicet-Joseph found in him a sure and active ally.

The draft decree on the adapted renewal of religious life that was presented for discussion during the Council's third session (October–December 1964) thus contained no mention of the lay male religious life. In response to the parallel approaches that I mentioned earlier, Brother Nicet-Joseph succeeded through his connections in having a number of Council Fathers intervene to emphasize the value of this form of religious life.¹³ With me as a go-between, my brother and Father Hoffer, Superior General of the Marianists, agreed to prepare two complementary interventions. The first focused on the meaning of the religious consecration and the apostolic life in relation to Baptism, the offering of spiritual sacrifice, and the priesthood of all Christians.¹⁴ The second intervention developed the significance of the commitment to secular subjects by Brothers in the exercise of their teaching profession. Several *modi* expanded in an abbreviated form what had been developed either in the Assembly or in written comments.

Because no one had raised the possibility during the Council's discussions of even a partial introduction of the priesthood in the Congregations of teaching Brothers, it came as a surprise—and for a man like Brother Nicet-Joseph, a kind of thunderbolt—when a new draft of the text was presented to the Council's Commission in April 1965. Paragraph 10.1 affirmed the recognition of the comprehensive nature of the lay religious

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 309–12, where these interventions are reported and analyzed.

¹⁴ The idea is from Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a–2ae, q. 186, s. 1, where he makes an abstraction of his development on ritual sacrifices, the “destruction” of what is offered. Congar takes up the idea of including religious consecration, notably by laypeople, as an act of the universal priesthood (“The Laity’s Share in the Church’s Priestly Function,” in Congar, 1957, pp. 181–221). See also Michel Sauvage, FSC, *La vie religieuse laïque (Commentaire des numéros 10 et 15)* in Tillard, 1967, pp. 313, 323–24.

life, a text that agreed with the discussions in the second session. In contrast, 10.2, worded as follows, had no detectable conciliar history:

In religious congregations of lay Brothers, some members, selected in accordance with the *Constitutions*, can receive Holy Orders, (only) for the spiritual needs specific to the Institute.¹⁵

Thus formulated, the text appears to contain a positive invitation, which is exactly how Cardinal Antoniutti understood it, as future events would show. To add a more imperative tone, the following handwritten words were added to the copies of the draft that the members of the Council's Commission received: *Ex mandato Sanctissimi* [text introduced] *on the order of the Sovereign Pontiff*. The meeting of the Commission was to have been chaired by Cardinal Antoniutti, but he was then in Australia, where he had been the Nuncio. The Vice-President, Archbishop Perantoni, as a former Minister General of the Franciscans, understood and personally supported Brother Nicet-Joseph's position. Astonished by the new draft and even more surprised by the added reference to the Pope, he requested an audience with Paul VI. He asked him whether he had added this written comment. The Pope replied in the negative and then stated that he wanted the members of the Commission to be informed of his denial. Could the text itself that claimed to be from the Pontiff be deleted? "No," Paul VI replied. "No more than I am not the author of this text, I cannot be the cause of its removal."

The discussion in the Commission was quite lively, and Archbishop Perantoni, still in communication with Brother Nicet-Joseph,¹⁶ finally obtained the Commission's approval of a new text that eliminated any positive invitation:

¹⁵ *In religionibus autem laicalibus Fratrum, pro necessitatibus spiritualibus (dumtaxat) Instituti propriis, aliqui sodales, iuxta Constitutiones selecti, sacris Ordinibus initiari poterunt.*

¹⁶ In *La vie religieuse laïque*, in Tillard, 1967, pp. 340–47, written in 1966, I was not able to state these details explicitly, notably the approach of Archbishop Perantoni to Pope Paul VI, although I was aware of it at the time. While researching at the Generalate of the Jesuits for the draft of the commentary in *Unam Sanctam* 62, I saw in the Archives of the Commission—with a line drawn through them—the words, *Ex mandato Sanctissimi*. Perhaps a trace of these facts can be found in the Archives left by Brother Nicet-Joseph or those of the Procurator General, for in the followup to this case, Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans was also involved. See Sauvage, 1991, p. 126. The Acts of the Council might also be consulted.

The sacred synod declares that there is nothing to prevent some members of religious communities of brothers being admitted to holy orders by provision of their general chapter in order to meet the need for priestly ministrations in their own houses, provided that the lay character of the community remains unchanged.¹⁷

The scope of the text had changed; no longer a positive incentive addressed to lay Institutes, it only granted some latitude—a *nihil obstat*. The question, as expected, would return when the General Chapter opened in 1966.

The other text in which I was involved is *Gravissimum Educationis* (*Declaration on Christian Education*).¹⁸ Circumstances led to my working closely in the final stage of writing¹⁹ one of the minor Vatican II texts. Because Pope Paul VI had decided that the session in autumn 1965, the fourth, would be the last one, the agenda of the third session was quite full, because most of the documents to be adopted in the following year had to undergo their first reading. At the time, the order went out to be concise, to reduce the length of the texts, and often to demote them to a lower level. Draft constitutions became simple decrees; decrees were reduced to declarations. Such was the case for the text on the Catholic school. The project sent for discussion by the Council Fathers during the third session was unworthy of a Council. “A banal, bloodless text,” wrote Father René Laurentin.²⁰ It was empty and was nothing but a resume of

¹⁷ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 10.2; http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html.

¹⁸ *Gravissimum Educationis*, as far as I know, is the only document of Vatican II without a commentary in the *Unam Sanctam* collection! However, Philippe Delhaye does speak of it in a lengthy article about Vatican II in “Tables Générales du Dictionnaire de théologie catholique”, columns 4286–4353. The *Declaration on Christian Education* is presented and explained in columns 4326–4328; the bibliography is in column 4354.

¹⁹ For a course I taught at *Jesus Magister* in the third year of the cycle, in 1966–67, I prepared a 96-page history of the text and commented on the *Declaration on Christian Education* in its final state, in light of its preconciliar history, its conciliar history, and its context within the Council. I will cite this course at times, but it is impossible even to describe it here. The first two parts of this course are reproduced in the journal *Orientation*, “L’école chrétienne et le Concile,” *Orientations* 18, April 1966, pp. 3–19 (conciliar prehistory), and *Orientations* 20, November 1966, pp. 1–20 (conciliar history).

²⁰ Laurentin, René. *Bilan du Concile Vatican II; histoire, textes, commentaires*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, “Bilan de la troisième session,” p. 238.

the teaching in Pius XI's encyclical, *Divini Illius Magistri*. It was content with repeating that Christian parents have the right—and the duty—to send their children to Catholic schools. Meanwhile, during the same third session, a certain Father Declercq, a priest originally from the diocese of Lille who dedicated his ministry to serving Christians in state-sponsored schools, was working behind the scenes at the Council, somewhat indiscreetly, to lobby against repeating the conventional teaching on Catholic schools. He went so far as to urge the Council not to address this issue at all.

When I learned about the draft—approved by the Fathers with a comfortable majority but with a substantial minority opposed²¹—near the end of the third session, I thought it would be impossible for the Council to approve such a worthless document. After speaking with Brother Nicet-Joseph, and with the agreement of Father Hoffer, Superior General of the Marianists and a member of the conciliar Subcommittee responsible for the *Declaration on Christian Education*, it became possible for me to work at the end of November 1964 on a survey of the Superiors General residing in Rome, of groups of Brothers from every source (Roman university students in small—often international—teams), and of open and thoughtful religious who were working in various parts of the world. Among them, in particular, were Brother Vincent Ayel, editor of the journal *Catéchistes*; Brother Didier Piveteau, editor of *Orientations*; teachers and students of *Instituto Pontificio San Pio X* in Salamanca, and some young French Brothers who were especially active in REPS, about whom I spoke in regard to contracts and the journal *Orientations*. Having already pursued with these young Brothers an intense and frank dialogue on the Christian school, I could appeal to them for help in improving the Council's *Declaration on Christian Education*.

From the ample documentation collected, I began in the second half of

²¹ On November 19, 1964, by 1457 *Placet* and 419 *Non Placet*, the conciliar Assembly approved in principle the entire draft schema. Previously, on October 19, 1964, the same Assembly had rejected the draft schema on priests by 1199 *Placet* and 930 *Non Placet*. On November 9, 1964, in spite of the Pope's favorable statement, the draft on the Missions had been rejected by 1601 *Placet* and 311 *Non Placet* (but the question had been reversed!).

December 1964 to write a comprehensive draft of a conciliar *Declaration on Christian Education*.²² It had sufficient scope, and I do not think it was lacking in spirit. Above all, it renewed the approach to the issue of the Catholic school in line with the vision of the relationship of the Church with the world, which writers were attempting to develop in the working drafts of the future Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). The starting point was no longer the Church's right to conduct its own schools or the obligation of Christian parents to entrust their children to Catholic schools. The draft began by emphasizing the situation of young people in the world, the importance and the difficulties of the issues about education, and, in particular, the need to recognize the *signs of the times*. From that standpoint and from the perspective of a Church that is serving human needs, Christians are encouraged to work together in the vast enterprise of educating youth in different forms and situations. The text recognizes in particular that the field of educating the young, on the one hand, goes far beyond the school; on the other hand, teachers in state-sponsored (neutral) education, by their Christian commitment, are truly performing a task of the Church—a very new concept at the time.²³

Only then does the text take up the topic of the Catholic school, viewed not as a right of the Church but as a *visible sign* of its dialogue with the world of youth and of culture.²⁴ The essential identity of the Catholic school is defined as a community of educators who are united in a project to demonstrate the Gospel in the fabric of secular reality. The Christian school is primarily a school; it cannot be Christian unless, first, it is true to the professional and relational requirements of this institution within

²² The unpublished text is reproduced in the course I gave at *Jesus Magister* (note 19 above), pp. 40–54. See the presentation in *Orientations* 20, pp. 14–26, “Le projet des Frères-enseignants.”

²³ *Gravissimum Educationis* endorses this perspective. This did not prevent one critic who was compelled to write in a well-known weekly, dated November 11, 1965, an article in which the allegations of flaws in *Gravissimum Educationis* are based on several misinterpretations caused by translations, *Orientations* 20, p. 30, note 96.

²⁴ This theme of the Christian school as a “sign” was presented and detailed in “École chrétienne et Pastorale,” by Michel Sauvage, FSC, *Orientations*, July 11, 1964, pp. 3–29, especially “De l’école chrétienne ‘efficace’ à l’école chrétienne ‘signe’ ” (pp. 14–20).

the entire domain of human existence. As for the school's specifically Christian aspect, in addition to its community character, it includes respectful attention to every young person at the center of the relationship and of the educational activities, in every aspect of being, and with the originality of a personal history, not just in intellectual ability. The Christian school stresses the evangelical style of the educational relationship, the humanistic spirit of education, the opening of young people to life and to the service of others with civic spirit and social sensitivity. The Catholic school has a mission to proclaim the Gospel explicitly to the young Christians who attend, but authentic catechesis implies the concern to promote the freedom of the act of faith. This aspect recalls the Council's difficult study of religious freedom that influenced the writing of the *Declaration on Christian Education*. Finally, the draft document recalls that the Catholic school traditionally has had a special concern for the poor, whether material poverty, emotional poverty, or poverty of faith.

Brother Nicet-Joseph presented the draft of the text to the Sub-Commission charged with the topic of Christian education. The chairman, Bishop Daem, first ordinary of the recently formed diocese of Antwerp and previously the director of Catholic education in Belgium, was in favor of improving the text and supported our efforts in that direction. However, the key person on the Sub-Commission was Father Augustin Mayer, a German Benedictine, professor at the University of Saint Anselm, and Under-Secretary of the Commission. He received my draft positively, but a procedural problem arose. Because the Council had already approved a basic text during its third session, it was not possible to substitute a different one. The only solution was to extract from the proposed new text certain fragments that could be introduced as *modi* in the text that was approved in 1964.

Father Mayer invited me to work with him in preparing the final text of the conciliar *Declaration on Christian Education*. It was not difficult at all to find a number of paragraphs from the draft to enrich the lean conciliar text. One *modum* was to make a drastic change in the document's approach, in the sense that I mentioned earlier. It was the riskiest change

in that it could be challenged as a fundamental alteration²⁵ of the text voted in principle by the Council.²⁶ In the debate during the fourth session, one or other Council Father did acknowledge the importance of the changes introduced, but for most of them it was a matter of improving a text by adding a little more substance. The solid presentation of the reporter, Bishop Daem, and his skill and good humor were instrumental in the acceptance of the text of *Gravissimum Educationis*. Nevertheless, it is not a “great” conciliar text. The work I described could not be anything but hasty, and it remained unsatisfactory. Also, at the final vote, on October 28, 1965, a sizable minority voted *Non Placet*. It was the object of scornful criticism, especially by some Fathers and many commentators.²⁷ Some critics, evidently, failed to recognize the radical “novelty” of several positions in the *Declaration on Christian Education*. The genre of such documents imposed an extreme brevity that did not allow for the uninitiated any measure of distance from the 1964 text. The document was especially criticized for being “out of tune” with all the other conciliar texts, a reaction I summarized at the beginning of my *Jesus Magister* course in 1966–67 with the following parable:²⁸

... [Thus] alongside the other documents of Vatican II, strong ships built according to the latest technology, with all the most modern equipment and weaponry, which would not only permit the living Church to con-

²⁵ In fact, when the amended text was submitted to a vote in October 1965, these changes would seem so important to some Fathers that several envisaged submitting it to the Council’s administrative tribunal. In his *relatio* for presenting the final text, Bishop Daem expressed his opinion that the text remained *quoad substantiam intactus*, but that it had been *notabiliter enucleatus*, in accord with the wishes of the Fathers. His presentation emphasized the meaning and the nature of *ampliatio*.

²⁶ An important detail: the project I had written only covered the first nine articles of the Council’s draft. I had not addressed the issue dealt with in articles 10 to 12 (Catholic universities and faculties of theology). Nevertheless, I participated with Bishop Mayer in their final rewrite. I had the opportunity later to meet Bishop Mayer again and to work with him when he became Secretary of the Congregation for Religious in the 1970s. My sister, a Daughter of Charity, sent to Rome to work in the French section of this Congregation, became the appreciated colleague of the Secretary, and she continued with him when he was made a Cardinal, became Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, and headed the Commission *Ecclesia Dei*, established by Pope Paul VI to receive the *Lefebvristes* of the Society of Saint Pius X who refused to follow the dissident archbishop in his schism.

²⁷ I included some of the most significant criticism in my 1966–67 course at *Jesus Magister*, p. 1; see *Orientations* 18, pp. 5–6.

²⁸ Translated by editor. See note 19; course cited, p. 2; *Orientations* 18, pp. 5–6.

front with security the stormy sea of the contemporary world but also help Christians to participate effectively alongside their fellow human beings to inventory and to exploit the riches hardly suspected of this world, the tiny boat *Gravissimum Educationis* made a rather pathetic figure. A belated witness of the era of sailing ships, it runs the risk of taking on water everywhere and would best serve to welcome nostalgic Christians, who do not understand the part to be played in the open ocean, on promenades with neither danger nor profit and within a tranquil harbor. Did we not learn that this fragile and outdated skiff even failed to fly the ecumenical flag?²⁹

Miguel—*You mentioned the great conciliar texts. What impact did they have on your thinking and on your way of understanding the evangelical life in the Church?*

Michel—In general, I was greatly influenced by a number of conciliar documents, especially by the four Constitutions (the most revolutionary, in my opinion, being *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation) and the truly revolutionary texts, each in its own way, on religious freedom, on the lay state, and on the priestly ministry. This is not the place to speak about them. I limit myself here to the main texts of Vatican II that helped me renew my understanding of the “religious life”—and my evolution has not yet ended! The texts are of two kinds, which I will discuss in turn. The first group renews what can be termed the doctrinal approach to the religious life. The second group refers to what Vatican II itself calls the effective renewal of the religious life.

NEW DOCTRINAL APPROACHES

As for *doctrinal approaches*, rather than go into a long development, I will simply highlight a few milestones, beginning with the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, clarified and completed by *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Gaudium et Spes*. In *Lumen Gentium*'s chapter on

²⁹ In the course, I decided, instead, to compare the text of *Gravissimum Educationis* with the major conciliar documents to show that it did indeed share the same spirit. The postconciliar history of *Gravissimum Educationis* is more positive and reassuring. The problem of the education and the schooling of the young, however, is profoundly more complex and subject to change.

the religious life, six points contribute to renew, even to revolutionize, our way of thinking.

1) The religious life finds its place within the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. This simple fact that seems to go without saying was not easily accepted, especially by the religious present at the Council. Many would have preferred a special dogmatic text for themselves, a wish that corresponded to a desire to share the widespread notion that “religious” are a world unto themselves. In fact, by being placed in the Church, in the heart of God’s design of the mystery of Christ and of the action of the Holy Spirit, and in the midst of Christian people on pilgrimage to the ultimate Jerusalem, religious are “recognized” far more and far better than by making them a sort of caste apart. Furthermore, some might have been shocked a bit that *Lumen Gentium* affirms that religious belong to the life of the Church, not to its structure.

Reflecting on this leads to at least a twofold important recognition. Although the hierarchical structure of the Church exists to support its life, that is to say, the growth in it and in its members of the Christian mystery, the life of the Church does not depend on this structure alone. It is constantly revived by the Holy Spirit, acting beyond institutional boundaries and dealing with human needs and situations in the world, as even the history of religious orders shows. Correspondingly, the religious life is “charismatic,” not only in its origin but also in the specific historical development of Institutes and their members. They are constantly tempted, of course, to become institutionalized, but their own vitality and the essential service they render to the Church endlessly remind them of the creative and innovative freedom of the Holy Spirit in relation to organizational structures.

2) This major teaching is repeated more specifically in *Perfectae Caritatis* 1, which recalls the successive forms of the religious life throughout the evolution of the Church and of humanity. In that text I see a second orientation that seems to me fundamental to any theological study of the religious life in the Church. The historical approach must be preferred, starting with specific realizations rather than with a general, deductive approach that initially tries to define “the essence of religious life” before

finding the elements in its diversified forms. Unfortunately, in this regard we are far from taking this historical approach into account, whether in the reflections of theologians or in the many documents of the Magisterium. *Perfectae Caritatis* confirms, nonetheless, the priority of the historical, specific approach by outlining in sections 7 to 11 a kind of typology of the various embodiments of the religious life—Institutes entirely ordered to consecration; Institutes dedicated to the apostolic life, the monastic and conventual life, or the lay religious life; secular Institutes.

3) In *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), the chapter on the religious life walks in tandem with the chapter that describes the universal call to holiness, to the perfection of charity. Contrary to what had long been taught in error—and instilled in so many men and women religious—the religious are not “professionals” of holiness; they do not have a monopoly. They do not possess particular ways to gain it, the “evangelical counsels,” for example,³⁰ while the simple faithful can content themselves with precepts. Their vocation is particular, of course, but just as every Christian has a unique and original vocation.

Commitment to the religious life is one way among others to live and to develop the common baptismal vocation. The entire Gospel is for all Christians, but an important corollary must be mentioned here. The search for the perfection of charity is a common vocation for all Christians. For each person, the search occurs in the specific situation in which people find themselves, and there is no point in dreaming about conditions or means that objectively might be better. This is what Saint Francis de Sales, for example, told a mother who was frustrated by her inability to follow monastic observances. In fact, the point is that everyone must engage in the search for the perfection of charity, not just in the particular situation but based on the conditions in that situation. Real life is the occasion as well as the substance of the offering of spiritual sacrifice. What applies to “laypeople” with respect to religious is true also for the

³⁰ The recent return—especially since John Paul II—of the expression “evangelical counsels” as a term applied in a privileged manner to religious is a damaging regression, it seems to me, and one that I do not understand.

various forms of the religious life. It is regrettable, for example, that apostolic orders adopted so many monastic “forms.” Ignatius of Loyola, for instance, considered it essential that the Jesuits not be obligated to pray the Divine Office together in choir. On the more positive side, this perspective suggests that the Brother’s “secular” activities are also components of his consecrated life.

4) I will not develop this crucial point, but there is much to say related to a fourth aspect that is also evident in *Lumen Gentium*. One of the traditional definitions of the “religious life” is the *Sequela Christi*, the following of Christ (which refers to any Christian vocation). Often this *Sequela Christi* was, in a way, concentrated on the practice of poverty, chastity, and obedience (identified as the three famous evangelical counsels), a singular reduction of the Gospel and a Procrustean bed tending to standardize the different forms of the religious life. A quite simple and very beautiful text of *Lumen Gentium* suggests a completely different way of thinking about the *Sequela Christi*:

Religious should carefully keep before their minds the fact that the Church presents Christ to believers and non-believers alike in a striking manner daily through them. The Church thus portrays Christ in contemplation on the mountain, in His proclamation of the kingdom of God to the multitudes, in His healing of the sick and maimed, in His work of converting sinners to a better life, in His solicitude for youth and His goodness to all men, always obedient to the will of the Father who sent Him.³¹

The Church *manifests* Christ through the religious and the diversity of their lifestyles and their tasks. This is the heart of the Christian mystery, the divinization of the human. We must get rid of what the image of the expression *Sequela Christi* might imply extrinsically, as though it were an imitation of a pre-existing, evangelical model. In truth, for Christians who have become children of God by Baptism, to live is the Christ. It is by their membership as children of God, inseparable from the individual vocation to which everyone is called in the reality of earthly existence,

³¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 46; http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

that Christians become the persons they are, enabling their filial and fraternal intentions (the will of the Father), their commitment to realize the filial and fraternal project (the Kingdom of God), and their evangelical style of filial and fraternal life in conformity with the image of God (the sanctification of God's name) to grow. I think that here we are at the heart of another conciliar emphasis.

Vatican II restored the primary position of religious consecration, which constitutes an expression of baptismal consecration. That consecration has a dual aspect, the first being religious profession, the offer of an entire life, present and to come, and the entire and future person. The second aspect of consecrated life is less often considered: when religious offer themselves entirely in the spirit of responding to a perceived, fundamental call, their entire life story is dedicated to making this offering effective in the "little by little" of the daily gift. According to the beautiful expression of Father Michel Rondet, SJ, "I consecrate my life, but my life consecrates me"—my life in its specific details, many of which are in the secular domain in the Brother's case.

5) This thought leads to a fifth important point, which I already mentioned and which *Lumen Gentium* more than implies but only *Perfectae Caritatis* affirms:

In these communities apostolic and charitable activity belongs to the very nature of the religious life, seeing that it is a holy service and a work characteristic of love, entrusted to them by the Church to be carried out in its name.³²

We must no longer speak about the two purposes of the religious life!

6) More discreetly, although still an essential point, *Lumen Gentium* states that religious are not strangers to the life of this world. This sixth and final major change in the doctrinal approach is already a reversal in perspective about the relationship of religious with the world. It is not only, or even primarily, to live "separated from the world" but to be present in it.

³² *Perfectae Caritatis*, 8; http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html www.vatican.va.

Miguel—*This is a crucial insight. In your courses you often speak about this tension between separation from the world—in the monastic life—and the presence in the world that the Brother’s professional life requires. Does the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* primarily affirm this concept of the religious life?*

Michel—It is true that the starting point of my thinking about this matter, even before the Council, was the importance of the Brother’s professional work in his practical living of the religious life. These duties are how he collaborates in building the world. Secondly, human education and contributing to the development of people by expanding their intelligence, their talents, their freedom, and their sensitivity participate in the realization of God’s plan. Humans are made in the image of God and are called by God to grow according to this image. Thirdly, with regard to the person of the Brother and his vocation, I think it is very significant that he be totally dedicated to God and at the same time be able to live, without restrictions, his commitment to the earthly city through his work and his responsibility for it.

In this regard, since the Council I have often said—and I maintain to this day—that we ought to rethink the evangelical life, particularly the life of the Brother, in the light of *Gaudium et Spes* as much as of *Lumen Gentium*. I am appalled that there is hardly ever a reference to *Gaudium et Spes* when people talk about the religious life—the vision of the human, of history, of the needs of the world, of culture, of current reality, and of human commitment in the world.

I want to be more specific in what I mean. It is regrettable that the thinking about the religious life does not sufficiently apply the magnificent texts of Part I of *Gaudium et Spes*, “The Church and Man’s Calling”—”The Dignity of the Human Person” (chapter I), “The Community of Mankind” (chapter II), “Man’s Activity Throughout the World” (chapter III), and “The Role of the Church in the Modern World” (chapter IV). I spoke earlier about the *Sequela Christi*. I regret that this central reality of religious life is not thoroughly understood as depicted in the concluding paragraphs of these chapters of *Gaudium et Spes*:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mys-

tery of man take on light... Christ ... by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear...

He Who is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness...

The Christian ... conformed to the likeness of that Son ... received “the first-fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love.³³

So from the beginning of salvation history He has chosen men not just as individuals but as members of a certain community.

This communitarian character is developed and consummated in the work of Jesus Christ. For the very Word made flesh willed to share in the human fellowship.

As the firstborn of many brethren and by the giving of His Spirit, He founded after His death and resurrection a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love.³⁴

Appointed Lord by His resurrection and given plenary power in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of His Holy Spirit, arousing not only a desire for the age to come, but by that very fact animating, purifying and strengthening those noble longings too by which the human family makes its life more human and strives to render the whole earth submissive to this goal.³⁵

For God’s Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men and sum up all things in Himself... Enlivened and united in His Spirit, we journey toward the consummation of human history, one which fully accords with the counsel of God’s love: “To reestablish all things in Christ...” (Eph 1:10).³⁶

It seems to me that the rich insights in these texts have not been sufficiently applied in thinking about the religious life. New perspectives on consecration might be discovered. It is consecration to God, of course,

³³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.1, 2, 4; http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

³⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 32.1, 2, 4.

³⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 38.1.

³⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.2.

but also a commitment to human service, to human development, to compassion among people, and to human communion and reconciliation. In this same line of thinking, I imagined a different triad: a vow to seek God, a vow to build brotherhood, and a vow of service to liberate and to heal people.³⁷

Basically, what stands out for me in *Gaudium et Spes* is its anthropocentrism. If I were asked, however, to sum up Vatican Council II or to select what was most impressive at the Council, the text that comes to mind would be the extraordinary homily of Pope Paul VI during the Mass at the last public meeting of the Council, December 7, 1965. I was present for what seemed like an illumination for me and the key to understand the entire conciliar movement and the texts produced during the four sessions. Paul VI said, in substance, “The Council was especially concerned with the human. Will it be said that in doing so, it had no concern for God? Not at all, for the search for God and the search for the human cannot be separated. The human is the only path of the human to God.” I prefer to quote a few passages from this homily, a recapitulation and a manifesto with its interpretation of meaning and prophetic orientation:

Yes, the Church of the council has been concerned, not just with herself and with her relationship of union with God, but with man... The religion of the God who became man has met the religion ... of man who makes himself God. And what happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation? There could have been, but there was none... The attention of our Council has been absorbed by the discovery of human needs...

The modern mind, accustomed to assess everything in terms of usefulness, will readily admit that the Council's value is great if only because everything has been referred to human usefulness... In this way the Catholic religion and human life reaffirm their alliance with one another, the fact that they converge on one single human reality: the Catholic religion is for mankind. In a certain sense it is the life of mankind...

[Our Council] has been deeply committed to the study of the modern world ... so much so that some have been inclined to suspect that an easy-going and excessive responsiveness to the outside world ... may have

³⁷ In a course at *Jesus Magister*, 1971–72, “Les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse,” *Lasallianum* 16, 1973, pp. 83–90.

swayed ... at the expense of the fidelity which is due to tradition, and this to the detriment of the religious orientation of the council itself...

... if we remember ... how in everyone we can and must recognize the countenance of Christ (cf. Matt 25:40), the Son of Man, especially when tears and sorrows make it plain to see, and if we can and must recognize in Christ's countenance the countenance of our heavenly Father[,] "He who sees me," Our Lord said, "sees also the Father" (John 14:9), our humanism becomes Christianity, our Christianity becomes centered on God; in such sort that we may say ... a knowledge of man is a prerequisite for a knowledge of God.³⁸

ADAPTED RENEWAL OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE*

The entire doctrinal richness of the Council seeks one thing only, according to Paul VI's memorable homily: *to serve humanity*. I think that the theological viewpoints on religious life that I mentioned also find their meaning in that same light. The veritable revolution that the Council brought to the discussion on the religious life is a call to action and not just an opportunity for reflection. *The adapted renewal of the religious life* that *Perfectae Caritatis* directs us to launch is far from being complete; however, that effort derives its significance and its scope only in reference to the desire *to serve humanity*.

Since the promulgation of this conciliar decree on the religious life, I have been both fascinated and skeptical about what the Council asked religious Institutes to accomplish. I can think of no similar instance of such a request, whether in other documents of Vatican II or in the entire history of the religious life. In the course I offered at *Jesus Magister* soon after the Council ended, I examined at length the history of the changes to the title

³⁸ Address of Pope Paul VI during the last general meeting of the Second Vatican Council; http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_epilogo-concilio_en.html.

* Brother Michel speaks about "la rénovation adaptée de la vie religieuse." The Vatican's English translation of *Perfectae Caritatis* uses the expression, "the renewal and the adaptation of the religious life," both in the main title and throughout the text. The main title in the Vatican's French translation is "Décret sur la Rénovation et l'Adaptation de la Vie religieuse," but throughout the French text the expression is *rénovation adaptée de la vie religieuse*. The English translation in this current work, at times, uses the expression *adapted renewal* to convey Michel's thought in his French text.—Ed.

of the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. From a doctrinal statement and static view at the outset—“Constitution on the States of Perfection,” the initial draft prior to the Council—the title of the conciliar draft became simply, “The Adaptation of the Religious Life.” Then came a dichotomous title, “The Renewal and the Adaptation of the Religious Life” (“La Rénovation et l’Adaptation de la Vie religieuse”), followed by the final language in the last session, “The Adapted Renewal of the Religious Life” (“La Rénovation adaptée de la Vie religieuse”).

The classic idea until Vatican Council II—the existence of “states of perfection”—was abandoned when *Lumen Gentium* restated the universal call to Gospel holiness. The initial focus on the word adaptation, dear to Pius XII, urged religious Institutes, often prone to preserve their practices and their projects, to engage in essential updating. The next step in writing the draft of *Perfectae Caritatis* introduced the word *renewal*, giving it equal importance with adaptation. An explanation of the term called for the *restoration of the past*.³⁹ If this terminology had endured, Institutes would have been confused about how to complete their postconciliar task. They would have been pulled every which way, much more than they actually were, between members more concerned about adaptation and meeting present needs and conditions and those more inclined to maintain traditional forms. The final version of *Perfectae Caritatis* uses the expression adapted renewal (*accommodata renovatio*), which retains the idea of adaptation as an attribute that denotes a quality of the renewal that deserves attention.

Renewal is no longer defined as the restoration of the forms of the past but as a return to the sources of the Gospel and of the Institute. Today the perspective, a quite different one, is creativity and dynamism. Schematically, I point out two major differences between “adaptation” and “renewal” in the sense that *Perfectae Caritatis* finally uses these words. These fundamental differences point to a radical, innovative challenge that might seem impossible. Adaptation is primarily concerned with the

³⁹ Renewal must include “the restoration of the past, when necessary, including the elements required for authentic religious life or those that the Institute has chosen in its origin or in its history and that cannot be abandoned without peril.”

way of being, with the forms (to be rejuvenated and pruned) and the “how” of the Institute. Renewal focuses on the *raison d'être*, the purpose and the “why” that the Institute must recall and embody in the world today according to the Founder’s *spirit and specific intentions*. These two expressions are not vague approximations; their content is precise and can be analyzed. The solution is not in predetermined realities that only need to be reproduced but in recovering the creative dynamism at the origins that must become active again in the real world.

A second difference is similar to the first. One can say that the process of adaptation occurs by concentrating on the Institute itself—its *Rule*, its customs, its projects—and by transforming it from within. The work of adapting an Institute consists in revising its *Rule* or in updating its apostolic commitments. By shifting the focus from *adaptation to adapted renewal*, the Council starts with why the Institute was founded, not with the Institute as it is—that is to say, starting with the needs of people and of the world and applying in a Gospel spirit the Institute’s specific response. The renewal will not come from the Institute but—inspired by the Love that comes from God—from listening to the calls of the world.

What strikes me today about this language in relation to Pope Paul VI’s homily is that all the Council’s work is directed to the *service of humanity*. Reflecting on the history of the religious life in the Church, with its successive appearances under various forms, demonstrates that every new Institute is born to respond with some service, new or renewed, for humanity, especially for people who are poor, marginalized, and abandoned. The *Sequela Christi* that is constant in all the forms of the religious life brings the saving presence of Jesus Christ, the image and the intimate of the Father, constantly letting himself be filled with compassion by the distress that he encounters—to the point of giving his life for human salvation.

An Institute that creates itself is always “the Gospel that springs forth in the situation,” as Father Chenu says about Saint Dominic’s foundation. Not only does the Gospel spring forth in the situation; the new foundation applies the Gospel in the precise, appropriate form that the situation requires. This makes the foundation actual, responsive, and appealing,

because it comes alive in response to a need that is often an emergency. This aspect also carries the risk that the original form will become more or less rapidly obsolete, even almost a caricature. The most typical instance of instantaneous burst and rapid expiration is the “military” order. In reality, the risk of being out of touch with reality is inherent in the Gospel response that various religious orders make.⁴⁰ At a time of change in civilization, one of Luther’s major criticisms of religious orders was their “institutionalization.” The good fortune of new religious institutes can quickly become their Achilles’ heel, to the extent that a generation of “conquerors” is followed by one of “keepers,” if not of “ghosts.”⁴¹

Admittedly, the legislation on the religious life that Rome progressively issued, especially during the nineteenth century, tended to favor uniformity, steadiness—even sclerosis—in religious Institutes. I gave some examples earlier when speaking about “the cult of the *Rule*.” This is why the reversal by *Perfectae Caritatis* to renewal is for me a “Copernican revolution” in the Magisterium’s approach to the religious life.⁴² But over the course of the years, it seems to me that the key to this radical revolution that in many ways invites religious Institutes and their members to “burn what they adored and adore what they burned” is concern for the Gospel service of humanity.

What does *Perfectae Caritatis*,⁴³ in effect, require of Institutes and of religious? It is to decentralize, not from a desire to maintain what they have acquired⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, OP, wrote in one of his books on religious life that very often the emergence of new congregations can be explained as a consequence of the non-adaptation of old forms to new contexts, more than as the emergence of an original charism. Instead of adapting the ancestral trunk that is too heavy to move, the preference was to let it follow its destiny, but to transfer some new sap into a side branch.

⁴¹ I am referring here to the work by Jean Lacouture on the history of the Jesuits, *Jesuits: a Multibiography*. Translated from the French by Jeremy Leggett. Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995; London: Harvill, 1996, 550 p.

⁴² This is true at least at Vatican Council II, because I must mention the tensions, the blockages, and also some questioning in the application of *Perfectae Caritatis*.

⁴³ Joined with it is the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* of Paul VI, which defines the terms for initiating the renewal.

⁴⁴ *Perfectae Caritatis* 3: “The manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted ... to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances... Therefore let constitutions ... be suitably re-edited and obsolete laws ... suppressed.”

or to seek their own perfection,⁴⁵ but to listen again to the calls of the people today,⁴⁶ to share the present concerns of the Church,⁴⁷ and in so doing to return to the Gospel source of the *Sequela Christi*⁴⁸ and to the charism surging from their origins.⁴⁹ Although not spelled out in *Perfectae Caritatis*—but related necessarily to *Gaudium et Spes*—the Council engages religious in an unprecedented undertaking, because we are living in a time of change in society and in the Church’s position in it that is unprecedented as the world becomes more autonomous and secular. The challenges implied in Emmanuel Mounier’s expression *Feu la chrétienté* (a possible translation is *Defunct Christianity*) never cease unfolding, confusing us, and constantly forcing us into more than one new exodus.

Perfectae Caritatis, then, launched a unique, unprecedented process for every religious Institute. The Council did not merely express a pious wish; it determined that all congregations must quickly begin this adapted renewal. It listed the criteria in the initial paragraphs and provided specific directions for practical implementation. “An effective renewal and adaptation demands the cooperation of all the members of the institute.” The decision making “belongs especially to general chapters,” but “superiors should take counsel in an appropriate way and hear the members of the order in those things which concern the future well being of the whole institute.”⁵⁰ This explicit wish to make religious active participants in the enterprise of their renewal sounds a new tone but is consistent with the Council’s teaching on the responsibility of the members of the People of God:

Whoever they are, they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification, since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer.⁵¹

⁴⁵ *Perfectae Caritatis* 8.

⁴⁶ *Perfectae Caritatis* 2d.

⁴⁷ *Perfectae Caritatis* 2c.

⁴⁸ *Perfectae Caritatis* 2a.

⁴⁹ *Perfectae Caritatis* 2b.

⁵⁰ *Perfectae Caritatis* 4.

⁵¹ *Lumen Gentium* 33. The theme of the participation of all (here the laity) *in the life of the Church* continues in the sections that follow: participation in the common priesthood and in worship (*LG* 34), the prophetic office of Christ and witness (*LG* 35), and the royal service (*LG* 36).

This desire for the active participation by all religious is also consistent with the concept in *Perfectae Caritatis* of religious obedience.⁵² It is consistent with the Council's teaching on the value of and the respect owed to the human person.

Paul VI announced even more specific guidelines for implementing the renewal of religious life in *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. This *Motu Proprio* gives extremely practical directives for implementing *Perfectae Caritatis* during the period of adapted renewal: the importance of the Special General Chapter, to be held in two or three years, which can have several sessions;⁵³ the preparation of this Chapter by a full and free consultation of the members;⁵⁴ the broad powers of the Special Chapter to change certain provisions of the *Constitutions* and also to undertake experiments contrary to the common law (with the prior approval of the Holy See).⁵⁵ The new *Rule* must include in one "fundamental code"

- a) The evangelical and theological principles of the religious life ... and suitable and clear words in which the spirit of the founders and their specific aims and healthy traditions ... are acknowledged and preserved. b) The necessary juridical norms for defining clearly the character, purpose and means of the institute...⁵⁶

In short, the central theme—and the spirit—that inspired this document are at the opposite pole of the Roman Curia's practice in the nineteenth century and in the first part of the twentieth:

That each Institute take its destiny into its own hands, examine itself

⁵² Religious "should use both the forces of their intellect and will and the gifts of nature and grace to execute the commands and fulfill the duties entrusted to them. In this way religious obedience, far from lessening the dignity of the human person, by extending the freedom of the sons of God, leads it to maturity." As for Superiors, "Subjects should be brought to the point where they will cooperate with an active and responsible obedience..." (*Perfectae Caritatis* 14).

⁵³ *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, I, 3, August 6, 1966; http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19660806_ecclesiae-sanctae_en.html.

⁵⁴ *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, I, 4; cf. 2.

⁵⁵ *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, I, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, II, 12–13. No. 14 adds, "Those norms however which correspond with the needs of the present time, the physical and psychological conditions of the members and particular circumstances should be set down in supplementary codes..."

before God, be more integrated with the Church and faithful to the spirit of its founder.⁵⁷

One of Paul VI's sentences in *Ecclesiae Sanctae* that went unnoticed⁵⁸ seems to me, in a way, to be the most important one in the document: "Nevertheless, suitable renewal cannot be made once and for all but should be encouraged in a continuing way, with the help of the zeal of the members."⁵⁹

Once again, this *Motu Proprio* overturned a too institutional and static concept of the religious life. The primary focus was often on permanent organizational structures, what might be called "institutions as things." The renewal enterprise requires an adaptation of these structures, including the revision of the *Rule*. However, the process envisaged by the Council is not simply to pass from one static situation to an equally unchangeable one, merely by going through a transitional period of experiences by trial and error. The statement that the *renewal is to be permanent* and must be *maintained by the fervor of the religious* replaces structural priority with living members. An Institute is not primarily texts and laws, perfect as they might be at any given time. An Institute is the living members who compose it and who are responsible for it, day by day, as they listen to God in everyday life rather than in the letter of a ready-made text. The emphasis is no longer on "institutions-things" but on "institutions-persons." "The form of government should be such that the chapters and councils ... each in its own way express the participation and concern of all the members for the welfare of the whole community..."⁶⁰

The Council's consistency is extraordinary. Every aspect of the instructions and the issues it addressed is based, according to Paul VI, on serving humanity and on personal respect and development of the person. As for the adapted renewal of the religious life, for which the texts provided no

⁵⁷ Armand Le Bourgeois, Bishop of Autun, *Histoire et bref commentaire du Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, p. 19.

⁵⁸ A typical example is in the commentary of Bishop Le Bourgeois, cited in the previous note, who moves from no. 18 to no. 21 without mentioning this sentence.

⁵⁹ *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, III, 19.

⁶⁰ *Ecclesiae Sanctae* II, III, 18.

details, the difficulty of such a project stems from its being so against the grain of what religious had been living and what “the competent authority” considered normal.⁶¹

Perfectae Caritatis—and *Lumen Gentium* before it—invited religious and their communities to shift focus from the institution to the person, from community observance to community relations, from separation from the world to presence in the world, from uniformity to pluralism.⁶² Because I spoke earlier about the “impossible challenge,” I need to mention some difficulties or crises that occurred in a number of Institutes in the 1970s. The change initiated by Vatican II did involve some evident risks of going off course. The central place accorded to the person could be impaired by individualism; loosening organizational structures could lead to temptations of anarchy (in community prayer, for example); encouraging pluralism could give free rein to dispersion and complicate the role of leadership, and, especially, the suddenness of the changes could affect a sense of belonging linked to accustomed ways of living. In almost all Institutes, the years from 1968 to 1980 would see a veritable drain of departures of men and women religious (as of diocesan priests).

These and other risks occurred, but are they enough to call into question the Council’s new guidelines? Are these guidelines not more related to the Gospel? Is it not necessary to engage ourselves in a concept of the religious life based on the free and voluntary membership of persons called by the Lord—who strive to experience day after day an inner relationship with the God of Jesus Christ who requires the gift of self in fraternal openness, in communion with the human struggle for justice, and in renewed service to the world according to the Institute’s specific vocation? This renewed vitality would arise, and the adapted renewal of the religious life, in spite of trials and failures, ultimately would become a living reality in religious Institutes.

⁶¹ To be fair, I must note that the renewal movement was already in process in many Institutes, as I described at some length for the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools between 1946 and 1966.

⁶² Father Vincent de Couesnongle, the French Assistant, later the Master General of the Dominicans, published in the 1970s the results of a survey entitled “La vie communautaire dans les Instituts religieux hier et aujourd’hui.” The contrasts I mention are from these results.

This renewal movement would come to life, it seems to me, in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at the 1966–1967 General Chapter, about which I will say no more for the moment. To be more specific, my recounting of the actual start of the adapted renewal and its course in the Institute for thirty years will constitute an illustration of the “Promethean” enterprise that Vatican Council II wished to undertake.

Chapter 9 – *PREPARING AND LAUNCHING THE 1966–1967 GENERAL CHAPTER*

1965–1966: ANTICIPATING THE 1966 GENERAL CHAPTER⁶³

Michel—In chapter 5, we spoke about the implementation of two of the three major decisions of the 1956 General Chapter: *to return the Rule to the Institute, by initiating a radical revision of the text, and to return the Founder to history*, by relaunching Lasallian Studies. A third decision, envisaging nothing less than *to return the Institute to the Brothers*, profoundly changed the way in which the Brothers participate in preparing future General Chapters.

Before discussing Brother Superior Nicet-Joseph’s application of this decision, I must mention, without going into details, two *Circulars* of a particular genre that he signed: *Circular 371*, February 2, 1962, “The Catechetical Mission of the Brother of the Christian Schools,” and *Circular 382*, March 7, 1965, “Our Participation in the Liturgical Renewal.” These documents in many ways were unlike the usual genre of communications from the Generalate. First of all, Brother Superior indicated that both *Circulars* were written by Brother experts, although he did not name them.⁶⁴ *Circular 383*, on catechetics, extended to the entire Institute the results of the renewal initiated in France.⁶⁵ Moreover, both

⁶³ For writing the following chapters, I had the benefit of the work by Brother Luke Salm, *A Religious Institute in Transition; the Story of Three General Chapters* (Romeoville, Illinois: Christian Brothers Publications, 1992). Although our approaches are different, the material is often similar. To avoid repetition, I will refer as needed to Brother Luke’s book.

⁶⁴ Only *Circular 371* mentions these “experts” explicitly, although indirectly: “We wholeheartedly thank our colleagues who assisted us in achieving this work” (p. 18). In fact, Brother Nicet-Joseph asked Brothers associated with the journal *Catéchistes*, Brothers Vincent Ayel, André Fermet, and Michel Sauvage, to share the writing (see *La passion d’évangéliser, Frère Vincent Ayel [1920–1991]*, Sauvage, 1996, p. 22).

⁶⁵ *Circular 382* speaks of “the great diversity of geographical, historical, and cultural contexts in which you live and work, our very dear Brothers ... because of that, all communities and Districts are not aware of the issue of liturgical renewal to the same extent” (p. 5).

documents were veritable treatises on these same issues that were alive in the Church⁶⁶ at the time and were marked by the conciliar spirit. The *Circular* on the Liturgy relied on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963).⁶⁷ Finally, without saying so, it might seem that by publishing these two *Circulars*, Brother Nicet-Joseph took a position contrary to that of previous Roman Superiors, who had thwarted—if not condemned—the catechetical renewal led by Brother Vincent Ayel.⁶⁸ He also distanced himself from the *Circular*, *Nos prières vocales*, that had provoked such a negative reaction prior to the 1956 General Chapter.⁶⁹

CIRCULAR 379 (DECEMBER 18, 1963) AND THE INSTITUTE QUESTIONNAIRE

The decree of the 1956 General Chapter on the writing of Notes by the Brothers for the next General Chapter determined the calendar for imple-

⁶⁶ *Circular* 371, 115 pages, and *Circular* 382, 140 pages, have detailed tables of contents. About *Circular* 382, on the Liturgy, “A connoisseur of the Liturgy, Dom Pierret, Benedictine Abbot of La Source in Paris, wrote on August 19, 1965, about all the good things he saw: ‘It is a masterful job where the problem is discussed in depth and beautifully structured. Everyone to whom I showed it is unanimous in praising the quality of the work, and I wish that all Superiors of clergy and religious had given similar instructions to their members’” (*La Passion d’évangéliser*, Sauvage, 1996, p. 22, tr. by ed.).

⁶⁷ From beginning to end, *Circular* 382 refers to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* but amplifies its perspectives. It begins by also referring to the *Instruction* for implementing SC, “published on September 26, 1964, and to go into effect on March 7, 1965, the first Sunday of Lent, when a number of changes to the liturgical rites become effective.” *Circular* 382 is dated March 7, 1965, the first Sunday of Lent.

⁶⁸ I spoke about this earlier, see *La passion d’évangéliser*, Sauvage, 1996, pp. 21–22, “une fin de non-recevoir.”

⁶⁹ *Circular* 351, *Nos prières vocales*, December 8, 1955, based on an encyclical of Pius XII, spoke against supporters of a liturgical renewal of the prayers used by the Brothers and concluded that all our daily prayers constitute “a family Liturgy.” More open while remaining cautious, Brother Nicet-Joseph wrote, “However, without wishing to anticipate the possible and desirable decisions of the 1966 General Chapter, we can say, as a certainty, that our community prayers will be more influenced by the liturgical spirit” (pp. 101–03). Between 1956 and 1966, a member of the Régime, Brother Aubert-Joseph, was a strong proponent, although alone, of the liturgical reform of the Brothers’ vocal prayers. He clearly explains in his unpublished *Autobiographie*, after the reaction caused by Brother Denis’s *Circular*, “Brother Superior (Nicet-Joseph) asked the Régime (in 1956) to start working on this issue without delay. Among the Assistants, I was almost alone in advocating a major overhaul, but most wanted to settle for rather superficial changes” (*Autobiographie*, B48, text provided by Brother Georges Authier, Archivist at the rue de Sèvres in Paris).

menting this decision:

Two years before the opening of the General Chapter the Most Honored Brother Superior General shall notify, by letter, the Brothers professed with perpetual vows that they may prepare notes for the General Chapter... Within a period not exceeding four months ... these notes shall be forwarded to the District administration... Brother Visitor shall call together the members of the District Council and proceed to the opening and classification of the notes... A period of eight months shall be allotted for these preparatory labors.⁷⁰

On December 18, 1963, *Circular 379* presented to the Brothers a lengthy questionnaire designed to elicit their thoughts and responses for a General Chapter that had not yet been officially announced. Brother Nicet-Joseph's open and bold reflections⁷¹ that preceded the text of the questionnaire were also fearful and full of misgivings. On the one hand, the Superior, profoundly influenced by his participation in Vatican II's second session, did not hesitate to apply to the Brothers the remarks made by the new Pope, Paul VI, who had asked the Roman clergy soon after his election to be actively involved with him in the renewal of the apostolate in the diocese of Rome. Thus, continued Brother Nicet-Joseph, "We must clearly understand that the Institute is each of us. It will be what we make of it."⁷² This is an entirely new language for a Superior General to use in addressing his Brothers.

The *Circular* went on to recommend that communities meet to develop collective responses to the questionnaire, it being clearly understood that the voices of the youngest professed with temporary vows must be heard as much as those of the older ones.⁷³ Brother Nicet-Joseph had the perception and the certitude that the ensuing General Chapter was going to be innovative—a new Pentecost, the Institute's adaptation and *aggiornamento*.

But from that point the Superior's text shifted to multiple warnings. We

⁷⁰ *Circular 354*, 1956, p. 119–20.

⁷¹ Cf. Salm, 1992, p. 20.

⁷² *Circular 379*, p. 10.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

must adapt,⁷⁴ of course, but the essentials will never change. “It will always be necessary to procure our salvation, to develop Christian and religious virtues, to maintain and defend the life of prayer, to fight against our laziness, pride, and instability... The adaptation to modern trends will never be a value in itself...” There is certainly constructive criticism, but there is—alas! and too often—the other, “this *bad* criticism, criticism that is too quick, which unfortunately is the *evil of the time*.”⁷⁵ The text concludes with a description of various forms of the accumulating malaise and its negative manifestations:

Are there not too many religious who are bent on seeing—by magnifying them, for that matter!—nothing but weaknesses and deficiencies? Without doubt, everything is not perfect, far from it! Thank God that it makes us uncomfortable, that we have feelings of malaise. To feel at ease would be, on the contrary, an unfortunate and culpable lapse.

But that feeling of unease can take many forms, especially in its effects. There is the “bad” *malaise* of the fanatic or of the theorist with no contact with reality, also that of the false idealist who in good conscience especially attacks the reform . . . of others; also of the disillusioned, someone bitter and disappointed, which is basically nothing but injured egoism that hardens into opposition... There is especially the feeling of unease that goes awry by an attitude of flight and of resignation when faced with the effort required to reform, an attitude of “negativism” caused by cowardice, revolt, and defeatism, and which creates change by replacing curative action with derogatory words of systematic, almost obsessive, criticism.⁷⁶

Ultimately, what was a bold and positive approach in itself became compromised by a sense of fear that threatens to infect the project’s implementation. This ambiguous attitude would only increase thereafter and result in increasing tension throughout the first session of the 1966 General Chapter and between the Chapter majority and the Superior and his Council. The facts indicate a flagrant injustice. Brother Nicet-Joseph and his Council had the honesty and the immense courage to launch in

⁷⁴ At the date of the Superior’s writing, Vatican II’s reflection on the religious life was still focusing on *adaptation* and not yet on *renewal*; cf. the preceding chapter on the Council.

⁷⁵ *Circular* 379, pp. 12–13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

great depth the Institute's renewal in the three directions indicated by the 1956 General Chapter. They would not reap the harvest of their commitment nor be seen as protagonists of decisive change, because they seemed to many to be opponents—which they did become to a certain extent. Today, from a distance, it is easier to accept a more fair and nuanced idea of the determining role that they ultimately played in opening the Institute to today's world.

As for the questionnaire itself, if read today it remains striking for its openness and breadth of vision. Certain limitations are regrettable; the most obvious one is the seemingly dichotomous division between two parts,⁷⁷ “Purpose of the Institute and the Schools of the District” (questions 6–34) and “Religious Life of the Brothers” (questions 35–57). Some questions are marked by an overly negative approach, especially in “Religious Life of the Brothers,” with a question, for example, about limiting “the invasion of female staff.”⁷⁸ Questions about “separation from the world, asceticism, and the evangelical counsels” are brief and timid. The “two issues that would initially engage the attention of the forthcoming Chapter, namely, the priesthood and the administrative structure of the Institute, were not explicitly addressed in the questionnaire.”⁷⁹

From a distance, the questionnaire's rather new, positive approach appears in at least three aspects.

1) Its *content*, unlike parts of the *Circular* that I cited, has a certain audacity in envisaging innovation. For example, with respect to the means of exercising the apostolate, it in no way seems to block coeducational schools, which the Institute up to this time had rejected in prin-

⁷⁷ In fact, the questionnaire consisted of four parts: I—Basic Information (questions 1–5); II and III, whose titles I indicate in my text, and IV—Vitality of the Institute in the District (questions 58–76).

⁷⁸ Question 45.

⁷⁹ Salm, 1992, p. 21. It is true that the questionnaire did not address the question of the government of the Institute, but the topic was considered in the work of revising the *Rule*. As for the issue of the priesthood, I think that we must observe the nuance that Brother Luke Salm introduces with the adverb “explicitly.” In the climate and the issues of the time, it was evident that questions 58–60 on the influence of the Brother's life, the attraction of this vocation, and the objections here and there in opposition to it could not help raise the issue of the introduction of the priesthood in the Institute (a matter not yet discussed at Vatican Council II at the time the Superior published *Circular 379*).

principle.⁸⁰ The questionnaire also includes the option to consider whether the Brothers ought to respond to new needs by involving students in extracurricular activities that the Brothers initiate.⁸¹ It is particularly concerned about the specific conditions of “our service of the poor.”⁸² The questionnaire goes to great length on the topic of formation, insisting on certain aspects that need special attention:

In principle, the formation of a Brother of the Christian Schools must meet a twofold objective and concern:

To be concerned about thoroughness and balance, it must be attentive to all aspects of the religious and the apostolic life of the Brother, without neglecting any one of them: human formation, formation of the religious, the teacher, the catechist, the educator.

To be concerned about integration, it is not enough to attend to all sectors; a hierarchy of values needs to be respected, and the proper order of each component must be preserved across the various components of formation.⁸³

2) The quality of the questionnaire appears in the *method* it most often uses, insisting primarily on realism in facing the facts.⁸⁴ It asks the Brothers not to dilute the Institute’s problems,⁸⁵ but to think about the qualities and the limitations of the situation. Finally, it asks them to consider improvements and innovations. Basically, in all the topics it addresses, the questionnaire seems to be based on the famous trilogy: *observe, judge, act*.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Question 13.

⁸¹ Question 15.

⁸² Questions 31–34.

⁸³ Introduction to questions on the formation of the Brothers (*Circular* 379, pp. 35–36). Questions 64–74 then go into detail about the various aspects of initial and continuing formation.

⁸⁴ Note in particular the basic information requested by the questions 1–5.

⁸⁵ A typical example: questions 42–43 about overwork.

⁸⁶ Each stage of this trilogy appears in every topic that the questionnaire addresses. For example, for “our schools in the city,” the questionnaire asks the Brothers to “observe the educational needs of the region and the use of religious personnel” (questions 6–7). It invites the Brothers “to judge whether their use is satisfactory in educational terms” (questions 8–11). It asks them “to act by offering suggestions for a better distribution of schools and staff in the District” (questions 12–15). This same three-part pattern is evident in the questions about “our Christian schools in the Church” (questions 16–30) and “the life of prayer and the theological life of the Brothers” (questions 35–43).

3) The third significant aspect is the *spirit* in which the questionnaire was written. Notwithstanding some traces of dichotomy, its authors correctly perceived the profound unity of the Brother's life. The proof is in the amazing introduction to the questions in Part III, "Religious Life of the Brothers." The usual order is somewhat reversed in the relationship between "action" and "contemplation." Vatican II, two years later, would state in *Perfectae Caritatis* that in apostolic institutes, "apostolic and charitable activity belongs to the very nature of the religious life."⁸⁷ The questionnaire is in accord with this primary statement:

The total consecration [of the Brother] to the Lord is experienced in and nourished by apostolic work ... but also by the life and the spirit of prayer, by the exercise of the theological virtues...⁸⁸

The same is also apparent with the formal question of "separation from the world," for the questions as a whole make it clear that by his vocation the Brother must be aware of the problems in the larger society to which he belongs and for which he works.⁸⁹ Finally, the questionnaire's insistence is striking when asking the Brothers to go beyond the issue of "religious practices" and to ask themselves about the spiritual energy that inspires them and is primary.⁹⁰

RESPONSE OF THE BROTHERS TO THE SUPERIOR GENERAL'S QUESTIONNAIRE

An exhaustive treatment of this topic—considering every answer of every Brother to every question—would require research and synthesis beyond the scope of this present work and is probably impossible. Some positive signs are evident about the interest that developed in the Institute as a result of this new kind of questionnaire and the responses it obtained.

... the priesthood and the administrative structure of the Institute were not explicitly addressed in the questionnaire. But at least a process had

⁸⁷ *Perfectae Caritatis* 8; cf. the preceding chapter on Vatican Council II.

⁸⁸ *Circular* 379, p. 27.

⁸⁹ This approach is particularly evident in "seeing" and then "judging" real situations.

⁹⁰ Typical are questions about "the life of prayer and the theological life" (questions 35–41) and about the Christian character of the schools for Catholics (questions 17–30).

been set in motion to engage on an unprecedented scale all the Brothers of the Institute, individually and collectively, in preparation for the Chapter. Just prior to the opening of the Chapter, a 30 page summary of the responses was prepared in French and duplicated for the use of the Capitulants... The invitation to submit proposals to the Chapter based on group discussion and consensus gave status and importance to the prechapter meetings of Brothers in the Districts and in the Region.⁹¹

The paragraph in which Brother Luke Salm describes the preparation in the United States for the Chapter pertains, above all, to the resolutions for the next General Chapter that were approved at the meeting of the Visitors in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in January 1965. He does not deal explicitly with the work done on the questionnaire in the communities of the American Districts; however, one of my most vivid memories of my first sojourn in the United States of America, in April 1964, is about this work.

First, at the Scholasticate in Washington, DC, where I resided for several weeks, more than one hundred young student Brothers were divided into several communities, not to mention the community of their professors. In these communities, the evening exercises (spiritual reading and prayer) were replaced three times a week by the study of the questionnaire. These meetings extended over a period long enough to cause the Scholastics to express some reservations. Why were they being forced to discuss all these issues, many of which were beyond them? One evening, Brother Leo Kirby, then the Director of the Scholasticate, met with everyone in the large and beautiful chapel.⁹² I still can see him urging the Scholastics at great length, "No, you are not wasting your time. You are the Institute, today and tomorrow, and your opinion is important for the future General Chapter. You must, therefore, continue to work on the questionnaire." He brought to this speech all the conviction and the vehement gestures with which he spoke whenever a topic was dear to his heart.

Then I stayed a few days in a community in New York City, where Brother Amedy John, one of my companions in the Second Novitiate, was the Director. I noticed that the same process was taking place. Three

⁹¹ Salm, 1992, pp. 21–22.

⁹² This recently constructed chapel was solemnly dedicated a few days before this meeting.

times a week for an hour, the Brothers met to discuss the Superior General's questionnaire. It is not improbable to think that from these discussions "at the base," the Conference of Visitors, at their meeting near Santa Fe, "passed a series of resolutions to express the concerns of the Brothers of their Districts."⁹³

Upon my return to France, my first impression was that nothing was happening at home like what I had observed in the USA. It was now May 1964, and during the coming 1964–65 school year, at least in several French Districts, communities were beginning to work actively on the questionnaire from Rome. A limited but significant documentation is preserved at the Archives at rue de Sèvres, Paris.⁹⁴ The mere enumeration of these Notes indicates the importance and the serious nature of these discussions. The issues raised would be central to the General Chapter.⁹⁵ Rather than trying to describe all of them, I will only highlight a few passages that show the clear thinking of the Brothers and the vision of the future that many of them shared.

Regarding the mission, I chose the following passage from the Note of the District of Reims on the purpose of the Institute, which could have been written even for the General Chapter of 2000:

The idea of the holy Founder was to bring the Gospel to the poor. The purpose cannot change. Are the means still adequate? Must we breathlessly follow the Ministry of Education and Public Instruction? Is it not more urgent to serve the real poor and those of the working class, whose ascent in society, because of its profound dechristianization, risks separating them farther from the Church?

It is our proper mission, and we must bring to it an indispensable witness in the Church of the Poor: a preferred, effective openness to the common milieu of people of lower social and cultural status.

⁹³ Salm, 1992, p. 22.

⁹⁴ The material was generously made available to me by Brother Georges Authier, Archivist.

⁹⁵ The list of Notes preserved in the Archives of the rue de Sevres: overwork, the life of prayer, nourishment of the theological life, collaboration of Brothers and laypeople, the prayer life of the Brothers, the mission of the Institute and the works that support it, the purpose of the Institute, the schools of the District, coeducation, the structure and organization of the Institute (note on decentralization), revision of the Rule, government of the Institute, the Assistancies and Assistants.

These essential elements require that every Brother be aware of the necessity that the formation provided for the religious equip him as a competent teacher, but also form the apostle charged with evangelizing the poor, these poor whom he must learn to know and to love, whose salvation he must be encouraged to seek and for whom his life will be the personal and the communal sign of his own salvation.

The 1966 General Chapter will take up this same vigorous language, and we will see that it remains the Institute's official language, even if the transfer to practical action does not achieve an institutional form.

The three Notes of the District of Lille on overwork, the life of prayer, and nourishing the theological life display great lucidity in their analysis. The breadth and the depth of vision surpass the limits of the questions posed. They question in reality the identity of the Brother, a topic that will become central for the General Chapter. I confine myself to a few excerpts.

The Note about overwork opens with a bleak picture of the "visage" that too many Brothers display:

They appear tense, anxious, seemingly doomed to a perpetual "race against the clock," not working happily, doubting the future, "being committed here, just hanging on, because it's too late to rebuild his life more intelligently." The Brothers suffer from a lack of culture and are enslaved by school tasks. They are not aware of the current problems of the Church and of the world. They lack availability, the teachers to their students, the Directors to their Brothers.

Research on the causes of this situation leads to the question of identity. It remains difficult "for the lay religious vocation to find its place in the Church. Because many Brothers have not resolved the issue personally, they lack self-fulfillment."

The Debré Law and the contracts made the teaching function both more difficult and apparently less satisfying for the Brother: "This is no doubt an invitation to focus increasingly on the educational and apostolic role of the Brothers, which might be their sole *raison d'être* in France."

The Note on the life of prayer begins with a striking contrast between the demands of personal conscience, being in charge of oneself, and simulta-

neously of the spirit of dialogue and cooperation. In a word, the adult responsibility that the professional life of the Brother requires is alongside what we still call “religious life,” reduced most often to required presence at “exercises of piety” marked by the repetitive poverty of their content and by gregariousness, the absence of commitment and personal participation, if not by a “voluntarism” that becomes incomprehensible to future generations.

PREPARATION OF THE 1966 GENERAL CHAPTER

Miguel—*Can we speak now about the preparation of the 1966 General Chapter ?*

Michel—I am going to suggest three aspects that anticipated *Perfectae Caritatis*:

1) Lasallian Studies

Between 1956 and 1966, there was the initial publication of *Cahiers lasalliens* 1, on the New Testament citations in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, which placed a high value on this text. Then came the publication of the works of Saint John Baptist de La Salle; by 1966, we had the first editions of all the Founder’s texts in *Cahiers lasalliens* 12–25, plus his early biographers, Maillefer and Bernard—never published before—and Blain. Then Brother Maurice-Auguste’s thesis on the Bull of Approbation of the Institute was published, an interesting study of the Institute’s canonical identity. His contribution was not sufficiently appreciated, nor is it yet. Also published were *Cahiers lasalliens* 2 and 3 by Brother Maurice-Auguste on the first vows of the Brothers. Some works of Aroz debuted in *Cahiers lasalliens*, as did others, such as mine; Poutet’s were published later, and the theses of the Spanish Brothers. I think that the dynamism of Lasallian Studies was an important element for the 1966 Chapter.

2) A new draft project of the *Rule*

Meanwhile, in September 1965, the General Council submitted Project 3 of the *Rule* to Father Beyer, SJ, a canon lawyer. His reply: “It is completely *dépassé*; you are way off the mark.” That was already apparent in

comparison with *Perfectae Caritatis* and would appear more clearly with the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, released in June 1966 but whose outlines were already known. Father Beyer suggested that he provide a new draft of the *Rule* for the Brothers, but the Assistants would not accept it. They said that they will not agree to have the Institute's *Rule* be written by a Jesuit. They decided in November 1965 to establish a commission of two Brothers, Aubert-Joseph and Michel Sauvage, to prepare a Lasallian Project 4 written in the conciliar spirit. We worked from February on, although not much together. Between February and April 1966, I was in Rome and wrote the dogmatic section of each chapter. To do so, I read all the conciliar documents, which I quoted too literally. I was very steeped in the Council, but I remained too dependent on it. The idea of creating a new Lasallian text was accepted; we were working on a much more spiritual, more conciliar text. There was still much work to do to achieve that goal.

3) The questionnaire ordered by the 1956 General Chapter

The 1956 Chapter had decided that, two years before the next General Chapter, the Superior General was to send a questionnaire to collect responses to major questions about the Institute's life and about the concerns of the Brothers. I wrote the questionnaire with Brother Clodoald, a project in which I found myself involved in the Institute's central government. We wrote it in November 1963, and Brother Nicet-Joseph published it (December 18, 1963) as *Circular 379* for the New Year.

Communities were asked to use the evening exercises at least several times a week to study the questionnaire, which happened in all the communities of Brothers in the USA. In France this questionnaire was taken lightly, I think. This is one reason why the Americans came so well prepared for the 1966 Chapter. Other Districts also prepared serious answers to these questions. It was a good questionnaire that asked fundamental questions about the Institute's *raison d'être*.

Then there was the entire movement created by Vatican Council II. The Brothers, therefore, were expecting change, and thus they prepared the 1966 General Chapter.

THE BEGINNING OF THE 1966 GENERAL CHAPTER

Miguel—*What are your basic impressions about what happened at the start of the 1966 Chapter?*

Michel—Brother Luke Salm tells it very well. I was in Rome as one of a number of invited experts, one of the features of the 1966 Chapter. Several battles occurred, initiated by the USA delegates and taken up by all the Capitulants—the first being about the daily schedule. To accomplish more work in the Chapter, the Americans wanted to reduce the scheduled time for prayer. That amendment was accepted, to Brother Nicet-Joseph's great distress.

Then came the issue of experts, with the maximum set at ten. Names were presented and votes taken, one by one. The Chapter elected me unanimously, the only such instance. Other experts were an American psychologist, who later left the Institute; Brothers Saturnino, Grieger, Vincent Ayel, Aloysius Meldan, Anselmo, and Enrique Justo. At first, we experts were not present in the Chapter hall and had no right to speak unless a Capitulant requested that we be allowed to do so. In the Commissions experts were free to speak. I began in the Commission on the Finality of the Institute, along with Vincent Ayel, Saturnino, and Luke Salm, a Capitulant. This Commission 2 was quite large in number at the beginning of the Chapter. After the first session, it would be divided into two groups to add the Commission on the Missions. Commission 2 was assigned to study the issue of the priesthood.

All the Notes were studied, including those unrelated to the priesthood, but on that particular topic, every Note was closely read and discussed in the Commission. Among the four experts who testified during Commission meetings were Luke Salm, on the sacrament *ex opere operato* relative to the priesthood; Saturnino Gallego, on the Founder's thinking about the priesthood, and Vincent Ayel, on sacramentalization and evangelization, a quite remarkable presentation.

Then I was asked to present Vatican Council II's position, which led to a huge fight. Partisans of the priesthood said that the Council requires us to introduce priests. In the early days of the Chapter, the Cardinal Prefect

of the Congregation for Religious, who had been the Chairman of the Commission for Religious at the Council and was a fierce partisan of introducing the priesthood in Institutes of Brothers, was adamant that the Brothers of the Christian Schools introduce priests, because ours was the first General Chapter of Brothers to consider the issue after the Council and also the largest, most numerous, most famous, oldest such Institute. The Cardinal came to address the Chapter in the opening days and announced to the Capitulants, “The Church has spoken; you must obey.” His speech provoked a reaction, not immediately, but it did trigger the fight. Most Capitulants were furious about it. I was delegated to say, “No, that is not what the Council said,” and then I explained what Vatican II did say, using the article that I had previously written for the *Unam Sanctam* publication.

The Chapter began around April 15, 1966. Commission work started in late April and early May, with the initial discussions about procedural rules, choice of experts, and organization of commissions. By May 15, 1966, the work of Commission 2 was complete, ending with ten propositions on the Institute’s position on the lay state. They had not yet been distributed to the Capitulants. At that moment came a phone call from the Congregation for Religious, on May 16 or 17, 1966, advising that the work of the Chapter cannot continue until after the Superior General is elected. Although elected for life, Brother Superior Nicet-Joseph had already announced that he would resign, but at a time he deemed opportune in view of the Chapter’s work. So, the Chapter improvised at full speed a new central government structure and proceeded to elect Brother Charles Henry as Superior General, on May 24, 1966, I think it was, and on the next day or two, elected the Vicar-General. The Chapter then continued, and after long discussions, interventions of experts, and lengthy debates on all propositions of Commission 2, the Chapter approved them all by an overwhelming majority. Still, each time there were about ten Brothers (at the most) out of one hundred who voted against.

Miguel—After the election of the Superior General and of the Vicar-General, did Commission work continue?

Michel—What I just described was the work of Commission 2, one of

eight Commissions in all. Between the beginning of the Chapter and May 15, 1966, some Commissions had begun to report, including those on the vows, on community, on finance, on prayer, and on the *Rule*. These reports that were sent to the Chapter Assembly were usually rejected by the Capitulants, who found every one of them lacking an overall perspective. Thus, little by little during the first session, the Capitulants were saying, “This is impossible; to do our work we need a document that offers a total view of the Brother’s vocation.”

For the project on the *Rule*, I was working with Brother Aubert-Joseph. I think it was on March 19, 1966, after Vespers, when he waited for me at the chapel exit in a furious mood and scolded me, “We cannot go on like this; you are far too slow.” Then he added, “The Chapter is going to assemble. We are proposing a text of the *Rule*. We are competent; the Chapter will convene and make some remarks about details and in three weeks adopt the *Rule*.” I replied, “Dear Brother Assistant, you are mistaken; things will not turn out like that.” I knew what the mindset of people was, so I added, “If that happened, it would be a disaster—the *Rule* of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools written by two Brothers.” He said, basically, “What you’re saying isn’t very original.” While I was writing one chapter, he would write ten. Because of the distinction between *Rules* and *Constitutions*, between the fundamental code and the practical directives, he was reintroducing in the *Constitutions* every prescription of the old *Rule*. We would never escape the impasse.

Brother Aubert-Joseph was a member of the Chapter’s Commission on the *Rule*, along with Brother Philibert, of Québec, and others, who immediately entered into conflict with the Assistants, Aubert-Joseph and Philipp-Antoon. I had been called in as an expert during one time in my life when I had to be brave. I was a good friend of Aubert-Joseph and of Philipp-Antoon, but I had to say, “No, I don’t think this is the Church’s thinking. We ought to have a different view of the *Rule*.” The General Chapter took up the debate, and the Commission on the *Rule* presented for study by the Institute only the portion of the draft of the *Rule* that I had written. The Assistants wanted to present in addition everything that had been written as *Constitutions*. Before the vote (it was on a Saturday),

Brother Félicien Hien spoke up, “As for me, I want to hear from an expert. Brother Michel Sauvage will speak on Monday.”

I had all day Sunday to prepare my intervention, which focused on two points. First, what are we going to include in the *Rule*, and is it truly necessary to enter into all these details? Second, can we agree to have a Prologue to the *Rule*? In preparing my remarks on the first point, I suggested what could be done in accord with the guidelines of *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. Then, instead of questioning whether or not to have a Prologue, I read a draft of a possible text to indicate what might be said to the young who enter the Institute. The lyrical and beautiful draft received thunderous applause at the end. But that moment also marked my radical break with Brother Aubert-Joseph, although not with Brother Philipp-Antoon, with whom I remained a friend to the end, but cooler. For them it was a great defeat, and I was the one to blame for championing a different point of view. That’s what I say; I wasn’t combative, but I showed some courage. Before presenting my text, I showed it to Brother Nicet-Joseph, who told me that he was in complete agreement with it.

THE NEED FOR A SECOND SESSION

Miguel—How did the idea of the Declaration arise?

*Michel—*We were in the first session of the Chapter, but the work was being delayed, and then the elections had to be held early in June. Two movements converged. First, the Capitulants expressed the need for a comprehensive document as a “backbone” (*épine dorsale*), which they assigned to the Commission on Finality. Second, the Notes to the Chapter from the Brothers were asking for something similar. A third factor, I believe, is the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, which declared that all religious orders must hold a Special General Chapter to rewrite the *Rule* and to launch the renewal movement.

In 1966, we were in an ordinary Chapter. It was difficult to imagine how to mobilize all the Brothers for a Special General Chapter in 1968 or 1969. The idea grew that if this 1966 Chapter held two sessions and approved a comprehensive document on the renewal of the Institute—

which the proposed text was—we could have the 1966–1967 General Chapter be considered as the Special General Chapter. This is what happened.

The *Declaration* is a document on the renewal. Read the introduction. Faithful to the spirit of Vatican II, the *Declaration* begins by noting the fidelity to the Founder, the calls of the world and of the Church, and the spiritual renewal as the starting points. It is a document to launch the Institute's renewal. Contrary to popular belief, the *Declaration* offers many practical guidelines that were never taken seriously. For example, it asks every District to hold a Chapter to revise its works, something that was never done anywhere. That is the idea of the *Declaration*.

I was elected Assistant. Why? At the first session, the Capitulants had observed me. I represented a certain image, and they never imagined that I would not be in the central administration. But at the same time, they wanted me to continue my projects, so they elected me Assistant for Formation and Research. Thereafter, I was paralyzed in fulfilling the expectations, but the original idea was, nonetheless, to have an Assistant with expertise in theology and concerned about the intellectual dimension within the General Council. At the end of the first session, which ended on June 15, 1966, the Chapter decided to have a second session beginning in October 1967. To continue the work between the two sessions, the Assistants were designated to serve as liaison agents for the Commission work. I was appointed as the liaison agent for Commission 2 (Finality) and for Commission 7 (the *Rule*).

THE INTERSESSION, THE *RULE*, AND THE *DECLARATION*

Miguel—*I am interested at this point in speaking about these two Chapter sessions, when the idea of the Declaration began to take shape and major changes in the religious life, along with their difficulties, became evident.*

Michel—This is where my role as Assistant was useful during the General Chapter, because I took my liaison duties seriously. I organized a meeting in November 1966 in Paris of all the French members of the

Commission, to study with them an initial draft of what could become a *Declaration*.

I worked extensively with the Vatican II texts. I did not concern myself much with the *Rule*, except to ask that a group of editors be assembled, because the study of the *Rule* occurred in three time periods. After the first period, we had received so many Notes that I told the Superior General, "The Commission on the *Rule* will never be able to study all these Notes. We need to form a group to meet one month before the Chapter." This was done by appointing four French-speaking Brothers (two French, one Belgian, one Canadian), two English speakers (British and American), and two Spanish speakers (Spanish and Mexican). They arrived on August 15, 1967; I gave them all the Notes, and I left them to their work.

For the *Declaration*, the European Subcommittee met sometime in January or February in Perpignan, where it was still winter. The location was selected to encourage the Spanish Brothers to attend, but they did not, which was most unfortunate. Considerable opposition was already beneath the surface; it was said, with some truth, that the French wanted service of the poor and the apostolate; the Spanish, prayer and consecration, and the Americans, community. People, including Brother Patrice Marey, were saying that the document must integrate the three dimensions (which was never my choice of words).

A major session of French Capitulants occurred at Guidel, Brittany, at Easter 1967. Each meeting would take up the previous draft, and then continue working. The Guidel session, for example, produced the document *Intersession*, with studies on consecration, mission, and integration. All this was fragmentary, but a feeling was growing that something new was in the offing. In May 1967, the plenary meeting of the General Council discussed the latest text. The title was chosen at the suggestion of Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, Vicar-General: *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* (reflecting *Gaudium et Spes*, *The Church in the Modern World*). It was a bit pretentious, if you will, but not all that bad.

In July 1967, the World's Fair at Montréal was in progress, and many Brothers attended. I pointed out the opportunity to have a meeting of all the North and South American members of the Commission. The paradox is that the Spaniards who had shunned Perpignan came to Montréal. When I convoked this meeting, I received an incendiary letter from Brother Luke Salm—he would not want me to remind him of it—saying that it was a breach of poverty to summon people to a meeting on the *Declaration* at Montréal. He came; so did Brothers Saturnino Gallego, Fernando Izaguirre, and Cristovão, of Brazil. I conducted the meeting, where everyone was free to speak. I distributed a detailed summary every day of everything that was said, and at the conclusion I presented a draft *Declaration* that emerged from the group. The idea was to have something dynamic. The objection was that, naturally, I began by talking about the apostolate, service of the poor, the ministry of the Brother, and his apostolic vocation, whereas the Spanish wanted to talk about consecration. A partial agreement was achieved before we left Montréal.

Meanwhile, I had organized a group of young French Brothers to prepare texts on modernity, education, the school, and the renewal; all were useful. I went to Cavaletti in early September to write a draft of the *Declaration*. The plan was that all the presidents and the secretaries of the Chapter Commissions, as well as the entire Commission 2, would meet in Rome from September 15 to October 1, 1967, when the Chapter was to start. In this group of about forty, the idea began to circulate that Commission 2—that is, Michel Sauvage—wanted to transform the Institute into a secular institute. This supposedly included removing the word *religious* and eliminating religious consecration in the Institute. The Commission, by unanimous consent, was discussing a text to affirm that the supposition amounted to nothing, that it was never its intention, and that it was working on a text that is more—at which point Brother Saturnino Gallego threatened a dreadful blackmail by saying, “If you do not begin by talking first about consecration, all the Spanish will vote against the *Declaration*.” So, consecration became the first topic. I remarked that I was indifferent. I think of the elements in a sufficiently unified way to be content with any sequence. In fact, when you read the *Declaration*, you see that when the text speaks about consecration, it

includes the apostolic vocation, and when it describes the apostolic mission, it speaks about the necessity of the gift to God. The document is truly a unified text.

Chapter 10 – *THE 1966–1967 GENERAL CHAPTER: ITS UNIQUE IDENTITY AND THE INSTITUTE’S LAY CHARACTER*

THE CHAPTER’S AWARENESS OF ITSELF

Miguel—Because everything you said previously converges at the 39th General Chapter, we ought to take time now to talk about that 1966–1967 Chapter.

*Michel—*This General Chapter certainly is the Institute’s major event in the twentieth century, perhaps in its entire history. Such a depiction is risky, and a more modest approach is wise—what would Brothers Agathon or Salomon, Gerbaud or Exupérien, or Gabriel-Marie think? In any case, for me and in my personal experience—and I think for Brothers in my generation who experienced this Chapter—it was the turning point, the “Copernican revolution.”

This does not mean that everything was dark before and rosy after. The preceding Chapters, on the contrary, show that the 39th General Chapter could only be what it was and accomplish what it did because of the major decisions taken by the 38th General Chapter in 1956 and the Institute’s serious implementation of these decisions during the intervening decade. In turn, the directives voted in 1956 were not possible without previous, fundamental work from strong initiatives by Brothers “at the base” who were acting with no impetus (sometimes in spite of opposition) from Superiors at the time. The activity of these Brothers was related, of course, to their consciousness of a “Lasallian” vocation, but this awareness was renewed and invigorated by their active membership in the local Church and in the society in which they were living.

It is certainly evident that as the 1966–1967 General Chapter proceeded, it depended fundamentally upon Vatican Council II. In my own personal life, it seems to me that the Council was and remains more decisive and more normative than the Chapter, if only because the Council brought

about a total renewal of my Christian life and my approach to the mysteries of God as Love and Savior and of the free human person filled with kindly and faithful love and called to love.

As for the 39th General Chapter, I will not repeat what Brother Luke Salm has written about it. My intention is to offer a synthesis rather than a factual narrative, a reflection without ignoring facts. However, writing for young Brothers who did not experience this event, I must describe real events and flesh-and-blood participants before commenting on the major aspects. In any case, the narrative approach is the basis for understanding the event's meaning. I am working from memory, which though alive can only claim to present a partial view of this history with so many different actors, episodes, and superabundant texts. Similarly, the synthesis that I am trying to derive from the changes launched by this General Chapter only represents my necessarily subjective approach to interpreting the facts and the texts.

My plan is to begin with an initial, rather brief, section that simply suggests that the first novelty of this General Chapter is that it existed. Then I will discuss what I consider to be the three major themes of the renewal it initiated: *a renewed understanding of the Brother's identity*. I will speak first about the significance of the debate on *the lay character of the Institute*, before discussing *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, and then, too briefly, the new way in which the Chapter addressed *the educational service of the poor* and the question of *consecration and vows*.

The second theme is *the renewed presentation by the Chapter of the Brother's actual life*, mainly the revision of the *Rule*—although the *Declaration* does not ignore this life—and also the work of other Chapter Commissions, especially the Commission on community life.⁹⁶ Then I will speak about *the new way in which the Chapter plans and organizes the Institute's government*. I focus on the positive, without omitting the limi-

⁹⁶ I will have the opportunity to return to this topic. I have thought for quite some time that the *Declaration* could serve as a *Rule*, if a number of practical directives were added to a number of points, but I am still not sure whether this view is totally chimerical.

tations of this renewal. My assessment of Institute governance certainly focuses on negative aspects, because I am convinced that the form given in 1966 to the central government of the Institute was a disaster and contributed to a large extent to the deficiency in implementing the renewal. A final section will describe the *communication* and the *reception* of the 39th General Chapter in the Institute.

A CHAPTER THAT WILL ITSSELF INTO EXISTENCE

Miguel—You often have said that the Chapter Assembly began with an event that determined its entire approach.

Michel—There is nothing, or almost nothing, in the essential critical texts produced by the 39th General Chapter that had not been “announced” during the previous decade, whether in the successive projects of the *Rule*, in the work achieved in the Institute through the renewal of Lasallian Studies, in the responses to the questionnaire at the end of 1963, or in Vatican II’s directives. The preparation of this Chapter was significant, even decisive, in that the entire “revolution” by the Capitulants of 1966 was rooted in everything that had prepared for it, directly or indirectly.

But the reverse is also true; nothing would have happened had the General Chapter not taken control of its life. The initial, innovative contribution of this 1966 Chapter *is that it existed* from the first to the last minute. This was evidently not the case with the General Chapters of 1946 and, to a lesser extent, of 1956, at least on some issues, for example, the lay state of the Brothers.

I will risk the surprising opinion that the subsequent General Chapters—in 1976, 1986, and 1993—had less awareness of being a Chapter than was the case in 1966–1967. This point of view is subject to challenge.⁹⁷ At any rate, the assertiveness and the strength of the Chapter’s self-deter-

⁹⁷ Someone could challenge this more easily who did not experience the 1986 and the 1993 General Chapters. As a member of the 1976 Chapter, it seemed to me at the outset that the important work of the Preparatory Commission (a structure that did not exist in 1966) somewhat inhibited the attention of the Capitulants in the early, decisive days of the Assembly.

mination are apparent in three key events that occurred in the early days of the 39th General Chapter. The Chapter's independence at the start had to be sustained repeatedly, especially at certain "crucial" times. I can pinpoint five such moments during the critical debates in the first session in 1966 and in the Intersession (June 1966–August 1967) and at least three more in the second session.

With regard to the "launch" of the Chapter, the three events occurred in the last ten days of April 1966. I must linger on the first one, because it affected the entire course of the Chapter; without it, all the later, decisive choices probably could not have happened. I immediately note that the first event preceded the Chapter; it was the admirable, "strategic" foresight of the Capitulants from the USA:

Then, on February 21 [1966], Brother D. John circulated a memo with the "good news" that Brother Charles Henry had drawn up a set of rules, which has been accepted by the Regime to be presented to the Chapter for its acceptance at an early session. Entitled *Rules of Procedure for Sessions of the General Chapter*, the document in effect accepted this priority item on the American agenda. It was a breakthrough toward an open Chapter. The most significant of the proposed rules was the first, which stated the principle: "The General Chapter shall determine its rules of procedure and may change them as it sees fit." In subsequent developments, this principle led to the provision for an elected general chairman (*Commissary*) and elected moderators to conduct the sessions of the Chapter in the manner of Vatican II.⁹⁸

At the beginning of its work, after the preparatory retreat, the Assembly adopted, virtually unchanged, the project introduced by Brother Charles Henry and authored by Brother Didymus John, familiar with meetings of religious orders that used similar regulations. In his *Autobiographie*, Brother Aubert-Joseph speaks unkindly of these *Rules of Procedure*,

proposed to the Régime by Brother Charles Henry and by Brother Majorian Pius, Assistant for Canada. According to him, the Assistants were unprepared for this question... In theory, it was excellent, though complicated, but in practice we could not predict where it would lead

⁹⁸ Salm, 1992, p. 27.

us... I remain convinced that these regulations, designed and skillfully handled by the Americans Brothers, were a good way for them to impose them on the Chapter.⁹⁹

The harshness of this judgment is probably due to the difficulties that Brother Aubert-Joseph experienced at the beginning of the General Chapter in the Commission on the *Rule*. The criticism does not err by excessive objectivity! Still, coming from an intelligent, open-minded man, it demonstrates the “innovative” aspect of these *Rules of Procedure* and also how disconcerting they could be for the Latins. These rules introduced by a group of Capitulants who had actively participated in the preparatory period were approved by the Capitulants without their being able to see all the implications clearly. That is true, but these *Rules of Procedure* quickly proved that they did allow the Assembly to “exist,” and for three main reasons. The regulations gave each Capitulant the right to speak; they allowed everyone to influence a debate, and they established for the Assembly a kind of “executive power,” a moderator elected by, accountable to, and controlled by it.

The right of everyone to speak might appear initially as a negative feature. The duration of a spoken intervention was limited to a few minutes (doubled if the speaker had prepared a written text). The moderator of the meeting was instructed to stop a speaker if he exceeded his time. Certain “tenors,” accustomed to endless oratory, could at the first instance consider this as bullying;¹⁰⁰ however, the restriction allowed others to say a word. A second intervention by the same Capitulant could occur only after everyone who had requested to speak on a subject had done so. The result was that the views expressed could be many and varied. Little by little, a consensus could emerge in the Assembly; if not, the disagreements probably required the revision of the text being discussed.

As for the power to influence the course of a debate, a Capitulant could do so in two ways, first, by proposing an amendment to the text under discussion. The amendment had to be precise, sometimes written on a

⁹⁹ *Autobiographie*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁰ Salm, 1992, p. 41.

display board, and be supported by one other Capitulant before a vote could occur on whether to discuss it. Following a positive majority vote, the amendment was immediately discussed and then put to a vote requiring an absolute majority.

I remember an amendment introduced that way during the December 1967 discussion of the *Rule's* chapter on obedience. The Commission proposed: "Each member of the community ought to be heard, *since the Spirit speaks and acts in every Brother.*"¹⁰¹ One Capitulant offered the amendment, "since the Spirit *might speak and act.*" Another remarked that the text by the Commission on the *Rule* was based on the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.¹⁰² Then someone observed that saying that the Spirit "might" speak and act also suggests that the Spirit "might not" speak and act, which would empty the text of any force. The amendment was rejected. This "right to amend" was exercised dozens of times, often improving the text.

A second way for a Capitulant to influence the debate was to introduce a "motion" of various types. The most common motion was to ask for a vote of the Assembly on a portion of the text under discussion that was viewed as particularly important and on which the opinion of the Chapter needed to be known. Thus, during the debate on the *Declaration*, when the discussion turned to the provision requiring the Institute to be open to educational work apart from schools,¹⁰³ the position of the Chapter on a controversial topic was clarified by a motion of this type. Another kind of motion was to close debate on a matter. The moderator would then tell the author of the motion how many members were still waiting to speak. If the motion was approved, the Assembly immediately and without discussion proceeded to a vote. If the motion received a two-thirds majority of approval, the debate was over. The reg-

¹⁰¹ This sentence remained unchanged in article 37 of the 1987 *Rule*; in the 1967 *Rule* it is in article 7b (*emphasis added*).

¹⁰² "The reason we have said that all should be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best" (Rule of Saint Benedict, Chapter 3, On Calling the Brethren for Counsel); <http://www.osb.org/rb/text/rbejms2.html#3>.

¹⁰³ *Declaration* 51 (Educational Work Apart from Schools) and 52 (Criteria for These Activities).

ulations required that the one who presented the motion to close debate must not have already participated in the discussion. This was where, perhaps, the Americans showed their sense of tactics by having practically every closure motion made by the same Capitulant, who would intervene only for that purpose. But when the Assembly considered such a motion premature, it would vote “No,” and the discussion resumed, so it was not a case of “manipulation.”

The *Rules of Procedure* improved the functioning of the Chapter by establishing in the Assembly a kind of “executive power” elected by it but also accountable to and controlled by it. The Chapter elected its officers, including the Commissary, who organized the discussions, and the Moderators, who led the individual sessions. With the Secretary of the Chapter, they formed the Assembly Commission, which met at least once a day. Unlike in previous General Chapters, the Superior General presided at the sessions but no longer directed the work of the Assembly, which made it more democratic. Like any Capitulant, the Superior could intervene after he requested to speak. If a Capitulant or a group of Capitulants thought that the Moderator or the Commissary had exceeded his rights or if they thought that a vote had been taken under questionable circumstances, they could “appeal” after obtaining a number of signatures. This case happened several times. The right of the minority in principle was preserved.

The second event that strengthened and affirmed the life of the Chapter occurred at the beginning, not on a matter of substance or even on a question of procedure, but about the Chapter’s work schedule. Brother Luke Salm shows clearly how in this matter the majority of the Assembly opposed the General Council, who could not have imagined that the General Chapter would not accurately observe all the exercises of prayer prescribed by the *Rule*. Supported by a number of Capitulants, the Assembly Commission proposed a reduced schedule that in the main eliminated spiritual reading and recitation of the rosary in community. The Superior General urged the Capitulants not to accept the reduced schedule by saying that the Chapter was not above the *Rule*. Put to a voice vote, the Commission’s proposed schedule won by an overwhelming majority. As Brother Luke Salm observes,

It was then that the delegates experienced for the first time on a concrete issue that the Chapter, and not any Superior or group of superiors, had control over its decisions and its destiny.¹⁰⁴

In a sense, this debate on an objectively “minor” issue constituted the founding event of the Chapter, one in which it affirmed its consciousness of being the supreme authority of the Institute, having power not only over the Superiors but also over the *Rule* itself. This assurance proved to be decisive at several crucial points during the Chapter.

A third event that occurred at the beginning of this Chapter strengthened its consciousness of itself and of its autonomy. On the evening of April 27, 1966, Cardinal Antoniutti, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, visited the General Chapter. Personally, he was vigorously in favor of introducing the priesthood in all the congregations of teaching Brothers. I think we can say that the prelate’s position strengthened the resolve of many Capitulants—in fact, the majority—who were already determined to maintain the Institute’s exclusively lay character. Some of the undecided resented the Cardinal’s remarks as an undue intrusion on a matter that belonged to the General Chapter. That attitude contributed to their decision to join the majority.¹⁰⁵

I spoke about five critical options during the debates in the first session that marked and strengthened the 1966 Chapter’s awareness of existing and of being autonomous. Three of these options directly or indirectly pertain to debates about the Institute’s lay character. The first was the Chapter’s reaction when the Congregation for Religious banned it from continuing its work until after the election of the Superior General, an evident abuse of power. Brother Nicet-Joseph had been elected for life and had already indicated that he would resign after allowing the Chapter to decide on the term of office and when he deemed it appropriate, depending on the progress of the Chapter’s deliberations. The Holy See’s

¹⁰⁴ Salm, 1992, p. 44.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56. Brother Luke cites the Chapter *Bulletin* of May 3, 1966, page 2, written in a flippant tone that would later attract a vigorous reaction from the Cardinal, when he was duly informed of what occurred at the Chapter. On the subsequent reaction of the Cardinal, who ordered the entire text of his speech to be distributed to the Capitulants, see *id.*, p. 69.

interference obliged him to make an abrupt decision. What is notable in this incident is the official protest that the Chapter lodged against the Congregation for Religious, because of this arbitrary action. The protest was initiated by Brother Superior Charles Henry in the form of a letter written by the Procurator General, Brother Maurice-Auguste, and carried by him, accompanied by the oldest elected Capitulants.¹⁰⁶

With the election over, the Chapter in General Assembly began to discuss the question of the priesthood. I will describe this impassioned discussion later. The circumstances of the calendar were such that the Secretary of the Congregation for Religious, Archbishop Paul-Pierre Philippe, OP, came to answer the questions of the Capitulants on May 30, 1966, two days before the final vote on the priesthood in the Institute was to take place. Following the appearance of Cardinal Antoniutti, Brother Nicet-Joseph and some other Superiors General of congregations of Brothers had applied to the Commission of Cardinals in charge of the interpretation of Vatican II texts for an official interpretation of *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2. Around May 25, 1966, the reply to the *Dubium* was sent to Brother Maurice-Auguste, who did not formally communicate it until the end of the first session, after the Pope had approved it,¹⁰⁷ but he had immediately made known to the Capitulants the nature of the response. The Commission of Cardinals confirmed the position taken by the Brothers, that Vatican Council II allows the General Chapter complete freedom to introduce or not to introduce some priests. It does not oblige them, contrary to what Cardinal Antoniutti claimed. Now, on the evening of May 30, 1966, Archbishop Philippe seemed to be treating the Brothers like children, showing them his briefcase and saying that it contained an important document “that would make them happy but which he reserved the right to make known to them only after his return from France after a ten-day trip that was to begin on the morrow.” It was obviously the response to the *Dubium*.

As expected, voting on the proposals of Commission 2 on the priesthood

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

¹⁰⁷ Although Pope Paul VI did not approve this response until June 10, 1966 (Salm, 1992, p. 81, notes 58–59).

took place on June 1, 1966. The overwhelming majority of Capitulants voted to maintain the Institute's exclusively lay character. As soon as the vote was known, Brothers Vincent Ayel and Michel Sauvage went to the Agence France-Presse office in Rome. They delivered a statement, prepared in advance, that communicated the position taken by the Brothers of the Christian Schools and also explained its significance. The next day, the text of this press release appeared in many newspapers around the world.¹⁰⁸ Archbishop Philippe became aware of it in France while reading the daily *La Croix*. Upon returning to Rome a few days later, he telephoned Brother Maurice-Auguste at great length and reproached him bitterly for the fact that the Chapter did not await his return before completing its discussion on the priesthood and that the result was made public. This new interference shows that the Chapter felt itself free to take the decisive vote and to make known its position on a crucial point by using the media.

I will only mention here three other critical choices made by the Chapter during the first session. One of the most important choices by which the Chapter strongly expressed its nature and its autonomy was its decision on Project 4 of the draft of the *Rule*, which I will discuss

¹⁰⁸ The text of the release: "At the General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Solemn reaffirmation of the exclusively lay character of the Institute. Meeting in Rome since April 20, the 39th General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools continues its work to update its Constitutions according to the calls of the world and of the Church, as Vatican II has made them known. The conciliar Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* on the renewal of religious life is particularly the focus of the 120 delegates representing 15,000 Brothers of the Congregation. No. 10 of this Decree emphasizes the full value in itself of the lay religious life, while giving General Chapters full liberty in their task of deciding whether or not to admit to the priesthood a limited number of Brothers to serve in the communities of these Institutes, it being understood that they must remain 'lay.'

"The General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, after a calm and thorough study of the issue, recently expressed by an overwhelming vote the firm intention of the Institute which solemnly declares itself to be composed of lay religious. In doing so, the Brothers wish to act completely according to the spirit of Vatican II by highlighting the value of lay religious consecration and by emphasizing the primary role of evangelization and the importance of the ministry of the Word in the pastoral ministry of the Church. By the forcefulness of their life, they want to be one of the forms of the dialogue of the Church and of the world and to be united in sacramental life itself with the laypeople to whom they offer their services."

Such a statement will awaken many fraternal echoes, and it certainly marks a significant gesture in the period following the Council.

later. The same is true for one of the last decisions in the first session: to submit to all the Brothers the text of the *Rule*, known as Project 5, developed by the Commission. The third critical choice was the decision to hold a second session, including a vote to continue to “exist” between the two sessions and to establish “liaison agents” responsible for continuity during the Intersession, which I will describe in relation to the *Declaration*.

As for the three manifestations of the existence of the General Chapter during the second session, I will mention briefly the nearly unanimous votes on the texts of the *Declaration* and of the *Rule* at the end of the debates. When the totals of the final votes appeared on the electronic panel, the Assembly experienced the feeling that this General Chapter did have a life of its own and that a common consciousness had been formed during the twenty months of two sessions and the Intersession. For a moment, the Assembly held its breath, then burst into vigorous and prolonged applause. A final point made by Brother Charles Henry ensured the consistency of this long effort. He declared, especially with respect to the *Rule*, “Only the text approved has the force of law.” The formula he employed was particularly clear, “Everything that is not expressed in the *Rule* is repealed.” A different interpretation of the Chapter’s work might have been feared: “Everything that was not formally abolished could be considered as upheld.” It could be—and was, in rare cases, by Directors of Novices, for example—a temptation for some conservatives. It was smothered in advance, once the Chapter adopted Brother Charles Henry’s words.

As with Vatican II, the General Chapter existed, first, because of courageous positions taken at certain moments that made evident who the people are who see things clearly. The particular issue might be relatively minor, with no apparent relation to the substantive issues of the Chapter. In fact, all the rest of the Chapter’s work would be affected, because in these options that appear to be secondary, the Chapter’s awareness of its responsibility and autonomy comes into play. This effect would appear several times during the heated debate on the lay character of the Institute.

INITIAL AGENDA: THE BROTHER'S IDENTITY AND THE PRIESTHOOD

Miguel—The first major debate at the 1966 Chapter was about the lay character of the Brother's vocation and the possible introduction of the priesthood. Why was there such haste, compared with the two previous Chapters that were so hesitant to address the issue?

*Michel—*The haste is explained by the context of the time. From 1960 to 1966, the question of the lay religious life had caused some turmoil in which I became embroiled—at times willingly, more often by force of circumstance. This agitation peaked during the final two sessions of Vatican Council II and persisted quite understandably until the first session of the 39th General Chapter in 1966. That is why I thought it more logical to deal with this entire question here.

Miguel—Where did the Vatican II texts on the lay religious life originate?

*Michel—*After repeated and at times controversial debate, the Council produced three brief articles on the lay religious life, two of them highlighting its value and a third supporting the possibility of a limited introduction of priests in exclusively lay Institutes. I am using here my commentary that I was requested to write, at the end of the Council, on three articles of *Perfectae Caritatis*,¹⁰⁹ the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life. The general topic of the lay male religious life had come to the fore with the development of these conciliar themes during the four sessions of Vatican II and from the questions raised by three different groups of speakers.

¹⁰⁹ Éditions du Cerf, in its series *Unam Sanctam*, published commentaries on all Vatican II documents. The editor of the work on *Perfectae Caritatis*, Father Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, OP, asked me to write a commentary on the text related to the lay religious life (PC 10.1–2, PC 15.2–3). The Secretary of the Commission (Father Peter Gumpel, SJ) placed at my disposal at the Rome Generalate of the Society of Jesus all the documentation used by the conciliar Commission, including successive drafts of texts, spoken interventions, and amendments proposed by Council Fathers. Studying these archival documents enabled me to read the succinct final texts in the light of the extensive background material. Cf. Michel Sauvage, FSC. *La vie religieuse laïque, Commentaire des numéros 10 et 15*, in Tillard, 1967, pp. 301–74; bibliography, pp. 373–74.

1) Male religious orders with priests and laymen were expressing interest since the early 1960s in *upgrading* the status of the lay members, who often received less consideration. Efforts were made to *upgrade* their status, highlight their positive value, and foster their development, especially through professional, intellectual, and spiritual formation.

2) At the same time and in a number of monasteries, the desire was growing to restore an authentic lay monasticism. Numerous publications reflected this converging research that the Council of Superiors General of priests supported. The result was the drafting of *Perfectae Caritatis* 15.2–3, on the common life. Paragraph 2 urges that “all the members be more closely knit by the bond of brotherly love, those who are called lay-brothers, assistants, or some similar name...”¹¹⁰ Paragraph 3 states that “monasteries of men and communities which are not exclusively lay can ... admit clerics and lay persons on an equal footing and with equal rights and obligations, excepting those which flow from sacred orders.”¹¹¹

3) In spite of repeated assurances by Pius XII and by Cardinal Valerio Valeri, the Superiors General of Institutes exclusively of lay Brothers (especially of teachers) remained disturbed by the recent questioning of their vocation and of their rights. They were dissatisfied by the way in which they were often perceived and concerned about rising pressure from “priesthood enthusiasts” outside their Institutes and from small groups of their own Brothers. Being already accustomed to working together, they produced several jointly sponsored documents of uneven value before Vatican II and during its various sessions.

Initially, they had no voice in the Council. At the second session, in 1963, Pope Paul VI appointed Brother Nicet-Joseph, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, as an expert. This appointment gave the Superior the opportunity to participate in all General

¹¹⁰ *Perfectae Caritatis* 15.2; in women’s orders the rule is “that there be only one class of Sisters in communities of women”; http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html.

¹¹¹ *Perfectae Caritatis* 15.3. The question of the possibility for these Brothers to participate in government at different levels (local, provincial, general) was not explicitly stated, but it was already in the air and would return repeatedly to the agenda during the thirty years after Vatican II.

Congregations and to receive all documentation distributed to the Council Fathers. With this information and with the relationships established or strengthened and experienced daily, especially with Bishops and Superiors of religious Orders, Brother Nicet-Joseph was able to follow the issues discussed and to intervene or to have someone speak on behalf of the teaching Brothers whose spokesman he was. Thus, thanks to the sufficiently numerous and strong interventions of the Council Fathers during the discussion of the Council's draft on religious life during the third session, a short paragraph that refers to lay male religious life could be reintroduced:

The religious life, undertaken by lay people, either men or women, is a state for the profession of the evangelical counsels which is complete in itself. While holding in high esteem therefore this way of life so useful to the pastoral mission of the Church in educating youth, caring for the sick and carrying out its other ministries (*aliisque ministeriis explendis tam utilem*), the sacred synod confirms these religious in their vocation and urges them to adjust their way of life to modern needs.

The conciliar text limits itself to a terse statement of various aspects of the lay character of the Brother's life. The perspective provided by the conciliar debates allowed my commentary to include a more extensive view of the positive aspects. First of all, *Brothers belong to the lay state*, and the value of their form of religious life is *complete*. Second, the *richness of religious consecration* is rooted in Baptism and in Confirmation, and the significance of this consecrated life lies in its *exercise of the priesthood of the baptized through the offering of spiritual sacrifice*. Finally, the unity of a life given to God for the service of a mission of the Church and the usefulness of the Brothers' apostolic activities (*ministries*) as laymen are valuable features.

The situation that had determined the direction of my own research and reflections in my doctoral thesis, *Catéchèse et Laïcité*, inspired me to accentuate the internal, ecclesial functions (the ministry of the Word of God) for which their lay consecration entitles the Brothers. Following *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.1 literally, I also highlighted the secular aspect of this same lay consecration: the commitment of the Brothers, men of the Church, to the life of the world. It seems to me that I was led at the time to understand the meaning of the lay religious life according to the thinking of

Gaudium et Spes, while the deeper understanding of the Council's teaching on the religious life relied more on *Lumen Gentium*.

Miguel—*The second paragraph of Perfectae Caritatis 10 seems to suggest the introduction of priests in lay male congregations. How do you explain the discrepancy and the apparent contradiction between the two paragraphs of PC 10?*

Michel—When they met in April 1965¹¹² to develop the heavily amended conciliar Decree, the members of the Commission on the religious life had no difficulty approving the draft of 10.1 of the final text of *Perfectae Caritatis*. They were surprised, however, to see that the following additional paragraph appeared in the draft of Section 10 submitted for their discussion:

In lay Institutes of Brothers, for spiritual needs exclusively proper to the Institute, some members, selected according to the *Constitutions*, can have access to sacred Orders.

The surprise of the Commission members was even greater with the accompanying terse Note indicating that the Sovereign Pontiff “wanted this question treated favorably by the Council.” For this spring meeting of the conciliar Commission, Cardinal Antoniutti, then its President in his capacity as Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, was on a mission in Australia. The Vice President who replaced him, Archbishop Perantoni, an Italian and former Minister General of the Friars Minor, was most attentive to all the issues about the lay religious life. Intrigued by this reference to the supreme authority, he requested an audience with the Pope. Without hesitation, he asked Paul VI whether he had added these words. The Pope’s response was negative, and he made it clear that he wanted this reference to his name removed. Archbishop Perantoni then quickly asked him about eventually suppressing the text itself. “I am not its author,” the Pope replied, “nor can I take any responsibility to make it disappear.”

¹¹² A number of details reported here were not previously published. I had direct knowledge of the facts at the time. My account is based on documents in my personal archive, on records of conversations with Council Fathers and experts about PC 10.2, and on all the documentation provided to the members of the conciliar Commission for their session in April 1965.

The members of the Commission were divided during a prolonged debate on this item. Because this text had no conciliar history, some thought that it must be removed. It is indeed inconsistent with the previous paragraph, 10.1, which values lay religious Institutes and confirms their members in their vocation. This proposed invitation from the Council, they added, will cause trouble in Institutes of Brothers. These Council Fathers were relaying the objections that the Superiors General of the concerned congregations were expressing. Other Fathers defended this draft, saying that although it has no official history and is not from the Pope, it could not have been introduced without the authorization of the President of the Commission, who knows, as we all do, that the question of the introduction of the priesthood in Institutes of exclusively lay Brothers has been raised by many bishops (particularly Latin Americans) and especially by Brothers.

Finally, the Commission agreed to offer a text that it considered to be more moderate:

The Council declares that there is nothing to prevent (*declarat nihil obstare*) some members of religious communities of Brothers being admitted to Holy Orders by provision of their general chapter in order to meet the need for priestly ministrations in their own houses, provided that the lay character of the community remains unchanged.

Even as amended, this draft continued to worry the Superiors General of Congregations of Brothers, especially, perhaps, Brother Nicet-Joseph. Between April and October 1965, several approaches were attempted to have it deleted. Now in its final session, the Council's engine was running at full speed. It was difficult to expect that a few lines could delay the ratification of the entire Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. The text of 10.2 was adopted along with the entire document.¹¹³

At this point in the narrative, the origin and the genesis of this controversial text, whose interpretation would soon be disputed, might be a subject for wonderment. The initial version of 10.2 can be explained with *certitude* by either of two similar and plausible hypotheses.

¹¹³ Section 10 received the most *Non Placet* votes (57 opposed out of over 2,000 votes) in the 19 votes on details of the text of *Perfectae Caritatis*. It was not Trafalgar.

The certitude—an active group of Italian Brothers of the Christian Schools of the District of Rome, along with a few Marist Brothers, were strong advocates of introducing the priesthood in their Institutes. They led a veritable campaign to convince the Council¹¹⁴ and circulated a number of mimeographed articles. In one of them, *Catéchèse et Laïcité* was used as a source of arguments in favor of the priesthood for the Brothers, which seemed strange to me, to say the least. During the 1964–65 academic year, about thirty students at *Jesus Magister* who had taken my classes took the initiative to draft—and to sign—a text that asserted my true position. This was the prelude to the heated discussions that would mark the entire first session of the 1966–1967 General Chapter. For their part, the Brothers living in Rome who favored the priesthood, familiar with how the Curia works, had no difficulty finding some of its influential members to plead their cause. They had the ear, especially, of Cardinal Antoniutti, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious. This former Nuncio to Spain, where a movement for the priesthood was evident in one or more provinces of teaching Brothers, had become convinced while there that these lay congregations ought to introduce some priests into their ranks.

The *hypothesis*—crosschecking and reflection have led me to suggest an assumption about the draft of *Perfectae Caritatis* that was submitted to the conciliar Commission in April 1965. The first draft of 10.2 was introduced by its President, Cardinal Antoniutti. He alone had the authority to add an article that had no previous conciliar foundation. Only he could assume that in doing so he was reflecting a papal wish. Subsequent events would show that as a partisan of the introduction of the priesthood in Institutes of Brothers, he would try to force them to accept it. He would enforce the order that the Council would have given them, as can be seen in the rigor of the initial version of 10.2,

¹¹⁴ The report of Commission 2 of the Institute's 1966 General Chapter, presented in its entirety in the brochure, "The Lay Character of the Institute," indicates the significant quantity of Notes from Italy and from Spain on the issue of the priesthood. "The 186 Notes that request the introduction of the priesthood in the Institute include 27 French, 28 English, 57 Spanish, and 74 Italian. The location and the source of these Notes are pertinent. The concentration is quite evident in two or three Districts, quite sporadic in all the other Districts with Notes favoring the priesthood" (pp. 19–20). "There are 242 signed Notes in opposition to introducing the priesthood in the Institute, 27 French, 31 Spanish, 160 English, and 24 Italian. These Notes come from the same Districts as those advocating the introduction of the priesthood. Many Districts sent no Notes on the subject (for or against), which seems to indicate that the question has not arisen in these areas" (p. 29).

although not in the definitive text in whose formulation he had taken no part.¹¹⁵

Like everyone else, I was taken by surprise when 10.2 was introduced. Noting the significant evolution from the first to the second draft, the commentary that I wrote insisted primarily on the limits that the Council placed on the possible introduction of the priesthood in lay institutes. I drew attention to what I viewed as inconsistencies in the text with respect to the general approach of Vatican II.¹¹⁶ I insisted even more on what cannot be overlooked in the second version of this paragraph—the Council opened a possibility but imposed nothing. This was consistent with the general line of *Perfectae Caritatis* and with the Council's fundamental objective, to abandon the already evident process of standardization and centralization that was accentuated between 1850 and 1950.

Perfectae Caritatis invites religious Institutes to exercise their autonomy and to return to their own identity and specific purpose. *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2 recognizes that if Institutes of Brothers were to envisage introducing the priesthood, it was the General Chapter as the sovereign authority that would make the decision. This interpretation seemed obvious to me, and I was surprised that everyone did not see it that way. The General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was soon to realize that contrary interpretations were apparent, not only among Brothers who supported the priesthood but also among the highest ecclesiastical authorities.

Miguel—How did the 1966 General Chapter react to Perfectae Caritatis 10.2?

Michel—Between April and June 1966, the Chapter, while resisting repeated pressure from the Roman Curia, reached a mature and resolute decision about the Institute's lay character. The calendar already called

¹¹⁵ I mentioned this in the statement that I was asked to make in the General Chapter's Commission on the question, "Does Vatican II invite us to introduce the priesthood?" (*Caractère laïc de l'Institut*, pp. 49–60). See in particular, *L'histoire de §2 du N° 10 de Perfectae Caritatis* (pp. 50–56).

¹¹⁶ This includes the notable inconsistency of envisaging the accession of some Brothers to Holy Orders to meet the needs of the priestly ministry in their communities; cf. *Commentary* cited, pp. 355–58, in Tillard, 1967.

for an “ordinary” General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, ten years after that of 1956. Theoretically, it would not be a Chapter with an election. Brother Nicet-Joseph, Superior General, had been elected for life, as was the rule since Saint John Baptist de La Salle. He had, however, announced his intention to resign at the point when he judged that the work of the Capitulants had reached a decision about the Superior’s mandate for a term of limited duration. This modification presupposed a revision desired by most Capitulants of the entire governmental structure of the Institute at all levels.

After opening on April 20, 1966, the General Chapter first had to take in hand what I mentioned earlier—its own existence. On Wednesday, June 1, 1966, at around 10 o’clock in the morning, the members of the General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools were called upon to vote by secret ballot on eight propositions that define the position of the Institute about its lay status and about the possible introduction of a number of priests among its members. The first two propositions posed the crucial questions:

1. The General Chapter affirms that the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a lay Institute and that it intends to remain as such.
2. In conscience before God and before the Church, the General Chapter affirms that the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools must remain faithful to what it is, that is to say, composed exclusively of laymen.

To achieve these simple propositions, the Capitulants had to resist “strong and repeated pressure from important authorities of the Roman Curia” that reflected intense, internal opposition by a minority of Capitulants. The long and bitter Chapter debate, with all its setbacks, allowed for significant progress on the question of the priesthood in the Institute.

Miguel—How did the Roman Curia exert pressure?

Michel—Why did the debate last so long, whether in the Commission—where it lasted almost the entire month of May—or in the General Assembly, and why was it so fierce? On two occasions, the Curia bluntly intervened to force the Chapter to accept the introduction of a few priests

in the Institute, and twice the Chapter resisted firmly but serenely, certain of its right to do so.

On April 27, 1966, Cardinal Antoniutti, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, visited the General Chapter. Everyone assumed that it was a matter of formal protocol with no connection to the work of the Assembly, which had scarcely begun. After the usual congratulations, the Cardinal exhorted the Capitulants to focus their discussions and their decisions on the implementation of the guidelines of *Perfectae Caritatis*, the conciliar decree that directed all Institutes to initiate a process of what it ended up calling their *adapted renewal*. The Decree had set the goals and established the principal conditions that made it possible to achieve the milestones outlined in the designated time period. The Cardinal's initial words could not, therefore, have been any surprise to the Capitulants.

But then the Cardinal, with no transition, announced his proposal. He focused his discourse on a specific point of this adapted renewal. He stressed the possibility that was given to lay Institutes to introduce the priesthood for some of their members. To prevent any hint of resistance, he toughened the tone—*Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2 expresses a *command*. To refuse this possibility would be to disobey Vatican Council II. Presented *ex officio* by the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, he made this the official interpretation of the conciliar text.

Taken by surprise, the Capitulants responded with polite but faint applause. The Cardinal had triggered the (predictable) battle, which would prove to be a lively one. The literal application of his remarks would result in the absence of any substantive discussions on the issue. If it truly were an order of the Council, there could be no discussion about the possibility of introducing the priesthood in the Institute. There could be no attempt to strengthen the meaning of the exclusively lay character that the Institute had maintained for two hundred and sixty years. The only responsibility left to the Chapter would be to decide how to implement the command of *Perfectae Caritatis*. But was it an order of the Council? Was the Cardinal's statement to be the final word prior to any debate?

After Vatican II, Pope Paul VI had established a Commission of Cardinals for the authentic interpretation of the conciliar documents.

They could intervene in case of doubt about the meaning of a text. This Commission was set to meet for the first time in May 1966. The memory of the conciliar debates, including the significant changes to the text of *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2, warranted an appeal to this Commission about the correctness of the interpretation by the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious. Immediately after Cardinal Antoniutti's speech to the Chapter, Brother Nicet-Joseph, along with the Superiors General of the Marist Brothers and of the Congregation of Christian Brothers, appealed to the Secretary of the Commission of Cardinals for an authentic interpretation of *PC* 10.2.

Miguel—*Was it sufficient merely to wait for the response from the Commission of Cardinals?*

Michel—After the seven General Chapter Commissions selected the topics to be studied, the Chapter began work in the early days of May 1966. The study of the possible introduction of the priesthood was a matter for Commission 2, on the Finality of the Institute. Initially, Commission 2 had some twenty members from all regions of the Institute, from Africa, North America (Canada, Mexico, USA), Central America (including the Caribbean), South America, and Asia. Near the end of the first session, this Commission split into two when the “missionaries” decided to form a Commission on the Missions. But it was important that these representatives from so-called mission areas (as well as from Latin America) take part in the debate on the priesthood. Proponents of the priesthood often insisted on the urgent need to introduce the priesthood in Districts where few priests are available and cited the names of bishops who added their opinions on the matter.

I will speak later about the content of Commission 2's work. Here I simply say that its initial task was to study and to evaluate all the Notes (428) sent to the Chapter on the question. The response was considerable, although the geographic distribution was uneven. The question could not be avoided; the Notes had to be studied.¹¹⁷ Opponents of introducing the

¹¹⁷ The first part of Commission 2's report has the results of its study of the Notes, in “The Lay Character of the Institute,” pp. 19–35: “A Situation to Observe; Study of the Notes sent to the General Chapter.”

priesthood in the Institute formed a large majority in the Commission. The active opposition was represented mostly by one Spanish Capitulant—the same who “dared” to make the intervention in 1956—and one Italian Capitulant. Their basic argument focused on the shortage of priests in the Church, especially in mission areas and throughout Latin America. Their credibility on this point, however, was weakened by the fact that they were from areas in the Church “rich” in priests. Their approach was contradicted by the resolute position in favor of maintaining the exclusively lay character of the Institute on the part of the Commission members who came precisely from those countries deemed to have a shortage of priests. As to their formal argument, the supporters of the priesthood option relentlessly relied on the authority of the interpretation of 10.2 presented earlier in the Chapter by Cardinal Antoniutti. The order of Vatican II must be obeyed. They considered as null and void my interpretation of this passage of the conciliar Decree. (I had referred to my commentary on *Perfectae Caritatis*.) They demanded that experts outside the Institute be consulted.

This internal resistance by the opponents was normal and healthy, but on the part of the Italian Capitulant, it was accompanied in a number of communities in Rome and at the Congregation for Religious by an ongoing telephone replay of the Commission’s work and the prevailing position. On the afternoon of Tuesday, May 16, 1966, Commission 2 ended its discussion with a vote on its final report, which concluded that the Institute will not introduce the priesthood. The result of the secret ballot was clear: twenty-one votes for approval and two votes against. According to the Chapter’s *Rules of Procedure*, the report was delivered to the Capitulants, but the debate in the General Assembly could not begin until Wednesday, May 18, 1966, because 24 hours had to elapse between receiving the report and beginning the debate.

But when the Capitulants assembled on the morning of Wednesday, May 18, 1966, it was to hear a statement from the Superior General, Brother Nicet-Joseph, announcing that Cardinal Antoniutti had communicated an order by telephone to suspend all work by the General Chapter until after the election of a new Superior General. All the Capitulants were upset by the Cardinal’s order, which appeared to them as a *coup de force*.

The Chapter immediately drafted, passed, and filed an official protest with the Congregation for Religious. No response arrived, other than the confirmation of the order to stop everything and to proceed to elect a new Superior General. Similarly, a request by the Institute's Procurator General for an audience was refused—submission was required.

Brother Nicet-Joseph presented his resignation to the General Chapter on Friday, May 20, 1966. Meanwhile, the Government Commission was preparing the changes needed in the Institute's *Constitutions*—election for a term of ten years and election of a Vicar-General as a full-time aide to the Superior General. The Assembly passed these changes in record time and set the election of the Superior General to take place on Monday, May 23, 1966, and that of the Vicar-General on Wednesday, May 25, 1966. This urgent timetable was followed. Adding to his *coup de force* a useless humiliation of the Assembly, Cardinal Antoniutti let it be known that to prevent any fraud or pressure, Archbishop Philippe, Secretary of the Congregation for Religious, would preside at the election of the Superior. This is what happened, without much regard by Archbishop Philippe for the outgoing Superior General, who normally would preside at the election and ask for the consent of the newly elected Superior, in this case an American, Brother Charles Henry.

Miguel—What happened after the election with the controversial topic of introducing the priesthood in the Institute?

Michel—The Cardinal's *coup de force* did nothing but delay the General Chapter's discussion of the application of *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2. It did not influence the Chapter's final decision, except perhaps by encouraging some hesitant Capitulants to react by joining the majority. The error of the Cardinal and of other officials of the Congregation for Religious was to assume that the resolutely hostile position of Brother Nicet-Joseph to the priesthood posed some kind of pressure on the Capitulants. The event would show what nonsense this was. The Assembly was well aware of its entire responsibility with respect to this historic choice.

On May 27, 1966, in strict compliance with Cardinal Antoniutti's orders, the Chapter began the discussion of Commission 2's report. The interruption, lasting no more than ten days, had produced no change in

the text that the Commission had already presented to the Chapter. The debate lasted for three full days.

Throughout the discussions in the Commission, as in the General Assembly, the personality of the Spanish opponent made a strong impression on me. With the sharp features of a Castilian ascetic, he spoke with a conviction that I could imagine was like that of Savonarola. Brother Luke Salm describes the scene in the Assembly:

[T]he Spanish advocate for the priesthood, in an impassioned and very poetic intervention, compared the priesthood to a beautiful garden behind an iron gate, the key to which the Church was now offering the Institute. How, he asked, could we ever refuse to enter and so deprive ourselves of all the benefits the garden had to offer?¹¹⁸

The two opponents of the Commission's report also vigorously resumed their arguments, notably their protest against the opposition's calling on outside experts and against the refusal to accept as normative Cardinal Antoniutti's interpretation of 10.2 at the beginning of the General Chapter.

On this last point, Brother Maurice-Auguste, Procurator General, could offer a decisive argument. The Commission of Cardinals had convened, and its response to the request for consultation by the three Superiors General was clear—*Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2 leaves to the General Chapters the *possibility* of introducing the priesthood in the various Institutes; it does not impose an *obligation*. That decision had been communicated informally to Brother Maurice-Auguste and to me by Monsignor Felici, Secretary of the Commission of Cardinals, immediately after its meeting. The official transmission to the Institutes would come later from the Congregation for Religious.

All the Capitulants could understand that such an interpretation would permanently settle the debate. It contradicted Cardinal Antoniutti and demonstrated that he had spoken only in a personal capacity.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Salm, 1992, p. 67.

¹¹⁹ This is what the *Report* of the Commission of Cardinals clearly, but not without gravity, states in its third part, "A Choice to Make. Introduction. The Commission has taken note of the allocation of His Eminence Cardinal Antoniutti to the General Chapter, and in its work it relies on the official doctrine of the Church expressed in the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (No. 10) of the Second Vatican Council" (Brochure, "Lay Character of the Institute," p. 83).

Opponents in the General Assembly of the introduction of the priesthood could, therefore, introduce the arguments contained in the Commission's report. The most significant interventions were made by representatives from the Institute's missionary areas, who were unanimous in recommending that the Institute retain its exclusively lay character.

The debate ended on Monday, May 30, 1966. The report of Commission 2 contained eight propositions that were submitted, one after the other, to a vote on Wednesday, June 1, 1966, after the prescribed 24-hour period.

Even before the General Chapter, the debate on the introduction of the priesthood in the Institute had taken place in an atmosphere of secret electioneering, pressure, denunciations, and authoritarian interventions by the Congregation for Religious. It wanted to compel the Assembly to admit that some Brothers could be ordained priests, but it underestimated the strength and the cohesion on this point of the Institute's vital consciousness. The vote took place on the appointed day. The first two propositions posed the two substantive issues mentioned above. The result was unambiguous; the first proposition was passed by 111 Yes, 2 No, and 4 abstentions; the second, by 98 Yes, 13 No, and 5 abstentions.

Miguel—We are speaking about how the 1966 General Chapter strengthened the Brother's identity. How did the debate on introducing some priests in the Institute lead to a deeper awareness of this identity?

Michel—At the end of this story, one thing remains clear to me. The solid thinking of the Commission,¹²⁰ clarified by the testimony of experts, enabled the 1966 General Chapter to approve two notable advances and shifts related to the Brother's identity: lay, why not priest?

¹²⁰ In what follows I refer to the Report of Commission 2 in the official publication of the 1966–1967 General Chapter, "The Lay Character of the Institute." It includes the eight propositions passed by the Capitulants and the Commission's Report, Part III, "A Choice to Make" (pp. 82–101). I indicate the sequence number of paragraphs 1 to 35. The authority of this report became that of the Chapter itself, because one of the approved propositions states, "The General Chapter decided to bring to the attention of all the Brothers the entire report of the Commission on the issue of the priesthood" (Proposition 7).

• *Advance and shift—in the approach to the question*

The first advance and shift comes from the fact that *the issue of the priesthood was openly questioned in an honest and serious approach*. For the Institute and especially for its leaders, to agree to discuss openly the possible introduction of the priesthood was a twofold, radical reversal. Until then, indeed, the Superiors of the Institute had considered that the lay character of the Institute belonged *to the intangible deposit that they were charged to preserve integrally*. They had always interpreted this responsibility of loyalty to the deposit as implying a refusal to question the exclusively lay character of the Institute. This happened in 1946 and, to a lesser extent, in 1956. The conciliar statement in *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2 prevented any evasion—the General Chapter *must discuss the issue freely*. In reality, the matter could not be decided outside the Institute.

Second, the Superiors, not without contradiction, had resorted to the authorities of the Roman Curia to support their opposition even to raise the question of the priesthood. The Curia supported them in their complacency, especially in 1946. Now *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2 stressed their responsibility and freed them from any fear—it is up to the living Institute to appreciate, accept, and express what it is. The Council offered it the possibility and even urged it to experience a collective awareness of its identity. The questionable introduction of that paragraph in the conciliar Decree was a blessing that brought out the truth. The Capitulants understood this so well that they were able to resist undue pressure from the same Roman Curia—this time in the opposite direction—and to use the new liberty that Vatican II gave them.

The 1966 General Chapter was able to *approach* the problem and to deal with it while understanding the individuals involved, with modesty in the arguments deployed and with clarity in the decisions. The Capitulants showed their understanding *regarding the persons* involved. With considerable nuance and realism, a Subcommission had considered the case of Brothers who did want to become priests. It recalled the primary importance of clarity in the Brother's original choice. Any ambiguity on the part of formation staff or "recruiters" who might allow candidates to

assume that after entering the Institute they could access the priesthood was unacceptable and must be avoided in the future. If such misdirection occurred in the past, it would be best to free any victims of such false information and to help them choose another direction.¹²¹ Even more so, any pressure is forbidden that would force any Brother to remain in the Institute who belatedly became aware of his wrong choice. The Subcommission here was blaming, without naming it, the famous *Circular 317^{bis}* of 1947.¹²²

• *Advance and shift—in the content of responses to this question*

As for the argumentation, the Chapter recognized that there were no decisive, rational arguments for or against introducing the priesthood.¹²³ The actual position of the Institute of the Brothers is a positive fact¹²⁴ that reflects the common will of a group of men who intend to live in an exclusively lay Institute. Congregations dedicated to teaching that include Priests and Brothers do exist, which is enough to show that the option chosen by the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a matter of free choice. On the contrary, many congregations of women religious are dedicated to education, a fact that removes in advance any absolute claim about the need to introduce the priesthood in a male Institute. Why is what is impossible for half of humanity indispensable for the other half?¹²⁵

The argument based on fidelity to the Founder could not be invoked as any more irrefutable. In his intervention on *the thinking of Saint John Baptist de La Salle on the question*, Brother Saturnino Gallego had initially demonstrated the radical nature of the Founder's position, but then he had to recognize the impossibility of deducing from such an argument any solution for today's situation in real life, not in demonstrative reasoning. It was the General Chapter's role to appreciate the thoughts and the feelings that the living Institute was currently experiencing about its identity.

¹²¹ *Lay Character of the Institute*, Part 3, propositions 19–21, pp. 95–96.

¹²² *Ibid.*, Proposition 18, pp. 111–12.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, Part 2, Proposition 6, p. 87.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Proposition 7, p. 88.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Regardless of everything, the Chapter had to make a decision. With clarity it affirmed *two positions of principle* that I recalled earlier—*the Institute defines itself as lay and as exclusively lay*. Although the Chapter did not try to prove these two decisions rationally, it justified them, nonetheless, by the living reality—the vast majority of Brothers *knowingly and voluntarily entered the lay religious life in an Institute that is exclusively lay*. The Chapter's decision would undoubtedly cause some difficulties, even some crises, but a contrary decision would have resulted in more numerous and formidable negative consequences.¹²⁶

Miguel—How did the content of the Chapter's decisions on the question advance the reflection on the Institute's identity?

Michel—The second advance and shift that I identified refers, in effect, to the content of the Commission's responses that the Chapter approved. I will offer four comments on the matter.

1) My first observation is about the kind of reversal that the General Chapter made in implementing *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2. Formally, the obvious question was a legal one, whether to maintain the exclusively lay character of the Institute. The Chapter did not shirk the issue but reiterated and defended the exclusively lay option. Most of the Chapter Commission's report, however, dealt with *the vital content and the significance of the lay religious life*. It referred also to *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.1; the Chapter wished to leave the field of controversy behind and to *illustrate* the Institute's lay character.

2) The Commission made its assumptions explicit. The initial assumption concerned the way of speaking about the religious life and its various forms. I will offer more detail later when speaking about the *Declaration*, but the Commission's report suggests that I add a word here. *The Decree of Vatican II confirmed the Brothers in their specific vocation*. The Council contradicted what the Curia had imposed for a century and a half. The understanding of the Brother's life must no longer be limited to the inadequate canonical definition of the *religious life in*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, Part 2, Proposition 6, p. 88.

general. Each Institute was invited to define itself based on what is unique to it.

3) The primary originality of lay Institutes is precisely *this lay character*. What about the threefold or fourfold division of members of the Church?—redundant, nothing but words. *Perfectae Caritatis* speaks repeatedly of lay religious life and of *lay* religious. Some choose to consider the term “religious” as somehow devouring the adjective “lay.” I think otherwise; Vatican II invites us to consider that there are two ways of living the lay state and that lay religious ought not to create an impasse about their lay character. The 1966–1967 General Chapter firmly committed itself to this approach:

If the Institute today has greater awareness and is declaring more explicitly that it places itself as a religious Institute alongside all laypeople living the baptismal priesthood and not alongside the ministerial priesthood, this option will need to manifest itself more clearly and unequivocally in various areas—style of formation, spirituality, and prayer life, even mode of clothing... Major research remains to be done seriously in this sense, so that it appears in the eyes of the members and in the eyes of those outside the Institute that we are building our lives as religious teachers based on the requirements of the life of the baptized and the confirmed, not on types of clerical or monastic life.

4) In 1966, there was much talk about *research*. In attitudes, in behavior, and in mentality, the value of the lay character had rarely been expressed, although in reality—in exercising a profession, in serious concern for earthly realities, in interest in human concerns, and in involvement in urban life to contribute to its transformation—the Brother is close to laypeople. *This research needs to continue* through analysis and expression, no doubt, but above all in life. To foster it, the Commission report encourages an exploration of aspects that are barely suggested in the conciliar Decree. The *religious consecration* must “be presented as a privileged exercise of the universal priesthood, because it consists in the offering of sacrifice to God.” *The apostolic mission of the Brother* must “be aligned with his participation as baptized and confirmed in the prophetic function of Christ. The *significance of his commitment to the world as a consecrated person* in a missionary Church that

wants dialogue with the world” must be valued. “*The meaning of the life and the community apostolate of the Institute’s members*” must be “*made apparent.*”¹²⁷

These reflections in the document on the lay character of the Institute go far beyond the legal aspect of the question that the General Chapter had to address. In light of what would become *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, the document on the lay character suggests some benchmarks for further strengthening the identity of the Brother. It also seems to me that its prolonged discussion on the Institute’s lay character is in part what led Commission 2 to realize that it had only just begun its work. It is not by chance that at that same time (late May to early June 1966) and initially within the Commission, an idea of the need for a “backbone” document for Chapter work and an awareness of the need for a second session took root.

A passage from the document on the lay character of the Institute went further, it seems to me, on the subject of the Brother’s identity and a premonition of necessary additional developments in this regard:

If Saint John Baptist de La Salle so explicitly chose the exclusively lay character of the Institute he founded, it was ultimately in an effort to assure the Congregation’s fidelity to its specific purpose: the service through the Christian School of the evangelization and education in the faith of poor youth who were “far from salvation.” This means that the Institute can understand and live its exclusively lay state only to the extent that its members remain faithful as a community for this purpose. Therefore, the question of the priesthood in certain regions of the Institute invites all Brothers to question themselves about their profound fidelity to the apostolic mission, the spirit of poverty and humility, the concern for the service of the poor.¹²⁸

Can anyone better demonstrate that this long debate about the lay character of the Institute was inevitable in the context of the time, when the insufficiency of a merely legal decision was obvious, and that it also pre-

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85, 3, *emphasis added*.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89, 9.

pared the Capitulants for a broader, more fundamental reflection on the Institute's mission?

Miguel—*What did you mean by saying that an awareness of the question's context advanced the consideration of the Brother's identity?*

Michel—To avoid an impasse, this issue had to be considered in the context of an ecclesiology *of communion and of solidarity* experienced with a defined group of people.

The text of *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2 supposes a distinction and an opposition between priesthood and laity that was classic until Vatican II. Nevertheless, the placement in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, of chapter 2, "On the People of God," before chapters 3 and 4, "On the Hierarchy" and "On the Laity," is an invitation to focus on unity over differences, on communion over separation, and on the equality of all over the superiority of a few. In addition, *Lumen Gentium* recalls that it is primarily the People of God as a whole who exercise prophetic, priestly, and royal functions and that they do so in a multitude of ministries distributed to all members of the Church according to the charisms received by each. This teaching of Vatican II had not sufficiently penetrated the general mindset to expect to find perfect consistency in this regard in all the Council's documents. This explains, for example, the curious concept of the ministerial priesthood underlying *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2—a priesthood seen as narrowly provincial, limited only to the *interior needs of the Institute*.

Many reflections in the Chapter Commission's report, on the contrary, go in the opposite direction to an ecclesiology of communion and of the complementarity of ministries. This is the meaning especially of this affirmation: the shortage of priests brings attention, above all, to *the priority of announcing the Word over sacramentalization*:

Today's world, especially in areas with the greatest shortage of priests, suffers especially from a lack of evangelization and of education in the faith. The fewer the priests, the more do the tasks of catechetics and of formation in personal Christian life seem fundamental instead of the tasks of sacramentalization. Thus, the extreme situations can cause the Brothers to rediscover vitally the fundamental importance of the catechetical min-

istry that constitutes the essence of their vocation and to intensify their efforts on this important point.¹²⁹

The fundamental character of the tasks in catechesis is compared with those in sacramentalization. *Extreme situations can lead the Brothers to a vital rediscovery of the fundamental importance of the catechetical ministry, which constitutes the essence of their vocation.* It is clear that such a statement can only be understood in the perspective of a plurality of ministries in a Church that is above all a communion.

This issue must be addressed in a *context of solidarity with a given group of people*. The shortage of priests in some areas painfully affects lay religious men and women. They can no longer always benefit from the priestly ministry of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation as frequently as they would wish and as they were accustomed. While recognizing the need to overcome this deficiency, the report to the Chapter courageously invites the Brothers to experience this situation in solidarity with the people whom they are serving:

As for Brothers who themselves suffer the lack of priestly ministry, although everything possible ought to be done to improve their situation, they can in extreme cases where they are experiencing a particularly painful situation of spiritual poverty also be led to a more radical trust in the interior activity of the Holy Spirit, the sole author of all holiness. This interior activity never fails. Sharing this situation of poverty with other Christians, they are thus called to understand and to live in solidarity with the local Church where they are working. Their suffering offered to God undoubtedly contributes to the work of salvation that is accomplished invisibly.

Similarly, Brothers in their educational institutions must be careful not to create situations that are so privileged with respect to priestly service that they cannot be found later.

The lack of priestly service in the schools where Brothers work is most often associated with the shortage of priests in the area where these schools are located. Rather than try to create conditions of sacramental and liturgical life or of better spiritual direction in themselves, but artifi-

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90, 11.

cial with respect to the local context, it seems more realistic and more effective from the point of view of a Christian education that prepares for life to work to accustom the young people to live as Christians after their schooling in the situation that will be theirs for the rest of their life.¹³⁰

It is plain to see that on the issue of the Institute's exclusively lay character, the Commission's reflection calls for a wider perspective on the identity of the Brother in the Church whose nature and life the Council explained. It raises some questions in the field of ecclesiology:

- the autonomy of religious Institutes and their primary responsibility to define their own identity;
- the connection of these vibrant bodies with their origins, a link that is neither servile reproduction nor rupture but a living, organic continuity that takes into account the original situation and the changes in the current social and ecclesial reality;
- the conditions for authenticity and freedom in every vocation;
- the requirements for renewal in implementing the specific mission, and
- the importance of moving to an ecclesiology of communion and of working in the Church with a complementary understanding of ministries, especially the Ministry of the Word and the sacramental ministry.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30, 12.

Chapter 11 – *THE DECLARATION: BACKBONE OF THE 1966–1967 GENERAL CHAPTER*

THE *DECLARATION*'S NOVELTY: THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE POOR, THE RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION OF THE BROTHER

Miguel—We now reach “*The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*,” a unique document in the Institute’s history. Was it foreseen by the Chapter in 1966?

Michel—The *Declaration* belongs to the order of unexpected events, not of conventional institutions. I personally experienced it as the tangible sign of the unpredictable passage of the Holy Spirit in the Institute’s contemporary history.

The Capitulants who met in Rome in April 1966 had no idea of producing a document like the *Declaration*. Over the previous ten years, the General Council had developed three successive draft Projects of the *Rule*. Projects 1 and 2 were sent to the Visitors and their Councils for their critique. Project 3 was awaiting the Capitulants in Rome, as was Project 4, a “conciliar” text hastily written between January and April 1966. Logically, the Chapter’s main task would have been to choose between the two final Projects, quite different in spirit and in content, and then to discuss and to amend the selected version prior to submitting it for approval by the Congregation for Religious. That was the general idea, especially among members of the outgoing General Council. I remarked earlier that Brother Aubert-Joseph expected this Chapter work to be “buckled up” in three weeks, just as in the previous two Chapters.

But if a document such as the *Declaration* was totally unpredictable to those who were to produce it, in retrospect the need imposed on the Capitulants for it is understandable. The *Declaration* is the result of a fundamental, basic shift that affected the Brothers but that arose initially from outside the Institute and later was accommodated within the Institute.

Miguel—How did the idea of the Declaration emerge during the first session?

Michel—Before producing the *Declaration*, or even being capable of doing so, the Capitulants of 1966 had to become aware of the need for it, which became necessary bit by bit, it seems to me, because of a three-fold experience during that first session.

First, the Chapter Assembly was able to take charge of its own existence, as shown by initially refusing to follow a predetermined schedule, by resisting pressure from the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, which wanted to impose its interpretation of *Perfectae Caritatis* 10.2 on the introduction of the priesthood in the Institute, and by adopting the basic principle of subsidiarity and resolutely choosing a new type of *Rule* (the first part of Project 4) that differs considerably from three earlier Projects developed between 1956 and 1965 and burdened with meticulous *Constitutions* that the Assistants obstinately wanted to add. This consciousness of an independent existence as a sovereign assembly also contributed to expanding the domain of responsibilities for the Capitulants.

Moreover, a second experience made the need apparent for a comprehensive document on *the Brother's identity*. The debate about the Institute's lay character and about the possibility of introducing the priesthood went to what might seem excessive lengths and met with inevitable internal and external interference. These prolonged, bitter, and sometimes painful discussions focused on an essential—but only one—aspect of the Brother's identity. The Chapter perceived this limited scope and recognized the need to expand the question by addressing all aspects of the Brother's identity and to reformulate in a positive, dynamic way the significance of this vocation in the world today.

A third experience, a negative one, confirmed this point of view. As with every General Chapter, the work was distributed among Commissions—seven in this case: 1) Vows; 2) Apostolic Life and Finality; 3) Formation; 4) Community and Religious Life; 5) Government; 6) Finance; 7) Revision of the *Rule*. Commission 8, Missions, was added after the election of the Vicar-General and was responsible for the entire “missionary”

sector of the Institute, with members coming mainly from the original Commission 2.¹³¹

Three Commissions, constrained by circumstances, were able to complete part of their work: 2 (the lay character), 5 (before the election of the Superior and of the Vicar-General), and 7 (clarifying the Chapter's position on the new *Rule*). The reports brought to the Assembly by Commissions 1, 3, and 4 were not accepted as a basis for discussion.¹³² The Capitulants were disappointed with their fragmentary and somewhat narrow results. These limitations were not due to the members themselves, as the rest of the Chapter will show, but the three issues assigned to them appeared to be fragmentary, even contradictory. In a word, the Assembly's rejection meant that proposals about the vows, community life, formation—even all the work on revising the *Rule*—needed to be situated in an overall perspective based on the actual nature and meaning of the Brother's life. This is what people were expecting from the “backbone” they were seeking.

These three experiences highlighted the need for such a “backbone” as an overview of the Brother's vocation. This awareness was first specified by members of Commission 2, whose title, the Finality of the Institute, meant that a reflection on the “why” of the Brother's vocation had priority over determining the appropriate practical details about “how” to live—prayer, vows, community life, formation, and so on.

In addition, two specific factors at this Chapter reinforced and made more evident to all Capitulants the idea of the need for this “backbone.” The Notes from Brothers in response to Brother Nicet-Joseph's questionnaire had to be taken into account. These Notes forced the Chapter to consider how to be a Brother—the “how” of the Institute—and the *raison d'être* of the Brother today—the “why” of the Institute. This evidence from the Institute's “base” was consistent with the demands of Vatican II.

¹³¹ Salm, 1992, p. 42.

¹³² I will not include the Finance Commission but merely refer to what Brother Luke Salm succinctly relates (id., pp. 75–76).

Perfectae Caritatis is not simply about *adaptation* of the religious life but *adapted renewal* of the religious life.

There are fundamental differences between the two expressions. Adaptation, which focuses on the “how,” is concerned with the forms of the Institute, the regulation of its life, the apostolic works. Renewal, concerned with the “why,” the purpose, can only be achieved by a vital rediscovery of the Institute’s purpose, which is not in the Institute itself, let alone in its *Rule*, but in human life and the needs of today’s world. Because the purpose of the 1966–1967 General Chapter was to apply to the Institute the norms defined in *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Chapter had to proceed with a fundamental reflection and debate on the Institute’s nature and purpose and on the Brother’s identity in the world today.

Miguel—Did the first session produce anything other than the election of the central government and the text on the Institute’s lay character?

Michel—You are right to ask this question. In fact, the Chapter Assembly made four decisions between the election of the Assistants and the end of the first session. The first three votes came from Commission 4’s propositions about community life. Although not of major importance, they had been in the recent past the object of disproportionate and passionate debates and blockages that are difficult to understand. These decisions dealt with the change in the content of vocal prayers, the use of tobacco, and the substitution of the legal family name for the religious name. The “climate” had changed since 1956; the position of the 1966 Chapter in each case was favorable, in spite of the “last stands” led each time by some intransigents.¹³³

A *Circular* that sought to block in advance the demands of many Brothers in the 1950s for *liturgical vocal prayer* provoked an unusual influx of Notes on the issue at the 1956 General Chapter. The changes made then were minor—a few superficial concessions that satisfied no one. This time, Brother Assistant Aubert-Joseph led the fight for the adoption of liturgical prayer. He also developed an adaptation of the Liturgy of the

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–74.

Hours for the Brothers that he proposed *ad experimentum* to the 1966 Capitulants during the first session. The positive nature of the experience, the belief of many Capitulants in the appropriateness of this change, the recommendation in this regard by Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,¹³⁴ and the desire to approve a proposal by Brother Aubert-Joseph—severely tested by the Assembly's opposition to his positions on the *Rule*—converged in the Chapter's vote by a large majority to adopt a liturgical vocal prayer.¹³⁵

Concerning *the use of tobacco*, the Commission's prudent propositions were adopted, "considering the issue of tobacco in a broader perspective of the ascetical life and with a positive formulation" and leaving to regional authorities the task of dealing with problems of tobacco and liquor, "taking into account local situations in a spirit of charity."¹³⁶ In fact, the previous taboo was lifted, and in the near future, the "tobacco issue" would resurface, not on "religious" grounds but out of concern for health and ecology and would no longer be on the Institute's agenda.

More easily, the Chapter "decreed" unanimously that the Brothers "will be from now on officially known by their *baptismal name followed by their family name*, and that a name in religion will no longer be assigned at the taking of the habit."¹³⁷ The change was a universal request from the Institute, made necessary by the exigencies of the modern world.

Personally, I was not surprised at the ease with which the Chapter loosened these regulations on three controversial issues of too long a duration. However, I did expect strong reactions on a fourth question addressed by Commission 2, *coeducational schools*. To my surprise it passed "like a letter in the post," late in the first session, not only, as Brother Luke Salm notes, because of fatigue and the Roman heat, but because "conditions

¹³⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 98.

¹³⁵ "The seven propositions on vocal prayers were accepted unanimously, with one or two opposed and one or two abstentions. However, for the second proposition, there are ten votes against and three abstentions." Minutes of the meeting on June 14, 9–11 a.m., p. 1. On these proposals, see *Proceedings of the 39th General Chapter*, 83–87, pp. 41–42.

¹³⁶ *Proceedings of the 39th General Chapter*, 139–40, pp. 57–58.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24–27, pp. 21–22.

throughout the world are making it necessary for the Institute to do away with its absolute ban on co-education.”¹³⁸ Although the initial propositions affirmed the Institute’s intention “to remain in the service of young men,” local authorities were allowed “to make prudent decisions in specific locales.” But another proposal called for “taking account in the formation of Brothers the new conditions of the apostolate and focusing more than in the past on ensuring the emotional maturity of the Brothers.”¹³⁹ Positively recognizing the changing world meant that coeducation in the schools—and not only there—would no longer be the exception but become the rule.

A SECOND SESSION OF THE CHAPTER

Miguel—*Because the idea of creating the “backbone” required a second session, how did the Chapter make that decision?*

Michel—The need to prepare a comprehensive document on the Brother’s identity became gradually apparent to the Capitulants, although the contours of the content remained unclear. It became obvious that the document could not be written during the first session. To make matters worse, all Commission work had been delayed. At the outset, the Chapter’s main objective was to revise the *Rule*, still evidently a paramount need. For reasons that I will return to later, the Commission had been delayed; moreover, it had to wait for input from the other Commissions. Drawing up the *Rule*, of course, now depended on the “backbone.”

The Chapter could not extend its work beyond June 1966. Most Capitulants were also Visitors; a long and bitter strike of the Italian post that paralyzed communication by mail in both directions made their absence from the District even more troublesome. The need for a second session quickly became evident in the minds of some Capitulants. “Even before the Chapter opened ... the American group ... had made the possibility of a second session part of its agenda for the Chapter.”¹⁴⁰ I have a

¹³⁸ Salm, 1992, p. 74.

¹³⁹ *Proceedings of the 39th General Chapter*, 16–20, pp. 19–20.

¹⁴⁰ Salm, 1992, p. 76.

specific recollection on the matter. On the afternoon after Brother Charles Henry's election as Superior, Monday, May 23, 1966, a few French Capitulants met in Castel San Pietro (a small village east of Rome), as they were wont to do. When our conversation turned to the Chapter's progress, we agreed on the need for a second session and considered how to lobby for the idea among the Capitulants. In the evening, three or four of us met with Brother Maurice-Auguste to plan a strategy to obtain the Assembly's quick decision.¹⁴¹

Recounting the visit to the Chapter by Archbishop Philippe on Monday, May 30, 1966, the editor of the *General Chapter News Bulletin* observed that "the question of a second session was in the air for some time."¹⁴² On this point, the exchange that evening with the Secretary of the Congregation for Religious was decisive. Archbishop Philippe informed us of the forthcoming release of a *Motu Proprio* by Paul VI with practical indications for applying *Perfectae Caritatis* to the renewal of religious Institutes.¹⁴³ To put it into effect, all Congregations must organize within two or three years a Special General Chapter of *aggiornamento* to be prepared by all members of the Institute, to have special powers, and to have the possibility of multiple sessions.

Our Assembly in 1966 was an "ordinary" General Chapter, but its advance preparation satisfied the conditions of the "renewal" Chapter described in the *Motu Proprio*. As never before, the entire Institute had taken part in its preparation, both in the project for a radical revision of the *Rule* and in response to Brother Nicet-Joseph's extensive questionnaire. We could not imagine another similar mobilization of all the Brothers for a Special General Chapter in 1968 or 1969. The breadth and the depth of the current Chapter's work fulfilled the requirement that all

¹⁴¹ At that time and for several weeks before, Brother Maurice-Auguste knew the substance of the *Motu Proprio* that Archbishop Philippe mentioned. See the following paragraph and note 143. For my work on the draft of the *Rule* (dated Monday, May 16), I had already used some elements from that future document.

¹⁴² *General Chapter Bulletin* No. 12, June 1, 1966, p. 2.

¹⁴³ The *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, in fact, would not be published until August 6, 1966. See Armand Le Bourgeois, Bishop of Autun, *Histoire et bref commentaire du Motu Proprio, Ecclesiae Sanctae*, 19 pages.

Institutes hold a renewal Chapter but also made a second session necessary. Therefore, could this Chapter not be considered in lieu of the Special Chapter that *Ecclesiae Sanctae* required? This argument and question were presented to Archbishop Philippe. He could not formally commit himself in advance without knowing the results of our Chapter work, but he left us with the understanding that when the time came, the response of the Congregation for Religious would be positive.

Engaged on June 1, 1966, in the vote on the priesthood, the Assembly quickly decided by secret ballot on June 2 to hold a second session in 1967.¹⁴⁴ The information given to the Capitulants about the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* also shed a bright light on the document still known as the “backbone.” This comprehensive text on the Brother’s identity was to have a specific target: launching the Institute’s “renewal.” This perspective inspired all the work to be done during the Intersession. The *Declaration* would open with a paragraph that formulates its dual aim:

Faithful to the spirit of Vatican II which invites religious families to undertake the work of renewal and adaptation, the thirty-ninth General Chapter gives expression to the willing response of the Institute and to the understanding it has at present of its own nature and mission, and therefore considers it opportune to publish this declaration on the Brother of the Christian Schools in the world today.¹⁴⁵

The *Declaration* follows the criteria in *Perfectae Caritatis* for this renewal—spiritual, above all, mindful of the request to return to the Gospel, to follow Christ, to renew the dynamic fidelity to the specific intent and spirit of the Founder, and to listen to the calls of the world and of the Church’s present life.¹⁴⁶

Miguel—Can we talk about the Declaration’s antecedents and sources?

¹⁴⁴ The secret vote was 107 yes, 5 no, and 1 abstention, according to the minutes of the meeting of June 2, 1966, 9 a.m.

¹⁴⁵ *Declaration* 1.

¹⁴⁶ *Declaration* 3.1–5, Personal and Spiritual Renewal; 4, Community Renewal; 5–7, Fidelity to the Founder; 8, The Signs of the Times; 9, Desires of the Brothers; 10, Desires of the Church; 11, Desires of the World.

Michel—As a document directed to the Institute’s renewal, which the recently concluded Vatican Council II had directed and guided, the *Declaration*—I think I can say—has no “ancestors.” It cannot be compared with any previous text of a similar nature. Comparisons can be made among the editions of the *Rule* of 1718, 1725, 1901, and 1947, among Projects 1, 2, 3, and 4, and between the *Rule* adopted in 1967 and in 1986, but no comparison is possible for the *Declaration*. We cannot say, however, that it has no “sources,” for they are quite obvious and important, as I will try to show in two complementary ways.

When I spoke about the Institute’s life between 1946 and 1956, I tried to show that the Spirit’s activity was forcefully apparent after the disastrous 1946 General Chapter. In spite of the multifaceted blockade created by that reactionary Assembly, some Brothers were able to open themselves quickly to the various renewal movements then enlivening the Church and the society. I limit myself to recalling the names of five Brothers to indicate how the *Declaration*’s text echoes their commitment and also their writings. In various ways, then, they were present and active in both sessions of the General Chapter, 1966 and 1967. Almost all are Europeans, but I do not mean to imply that there were none like them anywhere else in the world. Because my limited experience at the time had no other horizon, these Brothers sustained my own hope.

Brother Vincent Ayel was the instigator in the Institute of the catechetical renewal that began in France in the aftermath of World War II. The paragraphs in the *Declaration* on “Education in the Faith and Human Development” often echo him and the journal he edited, *Catéchistes* (*Declaration* 35–42).

Wounded by the arrogance of clericalism, *Brother Guillermo-Félix*, Assistant for Spain, was able to go beyond any sense of inferiority and to realize his dream of university-level formation for the Brothers in their catechetical ministry in the Christian school. His vigorous convictions and actions are not strangers to the *Declaration*’s text on the lay character of the Institute. They also reverberate in many strong paragraphs about the renewal of the formation of the Brothers (*Declaration* 9, 15, 25, 38, 48, 49).

The chapter on “The Service of the Poor through Education” (*Declaration* 28–34) largely reflects the activity of *Brother Honoré de Silvestri*. His involvement in technical education and in Catholic Action contributed to make the option for the poor a renewed priority in the Institute. This portion of the *Declaration* also owes much to the passion, inspiration, and work of Brother Augustine Loes during the Intersession.¹⁴⁷

Brother Didier Piveteau raised attention in the Institute in France to the need to renew the Lasallian school and to update teacher preparation with the best current methods of modern education and the contributions of the social sciences. A number of his articles in *Orientations* inform the chapter on “The Educational Work of the Brothers: The Need for Renewal” (*Declaration* 43–52).

Brother Maurice-Auguste, the Sub-Director of the Second Novitiate as of 1947 and an expert on the *Rule*, understood the need to begin by studying it as a human text, examining its sources, researching its broader context, and distinguishing its various editorial layers. He had the audacity to challenge the official, fundamentalist approach that granted the same value as the expression of the “will of God” to every item in a heterogeneous *Rule*. Furthermore, he was the linchpin of the renewal of Lasallian Studies. What the *Declaration* says about fidelity to the Founder is directly attributable to Brother Maurice-Auguste. (*Declaration* 5–7).

Miguel—Is the Declaration a combination or an amalgam of these diverse facets of the Brother’s vocation?

Michel—What I just said about the Brothers whose writings are echoed in the *Declaration* must not put you off the track. More than any literal sources, the most important and unifying factor is the inspiration from the movements in which these Brothers in the Institute were protagonists. The 1946 General Chapter wanted to lock all the Institute’s portals against human life and Christian communities. Thanks to the initiative of these Brothers in their time, the life of the world and of the Church

¹⁴⁷ Salm, 1992, pp. 99–100.

reached the Institute through the windows. In various ways, these pioneer Brothers had to struggle to obtain recognition for their innovations. But little by little, thanks to them and to many other Brothers who were attentive to the needs of young people intensely searching for their own perfection, the Institute's mindset changed.

Without being a prophet, at the point when the 1966 Chapter was searching for a "backbone," I was personally conscious that something like a deep breath was moving in the depths of the Institute and that the Capitulants could not ignore this groundswell. In 1966 I witnessed the irresistible confluence of four streams: the thawing of an ancient glacier, the breaking of an ages-old dam, the resurrection of dry bones, and the unpredictable outpouring in the temple of a spring that became a torrent. The first three streams represent the three major decisions of the 1956 General Chapter and Brother Nicet-Joseph's implementation of them. Because I spoke about them earlier, I limit myself to a few allusions:

- *Thawing of an ancient glacier* refers to the decision to undertake a radical revision of the *Rule*; unlike all previous attempts over two centuries, it would no longer be based on the original text (*Declaration* 19.2).
- *Breaking of an ages-old dam* means that instead of banning collective Notes to the General Chapter, the Institute encouraged them in response to Brother Nicet-Joseph's questionnaire, with which the Spirit could be at work in dialogue within the living community (*Declaration* 9.1).
- *Resurrection of dry bones* is an image that typifies the results of the renewal of Lasallian Studies, which stimulated the emergence of a new view of the Founder, especially by the rediscovery of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, whose inspirational force even more than their words invigorates the entire *Declaration*. These *Meditations* manifest the Institute's charismatic origin and significance. They restore the priority of the Founder's vital life force (*Declaration* 6.2) over the static view of the observance of an often meticulous, binding, and negative *Rule*. These *Meditations* highlight the existential and spiritual unity of the Brother's vocation.

He is called by the Father and by the poor to a ministry; he consecrates himself to follow Jesus Christ in a Gospel mission, and he dedicates himself day by day to fulfill this mission of the Good Shepherd to abandoned youth. As a recipient of the Holy Spirit's gifts in the Church, the Brother grows in the spiritual life that is inseparable from his apostolic service.

- *Unpredictable outpouring in the temple of a spring that became a torrent* is obviously Vatican Council II, celebrated from October 1962 to December 1965. I am not going to mention here how after 1950 the various renewal movements—biblical, theological, patristic, ecumenical, liturgical, catechetical, and missionary, not to mention the radiant work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin—were in difficulty. Many of their leaders were the object of suspicion, often of condemnation. Soon after his election, Pope John XXIII released the Spirit by announcing a Council that was to be pastoral. The Pope's wager held and fulfilled to a great extent his hope in the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁸ From the Council's teaching on the religious life, I highlight only two decisive aspects.

First, the Council introduced fundamental changes in the meaning of the religious life. Its place is within the total Church; religious are included in the People of God, not beside them or above them, and consecration becomes primary, not the vows. An inductive and specific theological approach, elaborated according to the charism proper to each Institute, now has priority over a deductive theological approach based on an abstract concept of the religious life in general that exists nowhere. Other fundamental changes in meaning include the unity of consecration and apostolate; the transition from separation from the world to presence in the world; the full significance of the lay religious life and the abolition of class distinctions in the religious life, and the fusion of obedience and dialogue in a common search for the will of God discerned in the present situation.

¹⁴⁸ Two works describe the power of the Spirit: Étienne Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté; La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II 1914–1962*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998, 322 p., and Joseph A. Komonchak, ed., *History of Vatican II*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995–2006, 5 vols.

Second, the Council had special influence on the religious life because it directed all Institutes to initiate a process of renewal. The paradox for religious institutes is that they are born in a creative breakthrough but are constantly tempted to move to ready-made, habitual forms. To break with this temptation to perpetuate the past by regarding it as sacred, Vatican II asked all religious Institutes to engage in the process of their renewal. In his *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* of June 1966, Paul VI stated that from now on, *the renewal of religious Institutes must be permanent.*

A COMPLEX PROCESS OF REFLECTION

Miguel—How did the process move from a “backbone” to a Declaration?

Michel—Thus, the basic idea of the *Declaration* was born of a rich and complex movement among the Brothers living in the Church and in the world. The Church in the late 1950s was stirred by profound movements of renewal and disturbed by blockades against and condemnations of its most ardent and vibrant members. In the postwar world and its technological, geopolitical, and cultural changes—just to cite the atomic age, the Cold War, decolonization, the separation of geopolitical blocks, the emergence of the Third World—the *Declaration* calls the Brother to be attentive to the signs of the times (*Declaration* 11–13). Vatican II had already told the Brothers, in effect, “Your vocation does not place you outside this world; it does not dispense you from being interested in it, from knowing its reality and its problems, and from committing yourself to serve, transform, and challenge it and make it holy.” The *Declaration* will translate this new language into proposals of profound fidelity to John Baptist de La Salle.

But just as it took the effective commitment of the Brothers to make the Chapter exist, the idea of a “backbone” would never have become the text of the *Declaration* unless people came forward who were aware of the “kairos” of this confluence of invigorating currents and decided to seize the moment to bring forth the Word that many were expecting. This did not happen without great élan, effort (inspiration and perspiration), and intense fraternal dialogue—with a lot of tension, suspicion, and even conflict—and great joy, at the price of much suffering at times.

The *Declaration* required a long process of maturation during the Intersession, successive drafts by Commission 2, and the test of a thorough debate in the Chapter Assembly. I will not repeat all the details of this patient work, except to add some nuance and shading to Brother Luke Salm's description.¹⁴⁹ He describes one result of the Montréal meeting, "It was agreed that the text would bear the title *A Declaration on the Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*."¹⁵⁰ In May, during the plenary meeting of the General Council, Brother Patrice Marey and I explained the progress already made, thanks to the meetings in Paris, Perpignan, and Guidel. During the ensuing discussion, Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, Vicar-General, proposed the title of the future document: *Declaration on the Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*. Upon reflection, I told myself that it clearly indicated the goal of the "backbone" and that it would be a challenge to make the content agree with the label.

Miguel—You played an important role during the Intersession in the work that resulted in the Declaration. What was your involvement?

Michel—I am going to reply simply to this question, but my answer especially highlights a paramount factor. My role in the *Declaration* was through a series of fortuitous circumstances or, as I prefer to say, a collection of unexpected gifts.

Starting in 1950, my itinerary took some quite unusual turns for a Brother at the time. The order I was given to earn the licentiate in theology at the *Angelicum* was a gift. The directive that Brother Assistant Zacharias gave me in June 1954 to prepare a doctoral thesis was a gift. My choice to focus on the lay religious vocation of the Brother was a gift from the Spanish bishops, who made it a hot topic. Another gift came from the Brother Scholastic at Annappes who led me to the dazzling discovery of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Initially, I did not consider my appointment as a Professor at the *Jesus Magister* Institute in 1961 to be a

¹⁴⁹ Salm, 1992, Chapter 4, "The 39th General Chapter, Intersession (1966–1967)," pp. 89, 91, 99–102; Chapter 5, "The 39th General Chapter, Second Session," pp. 115–27.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

gift, but I had the opportunity to organize my cycle of courses as I wished. By increasing the awareness of Brothers from various other congregations, I could continue my research on the identity of the Brother in successive and comparative reflections on the religious life, on the ministry of the Word of God, on teaching secular subjects, and on the theology of earthly realities.

Another sizable gift, quite unexpected, was to be able to follow the work of Vatican Council II from beginning to end, more and more actively, because of my brother's appointment as the Bishop of Annecy in August 1962. At the same time, some young Brothers in France (REPS) invited me to participate in their intense conversations about the future of the Christian school. Again without seeking it, I was asked to participate in drafting the new *Rule*. Marginal at first, this collaboration increased in the first quarter of 1966 and allowed me to highlight the fact that in the pre-conciliar Church, this courageous revision could not help but "make me hit the wall"¹⁵¹ and that a new project, although attempted in the spirit of Vatican II, would provide little response to the substantive issues on the actual state of the Brother's vocation.

From various angles, all these unplanned "gifts" sensitized me more and more to the need for an overall reflection about the place and the mission of the teaching Brother in the Church and in the world today. The "symbolic" result of this unpredictable experience, at a meeting organized by REPS in September 1965, was my keynote conference that they had requested. It focused on "The Purpose of the Institute of Saint John Baptist de La Salle."¹⁵² Leading this reflection in the renewal perspective required by *Perfectae Caritatis*, I presented all the topics that would be included in the *Declaration*, obviously on a different scale.

For the first—and thus far the last—time in the Institute's history, the Capitulants of 1966 included the participation of ten "experts." I was chosen and participated actively in the work of Commission 2 on the lay

¹⁵¹ This was my observation in a conference given at Montréal in March 1964 and published in *Lasallianum*.

¹⁵² Published in *Lasallianum* 2, second edition.

character of the Institute. I became quickly convinced that a “backbone” was needed. As a result of circumstances that I will explain, I was elected an Assistant and thereby became a full-fledged Capitulant. The Assembly, to express its will to exist between the two sessions and to continue the Chapter’s work between June 1966 and September 1967, decided that “liaison agents” would be responsible for the continuing activity of the Commissions. For practical reasons, these liaison agents were chosen from the Assistants, who now were in a central position in the Institute and had time for the project. I was asked to perform this task for Commission 7 (*Rule*) and Commission 2 (*Finality*).

My role from that point on was mapped out with respect to the “backbone.” I ardently supported its necessity and had some ideas for possible content, but I was equally convinced that it could only result from collective and collegial effort. I was aware, moreover, that serious differences, even strong opposition, existed among various Capitulants and groups of Capitulants about the relationship between consecration and mission, the priority of service of the poor, and the place of the school in the Institute’s mission. I also suspected that many of these disagreements rose primarily from a misunderstanding of the terminology. In any case, for this project to succeed, the various members of Commission 2 needed to meet and, far from fearing disagreement, to provoke the indispensable confrontations. In this spirit I organized meetings in Paris of the French members (November 1966),¹⁵³ in Buenos Aires of the Latin Americans (February 1967), in Perpignan of the “Europeans” (March 1967), and in Montréal of the North and South “Americans” (July 1967).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ For the historical record: I boarded the Palatino in Rome, the night before the Paris meeting. When I awoke the next morning, I was surprised to find myself in Grosseto, only 100 km from Rome, although I was to have arrived in Chambéry. We were surrounded by water in the famous 1966 flood that caused many deaths and much damage in Italy. The artistic heritage of Firenze, one of the most valuable on the peninsula, was severely damaged. I don’t know how, but I left the station and hitched a ride to Torino to board a train there that brought me to Paris on time.

¹⁵⁴ The meeting at Guidel was very important, but because it occurred during a meeting of the Conference of Visitors with the French Capitulants, the agenda was larger than the topic of the “backbone,” although it was included. This meeting produced the booklet *Intersession*, whose role was essential.

Brother Luke Salm clearly shows that blockage can arise from unfounded suspicions and that dialogue is possible, even at a distance, when people want it. At first hostile to the idea of centering the backbone on the “finality,” as they thought the French wanted,¹⁵⁵ the Capitulants from the USA changed their point of view when the booklet entitled *Intersession* appeared, which Luke presented to them. They were struck by “the quality of the reflection, the dynamism, the scope, and the integration of the themes in this publication.”¹⁵⁶ Establishing dialogue with the Spanish Capitulants was more difficult, yet I knew that the major difficulties in understanding would come from that side. As a classmate of Brother Saturnino Gallego, I was very close to him. Almost contemporaneous, our doctoral theses had focused on similar subjects.¹⁵⁷ He was responsible for the almost immediate translation into Spanish of my thesis, *Catéchèse et Laïcité*.

Then our paths diverged. He wanted to assert the priority of “consecration” over “mission,” while I was impressed by the dynamic unity of Saint John Baptist de La Salle’s teaching on the Brother’s ministry, which involved his personal call by the God of love. Brother Saturnino suspected me at one time of leaving religious consecration in second place. Confident that we could talk things over and to provoke our discussion, however harsh it might be, I convoked the second meeting of the European members of the Commission at Perpignan. But it wasn’t worth the trouble, for although the presence of Brother Leo Kirby was likely to promote reconciliation between Americans and French, the Spanish Brothers were conspicuous by their absence.

The meeting in Buenos Aires, somewhat improvised in fact during a conference of South American formation directors that I hosted, was unproductive. But I wanted to exchange views with Americans from both continents before the second session began. Curiously, when I announced the decision to meet in Montréal and the date, Brother Luke Salm reacted

¹⁵⁵ Salm, 1992, pp. 99–100.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁵⁷ Brother Saturnino Gallego’s thesis, *La théologie de l’éducation selon saint Jean Baptiste de La Salle*, was published in the *Simite* collection.

immediately in a bad temper. He reproached me for violating subsidiarity by abusing my title as an Assistant to convoke the American Capitulants. He added that this meeting seemed unnecessary and, therefore, constituted a breach of poverty. I had no difficulty finding him serene once more, always with good humor. The organization of such a meeting was my responsibility as “liaison agent,” and I had not decided until after seeking the opinions of all potential participants.

The Montréal meeting was productive beyond all expectations. If the Pyrénées had seemed insurmountable to the Spaniards at winter’s end, flying across the Atlantic appeared more attractive to them, for in addition to the meeting of the Chapter’s Commission 2, Montréal offered a magnificent World’s Fair in the torrid summer of 1967. So, as Brother Luke reports, this meeting was truly “representative of the entire Commission.” He cites the importance of the USA contribution, notably of Brother Augustine Loes on the service of the poor.¹⁵⁸ He concludes, “Before the Montréal meeting was over, all the principal elements that would have to be included in the eventual declaration had been thoroughly discussed: apostolic finality including service of the poor, catechesis, and the school; religious consecration, and community life.”

The confrontation that I expected took place between the French and the Spanish (represented by Saturnino). Luke admirably summarizes the situation, and I can do no better here than refer to his particularly successful paragraph in which he analyzes the antagonism between the French and the Spanish.¹⁵⁹ I am not so sure that the Capitulants of the USA managed

¹⁵⁸ Salm, 1992, p. 121. But I challenge—about the service of the poor—the distinction that Brother Luke makes between supporters of a “realistic position,” which insisted on the need to preserve the traditional schools ... and those who supported a “position that could be called idealistic,” who preferred the normative priorities outlined by the Founder. They proposed “to devote more effort, imagination, and staff in pursuit of what was the essential activity of the Institute,” but like the Founder, their desire was based on the urgent needs of the youth in the world today. More than thirty years later, the debate remains current, even as it is complicated by the facts of the “shared mission”!

¹⁵⁹ “As the discussions continued and became increasingly heated on both sides, it was evident that the Spanish wanted to start from an *a priori* and essentialist definition of religious life. By contrast, the French approach was more historical and existential, with the emphasis on the ‘life’ as it was lived concretely in its totality, and with the apostolic thrust as an expression of a total religious response to the divine call. The Spanish bolstered their arguments with extensive citations from Vatican II on

“to bridge the gap between the Spanish and the French,” even “to some extent.” On the contrary, perhaps the very nimble mind of Saturnino and his dialectic skill had enabled him to appreciate, at least from his point of view, that the difference remained between the two positions. At the meeting of the full Commission in Rome during the second half of September 1967, he would bring an entire text with the “Spanish” position and try unsuccessfully to impose it on the Commission. Again, Brother Luke reports this attempt—it was not the last.¹⁶⁰

I must add a final word, a unique, unpublished detail about the Intersession. In summer 1967, Brother Maurice-Auguste had organized a meeting in Rome of a group of Belgian Brothers. He asked them to put in order the enormous file of cards of the “Lasallian Vocabulary.” I took advantage of their presence to add some Brothers of REPS: Robert Comte, Jean Brun, and Bernard Ginisty. I gave them the *Intersession* booklet and the minutes of the Montréal meeting. They compiled a good number of Lasallian Vocabulary cards that were most useful for the draft of the *Declaration* that I prepared. But then I thought it better not to report this collaboration of young Brothers who were French and not Capitulants.¹⁶¹

Miguel—Some Brothers think of you as the Declaration’s “author,” an attribution that Brother Luke Salm questions. What can you say about that?

the nature and purpose of the religious life. The French countered with the view that the Council wanted to create a new approach to religious life by emphasizing its diverse forms rather than certain common and constitutive elements. The French interpreted the history of the foundation of the Institute as an original creation of the Founder, whose intention did not conform to the established forms of the ‘religious’ congregations of his day. The Spanish insisted that the Founder intended all along to bring his foundation to the point where it would be recognized as having all the essential components of a religious institute” (Salm, 1992, pp. 120–21).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122. The alternative text presented by Brother Saturnino was prepared at Salamanca, after the Montréal meeting.

¹⁶¹ Brother Pedro Gil speaks of a contribution of Jean Brun, who “amid tension between two seemingly incompatible approaches (Mission prevails, Consecration prevails) ... was the bridge to overcoming all incompatibilities,” and he cites “his magnificent conclusion” (*La Consagración del Hermano: un tema que la Declaración no dejó cerrado*, in *La Declaración ... 30 años después*. Valladolid, 1998, p. 196.) Simply put, the document referred to was not a document within the Chapter Commission, and Jean Brun was not a member of the Commission.

Michel—I much prefer to be laconic here. Everything I just said about the *Declaration*—germinating since 1946!—shows clearly enough that I in no way lay claim to paternity. In this sense it is true that I am not the “author.”¹⁶² Moreover, in this area I always have in mind Pascal’s words about people who claim ownership of “their works.”¹⁶³ What I just said about my role during the Intersession indicates that it was given to me to be “the driving force”¹⁶⁴ behind its gradual progress.

As for the work done from September to December 1967 in the Commission and then at the Chapter, it was so considerable that it is correct to say that the *Declaration* is the effort of the entire General Chapter. However, it was my lot to be “the pen,” the editor. From start to finish, I prepared four “versions” which were constantly amended, but I rewrote them carefully, as the Rome Archives can attest. But if the document contains one or another passage that seems “inspired,” I was well aware in writing of being “carried” by the Chapter’s movement. Most often, editing the text was a joyful experience.

Miguel—*You said that this document has no antecedents, but isn’t the Preface to the Rule of 1726, in some sense, a “Declaration” which played an extended role by its being reproduced in many future editions of the Rule?*

Michel—This is an excellent question that I would otherwise never have considered. In some ways that 1726 *Preface* was a *Declaration* that wanted to stiffen the *Rule*. Its origin remains an enigma. Placed at the beginning of the first printed edition of the *Rule* in 1726, after the approbation of the *Rule* by the papal Bull and the introduction of the “triad” of classic vows, its contents are at odds with Lasallian experience and teaching. It wants to focus attention on the observance of a *Rule* that it presents from

¹⁶² This is what Brother Luke says (Salm, 1992, p. 68).

¹⁶³ “Certain authors, speaking of their works, say, ‘My book, My commentary, My history,’ etc. They resemble middle-class people who have a house of their own, and always have ‘My house’ on their tongue. They would do better to say, ‘Our book, Our commentary, Our history,’ etc., because there is in them usually more of other people’s than their own” (Blaise Pascal. *Pensées*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958, p. 12, #43).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Salm, 1992, p. 124.

the outset as a pre-existing superstructure. The *Preface* misunderstands a structuring process that lasted forty years(!) and is untouchable by being “canonized” as the product of the gift of the Spirit—the Founder was inspired to write it!—and by the Institute’s papal approbation.

The approach of the 1726 *Preface* is based only on considerations of the religious life in general that are applied to the particular case of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.¹⁶⁵ The Brother is defined by extrinsic categories. The *Preface* seems dazzled by what it mistakenly believes to be a “promotion”—access to the canonical religious state. It tends, therefore, to define the Brother by his canonical identity as a “religious,” highlighting general elements external to his real life, in stark contrast with the spiritual teaching of the Founder. John Baptist de La Salle always started with the Brother’s experience, read in the dynamic light of salvation history, as he wrote in the astonishingly rich *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.

The 1726 *Preface* emphasizes the relationship between observance of the *Rule* and fidelity to the triad of vows. The argument is classic but stresses the negative character of the three vows as the remedy for triple concupiscent.¹⁶⁶ Curiously, it seems to ignore the three specific vows.¹⁶⁷ Again, the experience of a specific existential commitment is completely eliminated. In opposition to the Lasallian movement, this *Preface* no longer situates the evangelical aspect of the Brother in the Gospel in action, which the Founder invites us to contemplate and to live, but in the “three evangelical counsels” presented also as a morality in two stages.

The *Preface* defines the religious state as a closed world, a citadel protected from the harmful influence of the world by the triple wall of commandments, vows, and the *Rule*. It offers the Brother the ideal of a religious life without an apostolate; it proclaims the equal value of all observances; it grants preferred value to examples drawn from casuistic treatises on the vows. This accentuates the loss of the Lasallian perspective on all history, on the always unfinished journey, and on the project to serve

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Preface of 1726, notably, number 1 and the beginning of numbers 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 16.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. number 4.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. numbers 20–21.

people in which the person is responsible to God and finds meaning, fullness, and growth throughout his existence.

Yes, this *Preface*, in one sense, was a declaration that hardened the *Rule*, made the Founder rigid, and radically misrepresented the “religious life” of the Brother. It might be said that the *Preface* of 1726 was, in advance, the antithesis of the 1967 *Declaration*.

Miguel—*Were you aware of this opposition? More broadly, does the 1726 Preface remind you that the Declaration introduces a number of fundamental shifts in understanding the Brother’s religious life?*

Michel—My answer has three parts. First, as for the 1726 *Preface*, I must confess that at the time the *Declaration* was being drafted, I was completely unaware of its existence and its content, as were all the Capitulants. Indeed, during the revision of the *Rule* in 1901, the General Chapter eliminated that *Preface*, retained in all the previous editions, because it was not in the text that the Founder revised in 1718. Our youth literally allowed us to escape this negative text, although what I said about the 1946 Chapter shows that its *evil spirit* continued to influence a certain mentality in the Institute.

As the final volume of the project to reproduce all the Founder’s original writings,¹⁶⁸ *Cahiers lasalliens 25* published all the different versions of the original *Rule*. For the sake of scientific rigor, it in a way resurrected the malevolent text of the 1726 *Preface*. The irony is that Brother Maurice-Auguste selected this same *Cahiers lasalliens 25* to be the gift to the Capitulants of 1966, because its publication coincided with that Chapter’s first session. However, we had other occupations and concerns than to read that *Preface*. I would not get to know it until 1972, when at the end of your thesis on the Gospel journey of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, you presented this *Preface* of 1726 as one of two simplistic readings of the Lasallian understanding of the Gospel.¹⁶⁹ It is through you, then,

¹⁶⁸ *Cahiers lasalliens* 12 through 25 reproduce these *éditions princeps*.

¹⁶⁹ Miguel-Adolfo Campos Marino, FSC, *L’itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l’Écriture dans ses Méditations pour le temps de la retraite*. Volume 1. *Cahiers lasalliens* 45, pp. 352–58. The other simplistic reading that is cited is the use of Scripture by the early biographers, *ibid.*, pp. 344–52.

that I first read this *Preface*, five years after the General Chapter ended in 1967.

Seeing that it is, in fact, the opposite of the 1726 *Preface*, the *Declaration* can in no way be targeted as a text by unknown authors! This brings me to a second point about the word “shift” that you just used. I hesitate to use that word if it gives an impression that the authors of the *Declaration* sought to contrast one idea of the religious life with another. In his *Preface*, Brother Charles Henry says correctly that the *Declaration* does not condemn anyone; it invites everyone to move on with the renewal. No doubt this document certainly can “challenge each Brother to renewal and perhaps to conversion,” but it does not do so by waging war against attitudes or behavior. The text has the serene tone of a tranquil presentation of a positive synthesis.

Along with that tone, the *Declaration* certainly declares—or calls for—many shifts or displacements. Thirty years ago, for many Brothers there was a *before* and an *after* the *Declaration*. The initial impact was most often positive—a breath of freedom, a document without moralizing, bursting with life, looking to a future to be invented, and calling for creativity, initiative, and responsibility. It was a breath of the Holy Spirit, unified and unifying, transcending disastrous dichotomies between the religious life and the apostolate, between professional career and ministry, between catechesis and secular education, between prayer and action, and between separation from the world and presence in the world to serve and to challenge it.

Miguel—*Does this mean that the Declaration’s reception is related to its “novelty”?*

Michel—On two occasions over the last five years, I have had the opportunity to address the topic of this novelty. I wrote a presentation for the Spirituality Seminar on the *Declaration* that the Brothers of the USA/Toronto Region conducted at San Francisco in 1994.¹⁷⁰ I repeated

¹⁷⁰ The translation, “The *Declaration*: Refoundation or Renewal?” was published in *The Declaration: Text and Contexts*, Michael Meister, FSC, ed., Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994, pp. 187–228.

some elements in a conference that I prepared for a preparatory session held in Lima in February 1999 prior to the General Chapter of 2000.¹⁷¹

I limit myself here to a brief summary of what these texts developed. The *Declaration radically renews our view of the Founder*—from model to witness of the Spirit, from definitive oracle to prophet of the Spirit, from an alibi that exempts us from inventing to a traveling companion on the paths of the Spirit at work today. Following Vatican II, the *Declaration* offers a *renewed vision of the Brother's religious life*, of his consecration and vocation, by shifting from the religious state to the Gospel life of the Brother;¹⁷² of his mission, by shifting from duality to unity;¹⁷³ of his community, by shifting from the gregarious uniformity of individuals to the communion of free persons endowed with the diverse gifts of the Spirit.¹⁷⁴

More fundamentally, perhaps, the *Declaration* is new because it engages the Brothers to undertake a renewing action for which it assigns objectives,¹⁷⁵ suggests some strategies—especially in renewed formation—and insists that the Brothers are the agents of this transforming action.

Miguel— Does the Declaration especially call the Brothers and the Institute to commit themselves to renewing the educational service of the poor?

Michel—The debate on this major orientation of the *Declaration* was one of the most passionate of the Chapter's 1967 session. The priority of renewing the Institute's educational service of the poor has been constant-

¹⁷¹ The text was translated into Spanish, but neither the French nor the Spanish manuscript was published. Health problems prevented me from attending the session in Lima in 1999 and the Seminar in San Francisco in 1994.

¹⁷² From the profession of the vows of religion to the consecration of the person to God, from perpetual profession (or from consecration of the life) to consecration by the life, from separation from the world to presence in the world in view of offering the world in Christ, the only consecrated.

¹⁷³ The unity between consecration and apostolate, the unification by the recipients of the Brother's mission, the poor, and the unity of the proclamation of the Gospel through all the Brother's activities.

¹⁷⁴ From the community of observance to the community of relations, from the community of established traditions to the community with a project, from the priority of structures-things to the primacy of structures-persons.

¹⁷⁵ Conversion of the Institute to the service of the poor; renewal of works, especially the school; spiritual renewal.

ly reaffirmed, whether by later Chapters (1976, 1986, 1993) or by each Superior General. At the same time, implementing this decision has proven to be more difficult and has resulted in many local tensions and controversies. I will say more about this issue that deserves a lengthy discussion. Here I confine myself to three reflections about the Chapter's work in 1966 and the central character¹⁷⁶ of the *Declaration's* chapter on "The Service of the Poor Through Education."

This chapter is central because the service of the poor is the key to the *raison d'être* of the Institute, to its purpose and, therefore, to its renewal. The Institute was born of the "existential shock" that jolts John Baptist de La Salle when he finds at his door many young people whose material situation and social condition deny them any access to school, even for the most basic instruction. At the same time, the Founder views as a social injustice, "a sin of the world," the negative situation that he experiences as the "truth of faith" that he will formulate in the first *Meditation for the Time of Retreat*. The good God wills the salvation of all, both temporal and eternal salvation, inseparably. The Institute will be born of this human and spiritual shock. Today, however, it is clear that the urgent needs of "neglected" youth are numerous,¹⁷⁷ whether in industrialized or in developing countries. Are these not the young people whom the Institute must serve as a priority if it wishes to be faithful to its historic mission?

¹⁷⁶ At the beginning of the discussion about chapter 6 of the *Declaration*, I wanted to emphasize the central character in a written intervention. Brother Luke Salm notes in his diary for November 8, 1966, "The *Declaration* continues. I had thought we might finish 3 chapters today, but M. Sauvage got up and said he thought Chapter 6 on the poor was the essential chapter. Thereupon there was unloosed a long string of speeches: we're being unrealistic and dishonest; it is communistic and materialistic in tone and not evangelical; the poor are too narrowly defined..." (Salm, 1992, p. 143, note 52). It was just my personal conviction, even though, as I said, it was recent (*Catéchèse et Laïcat* speaks little of the poor; it is not a priority in it). I was made aware by my close contact with the activities of Brother Honoré de Silvestri, from autumn 1960, and also, between the two sessions of the General Chapter, by my discovery of the Brazilian "favelas," the sight of which shook me to the core. These two facts stimulated a new "reading" of the itinerary and of the spiritual teaching of Saint John Baptist de La Salle (which appear in *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*). Since then, my conviction that the return to the poor is the key to the renewal of the Institute has grown stronger, even if my few tentative, personal commitments to direct service of the poor fell short.

¹⁷⁷ *Declaration* 11.

Many Notes from the Brothers to the General Chapter recognized this “principal” priority.¹⁷⁸ But the central characteristic of chapter 6, “Service of the Poor Through Education,” owes much of its bold and strong affirmation to the courageous lucidity of two members of Commission 2 who were confident and competent protagonists. I mentioned their names before, Brother Honoré de Silvestri, of Reims, and Brother Augustine Loes, who succeeded Brother Leo Kirby as Visitor of the New York District. The *Declaration*’s vigorous analysis of the distinction between “poverty of frustration” and “spiritual poverty” and of the importance of “self-improvement of the poor” through the development of a “dedicated laity among the working class”¹⁷⁹ comes directly from Brother Honoré’s pen. He translated, in a way, his own experience in technical education and in labor union and Catholic worker movements. Brother Augustine Loes contributed significantly to make the “cause of the poor” a sensitive and sympathetic issue for North American Brothers and, more broadly, for English speakers. To him we owe the profoundly spiritual passages in the *Declaration* on poverty of heart, which underlies the necessary human struggle against social injustice. On this point as on so many others, the General Chapter “existed” collectively, thanks to the personal commitment of its members.

The *Declaration*’s pages on the educational service of the poor open and close with a firm, repeated statement that “the apostolate with the poor is an integral part of the finality of the Institute.” “Every level of authority, then, every dialogue and decision in the Institute, must be in harmony with this orientation, so that all our plans and work will show in deed and in truth our ‘return to the poor.’”¹⁸¹

This inclusive language expresses the central character of the Chapter’s determination to direct its reflection and its decisions in two essential areas of the Institute’s renewal. The first area is “apostolic works.” The

¹⁷⁸ *Declaration* 9.3.

¹⁷⁹ *Declaration* 31.6. Translation of the two expressions presented difficulties, especially for English speakers.

¹⁸⁰ *Declaration* 28.2.

¹⁸¹ *Declaration* 34.4.

Declaration speaks at length about the need to renew the schools according to a threefold plan of “Relevance to Contemporary Culture, Concern for Persons and Community, and Involvement with Life.”¹⁸² But as worthy as they are, these developments must not obscure a more radical change in perspective. The need to be “converted to the poor” means that the Institute’s renewal will not come from existing works but from the needs of the young.

The renewal of the schools conducted by the brothers calls for a reappraisal of the policy for the opening of schools and of the nature of their programs... [T]he Institute’s purpose ... is not simply to maintain schools, but to work in the apostolate of education with the school as a privileged means... The unsatisfied educational needs of the youth of the world forbid more than ever before any notion of withdrawal into isolation... [New] endeavors ... must answer the real needs of today ... on the behalf of the most neglected...¹⁸³

The Institute’s “missionary” emphasis must also be determined by its preferential option to serve poor young people through education:

Attention will be given first of all to those places where there is the greatest lack of catechesis and general education.

... now is the time “sincerely to ask ourselves in the presence of God whether we cannot broaden our activity in favor of expanding God’s kingdom among the nations” at the expense of “leaving to others certain ministries” (*Ad Gentes* 40).¹⁸⁴

The Institute’s renewal also requires the renewal of each member’s consecration to God:

An authentic service of the poor through the apostolate of education will contribute greatly to an integration and a deepening of the personal life of a brother, helping him to overcome more easily the difficulties encountered by those who have given their whole lives to Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² *Declaration* 45–47.

¹⁸³ *Declaration* 49.1–5.

¹⁸⁴ *Declaration* 49.6 and 24.2.

¹⁸⁵ *Declaration* 34.3.

Miguel—*Is there also another shift in that the educational service of the poor, in itself a matter of the secular realm, can help the Brother renew his “religious” consecration?*

Michel—That is precisely what now seems to me to be the “newest” element in the *Declaration*: its focus on the secular nature of the Brother’s religious consecration. The second session of the General Chapter was to begin on October 1, 1967. As of September 15, 1967, the entire Commissions 2 and 7 were meeting, as were the Presidents and the Secretaries of the other Commissions and the Officers of the Chapter. Noting the initial awareness of some degree of discomfort, of a certain malaise, we soon realized that a rumor was spreading in the Generalate: “Brother Michel Sauvage and the Apostolic Finality Commission are trying to turn the Institute of the Brothers into a secular institute.” A statement from Commission 2, adopted unanimously by its members in a secret ballot, refuted this accusation.¹⁸⁶ The suspicion about me personally lasted until the 1976 General Chapter¹⁸⁷ and also blocked any reflection on the vows from being undertaken at the 1971 meeting of the Visitors.

I have no intention of reviving a controversy that was vastly inflated, in my opinion, and with uncertain data. I mention the *Declaration*’s accent on the secular aspects of education, because I think that the text is “prophetic” as well as profoundly Lasallian. I limit myself to suggest some thoughts and to take the opportunity to recall some of the *Declaration*’s strongest passages.

One of the major “novelties” of the *Declaration*, one of its most impressive emphases, is the attention, respectful consideration, and openness with which it regards the person of each Brother in human terms.¹⁸⁸ *I dedicate this free and responsible person to God.* This means that I decide to direct to God and to God’s service my resources and my human

¹⁸⁶ Salm, 1992, p. 123.

¹⁸⁷ I received about 70 anonymous letters (not counting those that Brother Charles Henry, in my absence, instructed Sister Claire, my secretary, to intercept). The envelopes were usually addressed to “Michel Sauvage, Founder of the Secular Institute,” and their content was often offensive, sometimes obnoxious, occasionally pitiful, but always with a meanness that I had never before experienced.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Declaration* 14.2, 14.4, 15.2.

strengths—intelligence, resources of will, and physical strength.¹⁸⁹ But this “service of God,” in practice, is the service of humanity:

By the very fact that God calls the brothers to consecrate themselves to him, he sends them into the world to work for the spread of his kingdom. This is done through the apostolate of service in the Christian education of youth...¹⁹⁰

This apostolate makes their consecration effective. Reread the following text that repeatedly insists that the Brother’s secular tasks are “religious”¹⁹¹ by his orientation as a person to God, certainly, but also in themselves and in their often prosaic materiality:

Apostolic tasks are religious because God wants them. In devoting himself courageously to the apostolate the brother accomplishes the will of the Lord who calls him. These tasks are religious because the brother finds Christ in the students to whom he is sent, particularly in the poor. They are religious because they realize the divine plan by contributing to the development of persons and by preparing them to welcome the Good News of salvation...¹⁹²

What is simply suggested here is repeated and developed in the *Declaration’s* chapter on “Education and the Teaching of Religion,” which I only mention here but is well worth reading. The Brother exercises his “apostolic ministry”—thus his “consecration to God” that is inseparable from it—through his educational work that seeks to awaken in young people a conviction of the grandeur of their human destiny and to improve their access to the autonomy of personal reflection and liberty, while disposing them to commit themselves to the service of others:

To open man up to the possibilities of life and knowledge and love is already a step in the building of God’s kingdom. This is not achieved by the Church alone, but also by work in the world.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ *Declaration* 17.3.

¹⁹⁰ *Declaration* 35.

¹⁹¹ Today I prefer a different term, for example, that the secular tasks of the Brother are “sacred,” not by virtue of an external “blessing” or the extrinsic addition of “religious” signs or gestures, but in themselves. But the term “religious” in this context has its value, showing that the Brother’s “religious” consecration is expressed first and foremost in the fabric of his human and “professional” life.

¹⁹² *Declaration* 25.1.

¹⁹³ *Declaration* 41.3.

The *Declaration* is referring to *Gaudium et Spes*. I think it is fundamental—and too rare—to illustrate the Brother’s consecration by the teaching in *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), and not only by *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis*.

However, this view of the Brother’s consecration on behalf of the human development of the young is in no way disembodied or idyllic. His consecration to God for the advancement of the Kingdom of God here below is not without “sufferings” and “sacrifices.” Consecration often entails fighting on behalf of humanity.

... it would be false to make Christianity an endorsement of an established order opposed to the claims and efforts of those who are endeavoring to secure social justice.¹⁹⁴

The poverty of frustration is generally a product of injustice, of physical and social evils, or of personal insufficiency or failure. This form of poverty consists in the impossibility of certain people, groups, or persons to obtain a standard of living which would allow them real freedom.¹⁹⁵

To consecrate oneself to God is certainly not to escape the human condition; the contrary is true.

Spiritual renewal implies a more concentrated effort to be present among men, a real attempt to be sensitive to the special circumstances of each, to keep abreast of the constantly changing reality of the human situation, to have an effective love for contemporary life and for those who live in it, taking people seriously and on their own terms.¹⁹⁶

Religious profession in no way dispenses with technical competence. The spirit of faith, far from substituting for professional or cultural qualifications, demands even greater respect for what is human: the realities of this world and those of faith find their origin in the same God.¹⁹⁷

To be authentically at the “service of humanity to build the Kingdom of God,” the Brother must live the consecration to God of his person according to the Gospel. For example:

¹⁹⁴ *Declaration* 30.2.

¹⁹⁵ *Declaration* 29.5.

¹⁹⁶ *Declaration* 3.5.

¹⁹⁷ *Declaration* 48.3.

Every brother must make his own the decision of Saint John Baptist de La Salle to go to the poor “with the heart of a poor man.” He will discover as he does so a deeper understanding of the meaning of his consecration to God. For the service of the poor cannot be separated from the poverty which is a Christian attitude of mind, the humble acceptance of the gift of Christ, the response of love for Christ and for all men.¹⁹⁸

People often speak of the “testimony” that religious “consecration” affords and the “sign” of the Kingdom in the present reality that it constitutes. Be wary of delighting in words, as too often happens when speaking about “religious” as if they were witnesses only because of their “religious profession.” This testimony, this sign, has nothing “magical” about it. Even the concept of “sign,” of “witness,” means the manifestation in a human, secular, and earthly reality of the presence and the action of another reality, another world. The *Declaration* clearly expresses this “secular” dimension of the sign of the “religious”:

When a brother truly loves those with whom he is involved, he helps to reveal the fact that God too loves them and calls them to give witness to his love for all men.¹⁹⁹

The world has more need than ever, even at the very center of man’s temporal pursuits, for a witness given by people who are consecrated and who know and love God as a living being.²⁰⁰

Within the People of God the brothers are called, as are other religious, to exercise the function of witness, investing it with a specific character. They are ... signs of the power of the Risen Lord ... of a renunciation which ... makes them less self-centered in their activities, more all-embracing in their charity, more available in their service (*Lumen Gentium* 44)... Such a witness is more necessary than ever in our scientific and technical world... It is advantageous that this witness be given by men who are not estranged by their consecration from participating in the life of the world.²⁰¹

The “consecrated life” is more of a sign or a testimony than the “conse-

¹⁹⁸ *Declaration* 34.2.

¹⁹⁹ *Declaration* 3.4.

²⁰⁰ *Declaration* 11.4

²⁰¹ *Declaration* 26.2–3.

cration” is. The other side of the *Declaration*’s insistence on what I call the “secularity” of the Brother’s consecration is that it illustrates the striking language of Father Michel Rondet, SJ, “I consecrate my life, but my life consecrates me.” “My life” in the human fabric of activities and relationships makes me, little by little, “conform myself” to Christ, the only consecrated one. As for my life in its “history,” it is too simple to say that the “apostolate” depends on the “consecration” or that “prayer” influences action. Life is what gradually becomes “spiritual” and “consecrated.” It is also thanks to life that we learn—little by little—to “pray” and to celebrate life as a gift, a call, a combat, and to express this celebration in thanksgiving, praise, supplication, and request for pardon.

*The brother ought to have no fear of losing God when he goes among the young to serve them (Mk 10:44), nor of being estranged from Christ when he spends himself for men (2 Cor 12:15). On the contrary, the fulfillment of the authentic apostolate is a source for him of spiritual growth; in listening to men he disposes himself to listen more faithfully to the Word of God; in forgetting himself, he allows Christ to grow in him; in spending himself disinterestedly without counting the cost, his heart becomes that of a poor man. Apostolic action degenerates into empty activity or into self-seeking only when one loses the ability to see the call of God in the real needs of the world.*²⁰²

The formation and spirituality of the brother will prompt him to perceive and live his teaching career as the expression of his consecration as a lay religious... He will discover in his love for Christ and for his students the energy to renew—for their sake—the work of his own education, the development of his teaching skill, and the interest and joy he finds in life.²⁰³

The first of these two texts was not retained without a struggle. After the debate in the Chapter Assembly on the text that the Commission proposed, the Commission was directed to revise it by taking into account—or not—any amendments that Capitulants proposed. I was absent when the Commission discussed this particular paragraph, 25.2. When I read the new version, I was shocked; all the words that are in italics in the above citation had been deleted. All that remained in this paragraph was

²⁰² *Declaration 25.2, emphasis added.*

²⁰³ *Declaration 48.7.*

the sentence that begins “Apostolic action degenerates...” I immediately drew up the following Note to the Commission:

About the *Declaration*, No. 25.2, first two sentences. The decision was made to remove these sentences. I would ask the Commission to agree to reconsider the matter because of their importance.

a) They express an important truth that in the past was often overlooked. Many presentations on the apostolate can give the impression that there is a risk of “losing God” in it. The opposite must be strongly affirmed.

b) These sentences imply nothing that is automatic, for the point is to go among the young “to serve them,” a characteristic Gospel phrase. (The son of man came not to be served but to serve; whoever is the greatest among you shall be the servant of all, and so on.) It is not a question of going among the young for no matter what purpose, but it is to serve them. Similarly, saying that the Brother “spends himself” for others is exactly in line with the words of Saint Paul (2 Cor 12:15): “I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes.” That truly is apostolic spirituality.

c) In addition, the remainder of this paragraph 25 expresses fully the necessary nuances and conditions.

d) Finally, this text cannot be considered as repetitious. In effect, 25.1 speaks about the religious value in itself of apostolic activity; 25.2 speaks about the value of the apostolate as nourishment for the entire spiritual life.

For these reasons I suggest that the Commission kindly reconsider the matter, and I hope that it reintroduces the first two sentences. In this case, it can indicate the scriptural references by a cf.

This small incident shows how difficult it was to include in the *Declaration* this new viewpoint about the “secular” aspect of consecration. These elements that I have just mentioned can also be found when the *Declaration* speaks about the community aspect of the Brother’s consecration.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ This community aspect has two meanings: the human dimension of the community—“for the human person can realize and fulfill himself only in so far as he opens himself to others” (*Declaration* 20.2)—and the consecration of the life achieved through community—“The brother meets God to whom he has consecrated himself when he opens himself and gives himself to his brothers in community. ... in loving and serving them, he loves and serves Christ...” (*Declaration* 20:4). See all of *Declaration* 20; for the witnessing, cf. *Declaration* 26.4.

Miguel—*Was this new presentation unilateral? Was the “transcendental” dimension of religious consecration still evident?*

Michel—Basically, throughout the writing of the *Declaration*—and since!—the objection constantly arose that the Brother’s religious consecration has priority over the apostolate, that prayer is more important than activity, and so on. The more I think about it, the more I conclude that this opposition draws attention to a necessary hierarchy but distorts the relationship of the terms. It seems increasingly clear to me that we must pay attention to the following “spiritual” and theological question: what is the relationship between God’s presence and action and the human person’s commitment? Who is given priority? What God, then, and what person are we addressing?

It would not be difficult to show that the *Declaration* well illustrates Joan of Arc’s “Messire Dieu premier servi.” More precisely, God is the source of the entire adventure of the Brother’s consecration and mission. God calls; the Brother answers. Once again the need arises to identify and to discern the “mediations” between the call of God and the authenticity of the human response. For the God in question is the God of history, the God of salvation, the God of Jesus Christ, the God who is Spirit, the God of the poor, and the “poor” God who respects and promotes human freedom. Furthermore, God is not only the origin but also the purpose of the human response and commitment. More specifically, humans are called to work to “bring about the Kingdom of God” in the world here below, which means welcoming, transforming, and challenging the world.

The *Declaration* can illustrate everything that I have just suggested too quickly. I will refer only to *Declaration* 3–4, about the priority of spiritual renewal (also presenting an “incarnated” concept of the “spiritual”); to *Declaration* 20.10, on the meaning of the Eucharist; to *Declaration* 26.4, about community, “that its very existence give witness to the God whom the brothers have been sent to reveal by their teaching,” and to *Declaration* 42, which concludes the chapter on “Education and the Teaching of Religion” by returning to the primacy of the Word of God. I can express the essence of what I mean here by recalling the conclusion

of the chapter on “The Religious Life of the Brother: an Apostolic and Community Life”:

The brother’s commitment to his apostolic mission engages fully his consecration to God. Yet the religious consecration which the brother lives at the very heart of his apostolic activities is not confined to any one of them. Consecration reaches its full expression in the mystery of the personal relation each one has with God. It is, after all, a characteristic of the person to transcend his activity... The Institute and every community, therefore will consider each brother in the totality of his person and not simply in terms of the apostolic work he does... Each brother, for his part, in devoting himself entirely to the common mission, can be assured that it is in giving that he receives, and in losing himself that he finds his salvation.²⁰⁵

Miguel—Religious consecration is often expressed by the “three vows” of poverty, chastity, and obedience. What place does the Declaration give them?

Michel—To reply to this question, I must first express a regret that I still have about the *Declaration*, which lists among the constitutive dimensions of the Brother’s vocation the following:

The brother gives full and explicit expression to his baptismal consecration (*Perfectae Caritatis* 5) by making a public profession of vows which are received by the Church. He assumes this engagement in an exclusively lay Institute.²⁰⁶

It returns to this point in speaking of “Religious Consecration: A Continuation of the Life of Baptism with Certain New Elements”:

There is a new way of exercising the universal priesthood of all the faithful. In the public profession of vows, especially the vow of obedience, the brother unites himself to the dispositions of Christ in his paschal sacrifice. This offering is an act of worship, a special gift to God of all that one is and all that one does.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ *Declaration* 27.1–2.

²⁰⁶ *Declaration* 13.2.

²⁰⁷ *Declaration* 18.4.

I regret these texts; I do not think that they are consistent with the overall presentation of the “religious” consecration of the Brother that I just mentioned. I have no problem admitting that the consecration is an act of public “worship” and, especially, that it is a privileged expression of the “universal priesthood” of the baptized. However, regarding the Brother, I see no point in assigning a special place to “religious vows” in this act of worship. As I reflect on it, the second sentence that I quoted (*Declaration* 18.4) is trivial, even in its construction. If the act of worship that constitutes the religious profession is “a special gift to God of all that one is and all that one does,” I do not see what special role “vows,” not even of obedience, play in this totality of life unless one returns to a “magical” notion.

A historical reference clearly points out the inconsistency of this reference to public vows. *Declaration* 14.3 says that the “constitutive elements” just listed are “received from the Founder.”²⁰⁸ This is true of the community dimension, of the service of the poor, of the educational ministry, of the school.²⁰⁹ But John Baptist de La Salle and his first Brothers were able to express their “consecration” to God and to humanity in a rich and meaningful formula. In it they were able to say that their “consecration” became evident by vows of association to create free schools, of stability, and of obedience. Their vows, however, were not the “public vows of religion,” that is to say for the sake of clarity, the triad of vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This element was introduced in the Institute seven years after the Founder’s death, following the Bull of Approbation. At no time was the Founder’s spiritual teaching based on the three vows. When he speaks of the Brother’s “consecration,” he is referring to the total commitment of his person, his life, and his activities—never to the “profession of the three evangelical counsels.”

Essentially, the *Declaration* follows the same approach; no part of the document makes any mention of the “triad” of vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Certainly, the two texts that I quoted refer to them

²⁰⁸ *Declaration* 14.3.

²⁰⁹ The object of *Declaration* 13.3–6.

implicitly, but in relation to the view of consecration that I referred to earlier, they figure only as erratic fragments of a different concept. Moreover, at no time does the *Declaration* mention the “three evangelical counsels.” The two references to “celibacy”²¹⁰ are judicious, and the quotation I just cited on “obedience” is only an addition.²¹¹ There is a mention of “poverty” when the topic is the educational service of the poor.²¹²

I think that we have reached, if not the heart of the opposition that erupted in Montréal between the Spanish and the French positions, at least a significant aspect of their misunderstanding about religious consecration. Ultimately, in the *Declaration* the Brother is surely “consecrated” and, as such, a “religious,” but it is the totality of his life that expresses and nourishes this “consecration,” not expressly the “three vows of religion.” When some accused the French Brothers of wanting to transform the Institute into a “secular Institute,” the real tendency in their viewpoint became clear. The French Brothers were uninterested in a “canonical” approach to the Brother’s religious identity; instead, they were preoccupied with highlighting his vital identity. They did not give excessive importance to the vocabulary. Initially, they had spoken of the Brother as “a consecrated layman,” but when they realized what suspicion this expression provoked, they agreed with no difficulty to return to the term “lay religious.”

During the Chapter Assembly’s debate on the entire *Declaration*, especially number 13, I was the one—in agreement with Brother Saturnino and to the great surprise of the other French Brothers in Commission 2—who proposed a change in the text, believing that I ought to worry more about the content than about the label.²¹³ Today, however, I would be more insistent. To be more precise, I would now have the Institute push its logic to the limit in reclaiming the vow of association that the 1986

²¹⁰ *Declaration* 18.3, 26.1.

²¹¹ More inspired is this language: “in seeking the common good and in submitting for this purpose to the superior, whose function it is to make this clear, it is God himself whom he obeys” (*Declaration* 20.4).

²¹² Some evocative passages on actual poverty and poverty of spirit are in *Declaration* 25.2, 28.2, 29.6, and 34.2.

²¹³ See the Minutes of the session on November 7, 1967, at 5 p.m., Document 932.32, p. 1.

General Chapter decided to include. In other words, I would have the Institute *return to making the Brother's consecration explicit by the single vow of association for the educational service of the poor, removing the reference to the "triad."* Leave, if necessary, one canonical category and opt for a different one of "consecrated," as apostolic societies without public vows have done. I suggested this option in 1976, but the climate at that General Chapter did not even allow a hearing. Perhaps the beginning of the third millennium will find a more favorable atmosphere?

In fact, these perspectives were already running through my head during the second session of the General Chapter in 1967. I had to make a discreet allusion during the debate on the report of Commission 1, "Religious Consecration and Vows." Talking in detail about this voluminous report would lead me too far astray.²¹⁴ I would just say that this report is well within Vatican Council II's perspectives on religious consecration: its human roots, its Christocentricity, its link to Baptism, and its priority over the vows.

Regarding the vows, the report very intelligently renewed the presentation of each of the vows by studying them from the anthropological, sociological, biblical, Christological, and apostolic point of view and by emphasizing the need to go beyond legalism and negative moralism. The report fulfilled its role by showing that the vows are "an expression of the Brother's total gift to God" while emphasizing their incarnation in the totality of life. The "triad" of poverty, chastity, and obedience occupied the best place.²¹⁵

Nevertheless, the General Chapter not only maintained the specific vows but also renewed them by updating their formulation. The vow of teaching gratuitously became one of *service of the poor through education*; the vow of stability became one of *fidelity to the Institute*. The vow of association was not mentioned; it would earn its acclaim twenty years later. The specific vows were threatened with suppression; several Capitulants were

²¹⁴ "Religious Consecration and Vows" has 250 pages. Brother Patrice Marey, Assistant for France, was the "liaison agent" for Commission 1 and the principal author of this document.

²¹⁵ "Religious Consecration and Vows," pp. 57–193.

not much in favor even of maintaining them in renewed format.²¹⁶ I was obviously in favor of maintaining the “renewed” forms, and for both gratuity and stability I presented a written statement. One argument was as follows:

To delete the vow of gratuity would be, it seems to me, to give in to an anti-conciliar concept of the vows. We have been accustomed to focus our attention primarily on the vows and on the obligations they entail. Vatican Council II, which Commission 1 followed, has highlighted the priority of Consecration over the Vows. What is essential to the religious life is the total consecration of the person to God. Throughout the history of the Church, this consecration, fundamentally the same, has been translated and analyzed in many different ways according to the times and the specific purposes of the various religious orders. *The formulation of the classic trilogy²¹⁷ of poverty, chastity, and obedience is a late development and is not universal, even today.* Our first Brothers expressed their total consecration to God in the service of youth without explicitly stating this trilogy. Their formula of vows, moreover, expressed the specific *raison d'être* of the Institute, its own finality. *All in all, if the consideration is one of duplication or of the need to reduce the number of vows, it would be far more logical to question the rationale for the explicit retention of the vow of poverty, for example...* Would it not be counter-productive only to delete what in the explicit definition of our total consecration to God and to his service is most specific and most characteristic?²¹⁸

²¹⁶ The minutes of the discussions on specific vows reflect this hesitation, even opposition. The votes on maintaining them as renewed reflected each time a relatively large minority: the vow of “stability,” 85 Yes, 10 *juxta modum*, 4 abstentions, 16 No; the vow of “gratuity,” 81 Yes, 7 *juxta modum*, 5 abstentions, 22 No (meeting of November 25, 1967, 5 p.m., Document 932.60).

²¹⁷ Today I would prefer to use the word “triad.”

²¹⁸ “Religious Consecration and Vows,” pp. 218–19.

Chapter 12 – *THE RULE: A SPIRITUAL RENEWAL OF THE BROTHER'S LIFE*

THE 39th GENERAL CHAPTER'S RENEWED VIEW

Miguel—Initially, the 1966 General Chapter's principal agenda item was to approve the revised Rule. The Declaration played a central role as the message of the Chapter. How important was the Rule during the first session?

Michel—I have spoken about the Rule several times in this present work. The first instance was about the disappointing nature of the 1946 “revision.” Then came the “historic” decision by the 1956 General Chapter to return the Rule to the Institute by engaging in a revision not based on the original Rule, whether of 1718 or of 1725. Brother Nicet-Joseph tried to implement this decision, and the General Council developed in succession Projects 1, 2, and 3 between 1957 and 1965. The process quickly bogged down on a seemingly endless path. Vatican Council II made it possible to think of writing a Rule in a different style. Drafting this “conciliar” project, unfortunately, had to be done too hastily by a far too disparate tandem.

When I spoke about preparing this text, I mentioned the difficulty of the work and the divergent views of the two editors. This discrepancy was reflected in their method of working. As the person responsible for writing the section of each chapter of the Rule properly so called, that is to say, the “doctrinal” texts inspired by the Council, I was progressing too slowly, according to my partner’s point of view. I too was impatient with my progress; the texts I was painfully elaborating seemed long, laborious, and too literally dependent on Vatican II texts. Looking back, I realize that I was insufficiently familiar with and, therefore, not liberated from the literal texts. During the same three-month period of our collaboration, Brother Aubert-Joseph quickly produced, one after the other, two or three drafts of what he called *Constitutions*. In actual practice he was unsuccessful in freeing himself from the literary genre of the ancient

Rules. In every chapter he multiplied prescriptions about detailed practices, schedules, and prohibitions.

Project 4, nonetheless, was given to the Capitulants, along with Project 3, in April 1966. The importance of the *Rule* to the Chapter was immediately evident in the Chapter's decision at the outset to register strongly its existence and its autonomy. After the Capitulants appointed me as one of the experts, I joined Commission 2 and participated in the debates on the lay state of the Brothers and on the possible introduction of the priesthood in the Institute. Commission 7 was responsible for the revision of the *Rule*. The disagreement between Brother Aubert-Joseph and me, the two editors of Project 4, was obvious in the two different texts that we produced. They immediately provoked strong opposition within Commission 7.

The General Council, the architect of the project to revise the *Rule* between the General Chapters of 1956 and 1966, was represented in Commission 7 by Brother Philipp-Antoon, Vicar-General, and Brother Assistant Aubert-Joseph. The latter was especially combative by insisting that Commission 7 approve the entire Project 4 and submit it to the Chapter for discussion and adoption. This motion faced almost unanimous resistance from other Commission members. They obviously preferred Project 4 to Project 3, but with the reservation that their approval extended only to the basic orientation of the various chapters directly inspired by Vatican II. They felt that the multiplicity of detailed requirements contained in the second part of Project 4 was too much like the genre of previous projects. The issue was crucial. So one option, while accepting a conciliar tone, was that the project would remain a thoroughly prescriptive *Rule*, continuing to specify in detail and for the entire Institute the daily life of the Brothers and their community practices (schedule, prayer, asceticism, and relations with the young and in general with "people of the world"). The other option was to search for an "inspirational" text, nourished by the Gospel, certainly containing guidelines for daily life but without the details that in accord with the principle of subsidiarity voted by the Chapter are to be decided at various specific levels of responsibility.

As expected, Commission 7 summoned me, because I was one of the two editors of Project 4. All I could do was to confirm the point of view that I had defended while working with Brother Aubert-Joseph on the draft. Because of the tension that persisted in Commission 7, its members decided to refer the matter to the Chapter Assembly. The majority of the Commission voted to retain in the *Rule* an Introduction on the Institute's nature, purpose, and spirit and the first three chapters of the draft—Apostolic Consecration, The Apostolic Mission of the Institute, and The Life of the Members of the Institute. Chapters four, five, and six—on formation, Institute government, and community life—would be placed in the *Constitutions* to be written later. At the last moment of the animated, sometimes confusing, discussion, one Capitulant in the Assembly sought the public intervention of the expert who had worked on the development of Project 4. His request was granted, and because it was Saturday, May 14, 1966, that expert's intervention was scheduled for Monday, May 16.

I spent the afternoon on Saturday and all day on Sunday, May 15, in preparation. I already had available the unpublished text of the future *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, the Apostolic Letter implementing *Perfectae Caritatis*. The argument that I developed to support the position of Commission 7 insisted on the criterion to distinguish between what the *Motu Proprio* calls the *Codex Fundamentalis* and the *Codex additifs*. The first category, containing what is essential and permanent, expresses the Institute's spirit and fundamental intention. The second category can include practical requirements but must eliminate from the *Constitutions* everything that has become "obsolete." What is now expected of a *Rule* is a text that appeals to the interior spirit of the Brothers, presupposes their love of God and of humanity, and invites them to live according to this love.

At this point in its work, Commission 7 also wanted to have some kind of Prologue, a Portico, to precede the text of the *Rule*. I was also questioned on this point, which I also defended, relying on the Prologue to the *Rule* of Saint Benedict. The entire matter seemed to me less important, but instead of dwelling on theoretical justifications, I tried to sketch

an example of such a prologue.²¹⁹ This text concluded my intervention on the matter in the Chapter Assembly, which was not subject to a time limit, curiously, because I was an expert.

The first part of my speech was the most important in my eyes, because it served to guide the work of Commission 7 and of the entire Chapter on the development of the *Rule*. But when I finished by reading the draft of the Prologue, that part received the enthusiastic approval of the Assembly. The fate of the Prologue, which became considerably altered during the Chapter's second session, demonstrated the fragility of the apparently vibrant hopes that the Commission had for it! However, the Chapter adopted by an overwhelming majority the propositions of Commission 7 for guiding the continuation of its revision work and for focusing on the distinction between *Rules* and *Constitutions*:

The rules would be a concrete interpretation of the Gospel to aid the Brothers to achieve their mission in fidelity to the Founder. The constitutions would comprise practical and universally observable applications of the rules. The rules and constitutions would be presented together in a single volume. The *Rule* would be complemented by the Book of Government. The text of the *Rule* would be brief, theologically grounded, and spiritual in tone. Fidelity to the living spirit of the Founder would be reflected in the *Rule*.²²⁰

Like the entire Assembly, the Commission on the *Rule* had its work limited, if not interrupted, on May 18, 1966, because of the need, at the least, to prepare the section of the *Book of Government* required for the election of the Superior General and of the Vicar-General. Then came the long debate on the priesthood. For the Commission, it also soon became clear that it could not complete its work during the current session. It

²¹⁹ The Minutes of the Chapter session on May 16, 1966, at which the Prologue was read, do not mention it. The *General Chapter Bulletin* (May 23, 1966, p. 2) provides an extract of this Prologue. The text that Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon offers is a Prologue revised for the Chapter's second session (*Pour un renouveau spirituel*, pp. 385–86). The best extract is the one that Brother Luke Salm provides (Salm, 1992, p. 51).

²²⁰ Salm, 1992, p. 130. Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon gives another version of these propositions, in *Pour un renouveau spirituel*, p. 42. The official minutes of the sessions on this matter lack clarity and precision.

decided, therefore, to confine itself to improving Project 4 to some extent. But as for the text that it was introducing, the Commission agreed in principle to send it to all the Brothers for their study and to provide the text in English, French, and Spanish. The Commission also recommended that the study be done in community and that comments be sent to Brother Visitor as a community response. A questionnaire and documents were to be added to explain to the Brothers the directions being taken by the various Chapter Commissions.²²¹

INTERSESSION OF THE 39th GENERAL CHAPTER

Miguel—How did the work on the Rule continue during the Intersession?

*Michel—*Yes, in accord with the desire of Commission 7, all the Brothers (about 15,000 at the time) were invited to collaborate in developing the new *Rule*. I had been given the role of “liaison agent” for Commission 7, although I was not a member. In the last days of the first session, I had to get involved in an important matter. I was responsible for collecting the orders from all the Visitors for copies of the draft of the *Rule*. I realized that many were ordering only four or five copies. Alerted by this fact, Brother Charles Henry stated with some force that they must provide a copy for every Brother. In other words, writing the *Rule* was the task of the entire living Institute. By its decision, the Chapter defined its existence and also enabled all members of the Institute to contribute to the new legislation being proposed.²²²

For what followed, my responsibility as “liaison agent” with Commission 7 was far less pressing than for the preparation of the “backbone.” Even so, I was asked to prepare three interrelated interventions. The community discussions of Project 5 of the *Rule* were scheduled to take place during the school year 1966–67. By Christmas 1966, the responses of the

²²¹ “To aid the Brothers in this work, two documents would follow soon after, a questionnaire from the Chapter’s Commission 7 on the draft of the *Rule* and a collection of the propositions passed during the Chapter’s first session” (Jourjon, 1969, p. 46).

²²² See the *General Chapter Bulletin* of June 17, 1966, for the decision of Commission 7 that the draft, available in three languages, be sent to all the Brothers and that the study be done in community and include the use of a questionnaire.

Brothers to the first portion of the project were arriving at the Generalate. Realizing their quantity, I said to myself that Commission 7 will never succeed in analyzing all the results of this active participation by the Brothers that the Commission itself had launched. In a discussion with Brother Charles Henry and in consultation with the Commission President, Brother Anselmus, Visitor of North Belgium, we agreed that a team of qualified Brothers who are not Capitulants will examine these Notes from throughout the Institute.²²³

This “group of compilers,” as it was known, was created in consultation with the Regional Assistants and included eight Brothers, four French speakers (two from France, one each from Belgium and Canada), two English speakers (from England and the USA), and two Spanish speakers (from Mexico and Spain). All had a sufficient knowledge of French. The choice proved to be an excellent one for the task. These Brothers assembled in Rome in mid-August 1967 and had an entire month to work before the plenary meeting of Commission 7, scheduled for mid-September.

My final task as “liaison agent” was to preside at the start of the group’s work on Wednesday, August 16, 1967. The only direction I gave them was to take into account absolutely all Notes from the Brothers. The Notes were grouped according to the themes of Project 5’s chapters—nature, purpose, and spirit of the Institute, consecration and vows, mission and apostolic works, community life, and prayer. Four “tandems” formed and then divided these chapters among themselves. In the initial days I participated in a few meetings to help get the work started; then I left, and the compilers organized and proceeded with their work. Each tandem produced a booklet that summarized the remarks from communities and Districts. The booklet on community life particularly impressed me by its size and quality. Its author was Brother Raymond Brisebois, District of Montréal, as open, hardworking, and spiritual as he was modest.

I had even fewer qualms about letting the group of compilers work freely, because one of its members had assumed the leadership naturally. Brother

²²³ Jourjon, 1969, pp. 46–47.

Paul-Antoine Jourjon, a profound and original philosopher, also grounded in theology, was chosen as one of the two French compilers. In summer 1966, the District of Centre-Est was formed by combining the Districts of Lyon, Savoie, Le Puy, and Clermont. The former Visitor of Clermont was named Administrator of the new province. When he resigned as a Capitulant before the second session, his alternate, Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon, suddenly became a member of the Chapter. His culture, spiritual depth, and sharp critical mind were apparent; the agility of his “pen” already assured him a natural authority within the group of compilers, and his qualities as a Capitulant strengthened it. He naturally became the leader of the group of compilers before joining Commission 7 for the second session.

SECOND SESSION OF THE 39th GENERAL CHAPTER

Miguel—What can you say about the development of the Rule and its characteristics during the second session?

Michel—Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon wrote the history of the draft, a work that I have cited repeatedly.²²⁴ Brother Luke Salm sums it up perfectly.²²⁵ In particular he describes how the other commissions participated in the development of the chapters of the *Rule* that relate to the objectives of their work (consecration, community life, formation) and especially how the text of the *Rule* itself (without the *Constitutions*) is “attuned to the spirit and content of the *Declaration*.” I have little to add to his comments.

To characterize this new *Rule* and to show what distinguishes it from previous drafts and editions of the *Rule*, I simply offer three examples. The first, a comparison, will show how the 39th General Chapter attempted to bring up to date the teaching of Saint John Baptist de La Salle about a text that is undoubtedly the strongest of the original *Rule*—articles that speak about the effects of the spirit of faith.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Salm, 1992, p. 131.

1718 Rule—Chapter 2	1967 Rule—Chapter 2
The spirit of this Institute is, first, a spirit of faith, which ought to induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith... (La Salle, 2002, <i>Rule and Foundational Documents</i> , p. 16)	Faith enables the brothers to evaluate everything in this world in the light of the Gospel. They see that the totality of creation, with Christ as its center, is ordered to God and destined through his love for the happiness and the salvation of all mankind (section 2).
not to do anything but in view of God.. (Id.)	Faith leads the brothers to dedicate their whole lives to the service of youth for the sake of the kingdom of God. They exert every effort to transform human society so as to prepare for the reign of justice and truth which the Lord will present to the Father on the last day (section 2).
to attribute everything to God, always entering into these sentiments of Job: “The Lord gave me everything, and the Lord has taken everything away from me; nothing has happened to me except what pleases him,” and into other similar sentiments so often expressed in Holy Scripture and uttered by the Patriarchs of old. (Id.)	Faith teaches the brothers to realize that God is supporting them in their work; in life’s joys or sorrows he is always present, since he has called them to help realize his loving plan to save mankind. Faith makes it possible for the brothers, little by little, to see in everything that happens, in every person they meet, especially the poor, the unwanted and the persecuted, a sign and an invitation of the Holy Spirit (section 2).

Today this 1967 translation might be considered as a commentary that fails to represent the perhaps more serious and inspiring tone of what John Baptist de La Salle wrote. Yet it seems to me that it improves the Lasallian expression on two points. First, it offers a more positive formulation for each of the three effects of the spirit of faith. Second, the explanation avoids pietistic interpretations that certainly were not in the Founder’s mind but that people sometimes draw from texts whose sober tone can lead to ambiguity.

“Not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith” has sometimes been understood or even presented in a manner that fails to recognize the depth of human reality. It is not a bad thing to clarify the positive value

of creation. “Not to do anything but in view of God” could encourage a “morality of intention” that shows too little concern for the intrinsic quality of actions. The 1967 text calls to mind the Brother’s activity itself and how necessary it is to contribute to the world’s transformation. Not only the “offering” of life matters, but also “what is offered.” In these few words we find an orientation appreciably enhanced by Teilhard de Chardin and by Vatican II.

Finally, and most importantly, is the reference to Job in a frequently cited text, a summary of this extraordinary book that is often misrepresented with respect to its message on the question of evil and suffering. “To attribute everything to God, always entering into these sentiments of Job, ‘The Lord gave me everything, and the Lord has taken everything away from me; nothing has happened to me except what pleases him.’” This short excerpt from the Founder risks encouraging a tendency to passive resignation based on an image of God who can “do harm” to test humans. It is not unheard of, even today, to hear Christians speak of this question of evil in simplistic language, “What did I do to the good God to suffer like this?”

The second example will allow me to show the major change that the new *Rule* introduced in the understanding of community and of community life. Chapter 3 of the original *Rule* was well entitled as “The Spirit of Community in This Institute and the Exercises Performed in Common in It,” but the content that followed seemed to concern itself only with the second part of the title. All exercises are in common, from morning until evening; everyone is housed together, including at night in a common dormitory; meals are taken with the Brothers to the exclusion of all outsiders, and the same is true for the rest of the common life; recreation is made together, and on holidays all walk together; the Brothers cannot go out alone.

It was an approach that no doubt corresponded with the times and was also inspired by the customs of the Trappists. To be sure, chapter 13 corrects this harshness somewhat in a life bordering on gregariousness, with respect to “How the Brothers Ought to Conduct Themselves Toward One Another.” The insistence on silence in chapter 22, however, is hardly

encouraging to relationships and conversations.²²⁶ Again, the influence of the Trappists is apparent.

I see three innovative aspects in the concept presented in Chapter 3 of the 1967 *Rule*.²²⁷ First of all, the community is not something “ready-made,” a result of constant proximity of the individuals who compose it. It is always under construction and can only be the result, day after day, of everyone’s active contribution. The Brothers are not individuals who become a community by finding themselves together for “exercises,” but individuals who are responsible for fraternal life:

The brothers create community by giving themselves with joy to the service of others. Together they share the responsibility for the life of the community and the power of its witness... To foster community life each brother considers himself responsible for all his brothers and for the good order of the house.²²⁸

The community can only result from the free membership of the various persons, which is why the *Declaration* insists on the unique value of each Brother as a person:

The community... fosters the development of the special talents of each and is receptive to the diversified wishes of all with full respect for the spiritual development each one has attained. The community favors initiative within the framework of a common purpose.²²⁹

Secondly, one basis for the ongoing construction of the community is the dialogue that its members maintain constantly. It is good to live together, which implies the adoption of a number of practices, such as prayer, but the specific modality of these practices is decided in consultation togeth-

²²⁶ No more encouraging is chapter 6, “How the Brothers Ought To Conduct Themselves During Recreation,” which by listing the topics of conversation that are forbidden, places the “recreation” in shackles. The chapter in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises* on approved topics hardly ameliorates the rigorous perspective of the *Rule*.

²²⁷ The 1967 *Rule* follows the same order as that of 1718 for the first three chapters, “Nature and End of the Institute,” “The Spirit of the Institute,” and “Community.” Then it diverges, speaking successively of the religious consecration and the vows of the Brothers (chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8), the apostolic work (9), the life of prayer (10), and the vitality of the Institute (11).

²²⁸ Respectively, 1967 *Rule*, p. 8, article 2; 1967 *Constitutions*, p. 36, article 1.

²²⁹ 1967 *Rule*, p. 9, article 4.

er. In other words, the old *Rule* focused on what I call “structures-things,” the practices universally determined by the *Rule*, even the details of the schedule. The new *Rule* focuses on “structures-persons,” because the goal is always “building community”:

To nourish the life of faith and to encourage the spiritual union of the community, a conference in the form of a presentation or an exchange of views takes place at least every two weeks.²³⁰

Dialogue encourages everyone to state his thoughts openly and to profit from the frank expression of differences of opinion or conviction that lead to a union of attitude and action.

The spirit of love as a living reality in each brother is the force that unites the community. In this spirit the community organizes and gives meaning to its life of prayer. The brothers pray together, hear and meditate on the Word of God together, and together participate in the same Eucharist. They seek God together and it is together they find him.²³¹

This last sentence, just like the first sentence of the second article cited, highlights what might be called the “mystical” dimension of the community. But the article’s construction itself suggests that there is no authentic, mystical, fraternal life except by taking into consideration the human conditions of living together. This is the perspective needed to understand the first article of chapter 3, which might be troublesome because it expresses an inaccessible and somewhat disembodied ideal:

Christ prayed: “Father, may they all be one as you and I are one.” This prayer is the inspiration for the whole life of the brothers. They make every effort to model their community life as brothers on the personal relations of knowledge and love that constitute the life of the Holy Trinity.²³²

Such a reference to the Trinity was new in the *Rule* about community, which is also reflected in the Lasallian texts of the *Meditations*.²³³ It was different, at least at first glance, than the latest new feature that I will

²³⁰ 1967 *Constitutions*, p. 36, article 5; the word “conference” is used in its etymological sense, which was the practice at the origin of the Institute, including that community meetings be held regularly.

²³¹ 1967 *Rule*, p. 9, articles 3 and 4, respectively.

²³² 1967 *Rule*, p. 8, article 1.

²³³ *Ibid.*

point out: the mention in the *Rule* of the community's apostolic character. Another aspect there is the insistence on dialogue for searching together, for if the community is always "being built," the "mission is always being discovered."

The community is aware that the full potential of the educational apostolate needs constantly to be explored. By its nature a community contributes to the reappraisal of apostolic goals and the adaptation of educational methods, with a view to coming closer to the spirit of the Gospel and re-examining before God the impact of its activity.²³⁴

At first glance, the spiritual teaching of John Baptist de La Salle suggests virtually no relationship between the community life of the Brothers and their apostolic ministry. In its experience of applying the Gospel, however, the community comes to birth through the ministry of education and in view of the best human and evangelical qualities of this ministry.

In connection with this apostolic dimension of the community, the 1967 *Rule* calls its Brothers to be open:

The community is open and generous to others. It cooperates with other congregations and organizations dedicated to education; it integrates itself in the total pastoral effort of the Church; it is involved in cultural organizations and social movements.

The community extends hospitality readily...²³⁵

Understandably, this new concept could not be immediately and universally effective. The Brothers were too accustomed to a "gregarious" form of the common life that had been too often idealized. They would not easily find their way to the new "vision" of a community based on relationships rather than on observance, on the community project rather than on custom.²³⁶ This is why, as far as I was concerned, in the conferences following the General Chapter that I was able to present on the subject of the renewal, I would say that "the most important exercise for the Brothers now is the community meeting," because it is the "instrument" of dialogue that fosters a gradual change in behavior and in mentality.

²³⁴ 1967 *Rule*, pp. 9–10, article 5.

²³⁵ 1967 *Constitutions*, p. 38, article 12; 1967 *Rule*, p. 10, article 5.

²³⁶ This was already the perspective of the *Declaration*, especially sections 19–25.

The third example that I recall of the “novelty” of the 1967 *Rule* fits the previous one. It pertains to the chapter on “The Life of Prayer.” The title indicates the difference with chapter 4 of the original *Rule* that it replaces, “The Exercises of Piety Practiced in This Institute.” The 1967 *Rule* speaks truly about the *life of prayer*, and the vision that it offers goes far beyond the matter of exercises and practices of piety. The first issue is the fundamental meaning of Christian prayer—the “priestly” activity in Christ by the baptized person that is necessary “to enter into this transformation more fully.”²³⁷ A reminder follows about the “principal basis for their prayer”—Scripture, the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist, and Penance (Reconciliation).²³⁸ The value of prayer experienced in the core of their activity is then recalled, although a better formulation might be desirable that echoes more strongly what I find in the chapter on the spirit of faith, that is, the importance of the activity’s secular content:

In prayer and in their apostolate the brothers live their union with God. They deepen this union by frequently recalling the presence of God, by bringing the spirit of faith to the events of their lives, and by a deep simplicity of purpose in their daily labors. Each day they set aside some time for renewing themselves in their faith.²³⁹

The text on the exercise of interior prayer is extremely rich and clearly summarizes the three parts of the Lasallian method of interior prayer,

in which God makes his presence known in the quiet of their hearts... The brothers unite themselves to the Person of Jesus Christ in his teachings, his virtues, and his mysteries. They discover the light to place their own lives in the history of salvation... praying for those whom God has entrusted to their zeal. They trust that Christ will give them the freedom of heart and discernment of mind that their apostolate requires.²⁴⁰

Then the *Rule* speaks of the asceticism needed for union with Christ and of devotion to Mary in inspiring words.²⁴¹

²³⁷ 1967 *Rule*, p. 27, article 1.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27, article 2.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28, article 3.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29, article 4.

The chapter of the *Constitutions* on the Life of Prayer is consistent with the logic of the chapter on Community in giving priority to structures-persons over structures-things. The essential is there: “The brothers as a community regulate the order and times for the various exercises.”²⁴² A list follows:

They come together each day for Lauds, morning mental prayer, Mass, Vespers and evening mental prayer. When possible, Sext and Compline, or the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, are recited in community or in private.²⁴³

The difference is clear in the degree of emphasis in these *Constitutions*. The following article sets a specific amount of time for interior prayer: half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening, including the recitation of Vespers.²⁴⁴ The same precise amount of half an hour daily is specified for spiritual reading.²⁴⁵

In fact, many Capitulants did not want to include these details, and the subsequent revision of the *Constitutions* by the 1976 General Chapter²⁴⁶ diminished the inflexibility. At the 1966–1967 Chapter, debates about the details of scheduled requirements sometimes lasted much longer than those on the various chapters of the *Rule*. This disparity was particularly notable with respect to the requirement to recite the rosary in community. That discussion was so long and lively that a few Capitulants named it, somewhat irreverently, as the “battle of Lepanto.”²⁴⁷ To reach the following compromise required a considerable amount of time and breath:²⁴⁸

Attentive to the recommendations of the Church and faithful to the traditions of the Institute, the brothers honor the Virgin Mary each day by

²⁴² 1967 *Constitutions*, p. 49, article 1.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49, article 2.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49, article 4, to avoid splitting up the time, “either two hours a week as a minimum, or half an hour daily.”

²⁴⁶ The 40th General Chapter (1976) made no change in the *Rule* itself.

²⁴⁷ Salm, 1992, p. 134.

²⁴⁸ The compromise was proposed by Brother Erminus Joseph, a respected American Brother who was a Visitor General, and it was amended by a Spanish Brother (*id.*, p. 145, note 77).

the Rosary or by some other practice of devotion to her in accord with the spirit of the Liturgy. This may be in private or in community.²⁴⁹

After ten years of experience, the Capitulants in 1976 did not alter this text in which everyone could find meaning, perhaps other than supporters of “True Devotion to Mary.” Ultimately, these endless debates and divided votes on specific practices—when the total *Rule* and the *Declaration* were voted almost unanimously by the Assembly—revealed that the spirit of renewal was accepted in principle but would be extremely difficult to put into practice, a topic that I will discuss when I speak about the reception of the results of the 39th General Chapter.

It can be said, however, that in general the 1967 *Rule* addressed the guidelines of Vatican II, especially when compared with the “revised” 1946 *Rule* and Projects 1, 2, and 3. Although the Council warned Institutes about the temptation of an easy “patching” by superficial adaptation and changes only in details (big or small), it is true that many details can and ought to be changed. *Perfectae Caritatis* requested that Constitutions, directories, customs, and books of prayers be updated according to the Council’s priorities (*Perfectae Caritatis* 3). This does not mean simply deleting obsolete prescriptions and adding more “modern” detailed requirements. “Nevertheless everyone should keep in mind that the hope of renewal lies more in the faithful observance of the rules and constitutions than in multiplying laws” (*Perfectae Caritatis* 4). After Vatican II, it became more necessary than ever before to appeal especially to the personal spirit of men and women religious and to take into greater account the diversity of local situations. The writers of the new *Rule* and the 1967 Capitulants who approved it understood this well.

Especially in the spirit of *Perfectae Caritatis*, all adaptations, indispensable as they are, only rank secondarily in relation to a more fundamental revision. They are valid only insofar as they stem from the inner meaning and if their conception and implementation are based on this essential revision. What is happening here is similar to what usually occurs in the foundation of a new Institute. *Constitutions* and regulations do not pre-

²⁴⁹ 1967 *Constitutions*, p. 49, article 5.

cede spiritual energy, apostolic dynamism, and Gospel inspiration. The vibrant soul of an Institute creates structures and expresses itself in rules that remain alive only by being inspired by this soul.

Vatican II summoned religious Institutes to rediscover the spiritual youth of a “renewed” foundation. The Council invited them to return to the essential Gospel sources (*Perfectae Caritatis* 2a) and to the specific intentions of each Institute’s original foundation (*PC* 2b). It called them to participate in the major renewal movements occurring in the Church (*PC* 2c) and to listen with loving and passionate care to the needs and the calls of people today (*PC* 2d). The idea of the *Declaration*, its creation prior to the revision of the *Rule*, its contribution to many of the *Rule*’s components, and its Preface by Brother Charles Henry—“It is, then, in the light of the *Declaration* that we must read and understand the other texts of our General Chapter, including the *Rule* and the *Constitutions*”—all served to remind the Institute, in great need of the reminder, that in the beginning there was no *Rule* and that the Institute must stop making the text absolute and the observance sacred and instead give primacy to persons and to the mission. This is a revolution easier to write than to live.

In the middle of the second session of Vatican II, the Capitulants enjoyed a recess to attend the canonization on October 29, 1967, of Saint Benilde. Unfortunately, Pope Paul VI was unable to preside. Many hagiographers, especially of lesser quality, had offered Benilde as a model of “regularity.” The *Declaration* ends by inviting all the Brothers

to turn to the Holy Spirit, who renews the face of the earth ... and to St. Benilde who, like so many other brothers before us, reminds us that God loves young people to the extent of providing them with saints.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ *Declaration* 53.3. This final sentence of the *Declaration* is a most welcome find by Brother Alain Houry.

Chapter 13 – *PROGRESS AND CONTRADICTION AFTER THE 1966–1967 GENERAL CHAPTER*

GOVERNMENT

Miguel—*You mentioned the vote on the principle of subsidiarity at the beginning of the first session of the 39th General Chapter. Was this principle applied to any other decisions of the Chapter?*

Michel—Illustrations of this principle occur in the General Chapter’s texts on obedience. The language differs from the traditional approach of many religious Institutes, including our own, and also that of John Baptist de La Salle, where obedience includes the sacrifice of personal judgment, even as far as blind obedience, and a renunciation of freedom and initiative, even as far as robotic passivity.

With respect to the Founder, you and I pointed out our own reservations in *Annoncer l’Évangile aux pauvres*.²⁵¹ It is significant that when speaking about the Brother Director’s exercise of authority, the chapter on obedience in the 1967 *Rule* refers explicitly to the “principle of subsidiarity”—

²⁵¹ In *Annoncer l’Évangile aux pauvres*, the question of obedience occurs frequently, as De La Salle repeatedly insisted—an impression that “the Founder advocates a kind of literal and mechanical fidelity that seems to paralyze all initiative” (see the commentary on the Wedding at Cana, note 225), Sauvage-Campos, 1977, pp. 134–35; reading of obedience as renunciation: “progress in perfection is proportionate to the degree of self-forgetfulness, and perfect obedience leads to total self-forgetfulness” (*Collection of Various Short Treatises*, p. 50, *Recueil* 13,17,3), id., pp. 174–76; “obedience is a community virtue *par excellence*, which can become stifling. Practiced to the letter as demanded, it risks paralyzing the root of initiative and creativity ... hindering the inner freedom of those who must obey. Such a conception of obedience can develop, justify, and even sacralize the natural tendencies to absolutism, even the inquisitorial mind of some authorities” (id., pp. 380–84). But important correctives are also mentioned several times in these pages. First, from the personal itinerary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, who is anxious to “discern” the will of God, based on criteria that are never reduced to passive performance of an external “order.” In his spiritual teaching, he insists on two criteria for discerning the will of God: obedience, certainly, but also “fidelity to the duties of employment,” which forcefully reintroduces the dynamic and creative personal commitment (id., pp. 136–39), and obedience to the will of God is driven by the awareness of being engaged in a ministry “in which you are doing the work of God” (id., pp. 396–98).

Brother Director “takes charge of those affairs that are his responsibility, having always in view the principle of subsidiarity.”²⁵²

But the deepest root of this “principle”—knowing the value of every person—is highlighted elsewhere in this chapter. I recall the following significant passage, because it refers to all the dimensions of obedience. It remains in the *Rule* of 1987:

The ordinary way in which the Spirit is revealed is through a community working together to discover the needs of the world and of the Church. Each member of the community ought to be heard, since the Spirit speaks and acts in every brother. Differences of age, of viewpoint, and of formation provide a rich source from which to form policies and come to decisions. It is the responsibility of the Brother Director to make the final decision concerning them.²⁵³

“Religious Consecration and Vows,” the report of the 1967 General Chapter’s Commission 1, highlights some fundamental principles of this “new” doctrine on obedience, particularly a kind of rediscovery of the dignity of every person, of the importance of interpersonal relationships, of greater communication of information, and of the general critical mentality.²⁵⁴ Without saying so explicitly, the report indicates that the “principle of subsidiarity” implies a different concept not only of obedience but also of authority. Nevertheless, I personally find it regrettable that the only explicit mention of “subsidiarity” is rather negative, almost condescending:

In the name of subsidiarity, [the Superior] comes to the help of the weaker ones to compensate for their shortcomings, to help them remedy them, and to enable them to attain an adult, interior, and religious obedience.²⁵⁵

Miguel—We could develop this theme, no doubt, but do the Chapter’s decisions about all levels of Institute government signify a major application of the principle of subsidiarity?

²⁵² 1967 *Rule*, p. 18, article 3.

²⁵³ 1967 *Rule*, p. 17, article 2; 1987 *Rule*, article 37.

²⁵⁴ “Religious Consecration and Vows,” pp. 146–51.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

Michel—Certainly, for as Brother Luke Salm, the expert on “subsidiarity,” rightly observes:

It is historically significant that the 1967 *Book of Government* provided the Institute with a new philosophy of authority and government (subsidiarity), as well as structural reforms that would radically change the relationships between the Brothers and those in positions of authority.²⁵⁶

He cites the Introduction to the *Book of Government*—the work of Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon. Anyone who reads this rigorous, consistent, and deeply spiritual text today will regret its disappearance in the *Rule* of 1987. If God, to whom alone all “authority” belongs, has given it to Christ and to the Church, the hierarchy has no monopoly on this delegation, neither among the People of God nor in the Institute:

All the brothers, however, are truly responsible for the life of the Institute and its work. The superiors shall take note of the inspiration of the brothers and respect the principle of subsidiarity in the exercise of their authority: each brother and each level of government has, in its own proper domain, a certain initiative and responsibility.²⁵⁷

Regarding the “regional” government of the Institute—communities, Districts, and Assistancies or Regions—the General Chapter of 1966–1967 established organizational structures to create a coherent plan based on the principle of subsidiarity. An Institute where authority was once intensely vertical in design and centralized in practice became a body based on responsible participation by all its members and on decentralization.

Overnight, one might say, local authorities gained mastery over the distribution and the exercise of the functions of authority. The distribution now becomes the result of the election of councils and chapters. No doubt the ongoing appointment of Visitors still formally belongs to the

²⁵⁶ Salm, 1992, p. 136.

²⁵⁷ *The Brothers of the Christian Schools, The Book of Government*, Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s College Press, 1967, p. 2. The introduction to Part II, The Government of the Institute, in the 1987 *Rule*, lacks the broad vision of the 1967 text. In 1987 the reference to subsidiarity is reduced to a *minimum*: “Authority is exercised with a sensitivity to persons and with respect for subsidiarity” (1987 *Rule*, article 102).

Superior General and his Council, but in practice the prior consultation by vote of all Brothers of the District is a decisive factor in 95% of the cases. In addition, local authorities carry out their duties of office, and authority at each level has the necessary fiscal powers of office without having to resort to a higher level. All this was quite unexpected in its scale and in its radical scope, but the overall positive results demonstrated the merits of the plan.

Miguel—I generally agree with this assessment, but I think some discord must be acknowledged, depending on the Region. I am surprised, however, that you did not begin by speaking about the Institute’s central government, in which you were involved between 1966 and 1976 as Assistant for Formation. Why the silence or, at the least, the delay in addressing this topic?

Michel—I would like to speak with a maximum of objectivity, which will be hard to do, because those ten years were without any doubt the most difficult in my life as a Brother. For the most part, I attribute the deplorable misfires to the defects in the central government structure that the 1966–1967 General Chapter created. I realize that I will be quite negative here, but I think that my conclusions go beyond mere subjectivity on my part.

Recall, first, the precipitous conditions that determined the structure of the Institute’s general government and the men chosen to function in it. For the reasons I already described, including the order from the Congregation for Religious, the work of the Chapter was brutally interrupted on May 18, 1966. The Commission on Government hastily improvised the new structure calling for a Superior General elected for a limited time and a Vicar-General as his *alter ego*. The elections were held on May 23 and 25, 1966, only one week after the Roman Congregation’s interdict.

Miguel—I think you were on the hot seat during those two elections. How did that happen, and how did you react?

Michel—It is true that for the election of the Superior General, a slight but almost imperceptible ripple moved in my direction. Brother Didier

Piveteau came to the General Chapter with the idea of getting me elected Superior General! His role was principally that of a translator (English to French), but his great intelligence, his mastery of the two languages, and his vision of the future gave him a certain audience, along with some strong opponents who missed no opportunity to denounce his activity as exceeding his function as translator. As for me, I was aware of the notion that Didier had attached to me, but I gave it no importance and was totally aware that I ran no risk. In 1964, during my first visit to the USA, I had come to realize that Brother Charles Henry certainly would be the next Superior General. The Americans wanted him, and he was undoubtedly the best candidate. Without doing any campaigning, I did not hide my opinion.

The few French Capitulants whom the Didier “project” might have briefly interested rallied with others in favor of Brother Charles Henry, after questioning him about his position on the lay character of the Institute and about the introduction of some priests into its ranks. On the eve of the election, Brother Nicet-Joseph told me, “You will see that it will take two rounds to select candidates; the Superior will be elected in the third round.” He expected that the morning session would be the same as his own experience in 1956. The Capitulants, well aware of where the current was flowing in the Assembly, were not surprised when Brother Charles Henry received two-thirds of the votes in the first round.

Without ever being “threatening” for me, conditions for the election of the Vicar-General were more complex. The real choice would be between the candidate of the former Régime, Brother Philipp-Antoon, and the “renewal” candidate, Brother José Pablo Basterrechea. A number of French Capitulants, however, were shocked by a rumor circulating in the days immediately preceding the opening of the Chapter that the American and the Spanish Capitulants had agreed that with the Superior an American, Brother Charles Henry, the Vicar-General would be Spanish, with Brother José Pablo Basterrechea the only possible candidate for this group.²⁵⁸ So, in the first round for the election of the Vicar-

²⁵⁸ I can attest, not to the accuracy, but to the fact of this “rumor.” In his diary for April 20, 1966, Brother Luke Salm mentions exchanges between the Americans and the Spanish, especially with

General, I received 33 votes, thereby depriving any candidate of the majority. The curious thing is that in the second round, the same number of votes fell to my name—33!—probably the same voters. Immediately after the voting session, one French Capitulant came to tell me proudly, “You see, we held firm!” Brother José Pablo Basterrechea received the support of those who in the first round had voted for Brother Philipp-Antoon.

Anyway, I never thought my election as Vicar-General to be likely, nor did I want it. But because I was sure of not being in any real danger, I refrained from any involvement. Now at some distance, I regret this passivity somewhat, because I think it was the source of misunderstandings that lasted until the General Chapter of 1976. Moreover, after these events in which he felt that his initiative had somewhat harmed me, Brother Didier handed me a letter in which he asked me to forgive him for doing so.

Miguel—How did the new structure of the General Council come to be?

Michel—The vast majority of 1966 Capitulants clearly saw that a reform of the Institute’s General Council was needed. Once the Visitors received the powers officially due to them, the role of Assistant had to change. In particular, an Assistant would no longer be a “Super Visitor” of a group of five or six Districts; the power to make decisions will logically belong to the local officials. It became necessary, therefore, to define the role of the Assistants as “Councilors” of the Superior General—historically, their initial function—and then to design the structure of the General Council as a more collegial body that is collectively responsible for the entire life of the Institute. This option assumed that the members of the General Council would be capable of seeing the total viewpoint, of working as a team, and of focusing on specialized functions of various kinds. In their

Brother José Pablo Basterrechea. “Leo [Kirby] and Paul [Carey] made quiet trip to M.H. [mother-house] to visit Pablo Manuel [José Pablo], leader of young thought among the Spanish” (Salm, 1992, p. 32, note 36), but this seems to challenge the agreement that was apparently widespread. “Rather than the conspiracy that some had feared, this program gave those who participated a chance to get to know other delegates and their hopes for the Institute, a respect for other points of view ... to engender in the delegates a sense of both their collective power and their common responsibility” (*ibid.*, p. 30).

study of the successive drafts of the *Rule*, as in their replies to the *Questionnaire* at the end of 1963, some Districts had developed a truly new “image” of the General Council of the Institute—a small team created on the basis of the tandem of Superior and Vicar-General, diversified in the expertise of its members but homogeneous in objectives and in understanding the Institute’s overall policy. This was the clear position of the District Council of the Central District of France, in whose work I had participated, both in the discussion of Project 2 of the *Rule* and in response to the *Questionnaire*.²⁵⁹

By thinking about the matter carefully, the proponents of this reform were trying to achieve unity in the Institute. Unity in the central government was paramount. Paradoxically, the much-criticized centralization of the Institute at the Rome Generalate was mostly an illusion. In fact, the Brothers could sense that they belonged to twelve different centers. The direction by the General Council over the interests and the general problems of the Institute left much to be desired. Therefore, the thought was that general, non-geographic Assistants could promote unity within the Council to greater effect, and unity across the various regions of the Institute would follow. The thought was that Assistants who were not connected with a territory could be concerned more directly with maintaining communion among the different regions. This search for living unity was considered to be all the more necessary, now that the Institute’s government was becoming far more decentralized.

A similar view would impose itself ten years later, in 1976—again not without flaws—following the fiasco of the General Council elected in 1966. But the composition of the Commission on Government at the 39th Chapter in 1966 left little room for the innovative viewpoint that I just described. Brother Charles Henry’s conception of subsidiarity, which he had widely practiced as an Assistant, led him to support the geographical structure of the General Council. The Commission on Government

²⁵⁹ According to Brother Luke Salm, many complaints came from most areas in the Institute—except from the USA—about how the Assistants were encroaching on District government. One suggested approach “would eliminate the territorial Assistants altogether in favor of a small advisory council for the Superior, composed of Brothers with expertise in specialized areas” (id., p. 69).

did its work of “auditioning” the Assistants currently in office, the former Assistants, and the “experts” who were attending the Chapter. I remember that the atmosphere during these interviews was more inquisitorial than fraternal. Called in my turn, I defended as best I could my vision of the future General Council, but I felt as though I were speaking in a vacuum. Most Commission members believed that “experts” in various fields ought to be available to the General Council but remain outside it. I supported the idea that for the General Council to be collectively responsible for the Institute and to inspire and to build communion rather than to make specific decisions, the Council must be constituted by a different type, that is, by men with expertise in the various areas of the Brother’s life—religious, social, professional, catechetical.

In the Chapter’s Government Commission, Brother Adrien struggled in vain to build support for a position similar to the one proposed by the Central District of France, whose delegate he was.²⁶⁰ Between the election of the Vicar-General, on May 24, 1966, and the first days of June, a compromise formula seemed possible. Eleven “geographical” Assistants (instead of twelve) were to remain, and the General Council would add as “experts” the three “general officers”—until then known as “following the *Régime*”—with expanded responsibilities: the Procurator General, responsible for issues of religious life related to Canon Law; the Secretary General, responsible for education and catechetics, and the Econome General, responsible for finance and for related administration.

Miguel—How did you become the Assistant for Formation?

Michel—I need to tell the truth here, quite simply, that some groups of Capitulants wanted me to be on the General Council, although they were uncertain about what “title” would be mine: mission, theology of religious life, Lasallian spirituality. Finally, the Chapter decided to add an Assistant for Formation to the General Council, and I was elected to this position on Wednesday, June 8, 1966.

The general thinking was that formation is extremely important, especial-

²⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 70 and 82, note 61, on the “defeat” that it meant for Brother Adrien when Commission 5, on May 21, 1966, approved the proposal for the constitution of the General Council.

ly during the period of study and research while the renewal process is beginning in the Institute. Particular attention needed to be given to formation and to sharing with the entire Institute the efforts undertaken by every region. Another belief was that the renewal of formation would lead to specific solutions for each region but inspired by a common vision of the Institute's mission, a common attention to the meaning and to the fundamental Gospel requirements of the religious life, and a united appeal to "the spirit and the specific intentions of the Founder." I am not reconstructing these points after the fact; this is the *Declaration's* perspective in speaking about formation.

Initially, I could not envisage my election as Assistant in any way but positively, because it would allow me to participate without restrictions in the deliberations and the decisions of the General Chapter. I had already experienced this participation in my role as the liaison agent for the *Rule* and, especially, for the *Declaration*. But I soon became keenly aware that I had entered an impossible organizational structure and that several colleagues on the General Council were going to block the positions that I would take as the person responsible for formation in the Institute. I need to say a word or two about these difficulties and the causes that led to paralysis.

First, the structure of the General Council was impossible because of its sheer weight. With seventeen members (counting the Superior General and the Vicar-General) having the opportunity to speak, the situation was relatively difficult. Dialogue and outright confrontation especially became serious problems, particularly during the two annual plenary sessions that we decided to hold in May and in November, attended by all members. During the rest of the year, oddly enough, the "General Council" operated from time to time but was quite diverse in the number of members attending, and the decisions varied depending upon the group's composition.

Just one example is the opening of the International Lasallian Center (CIL) and its initial sessions that proved to be increasingly disastrous. Following the aggravated checkmates of the first three sessions of CIL (1968, 1969, and 1970) and because of the small number enrolled in the

spring 1971 session, I asked the General Council to cancel it. I was successful in my plea because the majority of the “geographical” Councilors were absent; the other members present understood my arguments. Quite the opposite could have happened.

Second, the structure was also impossible because of its imbalance. The regional Assistants as a group played a predominant role by force of numbers, by weight of habitual patterns, and by the nature of their information channels, communications, and frequent encounters. The priority areas of interest for most Councilors were, in the nature of things, regional. They were more sensitive to differences in practical implementation than to the general similarity of issues and to the unity of the inspirational texts. Another factor was that the constitution of the General Council and the method of electing its members were not inspired in any way by concern for building a cohesive team. The essential criterion for designation was regional. In addition to these structural factors, extremely strong tension, even rivalry, existed among the Capitulants from several regions. The choice of Assistants for the two sectors of Latin America was disastrous. The candidate for the southern zone was not elected until the second round, an unheard of situation in an election to the General Council of the Institute.

The extremely serious crisis that developed in the Institute—and beyond it—from the two conferences delivered at CIL by Brother Charles Henry in November 1968 vividly illustrates this structural inadequacy. The General Council was initially unaware of these conferences of the Superior that would trigger an unprecedented storm in the Institute. It was inevitable that the conflict built into the Institute’s central structure would acutely show itself in the particular case of the Assistant for Formation. In this central structure, he found himself in an awkward position, for he was the only “general” Assistant whose specific domain overlapped that of all the regional Assistants.

The Chapter documents of 1967 indicate an obvious disproportion between the ample objectives designated and the few measures designed to put them into effect. In addition to their magnitude, the objectives were also imprecise, especially difficult to identify in ways that made it

possible to translate them in real life. One example suffices: “The Brother Assistant in charge of Formation of the Brothers shall provide suitable guidelines... for the formation of the brothers.”²⁶¹ How could these general guidelines for formation be issued so that they meant something effective in the various local situations? The problem was not confined to the Institute, as I found out when I became a member of a commission established by the Congregation for Religious to prepare guidelines for the formation of young religious in all forms of religious life.

As for the limited means for taking action, a text introduced during the second session of the General Chapter in 1967 prescribed in two instances that the Assistant for Formation work “in collaboration with the Brothers Assistant and the Brothers Visitor concerned.”²⁶² I am often asked about the impact of such a clause—directed only to the Assistant for Formation without any reciprocity with respect to the other Assistants.

This leads me to explain the second cause of a situation that in practice proved impossible. Several of my colleagues opposed the positions I took as the person responsible for formation in the Institute. I remember that during one informal meeting of a few Assistants in April or May 1967, I said, “The measures that the General Chapter is going to approve will introduce such changes and require such modifications in mentality that all of us ought to resign during the second session of the Chapter. This will allow the Capitulants to elect a General Council that is homogeneous in its new visage and in the *project* that the Institute is assigning to itself.” It was a joke, certainly, and completely unrealistic, but it also expressed the evidence that was becoming more and more clear to me about the Institute’s evolution. Bold in the vision it gave to a renewed Institute, resolutely open with respect to indispensable decentralization, and realistic enough about the basic means indicated to implement the renewal—for example, in the *Declaration*—the General Chapter of 1966–1967 was far less successful with respect to the organizational structure of the

²⁶¹ *Book of Government*, II, 3, article 8a, p. 16.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

Institute's central government. This "original sin," whose consequences are not yet wiped clean, is in large part due to the fact that the General Chapter that elected the General Council during the 1966 first session was not the General Chapter that voted for the *Declaration* and the new *Rule* in 1967.

Suffice it to say that one-half of the regional Assistants were deeply hostile to the *Declaration*, although all of them had voted in favor of it. To the extent that it was my "charter" as the Assistant for Formation, I could only hurt myself with them when it came to issues about formation, the Brother's vocation, the mission of the Institute, consecration, and the vows. I will say a word only about some of the opposition that blocked the various attempts that I made to write the "general guidelines" on formation, which my job description required me to do.

With reference to the vocation of the Brother, its authenticity, its freedom, and its discernment, I encountered a refusal to set a minimum age for entering the Novitiate, as well as opposition to more open guidelines for administering the Juniorates. In 1969, *Renovationis Causam*, Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes, advocated a certain easing in the format for making the temporary commitment. I could not gain the General Council's agreement with the new approach that "promises" might represent. Many Councilors could not understand why promises could substitute for vows. A reflection on "The Vows in the Institute," initiated after the meeting of the Visitors in 1971, ran into a violent end of inadmissibility that paralyzed any progress, including at the 1976 General Chapter. On this point, the reputation that had been imputed to me, like a scar, of wanting to turn our Institute into a secular Institute continued to weigh on me. With regard to the Institute's mission, it was impossible for the General Council to accept the idea of an "internship" experience for Novices in settings for disadvantaged youth outside of the school. This was but one form of resistance to the Institute's resolute commitment to the educational service of the poor.

Under these conditions it was not long before I began to wonder about the significance for my own life if I remained a member of a General Council where I felt paralyzed to the point of suffocation. I was faced

with the question within a year after the end of the General Chapter's 1967 second session. In the context of a reform of theological studies that he had undertaken, Cardinal Garrone, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, had asked me during the term of Brother Nicet-Joseph to rethink the objectives and the organization of *Jesus Magister*, which was then beating its wings uselessly after a promising start. I undertook this task ardently, enthusiastically, and without a second thought. With the Claretians, we envisioned the creation of a Faculty of Theology that specialized in the study of the "Religious Life" in its various forms. I tried in vain to interest the President of *Jesus Magister*, an Italian, in this project. Without seeing what was coming, I was attacked so severely by some Councilors during a session of our plenary meeting in November 1968 that I decided to offer my immediate resignation to Brother Charles Henry. Wanting to involve myself in the Institute's basic orientation to the service of the poor, I was thinking about going to Latin America. He refused to accept my resignation but simply said, "Michel, for you the poor are the Brothers, so you must continue to work for them." For me it was a decisive illumination, although later on I still had to offer my resignation twice more—but it was always refused.

Miguel—What were the positive aspects in your work as Assistant for Formation?

Michel—That is true; had everything been negative, I would not have stayed ten years in that position. But I will discuss the positive aspects when speaking about the "reception" of the General Chapter of 1966–1967. If I did not do so, it would be unfair to me and to my colleagues who supported me then, starting with Brother Charles Henry. I think especially of Brothers Bernard Mérian, Patrice Marey, Paulus Adams, Arthur Bonenfant, and Leo Kirby from among the territorial Assistants, as well as three other general Assistants, Maurice-Auguste, Aloysius Carmody, and René Hamel.

This list could include other names too. I might be leaving an impression that the polarization about me personally was the cause of the division that prevailed in the General Council to which I belonged. This division became public knowledge at the meeting of the Visitors in 1971. But in

concluding my commentary on the central government of the Institute, I want to reiterate that whatever my own sufferings and shortcomings were at the time, what I fundamentally state is that the division was due less to the people involved than to the radical “deficiency” of the General Council’s unreasonable structure that the Chapter established in 1966. My situation, also a “structural” problem, explains what I especially had to suffer, but the negative consequences went far beyond my own person. There would be no one at the General Chapter of 1976 to defend a system that many had already rejected ten years earlier.

MAJOR GUIDELINES AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN FORMATION

Miguel—You mentioned earlier the Declaration’s guidelines on formation.

*Michel—Yes, and I will now return to that topic. The *Book of Government* of 1967 speaks in technical terms about the formation of the young Brothers, but the *Declaration*, in keeping with its renewed vision of the Brother’s identity, contains extensive and inspiring guidelines for everyone responsible for formation, as the table of contents shows. By simply quoting some excerpts, I will confine myself here to describe the triple dialectic tension that make this ambitious outlook so dynamic.*

First, the *Declaration* frequently returns to the irreplaceable importance of initial formation. It asks for a broad scope in the amount of time devoted to it, the objectives assigned to it, and the basic preparation provided for the young Brothers.

The General Chapter insists on the importance of a serious preparation for the brothers, one that is professional and pastoral as well as cultural, spiritual and theological, a preparation that joins the knowledge that comes from serious scholarship to the experience derived from appropriate activity. In this way the brothers will develop a mature balance of individual initiative and union with the community in the growth of an apostolic spirit.²⁶³

²⁶³ *Declaration* 15.1.

The training of young teachers must not, then, cut them off from the life of the men of our time, but must help them to participate deeply in it, according to their state and in view of their mission. The professional preparation of the brothers is not reduced simply to academic degrees and an intellectual excellence. It must provide “an education in the prevailing manners of contemporary social life, and its characteristic ways of feeling and thinking” (*Perfectae Caritatis* 18.2).²⁶⁴

But this emphasis on the need for a serious effort only makes sense if formation is viewed as a never-ending process:

This emphasis on the responsibility of each brother demands that an initial period be devoted to a formation that is profound, while recognizing that the work of formation is a personal and continual task.²⁶⁵

In particular, special care is needed to provide [the Brothers] the training in Scripture and theology, ... a solid preparation for catechesis, including an introduction to contemporary methodology, ... based on a knowledge of psychology, sociology and anthropology; ... every catechist must be well versed in the human and social sciences... It is equally important to provide for the brothers who are already engaged in the apostolate ample opportunities and concrete means to bring up to date the training they received years ago...²⁶⁶

The formation and the style of his religious life will tend to develop this “constant readiness to begin anew and to adapt” (*Gravissimum Educationis* 5), demanded by the very nature of the teaching vocation.²⁶⁷

To be genuine and constantly renewed, this process must be a consistent effort by the institution. As usual, the *Declaration* does not pause to deplore the mistakes of the past; nevertheless, the impact of texts like the following encourages us to read between the lines:

Those responsible, then, will guard against fearful attitudes and narrow pragmatism in the preparation of the brothers. Not only will they see to it that all will have the necessary professional and university degrees, but they will strive to have them receive an education as broad as possible,

²⁶⁴ *Declaration* 48.5.

²⁶⁵ *Declaration* 15.1.

²⁶⁶ *Declaration* 38.5.

²⁶⁷ *Declaration* 48.7.

developing the particular talents of each. It is important that the young brothers have the time and the necessary means to acquire this basic education, without which the competence and effectiveness of their work would risk being compromised over the course of time.²⁶⁸

The wealth of the Institute is nothing less than the brothers who compose it; its apostolic effectiveness depends on their preparation. Accordingly, it becomes urgent that the means be provided to permit them to work with confidence and optimism.²⁶⁹

Although the *Declaration* does not linger over criticism of the past, it seriously warns against a policy in which institutional projects too often were developed at the expense of the Brothers' formation. The same warning is issued for the present:

The renewal of the schools conducted by the brothers calls for a reappraisal of the policy for the opening of schools and of the nature of their programs. Without a sound policy in this regard the quality of the education provided by the brothers, as well as their own preparatory and continued education, becomes very difficult.

It must be recognized that taking on too many commitments may result in an abbreviated or incomplete preparation for the young. For the brothers already teaching, such over-extension of our apostolic work means the impossibility of deepening and renewing the intellectual life...²⁷⁰

But the obligations of educational institutions with respect to formation will be effective only if they are undertaken and complemented by every Brother's responsible commitment to his own formation. This last aspect is consistent with the *Declaration's* insistence on the primacy of the person:

Programs for the training of the brothers, however excellent they may be, can never dispense with the responsibility which each brother has for his own formation. The achievement of a personal vocation is the life-long task of every individual through fidelity to the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit. All true formation is a personal discipline which involves frequent moments of self-study, constant readiness to examine and accept

²⁶⁸ *Declaration* 48.4.

²⁶⁹ *Declaration* 38.5.

²⁷⁰ *Declaration* 49.1–2.

new ideas and the rejection of any complacent reliance on a purely mechanical technique.²⁷¹

The third tension that I want to highlight is also consistent with another major feature of the *Declaration*—the strength and the authenticity of professional competence are the condition for and the result of spiritual depth. The *Declaration* is limitless in its dynamic unity:

Accordingly, throughout the entire period of formation it is of the utmost importance that the apostolic spirit be engendered, fostered, and brought to maturity... Formation to a life of prayer leads the brothers to direct attention to God who will enlighten and purify their apostolic zeal. Their apostolic zeal in turn will awaken and sustain the impulse towards God.²⁷²

The effective service of the poor calls for serious preparation ... by a thorough study of social, economic and political affairs which will help him understand the full dimension of the Christian struggle for the dignity of man... For the service of the poor cannot be separated from the poverty which is a Christian attitude of mind, the humble acceptance of the gift of Christ, the response of love for Christ and for all men... An authentic service of the poor through the apostolate of education will contribute greatly to an integration and a deepening of the personal life of a brother, helping him to overcome more easily the difficulties encountered by those who have given their whole lives to Jesus Christ.²⁷³

The formation and spirituality of the brother will prompt him to perceive and live his teaching career as the expression of his consecration as a lay religious. He will strive try to understand and grasp the significance of his vows for his educational apostolate. He will call upon his faith by “being attentive to the way in which God speaks to the young of today” (Paul VI, speaking to the brothers on June 16, 1966). He will discover in his love for Christ and for his students the energy to renew—for their sake—the work of his own education, the development of his teaching skill, and the interest and joy he finds in life.²⁷⁴

Miguel—Did the 1966–1967 General Chapter introduce any new elements in formation?

²⁷¹ *Declaration* 15.2.

²⁷² *Declaration* 25.3.

²⁷³ *Declaration* 34.1–3.

²⁷⁴ *Declaration* 48.7.

Michel—Hardly anything new was introduced in initial formation, because the new guidelines were expected to come from the Assistant for Formation. The previous office of Visitor General was eliminated. The Chapter approved two major innovations in continuing formation; it encouraged regional Lasallian formation activities and created the International Lasallian Center (CIL).

THE INTERNATIONAL LASALLIAN CENTER (CIL)

Miguel—*Why did the Second Novitiate in Rome close in 1966?*

Michel—The Second Novitiate was established at the Center of the Institute at the end of the nineteenth century. From the outset it was an international institution. The title indicated its main objective—to provide a time of spiritual renewal for about sixty Brothers who had a sufficiently long experience in community and in the apostolate.

Initially—and for forty years—the duration was limited to three months, the so-called *hundred days*. The General Chapter of 1923 decided to lengthen it to a nine-month academic year. Located at Athis-Mons, near Paris, from its inception until 1904, the Second Novitiate twice followed the relocation of the Generalate, first to Lembecq-les-Hal (Belgium), until 1936, and then to Rome in a building constructed for the purpose for the session of 1936–37. The 1939–40 session had only twenty Brothers, and the Second Novitiate had to cease operating during World War II. At Brother Athanase-Émile’s urging, the 1946 General Chapter decided to resume the Second Novitiate immediately. Twenty classes succeeded one another without interruption, but the last group in 1965–66 remained only six months, because work was needed to prepare the building for the 1966 General Chapter.

Several potential candidates for the supposed next Second Novitiate class of 1966–67 remained in Europe at the end of that General Chapter’s first session, especially some Brothers from the USA who planned to study French during the summer. However, at the first meeting of the new General Council on June 13, 1966, I proposed as the Assistant for Formation that the Second Novitiate not be held, a decision that was easily and unanimously reached for obvious reasons. First, Brother Mutien-

Clément (of South Belgium), who had directed the last two sessions (1964–65 and 1965–66) had resigned. His Sub-Director, Brother Aloysius Carmody (of Australia), had been elected Assistant and Secretary-General. It would be impossible to create a new staff immediately. Besides, it was common knowledge that the Second Novitiate session of 1965–66 had been a fiasco that led to the Director's resignation. Furthermore, the decision by the 1966 General Chapter to hold a second session in 1967 required the complete renovation of the Second Novitiate building and made it unusable.

As if these situational reasons were not enough to cause the suspension of the Second Novitiate, another factor was the obvious necessity to rethink its objectives, operation, and staff. In my opinion, the Second Novitiate had functioned relatively well during the period since World War II under the direction of Brother Nicet-Joseph from 1946 to 1956 and of Brother Clodoald from 1956 to 1964. Because of their exceptional stature, these two Brothers overcame the deficiencies that were becoming increasingly apparent. They managed to have the participants tolerate—willingly or not—the Second Novitiate's obvious inadequacy in facing the Institute's current reality. It is also thanks to the influence that he enjoyed with many of his former students, who were Capitulants in 1956, that Brother Nicet-Joseph was elected Superior General, even though he was not a member of the Régime at the time.

Many Notes sent to that 1956 General Chapter, however, drew attention to the need for a radical rethinking about the Second Novitiate in Rome. Because of lack of time, the Capitulants confided this revision “to the wisdom and the experience” of the new Superior General. Sufficiently absorbed by the “ordinary” administration of the Institute, becoming more difficult in these years of change, not to mention by the major project of revising the *Rule*, Brother Nicet-Joseph scarcely had the time or perhaps the taste to tackle this project, however dear it was to his heart.

He might have felt the matter to be less urgent, because the Second Novitiate seemed to be working well under the direction of Brother Clodoald, who had taken the responsibility under the aura of a triple crown whose legend rivaled its history. His intelligence was so brilliant

that he had been offered a university teaching position while still quite young. He was considered to be a “modern” leader, one of the few “open” Capitulants in 1946. He was unfairly demoted as Visitor in 1952 by a narrow-minded Assistant. To many Second Novices, Brother Clodoald’s teaching seemed quite new. He presented the treasure lavishly, without parsimony, for his daily conferences never lasted less than an hour. As librarian and secretary of my Second Novitiate class (1960–61), I had even been kindly invited by the Canadian group to type Brother Director’s complete texts, a service for the classes that followed.

Appointed as Brother Clodoald’s associate for the 40–day and 50–day retreats held in France during the summer holidays of 1962 and 1963 for Brothers 32 years and older, I witnessed the same radiating influence of his teaching, even though he spoke in a monotone. However, the Second Novitiate class to which I belonged experienced a mini-revolt that Brother Clodoald denounced and blocked with the singular rigor of a public verbal flogging. The three French Brothers who led it (Brother Paul-Antoine Jourjon being in the lead) were so upset that my compatriots asked me to attempt to repair the damage.

That is to say that everything was not running smoothly. In July 1964, Brother Clodoald suffered a terrible automobile accident in Canada. He was paralyzed for the rest of his life (a martyrdom that lasted until 1979). The new Director—appointed on a totally improvisational basis—had been relatively successful as the Director of the Second Novitiate of three months at Bordighera. He assumed his Roman duties at the worst possible time. Vatican II was in full turmoil; the campaign for and against the priesthood was growing among some Brothers, especially in Rome; the questionnaire in advance of the 1966 General Chapter was calling many things into question. As smart and as good as he might have been, nothing prepared Brother Mutien-Clément to suffer the brunt of the multifaceted challenges that the Second Novitiate’s “leisure” allowed to develop.

In reality, the new Director’s problems were caused more by an already threadbare agenda than by any personal inadequacy. Three of the Second Novitiate’s basic characteristics, no doubt explainable by the context in which it was created, became major dysfunctions because of the changes

occurring in the twentieth century. The concept of a “Novitiate,” a kind of move in reverse in order to revive a “fervor” more or less eroded by life, became intolerable in a world and in a Church marked by the idea of a spiritual “itinerary” that a person experiences in memory, certainly, but far more in hope.

The idea and the custom of a time of “spiritual retreat,” disconnected from normal and beneficial apostolic commitment and from any integration of the “ministry” with the search for God, had been officially contradicted by Vatican Council II and also by the rediscovery of the central role of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* in Lasallian formation. Finally, the individualistic style of this international gathering—“juxtaposed” personalities living in a system of uniform regulations based largely on silence—was no longer tolerable in a world of communication and in a Church as communion.

More practically, in a mundane sense, the 1966 General Chapter’s first session had recently experienced the possibility to communicate in the three most frequently spoken languages in the Institute (English, French, and Spanish), thanks to simultaneous translation. The idea of teaching only in French and without translation was no longer acceptable. I remember the enormous frustration that I witnessed in an otherwise brilliant American Brother who endured nine months of conferences without understanding a word.

Miguel—How did the Second Novitiate evolve into the International Lasallian Center (CIL)?

Michel—The process went through several stages. Being responsible for formation now, I could not stop at suspending the Second Novitiate. I was convinced of the need to invent something else.

In a letter to Brother Superior Charles Henry in September 1966, I proposed to start with a session for Directors of Novices, a gathering to enable the Institute to inform these Directors of the results of the current General Chapter, which already was predicted to be a significant one. The proposed session would also create an opportunity to develop a specific outline of the renewed format that we were seeking. I also suggested

that I be the Director of this session. The answer of Brother Charles Henry, speaking on behalf of the General Council, was immediate, positive, and cordial.

Miguel—What happened as a result of this correspondence?

Michel—On my return to Rome in October 1966, I concentrated on promoting an idea that had been positively received in conversations with Brother Superior and the General Council members who were present. As several Assistants suggested, we decided to extend the invitation to Directors of Scholastics. Suddenly, we were anticipating not one but two sessions of three months each, both open to the two groups of intended participants. Because the first date proposed, February to April–May 1968, seemed too close to the end of the Chapter’s second session, the initial group would attend from November 1968 to January 1969, with a second group from March to May 1969.

Although all the details of the content were far from being developed, it was urgent to inform the Visitors, to obtain their reactions, and to recruit candidates for each of the two sessions. In November 1967, a *Circular* signed by the Assistant for Formation and sent to all the Districts announced the organization of the two sessions, briefly described the purpose, the intended candidates, and the schedule, and requested that the names of applicants recommended by the Visitors, including for the future, be sent to Rome by January 1, 1967.

The responses were generally positive, many enthusiastic, a few more reticent. One or another expressed the fear that the new sessions would promote the “intellectual” at the expense of the “spiritual.” Although such reactions were few in number, they touched a raw nerve in me. I have never understood or been able to accept the kind of allergic reaction shown by some administrators in an Institute of teachers when it is a question of education, research, and intellectual work. I understand even less what kind of opposition can exist in principle between “education” and “spiritual life,” as though the search for God forbade the use of intelligence. By that I do not mean to say that I believe in an automatic, positive relationship between the two domains, but neither is there basic incompatibility. If you cite for me as a model the “ignorant” holiness

(probably less than claimed) of the Curé of Ars, I can answer by referring to the “learned” sanctity of Thomas Aquinas and of many Fathers of the Church.

Miguel—*You had suggested that you be the Director of this initial “test” of a new kind of Second Novitiate. Why did this aspect of the plan not happen?*

Michel—It was obvious to everyone that during its second session in 1967, the General Chapter would have to discuss and to determine the future of what—in the exchange of letters that I mentioned—we continued to call the “Rome Second Novitiate.” Moreover, it was well within the jurisdiction of Brother Superior and the General Council, in particular of the Assistant for Formation, to foresee the practical steps to create what had already been decided. The first plenary meeting of the General Council, in May 1967, discussed some practical issues for organizing sessions in 1968–69. I recall that it was during that meeting that we abandoned the name “Second Novitiate” and began speaking of the *Centre International Lasallien*.²⁷⁵

The General Council discussed the staff of the new organization at great length. No doubt I had not paid enough attention to the fact that Brother Charles Henry in his reply of October 2, 1966, had not explicitly mentioned my suggestion that I be the Director—which, by the way, I was offering “on tiptoe” and conditionally. I thought that it was assumed along with the entire proposal, and since his reply, I was acting under this supposition. But during these meetings of the General Council devoted to CIL, several Assistants were reluctant to agree with the idea that I take on direct responsibility. At the time, it seemed to me, their reservations were positive; they thought that I ought to remain free for the other tasks of the Assistant for Formation. I must admit that I did not insist then on my candidacy, which was a mistake, I think, as what followed would indicate.

²⁷⁵ In the 1967 discussions, as in the *Book of Government* (chapter 19 in the English edition), the name in French is *Centre International Lasallien* (CIL). This name quickly prevailed, probably because of the convenience of the initials (CIL). That is the form I always use.

Rather laboriously and after contacting those involved, the General Council decided to appoint a staff of three members, Brothers Juan Viola, Didier Piveteau, and Julius Winkler. The first, a very convivial Andalusian, was originally from the District of Madrid. He had completed the philosophical and theological courses at the Gregorian University and completed his doctoral thesis. Professor of Moral Theology at the Pius X Institute of Salamanca, he had recently succeeded Brother Fernando Izaguirre, now an Assistant, as Visitor of the Central District of Spain. He had exceptional intellectual ability and interpersonal skills. I could only rejoice with this selection. I already spoke about Brother Didier Piveteau; his many talents, especially his creativity and imagination, would play a key role. I had no reluctance in presenting him as a candidate, but I strongly doubted to myself that Didier would consent to “lock” himself inside the Generalate. I did not know Brother Julius Winkler, of the District of Winona (USA), but his competence in psychology and the social sciences and his religious seriousness and affability enabled him to make a significant contribution. At the last minute, Brother Ezequiel Nieto, of North Mexico, agreed to join the staff. He was also skilled in psychology and sociology.

Miguel—You mentioned the role of the 1966–1967 General Chapter in CIL. What did the second session contribute to CIL?

Michel—Commission 3, responsible for formation, created a Subcommission in the final period of the second session of the Chapter in 1967 to prepare the text in the *Book of Government* about CIL and Regional Lasallian Formation. I chaired this group that included Brothers who had attended the Second Novitiate. The discussion on CIL in the Chapter Assembly required little more than half an hour on December 9, 1967, at the end of the 11 o’clock morning session and the start of the 5 o’clock afternoon session, which led to a vote on the content of chapter 20 in the *Book of Government* that pertains to CIL.

The important guidelines in this text show the considerable and collective thought that had occurred since my quick letter of September 1966. CIL was clearly distinct from the Rome Second Novitiate. “The specific objective, therefore... is not the personal renovation of the participants.

Nevertheless, the specific work of the International Lasallian Center requires that it simultaneously promote a deepening of the spiritual life and community renewal.”²⁷⁶ The purpose of CIL is “to contribute towards a living unity in the Institute, to form its leaders, to deepen study of the thought of the Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle.”²⁷⁷

This general goal of CIL is supported by the specific directives that the General Chapter assigned to the team responsible for finding practical ways to achieve them:

to diffuse more widely in the Institute the results of ... studies ... on the Founder, and thus to contribute towards a better knowledge of his work...

to develop a knowledge of the living tradition of the Institute...

to promote better acquaintance and greater understanding among the various sectors of the Institute and to permit common reflection on the actual and varied conditions of the brothers' apostolate in the world today...

to furnish deeper knowledge of the doctrine of the Church on ... topics which particularly interest the participants...

to afford a more advanced knowledge of modern thought and the techniques of communication...²⁷⁸

The emphasis on the importance of dialogue among the participants was another difference between CIL and the Rome Second Novitiate. Furthermore, CIL's objectives were in profound harmony with the *Declaration* and, more generally, with the Institute's search for renewal that includes rootedness in the Founder and in the living tradition, openness to the Church and to the modern world, and tolerance of necessary pluralism.

The only question about CIL's objectives in the draft document that provoked discussion at the Chapter focused on Lasallian research. One Capitulant pointed out that the Institute did not expect CIL

²⁷⁶ 1967 *Book of Government* III, 19, article 4, p. 54.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 19, article 1, p. 52.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 19, article 3, pp. 53–54.

to focus only on research on the Founder and on the religious life, but instead to enable the Brothers who attend to be in prolonged contact with the thought of the Saint and the directives of the Church on the religious life.²⁷⁹

The minutes of the discussion summarize my response:

To this, the Brother Assistant in charge of formation replies, “CIL must find its way. Over time, a number of Brothers, dedicated to research, will benefit the Brothers of CIL by it and thus maintain contact with the life of the Institute; the results will be reciprocal.” Also noted was that a minimum number of courses must be offered at CIL, supplemented by personal work that will make them more beneficial.²⁸⁰

Not that I could suspect it, these three sentences evoked in advance the laborious initiation of CIL. By saying that “CIL must find its way,” I thought only of observing that it is a new experience and that the texts that delineate its features cannot foresee everything. I never imagined at that moment that CIL would not find its way until after venturing on back roads that would appear to many—and to me also—as dead ends.

A difficulty that arose quickly—and still continues—is that of recruiting people for the vocation of “Lasallian researcher” (a topic to which I will return). What would become the main stumbling block at the beginning of CIL was the balance between the personal work of the Cilists and the need for a certain amount of “authoritative” instruction.

Miguel—In the structure of CIL approved by the General Chapter in 1967, what was the role of the Assistant for Formation?

Michel—My final reference on this topic is from article 2 of chapter 19 of the Book of Government, concerning the international team that is responsible for CIL:

An international team of at least three brothers shall be charged with its direction and organization on a permanent basis *in liaison with the Brother Assistant in charge of Formation*. This team is to organize specialized courses to meet the specific needs of the Institute, and to determine

²⁷⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of December 9, 1967, 5 p.m., Doc 932.90, p. 1, Proposition 3.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

the practical operation of its sessions: duration, programs, methods of work.

The brothers who make up this team are appointed by the Brother Superior General for a term of three years. Their appointment is renewable. Before making the nominations Brother Superior General shall consult the General Council...

The Brother Director of the International Lasallian Center shall be invited to assist the General Chapter in the role of expert without forfeiting his right of being eligible for election as a delegate.²⁸¹

I will add a quick word about the second paragraph of this article. I thought that the Director of CIL ought to be a member by right of the General Chapter, as the Director of the Rome Second Novitiate had been. The 39th General Chapter, however, was hostile to members by right, a justifiable reaction against the abusive proliferation since 1946. The only thing possible to obtain was that the Chapter consider the Director of CIL as an expert. In fact, this situation never came to be, and the item was not retained in the revised *Book of Government* in 1976.²⁸²

I now come to the question that you asked about the role that the Assistant for Formation was to play in the operation of CIL. I already said that in May 1967, the initial suggestion that I be the Director of the first two sessions of CIL was rejected. The article in the *Book of Government* on the people responsible for CIL is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity, over which, during the second session of the 39th General Chapter, we were attentive to keep careful, even cautious, watch. It was truly up to the CIL staff to conduct the sessions and to determine all the practical aspects: duration, participants, content, and methods of work.

The phrase “in liaison with the Brother Assistant in charge of Formation” had the merit of recognizing some responsibility for him in the functioning of CIL, but the formula was sufficiently vague to allow his suggestions

²⁸¹ 1967 *Book of Government* III, 19, article 2, p. 53, *emphasis added*.

²⁸² In 1976, *ex officio* membership in the General Chapter of the general officers (Procurator General, Secretary General, and Econome General) was revoked. I protested in vain against this ostracism. In 1986 there was opposition even to mention in the new legislation the functions of these general administrators!

to be ignored. At the plenary session of the General Council in April–May 1968—that is, before the first CIL session was to take place—the Vicar-General publicly stated that “the Director of CIL is Brother Juan Viola, not the Assistant for Formation.” That was my invitation to accept a narrow interpretation of the clause in article 2.

Part Three

**A FRAGILE AND VULNERABLE HOPE
IN THE REFOUNDATION
(1976-2001)**



Bucciero, pc 2013

Introduction – *THE ALWAYS NEW RESURGENCE OF A FOUNDING CHARISM*

Brother Miguel Campos, FSC

The three stages of a transition

All of us have had the experience in life of discovering that one way of being and doing is ending and another one is about to begin. Ending and beginning are the key moments of every transition. Events happen that are somewhat unpredictable; they shake us up, tear us away from the security of the known world, and launch us into a new space and time. Alongside these *unpredictable transitions* are others that are more organically related to human development, including crises of identity, aging, and generativity.

These two types of transitions are individual and personal experiences. We can also speak about a transition in a community or in a group of individuals who associate for a common purpose. When the people change whom this community serves, or when the understanding of the purpose shifts, the group's organizational structure can no longer sustain the vital impulse that provides meaning.

Finally, there are transitions that are more dramatic in depth and in scope. In these situations, radical shifts occur in the way of understanding reality, of evaluating good and evil, of recounting and celebrating the foundational stories, of identifying icons, heroes, and enemies, and of controlling ethical conduct. When a society realizes that its cultural narratives and its myths and codes of conduct no longer function to give meaning and direction to its members, it recognizes that something has ended and that a new beginning is at hand. In this type of broad transition, one way of viewing the world disappears, but the new day that is coming is not yet clearly visible.

In the itinerary in Part Three, several types of transition intersect: the per-

sonal one experienced by Brother Michel Sauvage, the transition of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the transition of the religious life and of the Church, and, finally, the global transition, especially as viewed in the Western world.

Whatever the type of transition, between the awareness of one reality that has ended and of the beginning of another, there is an *in-between*—a stage of conversion, contradiction, confrontation, and dialogue from which the new emerges. It is the stage that makes us transcend. What is most remarkable, however, is that the new times carry the seeds that already announce a new stage when the transition occurs. The life cycle of transitions marks our history.

The great transition experienced in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

Part One and Part Two of this book analyze the crisis and the transition of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools over the past sixty years. We made our analysis as we followed the events in Brother Michel Sauvage's itinerary. We carefully avoided presenting the predictable and the unpredictable crises along his route, because it was not habitual for Michel to share confidences; he had a certain allergy in that regard. We situated his transitions in the great cultural crisis of our time, in order to be aware of the shifts and the questions about the lay religious life and, in this great transition, of the great crisis of the Church in the 1960s and 1970s in which occurred, of course, the transition in the religious life from the perspective of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Michel lived the first stage of his life (1923–1956) in a world in crisis, in a Church under stress and searching for its place in the modern world, and in an Institute deaf to history. The tensions were enormous. In spite of all its efforts, the Institute as it understood itself at the time was at an end, and a new Institute arose, inserted in history. The outbreak of new life that emerged strengthened the hope for adaptation. But before moving to a new situation as an Institute, we had the exhilarating experience of living between two times, between two systems of values. From an Institute that was disappearing emerged an Institute of Brothers that

could not have been foreseen (1956–1976). We can view these twenty years as years of our transition when a stronger hope in renewal arose.

But the process does not end at that point. Some are already able to accept the new situation and, therefore, open themselves to new knowledge, new values, and new interpretations; they begin to speak a new language. New questions replace those that were important in the past; new horizons appear. Nevertheless, others—unable to abandon what they had built and what was the plenitude of another time—remain passionate about old questions in which the new generation has no interest. This future horizon that arises from the confrontation is both gift and fruit of our work, and it affects the life of everyone involved in the process.

Perhaps we would wish to see three stages that are more clearly differentiated, but history follows its own logic. With Brother Michel Sauvage, we can dialogue with the questions, the anxieties, the expectations, the hopes and—why not?—the difficulties encountered by the protagonists of his generation. As the years advanced and the horizon shifted, new questions replaced the old alternatives. Michael was able to remain on the frontier with the young. His leadership at the 1966–1967 General Chapter and his contribution to the drafting of the *Declaration* demonstrate the depth of his being. In the years that followed, he remained alert to events with an informed, critical vision. He especially developed an enriching dialogue with the Brothers of Latin America, and he wrote for them his last two texts, a kind of synthesis.

A witness of God's passage in the shared itinerary of the Institute: a route of 50 years of travel

Although Brother Michel Sauvage is a privileged witness of God's passage in the history of the Institute during these past sixty-five years, we cannot look to him for any recipes to identify the perspectives for collaborating in its refoundation.

He conveyed the questioning of a creative generation suffocated by the repression of the 1940s. He felt the strength of the renewal in the 1950s. He welcomed the Second Vatican Council and intensely participated in

the General Chapters in the 1960s and the 1970s in the hope of collaborating in the renewal. He experienced the 1980s and the 1990s in a new stage of incarnation and kenosis, of the dark night and searching, of new questions that impelled him to work for the refoundation. The fragile and vulnerable hope that surged in this third stage was his definitive entry into the Paschal Mystery.

New questions

The decade of the 1960s ushered in a time of great change at a speed unprecedented in history, a change recognized by the Church and also by the Institute, two institutions that no longer would be the same as before.

From that point on, questions continue to evolve. In the next fifty years, the Brothers experience new shifts and fractures, the departure of many religious, the aging of the Institute, and the mission's new urgent needs. In these circumstances, are Michel's questions still valid ones?

This question is of paramount importance, for it plants a doubt about the relevance of his contribution. Some might allege that his ideas were valid yesterday but no longer have any impact on today's issues. In reality, at the end of his life's course, Michel opens his eyes on a radically new world at the end of the twentieth century:

- generations who have not experienced worldwide crises and the horror of war;
- changes beyond our capacity for wonder in culture, science, politics, economics, and communication technologies;
- ecclesial structures that continue to evolve slowly in the midst of a society that has a different sensibility of the transcendent, and
- a globalized and interconnected world that seems to be moving to an unclear common project.

Like Brother Michel Sauvage, when we open our eyes to the historical situation that is ours to live, we will dream of a radical, totally new world. Perhaps Michel can guide us in our discernment of new perspectives and horizons. Perhaps he can help us identify the shift in the questions that

we ask and revive our open dialogue with new generations of Brothers and laypeople who identify with the charism, the mission, and the spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Chapter 14 – *NEW ACCENTS IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE*

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE ACCORDING TO THE THINKING OF VATICAN COUNCIL II

Miguel—Some critics of the conciliar renewal associate the present crisis of the religious life with the changes in the way of understanding it and in living it. How did the Council Fathers reach the point of abandoning old concepts and of embracing new and rather radical language?

Michel—At the outset there was a draft document on the religious life, but it was worthless. There it was, however, at least indicating the Council's awareness of the need to address the religious life. Who wrote the draft? From the moment Pope John XXIII announced the Council, members of preconconciliar commissions were writing and revising various preparatory documents. Someone could research what the bishops were saying while preparing Vatican II, but the analysis of such documentation would require a thesis that would be difficult to undertake.

One initial text on the religious life bore the title *De statibus perfectionis*. While the Council was in session, this title would change to *De accommodatione* (adaptation) and then to *De accommodata renovatione*. The title is changed to indicate a change in orientation—no longer *adaptation* but *adapted renewal*. The change shows us that the movement is, above all, one of renewal. Adaptation is a result of the renewal. This change of title, therefore, is a significant action that consequently becomes a decision to ask all religious orders to undertake their renewal.

Another decision was to include the chapter on religious in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which was difficult and controversial for the religious present at the Council, who were quite numerous. They included Superiors of male religious orders with more than one thousand members and all the bishops who belong to religious orders, for a total of eight to nine hundred religious among the two thou-

sand Council Fathers. The religious wanted a separate document on the religious life. The introduction of the religious life into the draft document on the Church¹ was the full-time effort of one person, Gabriel-Marie Garrone, the future Cardinal. Following the significant decision to introduce a chapter on the People of God in the draft document during the first session—thanks to Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens—it was equally important and symbolic that the text on the religious life be in the same document on the Church. To do that, the language about the evangelical counsels had to be moderate in tone.

Miguel—What are the major orientations of these texts?

Michel—As for major trends, although Vatican II was not primarily a doctrinal Council, I can suggest three major changes in orientations: 1) from the *state of perfection* to the *evangelical life*; 2) from *above* or *alongside* the people of God to *in* the people of God, and 3) from *separation from* the world to *presence* in the world.

Perfectae Caritatis (Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life) begins with an overview of history, thanks to which a shift occurs from the religious life as the state of perfection (singular, encompassing all forms) to the diverse forms of the evangelical life (plural). It is the historical, that is, the charismatic perspective, although Vatican II never uses the word *charism* in reference to the religious life. Pope Paul VI will speak later about the religious life as a charism. Although the word itself is not used, the reality of charism is in the Council texts.

Perfectae Caritatis offers, first, a grand historical overview of men and women inspired by the Holy Spirit. Here we have the first shift, the primary way to pass from the religious state to the evangelical life, shifting from a general, global view to specific history and, therefore, to the charism. That approach is already evident in *Lumen Gentium* when it

¹ The chapters in *Lumen Gentium* (1964) are (I) The Mystery of the Church; (II) On the People of God; (III) On the Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate; (IV) The Laity; (V) The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church; (VI) Religious; (VII) The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Its Union with the Church in Heaven; (VIII) The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church.

describes the following of Christ—Jesus in contemplation on the mountain, Jesus preaching to the multitudes, Jesus healing the sick, Jesus in his suffering. Religious follow Jesus, certainly, but the *sequela Christi* is following Christ in his historical situations, whereas in a general theory, religious follow Christ poor, chaste, and obedient, a reference to the three evangelical counsels. Here, in *Perfectae Caritatis*, the *sequela Christi* occurs in the diverse forms of the religious life. Beginning with the prologue of *Perfectae Caritatis*, the new view follows the passage from the religious life in general to the specific forms of the religious life.

Perfectae Caritatis instructs each Institute to undertake its renewal and, in doing so, to change its relationship with the Founder, shifting from the state (religious) to the life (evangelical). Until now, the Church had encouraged literal fidelity to the Founder who passed on customs, rules, and works that required respect. *Perfectae Caritatis* invites religious to a fidelity to the Founder that focuses on his *spirit* and on his specific *intent*. These two dynamic words do not define objects; they announce a movement, a project, a reality that looks more to the future than to the past. That is why it is necessary to revise the *Rule*, an extraordinary enterprise that had never before been seen. For years to come, religious orders and congregations will live without an approved *Rule*. Although an order cannot exist canonically without an approved *Rule*, for ten years (twenty years for us, which is the maximum), Institutes will be living without an approved *Rule*.

Third, in conformity with *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Ecclesiae Sanctae*² (one cannot be considered without the other), all religious must be concerned with the revision of the *Rule*. The matter is not left to higher authorities; everyone must take hold of life personally as part of the shift to the evangelical life.

Miguel—*What was most revolutionary and unexpected in the Council's orientation?*

Michel—What seems revolutionary and unexpected to me is its unprece-

² *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, August 6, 1966, by Pope Paul VI, implemented the four Decrees of Vatican Council II.

dented instruction to proceed with renewal. In *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, Pope Paul VI almost said, in effect, that from now on, renewal must be continuous, although he might not have measured the import of that statement. No more, then, will one period of stability be succeeded by another period of stability, with a transition period in between. From now on, renewal must be continuous, rediscovering in the present the dynamic principle, the charism that gave birth to the Institute at its origin. This call to recover a charismatic religious life, upon reflection, is not without a certain contradiction. This summons to renewal goes largely unheeded, because quite soon after the Council, the Congregation for Religious adjusts itself to require the approval of *Rules*.

According to *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, the renewal must be initiated by a special General Chapter with the power to change the legislation of the religious Institute. The following regular General Chapter can then choose to prolong the period of experimentation. This provision explains why our Institute was not obliged to have its *Rule* approved until after twenty years.³ Because most of the other religious orders had a term of six years between their ordinary General Chapters, they scheduled a special General Chapter in 1968 or 1969. Then they could extend the renewal period to the next ordinary Chapter, three or four years later, and then again six years later. As a result, in 1975 the Congregation for Religious began determining its process for approving *Rules*. My sister, who started working at the Congregation in 1967, became an expert in the 1970s on the process for approving *Rules*.

Miguel—This orientation of the Council led us to the first shift: the passage from the state of perfection to the evangelical life. Did this decision meet the expectations of religious?

Michel—It exceeded expectations, because religious were only expecting adaptation. I am thinking of my brother's friend, a priest who had been appointed bishop of Arras six months before my brother's appointment

³ It happened that our ordinary General Chapter was to occur in 1966, just after Vatican II's conclusion in 1965. The Institute obtained permission to have this ordinary General Chapter, with its two sessions, considered as the special General Chapter, because its preparation had occurred in the correct manner for this purpose.

to Annecy. This priest was responsible for religious Sisters in the diocese of Lille. At the time Vatican II was announced, he wrote a book that had great success, *Tensions and change; the problems of religious orders today*.⁴ The idea of adaptation, in effect, dominated in advance; that of renewal arose during the Council. Although the expectation was adaptation, the response was renewal.

Miguel—In your opinion, does renewal go beyond adaptation?

Michel—This is a complete change. Everyone has to adapt, but doing so does not require returning to the original inspiration. Renewal necessitates rediscovering today the original creative, dynamic principle and, as a consequence, finding the forms. As I reflect on it—not implying that the Pope was thinking this same way when he spoke about continuous renewal—I think that the primacy of the religious life is no longer the issue; it is the dynamism that institutes and creates the specific forms. These forms are constantly under revision, a situation that is almost unreal and contradictory. It harkens back to Martin Luther’s wish; he criticized the attitude, after a charismatic start, of becoming frozen in the institution. Now the message is, “You must continually rediscover the creative dynamism,” which to me, if I follow this thought to its conclusion, means the end of religious Institutes as they are today.

Miguel—What are Vatican Council II’s criteria for renewal?

Michel—*Perfectae Caritatis* 2 explicitly mentions five principles:

- 1) The return to Christ, the following of Christ in the Gospels and according to the diverse forms of the evangelical life expressed in *Lumen Gentium*.
- 2) Attention to the movements in the Church today.
- 3) Fidelity to the inspiration, the intention, and the spirit of the Founder.
- 4) Attention to the needs of the world today.

⁴ Huyghe, Gérard. *Tensions and change; the problems of religious orders today*. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965.

- 5) A spiritual renewal that has the principal role, including in the development of external activities.

Each of these five principles is related to an eternal dimension (but perhaps in what follows, the historical aspect is more evident): Christ first, then the Church, and also the Founders, whose specific intention and spirit are to be applied in the Church today. The Founders were totally focused on the world of their time, which led them to invent new commitments that must be evaluated today. Thus, in our own case, we have not been able to understand, for example, the need to go beyond the schools to find the poor.

Attention to the needs of the world is a completely new aspect. How is attention to the world's needs possible by being separated from it? Religious must be educated in the reality of the world, well informed about the life of the world, and aware of what is happening in the world. The religious life was born in a monastic context, but the more it evolved into an apostolic presence, the more attention it had to pay to the world's needs. That is the tradition of the Society of Jesus, among others. Presence in the world, however, must include a certain separation from the world.

Miguel—You cite *The Christian Brother in the World Today: A Declaration and Perfectae Caritatis*, which seem to express two different aspects. *Perfectae Caritatis* focuses on radical attention to new needs, to history, to the Founder, and to the charism that compels us to be inventive; however, the *Declaration of our 39th General Chapter* concentrates on existing institutions, on the schools. Does this theological discrepancy signify a misunderstanding of the Council?

Michel—Because you pose the question that way, I must make two clarifications. First, perhaps I am being a little hard on the *Declaration*. Section 13 lists the characteristics of the Brother: lay, baptized, consecrated by vows of religion, in an apostolic community, and working in this apostolate principally, but not exclusively, in the school. This last point was quite a new element in the relevant discussions at the Chapter.

The 1966–1967 General Chapter specified that the Brothers can work in educational institutions that do not depend on the Institute and also in

projects other than schools, according to criteria to be specified. I asked to speak and offered a motion that the Chapter take a vote on that particular point. Three-fourths of the Capitulants voted to retain the wording, accepting at that moment that the work of the Brothers not be limited solely to our institutions.

I also want to point out another very important, although more negative, aspect. A draft of the *Declaration* had stated that attention to the needs of the world is *the* principal source of the Institute's renewal. An amendment introduced and accepted during the debate changed the wording from *the* source to *a* source. In his letter, Brother Superior mentions this point and my own position without seeming to attach the same importance to this change. I am convinced that this amendment was a step back and that attention to the needs of the poor is the source of renewal, just as it was the principal source of the foundation.

Miguel—*What is original about Vatican II's emphasis on attention to the needs of the world?*

Michel—This topic is the Council's third shift. *Perfectae Caritatis* 8 was the object of a closely fought debate that I had the good fortune and the grace to attend. The apostolate is an integral part of consecration in apostolic Institutes. This is what *Perfectae Caritatis* 8 presents, which is a fundamental reversal that replaces the idea of the two purposes of the religious life. This was a decisive shift, even though a popular book at the time, *L'âme de tout apostolat*,⁵ affirms that prayer and the interior life constitute these two purposes.

According to *Perfectae Caritatis*, the apostolate has its own dynamism as a response to a call, because following Jesus Christ involves attention to human needs and our gift of self. By this gift we make our consecration effective through a ministerial service. *We consecrate our life, but life consecrates us.* Our activities in ministry are our offering of a spiritual sacrifice.⁶

⁵ Chautard, Jean-Baptiste. *L'âme de tout apostolat*. 14th edition. Paris: Artege, 2010, 345 p.

⁶ Romans 12:1 and 1 Peter 2:5 on spiritual sacrifice.

Miguel—Did these shifts respond to the expectations of religious?

Michel—It exceeded them, but I ought to have mentioned earlier that the first half of the twentieth century already knew similar movements focusing on serving people. The book by Father René Voillaume, *Seeds of the Desert*,⁷ had great influence. He founded the Little Brothers of Jesus, who have no apostolic activity other than being present in the life of the people, living and sharing the lot of the poor, as they are and where they are. Later, he also founded the Little Brothers of the Gospel and the Little Sisters of the Gospel, who have an apostolic focus. Father Voillaume, however, maintains that ministerial service is not required. The Little Brothers of Jesus work, earn their living, are simply and modestly present, and have no projects of their own. The priest-worker movement, another example, included many religious. With regard to expectations, what people expect to hear is that religious must go to the people and not wait for the people to come to them in their institutions. It is up to us to leave our ghettos to go to others, which I think is a radical change. The fact is, the conciliar texts surpassed all expectations.

Miguel—Do you view this surpassing of expectations as a new way of understanding the apostolic religious life?

Michel—I don't think it is a new concept in the sense that the history of the religious life, especially in women's communities, is consistent with the return to the world. Pius V established the rule of the cloister that was applied, among others, to the famous Visitation of Saint Francis de Sales; the girls being educated had to come inside the cloister. Saint Vincent de Paul said to his Daughters, "You are not religious, not cloistered, not behind grills. Your cloister is the city streets; your veil, holy modesty; your chapel, the parish church." If John Baptist de La Salle did not go that far in his language, he did leave his cathedral and immerse himself in the world where the young were living. He created, admittedly, somewhat enclosed communities, but they were more so in the texts than in real life.

This aspect is not new; the movement of the religious life has always been

⁷ Voillaume, René. *Seeds of the desert; the legacy of Charles de Foucauld*. Chicago: Fides Publishers Association, 1955.

to go where human needs are. At the time of the founding of the Dominican Order, the poor are demanding poverty in the Church and the freedom to preach, a difference with the Cistercians, for example, who in the crusade against the Albigensians, think they can impose solid doctrine by a grand display of carriages and weaponry. Leaving the monasteries is necessary to be close to the people, as Saint Francis of Assisi did in his time. The Jesuits understand their need to evangelize through the transformation of the culture, hence their success, especially with university colleges. An examination of the historical evolution of the forms of the religious life shows that the movement is always in favor of greater presence in the world.

At the same time, however, the tendency to central control and to uniform approaches forces the women and men religious who want to serve the world to remain separated from that world and enclosed within their own works.

Miguel—In popular, nonscientific theology, laypeople in the Church esteem the religious life as a superior state, which the aspects outlined here do not support.

Michel—Popular theology does not forget that religious communities serve as the veritable presence of the Church. In small towns, communities of Sisters are close to the population, even while living separately. They are present with the sick and with the children, and they provide extremely important health and education services. Popular Christianity is aware of that and regards the Sisters as special people who have an important social function.

In valuing this type of the religious life, the Council suppressed artificial barriers, which became apparent in the quite rapid and general changes among women religious, depending on the places and the congregations, especially notable in their clothing, although with some reluctance and delay.

Miguel—At this point in our conversation, do you have anything to add to the major shifts in the religious life that we have already identified?

Michel—I spoke about presence in the world, the new way of referring to the founders, renewal to be undertaken by everyone, and the shift from the religious life in itself to the religious life in service to the world through the Gospel. I spoke about the two ends of the religious life and about the specific forms of religious life. There is something extremely important, however, that I did not discuss, namely, the passing from vows to consecration.

Vatican Council II, in *Perfectae Caritatis* and in *Lumen Gentium*, initially spoke about religious consecration before speaking about vows. What theologians have not yet been able to clarify sufficiently results from the Council's double language. On the one hand, Vatican II abandoned the idea of a superior state; on the other hand, it stated that religious consecration is rooted in baptismal consecration, which it expresses with "greater" visibility and fullness. This "greater" has given rise to endless discussions. Is "greater" not a way of restoring a certain superiority to the religious life? I witnessed the grammatical discussions on this point. Vatican Council II is not at all clear, although its fundamental insights are positive, but details remain dependent on an ancient concept. This problem does not only occur with the religious life. Ghislain Lafont, OSB, expertly shows how it occurs with the Church.⁸ The Council was not always consistent.

Miguel—*The difficulties that men and women religious experienced prior to Vatican Council II were frequent topics of conversation. Did the Council's new directions and major shifts respond to these difficulties?*

Michel—I think so. The proof is the drama for men and women religious that sometimes occurred. I am thinking of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, founded by Saint Jean Eudes in France for the rehabilitation of prostitutes. In keeping with the concept of the religious life at the time, they live within the cloister, and the young women also have to enter it. Another congregation was founded in the nineteenth century for the same purpose, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd of Angers, who also responded to both aspects, the cloister and the ministry to prostitutes.

⁸ Lafont, Ghislain. *Imaginer l'Église catholique*. Vol. 2, *L'Église en travail de réforme*. Paris: Cerf, 2011.

Then Vatican II takes place, and the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity think that they must leave their cloister. I knew two of them at the School of Faith who opened a community at Montreuil. Twice a week, they go in pairs trying to meet prostitutes working in the Bois de Boulogne. One of these Sisters now works with *Le Nid*.⁹ But I also knew other Sisters of this Congregation who entered because of the religious life in the cloister. There can be several motives initially, some people more attracted by contemplation and the cloister, others by the ministry to prostitutes. That is why, for Sisters who want to keep the cloister, the Congregation for Religious supported communities with the cloister but with a different work.

Perfectae Caritatis includes a number of important points that need to be considered. The first point is in section 15, on the common life. No longer are there to be any class distinctions within communities and congregations. These divisions became impossible to justify, whether among men who as Brothers in clerical congregations were considered inferior, or, worse yet, among women religious. Because these categories are contrary to the Gospel, their suppression was highly anticipated to be in accord with modern life.

The second point is a new concept of obedience. Two traditional concepts of obedience are present, in effect. In one, the Superior is the father, and the community depends on the Superior's authority—the monastic, vertical image, the way of the Jesuits. In the other concept, the community is primary, and the Superior is an expression of his community, which makes obedience more horizontal and circular. Father Tillard wrote the section in *Perfectae Caritatis* on this topic and composed it more from the Dominican point of view. In the context of a world becoming more democratic, it is no longer possible to speak of blind obedience, where the superior is God's representative, much less of a hierarchical Church in which the superior represents God, the Father, the head. Obedience now must be understood within the image of the Church as People of God.

⁹ Le Nid is a public association against the causes and the consequences of prostitution.

The third point refers to *Perfectae Caritatis* 10 and its expected and unexpected aspects. The first—the expected—paragraph affirms that the lay religious life is a complete religious life. The second paragraph—having no father, mother, or genealogy—has a most curious history that I have already described elsewhere. I wish to speak about the introduction of priests in congregations of Brothers, which is related to the intervention of Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti, who visited the Generalate and told the 39th General Chapter, “Vatican Council II has spoken; you must obey.” Before taking up any other matter, the Superiors consulted the recently created Commission of Cardinals responsible for the authentic interpretation of conciliar texts. “Is the General Chapter free to introduce or not to introduce the priesthood?” The answer was clear: “The General Chapter is free.” Knowing the answer, Brother Maurice-Auguste and I obtained the document from Monsignor Pericle Felici, Secretary of the Commission of Cardinals. Cardinal Antoniutti officially conveyed it, but he added a *mens Concilii* (mind of the Council) declaring that Institutes cannot refuse to introduce priests solely under the pretext of loyalty to their origins. To the official interpretation, “You are free,” he added, “You are not free.”

The fourth point is related to the criteria of renewal that refer to the following of Jesus Christ. I insisted on fidelity to the Holy Spirit, which is fundamental. The shift from the religious state to the evangelical life requires a return to the charism, to the reality of the Holy Spirit—here and now, today and yesterday, in today’s world as well as in the Founder’s—while following Jesus Christ in the Gospel and in the Church today.

Miguel—What are your observations about these shifts in the theology of the religious life in the Church, which did not occur in a vacuum but arose in the particular context of the Council’s theological teaching?

Michel—It is interesting here to recall Vatican II’s four Dogmatic Constitutions: *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Sacred Liturgy), *Lumen Gentium* (The Church), *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), and *Dei Verbum* (Divine Revelation).

Surprisingly, the first Constitution was the one on the Liturgy. Why? Because it relates to one of the questions that the Council studied, religious consecration, which is the offering of a life, that is to say, an eminent exercise of spiritual sacrifice. Consecration is linked with Baptism. The consecrated life is the expression of, and the way of demonstrating, this offering of spiritual sacrifice through liturgical worship, including the Eucharist. The consecrated life is intended, like the Church itself, to be the offering of spiritual sacrifice by Christians worldwide. The Eucharist is the sacrament of that sacrifice.

The Eucharist presently requires the exercise of the hierarchical priesthood, but the primary, fundamental priesthood is the universal priesthood of the Christian people, ordained to offer the spiritual sacrifice of self and of the entire world. The Constitution on the Liturgy shows the connection between religious consecration and the Eucharist as the sacrament of spiritual sacrifice. We bring to it the bread and the wine, the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands. We ask that this offering be transformed in Christ, and then we are sent back to continue our work. This offering is situated in the context of the renewal defined by *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests). In effect, the ministry of the priest is linked, above all, with the proclamation of the Gospel, the context in which the Eucharist takes place.

The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (The Church) reflects the texts on the religious life, which is an integral part of the Church as People of God, as Christ's body, essentially missionary. These texts and the realities they describe illuminate the concept of the religious life in a renewed manner and impose the requirement that religious know and understand them. That leads, with reference to the Church as People of God, to a better understanding of *Perfectae Caritatis* 15—which I just cited—as the application to the religious life of the unity of the People of God and the mutual equality of its members. Similarly, when the missionary Church is mentioned, its essential purpose is to proclaim the Gospel, and in it the religious life is inconceivable if it is only for itself. *Perfectae Caritatis* also defines the monastic life as apostolic, part of the same *sequela Christi* in a Church always enlightened by the Holy Spirit while it makes its earthly pilgrimage as new religious families arise.

The third Dogmatic Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), presents an anthropology that underlies a number of the Council's texts on the religious life: unity of the human person, human community, culture and its importance, secular realities, and serious engagement with the world's realities. Because *Lumen Gentium* had already declared that religious are not strangers to the service of the world, flight from the world can no longer be a component of the religious life. Rather than being estranged from the world, the Christian is its servant, including the service of the poor.

Miguel—*A consideration of the collection of Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitutions shows that the religious life cannot be understood as one lived for its own sake and separated from the world. The history of God incarnate in humanity continues. What, then, do you think about the conciliar Decrees on priests, bishops, and the laity?*

Michel—They need to be studied to avoid being forgotten, because there are many interesting aspects to address. *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom) has a prospective link with obedience. *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education) is also important. Although not a text on the religious life, it is a significant document for an Institute such as ours. Note, moreover, that a Brother worked on the text.¹⁰ Certain Decrees, such as *Ad Gentes* (On the Mission Activity of the Church) have texts relevant to the religious life.

What strikes me as the most decisive key to Vatican Council II, which also can be applied to our 1966–1967 General Chapter, is Pope Paul VI's discourse, a lyrical text at the conclusion of the Council in Saint Peter's Square on December 8, 1965. If some observers note that this Council was preoccupied with humanity, others might point out that it was not sufficiently preoccupied with God. In any case, it was more concerned with the human than with God. I think that the Council did well, "because the human is humanity's only path to God." I think that *the most fundamental key to the Council is, ultimately, the return to the Gospel*, because God and the human cannot be separated.

¹⁰ Cf. chapter 8 on the participation of Brother Michel Sauvage in Vatican Council II.—Ed.

Only a deistic view could at once seek to find God alone and no longer care about humans. In reality, men and women are part of the mystery of God and of Jesus Christ. He said so himself, and the Council emphatically insisted on this truth. Many of its texts on the religious life bear this imprint.¹¹ In Christianity, the cause of God and the cause of the human can never be separated, even if this truth is often forgotten in practice. To dream of speaking about God without dealing with the human is to dream of a God who is a construct of the human mind. God as revealed in Jesus Christ is God become human, inseparably. The distinctive character of the Christian faith is that God without the human is unthinkable.

I will offer only one example of this truth, that of the historical evolution of the religious life. Every generation, one after the other, of men and women who are “fools for God” rediscovers that God and the human cannot be separated, in particular humans who are suffering. Thirst for God is inseparable from compassion for humans. To follow Jesus Christ today is inseparable from meeting human needs today—not people theoretically, but people here and now. The history of Saint John Baptist de La Salle demonstrates this fact. The best feature in the Institute’s existence, beyond all limitations of language, is that in their daily life the Brothers have a true passion for helping the young and often the passion for the poor.

Miguel—Vatican Council II launched a movement in the Church. What was the Council’s reception throughout the Church, in particular, that of its texts on the apostolic religious life?

Michel—Recounting the entire story of the Council’s reception, including every decision, is beyond me. Texts such as the Dogmatic Constitutions *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (on the Sacred Liturgy) and *Gaudium et Spes* (on the Church in the Modern World) had an immediate impact, but I also think that the process of evolution in the Church was quickly blocked. To investigate that point would require consulting Ghislain Lafont’s work¹² on Vatican II’s inadequate reception.

¹¹ Letter of the Bishops to the Catholics of France, *Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle*, November 9, 1996.

¹² Lafont, 2011.

However, I think that religious were obliged to take the Council seriously because of being asked to undertake their own renewal. They did take on the project, even if they turned out to be more or less successful in doing so. In effect, a veritable blossoming of new *Rules* resulted from the Council, at a cost of enormous effort by religious Institutes. This work to apply the Council was fundamental. It remains to be seen whether religious went back far enough to their roots, that is, to the renewal of their works and to questioning the form that the religious life took in each Institute.

I think that was the case in a considerable number of religious congregations, in particular among women's congregations. I also think of the Jesuits, whose 1973–1974 General Congregation experienced a remarkable development by linking the promotion of the faith with that of justice. The Jesuits continue to use the extraordinary texts that resulted. The 34th General Congregation, in 1995, explicitly referred to that 1973–1974 meeting.¹³

Many women's congregations made remarkable renewal efforts. Many that in their origins had served the poor took the issue of returning to the poor seriously. This willingness to be incarnated in the world was especially evident in small communities that lived in apartments in the same conditions as ordinary people. This way of applying the idea of passing from separation from the world to presence in the world happened more readily in congregations with fewer works of their own to maintain. In France, the Jesuits left the administration of their colleges to others. As for us, Brothers of the Christian Schools, most of us consider ourselves to be bound by our institutions. The general movement of renewal is evident in choosing clothing, living simply with people, selecting housing, working for wages, and participating in trade unions, which has the consequence of activity sometimes considered as an abuse when the commitment takes on a political coloring of the left, especially in France. Unquestionably, the special General Chapters were viewed in the congregations as the primary way to implement the Council.

¹³ The most recent General Congregation of the Jesuits, the 35th, occurred in 2008.—Ed.

Note also that if before Vatican II we were in something of a desert with respect to the theology of the religious life, the postconciliar years saw the release of a considerable number of publications that were not always of the highest quality.

Miguel—*The Council launched a theological movement on the religious life. Can you comment on the major texts of Vatican II and also on the Popes who spoke about the religious life after the Council?*

Michel—I would point out first the commentaries by theologians, published in France in the collection *Unam Sanctam*, on all the Council's texts, especially *Renovationis Causam*, *Lumen Gentium*, and *Ad Gentes*. As for *Perfectae Caritatis*, which is of particular interest to us, its commentary is the most significant and was written by Father Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, a specialist on the religious life after the Council.¹⁴ His *Devant Dieu et pour le monde*, a wide-ranging and powerful work, is a synthesis of the conciliar theology of the religious life.

After Vatican Council II, the world of the religious life experienced a palpable effervescence of change, with such seemingly audacious initiatives as mixed communities, but also the increasing hemorrhaging of departures throughout religious Institutes, including the Trappists in the USA. One consequence of this crisis was a kind of panic at the Congregation for Religious in Rome, especially since what reached the Congregation was in the nature of denunciations of abuse, deviations, aberrations, and departures. Vatican II ended in 1965, and when, five years later, Pope Paul VI, with the Congregation for Religious, was planning to publish an encyclical, the motive was that the Roman hierarchy no longer had control but wanted to be in control. The encyclical's initial draft was an extremely reactionary text, a blockade demonstrating that the conciliar inspiration had not affected the members of the Curia, the Congregation in particular. This projected encyclical provoked such criticism in 1970 that it was abandoned. Unfortunately, the later draft of the text was also reactionary.

¹⁴ Tillard, Jean-Marie Roger. *Devant Dieu et pour le monde: le projet des religieux*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1974.

Other works were published here and there, for example, articles in *Review for Religious* in the USA, the origin of Brother Superior Charles Henry's CIL conferences on the religious life in the same period, 1968–69, that sparked a violent reaction in the Institute among some members. *Evangelica Testificatio* (Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life, 1971), essentially written by Father Raymond Régamey, is moderate in tone compared with other texts that preceded it. *Evangelica Testificatio* appeared before *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, 1975), the primary reference being the Gospel, whose name appears in the two titles. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* establishes the promotion of justice as a component of evangelization, because the cause of God and the cause of the human cannot be separated; justice is the constituent and key element. *Evangelica Testificatio* is also an advance, contrary to what might have been feared. This rather brief but worthwhile text neither basically questions Vatican II nor provokes any rupture; it limits itself to some warnings and cautions.

Then Pope Paul VI personally intervened forcefully to prevent both the monks and the Jesuits from giving too high a place to lay religious. In fact, the consequences of *Perfectae Caritatis* 15 were not applied at all, and the controversy would last twenty years over whether lay religious can become Superiors in congregations that include priests.

Miguel—What are the important insights in *Renovationis Causam*?

Michel—*Renovationis Causam*¹⁵ (1969) developed two important insights: the first, a progressive attitude to the question of the Novitiate, that it be more open and include practical experience, and the second, the possibility of substituting promises for temporary vows. That idea was completely misunderstood, in particular in our Institute, because people wanted to compare temporary vows and promises, temporary commitment and definitive commitment, whereas the major idea is that the commitment be progressive. The initial commitment ought not to have a

¹⁵ *Renovationis Causam* (Instruction on the Renewal of Religious Formation), by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, January 6, 1969.

form that makes the final commitment nothing but a repetition. This idea was not understood by many people who focused solely on the notion that there was no difference between temporary vows and promises. Promises, then, were quickly suppressed, and they disappeared from the Code of Canon Law. Recall in this respect the remarkable achievement of the Brothers in the USA in placing the Novitiate at the end of a process of dynamic formation.

This is the context in which the Vatican decided to produce a basic document on the formation of religious. So, as Assistant for Formation, I found myself on the commission charged with preparing it, and I worked with Father Vincent de Couesnongle, Assistant of the Dominicans and later their Master General (1974–1976). It seems to me that this document on formation did not appear until the 1990s¹⁶ because of its interminable preparation. To establish a formation guide for all religious—priests and non-priests, women and men, contemplative and active—was a challenge that risked presenting the religious life in itself and not taking into account the specific forms. In fact, the document either says nothing or offers banalities, given that only a specific type of religious life would allow for some useful development of its particular features.

I also want to say a word about *Mutuae Relationes*,¹⁷ published in 1978, the result of collaboration based on Plenary Assemblies of bishops worldwide between the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes in a joint *Plenaria*. This canonical and doctrinal text, designed to regulate a number of mutual problems between bishops and religious, also served to advance various issues.

Another *Plenaria*, on the vocation of the Brother, had been scheduled for 1984 to respond to the persistent malaise in congregations such as the Franciscans and others that became clerical congregations but had an extremely strong lay tradition since their origin. The basic question was whether to allow a Brother in such congregations to become the Superior

¹⁶ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, February 2, 1990.

¹⁷ *Directives for the Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in the Church*, May 14, 1978.

of a community or of a province or to be a member of the General Council. I was asked to write the basic document, the *positio*, for the *Plenaria*. I began by expressing my astonishment at discovering that the same problems still persist, twenty years after Vatican II, regarding the nonrecognition in practice of the vocation of the Brother in the Church. I explicitly posed the question of a specific and historical theology versus a deductive theology. The *Plenaria* took place after a delay caused by the change in administration at the Congregation for Religious, but it accomplished nothing other than forming two commissions. John Paul II did mention in his discourse some ministries of Brothers, although the Roman Curia never agreed to use the word *ministry* in relation to people who are not ordained priests. Note the translation of certain conciliar language in the Code of Canon Law that indicates this allergy against using the term *ministry* with laymen and laywomen. Although not in favor of the priesthood for women as the priesthood currently is, I think, following Bernard Sesboüé,¹⁸ that we need to distinguish the *structure* from the *form*, that is, we need to be able to modify the *form* of the ministerial priesthood (the presbyteral ministry). Although the distinction between ministerial priesthood and universal priesthood relates to the *structure*, the *form* that the presbyteral ministry takes is subject to modification.

Miguel—*Can you speak about the Conferences of Religious in various countries that support renewal but also experience tension with the bishops?*

Michel—I can give an example, especially of CLAR.¹⁹ In applying Vatican II's return to the poor, CLAR truly was a model of real concern for the poor. Then came the impact of liberation theology and the Conferences of Bishops of Latin America, in Medellín (1968), in Puebla (1979), and in Santo Domingo (1992), which is less frequently cited. CLAR took seriously the conciliar documents that encourage the preferential option for the poor, which then led to accusations of Marxism. A crisis ensued, with the officers of CLAR—president, vice-president, and

¹⁸ Sesboüé, Bernard, SJ. *N'ayez pas peur: regards sur l'Église et les ministères aujourd'hui*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1997.

¹⁹ *Confederación Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Religiosos y Religiosas*.

secretary—summoned to Rome and demoted, followed by Rome's appointment of new officers. The development of this conflict between the bishops and the religious represented by CLAR brought to light an aspect of ecclesiology in which the appointment of bishops might be questioned because of its pyramidal character, for the nomination falls within the powers of the Pope. The bishop, however, as a successor of the Apostles, does not hold his power from the Pope. Imagine a different movement, an ascending one. Ghislain Lafont suggests the example of what occurs with the appointment of religious Superiors. With rare exceptions, the congregations maintain control over the nomination of their Superiors. Since Vatican II, however, a reactionary policy has prevailed in the appointment of Latin American bishops.

Miguel—What do you recall about the relationship between the 1993 Congress of Superiors General and the 1994 Synod of Bishops on the Consecrated Life?

Michel—This question is related to the Synod of Bishops on the Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World (1994). Because the Superiors General had planned a Congress among themselves, independently of the idea of a Synod, they were quite happy with the decision to hold a Synod that would enable them to state their position. As with any Synod, the preparatory working document, the *Lineamenta*, was sent to all the bishops. Having read the document, I viewed it as catastrophic and a sign of the impossibility for the Roman Curia to deal with the movement. After the reactions to the *Lineamenta*, a second text, the *Instrumentum laboris*, was published just before the Congress on the Consecrated Life. The Congress featured keynote lectures in the morning and workshops in the afternoon based on the morning lectures and on accounts from different continents on the topics.

I have in mind three terms repeatedly used in the lectures and especially in the debates in full session. The first is the *acculturation* of the religious life, especially provoking in view of its too European character, a complaint especially from Africa. Latin America was less noticeable on this issue. The second term, *creativity*, is linked with the expression *at the frontiers*. *Freedom*, the third term, is a requirement if the acculturation—

entering into the history and the culture of the people, being creative and inventive—is to support *the passing from the religious state to the evangelical life and to presence in the world*. To do so, the religious life must be freed from canonical requirements. At that point, the great complaint arose about Rome’s excessive and restrictive demands, a topic that was reflected in the discourses that closed this Congress.

Miguel—What are the similarities and the differences between the Congress and the Synod?

Michel—It’s a good question that I cannot answer, not having at hand the final document of the Synod, *Vita Consecrata* (1996). It does include some interesting points, although my attitude might be blocked too much by the fact that the expression *evangelical counsels* keeps returning. There are aberrations in the text also. For example, on the vocation of the Brother, I was flabbergasted to read that the expression *lay religious* is forbidden and that the correct term is *Brother*. That is a contradiction and nonsense. If religious who are priests certainly remain priests, why do lay religious not remain lay? The distinction between priests and laypeople remains a constitutive element in the Church today. Dominicans and Franciscans, wishing to be faithful to their origins, call themselves Brothers (Friars) and are known as such and are no less priests. This example indicates what areas require further work.

We must think of the theology of the religious life as mostly a theology of hope. We are facing an unprecedented crisis in the religious life, with the forecast—and already evident—disappearance of numerous congregations, while the religious life experiences an incredible aging. At a followup meeting about the concluded Synod, a woman theologian made a particularly striking presentation on the fact that we must start on the basis of reality, which is a reality of death. The era of making grand theological statements about the religious life is finished, because we now understand that we are in a crisis of considerable dimensions.

There still are people who continue making abstract statements about the three vows, but I think these are empty words, because anyone who truly wishes to offer a theology of the religious life as it is now must start with the fact that it is in a crisis.

Miguel—*You speak of crisis, aging, and death. At the same time, however, other aspects of the religious life seem dynamic: mission, return to the poor, and emergence of new communities. What do you think of this movement of new foundations?*

Michel—It is true that if the image of the priest is in the process of disappearing, as Bernard Sesboüé, SJ, says in his book, *“N’ayez pas peur”*; *regards sur l’Église et les ministères aujourd’hui*, the question of lay ministries is itself a very ambiguous one. Some lay ministries are truly lay, but others, in fact, are substitutes for presbyteral ministries, even if they are called lay. A considerable malaise persists about these questions. It ought to be possible to ordain these laypeople who perform tasks and assignments of ordained ministries. The development of the diaconate introduced a quite significant change in the image of the priesthood. Along with the traditional duality of celibate priest and layperson, we must now situate the deacon, who is in many respects on the lay side, because he can be married and engage in politics and in trade unions without being considered as implicating the Church, while at the same time, he is operating on the ordained ministry side. Father Sesboüé is opposed—and I agree with him—to the Sunday assembly in the absence of the priest, which makes no sense if the Eucharist is truly a constitutive element of the Church. Although some groups enjoy the daily presence of a priest, it is unjust to deprive Christian communities of the Eucharist.

Father Sesboüé sees an attempt being made to return to Tridentine theology in that the taking of responsibility by laypeople has the effect of pushing priests to focus more on the sacramental functions in which their powers are invested. Vatican II’s theology of the presbyteral function, however, begins with the mission to proclaim the Gospel, which is quite another matter.

In the end, what the religious life has achieved is that it is engaged in a renewal movement. The return to the poor is a resolute force that no one calls into question. Another achievement is acculturation, which affects the specific forms of the religious life as a presence in the world. Collaboration among religious and laypeople in various ways is yet another result. What we can see happening in our Institute is also occurring in

many religious congregations, especially the sharing of a particular spirituality. To describe my global image of the religious life, I would say that it appears to be the advancing wing in the life of the Church.

What is not advancing—what is resisting and what I do not understand—is the concentration on the three vows and the three evangelical counsels. Theology remains marked by it, even with its renewed interest in the value of consecration. Although the renewal produced a more positive, more evangelical theology, the risk in doing so is to restore the distinction between Christians and religious and, certainly, to fail to respect the specific forms of the religious life. It is a waste of time to focus on a quite secondary matter when the mission is what motivates us. We remain, in a way, in a certain survival stance with a deficit of theological reflection, whereas what gives people life is not the theories but the service of humanity and the presence in the world.

NEW HORIZONS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE AFTER VATICAN II

Miguel—After Vatican Council II, while one model is disappearing, another is taking shape. Did you have a role in the renewal of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools during this period of transformation?

*Michel—*This is obviously an extremely broad question. First, let me say that I could not have predicted that I would be a witness and an agent of renewal. Nevertheless, this designation is somewhat exaggerated, because as a young religious, I suffered much from an enclosed, negative Institute encased in a *Rule*. I endured a severe crisis between 1946 and 1948 before my perpetual profession with the Brothers. When I decided, after a period of discernment, to make my perpetual profession, I said to myself, “If I can change something in this Institute, I will do it.” I found that the Institute was lacking in spirituality, so I said to myself, “If I can do something to bring a little more of the spiritual into the Institute, I will do it.” At the time it was nothing but an inspiration; I could never have imagined in what that might consist.

As I look back at the immediate history, what led me to become an agent of this renewal is that I experienced Vatican Council II. Just prior to the Council, I was engaged in a study of the religious life with seven or eight French religious who represented various forms of the male religious life. Thus our work already required a more specific approach to the religious life. We were assembled to help with the preparation of the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. Then I experienced the Council quite intensely, because my brother, Jean, was appointed bishop of Annecy just before the Council began, and I was at his side throughout all four sessions. Little by little, I became aware of the new theological trend in general and of the profound renewal displayed in the four Constitutions and the Decrees that followed. This conciliar movement also was highly significant for the religious life. Religious are, first of all, human and Christian. The view of humanity and of society, the anthropology, the concept of community, and the role of the Church in the world held as much importance for the evolution of the religious life as the specific texts that were written about the religious life.

Moreover, as for me personally, I was led a few years before Vatican II to write a doctoral thesis on the life of the Brother, and in it I highlighted the apostolic dimension of this life. It was a veritable discovery for me, consisting especially in this apostolic dimension at the heart of the life-long experience and teaching of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. I learned in a practical way that the search for personal perfection is not at all what is most important in the religious life. Instead, it is the gift of self in service to the world and, in our case, in service to the young, especially those who are most in need. The rediscovery of this apostolic dimension significantly prepared me for what was to follow.

After the Council, I had the opportunity to participate in our 39th General Chapter (1966–1967). I think that I was able at certain moments to play an active, and at times decisive, role in determining the lay character of the Institute and in supporting a profound renewal of the *Rule* through becoming aware of the need for a global view of the life of the Brother of the Christian Schools in the world today.

Miguel—*What thoughts and feelings do these experiences that you just mentioned bring to mind?*

Michel—At the end of this itinerary, my primary feeling is one of gratitude, because I have seen the certain action of God. During these events, I was led farther than I could have gone on my own. If it was my lot to experience them, it was not a mission of which I was aware at the outset. It was the circumstances that led me, and in that I recognize a route that I was called upon to take. That is why I feel so grateful.

I wish to evoke a second sentiment, especially because of its paradoxical nature. It seems to me that initially I was a peaceful man, even one who would never want to fight. I was not at all combative, and fighting frightened me. One thing I know now is that the courage to fight, at times to protest, and to react strongly was given to me in what were extremely difficult circumstances for me and for my natural disposition. Little by little, I became more of a fighter. I am divided on this point with respect to the ideal of purity of intention, because of the feelings obviously involved. Although the intention in this fight is a good one, a certain impurity ends up mingling with it. In other words, in some instances I got my hands dirty on certain questions. I found myself able to sustain a rivalry with people, and although I never wanted to be hurtful, I sometimes was.

A third feeling, overall, is one of a certain frustration, because I sense that the movement both of Vatican II for the Church and of the 1966–1967 General Chapter for the renewal of our Institute has faltered in many respects. I will offer a few examples. Chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium*, which begins by insisting on the unity and the fundamental equality of all members of the People of God and describes Baptism as the primary sacrament, has been inoperative in real life. The strong distinction between the priesthood and the laity continues. In the Roman Curia, for example, we see that almost everyone in a position of major importance is either a priest or a bishop. No layperson has any real power. In other words, the top level of government in the Church and also in many dioceses remains a clerical government. What still offers some hope is that at the base—not in a spectacular fashion or as an underground movement—preparatory work across various small communities is making laypeople aware of

their responsibilities. At the same time, I see a gap, a kind of gulf, between this new Church aspiring to be born and the old, visible Church that continues a system of power. I am thinking of some popular, futuristic novels, for example, *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (1963), by Morris West, on the renewal of the papacy. There is some kind of yearning for a Pope who is a man like any other. *Le Manuscrit du Saint-Sépulcre* (1994), by Jacques Neiryck, offers a dream at the end of a Pope who abandons the pomp of Saint Peter's and goes to live in the Lateran. Because the novel barely touches on the resolution, strong frustration is the only result.

As for our Institute, I see something similar. In effect, the renewal of the service of the poor has inspired a significant number of Brothers to take action, but globally the Institute as such remains an Institute of schools. The passage from schools of the Brothers to schools of the laypeople retains the same viewpoint. There has been no real commitment to this process of returning to the sources, of renewing, of rediscovering what is profoundly our mission. If the poor and their current needs were truly the starting point today, we would be a totally different Institute. I dream of such an Institute. I think that the Lasallian insight has a future and is among those with the best possible future in a renewed Church. What I see presently, however, is an Institute that is physically and materially disappearing as it is. I am not frustrated because that Institute is disappearing; I am frustrated because the people responsible are not fostering the movement.

Miguel—*It is true that Vatican II opened new horizons, but the Council continues to provoke tension and blockage. What do you think is preventing us from going forward, from thinking anew, and from imagining the evangelical life in the third millennium?*

Michel—That is difficult to say. Personally, I think that the blockade by the papacy and by the Roman Curia is still the determining factor. Many Christians worldwide are not much concerned about what the Vatican thinks and says, even if there are those who remain attached to this image of the powerful, pyramidal Church. If this image had no basis at all in the minds of Christians, another movement could take root, but that cannot happen except by human searching, not by dreaming about an ideal sit-

uation. The struggle is always between the sin and the light. I do not deny that all these forces are at work in the Church, but I do say that they are being blocked by the Roman Curia.

They are also blocked by Christian ignorance. In 1994 a book appeared in France that made some noise, *Jésus*, by Jacques Duquesne, a good journalist, a novelist, but not an exegete. He questions the virginity of Mary and the way of understanding the miracles. He is a Christian who affirms his faith by trying to distinguish between what is truly faith in the Risen Christ and what perhaps are elements—I would not say of folklore—of a number of more or less valid traditions. What struck and disturbed me most in reading the comments of “ordinary Christians” in *La Vie catholique* is the level of their reactions, indicating that they are still at the level of the little catechism. This explains a type of blockage and sometimes a gap between active and committed Christians who think about their faith and the mass of practicing Christians who want nothing to be changed.

One current weakness is the weakness in theology, at least in the French context that I know the best. Before Vatican Council II we had Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Henri de Lubac, Philippe Delhaye, and others who made the Council. Today, at least in France, there is an absence of profound renewal in theology. The conciliar movement did not continue.²⁰

Miguel—What signs of hope do you see today in the present situation of the evangelical life?

Michel—The first signs of hope are found in the current reality. In France, because I am still speaking of it, we know a number of monasteries that are experiencing renewal. I am not going to speak about them, although they certainly are one form of evangelical life. As for the general view, people are beginning to accept the need to clarify, to simplify, and to rethink the language. They see that the religious life must be discussed in specific terms and that the renewal of the religious life must start with

²⁰ Works by Ghislain Lafont and by Jean-Marie Roger Tillard on the local Church are significant, but these theologians were already active at the time of the Council, where Tillard was an expert.

the world and the calls of the world. The same is true for the vows, with some even daring to say that the three vows are not sacred.²¹

In daily life is where we must look especially for signs of hope. Three points struck me during the Rome Congress on the Religious Life. First, to be inventive, religious Institutes need *freedom*. Second, religious institutes were created to go to *the frontiers of the Church*, the places with the most urgent needs. That is why they needed to be free to be inventive, without always being bound by the obligations of the *Rule* approved by Rome. Third is the concern for *acculturation*. Movements exist with that intention, including in the classic religious life. I am not speaking of charismatic movements or new communities. My conviction, my hope, is that new shoots will grow from old branches. Freedom and boldness are required for that to happen. Our handicap in France, as in Europe and elsewhere, is the small number of young religious.

In other words, I carry within me the signs of hope—or rather, hope itself—convinced that *an insight such as John Baptist de La Salle's is a formidable reality in today's world*. What I do not see is how that insight is going to be put into effect. I also tell myself that De La Salle began in a very small way with something infinitesimal in relation to the vast need of the time. Besides, how can we believe in spectacular numbers of turn-arounds? The signs of hope are like tiny shoots that require skillful searching. I also think that a new and fundamental factor is that a posterity is no longer likely, which is to say that every generation, in every city, and in every place is going to have to start fresh.

That is a huge question in relation to our work. *I think that placing all our hope in the renewal of religious Institutes²² is way off the mark*. Religious institutes like those fashioned in the past are finished. What might arise will be based on the insights of Founders and put into effect, but they will spring up and then disappear without necessarily having many descen-

²¹ In this regard, Pope John Paul II's discourse on the three evangelical counsels is boring. At the 1993 Congress on the Religious Life, the discussion on the three evangelical counsels was notable. Yet, we are starting to reconsider the matter.

²² That is to say, as religious Institutes were understood in the past, with no effort of refoundation. In chapter 17, Brother Michel Sauvage will develop his hypothesis.—Ed.

dents. We have always based continuity only on worrying about numbers, but the reality of our religious life requires something else today. Therein, I think, lies an important insight.

Miguel—For us, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, what shifts in the religious life that Vatican Council II proposed are also reflected in the Declaration?

Michel—The considerable shift in the *Declaration* is not about a text but about a mentality that, in line with the Council, shifted from the religious state to the evangelical life. The *Declaration's* section 13 expresses the trend to define the identity clearly by its constitutive elements. The Brother, lay, baptized, consecrates himself to God by the vows of religion in an Institute approved by the Church whose members live in community, are dedicated to catechesis, and exercise their apostolate mainly, but not exclusively, in the school.

That statement could serve as a way to recall what constitutes one form of the religious state, even if it is a specific one, especially as it refers to membership in a religious Institute. But immediately after, section 14,²³ quite strong and absolutely crucial, states that the Brother cannot be defined simply by listing the objective constitutive elements. If, to be a Brother, you must recognize the constitutive elements, that is not enough. Everyone is encouraged to accept these elements according to his own inclinations as a result of his personal dynamism. Because each person is aware of the different tendencies based on these same elements, a form of pluralism must exist that leads everyone to accept the others while paying attention to the common good. In other words, it is not possible to define the Brother only by the objective elements. *The person of the Brother is a factor in defining the religious life.*

This last factor certainly had its consequences. The General Chapter adopted the principle of subsidiarity during the first session of work on

²³ "The constitutive elements of the brother's vocation taken together give the brother a distinct place within the People of God. The brother is identified by none of these elements considered separately, but rather by the decision to assume them all in a personal synthesis as an expression of love." (*Declaration* 14:1)

the *Declaration*, recalling that each Brother, as a unique person, is primarily responsible for his own life. This idea repeats a principle expressed by Vatican Council II. In fact, the importance given to the person will remain evident throughout the 39th General Chapter. It is a major aspect of the shift from the religious state to the evangelical life. Previously, sufficient consideration was not given to the person of the Brother, with his own dynamism and his determining role in the progressive integration of the various constitutive elements. We also had to rethink the content of obedience. In 1965, the Jesuits, a year before us, prepared a declaration on conscientious objection in the name of religious freedom. That became a reference for us to consider in our own Chapter.

Miguel—Was the focus, nevertheless, on individualism?

Michel—Not at all, even when speaking about fidelity to the Founder, which does not exist in itself in the texts. Fidelity is entrusted to all of us who are alive. Each one of us needs to live it, but it is not confided to individuals as such. The living community in dialogue fashions it, which is why the General Chapter is in a particularly strong position to do so. Thus the interpretation of the Founder must be done by people in a given situation and in dialogue. If it is said that each person must find his own way, it cannot happen in an anarchical way but by taking into account the demands of the common good. The *Rule* and the Institute's administrative structure have a role here in reminding us that we cannot find our way as Brothers of the Christian Schools without referring both to the constitutive elements and to the Institute's *Rule* and structure.

I want to insist on this fact that we define the Brother by the constitutive elements that form what I will call a vital identity: a baptized person, a man in community with a ministry of the Word as an educator. These are traits that everyone can identify as originating with the Founder. Then, suddenly, the formula is added, "religious approved by the Church," which introduces a canonical dimension within what was a vital, existential list. To begin with the canonical identity constitutes a tragedy for the Institute. *It is not the canonical identity that gives us life, but a specific consciousness of vital identity, an identity that is always in process.* John Baptist

de La Salle never spoke about this canonical identity, a topic that I hope to develop later.

A vital evolution is occurring in the Institute that the texts do not sufficiently take into account. The choice of a forward-looking approach cannot occur without a liberation from the canonical religious life.

Miguel—*Does the Declaration present a definition of the evangelical life that is too focused on the three vows?*

Michel—The text in the *Declaration* develops in a beautiful way the consecration that the Brother is called to live. The morality is no longer based on the vows but on a theology of consecration that shifts from state in life to evangelical life. In effect, the *Declaration* is not based on the vows, unlike the chapters in the *Rule* on poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The renewal of the service of the poor is another conciliar element derived from listening to the calls of the world. The affirmation *listening to the needs of the world* is the key to achieving and renewing the service of the poor. The *Declaration* does not indicate how to perform this service of the poor. It specifies the meaning to give to the fidelity to the Founder, to the calls of today, to the following of Jesus Christ, and to the teachings of the Church, thereby designating the poor as the object of our mission.

Our sensitivity to the calls of the world is *the*—not *a*— principal source of renewal. Every call for renewal includes a desire for personal renewal and, therefore, it is related to formation. This dynamic call insistently asks us to be concerned about initial and continuing formation. The individual person, who is central and must live his consecration in his unique history, must have the means at the outset of his journey to read and to understand this history. This is possible only if the formation is of a broad scope, not only in the necessary professional preparation, but also in view of human life *today* in the world *today*. Such formation is continuous, because life itself is a formation process. The religious, in fact, never reaches the point of definitive achievement. The *Declaration* (15.1) offers us a particularly well-balanced description of the important and thorough preparation that fosters the renewal of the apostolic spirit. Because this

renewal requires listening to the poor, every District, community, and Brother must discern the way to follow in serving the poor.

The elements that the *Declaration* defines as constitutive, that is, needing to be taken into account, do not pertain to a state but to a vital dynamism, to an evangelical life in which these elements are integrated in a way that cannot be anything other than personal. The approach to renewal also is personal in its focus on the world, particularly on the poor. All future General Chapters have this mission to allow for the passage from a religious state to an evangelical life in view of a more effective presence in the world and, at the same time, a forceful membership in the People of God.

Miguel—Do we need to talk more about service to the world?

Michel—When speaking about the renewal of the life of the Brother, we insist on the importance of the defined constitutive elements. We know that to be a religious as a Brother of the Christian Schools, the three vows do not suffice, because the lay character, the catechetical ministry, and the service of the poor are also constitutive elements.

Catechesis is defined in relational terms, not primarily as transmission of knowledge and truths but as building relationships with the young. We cannot separate the cause of God from the cause of humanity. The consecration of the Brother involves his service of the poor and his compassion and concern for human needs, that is, his explicit way of paying attention to the world. We cannot speak the truth about the Church unless we take into account the people we are serving. They are the ones with whom we must begin when we announce the Gospel to them.

If the Brother is a catechist by vocation, he is not one blindly. During my Second Novitiate, I met a Brother who was upset because when he was in Djibouti, he was not allowed to teach catechism to Muslims. He was shocked, as he recounted to me, “I wanted to become a Brother to teach catechism.” I had great difficulty explaining to him that he could not teach catechism without considering the people he was addressing. That incident happened before Vatican II, but the point appears strongly in

the *Declaration*. As catechists, we must be engaged in the renewal effort while taking into account the people we are serving.

We move to a new theological concept of the Brother's ministry, as explicitly described in the *Declaration*, if we begin with concern for the young people and, therefore, with our presence to the world. Similarly, being a qualified teacher supposes not only competence but also continuously renewed presence to the world, just as personal competence is continuously renewed. It is a matter of competence not just in the professional domain but also in political, social, and economic matters. In effect, the true educator, to be present to the world today, must continuously renew his way of being present.

Miguel—Does the Declaration move beyond the dual purpose of the religious life and the dichotomy of consecration–mission?

Michel—Instead of the dichotomy of consecration–mission, it would be better to speak about a trichotomy: consecration–mission–community. The *Declaration* is structured so that when it speaks of one element, it integrates the other two with it: *consecration by*, *consecration for*, and *consecration with*. *Mission of* implies a time of personal relationship, *mission for* and *mission with*; a *community of people united by*, *with*, and *for*, and consecrated people. From this point of view, I did not agree with Brother Patrice Marey, who insisted too frequently on integration. In a similar movement, John Baptist de La Salle conceived the dynamic elements of consecration, mission, and community. That is how he created the Brother. We habitually ignore this movement, because we situate ourselves in a world where we express ourselves in a unitary way on one specific thing. One can never speak about the religious life in a general way.

Miguel—Why do you resist this language of integration?

Michel—I am wrong to oppose the idea of integration. It is true that when the Brothers actually pray, they must remember that they are not praying only for themselves. Specifically, when they are working, they must remember that they are being sent, are doing God's work, and are in community to share God and the mission.

So why do I react negatively to the idea of integration? I have the feeling

that some begin by citing distinct elements; only later do they say that they must be integrated. It is true that the *Declaration*, referring to the Founder, speaks of community life, consecrated life, prayer, and God. Everything is not mixed together, but *the creative movement that gave birth to the Institute is one*. That is what we have to rethink and to understand more profoundly.

In the same way, concerning the school, it is the place where the Brother carries out his ministry and is present to the world, a presence that is indispensable to be a Brother. This presence, however, must be constantly renewed and updated by continuing formation and interest in human life.

Miguel—With respect to the world, how can we understand the Declaration’s prophetic dimension?

Michel—I will return to this rich and innovative issue, the shifting from a state, in effect, to life and from separation from the world to presence in the world. That is shown also in the way the *Declaration* describes the six or seven constitutive elements, presenting these constitutive elements as inseparable from the movement by which each Brother must make them his own and continuously renew them.

A call for renewal exists. I already talked about the religious life, catechesis, service of the poor, and the school. This last is perhaps the strongest point: the Institute’s mission is not to conduct schools but to renew the school. I think that “conduct” refers to a “state,” but “renew” speaks about “life.” The *Declaration* offers orientations for renewing the school. These orientations must be implemented to renew the school along with all the works. If that has not yet happened, the *Declaration* in all its parts is an invitation to do so. In effect, nothing is assured, and this commitment cannot succeed without struggles to invent new forms of the apostolate in response to new needs, including forms of ministry that are not necessarily schools. This is the great opening of the 39th General Chapter.

Is the *Declaration* prophetic? In other words, does it reveal this preoccupation to denounce, to announce, to transform? I think that I answered that question when I spoke about the willingness to transform the situa-

tion of the poor as well as that of the schools, also about the way in which the Brothers sometimes understand catechesis, which needs renewal by stressing relationships and the desire to make a difference in the life of the young.

It is true that this implies the strong denunciation of the consumer society and of the fact that the poor are neglected. Saying that the Institute must return to the service of the poor means, in effect, that it has not done enough. When the *Declaration* says that affective and effective poverty are required, the implication is that we have not sufficiently done so. When poverty is mentioned, it is not linked with poverty in itself, with the vow of poverty, but with the situation of poor people. The *Declaration* also denounces a kind of totalitarian concept of catechesis that would claim to impose the catechism on everyone without taking religious freedom into consideration.

But the *Declaration* announces at the same time as it denounces. If we have the mission to transform the school, the text outlines with beautiful insight what is essential about the Christian school. The same is true when it speaks about the renewal of catechesis, for it accurately describes what catechesis in the Church is and what the Brother's catechetical ministry is. It proclaims the Brother's vocation and its meaning, significance, and impact, and it announces the community in beautiful texts that focus on relationships, sharing, and the resulting shared prayer and Eucharist as the summit of the Brother's vocation. It announces the mystery of Jesus Christ, the manifestation of the Father, made present by the Spirit in the daily fabric of the Brother's life. It does not speak of the Brother's life in material terms but presents and announces the unique mystery of Jesus Christ, actualized and sacramentalized in the life of the Brother.

FINAL NOTES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE 39th GENERAL CHAPTER

Miguel—What do you think are the new expectations that Vatican Council II stirred in the Brothers?

Michel—I do not think it can be said that any new expectations arose

during the 39th General Chapter, although it is true that the Council did influence the Chapter. But were the expectations of the Brothers themselves manifest? The Council ended in December 1965 and did not come to the world's attention until early in 1966. Half of the conciliar texts were approved during the last session, including *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dei Verbum* and most of the Decrees. Even had the Brothers been well informed about the Council, it seems to me that for them the movement of the General Chapter was not primarily in the footsteps of Vatican II. It was primarily the movement of the Institute since the previous General Chapter in 1956.

I think, then, that the dynamism of the 1966–1967 General Chapter did not emerge from the Council. In effect, we must distinguish two things, first, the prior movement, for example, on the question of the *Rule*. The desire to compose a new *Rule* came from the 1956 General Chapter, not from Vatican II. What did come from the Council is the fact that the draft projects of the *Rule* already written were outdated. A new text had to be written quickly to be consistent with the conciliar documents. This text, Project 4, was adopted as a working text by the 39th General Chapter during its first session, and then Project 5 itself was reworked later. Thus it is true that the Council influenced the text of the *Rule*, but only in the later stage.

The same is true for the questionnaire that the 38th General Chapter, in 1956, sent to the Brothers at the end of 1963, a time when few conciliar texts had appeared. The 39th General Chapter, 1966–1967, adopted *ad experimentum* the liturgical prayers on which Brother Assistant Aubert-Joseph had worked extensively in response to a general desire to replace the traditional vocal prayers with the prayer of the Church, something that the 1956 Chapter could not do. Some might allege an influence of Vatican II on this matter, but it would have been later, when the 39th General Chapter was already in process.

Miguel—*In conclusion, what are your thoughts, three decades later, about the reception of the 39th General Chapter by the Brothers?*

Michel—Several impressions come to mind. I received sporadic comments about the *Declaration* in the years that followed. The Brothers

understood that it was a different language; many were completely surprised, also inspired, because everything seemed so new. That resulted in difficulties, tensions, even conflicts, and opposition, for example, concerning the service of the poor. The *Declaration* encouraged Brothers already serving the poor because of their decision to work in this area, and it motivated them to continue. Unfortunately, extreme decisions or attitudes sometimes led to failures.

Miguel—We spoke about the shifts in the life of the Brothers during the 39th General Chapter. What were the dynamics within the Institute that led to these shifts?

Michel—This question pertains to what I said at some length about the 39th General Chapter.²⁴ I looked at the *Declaration* as a text that results from an action and that leads to an action. The Brothers were the agents, the protagonists. The Chapter produced that document after becoming aware of its own existence and while sustaining its entire activity between its two sessions. The Chapter was not content simply to apply Vatican Council II; it created something that has not been seen since.

Two factors led to the development of the *Declaration*: the prior extensive participation by an international community that responded to the Institute questionnaire in the years 1964–1966 and the efforts of Brothers who took positions and worked intensively throughout the 39th General Chapter.

What action does the *Declaration* stimulate? It is action both to transform and to displace. The *Declaration*, in a certain sense, is a new genre; no prior text is comparable to it. A comparison is possible between the 1947 *Rule* and Projects 1, 2, and 3, and the *Rule* adopted in 1967. The *Declaration* speaks about displacements, but in fact it displaces nothing, because nothing is comparable to it in the Institute's past.

Miguel—We had the Preface to our Institute's 1726 Rule that was, in a way, a longtime and influential "declaration," because of its repeated inclusion in many later editions and its effect on the overall men-

²⁴ Cf. chapter 10 of this present work.

tality for centuries.

Michel—This is an excellent reminder about something that I had not considered, because this Preface is a type of *declaration* to harden the 1726 *Rule*. It defines a religious life without an apostolate by placing it behind barriers—an ideal text to demonstrate the errors in the classical concept of the religious life.²⁵

On the contrary, the *Declaration* of the 39th General Chapter represents a major shift relative to such a text. To repeat what I have already said about Vatican II, the *Declaration* shifts the thinking from the religious state to the evangelical religious life. Consider the following examples.

First, recall that the *Declaration* was published to give everyone the possibility of engaging in the renewal. It begins by recalling the major rules of the Institute's renewal, an important one being that it will happen only if the renewal is spiritual—not beside or above, but in the interior of normal life. God, in effect, causes the renewal, and the Holy Spirit effects human, as well as institutional, renewal (*Declaration* 3.2). The text does not say that prayer produces renewal, but no renewal occurs without prayer. Renewal does not happen without an awareness of being loved by God and a conviction that the Brother's vocation is a call to love. This indispensable spiritual renewal cannot occur, however, without forcefully taking into consideration what constitutes the life of the world and of the Church: the signs of the times are at the heart of our will to renew. The purpose of the *Declaration* lies outside the scope of the *Rule* and always subordinates organizational structures to people. This is the mark of this passage from the religious state to the religious life, a new idea that challenges us as an Institute looking to the future.

²⁵ *Cahiers lasalliens* 25 appeared at the beginning of the 39th General Chapter and was distributed as a gift to the Capitulants at the first session in 1966. No one had read it at the time of the Intersession. This Preface (pp. 12–15) from the first printed edition of the *Rule* is one of the mysteries of the Institute.

Chapter 15 – *NEW HORIZONS FROM ATTENTIVE LISTENING TO THE URGENT NEEDS OF THE WORLD AND OF THE CHURCH*

HISTORICAL NOTE BY THE EDITORS

Between 1966 and 1976, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools experiences a complex ten-year period between two General Chapters under the leadership of Brother Charles Henry Buttimer, the first Superior General not from France, who is surrounded by a large but divided group of general Assistants.

A new vision of the apostolic religious life, nevertheless, gradually takes hold in the Institute, but not without serious rifts and inevitable suffering. Different approaches to this life collide at every level of the organizational structure. In particular, confrontation is more virulent between two approaches: first, Brothers who are motivated by a new viewpoint and seek to respond to the demands of today's world, and, second, Brothers who wish to restore the order and the discipline of traditional religious life. The prophetic voice of those who wish to focus on serving the poor is severely contradicted. While some say that the passion for God must be experienced on the basis of the passion for the poor, others maintain that fidelity to God comes from fidelity to structures experienced throughout the history of the Institute.

The Institute and Brother Michel

The two itineraries, the Institute's and Michel's personal one, are not parallel, but they intersect each other over the course of history. Michel is led step by step to a place where he can accompany the Brothers in the search for their identity and for the purpose of their Institute. The proximity of these two itineraries becomes apparent in the Roman context when Michel arrives there in 1950. His departure from Rome in 1976 will certainly be a wrenching experience for him. He leaves Rome then to return

to France, setting aside fields that he had professionally mastered: theological studies, participation in the Scholasticate community, international experience, professorship at the *Jesus Magister* Institute, and participation in two unique events, the Second Vatican Council and the 39th General Chapter of the Institute. At the same time, he leaves behind the tensions he had experienced at the Institute's Generalate.

In this chapter, we focus on Brother Michel's experience at the 40th General Chapter, in 1976. No longer on the scene where policies are formed and decisions are made, he has no access to firsthand information, as we see in the content of his reflections during this new period in his life. He does, however, remain aware of the Roman context as he insists frequently on the prophetic character of the *Declaration* and the need to continue the renewal undertaken by the Institute at the 39th General Chapter.

The Institute between 1976 and 2000

The history of the Institute's renewal after 1967 is marked by the terms of the Superiors and their respective Councils. Each faced new questions and brought new responses to novel and often unpredictable situations.

In 1976, Brother Superior José Pablo Basterrechea, with Brother Vicar-General John Johnston and the General Council, in view of the injustices and the inequalities in the world, accentuate the educational service of the poor and, for that purpose, undertake an assessment of the Institute's works throughout the world. Thus the commitment to the poor becomes the principal axis of the renewal, which involves a radical conversion in the way of understanding our educational service and of being attentive to urgent situations of injustice.

In 1986, the General Chapter elects Brother Superior John Johnston, Brother Vicar-General Genaro Sáenz de Ugarte, and a General Council reduced in size. A period begins in which the new Superior General must face the problem of the aging of the Brothers, but at the same time he witnesses an important development of the Institute's mission. The *Rule*, after its definitive approval by the Congregation for Religious and for

Institutes of Secular Life in 1987, is distributed to the Brothers and implemented throughout the Institute. Another feature of this period is the new openness to the worldwide Lasallian family.

In 1993, the General Chapter elects Brother John Johnston to a second term, and with his Vicar-General, Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, he serves with the assistance of a team of regional Counselors during this new period of leadership in which the shared mission becomes a theme throughout the Institute.

In 2000, the General Chapter elects Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría as Superior General. With his Vicar-General, Brother William Mann, and his new General Council, he addresses the needs and the issues that arise in designing organizational structures for the participation of laypeople in the Institute's mission. He especially encourages the development of the concept of Lasallian Association.

Throughout this sequence of General Chapters, the Institute discovers new realities, motivated by the vision of Vatican Council II and of *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, a document still considered to be a necessary reference for understanding the Institute in its journey to the twenty-first century.

Brother Michel's itinerary in the final stage of his life intersects those of these Superiors whom he knew personally. During the term of Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, he publishes his book, *Annoncer l'évangile aux pauvres*, with Brother Miguel Campos (1977). He continues to offer many retreats and seminars worldwide to help his Brothers engage in a new reading of the Institute's foundation. With Brother Superior John Johnston, a period of more direct collaboration finds Michel assuming the direction of Lasallian Studies in Rome, which allows him to publish a number of works, among them a study with Brother Miguel Campos of De La Salle's *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer (Cahiers lasalliens 50, 1989)*. Lastly, Michel's state of health limits his activity during the first term of Brother Superior Álvaro Rodríguez, but he continues to develop his insights on Lasallian association, based on a rereading of the Institute's origins from the perspective of the lay state. In this broader historical context, the chapters to follow present Brother Michel's reflections.

INSTITUTE *CIRCULARS* AFTER THE 40th GENERAL CHAPTER

Miguel—*What were the major orientations of the 40th General Chapter (1976), and what overall impression do you have?*

Michel—As far as I can recall, the 1976 General Chapter was far less forceful than the Chapter of 1966–1967 and also a most disappointing one, because in the end it produced very little of substance. Let us look at a few points.

- In spite of the important work undertaken between the meeting of the Visitors and the General Chapter, the Commission on Consecration found itself blocked, because of its own lack of organization at the time of the Chapter.
- The Committee on the Mission made some advances on various points, especially related to the *Declaration's* position on the issue of justice. The *Declaration* reminds the Brothers that serving the poor cannot be effective without dealing with the root causes of poverty on global, political, economic, and social levels. What is required is an invitation to foster justice, although the word is not used explicitly. This same idea was already present at the 1966–1967 General Chapter, ten years earlier, which had initiated the topic in that direction.
- The topic of community is included in the Chapter's reflections, even if the *Circular* that follows does not report it. The Commission on Community Life had distinguished fifteen different types of community, an approach of some interest, by taking into account the already-occurring evolution. It was especially an invitation to look to the future, making a distinction between the essence of community structure and the shape that this community might take. Here again, however, this work lacked any follow-through.
- The Commission on Formation produced excellent work by including all the aspects of formation reflected in *Lumen Gentium*. Thanks to this effort, we have the beautiful text at the beginning of the chapter on formation about encouraging vocations,

although the related text in the *Rule* is less compelling (cf. *Circular* 404). I had introduced this text, because I was dissatisfied with how the issue of vocation was being addressed. In particular, I insisted that the primary means of encouraging vocations is personal witness.

- The missions, that is to say, the Institute's presence in the young Churches, occupied an important place. The 40th General Chapter acknowledged the good work achieved by Brother Vicar-General José Pablo Basterrechea and also confirmed SECOLI as a service of the General Council in liaison with the District mission secretariats.
- Finally, I note the change adopted in the mode of government by eliminating the function of Brother Assistant and by creating a small team of six General Councilors and the Brother Vicar-General. In fact, we were ten years late in making this important change.

Looking back over the previous ten years, this 1976 General Chapter noted that the results of the preceding General Chapter, the *Declaration* in particular, were not sufficiently understood. The major word now would be revitalization. With this perspective, the Chapter left to Brother Superior General and his Council the initiative of publishing gradually, in a series of *Circulars*, the results of all the Commission work, along with necessary commentaries. A slogan repeatedly heard in 1976 was that the 1966–1967 Chapter lacked an implementation strategy, and the many publications it produced failed to achieve results. The future *Circulars* on various matters were to address this problem.²⁶

Another important aspect of this 1976 General Chapter is that it did not change the *Rule* but extended it *ad experimentum*. However, it did rewrite the *Book of Government* to reflect the changes and also to put in order var-

²⁶ *Circular* 403, *The 40th General Chapter*, October 1976; *Circular* 404, *Pastoral of Vocations and Formation*, May 1977; *Circular* 406, *Our Consecrated Life*, December 1977; *Circular* 408, *Our Mission and the Institute in the Young Churches*, June 1978; *Circular* 410, *Our Community Life*, April 1979, and *Circular* 412, *The Educational Service of the Poor and the Promotion of Justice*, September 1980.

ious issues of District and community government, including the introduction of the Community Annual Project.

Miguel—In your opinion, did the change in language from “adapted renewal” to “revitalization” indicate a new shift? If so, was this new shift a look ahead or a return to the past?

Michel—I regret this new change in the language. Brother Superior, in his 1976 Christmas letter, refers to Brothers who, somewhat cynically, note these changes in wording from one General Chapter to the next²⁷—renewal, revitalization, conversion. I regret that the courage was lacking to continue the renewal by retaining the vocabulary of Vatican Council II. From this point of view, the changes were a step back, because the word *renewal*, as a technical word, says exactly what it means, which is an extremely strong concept of revitalization. That is precisely the idea that was abandoned, along with the change in vocabulary. Speaking about revitalization implies more of an inclination to look at the life of the Brothers *ad intra*—among other aspects, how they are living in the communities. Renewal, however, is a total concept that requires us to listen to the world today and to be faithful to the Founder and to the Church. Renewal implies that each member engages in the process continually. By widening the field to what the Brothers, as the living Institute, must realize, renewal goes beyond what is simply objective.

Because the idea of revitalization adds nothing to that, I regret that the texts did not continue to employ this strong word, renewal, in relation to Pope Paul VI’s call for the renewal to be permanent. Even if these other words are regarded as synonyms, recalling their linkage with the fundamental line of renewal is important.

Miguel—Do the Circulars on the selected topics indicate a new shift, or are they in line with the thinking of Vatican Council II and the 1966–1967 General Chapter?

²⁷ Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, at the end of his 1976 letter, asks, in effect, whether all disappointments have been eliminated, for some of the letters he receives do mention them. He advises the Brothers not to lose hope and not to slow down their efforts to meet the present and future challenges expressed in his letter.—Ed.

Michel—The *Circulars* need to be considered one by one. After the 1976 General Chapter, one *Circular* was to appear each year. I will first say a word about each one and then report on certain themes to see whether I recognize in them evolution and progress or, rather, a step back.

Circular 404, May 15, 1977, on Vocations and Formation, in my opinion is very weak. The next one, *Circular* 406, in December 1977, focuses on the Consecrated Life. To try to present the topic in a more interesting way, each *Circular* includes questions at the end for study and discussion in community. Although it is unknown whether they were widely used, they did have the merit of providing a method to discuss the texts.

These *Circulars* reflect the conclusions of the 40th General Chapter, in 1976, and ask each reader to reflect on “What must I do?” Specifically, for example, in the *Circular* on Consecration, the references are obviously to the *Declaration*, to the current edition of the *Rule*, and to the document on Consecration and the Vows from the 1967 General Chapter. My interest in this case is to show the shift that gradually occurs between the current text and the previous ones to which it refers, and also to those produced later, especially concerning the chapter on Consecration and the Vows in the 1987 *Rule*. The purpose of such a thematic and chronological approach is to pinpoint the Institute’s changing language.

A similar task to undertake, to be complete, would be to ask about the real effect in the Institute of each *Circular*, a difficult thing to do. In the absence of reading, discussing, or looking back, how can we know on one or other topic what the actual situation is in the Institute? *Circular* 406 itself states that the first report of the Commission on Consecration and the Vows was not presented to the Assembly. The second report speaks of promises, as distinguished from vows. Remember that the preparation of the 1976 General Chapter had included an opinion survey by a professional company hired for the project. On December 8, 1974, all the Brothers of the Institute were to respond to this questionnaire on what was called Institute Day.

To the question whether the general rule about final profession ought to be maintained, the majority said yes (*Circular* 404, Proposition 36, p. 16). In exceptional cases, a Brother might receive authorization to express

his commitment by vows or promises indefinitely renewed (*Circular* 406, Proposition 38b, p. 16), which in practice never was the case. These attempts to advance were blocked by a collective mentality and also by the Congregation for Religious in Rome. I will leave the matter at this point, other than to refer to the milestones of the history of the vows, by Brother Maurice-Auguste.²⁸

Miguel—Which Circular followed the one that we were just discussing?

Michel—It is *Circular* 408, on our mission and The Institute in the Young Churches. It is the report of the General Chapter that presents the theme of *revitalization* as a response to the transforming signs of the times, a rediscovery of the charism of the foundation and a profound renewal of faith and of prayer focused on Christ.²⁹

When this *Circular* presents the mission of the Institute as Christian education (chapter 2) and the ministry of the Word (chapter 3) and proposes the service “especially to the poor” (chapter 4), it provokes a debate that annoys some Brothers by declaring that the orientation to the poor must become the rule, not the exception, and that no obstacle must prevent Brothers from voluntarily offering themselves for the educational service of the poor. In other words, the need to maintain works must not hinder a Brother from dedicating himself to the educational service of the poor, even if this service is not in an existing work. Well in accord with the General Chapter, this *Circular*, following the one about justice, offers a notable advance on issues about ministries, incarnation, communion, and acculturation.

Circular 410, *Our Community Life*, April 30, 1979, includes a major new feature, the Community Project. One year later, *Circular* 412 appears, September 15, 1980, on The Educational Service of the Poor and the Promotion of Justice.

In the introduction, *Circular* 412 states that Brother Superior has already given in his letter of May 15, 1979, a preliminary account of the responses received by the Generalate as a result of proposition 14 of the 1976

²⁸ Cf. “Quelques jalons pour une histoire des vœux dans l’Institut des Frères des écoles chrétiennes,” *Circular* 406, pp. 51–70.

²⁹ Cf. *Circular* 408, p. 12.

General Chapter. This was indeed a serious effort, for during this Chapter, the Commission on Mission presented Proposition 14:

Each District shall submit to the General Council by December 1978 a report in which it shall explain how it applied the principles of the *Declaration* and the guidelines of the recent General Chapter in what concerns the educational service of the poor and the efforts for the promotion of justice. It shall also specify how it intends to continue its work. These plans must be evaluated and updated annually by the District concerned (*Circular* 403, p. 79).

This was a significant step, because the Districts were asked to report systematically and to send to Rome a statement on how they planned to carry out their activities. The importance of this *Circular* 412 stems from the fact that, at a specific time, it affirms the situation in the Institute relative to the educational service of the poor, based on responses from the entire Institute that are likely to stimulate interest, which makes this *Circular* a fundamental text.

The year 1980 marks the end of this series of *Circulars* that followed the 1976 General Chapter. Attention turns, in effect, to the perspectives for 1986, with the report of the meeting of the Visitors, then, in 1983, with a *Circular*, on vocations and initial formation, that displays a certain obsession. After that comes the 1986 General Chapter and the work on the *Rule*. What I remember from this period between 1976 and 1986 is that the General Council benefited from the major initiatives of Brother Superior José Pablo Basterrechea and of Brother Patrice Marey, a man of great intelligence, clear vision, and rapid assimilation that seemed to prepare him well to become Superior General in 1986.

THE YEARS BETWEEN 1976 AND 1986

Miguel—As for CIL (Centre International Lasallien),³⁰ the plan that we had created together included major components: creation of the

³⁰ The 1986 Rule affirms that the International Lasallian Center (CIL) “aims to contribute to the living unity and revitalization of the Institute in the various cultures of the world. It promotes the spiritual renewal of the Brothers who take part in it and helps to prepare those who will be called upon to fill leadership roles in the Institute” (101i).

CIL community, study of the original charism, and exploration of contemporary issues. Was it in 1976, at the 40th General Chapter, that certain restrictions appeared?

Michel—The CIL experience, in spite of the catastrophic period of 1968–1971, is a component of the renewal that the 39th General Chapter proposed. As you said, the revised plan of CIL, after 1971, included the three part, community formation, instruction about the Founder, and current issues. In reality, however, the components did not necessarily occur in that order.

Miguel—***Did CIL’s purpose remain focused on contemporary issues primarily related to formation and to education?***

Michel—Yes, that is true. Remember that the theme, the schedule, and the arrangements were selected by the CIL staff, not by the General Council, and were based on what the staff judged to be the needs of the Institute. Specialists on the Founder were certainly on the schedule, as were experts qualified in other subjects,³¹ specialists from outside the Institute, and lecturers from other religious Institutes. Thus Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP, came annually between 1972 and 1975 to speak about liberation theology at the same time as his course at *Lumen Vitae* in Brussels.

The basic idea of CIL was to work on the renewal by following the major movements of *Perfectae Caritatis* 2, that is to say, the return to the Founder, the needs of the world and of the Church, and the following of Jesus Christ. This last objective became more explicit in the schedule with the addition of a retreat at Assisi. After 1976, the General Council took charge of CIL, and the staff members were only there to carry out the plan. As far as I know, they sometimes complained in general terms, but they never protested to the extent of saying, “Take it or leave it.” The plans, at least the themes, had become a matter for the General Council. A new approach evolved later with an increasing and more exclusive concentration on Saint John Baptist de La Salle. Other themes continued to

³¹ For example, Brother Kevin Hargadon, a psychologist from the USA, and Brother José Cervantes, a sociologist from Mexico, were among the experts.

be included but were mainly treated in relation to the Founder. In 1978, an entire month was focused on the Founder.

Miguel—Can we talk about what was most characteristic about the 1986 General Chapter?

Michel—This Chapter was controlled from the outside by the fact that it had to approve the revised *Rule*. An understandable difference arose between the Brothers and the General Council. The Brothers were satisfied with the text of the 1967 *Rule*. I too thought that the text was satisfactory, but publication of the new Code of Canon Law in 1983 required its revision. For this purpose, the Institute distributed an important questionnaire and invited all the Brothers to complete it, as was also the case during the Intersession of the 39th General Chapter, in 1966–1967. It would be interesting to compare the responses to these two questionnaires. In my District, for example, I remember bringing to the attention of Brother Visitor, almost at the last minute, that we still needed to do something on the *Rule*. Although we sent our contribution after the deadline, it was still considered.

In addition to these responses from a number of Brothers, an International Commission on the *Rule* was created, with Brother Félix del Hoyo as chairman. Brother Maurice-Auguste, although not wanting to preside, was a key member of this Commission, along with Brothers Luke Salm, Bruno Alpage, Damian Lundy, and Jean-Pierre Lauby. It was an excellent Commission that also had to deal with the General Council, which had the last word. Although everything that the Commission proposed was not accepted, the important aspects were taken into consideration.

Thus they revised the *Rule*, so much so that the 1986 General Chapter spent most of its time discussing the text, chapter by chapter, no doubt even article by article. This doesn't mean that nothing else was accomplished; other propositions were presented. I would like to say a word about this *Rule* revised in 1986, whose quality, substantially, is that it denies none of the *Declaration's* guidelines, nor does it harden anything. It remains open by introducing new perspectives, on the *shared mission*, for example. What is crucial for me is the style itself, the language of this *Rule* in which almost every chapter begins with an article relating to the

history of the Institute's foundation, a kind of theological narrative that is well presented, except for the chapters on consecration and on prayer.

This *Rule* offers us an excellent benchmark for studying how the changes evolve. It was accepted as a *Rule* that says everything that needs to be said. During the period after 1986, the General Council could not utter three words without citing the *Rule*, no doubt because of its desire that it be adopted throughout the Institute and because of the illusion that the Institute had reached a successful conclusion, a phenomenon comparable to the general progress of the Church.

The Institute was required to obtain the approval of this revised *Rule*. I would like to note the following facts on the matter. This turned out to be the last text on which my sister worked on the procedure for approval at the Congregation for Religious. Totally unexpected and to everyone's amazement, the text presented at the beginning of July 1986 was approved at the beginning of August. I learned about this in early August, when I met Brother Superior at Lorient on the occasion of the Regional Assembly of France. He said, "Your sister hastened the matter. Some Institutes wait months, even years." I must add that this approval, obtained in record time, was accompanied by conditions that consisted, not in changing any articles, but in moving many of them from the category of freely changeable to that of constitutions that cannot be changed without authorization from the Congregation for Religious. Most of the future debates between the General Council and the Congregation would be about those articles.

Miguel—Is this a good opportunity to mention the controversy about the word ministry?

Michel—Vatican Council II expanded the usage of the word ministry, but during the pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II, this term appeared less frequently in the texts about the Church and its ministries. The President of France's Northern Apostolic Region, Bishop Lucien-Émile Bardonne, of Châlons-sur-Marne, in his report on his *ad limina* visit to Rome in 1982, expressed his desire that a different word be substituted for the word *ministry*. In effect, he said that to the extent that this word is applied to laypeople, it seems to cast a shadow on the exclusive

ministry of the priest, and its use ought to be restricted. In preparing the text for the 1984 Plenaria, I observed that in places where Vatican II speaks of the ministries of lay religious men and women (*Perfectae Caritatis* 8 and 10), the Code of Canon Law had systematically replaced this term with the word *service*, even when directly quoting the Council's texts.

Moreover, in his allocution at the Plenaria, in whose preparation I had participated, Pope John Paul II did not hesitate to speak of ministries for the Brothers, lay religious. The way in which *Osservatore Romano* later reported the Pope's text shows in an obvious way the wish to eliminate any connection between the word *ministry* and the lay religious state. I was in Rome at the time for a conference on Lasallian spirituality prior to the 1986 General Chapter, then in session, and to work on Commissions after the Plenaria.

Miguel—What other topics did the 1986 General Chapter discuss?

Michel—Subjects other than the *Rule* were on the agenda, including the Sharing Fund, Lasallian Studies, continuing formation, ministry of retired Brothers, lay teachers, and the Lasallian Family. When I arrived in Rome in 1987, I assisted with the preparation of a document on the Lasallian Family, my first project at the Generalate at the beginning of my new sojourn there.

The period after 1986 was focused on fulfilling the decisions of the 41st General Chapter. I remember the documents that were published, including the two messages of the Chapter, one to the Brothers and one to the members of the Lasallian Family, whose various components were described, and the closing remarks by Brother John Johnston, the new Superior General.

FURTHER PROGRESS OF LASALLIAN STUDIES

Miguel—On the topic of Lasallian Studies, can you recall the developments prior to 1986 and also describe the vision you had for the future?

Michel—This is a good moment for an overview of Lasallian Studies. The 38th General Chapter, in 1956, received two significant reports on

this subject. The one from Brother Maurice-Auguste was accepted as official and, as a consequence, led to his appointment as Director of the *Monumenta Lasalliana* and of Lasallian Studies. An extremely productive and creative period ensued from 1956 to 1966, with the publication of all the texts of John Baptist de La Salle in the *édition princeps*, along with the early biographies of the Founder. This was also the period when the theses of a number of Spanish Brothers appeared in a Lasallian Studies collection in Spain, while the *Cahiers lasalliens* in Rome were appearing without interruption.³²

Between 1966 and 1982, the *Cahiers lasalliens* were especially occupied with publishing the work of Brother Léon-de-Marie Aroz. In their initial surge, these volumes of research were remarkable for his exhaustive research, especially in French notarial archives, that brought to light items of primary importance, such as the account (*compte de tutelle*) by John Baptist de La Salle of his guardianship (*Cahiers lasalliens* 28–31). The entire series of *Cahiers lasalliens* 26–42, presenting all the documentation of various researchers, nevertheless, remains insufficiently valued and used.

That said, along with this important progress in research and in diffusion, a considerable lacuna must be noted with respect to the Brothers in general. I used to say that the *Cahiers lasalliens* written by Brother Aroz are extremely necessary for the Institute but useless for the Brothers. The only exception in this series of *Cahiers lasalliens* up to 1982 is your doctoral thesis, *L'itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l'Écriture dans ses Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite* (*Cahiers lasalliens* 45–46). Unfortunately, its impact was hampered by its appearance in the *Cahiers lasalliens* series.

Cahiers lasalliens 42, also by Brother Aroz, appeared in 1982. The next two numbers, 43 and 44, were reserved for him. *Cahiers lasalliens* 42 was the last volume published in his series; printing delays ended it. The main problem proved to be difficulty in finding researchers. At the request of the General Council in the 1970s, Brother Maurice-Auguste tried to

³² See chapter 7 of this present work.

identify potential researchers, especially in France and in Spain, but negative responses were the general result, mainly because of lack of interest in this type of research. The sole exception was Brother Saturnino Gallego, in Spain, who wrote for BAC (*Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos*) two volumes on the life and the writings of John Baptist de La Salle.

Brother Maurice-Auguste himself produced some interesting works, including *Cahiers lasalliens* 9³³ and 10,³⁴ with the valuable *Index*. As for a digital edition of the Lasallian texts, I regret—and yet do not regret—that we did not proceed earlier. Brother Roger Hubert, a sort of prophet in France for processing school accounts on the computer, came to Rome in 1978 to do the same, on a huge computer, for the Generalate accounts. He advised me, “You are preparing a Lasallian vocabulary? You are making a mistake; you ought to transfer it to a computer immediately.” At the time, I could not understand the importance of such an operation, but I think it turned out better for us not to have ventured in that direction. We entrusted this work later to a team of experts who had previously worked on the Concordance of the Jerusalem Bible.

Then Lasallian Studies went to sleep for a time. When the 1986 General Chapter passed its proposal on SIEL (*Session internationale des Études lasalliennes*), it also asked for the resumption of the production of new Lasallian texts, with a main focus on their distribution. Although the explanation of the motives included the need to stimulate research, the proposal in the end focused only on the question of distribution. In fact, the team of Lasallian researchers was quite limited, although it is true that there had been a research team for thirty years, from 1956 until 1986, the year when I was appointed Director of Lasallian Studies. The 1986 Chapter asked us to prepare a research prospective. We did it together, based on a widely distributed questionnaire. The resulting report described the necessary steps for further research.

³³ *Cahiers lasalliens* 9—Bernard, Maillefer et Blain: *Index Cumulatifs des Noms de Lieux et des Noms de Personnes*. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1974, 288 p.

³⁴ *Cahiers lasalliens* 10—Bernard, Maillefer et Blain: *I. Index analytique cumulatif; II. Relevé des dits et des écrits attribués à Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1979, 215 p.

What happened during my term as Director of Lasallian Studies? We created an International Council on Lasallian Studies (CIEL), which at its initial meeting unanimously requested the digital edition of the *corpus lasallien*. The report of this meeting, with the request for the digital edition, was presented to the Superior General and to his Council in 1987, but it received no reply. I was disconcerted and found no explanation for it. The 1989 meeting of the CIEL chose some interesting projects: a collection of Lasallian Studies, a plan for writing the Institute's history since Georges Rigault, a research project by Brother Pedro Gil, and a new series of *Lasallian Themes* that proved to be the most prolific outcome. The three volumes of *Lasallian Themes* that appeared constitute a veritable breviary for the International Session on Lasallian Studies (SIEL).

Also during this period was the resumption of publication of the *Cahiers lasalliens*. As soon as I arrived, I encouraged Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue to publish his *Cahiers lasalliens* 47 on the sources of the Founder's *Méditations sur les principales Fêtes de l'année*, and I decided to prepare a new volume in the *Cahiers lasalliens* series. I also invited Brothers Yves Poutet, Joseph Cornet, and Émile Rousset to participate in preparing publications on the context in seventeenth-century France and on the Lasallian iconography. During this same period, you and I prepared our volume on the *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, based on the text of 1739. It appeared as *Cahiers lasalliens* 50, the result of previous research that was your idea at the time of your theological studies at the *Jesus Magister* Institute. Then came *Cahiers lasalliens* 51, by Brother Louis-Marie Aroz, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, exécuteur testamentaire de feu Me Louis de La Salle, son père*, the last volume to appear before my departure from Rome.

Miguel—*When did Cahier lasalliens 57, about Parménie, appear?*

Michel—I stayed involved in two projects when I left the Lasallian Studies position: the *Cahiers lasalliens* on Parménie and the digital edition of the complete works of John Baptist de La Salle. At Parménie, a colloquium was held, attended by many people. The eventual publication was considerably reduced, with not much content other than the research of Brother Leo Burkhard that I wanted to make known. I also contributed

my study in 1988 of De La Salle's *Letter to the Brothers in 1714*. I also encouraged certain projects, for example, Brother Jean Pungier's work that is now appearing and Brother Léon Lauraire's research on the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*.

I was recalled to France in 1991, probably a good thing, because after my return, health problems began occurring that I preferred were treated in France. That was the time when the project for the digital edition of the *corpus lasallien* was taking place, for which I owe a well-deserved tribute to Brother Pierre Josse. Without his decisive presence, the project could not have been a success. Brother Léon Lauraire, who replaced me in Rome, assured the continuation of Lasallian Studies, including the publication of *Lasallian Themes* and another meeting of the *Conseil international des Études lasalliennes*. After two years, Brother Alain Houry became the Director, so that Brother Léon Lauraire could work full-time at the *Centre Lasallien Français* in Paris.

Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue, for his part, did exemplary work and encouraged the contribution of Brother Raymond Brisebois, who authored a collection of booklets, *Invitation-Initiation aux Cahiers lasalliens*, which I like to read to flatter my ego. I had always been trying to persuade Brother Marcel Martinais (Brother Clément-Marcel) to give us the results of his thirty years of research on Jansenism, a unique and extensive documentation. That is why, when I went to visit him, I said, "If you don't prepare a catalogue, your lifetime of research will be lost." He agreed in principle, but it is thanks to Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue that all his documentation is now available at the Generalate. He was an incomparable Lasallian researcher, a *connaisseur du jansénisme*, as well as of Church and society at the time of the Founder.

After his arrival in Rome in 1993, Brother Alain Houry initially devoted most of his time to the accurate presentation of the writings of John Baptist de La Salle, transmitted on diskettes to the printer. This is a commitment that I personally find admirable, and I also point out volume two of the collection *Études lasalliennes*, Brother Henri Bédel's very interesting work on the time of the secularization in France (1904–1914).

THE YEARS BETWEEN 1986 AND 1993

Miguel—Based on the reports of the Brother Superior since the 39th General Chapter, can we attempt to look back and to speak about the reality that the Institute has experienced in the last years of the twentieth century?

Michel—To do that, we must begin in 1976, with Brother Charles Henry's report, mostly a look ahead, which was enthusiastically received by the Capitulants of the 40th General Chapter. I recently read some passages on the topic of revitalization. Then we must talk about the reception of the 40th General Chapter.

As of 1976, a certain revival occurred in a number of Districts with the creation (the dates would need to be researched) of new works in the areas of literacy and of educational service of the poor. With the elimination of the position of territorial Assistant, the Districts and the Regions took on more direct responsibility. Thus some Districts developed new policies for the creation of works to increase their service of the poor in response to new needs. The achievements were certainly not in proportion to the immense needs that our works, in spite of their large quantity, cannot resolve. To what effect is the publication in a grandiloquent manner of the long list of our works, of the number of students worldwide—900,000—and of the number of laypeople involved? We ought to accept that in the face of tremendous needs, we can only provide partial, limited, temporary, and fragile responses. Saying that helps nourish hope.

Following the 41st General Chapter, in 1986, after the presentation and the approval of the *Rule*, many initiatives, including sessions and retreats in the Districts, focused on the *Rule's* reception and application. As a prolongation of the ten years of experience with the Community Project, this Chapter also introduced the Personal Project, with rather limited effect, I believe. I would like to point out the extremely positive factor of the creation of Lasallian formation opportunities for lay colleagues, in several Regions of the Institute, which offer a formation experience for the increasing number of laypeople who are in leadership positions in Lasallian institutions. Excellent examples include le *Centre lasallien*

français in Paris, the Buttimer Institute in the USA, and el *Centro de Estudios Lasallianos* in Spain.

NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE INSTITUTE

Miguel—At the end of this period, what difficulties arise as the Institute approaches the twenty-first century?

Michel—An enormous objective difficulty is the declining number of Brothers, along with the aging of the Institute. For example, in the District of France, the average age of the Brothers is 70 years, while it is 58 years in the USA.³⁵ In this context, what is the role of the Brothers? What is the religious life? In retirement communities, people say, the only thing left to do is to pray. That is true. Nevertheless, this is a real problem to consider without indulging in useless pessimism: the question of the future of the religious life.

Miguel—But what is the role of a small community of Brothers who wish to live an evangelical life among the laypeople with whom they share the mission? Must we speak about a third shift?

Michel—I cannot answer that question. From what we were just saying, I first ask myself what these statistics mean. What is the number of Brothers? What is their age? I have a difficulty with statistics and their interpretation, because I think that the problem must not be posed from that angle. There still are Brothers who are teachers in schools, but as Brother Superior says in his letters, something has changed with respect to what the *Declaration* says. There we read, in effect, that the community is the soul of the educational institution. What can Brothers in a school do today? Furthermore, there are relatively young Brothers who are engaged with the poor, others who teach reading or work with prisoners, and still others who work alongside people who are neither lay Lasallians nor Christians but find meaning in the Gospel.

³⁵ The Institute statistics as of December 31, 1994, indicate that of 7,400 Brothers with vows, 4,241 (57.2%) are 60 years of age or older, and 3,159 (42.8%) are 59 years of age or less.

Miguel—Are these various initiatives and commitments an invitation to consider, in a renewed way, the challenges of acculturation that the 40th General Chapter observed with regard to the educational service of the poor?

Michel—Acculturation is a challenge to put into effect. The basic texts to which we refer in the Institute were developed in a European language and by an Institute born in Europe. This same situation exists in the Church, for example, when a theology of liberation in Latin America uses European concepts to attempt a new language. Recall that on the subject of the evangelical life, few elements in the discussion are from outside Europe.

What I have heard most forcefully in recent years is the need for creativity and freedom in the acculturation of the religious life. What does proclaiming with a hue and a cry the need for the acculturation of the religious life mean, other than that it has not yet occurred? In fact, who in the Institute is truly acculturated in the milieu of the poor?

Miguel—We are speaking about acculturation, but we can also mention new blockages in the Church. Can you identify some of them?

Michel—There are blockages in the Church, to be sure, because it remains pyramidal, and the issue of ministries surely is going nowhere. Questions also remain about the ordination of married men, about the remarriage of divorced people, about the appointment of bishops. It is obvious that the Council's movement has been stopped, while at the same time, change is happening at the base. I am thinking of the cry of alarm launched, for example, by Father Bernard Sesboüé about the risk of weakening a Church where, because of the shortage of priests, the Eucharist will no longer be possible. The development of lay movements and the value of their commitment offers nothing in response to this question.

Also, I think back to the very interesting distinction that Father Sesboüé makes between ministries by laypeople as laypeople and ministries by laypeople because of a pastoral delegation they receive from the bishop—for example, everything related to leadership of communities, a trend that he says ought not to be expanded. The total ministry of the priest, the

presbyter, whose specific role is more than a sacramental one, must continue to be valued. If the laity receive all kinds of delegated responsibilities, which then multiply, the Church will return to a priesthood that is, above all, sacramental, which is the position of the Council of Trent, not of Vatican Council II.

In general, the formation of lay Lasallians that we Brothers are encouraging in our institutions does not pull them away from their profession, which is a positive aspect. We are offering them an introduction to our Lasallian specific nature and inviting them to share a spirit. This too is a positive approach, for we are trying to preserve in our educational institutions a certain number of values that I think are appropriate: the concern for everyone and for the whole person of the young and the desire to work as a community, which is still a very strong feature among Lasallian teams in an educational community identified with a Lasallian educational project that involves parents in the life of the school and empowers students themselves. I am not talking only about schools particularly for serving the poor, but about the entire current reality.

The actual problem is that we are experiencing a worldwide crisis of civilization and of culture that is reflected in the statistics about the religious life, those for our Institute in particular. In the Church, we can think of a future that will include the priesthood of married men. With the Brothers, we can think of positive changes on the side of the Lasallian Volunteers or of Young Lasallians, but globally, the decline in numbers is still a dramatic question.

Miguel—With us, the Brothers, the question of the priesthood has remained dormant since the 1966–1967 General Chapter.

Michel—The 40th General Chapter, in 1976, contrary to that of 1966–1967, was not especially interested in studying the question of the priesthood, which was no longer of much concern to Brothers in all the Regions, except for one particular plea by a Brother from Vietnam. Some reprise of the question, however, had been expected. The proof is that Brother Charles Henry, in preparing for the 40th General Chapter, had asked two groups, one in the USA, the other in France, to research the matter in case it would have to be discussed. The French group produced

a substantial booklet, including a superb article by Brother Vincent Ayel, "Sacrament and Word," and an excellent article by Brother Robert Comte on the evolution of the theology of ministry in the Church, along with a piece I had written on the evolution of the Founder on the same subject. In fact, this collection, which did receive some attention, was never referred to again.

When the 1976 General Chapter had to discuss the issue, it created a special commission whose work concluded with two propositions. One recommended that the lay status be maintained; the other, that the Brothers be encouraged to participate in theoretical and practical research on ministries that is occurring in the Church. The second recommendation had no impact in the Institute, because for many years the issue of ministries in the Church, whether ancient or new, was blocked.

Shortly before the 1976 General Chapter, research was taking place in the Church on lay ministries. I am thinking about the research of Father Joseph Moingt, who went quite far on this subject, for example, on the existence of various levels of celebration of the Eucharist. On the one hand, at the level of the total Church, the Eucharist is celebrated with the bishop and in parishes with solemn masses, large celebrations, and assemblies. On the other hand are the domestic celebrations, the masses that conclude a group retreat and the masses in religious communities. In certain circumstances, the entire event is conducted by the group itself, and when this group includes a priest, there is no difficulty. But if there is no priest, and the group wants to include the sacrament in the meeting, the only option is to find a priest who was not a participant. With that, the Eucharist might conclude in an artificial manner as an ecclesial event. What if, in such a case, we imagine that some kind of provisional delegation would be possible to permit a member of the assembly to preside at a eucharistic celebration but without the permanent character of an ordination? Studies on this type of situation are presently blocked.

I come now to a work I already mentioned in which the problem of ministries in the Church is posed in a rather new way, although it is not the only work on this subject. The book, by Father Bernard Sesboüé, is *N'ayez pas peur*, on the theology of the Church and its ministries. He

explains that laypeople are being given more of a place in the Church, to the point that in some cases, paradoxically, the role of the presbyteral ministry, ordained to administer the sacraments, is the only action that a priest alone can accomplish: to consecrate the Eucharist and to administer the sacrament of Reconciliation. In limited circumstances, the laity can administer the other sacraments. He argues that priests ought to be prepared to live, in effect, according to the theology of Vatican Council II. The Council of Trent created a theology of the priesthood that focused on the Eucharistic sacrifice and on the power of consecration, in opposition to the Protestants. That emphasis was in spite of the insistence in the Council of Trent's texts that the priests also be attentive to pastoral needs. If juridically this Council established a connection that was too exclusive between the Eucharistic sacrifice and the ministerial priesthood, in practice it did not fail to insist on the totality of the pastoral ministry, including the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Church.

It is interesting to observe this kind of dichotomy. The paradox is that, on the one hand, the theology issuing from Vatican II is expansive by placing the proclamation of the Word first, and the pastoral ministry culminates in the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. On the other hand, the Tridentine tradition remains, with its excessively sacramental and simplistic role for priests. In spite of the theological openness that exists, the increasing and active presence of non-ordained pastoral agents can tend to reduce the priest to cultural and sacramental functions, because he is the only one who has the power to perform them. Father Sesboüé then discusses two types of lay functions. Ministries exercised without a particular ecclesial mission, simply because the person has received the sacrament of Baptism, are the first type. Founded on the sacraments of Christian initiation, Baptism and Confirmation—to which Pope John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici* added the sacrament of Marriage—the apostolic possibilities for laypeople, in effect, can be considerable.

But now it happens more and more generally in the Church that laypeople, especially Sisters, receive a truly pastoral mission. They find themselves being in charge of parishes, at times responsible for tasks in social and health areas. They are involved as presider or leader in Sunday assem-

blies without priests (ADAP, *Assemblée dominicale en absence de prêtre*) at which they distribute Communion, which the 1984 Code of Canon Law considers to be an exercise of the sacrament of the Eucharist. They also hear confessions, without being able to give absolution, and by that fact participate in the ministry of the sacrament of Reconciliation. With that, as Sesboüé concludes, this new form of ministry cannot purely and simply be attached to the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. What is now occurring is the use of a so-called “missioning letter” that bishops give to laypeople and to religious who are to exercise this ministry. This practice signifies that it is no longer simply the earlier case in which laypeople are given a particular mission solely because of their Baptism.

We see that this mission of every Christian, based on Baptism and Confirmation, can result in a particular pastoral ministry. The example of the chaplaincies in State schools and in hospitals that are placed under the responsibility of laypeople clearly highlights the fact that these people have a pastoral responsibility in the Church. If Father Sesboüé can speak of school and hospital chaplains, I wonder, of course, about the situation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who have a catechetical ministry within the context of pastoral activity. Considering the situation in the past, I see it explained by our holy Founder himself and experienced throughout the centuries that followed. A Brother in charge of a class to whom he is teaching secular subjects and fostering a particular culture fulfills this charge in connection with a ministry whose point, whose summit, is to proclaim the Gospel, to offer pastoral counseling, and to care for and to be concerned about each student. Certainly, he does all that in the name of his Baptism and his Confirmation, and not because of the sacrament of Holy Orders. I do say—it is one of the points of my thesis—that his activity is also based on an explicit mission confided by the Church. What makes it explicit is the approbation accorded by the Church, first of all, followed by the obedience from the Superior who assigns him to a particular task. The paradox is that a number of Brothers have no catechetical or even pastoral responsibility, or they have one only by the fact of their working with young people. We need to go beyond the legal aspect of these questions and to reflect on the ecclesial meaning of such a situation.

PREPARATION AND EVENTS OF THE 42nd GENERAL CHAPTER

Miguel—What is significant about the 1993 General Chapter?

Michel—To answer this question, we must read again Brother Superior John Johnston's report to the 1993 Chapter, a vigorous, extraordinarily lucid, and most interesting document. To human eyes, he says, the Institute in some areas is going to disappear. From this report I retain four images of the Institute: breaking up, resilient, unexpected, restored—four images that signify as many paths to explore.

From the Chapter itself, we have some interesting results that are presented in various texts, including the Message of the 42nd General Chapter to the Brothers, the Message of the 42nd General Chapter on the Shared Mission to the Lasallian Family Throughout the World, and a document on the Institute as a Community of Brothers Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor in a Changing World and Church in the spirit of *Redemptoris Missio*.³⁶

The Superior's text begins by saying that the General Chapter is part of a continuum, a movement of the Institute that has been strengthening gradually since the 1950s. It then insists that we ourselves must be evangelized by the Church and by the Second Vatican Council, as well as by the many young people and adults whom we encounter on a daily basis in this constantly changing world that we love. Lastly, it affirms that we are laymen consecrated in the religious life and that the Church sends us for a new evangelization among young people and adults of all cultures and religions present in the world.

In my view, this approach faces us with an extremely open vision of the mission. Certainly, the expression, *the Church that sends us*, needs to be studied more deeply—what *Church* means, what *that sends us* means. Concerning both the young and the adults, the conversation is not about the school but about the evangelizing mission. This is no longer the language of the *Declaration* but a new language in a situation that has

³⁶ Cf. *Circular 435*, June 24, 1993.

become pluralistic in culture and in religion and in which our activity is not limited to the young. In the end, where is the Institute of Saint John Baptist de La Salle situated? I am not sure that I understand the link between the diverse points, one speaking about consecrated laymen in the religious life and sent by the Church, the other about the Institute of John Baptist de La Salle. Our option for the human and Christian education of youth and for adults in formation, especially the poor, is affirmed with conviction. We can understand this as a specification of what precedes and what is put into practice in the actual situation. The talk is not yet about the school but is ready for it. We are repeating collectively today the process of our Founder, deeply moved by the situation of abandonment of the children of the artisans and the poor, who discovered in faith the mission of the Institute as a concrete response to the contemplation of God's plan of salvation.

I insist on the restrictive wording: all the young who are being educated, particularly the poor. I still think that the Institute's dynamism is the poor, then extending the service to others, which is not the same thing. The *Declaration* was more explicit on this theme. But the text here wants to offer an image of what the Institute is, as it is living and is seen today. The Brothers do not accept the statement, "The Institute is for the poor." They reply, "No, the Institute is for everyone, particularly the poor."

Miguel—Did the 42nd General Chapter introduce any new perspectives?

Michel—Yes, I think so, for example, the fine text on the rights of the child, a kind of declaration that cites the urgent needs of today. When I read that the Brothers are called by urgent needs, I first ask myself whether they really feel that, whether all Brothers feel that these great needs call them. I also say to myself that to become involved in a particular and partial situation of a new need, a global vision is required. Does this list give us a global overview? It lists a succession of partial phenomena that could be grouped in the same situation. For example, the loss of basic human values is not unrelated to AIDS, to freedom, to sex tourism. One could think also of the flow of migrants, of terrorism, of illiteracy, and of displaced persons.

It is not possible for a Brother or a group of Brothers in a given situation to feel called at the same time by all these situations. Even if a General Chapter says that all Brothers are called by all these things, the Brothers in a given situation will be called by one particular point, with the possibility later on that it does relate to all the rest. The particular point will not be the same for all, depending upon the psychology, the situation, and the skills of the Brothers. If we pay attention to these calls, we are moving into a much more pluralistic and explosive situation. So then it can be said that the Institute is no more. When the 42nd General Chapter says all that, in a way it says nothing for a specific Brother. I am thinking of Jesuits who in a particular place chose displaced persons as an option. We have not made that type of choice. One possibility could be an option for young people with AIDS or for street children, possibilities that are often mentioned.

My conclusion, then, is the following: when the *Declaration* invited us to be preoccupied with the poor, it does not expect the General Chapter to say who are the poor. It is up to us to find them where we are, and we know very well that they are not the same everywhere, with respect to illiteracy, to values education, and to specific needs. From this comes the positive recommendation of the General Chapter to the District Chapters, inviting them to promote projects within the world of the poor as much as possible. In consequence, initiatives in this direction and supported by a community are to be submitted to the District Council for discernment and approval. Lasallian universities are invited to conduct research on situations of poverty. Have they begun to share their research on such truly Lasallian approaches?

Another initiative is expressed in the Chapter's Proposition 1, to make available one hundred Brothers and a number of Lasallian partners for a period of formation followed by their being sent on a mission in response to the calls of today.³⁷ As an international body, the Chapter encourages the Institute to identify one hundred projects and to invite Brothers to implement them.

A third project is the object of Proposition 2. It asks Brother Superior

³⁷ Cf. *Circular* 435, pp. 27–28.

General to appoint a group of experts on education who will be responsible for observing the major educational issues throughout the world³⁸ and for providing the Lasallian world, the media, and international organizations a public voice, if necessary, coming from the Institute.

A fourth, very clear, aspect is the issue of the shared mission. The Institute is invited to listen to the signs of the times, to understand the needs of the young and the poor, and to do so in communion with the needs of the Church and the Institute—a dichotomy that we do not manage to leave behind. By entering this movement for today, where everything is a grace, we are invited to deepen a new theology of the educational mission, to renew our charism, to embody the Institute in a specific context, to acculturate ourselves, especially with the poor, to put ourselves in a situation of renewal by accepting the diversification of responses that the Institute offers.

After this Chapter, *Circular 435* offered a text on the *community as sign of hope, source of life*.³⁹ Brothers among the young and for the poor, we must move from separation from the world to presence in the world, in the heart of which we are often tempted by the forces of death. We find in this *Circular* convictions about community and recommendations for a unified life and a more consistent lifestyle.

Miguel—Finally, perhaps we ought to mention this aspect of the community in relation to the Declaration of 1967.

Michel—This text seems very beautiful to me, because after announcing that it will speak about community, it begins by talking about our world. We cannot locate our community effort aside from this real world. What this *Circular 435* provides us of importance is, in a more ample way than in the *Declaration*, the challenge to turn our attention in different directions, always attentive to the signs of the times. We listed earlier what our mission can invite us to share. We find here the same approach, more assertive and placing us in the extension of the *Declaration*. This is the confirmation that, as an Institute, we are *in* the people of God and at the same time *for* the people of God. We can never separate the cause of God

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 52ff.

Chapter 16 – *A RADICAL SHIFT: FROM THE SEARCH FOR PERFECTION TO AN ITINERARY OF EXODUS, INCARNATION, AND SERVICE*

HISTORICAL NOTE BY THE EDITORS

Brother Michel Sauvage left Rome immediately after the conclusion of the 40th General Chapter, in 1976, which had elected Brother José Pablo Basterrechea as Superior General. His return to France signified a major shift after ten years of intense international activity and the awareness of having participated from the perspective of continuing formation in the renewal of the Institute that the Second Vatican Council and the 39th General Chapter, 1966–1967, desired.

Brother Michel acknowledged having been a pious young man, guided by the institution and by Superiors who defined the religious life as a search for personal perfection that was lived in communities not only separated from the world but also openly opposed to the world. He and all who belonged to the Institute felt protected by the vow of obedience from every wind of freedom. Extinguishing all love for life, they lived their vow of chastity, and destroying every attachment to the material world, they took on their vow of poverty. This ingrained concept of his commitment did not prevent Brother Michel from developing an intense intellectual life. This entire religious environment, however, was transformed during the particularly intense years of renewal after the General Chapter of 1966–1967.

Thus, rejected by some of his peers and supported by many Brothers from various Regions of the Institute who participated in formation sessions at CIL, Brother Michel left Rome in 1976, imbued with the theology of the religious life that radically changed his youthful ideology while searching for other paradigms that are consistent with the conciliar movement of Vatican II. During this new stage in his life, he discovers a renewed emotional and relational dimension to assist him in reaffirming his identity as a lay religious in the Church.

In fact, his departure from Rome coincides with the publication of his major theological, spiritual, and resolutely Lasallian synthesis, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle; Expérience et enseignement spirituels; Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*. What motivates him to move forward is not the institution but the original charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. For the next twenty-five years, from 1976 until his death in 2001, Brother Michel Sauvage will travel an itinerary of insecurity and of vulnerability, similar to what the holy Founder experienced, an itinerary of exodus, kenosis, and service, an itinerary in which we can feel ourselves in dialogue with a Brother who is a witness of an era.

On this route, Brother Michel does not live simply to meet any institutional expectations of his Superiors. Stimulated by the charismatic force, he searches for a ministry that will enable him to find a place in the world of the poor. His tireless search leads him to a number of different commitments. He joins the School of Faith in Switzerland (1976–1978), serves as Regional of France (1978–1983), engages in parish ministry at Loos (1983–1986), returns to Rome as Director of Lasallian Studies (1986–1991), and, lastly, becomes Director of *Maison St. Jean*, the retirement community of the Brothers at Annappes, where he dies in 2001.

Reading the interviews about this period draws attention to the fact that Brother Michel speaks little about himself, but what he does say shows a certain similarity with the itinerary of John Baptist de La Salle. Michel, in effect, experiences an exodus journey, leaving behind everything that prevents him from seeing and feeling the reality of poor young people. He chooses this itinerary of incarnation that allows him to experience the human condition in the world of the poor, an itinerary of kenosis and of service so that the poorest can have a life.

Based on his experience—as fragmented and limited as it might seem—and in the light of the theology of the Lasallian religious life and of the spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Brother Michel underlines an experience of the evangelical life that never ceases being restless. His questions remain open; his choices continue to mature as each experience warrants. At the end of his life, he has become a man of profound prayer

in which he finds comfort from God the loving Father, who has accompanied him in his exhaustion and in his vulnerability.

EXPERIENCE AT THE SCHOOL OF FAITH IN SWITZERLAND

Miguel—What is your assessment of your personal experiences after leaving Rome in 1976?

Michel—I left Rome in a tranquil way, because, all in all, I did accomplish some positive work during those ten years. What were the accomplishments during this period? Your thesis and also the initial text of *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres* were completed, and CIL was fulfilling its role well and would continue on the same basis. I was happy to leave Rome, because I was exhausted by the futile infighting. I saw that many situations remained blocked. I was also happy to leave because I was going to work at the School of Faith in Fribourg and join the community of Fontaine-André at Neuchâtel (Switzerland), which at that time was serving the poor by devoting itself to the rehabilitation of drug addicts. I experienced this departure from Rome, therefore, as a positive event in my life. I did not want to hear another word about government, and because I went to Switzerland instead of returning to France, I saved myself from getting involved in many discussions there until 1978.

What are my overall impressions today about advances or setbacks? When I consider the Institute, I think that the 1976 General Chapter reaffirmed that the 1967 *Declaration* is still its *constitution*. Some resistance did arise on this point at the 1976 Chapter, but ultimately it was very little. What is most important is that the reaffirmation took place. Although progress on certain points was evident, for example, on the vows, we must recognize that in the Church, the questions about ministries and vows remain blocked. The lay character of the Brothers of our Institute was not challenged at the 1976 General Chapter, which only had to express the necessity of studying more profoundly the question of ministries, which, in fact, did not take place. Was there an advance? Not much, in fact, nor was there a retreat. The 1966–1967 General Chapter was incontestably charismatic. What can be said about the 1976 General Chapter is that it functioned.

Miguel—*After leaving Rome, you went to Neuchâtel, where you joined the community of Brothers and worked at the School of Faith. What was your experience of Church with the facilitators and students at the School of Faith and with the Brothers' community?*

Michel—What gave me the idea of going to the School of Faith? It was founded in 1969, so in 1976 it was still rather new when I arrived there. The Director was a well-known figure in the Church, Father Jacques Loew. An unbeliever initially, he converted, became a Dominican, and was a longshoreman at the port of Marseille during the war. When the priest-workers were banned, he obeyed. He established the *Mission ouvrière St. Pierre et St. Paul*, staffed mainly by priests who worked in the city and at the same time in ministry, a religious congregation comparable to that of the Little Brothers of Jesus. This small, emerging congregation rapidly became international by being established in South America, notably in Brazil, where Father Loew lived as worker and founder.

In Brazil he became aware of the widespread religious ignorance among Christians and witnessed the success of sects, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, with a type of diffusion of the Word of God through reading the Bible in a fundamentalist way. From that he became aware of the need to train ministers of the Word in whom the Word is alive. The School of Faith was also called the School of Faith and Ministries, because his objective was to form ministers of the Word. The original feature of his insight was that this formation must occur in small communities with small teams, similar to his own congregation, that shared life, prayer, and material aspects and based everything on the Word of God. As for its courses, the School of Faith was in the main a Bible school. It was open to all, but because of the high cost of living in Switzerland, in fact it was mostly attended by female religious (and a few male religious). The teams of facilitators were homogeneous, one male team and a number of female teams, for the most part of Sisters, sometimes with one or more laypeople, and also one married couple. The course lasted two years.

I was attracted by that type of experience. I had spent about a week there on my way to the 1976 General Chapter, because I wanted to take a first-hand look at the place and also to find some peace of mind in advance of

the Chapter. This school and its study teams worked well. The facilitators were religious (priests) and Sisters. I met Sisters who themselves had attended the School of Faith, including Christine, Marie-Jo Fleury, and Colette Bogiolo. We have remained close friends since our initial meeting in Fribourg. What most appealed to me in this experience was the ministry of the Word of God, which was of great interest to me because of its connection with the fostering of renewal in religious communities.

I was somewhat mistaken, however, for I had assumed that the team leaders were teachers, but I never was asked to teach a course. I had to be content with attending classes with the students and then guiding their group work, which was, nonetheless, quite interesting. They were assigned to small study teams, which were different than the groups that were living together, and they explored in these teams the material assigned by the instructors who were teaching the courses. There was also faith sharing in these teams from time to time. In addition, we were responsible for assisting the study teams, of which I had three: two of Sisters and one of laymen, a most heterogeneous and difficult group. The theory of the School of Faith was to mix members of different religious congregations of Sisters (often there might be only one or two from each congregation). In spite of that, one study team to which I was assigned consisted of members of the same Congregation, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart of Issoudun. They comprised, in fact, a future Novitiate, with Postulants and two professed Sisters, one being the future Mistress of Novices. I was assigned to that team because of my previous role in Institute formation. One result was my deep and constant friendship with the Sister who is now the Superior of the Monastery of the Visitation at Annecy.

The School of Faith wished to offer its participants an experience of Church. Father Loew thought of the Church as small communities, but not without the hierarchy. The School of Faith, therefore, was closely linked to the Bishop of Fribourg and also to the Pope, with students undertaking a pilgrimage to Rome in their second year. Father Loew had also preached a retreat at the Vatican. I performed my task as a facilitator completely, although disappointed at not having an opportunity to teach.

I offered to teach a course on the theology of the religious life, but no one was interested. In comparison, Lumen Vitae took a far different, even international, approach with its study teams, but without the intense life of ongoing communities at the School of Faith, with daily Mass, twice a week for the entire school, and ordained facilitators who presided at Mass for the study teams.

To my considerable astonishment, I gradually discovered that I did not at all share Father Loew's spirituality, which was not one of incarnation, contrary to what might be expected. The subsequent career of this man, a holy man, was curious. His father, an unbeliever, had respect only for the Brothers of the Christian Schools at Clermont. When Father Loew received me, I imagine that he said to himself, "This is an expert in education who could replace me as Director of the School of Faith." The illusion did not last, because that was not my path. His spirituality, monastic in style, did not suit me.

Miguel—What was the specific ministry of the School of Faith?

Michel—There was no emphasis on teaching. For Father Jacques Loew, the idea was simply for people to immerse themselves in the Word and then to form Bible study groups wherever they happened to be. The primary benefit was for the participants themselves, who could personally deepen their own faith as they learned from great biblical scholars. An excellent Dominican professor of Church History also taught a course. In the second year, they learned some theology, including from two very open Dominicans. There was no practical or internship experience, but the instruction was extended by personal meditation and by group sharing and work. The expression School of Faith, therefore, prevailed over that of School of Ministries.

Miguel—Until that time, your experience of religious life was predominantly male, and your theological reflection was especially with and about Brothers. What did this experience at the School of Faith, where you developed contacts with many women, teach you about the theology of the religious life, about community life, and about the sensitivity to the Word from a woman's point of view?

Michel—What I can say, without being pretentious, is the fact that in these new contacts, I immediately felt at ease with the women. I think I was neither too macho nor too paternalistic. What can make my answer to your question embarrassing is that, in a way, I did not have to give much thought to the difference in the religious life between men and women. I felt it and lived it. I listened to them and to the questions they were asking from the woman's point of view, and I tried to react accordingly. What I can say is that they were more intuitive. The same was true for the female facilitators, with whom I felt closer than with the male facilitators. We shared, but on an equal basis. I have sometimes thought about this question. After all, it could have been a huge shock, because I had mostly lived with men and taught men.

The fact that I am not a priest, I think, especially with respect to women religious, established a brotherly closeness that they felt. I was a religious, like them, but not a priest. Sisters at retreats that I directed often told me that. Sisters who are accustomed to having retreats preached by priests react differently to a retreat given by a Brother. I did not offer spiritual direction, strictly speaking, and I did not wish to do so. Priests did seek to do it, which sometimes provoked conflicts. I only had the opportunity to offer encouragement. I had taught lay religious, and I too was lay. I think that the difference is very profound between the lay religious and someone who has been formed only as a priest in clerical formation like that in France and in Europe: the priest who is another Christ, a man apart, invested with superiority. In fact, this superiority of the priest in the Church was far more often experienced by female religious and by laypeople than by male religious. One could say that the religious life is superior to the married life, but that is only in theory. In reality, the comparison to make is between religious priests and secular priests. I cannot say more about it, for what I felt on these occasions was in the realm of experience more than of theory or principles.

Miguel—*You also lived in the community of Swiss Brothers at Neuchâtel.*

Miguel—In agreement with my Brother Visitor of Lille, I was a member of the community at Neuchâtel, where I returned every Friday evening.

The community met all morning on Saturday, and I left on Monday. The Brothers directed three works in Neuchâtel. The boarding school in the city was for Swiss German youth at the end of their secondary schooling who enrolled for an intensive year of French; next to it was the Catholic parish's primary school. The residence for Brothers and for a group of young men in drug rehabilitation was at the Abbey of Fontaine-André. Canonically, there was one community.

Of the three Brothers living at Fontaine-André, two taught at the parish school in the city. Brother Leo Egli lived at the Abbey full-time, and I was particularly associated with this group. We were living and sharing meals with young Swiss Germans who were trying to quit using drugs. I gave some French lessons to one or more of them. The Saturday morning meeting of all the Brothers was important, because we shared what we were living. I spoke about my experiences at the School of Faith and my growing doubts about it. I discerned with them⁴⁰ whether to continue in Fribourg, and they deeply shared their life, their questions, and their concerns. We also had shared prayer twice a day and at times celebrated the Eucharist, with many shared intentions. With them I experienced a type of prayer about life, including its tensions, and about sharing.

That experience also agreed with my desire to immerse myself in a milieu of the poor. In this case it was with drug addicts, a work for which I had absolutely no experience or preparation. Living with the young men as Brothers, we were close to them in spite of the language barrier.

⁴⁰ This discernment would be more intense and decisive in 1983. After my time as Régional, I returned to Fontaine-André. In May, Brother Jean-Marie Thouard, the Régional, came from Paris to ask me if I would agree to be the Secretary General of the Conference of Male Religious of France. I went to Paris, and Brother Eugène Bodet came from Lille. I met the President and the Secretary of the Conference. After some discussion with Jean-Marie and Eugène—I set as a condition that I could live in community with Honoré de Silvestri, which Jean-Marie found difficult to see, but he agreed if I would be the Secretary General of the Conference—I agreed, somewhat against my heart's advice. I returned to Neuchâtel and told Leo of my decision. He simply said to me, "You, Michel, that job?" in such a tone that I immediately and unhesitatingly made a complete turnabout. I telephoned and wrote to Lille and to Paris about my change in point of view. Brother Jean-Marie Thouard had to revoke my appointment with the Conference officials. So I quickly returned to my District in September and undertook a difficult experience, which did not last long (but not of my doing), of working with young people who had recently completed a term in prison.

Miguel—*Listening to you gives me the impression that this time at the School of Faith and in Neuchâtel was like a Second Novitiate. Did the new questions that arose perhaps lead to a new way of viewing the Church, of speaking about the religious life, of announcing the Gospel to the poor?*

Michel—They certainly did. I stayed three years in this community, two years before I became Regional and one year after I left that office. One item during the weekly community meeting was a selection of a few pages from a book chosen by the group. Because the Brothers greatly admired John Baptist de La Salle, I shared with them some pages from *Annoncer l'Évangile aux Pauvres*.

This was a community in which some Brothers had been impressed by the Focolare movement. At Leo Egli's suggestion, the 1973 CIL group visited Loppiano. He had stayed there for two months, prior to coming to CIL, and experienced this new way of community life: simpler, more fraternal, sharing tasks as well as concerns and prayer.

Miguel—*Did the community have a structured form?*

Michel—Not at all, at least at Fontaine-André. We created our own schedule, with no set time for rising, a truly flexible approach, a creation, I can say, of a great fraternity with Brothers involved in different activities. Because I was also in contact with the other Brothers in the city, when I was in Neuchâtel during holiday periods, I would go to have lunch with them. This provided a good walk for me and gave me the chance for simple sharing with Brothers who were working either at the boarding school, the primary school, or elsewhere. I also brought groups there from the School of Faith for a meaningful experience, and I then felt the influence of this community beyond itself.

We were also in close contact with the Sisters of La Chaux-de-Fonds, who conducted—and still do—a residence for girls who are in difficult situations. I developed friendships with these Sisters that continue to this day. Because the priests of La Chaux-de-Fonds were closely linked with the Sisters, we had more contact with them than with those at Neuchâtel. The pastor of La Chaux-de-Fonds later became the episcopal vicar of

Neuchâtel and was in contact with the Abbey of Fontaine-André. I found the style of these priests to be less clerical and more fraternal and friendly than that of the French clergy, for example. Sister Colette Bogiolo, FMM (Franciscan Missionary of Mary), a facilitator at the School of Faith⁴¹ and director of the second year, was and still is leading Bible study groups of Protestants and Catholics together. In a predominantly Protestant country and in a city with a university faculty of Protestant theologians, this Sister was well known for her exceptional commitment to the Bible. There I had a practical experience of ecumenism, including with the Brothers.

In sum, it was a discovery of fraternity, of ecumenism, of the link between men and women religious, of a religious life not attached to established structures, and of a community that did not live as part of an educational institution. It is true that there was a boarding school of the Brothers in town, but it did not have exactly the same relationship with the community as in France, given the fact that the young people attended only one year, with a freely structured academic curriculum. I also observed the excellent teaching at the primary school level in Switzerland. I met only a few laypeople, however. At Fribourg I was in contact with Sisters who had to create new forms of living together outside the traditional structures of their congregations, but based, of course, on their prior experiences.

Miguel—Then came your responsibility as Regional in France. How did it happen that you were called to be the Regional?

Michel—Regional in France: I still don't understand what happened. The 1976 General Chapter eliminated the functions of the Assistants. In 1975, the French Districts had held an important National Chapter, which I did not attend, because I was not living in France at the time. It is important to understand how things happened.

⁴¹ I had been in contact with her before I came to the School of Faith. She was doing research at Chantilly on her Foundress, Sister Marie de la Passion, and Father Rayez had put us in touch with each other. I believe that she contributed to my decision to join the School of Faith, to which she had introduced me in summer 1975.

A drifting off course was occurring, even if that word is an exaggeration, as were the excessively ideological insights of Brother Honoré de Silvestri. He had succeeded at this 1975 National Chapter in obtaining a positive vote to acknowledge two possible tracks for being a Brother in France: the track of institutions and the track of (Catholic Action) movements, for which he was the upstart who influenced the Chapter. He certainly had strong convictions about the renewal of the religious life that came from experiences with and commitments to these movements in real-life situations, plunging into the reality of the world of the poor and leaving institutions, that is to say, insights that were far ahead of what was happening at the time. He had written an excellent document about this so-called “second track.” If he mentioned two tracks, it would be to say, “There is mine!” Faced with him, many Brothers could not understand why certain Brothers were leaving the institutions in order to involve themselves in something other than the school, in the strict sense, to serve the poor. They also found it extremely difficult to speak about the first track in which they were living.

I was not present, and when I heard what had happened at the national Chapter, I said to myself, “This is a mistake; in fact, there are at least ten tracks!” That Chapter, at Brother Patrice Marey’s request, created an organizational structure that, in a way, supported these two tracks. Brother François Kerdoncuf, a school man, was placed in charge of the Education Secretariate. As for the other track, that of the poor (although it was never expressed as such), Brother Eugène Ernoult, not Brother Honoré, directed the Secretariate. Brother Eugène remained in his community among the poor, and Brother François set up his office in Paris. In Brother Patrice Marey’s plan, these two Secretaries were on the Assistant’s staff and reported to him. Incidentally, I told Brother Patrice that the structure planned for France was made to measure in his style.

There already was a Conference of Visitors of the Districts of France, which then formed the Region. The 1976 General Chapter had left it up to each Region to create its own structure. Not wishing, as a former Assistant, to be involved in these negotiations is one reason why I did not return to France in 1976. I was at Fribourg in 1976–1977, and I left the

School of Faith at the end of the school year. I was still receiving invitations from throughout the Institute to give Lasallian retreats and conferences. Lasallian matters thus were still catching up with me, even though in leaving Rome I thought that I had done enough in that regard. I had felt many times a deep desire to withdraw from the Institute's *ad intra*. Circumstances kept calling me to be concerned with the Brothers and also with John Baptist de La Salle, and I had always done so with great personal interest, especially in relation to my thesis. In fact, I was always drawn to John Baptist de La Salle.

You and I brought our book, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux Pauvres*, to completion, and it was quickly translated into Spanish and English. At that point, besides retreats and conferences, I also agreed to continue my conferences at CIL in 1977 and 1978. While at CIL, I received a letter in February 1978 from the President of the Conference of Visitors of France, Brother Robert Blanchard, in which he wrote, "Michel, we are going to have to choose a Regional, and I see no one but you in that position." Then he explained his reasons, and after some thought, I replied to him.

REFLECTION ON LASALLIAN ASSOCIATION AND THE NEEDS OF THE YOUNG

The Lasallian community

Miguel—*Did your experience in Switzerland and your reflection on John Baptist de La Salle's experience provide a framework for understanding Lasallian association in a new way?*

Michel—Your question about Lasallian community, I think, raises an important point. In the Institute, the matter of the community seems paradoxical. We are impressed by the expression, "together and by association to conduct schools." The formula is very rich, but it arose in a particular historical context that has unique characteristics. The vow of association to conduct the Christian Schools takes us back to the Founder's time, as does the question today, "Is association essential to the Institute?"

To that I reply, “What is essential to association?” I reach the conclusion that *the vow of association is more to the Institute than to the community*. We constantly play on both sides.

In saying this, I am referring back to the way things happened in the original model. Some Brothers gather to conduct a school together. That is correct, and it means that each classroom of students is conducted by a particular Brother who is with his students throughout the day. In fact, in all his writings, John Baptist de La Salle never addresses the community when he is speaking about the ministry of apostolic activity. Instead, he addresses each Brother: “You have the good fortune to... You are with the poor every day... You must represent Jesus Christ...” It is each Brother who is personally addressed. The Founder never uses a community image for the exercise of the ministry. In actual practice, that is the way it is. There is a combined effort, it is true, whose symbol is the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, where the pooled experiences of all the Brothers become the norm. We know, in effect, that the *Conduct* is derived from the shared experience of the individual Brothers and then becomes a type of *Rule* for everyone. From this point of view, a fraternal spirit certainly developed, but not in the sense that the Brothers taught each other’s students or as a community discussed the state of their students.

All of this is certainly important, even though no Brothers now teach in a primary school where one teacher, not two, provides all the instruction, plus the catechism lesson. The individual teacher is the original basic image. When the Brothers vow to associate themselves to conduct the Christian Schools, they do so in a larger assembly, not in their own community. The meaning is that they, together, will maintain the network, to use a modern term, in which they are interchangeable.

To a great extent, any Brother can be assigned to do anything, anywhere. A Brother at Dijon can be sent to Calais or to Marseille. Although John Baptist de La Salle does take into account that the South and the North of France are different, interchangeability is the general rule. His genius is to have perceived a national problem that could become a much larger problem, that of young people deprived of an education. Along with him, we could be concerned about this particular problem in France from the

moment that a common vision emerges. Then we could form an Institute, because we have a common vision not only of the mission but also of the particular work. This is why a Chapter to focus on the work is necessary and not just on the mission. This is a particularly important point in view of the considerable changes that have occurred.

I never experienced the type of primary education system I described above. I did experience secondary education, and unlike what might occur elsewhere, the fact is that with whatever group of young people it is, the primary focus is on teaching and on professional competence. Also—and I say this constantly—I think that people repeat *together and by association* without knowing what it means when they apply it to situations that have nothing in common with the circumstances in which the expression originated. I am not saying that the expression must not be used; my advice is to know exactly what is being compared. The phrase has become a slogan—and with that, I end my digression.

The tradition of the exercise of the apostolate by a community, if you look at it closely, is perhaps less strong in the case of a school “conducted together” than with other kinds of works. In effect, *Lasallian strength is the strength of the Institute more than the strength of each community*.

I now take up the case of Brothers who are engaged according to the Institute’s orientation. Do not forget that Brothers who are committed to serving the poorest and are not working in a school are doing so, not by personal whim (although that can happen) but because it is the Institute’s fundamental orientation and because they have observed urgent needs.

The needs of young people today

Miguel—The diversity of problems and of solutions is enormous today, when millions of young people are unemployed, are experiencing difficulties, and are living on the margins. Do you think that the Institute ought to focus on a common project, an Institute project?

Michel—This is a particularly important question that I have been considering for a long time. I said earlier that association is a vow to the Institute, not a vow to the community. This problem requires a collective

approach as an Institute. Consider the case of youth unemployment, a situation occurring everywhere and closely related to other problems, such as violence, drugs, AIDS, sexuality, and family disruption. I say to myself that in the face of these situations, an Institute decision is possible. In any case, it is a position dear to my heart.

If we now consider all the Brothers, especially the youngest who are working in schools, they naturally tell us that the school is the primary means to avoid unemployment. It is true that there are professional and technical schools that are greatly concerned about unemployment. We cannot say, however, that the fundamental dynamism of Brothers in the schools is unemployment. Why must it be the Brothers who devote themselves to the service of the unemployed?

On the other hand, the Institute's official language now, that is to say, in the 1990s where we are, is that of the *shared mission*. In schools there may be a concern for unemployment, but not specifically youth unemployment. When John Baptist de La Salle founded the Institute, the urgent situation mentioned in several articles of the *Rule* is the issue of street children, which in our day brings to mind the problem of unemployment, with a new meaning, of course. Imagine if the Institute, as such, were to say, "We will change course," and if there were then a realistic consideration of the change at the international level of government. *Because the problem of the young is linked with severe economic realities, we can energetically focus our projects in a particular direction.* In any case, this is a general idea that can give meaning to our search for the glory of God by working for humanity.

Miguel—*Was this not the case with the Institute's reflection on the megalopolis?*⁴²

Michel—Yes, but I mean that we could have raised awareness among the

⁴² The 42nd General Chapter asked the Superior General to appoint a group of experts in education to identify the major educational issues across the world. In September 1993, three Brothers were invited to Rome and were asked to prepare, with the Superior General and his Council, four colloquia on highly significant issues for the Institute's involvement in contemporary society. The colloquium in 1996 on *The Megalopolis and the Lasallian Educational Mission* focused on the challenges of globalization in the twenty-first century (see *Bulletin* 245, 1999).

Brothers of the issues of the megalopolis. If we talk about violence or unemployment, they know what it is. What I am saying could happen; all it needs is to decide to do it. This would, indeed, be an action of the Institute to say, “We are going to make unemployment the fundamental objective of the work of the Brothers in France, whether in the school or elsewhere,” and then to establish a plan for adults also. That would respond to a need.

Miguel—John Baptist de La Salle speaks about the abandonment of the young. Must we rewrite Chapter 1 of the Rule in this sense?

Michel—In fact, we can speak today about the abandonment of young people who cannot find employment opportunities and who are isolated because of the competition among young people. As for the young of the elite, who in France are enrolled in preparatory classes prior to entering the *grandes écoles*, we need not be concerned with them, for they are not included in a Lasallian option.

I continue with the issue of unemployment. Because we are now encountering difficulties in maintaining all our institutions under *Lasallian trusteeship*,⁴³ might that not be one criterion? Laypeople who want to continue working in schools under our trusteeship could also move in that direction. All at once, it would be a certain form of Institute, *a specific Institute with a unique purpose and diversified forms*. I think we could also involve in a more specific way the Brothers in retirement communities in this perspective under its various aspects.

Choosing such an option as unemployment, if that were the decision, could not be effective without objective strategies and tactics. In recent decades, we have known Brothers who are particularly determined to defend the system of Lasallian educational institutions. They always have

⁴³ *La tutelle lasallienne* (Lasallian trusteeship) refers to the exercise of institutional responsibility for leadership and formation in the network of institutions known as Lasallian (after John Baptist de La Salle) in France. The Trusteeship Council (*Le Conseil de tutelle*) assists the Brother Visitor of the District in determining the directives for the governance and the leadership of the network. The services and the personnel (Secretary General of the Educational Mission, Trusteeship Delegates, Treasurer, Formation Leaders, Director of Communications, and so on) assure the network's operation, coordination, and cohesion.—Ed.

opposed anything that in their eyes deviates from the origins. They are the ones who declared that Superiors from 1966 on have sold the Institute down the river by allowing commitments other than schools.

I think that we have a problem of a divorce in the language, prior to a divorce in the life of the Brother. Indeed, there is a double language in the Institute. The official, general language that we repeat says, in effect, “The priority is to serve the poor; revise everything, and transform the works,” while the language in practice insists, “We have works, and we must run them well.”

Miguel—What do you say about the Institute’s visibility in France today?

Michel—Today in France, we have a very small number of young people entering the Institute for the service of the poor, which surely relates to the Institute’s visibility. That visibility, in France, is not one of a group of people who are concerned for the poor, but of a group that has an excellent organization of shared mission and trusteeship administration with laypeople. That is the image that we present. The bishops of France, as a group, state that the Brothers of the Christian Schools direct the best trusteeship administration in France. They also would like to take over that direction. The question arises: when there are no more Brothers, what will happen to the trusteeship?

NEW EXPERIENCES FOR BROTHER MICHEL SAUVAGE

Miguel—Turning now to your role as Regional in France, what struggles and conflicts occurred during that period?

Michel—Yes, there were conflicts, but not permanent ones. The Visitors and I were totally in agreement. I think that they respected me, believed that I was fundamentally dedicated to my work, and knew that I am not a fanatic. There was no radical cultural misunderstanding, for we were culturally homogeneous. They also respected my Lasallian competence. They took into account that today we need to develop a contemporary Lasallian language. At the time, I believed that although renewal was difficult, it was possible, although certainly not in a global manner. I often

said to Brother Honoré de Silvestri, “You want everything to happen in military style, that it was sufficient to write the *Declaration*, and the next day everyone will go to serve the poor.” Things don’t happen that way, because people and their personal histories must be respected. I also learned that progress is in small groups. If the entire Institute in France cannot be transformed, at least some significant changes can be made in the way the Brothers are living, as long as it is done with their consent.

I also found that nothing was automatic. We established a policy for initial formation that included a two-year Novitiate. The second year was to be in a community especially engaged in an educational project for poor people. We observed a different result with each Brother. That made me more aware of the need in formation to respect personal freedom and history and the community’s basic priorities. The ideas that came to me about the impossibility of the Institute’s renewal at the global level evolved because of the facts and the experiences that I had at that time.

I also experienced with the Brothers in FMO (*Frères du monde ouvrier*) the spiritual richness of this plunge into the real world of the poor. There I saw that the path of the Gospel and of evangelization was not to be studied only in general terms, which is often the case with the Brothers. The contemplation of Christ in the Gospel leads to the poor. Motivated by a desire to be immersed in this world of the poor and to share with them, we discover the Gospel values they are living, and we feel the need to share them more radically while deepening the understanding of the Word of God with them. I witnessed these developments that I have often used as examples of the relationship between the religious life and the apostolate. It is often said that the religious life is a precondition for the apostolate and that the apostolate is, to a great extent, a consequence of the religious life, a dichotomous concept to be sure. That is why I like to repeat that the apostolate both expresses and nourishes the religious life that develops from the apostolic commitment.

All this certainly is not without an effect in the community domain. The *Declaration* (25.4) notes that “to avoid the risk ... of suffocating in the pettiness of small internal problems,” we must devote ourselves to the

apostolic life.⁴⁴ In general, I found that communities did have more discussions when they were working together, not necessarily in the same specific apostolate but in similar apostolic activities.

Miguel—*After your service as Regional, you returned to your District of Lille to join a small community at Loos. What was the situation of the Church in Lille when you returned there, compared with what it was when you left?*

Michel—First, I must say that at the age of 60, I left Neuchâtel, in 1983, because I wanted to return to my District of Lille. Immediately after being Regional, I was offered the job of Secretary General of the Conference of Religious Orders of Men in France. For the first time, they were considering a Brother. Because I was conscious of an inconsistency between my search for options to serve the poor and such administrative work, I refused. Around the same time, I received an invitation from Brother Superior to work in the Roman Curia, at the Pontifical Council for Culture, which was of no interest to me. I did not see myself in the Curia. Another option came to light that could have been more positive. My Visitor had been urging me to return to intellectual work, which I admit is an important aspect of my vocation. After extensive negotiations with the editors of *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, as well as with my Visitor and the Jesuit Provincial, I recognized at the last minute that this also was not for me.

The decision, therefore, was to return to my District. Initially, the only alternative was to join the Visitor's community at rue Jean Levasseur, Lille. The Visitor asked me to do so, for he wanted to create a community. As soon as I arrived in Lille, I began working as a facilitator in a residence recently opened for young people just released from prison by Father Philippe Maillard, OP, a prison chaplain from Loos. I worked there for a few months, a rich experience of seeing something of the world of delinquency, of young people with no chance in life who, in a way, were programmed for delinquency.

⁴⁴ "The reference of everything to the common mission makes it possible for a community to avoid the risk of becoming enclosed within itself, of suffocating in the pettiness of small internal problems which threaten even the most regular communities if they are not constantly renewed in apostolic zeal" (*Declaration 25.4*).

The director of the residence was a young man who had been convicted of crimes and in prison for years. In this situation I observed a kind of otherworldliness in Father Maillard, who as a prison chaplain had helped this young man survive his incarceration and who then concluded that he was best suited to direct the residence for young offenders. In fact, the young man was totally unbalanced, although it was not evident while I was there. I had promised to do another trip to Latin America in late 1983 and early 1984, which I did. By the time I returned home, the residence was no more, and I had no further contact with it. The chaplain was going to preach during Lent on television and was concentrating on his preparation. He never agreed to receive me, and our phone calls became more evasive. I also saw the difference that could exist between a man who had an image in France for his work with young delinquents and one who had no personal respect for a colleague whom he had requested to work with him. I saw in this situation the importance of the Lasallian charism, which is not content with generous and beautiful opinions about education but believes that competence is required in the psychological, sociological, and secular dimensions of the work. In this case, a project was deduced from a generous idea, but it could not succeed, lacking any consistency in the real world.

Miguel—Do you view that experience as a failure?

Michel—Not at all on a personal level; I would not have been able to prevent that drifting off course. I did, however, experience some success. These young people coming out of prison needed help in finding work and housing, two related matters because housing requires regular income. I knew the owner of a company that built automobiles by assembling component parts. I asked him to agree, knowing it to be a social service project, to hire one or two of these young people, 25 to 30 years old and with no professional competence. In prison they painted walls and were paid as apprentices. He accepted, and I even had made a commitment with a certain young man who was willing to go to work there. I had also contacted the person responsible for reduced-rent housing and secured priority consideration for these young men. Thus, a system was in place to solve both aspects of the problem. I went to Latin America, as I said, and the director of the residence immediately ruined everything.

The young man scheduled to work at the automobile company never went there. I considered the whole matter not as a failure but as an opportunity for me to learn about drugs and the fact that there is no escape. So, although it was not a failure, neither was it a success.

Brother Eugène Bodel, the Visitor at the time, wanted to create a small community. The diocesan officials whom we had consulted suggested that we look near Loos, where no religious community existed. A very large house there was owned by the foundress of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, an active, superbly educated, Ignatian-inspired religious congregation supported by the Jesuits. They have an excellent community at Villeneuve d'Ascq, with remarkable women who work as university chaplains. The Sisters were willing to let us use this house on condition that we welcomed there the parents of detainees who will come to visit their family members, the prison of Loos being nearby. I wanted to join a community like that, and so did Brother Eugène. When asked to join the community, Brother Robert Perin, who was at rue de Turenne, did not want to be involved in this project, which in the end was abandoned.

Nevertheless, we did create the new community that we desired, which we envisaged as a link with the local parish church. Brother Robert, chaplain at the local *lycée*, was already closely involved with the parish. The community included Brother Eugène Bodel, Visitor, Brother Albert Tellier, the District Econome, living at rue de Turenne, and me, living at rue Jean Levasseur. We had lively prayer and discussions, especially when Eugène returned from his visits.

We made contact as Brothers with the parish clergy of Loos and became involved, Albert in parish catechesis and Eugène with some family catechesis, which I also did. I took care of welcoming parishioners, preparing families for infant Baptism, and some wedding preparation. We needed lodging, and I found a residence in August 1984, when we finally agreed to use the old presbytery. It was in such a state that it required several months of work. The community began in September 1984, but it was April 1985 before we were able to move in gradually.

For me it was a great experience, lasting three years, that gave me an opportunity to discover the tremendous gap in requests for the sacra-

ments, ignorance of religion, and lack of connection with the Church. Among about one hundred preparations for Baptism during this period, I did not find even two families motivated by Christian reasons to baptize their children. I was so shaken by this experience that I said—just hoping to get a reaction by teasing a Vicar-General⁴⁵ who came to have dinner with us—“We ought to stop baptizing the very young infants, but if we refuse, their parents will say, ‘You are saying no because we are poor.’” Why wouldn’t they say that we are now in a world where it is impossible to have infant Baptism? Originally, Baptism made no sense unless the parents vouched for the education of the children. That was the great Tradition of the Church. Infant Baptism was linked with the conversion of the parents, as in the Acts of the Apostles, “[He] was baptised then and there with all his household” (Ac 16:33). The parents are the guarantors of education in the faith.

An interesting experience of this community, which was certainly supportive of the work of its members, came from our contacts with priests who were their colleagues. Brother Michel Boels worked in chaplaincies at the La Salle School in the morning and at Collège Perrin, a government school at Lambersart, in the afternoon. Brother Robert Perin was responsible for the chaplaincy of the government school at Haubourdin. This rich experience was especially noted at Michel’s funeral. This is the second community in which I shared much, including meals and sometimes during prayer. I treasure the fond memories of my three years in this community.

Miguel—What was the role of the laypeople in this Church?

Michel—The priests were working with independent Catholic Action movements. We had no direct contact with the laypeople in these movements, except indirectly. While saying that, I think of Nicole, very committed to the school chaplaincy and Brother Robert’s close colleague. During the first year of this community, I continued to live at rue Jean Levasseur, but I came to Loos three times a week to work with Baptism

⁴⁵ We had many contacts with priests who came to celebrate Mass at least once a week, took meals with us, and had frequent conversations with us about our pastoral experiences.

preparation. During that first year, we also helped with parish catechesis. Each of us met with a small group of parents who were then expected to teach the catechism to their children. During the 1985–86 school year, the community of rue de Turenne joined this new community.

We had other opportunities because of our participation in the parish liturgy and our good rapport with laypeople who were involved in the parish. Teams of these laypeople, since my departure, take care of the preparation for Baptism. That this did not happen before means that our pastoral ministry was lagging.

Miguel—When you were the Regional, you were concerned with the life of the Brothers in France, but here you were in a small community in one neighborhood. Was it a huge shift for you?

Michel—My commitments with the Sisters remained important, for I continued to lead retreats and many sessions that required a considerable amount of time to prepare. I was in a smaller arena, it is true, limited to Loos, but our community life was open, because of our constant awareness of the problems of schools, colleges, State education, and Catholic education. I was still involved with Lasallian Studies, and the *Centre Sèvres* in Paris also was asking me to do a lot of work on the religious life in the Church.

Miguel—Did you also offer Bible courses to groups of Sisters?

Michel—That was very important, and I almost forgot to mention it. There was an organization called CARCO⁴⁶ for men and women religious who were serving in ministries in the working world. They followed a two-year formation course while remaining in their own communities. The sessions were held in Paris on four or five weekends per year with courses on the Bible, Church history, and social issues. Brothers Léon Sevin and Eugène Ernoult attended these CARCO sessions. On one occasion, the staff member responsible for the northern region (from Le Havre to Langres) was looking for a replacement for the Bible teacher, a

⁴⁶ CARCO is the acronym for Cycle d'approfondissement pour les religieux et les religieuses en classe ouvrière.

Vincentian who was about to leave for Cameroun. He was a good exegete with no teaching skills. The Brothers suggested, “We have someone who, we are sure, will be an excellent Bible teacher.” I was asked, and I agreed to take on what for me was a renewal opportunity.

I proposed to teach one year on the Old Testament and one year on the New Testament. Thus I offered in year one a course on the prophet Amos and also an overview of the Old Testament. The other year, I focused on the Gospel of Mark and the Acts of the Apostles. My participation lasted for three years, which was highly rewarding, both in the work of preparation and teaching and in my contacts with the Sisters. For them it was an occasion to speak about their community issues and their commitments with the poor. Studying Amos, the Acts, and Saint Mark was related to their apostolic commitment. In my opinion, that was far more productive than the School of Faith, because the Sisters read, worked, prepared, and shared together.

Miguel—*This is the period when you and I began working on the Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer by Saint John Baptist de La Salle. What did your study of this text mean to you? How did it compare with what you wrote when you first encountered his Meditations for the Time of Retreat?*

Michel—I must tell it like it is. When I discovered *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, I experienced an extremely powerful and personal shock, a conversion to John Baptist de La Salle. I have never had this same kind of shock with *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*. Here I must render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, to God what is God’s, to Miguel what is Miguel’s. Remember, as a student at the *Jesus Magister* Institute after your Novitiate, you wanted to do a study of Mystery, based on *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*. Then we worked on our text in Neuchâtel in 1977. The project to publish an edition of *Explanation* was approved and announced, and people were always asking us when it will appear. But who was the driving force? You were, because I wasn’t yet on board at the start, but later, yes.

I must also admit that when I open this book and start to read it, I react coldly every time. Later on, there are some beautiful passages. You yourself taught me the beauty of John Baptist de La Salle’s prayers. We did

what we could, and we worked together to produce a worthwhile study that was translated and published in three languages. All the same, it is a rich text. I always say that I produced three syntheses of John Baptist de La Salle: in my thesis, *Catéchèse et Laïcité*, in *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*, and in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer (Cahiers lasalliens 50)*. I think this last is a beautiful work to read and to use by anyone wishing to know De La Salle's experience.

Miguel—What relationship do you see between this interior prayer and the Brother's ministry?

Michel—The Founder expresses well in his texts what we fundamentally are. To understand this, we must never separate *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* and *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. That was our constant effort, especially when we prepared our *Vue d'ensemble of Explanation (Cahiers lasalliens 50, pp. 537–612)*.

We went from ministry to interior prayer and from interior prayer to ministry. A dynamic reading of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* cannot exclude that connection. Certain passages can be confusing and disconcerting, because of style, austere content, and the method's complexity. Only a frequent and careful reading of this work will enable the reader to appreciate the substance, to sense the depth, to discover the simplicity, and to understand the freedom that it advocates.⁴⁷

We tried to show continually that the text of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, in a profound way, is not a stranger to the Brother's ministry. Wasn't that your initial insight? The object, the reality of the ministry, is the mystery in process of attainment, the mystery that is the action and the achievement of salvation. You have always insisted on the fact that Lasallian interior prayer is not something apart from Mystery. It is God present here and now, the mystery of Jesus present in our history.

Both of these works must be considered together. At the International Session on Lasallian Studies (SIEL) in 1990–91, I led a seminar on these two works with an excellent group.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Cahiers lasalliens 50*, 1995, p. XIII, Avant-propos.

Miguel—*In the postmodern period, it is not easy to understand the lack of long-term commitment among the young or their lack of interest in lifelong projects and in the future. How can we discern the new needs of the young in a world of cultural change?*

Michel—I would like to return to the topic of the postmodern, because the term is not at all clear to me. Today we are witnessing the passage from the modern to the postmodern. Everything evolves extremely quickly in this world that we can no longer follow. Even the experts cannot keep up with it. Look, for example, at the recent debates on the subject of cloning. The increasing speed of communication is completely changing the system of relationships and even risks killing them. Science has no limits but at the same time is aware of its powerlessness.

As for the postmodern, I still wish one day to have something solid and systematic that explains to me what it is. Everyone talks about the postmodern era, but I cannot describe exactly what it is. Moreover, this cultural and profoundly human moment is knocking at our Institute's door and influencing our decisions. This is a challenge that can explode in conflict and tension at the next General Chapter, this challenge not to retreat in the presence of the postmodern era.

Where ought we to situate our visibility as Brothers of the Christian Schools? Must the emphasis not be placed, one way or the other, on Gospel values? "The blind see again, and the lame walk, those suffering from virulent skin-diseases are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life" (Mt 11:5). What does that mean in our world full of injuries and maladies? Again we see that we cannot think of the visibility of our lives unless they are integral and inspired by profound compassion for the suffering in today's world, while taking into account with no paternalism that we also are fragile. We must share this compassion, so that our visibility is not that of the powerful who arrive with solutions for humanity's ills. We are visible as humble Brothers, conscious of having received something and being able to share it with others, but only on the condition that we do not do it alone. Here we find, although totally different from what people call the *shared mission*, the necessity of sharing with others.

This sharing needs to be accomplished especially with the help of professionals, because we cannot be professional in everything. Nevertheless, it is important that the Brothers be professionals of some kind. From my own experience, I would say that if I had my life to live over again, I would want to become a Brother of the Christian Schools without any hesitation, but at the same time, I would want to become a lawyer, so that I could be close to young people who are tempted by delinquency and be able to help them escape it. I see in it an approach from a Gospel perspective, but working with others, because a lawyer cannot work alone. That is the type of confluence in which we must look for visibility, not in tasks to be achieved or in questions about habitat and clothing. I am speaking about a visibility of espousal and partnership.⁴⁸

We see this also in the founding of our Institute. We cannot join this new world unless we leave our own citadels, that is to say, our institutions. In a conversation with me, Brother Superior once said, “When I see the problems of the Brothers and of the laypeople with the works in France, I say to myself that you have the good fortune to start from zero.” “Yes,” I said to him, “that is the refoundation.” “Exactly,” the Superior replied, “it’s the *refoundation*.”

The problem is that we cannot wish to break away from all the institutions. But I say to myself that in some countries, with respect to the shared mission, we have reached the point where we can ask ourselves, Brothers and laypeople—in France, for example—whether we can retain control over everything that exists. Doesn’t this mean that we are being led to question ourselves far more radically? What are we doing? What do we want to do? What is going to motivate all our lives?

⁴⁸ I am recalling what in another context happened with the founding of the Dominican Order. Pope Innocent III says that the Albigensians are people with values—for once it is the opposite. Even so, their conversion to the Church is necessary so that their wealth comes to the Church. He sends Cistercians, who come reluctantly with visible trappings to impress the Albigensians with power, carriages, horses, and great wealth. They are not at all impressed; what they are looking for is a Gospel of poverty, a Gospel of free preaching. Saint Dominic passes by and sees what an aberration this is. His visibility will consist of leaving the monastery, not building one, of creating a kind of nomadic religious order, a great nomadic experience. They will go from town to town, *espousing at the same time the living conditions of the poor people there and being close to them*. This is the ideal; later, the Order of Preachers will create the Inquisition, but initially their true ideal is to share the life of these people, to espouse them.

Miguel—*In the context of postmodern society, living according to the Gospel presents new challenges. How do you explain the birth and the growth of the new communities, such as Mother Teresa's, the Brothers of Saint John, or others, that espouse the poor living conditions of people?*

Michel—I don't know much about Mother Teresa's community. From what I've heard and read, I think there are some contradictory features and aspects. It is not often enough said that Mother Teresa left one congregation to found another. She is an Albanian, a former religious, and—what I find positive—a woman who launched a strong movement to be with people in extreme misery. Basically she began by picking up the dying in the streets of Calcutta, which seems to me to be radically evangelical. Up to the present, Mother Teresa is continuing this kind of activity and service. I also see the Little Sisters of the Poor, who welcome the elderly, people who are homeless and have no resources, and also priests who find refuge with them. Their activity continues to make sense and to attract vocations. They still wear a religious habit and in their institutions are essentially faithful to the purpose for which they were founded, taking care of the elderly who have no resources. You mentioned the Brothers of Saint John, but they are a different sort. They were not born in a context of need, as we were discussing. They are disciples of a highly intellectual Dominican priest whose fear of the collapse of the study of philosophy and theology led him to found a community in which the study of Thomistic philosophy is the foundation of everything.

The ambiguity in the case of Mother Teresa is that she remained the undisputed leader for a long time and only recently was replaced. Thus, I cannot say today what necessary evolution will occur in a few years, especially in what concerns very conservative aspects, for example, concerning modern sexuality, a subject in which Mother Teresa is even more uncompromising than John Paul II is.

In one sense, these Sisters are closer to the helping function that Saint Vincent de Paul was able to develop with his Daughters of Charity in the seventeenth century. Here we touch an extremely interesting and difficult question. In spite of all our texts, we have not attacked the root causes of poverty. But who wants to attack the roots of poverty? If I use the word

attack, I acknowledge that I am entering a world of struggle. It is not a question of talking about class struggle in the Marxist sense, but about seeing clearly where the roots of poverty are. The roots lie in social injustice, in the fact that the rich become more and more rich and the poor become more and more poor. Individualism dominates; solidarity does not exist. It is up to us to denounce that situation at different levels while trying to transform it.

It can be said that Mother Teresa achieved a real transformation for the people she aided, but she did so without denouncing the situation. In a way, she comforts the rich and the wealthy. There are people who care for the poor while others continue being rich and dine while poor Lazarus dies at their door. Unlike the Gospel parable, now someone is taking care of the poor Lazarus and salving the conscience of the rich who can continue eating. This is an image, of course, but enter such a world and you necessarily enter a world of social struggle. Can a group of Brothers get involved in such a plan that goes after the roots of poverty and of social injustice and that necessarily gets them involved in politics?

Apart from some Institute *Circulars* on justice, the discourse of the Brothers has not been sufficiently profound in its intellectual analysis of reality. I will offer a comparison. The authors of the great social encyclicals of the Church are not Saint Vincent de Paul, Mother Teresa, or the Pope. They are written by people with profound philosophical and theological preparation. Here we touch a difficulty that I can explain as I see it. The idea of going to the roots of poverty is already old; we find it in the *Declaration*. Once the idea is expressed, however, the analysis does not go on to follow what it implies about the concept of the religious life and of the service of the evangelical life, along with the risks and the conditions for formation and for solidarity with other institutions engaged in the same issues. The discussion on the Church's Social Doctrine—an expression that for a time was criticized and abandoned and is now returning—is rooted in a profound reflection on the confrontation with the Gospel, but it provides no solutions on how to attack the root causes of poverty, except through a discourse that remains an ethical discourse, the sermon on the Beatitudes. The Gospel offers neither sociological nor philosophical analysis.

Miguel—*You speak about the evangelical life, confronting poverty and injustice, but the religious life remains focused on the three vows and on the evangelical counsels. How do you understand this situation today?*

Michel—I think you are posing a very interesting question. I ask myself why I am so allergic to the “poverty–chastity–obedience” triad. In the presentation I prepared for California in 1994,⁴⁹ I said that the triad is useless when you already have in itself the radical dynamism of the foundation. The three vows can even constitute a waste of time and a dispersion, with a risk of perversion when they are replacements for this fundamental dynamism.

What happens, in effect? People commit themselves by the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and with that they find themselves integrated in a well-known institution, and they enter a system. In the ancient perspective, they then must observe poverty, which consists basically in having nothing—but they already have nothing. They are expected to share everything, to receive nothing, to give nothing, to do nothing without permission. When the day does come that they obtain something, they think that permission suffices. Thus they have progressively entered a system that is false. Celibacy is another question that we could discuss. As for obedience, what does it mean? What I find perverse is that the spiritual dynamics in that situation focus on a system of self-preservation, of personal tranquility and stability, whether in a poor or a modest life, or in one of comfort and advantage, as happened in France with the economic means that the new contracts of association with the State provided.

I say that the true dynamism of the foundation, the commitment to follow Jesus Christ in response to the call of God, is a dynamism of *incarnation*, of *solidarity*, and of *transforming commitment*. Those are the vows one could make. In other words, it is the dynamism of seeking God, not of fleeing everything to be with my God, “God and myself.”

⁴⁹ Sauvage, Michel. “The *Declaration*: Refoundation or Renewal?” pp. 187–228, in Meister, Michael F., FSC, ed. *The Declaration: Texts and Contexts*. The Christian Brothers Spirituality Seminar. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994.

What is “seeking God?” In the first place, it is seeking the God who calls us in history, the God who is always ahead and who never stops calling. It is seeking the God who is always about to arrive, always about to turn things upside down. It is to admit that it is God who is searching for us, who is calling us, who is present. Secondly, it is to serve justice, to cause justice, and to take a stand so that justice exists. Thirdly, it is to live as a Brother. This is another way to talk about three positive dynamics.

I can express the three dynamic elements in three words: *announce*, *denounce*, *transform*. Announce, as John Baptist de La Salle means it, involves the awareness that we are sent, that we are not doing this by ourselves, that what we are announcing is a reality that lives in us, that is transforming us, and that is shaking us up. This is witnessing and exhibiting a visibility. Announcing the Gospel to the poor is to manifest what is visible: the blind see, and the deaf hear. This leads to a commitment to denounce, which is a radical engagement to challenge the world, a rejection of the world that is not an escape from the world but a Gospel challenge to the values of the world in the name of another system of values. From this commitment arises the need to transform, to try unceasingly to bring justice to bear, to change something in this world so as to serve others in solidarity and fraternity, but also with critical intelligence, and thus sharing with others in our necessarily pluralistic world.

These dynamic qualities, then, will lead to other attitudes, and thus we will recover a vital sense of celibacy. The freedom that celibacy offers is a true liberty if this celibacy is genuine, not a celibacy closed to love, withdrawn into itself, self-sufficient, or a celibacy of fear, purity, or absence of temptation. This celibacy offers a continuous freedom to live the dynamic virtue without reverting to a position of superiority. Can the father of a family also participate in this dynamic virtue? Each time he poses the question of a radical option or of a denunciation in a particular situation, he must take into account his wife and his children. People who commit themselves to celibacy must be able to do so freely. I know that this language needs to be refined, especially to avoid pursuing a new kind of superiority.

SHIFTS IN A BROTHER'S LIFE

Miguel—When you look at your entire history as far back as your family, what shifts have you observed in the doctrine of the evangelical life in the Church?

Michel—I want to speak first about the shifts that occurred in my own life as a Brother, in my personal life, without being totally subjective, and in particular about three shifts and some constants. Even if it is only a schematic outline, it is important to me.

The three shifts in my life

At a certain point, I became aware that I existed in the Institute and was known there as a person, an active member. When I entered, we were all treated as passive objects who had to observe the *Rule* and to practice obedience. Unlike with a Jesuit, for whom great care is taken to try to discern his talents in order to find, with his help, his unique path in a company engaged in a diversity of ministries, with the Brothers—even though no longer expected to teach no matter what—the diversity of ministries was limited. As a result, we felt that we were treated as objects.

The first shift is that I was considered as a person, someone who had to take the initiative, had the right to speak, and was consulted. Obedience and freedom were combined. Thus, I was asked to prepare a thesis, but I was completely free to choose the topic. Then I was asked to teach at the *Jesus Magister* Institute, but I was also told that I had *carte blanche* about the content of the courses. Given that freedom, I knew that I could be creative and inventive. I know, however, that this was not the case with all the Brothers to the same extent.

The second shift concerns my changing image of the Institute. I entered an Institute that was a citadel, an Institute that rejected the exterior world. Thus, when I was eight years old, I wanted to be a Brother. My mother had the foresight to enroll my older brother, Étienne, at the Estaimpuis boarding school. The Brother recruiter would visit our home quite often and enjoy a meal with us. Because Étienne was a Scout, my mother asked

Brother Firmilien (the recruiter), “Can my son continue to be a Scout at Estaimpuis?” Brother Firmilien replied, “Oh, Madame Sauvage, we have our own teaching methods and don’t need any external ones.” That shocked me.

Another example is in reference to the 1946 General Chapter, which decided that Brothers must no longer participate in summer camps, Scout camps, and the like. That same Chapter insisted on returning to the Founder’s *Rule* and then had it approved by the Holy See in 1947. The Institute, self-sufficient, needed no one and was a citadel. That same mentality was evident in 1943 and in 1944, when my brother, a priest, asked Brother Paul, the Visitor, “Why don’t the Brothers, who are catechists by vocation, study theology?” The Visitor is reported to have replied, “The day the Brothers study theology, they will no longer obey.” This reaction illustrates the same reflex of the Institute’s total seclusion within itself. Because private education in France at the time was administering itself completely autonomously, not much progress on the side of openness occurred.

The major change took place in fields where the Institute accepted some opening of itself. This occurred in two ways, but the initiative never came from the Institute’s governance structure itself. It does happen at times that Brothers are able to initiate projects that are more open. Thus, the journal *Catéchistes* and the movement to renew religious studies that followed it were created, thanks to movements within the Church. Through many difficulties, Brother Vincent Ayel, an active force in this movement in the Church, succeeded in bringing something of it to the Institute. The same was true for Brother Honoré de Silvestri, who was able to “have some Brothers leave the Institute” to work with teams of priests and laypeople who were involved in the world of workers. Other changes occurred that were mostly caused by events, for example, the French government’s contracts with teachers, which significantly changed the Institute, although from the outside.

The 1966–1967 General Chapter demonstrates in its texts that the Institute now accepts the need for, and the positive nature of, this openness. It was a movement parallel to what was happening in the Church,

which always has a tendency to enclose itself in its structure, in its internal life. External events, including political events, make things happen, such as the temporal sovereignty of the Pope and the 1904 expulsion of the Brothers from France. One of my convictions about *the Institute's renewal is that the Institute cannot live without facing the world*. Recall here the truth in the expression of Father Chenu about the foundation of the Dominican Order: the Gospel in the situation. The outpouring of the Gospel stems from the needs of the world.

The third shift is to discover the apostolic dimension at the heart of the outpouring of the Brother's life and the return to the poor. These shifts also apply to the religious life in general. We cannot live other than in relation to the world and to the Church, and certainly not on an autonomous path.

Certain constants in my life as a Brother

As I look at my life now, I must acknowledge some fundamental elements that I owe to the Institute, first, *the vital importance of interior prayer*; second, in interior prayer, *the actual sense of the presence of God*, and third, *the unity of the mystery of Jesus Christ*.

These are the constants in my life that have remained throughout all the changes. For example, I completely changed my idea of God. In my religious youth, I was convinced that the world here below made no sense, except to prepare for the eternal life that alone has meaning. I had to discover that the idea of God cannot be separated from the world in which we are living and that this world has meaning because God wills its creation and its development. The presence of God is a permanent, living reality that I experienced and that, in a certain way, led me to enter the Institute.

Miguel—Looking back at your experiences, from your family until today, what theological shifts are most significant?

Michel—I will focus on Vatican Council II and speak about the aspects of the Council that to me most explicitly appear to be shifts and displacements.

The first theological shift is the Council itself, the fact that the Council Fathers took charge of the Word and wanted to hold the Second Vatican Council, a reality that I experienced at close hand. As prepared by the Roman Curia, the Council was supposed to meet and then to approve or to modify a bit some seventeen previously prepared drafts of the documents. The Fathers refused to be nothing but a registration chamber. They took the time to establish conciliar commissions that functioned as an expression of the entire Council, its majority in particular. That the Council placed itself in its own hands constituted a major shift.

For me, the Council's most fundamental theological change was in the concept of Revelation. It is a cultural change, a considerable revolution. The habitual formula was that Revelation is contained in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition, two sources, but more importantly, that it ends with the death of the last Apostle. Vatican II reversed the question completely. Revelation, it says, is neither Scripture nor Tradition nor the two together. Revelation is God, who manifests his Mystery in history, in Jesus Christ. It remains true that Jesus Christ is the term of Revelation, but the risen Jesus Christ continues to live in his Church through the Spirit. Revelation is not accomplished; it continues in history today. Of course, it must be verified and discerned, but God continues to speak in history. Is it not true—and it is evident upon consideration—that in the history of the religious life, if Revelation had ended with Jesus Christ, only one religious order would have sufficed? But we cannot even trace the religious life back to Jesus Christ in his earthly history, for it arose over the course of the Church's history.

The Church's life is the Spirit's constant creation. Consequently—this is the cultural problem—truth is not a totality that can be acquired at any given time. We are always searching for the truth, because we never possess it. Another cultural aspect is that truth cannot be delivered from on high in a pyramidal movement. We can only find truth through the many. This is true in the scientific domain as in the field of literary expression; truth always entails various registers. We have been habituated in the Church to reduce truth to a rationalistic and authoritarian concept. We must note that reality is far more complex and rich; moreover,

truth is not in the abstract order and uniquely rational. Truth is the authenticity of a human life. It is found in the correspondence between the image we have of the world and the reality of this world. This is a fundamental change that certainly applies to the Institute, to the changes in the *Rule*, for example, and also in many other applications.

The second theological shift is the image of the Church. We can read about this major shift in chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium*. Pope Pius X wrote in the Encyclical *Acerbo Nimis* (On Teaching Christian Doctrine, April 15, 1905) that the Church is an elitist society, because it is hierarchical.⁵⁰ This statement is related to the fact that the Church has always preferred authoritarian regimes and monarchies. The fundamental shift in *Lumen Gentium*, introduced thanks to Cardinal Suenens, is to add a chapter on the People of God between the chapter on the Mystery of the Church and the chapters on the Hierarchy and on the Laity. This added chapter declares that Baptism is the fundamental sacrament, that the universal priesthood is the true, definitive priesthood, that this priesthood is exercised in the real life of the people, that all members of the Church are equal, and that a fundamental equality exists among them. I am not pretending that this theology passed into reality, but I do say that it is a revolution. Whether or not the Church wants it, this revolution is the result of the influence of democratic progress in the Church. Something is evident here of the primitive Church, which did not claim to be a society, certainly not a perfect society. That Church was a network of small communities that developed with considerable autonomy. The catastrophe

⁵⁰ Cf. also, even more recently, the text of Pius XII quoted by Father Ghislain Lafont, OSB, at the conclusion of his chapter on “The Gregorian Form of the Church”: “By virtue of God’s Will, the faithful are divided into two classes: the clergy and the laity. By virtue of the same Will is established the twofold sacred hierarchy, namely, of orders and jurisdiction. Besides—as has also been divinely established—the power of orders (through which the ecclesiastical hierarchy is composed of Bishops, priests, and ministers) comes from receiving the Sacrament of Holy Orders. But the power of jurisdiction, which is conferred upon the Supreme Pontiff directly by divine right, flows to the Bishops by the same right, but only through the Successor of Saint Peter” (1955 encyclical *Ad sinarum gentem*, *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 47), 5–14 (Lafont, 2000, p. 61). There is another text with the same inspiration in Pius XII’s Address to the Second World Congress for the Lay Apostolate, AAS 49 (1957), 924–925. See Lafont’s commentary: “This text is very clear; it begins with the distinction between clergy and laity, but says nothing more about the latter, who do not even figure in the synthesis. As for the clergy, they are defined by power” (Lafont, 2000, p. 62).

was Constantine, who made a Church an empire alongside the empire, with all the conflicts that followed while the civil power regained its autonomy (the process of secularization.) We can well say that the Church is not democratic, but it now finds itself in an irreversible evolution. We see clearly that one of the wishes for the election of bishops, as of the pope, is that the people of God participate more.

Thus we have underlined the shift that consists in recognizing the importance of the individual person, a philosophical change due in large part to Christian personalism and to the role it played in French Catholicism before the Council, whereas Marxism does not recognize this importance of the person. The result is a shift in the link between person and community, for community can only blossom if it is constituted by free, autonomous, and responsible persons, that is to say, responsible also for the community. This profound cultural shift also occurs, to be sure, in its own translation in the Institute.

The third theological shift is the relationship of the Church with the world. I will not dwell on it here, but this important displacement consists, for the Church, in regarding itself not as next to the world but in the world and a servant of the world, while at the same time it acknowledges the world's autonomy. We must accept, then, that the Church and our Institute cannot survive unless they are stimulated, even attacked, by the world, because the world has gained its autonomy over the Church through political, scientific, and exegetical conflicts and has become aware that it exists and can be Word of God distinct from the Church. All Revelation cannot be reduced to the Church. The Church must agree to acknowledge this, just as it must acknowledge that it cannot be the totality of the human. Humans are people in the earthly city, with skills, in professions, and all of that cannot be governed by the Church. There can be a Christian inspiration in life, in all of human life, but there is no Christian solution, whether political, economic, or social.

This brings me back to my third personal shift. I discovered that I was not primarily, or only, a Brother, but first a man and a Christian, and that in all the realities of my life as a Brother, I must live my life as a man and as a Christian. What had been presented to us was life as a Brother under-

stood as some kind of totality that encompassed everything. Some facts related to this matter come to mind.

The first example is what I heard in my religious youth, that we Brothers were stripped of our rights in 1904. From that time on, whatever a Brother could take from the State—for example, during military service—was secret compensation. This means that the only consideration was the dimension of Brother, not human reality, human truth, or the authenticity of human society.

The second example concerns the Brothers at Annappes. In 1904, the community at Annappes was not closed; it remained open as a community of retired Brothers after the groups of young men in formation were assembled and relocated in Belgium. The retired Brothers, because they were not teaching class, were allowed to remain. In 1913, I think it was, an election took place. At that time, a citizen did not need an identity card to be able to vote. The names of some Brothers who were living in Belgium, or even in Brazil, were still on the voting list at Annappes. Some Brothers at Annappes went to vote four or five times, each time assuming a different identity. The ruse was discovered, and they were expelled from their residence as a result. In no way did they believe it to be the wrong thing to do. They had no idea of civil law and citizenship; the vocation of Brother absorbed everything.

The third example concerns the basic certification, the *Brevet élémentaire*, required to teach in a primary school. Some Brothers failed the examination. I knew a Brother who took the test more than eight times, an obstinacy that indicates total ignorance of the secular order as well as fundamental dishonesty with respect to the students.

I admit that I chose examples that are caricatures, but they illustrate the mentality that existed according to which the status of Brother and the spirit of faith conferred professional competence. The reversal is, therefore, important. If these examples are extreme, they reveal an important reality. All this needs further development. By referring to three conciliar constitutions of Vatican II, I derived their consequences in the life of the Brother. That invites new research on a concept of truth and of the person, as well as of democracy and of the world's autonomy.

Chapter 17 – *THE “REFOUNDATION”:* *A CONTINUAL RESURGENCE OF AN EVER* *YOUNG WELLSPRING; THE FRAGILE HOPE* *OF A BROTHER OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS*

Brother Miguel Campos, FSC

HISTORICAL NOTE

In Part One of this book, readers were able to sense the personal and institutional tensions that existed during the formative years of Brother Michel Sauvage (1923–1956). He developed his identity through profound relationships with the communities of Brothers in the District of Lille and in the international milieu of the Generalate in Rome. This first portion of his itinerary left him fully prepared to exercise extraordinary leadership at the General Chapter of 1966–1967.

In Rome and throughout his professional career, Brother Michel distinguished himself as an excellent professor and a rigorous researcher. His teaching was directly related to his systematic and critical reflection. He learned with his students. Everything converged in a body of work with practical applications to the life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He read extensively and kept himself up-to-date during a time of great intellectual challenges. His years as a professor at the *Jesus Magister* Institute in Rome are still appreciated by his former students within and outside the Institute.

In his most productive years (1956–1978), Brother Michel found himself in a most uncomfortable position in the Institute’s history. Many Brothers from throughout the world admired and appreciated him for his skill and his ability to relate, but at the same time, others who were resistant to change thwarted his every effort. During his time in Rome, his influence extended to the entire Institute, as we saw in Part Two of this book.

In this final stage of his itinerary, during his years of synthesis and wisdom (1978–2001), we see Brother Michel, in spite of a serious illness, preoccupied with serving the poor. He develops, in a new language, a synthesis of his ideas about the religious life. This turning point in his itinerary represents a new shift with respect to the perspectives of the Second Vatican Council and of the 1966–1967 General Chapter.

The *Declaration* does not suggest a refoundation. In unambiguous language, it clearly affirms that the adapted renewal is not a refoundation that is out of phase with the original foundation.⁵¹ Nevertheless, thirty years later, perhaps inspired by certain statements of Brother Superior John Johnston—and especially by the ups and downs of the Institute in general—Brother Michel seems to move to the idea of refoundation.

Impelled by the virtue of hope, Brother Michel discovers in the stages of his life and of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools that the wellspring of the foundational charism resurges every time the Brothers contemplate the God of present history and are attentive to the urgent needs of abandoned children and young people.

THEOLOGIAN FOR WHOM?

Michel, a theologian who concentrated on the theology of the religious life, did not construct a general treatise applicable indiscriminately to every form of the religious life in the Church. His perspective takes as its starting point the experience of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the Church and in the world.

The lay dimension is not new in his theological work. Since his doctoral thesis, *Catéchèse et Laïcat* (1961), his central topic is the laity in the ministry of the Word. In the second part of his thesis, Brother Michel finds himself for the first time before the figure of a Founder of communities of lay apostles. Thus he systematically develops distinctive aspects of the

⁵¹ “The community must also conduct its examination according to objective norms. There can be no question of ‘refounding’ the Institute, but respect for the action of the Holy Spirit in the past will in no way prevent the brothers from being equally attentive to the signs of the times today” (*Declaration* 7.3).

participation of the teaching Brother in an apostolic ministry, clearly distinguishing it from the ministry exercised by the hierarchical priesthood and diaconate. In the turbulent postconciliar decade, Brother Michel continues to lead the reflection on the theme of the laity as he deepens his understanding of the new approaches from Vatican Council II.

An important modulation in Brother Michel's thinking, thanks to his contacts with Brothers throughout the world, is his insight that the experience of John Baptist de La Salle is a response to the historical process. Thanks to the thesis of Brother Miguel Campos, *L'Itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, Michel precisely understands and takes up with renewed passion the Holy Founder's itinerary of incarnation, crisis, and searching. As a result of this dialogue with new, more authentic, evangelical foundations of the religious life, he reaches a new and unexpected synthesis, which emerges in their shared work, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*. Three dynamic elements in this synthesis sustain the Brother's spiritual and ministerial life. First, as a man of God, he experiences interiorly the power of the Gospel that he is proclaiming in his daily life. Second, from one commitment to another, he becomes incarnated in the world of the poor to transform their lives. Third, he does so within a fraternal community that constructs itself until it reaches the point where its members are able to hear God and to serve the poor. Without this profound unity, it is impossible to comprehend the Lasallian spiritual teaching. During this final stage in his life, we see Brother Michel working with Brother Miguel to spread these dynamic spiritual ideas throughout the entire Institute.

With this new sensitivity to personal itineraries, to life experiences, and to the Word of God read in the daily context, Brother Michel develops a new theology, step by step. His reflection during this stage in his life focuses his attention increasingly on the internal dynamics of discernment and prayer. Then his searching leads him to a radical place at the periphery of the institutional Church and of the religious life. He senses that he must dispense with the forms and the structures known and approved in the Church during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

His concern leads him to work with Brother Miguel Campos on the pub-

lication, in 1989, of a study of John Baptist de La Salle's *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*. In spite of the health problems then beginning to occur, Brother Michel maintains his pace of exhaustive and rigorous research, which now focuses on an even more radical understanding of the Lasallian spiritual itinerary. Thus, this new study brings into focus for us the three movements of interior prayer and its intimate connection with the Brother's ministry. The first movement starts at the heart of life, of history, of the world, and of our work, and it urges us to perceive the signs of the God of life and to celebrate God's presence in few words, in silence, and in suffering. This initial movement leads us to a new dynamic force at the core of salvation history, to the mystery of Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. In this second, central, movement, we read the Gospel and contemplate its effect as it is slowly transforming us into his disciples. From this transcendental central point, the third movement arises, returns us to the earthly reality from which we began our prayer, and helps us to focus our life anew on the Gospel and to ask for God's grace. In sum, these three movements represent the spiritual attitudes of the true disciple. Attentive to the signs of God's absence and presence, we leave our daily life and lay aside our needs, our expectations, and our work, and enter the core of the history of salvation, the source of our power. Having admired the marvels that God has produced in Jesus Christ and in the history of the Church, in this same movement that drew us away from the daily grind, we return transformed so that we can face urgent problems. We "leave" to "go to the center," and at the center, we "embrace" with new energy our reality to "incarnate the Gospel" in it. The movement is continual from our actions to Jesus and from Jesus to our actions.

Brother Michel's experience and employment after leaving Rome can help us understand his profound motivation.

- He experiences communion with women and men religious who rediscover their vocation to apostolic ministry in relation to the Gospel.
- He assists the Brothers in a rehabilitation residence for young people who have quit using drugs or have been released from prison.

- He volunteers to serve his Brothers as Regional in France and supports their educational initiatives and, especially, their new responses to the abandonment of marginalized youth, immigrants, and the poor.
- He works with the parish's Baptism preparation team that includes lay ministers.
- He becomes the Director of Lasallian Studies in a new context in the Institute and gives special impetus to a new reading of the Institute's origins.
- In his final years, he moves to a retirement community of Brothers, first to serve, then to be served.

This kaleidoscope of ministerial activities leads Brother Michel to the heart of life, where he learns to respond—not so much to the needs of the institution as to the urgent needs of the most destitute people—and he experiences what it means to place himself in the human condition of the poor and in solidarity with them.

That is why Brother Michel, at the end of his life, shares an innovative reflection that signals a shift, a new aspect of his research. We find one example in the text he wrote for a meeting of the Brothers of Latin America, held at Araruama (Brazil) in 1997, entitled “Perspectives on Refoundation.”⁵² In it he observes that the Lasallian lay perspective stems from life itself, not from some theoretical option. Recalling John Baptist de La Salle's experience, he writes, “His methods and goal are completely pragmatic” (*Cahiers lasalliens* 55, 2001, p. 252).

This is a different kind of experience of Church beyond the distinction between clergy and laity. Because this ecclesial perspective is fundamental in the Founder's itinerary, a new reading of it, guided by Brother Michel's reflection, can certainly enable us to understand how a new charism is born in the Church.

⁵² Sauvage, Michel. *Perspectives de Refondation*. Conférence du F. Michel Sauvage à l'Assemblée de la RELAL, Araruama, March 1997, in Sauvage, Michel. “Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et la Fondation de son Institut. “Frères consacrés” en Église pour le Monde.” Rome: Maison saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle. *Cahiers lasalliens* 55, pp. 246–62.

This present chapter reconstructs the final portion of Brother Michel's itinerary of synthesis by detecting the way in which the interaction between successful activities and failed initiatives fosters his emerging attitude of total abandonment into the Father's hands. Brother Michel, like Job and De La Salle before him, can make his own these words: "Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh!" (Jb 1:21). Today in this narrative we can draw closer to his experience and share his insights.

Because of his illness, Brother Michel was unable to complete his new synthesis. Consequently, his last articles and conferences represent his privileged witness of a new time that is on the horizon.

AN ITINERARY THAT CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

Among lights and shadows, among successes and uncertain failures, Brother Michel gradually reaches the paradoxical core of the wisdom of the cross at the heart of history. Because of his illness and his limitations, he senses his solidarity with all humanity. In this dark and endless night that is prolonged by suffering, he opens his eyes on the "renewal of the young fountain."

Brother Michel discovers the source of the refoundation that will renew the foundational charism in our here and now in the rich and complex process of the current transformation of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In this process he finds a new way to speak about the apostolic religious life. These changes in the language hold the key to understand the refoundation and to discover the strategies for its implementation.

How does this language evolve during the years of Brother Michel's life-long itinerary? Sequentially—at times, simultaneously—we have spoken about adapted renewal, revitalization, conversion, transformation, and refoundation.

This varied vocabulary emerges in a rich and complex process of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools—engaged in a common task, once again understanding its identity, and defining its purpose here and now in this world and in a history of untold changes and unprece-

dented rapidity. The conclusion of the *Declaration* defines this process as a matter of life or death:

Societies, like individuals, grow old and die once the habits inherited from the past outweigh the will to renewal... The destiny of the Institute is in the hands of the brothers. They must not expect those in authority to give ready-made solutions to the new problems that come from a world in evolution. It is up to each brother in the presence of God to start out along the path of spiritual conversion and determine to have a personal share in the great community work of renewal and adaptation. This is the price each must pay if the threat of stagnation is to be warded off and the Institute is to live in youth and vigor. (*Declaration* 53.2)

A reflection that evolves from 1967 to 1994

Until the end of his life, Brother Michel engages in a continuous process of research. Unfortunately, the interviews end abruptly during the visits of Brother Miguel Campos to Annappes in 1994. Brother Michel's state of health is becoming increasingly precarious, and the worsening problems require multiple surgeries. Furthermore, Brother Miguel, after discerning his decision with Brother Michel, volunteered for Project 100+, launched by the Institute after the 42nd General Chapter, and is about to return to Cuba. In spite of difficult communications with Cuba, both of them keep in touch by telephone and by fax. Moreover, Brother Miguel is able to visit Annappes on his way to the meeting of Visitors in 1998.

For these reasons, the interviews cover Brother Michel's itinerary only until 1994. If this present narrative were limited to the already completed interviews, his reflections during the last stage of his life would not be included. The incorporation of certain articles and conferences that he wrote later in his life explains the different style of the final chapter of this book.

A reflection in process since 1994, especially as developed in the 1997 Araruama text

From 1994 we have a pivotal⁵³ text, "The *Declaration*: Refoundation or

⁵³ It is pivotal, because it serves as the link between two different periods of Brother Michel's research.—Ed.

Renewal?" Brother Michel prepared it for the Spirituality Seminar sponsored by Christian Brothers Conference (the USA/Toronto Region).

To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Declaration*, the Spirituality Seminar examined various aspects of the text, the new contexts in the present time, and the perspectives for the future. Brother Michel could not attend, but his contribution is included in the published minutes.⁵⁴ In the introduction of his conference, he explains his approach:

I have organized [it] in three parts: 1, in its literal meaning, the *Declaration* is not the refoundation of the Institute; 2, whatever the phrasing, it seems to me that the new approach that it has provided is related to a refounding dynamism more than to mere adjustments for a better adaptation (this is in complete agreement with the appeal formulated in the Second Vatican Council's decree *Perfectae Caritatis* and Pope Paul VI's *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*); 3, with the passing of time, have we not been led to perceive the realism of Pope Paul's formula in *Ecclesiae Sanctae* 3, about the renewal of religious institutes? From now on, renewal must become a permanent feature of the Institute. These points undoubtedly reflect an uneasy realism which, somewhat in the dark, can be lived positively only as hope (Sauvage, in Meister, 1994, p. 189).

Michel's position in 1997 and 1999

A discussion of the 1994 text is not included in this book; suffice it to say that it represents Brother Michel's thinking about refoundation at the time.

Instead, we include two later texts that Brother Michel prepared at the end of the 1990s. He wrote the shorter, but no less lucid, text in 1997 for the meeting of the Commission on the Educational Mission of RELAL (*Región Latinoamericana Lasallista*) in Araruama, Brazil. The other, more complex, text in 1999 was for a preparatory meeting before the 43rd General Chapter (2000). Brother Michel was unable to attend this second meeting because of his poor health. Surely, it is not accidental that he is speaking about refoundation in Latin America, where the Institute

⁵⁴ Sauvage, Michel. "The Declaration: Refoundation or Renewal?" In Meister, Michael F., FSC, ed. *The Declaration: Texts and Contexts. The Christian Brothers Spirituality Seminar*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994, pp. 187–228.

has a strong presence and where the educational needs of children and youth from poor families inspire many new responses. In fact, Latin America and the Caribbean and their cultural complexity form a Region of the Institute with many *islands of creativity*⁵⁵ that are opening the door to new beginnings for many Brothers and laypeople who are engaged in constructing a more just and equitable world. These two fundamental texts express this final stage of Brother Michel's life.

ARARUAMA: PERSPECTIVES ON REFOUNDATION

What appears as radically new in the theological development of Brother Michel Sauvage is his entry point for thinking about the laity. From now on, it cannot be the priest–lay distinction but, instead, *experiencing Church in another way*. But where are these perspectives and the keys for understanding them to be found?

From his rereading of the foundation itinerary of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Brother Michel proposes the following key elements:

- John Baptist de La Salle leaves his clerical world to immerse himself in the lay world of Reims.
- His experience leads him to join a community that is composed exclusively of laymen.
- He radically experiences the passage from a powerful and clerical Church to a fraternal Church that is attentive to the needs of the world.
- To do that, he fosters the development of the lay identity by means of the experience of association for a specific mission.
- Thus he discovers the need for the community to be autonomous and for its members to be equal as they respond to the passage from a hierarchical Church to a Church as People of God.

⁵⁵ This expression summarily describes the creative and alternative educational responses in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the past two decades (*Lasallian presence*, MEL [*Mission éducative lasallienne*] *Bulletin* 16, March 2005).

- He reads the community's itinerary in the light of the Gospel, which consecrates them in life and for life.

Michel—⁵⁶

John Baptist de La Salle experiences Church in another way, beyond the distinction between priesthood and laity.

Four features of this Lasallian itinerary make it possible for us to see that the issue of the laity is subsidiary, as is that of the priesthood, according to the dictionary definition of subsidiary. The issue of the lay state rises in support of a more important reality. Although not a priority in itself, it exists and finds its meaning in the larger context: *experiencing Church in another way.*

* First, almost at the beginning of his itinerary as Founder, *John Baptist de La Salle leaves the clerical milieu in order to live in the lay world.* A priest by vocation, he intends to devote his life to the service of God, and he does so as a canon of the Cathedral of Reims. He spends a good portion of his time in recitation of the hours of the Divine Office and in the prayer of praise and of intercession. His relationships are with the other members of the Cathedral Chapter. Financially, he has his family patrimony, and he also enjoys a substantial stipend from the Church of Reims. He is a man of the Church—in a sense, he is only of the Church.

An existential shock turns his life upside down. At first, he endures the shock and is even tempted to avoid it before accepting it. He is led to become aware that at his door is an entire category of young people who, because of the economic and social situation of their marginalized families, are deprived of any chance of education, any hope of employment, any possibility of participating in the life of the city. He sets out to remedy this situation. His life's project becomes more evangelical than ever before. From that moment on, he goes beyond the simple wish to provide for the human development of these underprivileged youth and becomes concerned ini-

⁵⁶ Text from Sauvage, Michel, 1997, pp. 250–54.

tially with this small group of schoolteachers who are engaged in this difficult educational project. He incarnates himself in their world, and this leads him to “change his vocation.” He resigns his canonry (and at the same time distributes his patrimony to the poor) in order to be as close as possible to the schoolmasters whom he is accompanying. The image is striking: he exits the cathedral and abandons the company of canons. *He renounces the clerical world that is his in order to join a struggling community of laymen.*

In this new state, Monsieur de La Salle continues to perform certain specific functions of the priestly ministry (he will be the Brothers’ chaplain). A number of his activities and, certainly, the greater portion of his time now fall under a category not specifically priestly but—if it may be said cautiously—in the worldly, the secular realm. Somehow, beyond all traditional labels, *he becomes lay among laypeople.* He takes as his own their commitment to serve the world, their preoccupations as teachers, and the importance they give to the secular domain that requires their professional competence.

From his shocking discovery of distress in the world, this thirty-year-old priest discovers a new call from God and a new mission to serve abandoned young people. On this basis, not because of any ideology or even because of any reflection about the Church, he vigorously moves, insofar as he is concerned, beyond the rigid priest–lay distinction. *In his own person, he completes the prophetic passage from a clerical Church enclosed within itself to a Church for the world.*

* Second, very early in his itinerary as Founder, he comes to the conclusion that the difficult educational tasks with young people who are constantly threatened with neglect require, as he wrote in 1690, complete men, that is to say, men who consecrate themselves totally, not thinking back to an ecclesiastical career but having no thought of turning back at all. He will choose a radical option with his Brothers: *the young community will be composed exclusively of lay members.*

The fundamental option is the new Community's mission to give a particular category of marginalized young people a basic human education and access to the vibrant sources of the Gospel. He senses the urgency of this mission from his own experience, and he can calmly write that the Institute he was led to found *is urgently needed*. Neither an ad poster or a song slogan, the statement comes from lived experience. The resolute option of the Institute's exclusively lay status might seem to be a subsidiary matter, but the Founder views it as a necessary condition for the vitally important mission of his Brothers to the young people whose faces he sees.

It is not an ideological choice or a theological point of view about the value and the role of the laity. His methods and goal are completely pragmatic, but no less prophetic. In the Church of the time, he establishes a Society of men who are consecrated and vowed to the apostolate, all of them laymen by their positive choice. His spiritual teaching will raise the standing of this situation by applying to the Brothers the great Pauline texts on the diversity of charisms and on the importance of the mission to proclaim the Gospel by exercising the ministry of the Word of God in catechesis. The proclamation of the Gospel, however, also occurs in the commitment to change the human situation of the young people whom they serve. By espousing the life of this Society of laymen, *he completes with them the passage from a powerful Church to a Church serving human needs*.

* Third, at the cost of a struggle against clerical power that will last a lifetime, John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers establish in the Church of their time a new Society of laymen consecrated to God for a specific mission. Very quickly, indeed, he and his Brothers come to understand that the educational and apostolic success of their young community requires them to form and to affirm its **original identity** and **autonomy** in the Church. Speaking of the moment when the Lasallian project takes form, one of the Founder's biographers applies to him the text in the Book of Revelation, "Look, I am making the whole of creation new" (Rv 21:5).

John Baptist de La Salle is not thinking at all about establishing or defining *the original identity of this new Society* by any existing category that might apply. He is surely not unaware, for he well knows that his foundation must some day obtain official recognition from civil and Roman authorities. But in his eyes, this approval will not give the Brothers the sense of identity and the inner strength that will come from a twofold, personal and collective, experience.

Initially, they themselves progressively structure their Society, for in this century of absolute power, the former canon closely associates the Brothers, these laymen, in establishing their *Rule* of life and their internal governance. Second, to affirm their consciousness of this identity, he writes for them and with them the professional manual that will be his bestseller, *Conduct of the Christian Schools*. He also develops an original spiritual teaching that is based on the resources and the requirements of their evangelical vocation as members consecrated in the Church-servant of the world. I will return to this point in a moment.

He establishes, lays claim to, and vigorously defends **the autonomy of his community**. He fights to the end of his life to achieve this complete autonomy, including the election of a Superior whom the Brothers choose from among themselves. Thus, in this rigidly hierarchical Church, he becomes the prophetic Founder of a type of congregation as yet previously unknown: *a truly fraternal, ecclesial community that is based on the fundamental equality of its members*, not on a theoretical reflection about the Church. Quite simply, both the urgency of the new Institute's mission and the freedom needed to achieve it require this autonomy in a corps of laypeople. Living as far as he is able with his Brothers, John Baptist de La Salle experiences with them, it can be said, *the passage from a clerical Church to a Church as the people of God*, a Church as a fraternal community, based on the union of hearts.

* Fourth, John Baptist de La Salle lives and understands his itinerary and that of the foundation of his Institute as a spiritual itiner-

ary in the fullest possible meaning of these terms:

—A spiritual itinerary involves a recognition of the priority of God’s strong, gentle guidance and of the Spirit’s irrepressible activity. In his own words, John Baptist de La Salle says that he could never have imagined the course that he would have to follow. “Indeed, if I had ever thought that the care I was taking of the schoolmasters out of pure charity would ever have made it my duty to live with them, I would have dropped the whole project.” He will begin his *Meditation* on the origins of the Institute’s founding with an act of recognition (in every sense of the word) “That God in his Providence has established the Christian Schools.” *A Church of the Spirit has priority over a Church of the established law.*

—A spiritual itinerary is a journey of faith. God enters human history, where God’s imperceptible action is carried out in the daily fabric of human relations, at the heart of events. For John Baptist de La Salle, faith, his choice as the spirit of the Institute, means to pay attention, above all, to the specific events of history in order to discern God’s call in them and to be obedient to history, rather than attempt to live on the basis of established principles. *The event has priority over the institution.*

—A spiritual, evangelical itinerary of what he calls zeal, inseparable from faith, is a free and responsible commitment to accomplish God’s work. Zeal is inseparably sustained by the inner dynamism of being possessed by Christ and by the awareness of the intolerable fracture that deprives of “salvation” a specific category of young people. In hope, the Brother’s mission directs him to those who are far away. *The priority of the mission is to announce the Gospel to the poor.*

—A spiritual, evangelical itinerary involves both the consecration of a life and the consecration by a life. Initially, his awareness of the mission’s urgency and of the call’s power urges the Brother, in the words of his vow to the Most Holy Trinity, *to consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I shall be able and as you*

will require of me. But the initial impulse must at the same time be incarnated, verified, and fortified in the daily gift. Bit by bit, the Brothers' gift of themselves to the young makes their consecration to the living God effective. *They consecrate their life, but life consecrates them.*

Miguel—For Brother Michel, it is not just a matter of “dreaming” about an ideal. We must go to communities that are worn out because of the long road and sustain what they have undertaken, in order to renew, reform, and use our best resources, that is to say, so that these communities are not lost along the way.

Some of the negative criticism focused on the fact that the Declaration does not offer a clear strategy for the adapted renewal that the Institute has been requesting since 1966. This attitude, however, was a sign of fatigue and of mistrust of change.

Michel—⁵⁷

“Let us hasten toward institutions grown weary through time, to support their reforms, and to put everything in motion so that the tide of ecumenism may not ebb away.”⁵⁸

* Mystical impulse and political strategy—I am referring here especially to the text of the *Declaration*. It translates the mystical impulse about which I am speaking into objectives for the renewal that it strongly supports. I merely list these five objectives.

* *The priority of the educational service of the poor.*

* *The apostolic purpose of the Institute and the ministerial vocation of the Brothers.*

* *The original and novel relationship between catechesis and human learning.*

* *The forcefully renewed vision of the Brother's religious life based on its specific qualities: apostolic, lay or secular, and also juridical: with*

⁵⁷ Text from Sauvage, Michel, 1997, pp. 257–58.

⁵⁸ Roger Schutz. *The power of the provisional*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969, p. 79.

respect to consecration, shifting from the religious state to the evangelical life; with respect to the mission of the Brother, shifting from duality to unity; with respect to the community, shifting from the uniformity of individuals to the union among persons.

** Finally, the Declaration's strongly expressed objective to renew the works, especially the schools.*

Less frequently noted are the *Declaration's* defined strategies for a policy of renewal:

** Strategy for effective service of the poor*—"Different historical and sociological contexts provide opportunities for chapters on the local level to define clearly and according to a realistic plan how to engage personnel and structures in the service of the poor" (*Declaration* 28.3).

** Strategy for revision and reconsideration of existing works*—required by the return to the poor, by catechetical renewal, by the renewal of the school, and by openness to other apostolic areas (*Declaration* 28.2, 31.1–2, 38.3, 49.2–3).

** Strategy for creativity and mobility*—changes in the world, new calls requiring a policy about new foundations (*Declaration* 33.1–3, 49.5, 50–51).

** Major strategy of respect for and formation of the agents of renewal*—"The destiny of the Institute is in the hands of the Brothers" (*Declaration* 53.2)—of each Brother, of the community in dialogue, and of Chapters and administrators in listening to the Brothers and to the calls of the world while remaining in a state of constant renewal.

Miguel—Lastly, Brother Michel specifies the three characteristic aspects of this itinerary of research: exodus and incarnation, pluralism and sharing, and fragility and hope.

Michel—

***Exodus and incarnation**

Start with the calls of the world; then plunge into it, be incarnated in it. At the start of the foundation, leave the clerical world, the

institutional Church, to hear new calls and to respond to new needs. In our day, doesn't this mean, above all, acknowledging that to a great extent and in vast areas, we have already left? We have left our institutions, or if you prefer, they have left us. So it is an Exodus, a departure, but the purpose is to make new departures based on perceived needs—the *Exodus to foster the incarnation*. In the Institute, a movement has already begun to plunge directly into the reality of the human world and to face the urgent needs of abandoned youth. My dream is that this movement will grow, that our leaders will give it a more vigorous impetus, that it will come to appear as normal, and that the presentation of the Brother's vocation to potential candidates will also take note and not be based only on the educational institution.

I still dream that this double movement of exodus and of incarnation will be a more decisive element in the formation of the young Brothers and that initial formation will resolutely take the path of direct contact and followup with the reality of young people in distressing situations. This aspect must not weaken the insistence on an indispensable interior formation in contemplative prayer that is linked with God's plan of salvation, with the Face of this God of Love in Jesus Christ, and with awareness of human distress.

The unique characteristic of the Christian faith is to reject any separation between the cause of God and that of humanity. Faith is entirely based on Jesus Christ, whom it professes as truly God and truly human, with the result that as disciples of Jesus Christ, we need not flee the world, for God came into this world. Consequently, we do not distance ourselves from God when we work in the world to serve humanity there, because the will of the Father who is in heaven is that the Kingdom take root within our humanity.

*** Pluralism and sharing**

According to the people, the situations, and the places, the perception of the needs leads to a variety of responses that are impossible to catalogue in advance. *The creative freedom of people is the norm.*

Their personal autonomy must be totally assured, although specific needs and actual situations serve as the starting points.

As a result, *pluralism* will be a more and more extensive element in the activities of the Brothers. In the broadest sense, the educational options can be many and varied. My dream includes a range of educational activities, including schools, along with the involvement of professionals who work in social welfare, delinquency, and justice fields. Many of these activities relate to professions that are primarily staffed by laypeople. The recourse to other professions means that the Brothers' formation cannot be done on the cheap. My dream supposes that we are well aware of the need for broadly professional and human formation, as the *Declaration* notes. The same professionalism ought to be present in the activities of the Brothers who are in pastoral ministry.

I hear the objection, "Is this not transforming the Institute into a secular Institute?" In the context of this conference, I will only say that my dream unfolds in the context of a *Lasallian refoundation*. Two fundamental implications are present in the question that concerns us here. First and foremost is the *Lasallian inspiration of a selfsame mission, to foster the development of abandoned young people*, which I can illustrate with a slightly modified text that echoes article 11 of the current *Rule*:

John Baptist de La Salle, deeply moved by the way in which young people were abandoned, discovered the mission of his Institute as a practical response to his prayerful consideration of God's plan of salvation. To respond to this same plan and to similar distressing needs, the Institute in the world today wishes to be a presence of the evangelizing Church. Concerned above all with the educational needs of the poor, the Brothers create, renew, and diversify their works.

The second fundamental implication is the *community character of the Brother's vocation*. A community, however, no longer necessarily serves just one particular institution. Nothing prevents groups in a given field who are sensitive to the overall needs of a population from working for the benefit of the same young people by applying a range of skills. We see the word **sharing** associated with

pluralism in the title of this section to signify that the community is structuring itself more and more on the basis of sharing. Even within the community itself, the frequently used words are exchange, listening, sharing, discernment, and prayer.

Communities have their autonomy and their own life, but they are also *open to a wider sharing*, open to the local milieu (especially by welcoming the young), open to the local Church and to other communities that share the same project. The Institute no longer exists as a uniform structure under central direction; it is a communion. One role of the Generalate and of its leaders is to facilitate this communion, along with stimulating inspiration by recalling its Gospel and Lasallian references.

* **Fragility and hope**

I am well aware that the utopia of which I dream, if it comes to be, will be quite fragile. What's more, the fragile achievements will never be due to the Brothers alone. Whatever form they take will require integration with other associations and participants, a fact that supposes an adequate formation for everyone concerned. Another aspect is the vulnerability of people who, when confronting situations often at their limits and being harassed by questions, cannot rely on recourse to any previously given answers. The *provisional character* of results in our world is a likely outcome where situations change quickly and new needs arise constantly. While avoiding any unhealthy instability, we can no longer rely on enduring works. Even less likely, no doubt, can the "refoundation" of which I dream be a "foundation" in the earlier sense of the word, that is, an enterprise that endures beyond its protagonists. *There will not necessarily be a posterity.* This is the sense in which talking about a type of death of religious Institutes is possible.

Fragility, no doubt, is more difficult to experience when many external supports disappear to which Institutes are accustomed. More support is then required from the internal strength of structures, organization, and centralization. Each person and each local community must find its own way of living. Perhaps it is reason-

able to think that something will happen easily and flexibly as soon as the reason for living becomes so close at hand and urgent that minimal consultation, dialogue, and structure are required. It seems difficult to me that what I am dreaming about can fit any existing label, for example, one that is approved by the Roman Curia. The reason is that it will be impossible to invent something in response to new needs without leaving behind the established Canon Law. At the Congress of Superiors General held prior to the Synod on Consecrated Life (Rome, November 1993), three terms struck me that frequently arose, linked as they are by the logic of life: that the religious life *acculturate itself*, be *creative and at the frontiers*, and, therefore, be more *free* with respect to canonical norms.

This fragility cannot survive unless it is based on **hope**.

Miguel—To make this prophetic dream come true:

Michel—

To make this happen... Obviously, I ought to write instead, “so that the Spirit who renews the face of the earth will irrupt, so that the free gift of the re-foundation will rise in our history.” Humbly, my dream here joins Ezekiel’s vision—“He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ I said, ‘You know, Lord Yahweh’” (Ez 37:3). A re-foundation is just as unpredictable and impossible to plan as a foundation of an Institute. Newly ordained Father John Baptist de La Salle, in 1678, never could have imagined that his commitment to the priesthood would lead him, four years later, to share the lay status of poor schoolteachers whom he considered to be inferior to his valet.

I dream about this re-creative irruption of the Spirit. Knowing that the upsurge is part of the fabric of our human history and that its force can only be irresistible when we are actively involved, I also dream that we are alert to the signs of the Spirit, profoundly open to what is new, and anxious not to quench the Spirit. My dream is in harmony with what Brother Roger Schütz wrote on the eve of Vatican II:

Let us hasten forwards, and not run away!

Let us hasten forwards to meet mankind's tomorrow...

Let us hasten towards those who cannot believe and towards the world of the poor, a treasure which is waiting for us.⁵⁹

Miguel—When Brother Michel speaks about refoundation, he is also speaking about a new beginning. Our journey is not finished; it is now up to future generations to experience the mystery of fragility and hope:

Michel—

*The lucid fragility of **the hope of the poor** will be the sign of God's benevolent kindness in the unexpected events of history, if my dream becomes real. When we have run out of human support, God appears as the Rock. This might appear to be a language of resignation, but it can also signify the radical human experience—at the outer limits and mysteriously transcending—of someone who feels profoundly poor and destitute.*

*The assured fragility of **the hope of the Christian** accompanies the knowledge that Life has conquered death and the daily strength to re-evangelize with this Good News the fragile human existence that is unsure of tomorrow. (I am thinking of assurance in the Acts of the Apostles and in Saint Paul's Epistles, a confidence that is receptive but never possessed—the opposite of an established and safely guarded tranquility.)*

*The wounded fragility of **the hope of the dedicated person** indicates vulnerability, in spite of confidence in life's victory over death, and solidarity with daily, shocking human suffering that defies vulnerability by bringing the healing power of life to the heart of situations of death.*

*The prayerful fragility of **the hope of the believer** appears in a cry, like Christ's on the Cross, in revolt against injustice while regaining strength to renew the fight.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The responsible fragility of **the hope of the envoy** strengthens the renewed commitment every morning to participate in the manifestation of the Kingdom of justice, of healing, of peace, and of reconciliation and to cooperate humbly in achieving God's promises that became a definitive Yes in Jesus Christ.

The receptive fragility of **the hope of the servant** indicates an acceptance of being turned upside down by life and of being revived by the signs of God's action written in history and calling anew to leave, to risk, to invent.

The faithful fragility of **the hope of the pilgrim** provides strength for continued walking, often during a night of God's silence and a test of Christ's absence, and replenishes human zest daily from the source of the Holy Spirit, whose mysterious presence at the heart of human history and of the life of the world faith guarantees. Drink from our own well, a beautiful image, holds deeper meaning when related to several passages in which Saint John speaks of the Holy Spirit who lives in us as an interior source. Jesus, conversing with the Samaritan woman, tells her, "No one who drinks the water that I shall give him will ever be thirsty again: the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up for eternal life" (Jn 4:14). Commentators say that Jesus is speaking here about the Holy Spirit, which he explicitly affirms in the Temple on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes come and drink! As scripture says, 'From his heart shall flow streams of living water.'" He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive" (Jn 7:37-39).

LIMA: A REREADING OF THE *DECLARATION*

Miguel—Brother Ludolfo Ojeda, coordinator of the RELAL regional meeting prior to the 43rd General Chapter, asked Brother Michel Sauvage to give a conference on the future of the Institute in a globalized world, including the challenge of poverty in the twenty-first century. Brother Michel prepared a text about the *Declaration*, its impact on the

life of the Institute, and its perspective in the context of the third millennium. In the main, it seems that the content has little to do with Brother Ludolfo's initial request, but in reality, Brother Michel draws from the history of the Declaration the fundamental directions and questions that lead to a better understanding of the refoundation of the Institute.

Michel—⁶⁰

I must return here briefly to the term *refoundation* that I used at Araruama. At the beginning, certainly, the *Declaration* expressly states, "The community [that seeks to renew itself] must also conduct its examination according to objective norms. There can be no question of 'refounding' the Institute" (*Declaration* 7.3). Yet, in hindsight, it seems to me that in its profound intent, the *Declaration* considered the renewal required by Vatican Council II to be a dynamic process of refoundation, of re-creation. The Institute that the *Declaration* projects for the future is a changed Institute, if not a different Institute.

Regardless of the term—renewal or refoundation—the *Declaration* calls for the definition and the implementation of a veritable policy of renewal. It describes the ongoing objectives of this policy, invites the Brothers to employ strategies to achieve them, and, finally and most importantly, designates the persons who are responsible for the renewal activity.

a) The *Declaration* indicates permanent objectives for the Institute's renewal. It opens ways to effective renewal by shedding new light on fidelity to the Founder and on the religious life of the Brother. The General Chapter's impetus led to the creation of this document that was so unexpected at the outset. Those who experienced the difficult and sometimes painful gestation, up to the final explosion of applause after a virtually unanimous vote, had a truly Pentecostal experience, an *irruption of the Spirit who renews*

⁶⁰ Cf. Sauvage, Michel. *Relecture de la Fondation*. Lima, 2 février 1999. In Sauvage, Michel. "Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et la Fondation de son Institut. « Frères consacrés » en Église pour le Monde." Rome: Maison saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle. *Cahiers lasalliens* 55, pp. 263-307.

the face of the earth (*Declaration* 53.3 and *Meditations* 42.3). In its turn, the text can serve as an *inspiring breath of fresh air* for the Brothers (Letter of Brother Superior Charles Henry, §6). But the *Declaration* goes farther by clearly communicating to the Institute the objectives of renewal and by **suggesting strategies for a policy of renewal action**. I limit myself to mentioning a few texts that pertain to these objectives and strategies, which are often difficult to perceive distinctly in the Chapter document.

The renewal's most vigorous objective is undoubtedly *to convert the Institute to the service of the poor*, "a work of preference" for which we are sent (*Declaration* 28.1).

"Every level of authority, then, every dialogue and decision in the Institute, must be in harmony with this orientation, so that all our plans and work will show in deed and in truth our 'return to the poor'" (*Declaration* 34.4).

The objective of *renewing the works, especially the school*, is expressed quite strongly: "...the Institute's purpose, which is not simply to maintain schools, but to work in the apostolate of education with the school as a privileged means" (*Declaration* 49.2). Moreover—and this is an objective—the educational purpose of the Institute must expand without fear of non-school activities: "Nevertheless, it is the mind of the General Chapter that the Institute must not limit the interpretation of its educational apostolate so as to refuse all apostolic activity unrelated to the school." (*Declaration* 51.4).

This orientation renewed a constant tradition of the Institute, hidden beneath a bushel in some regions since the French expulsion laws of 1904. It was the object of a separate vote during the Assembly's discussion of the *Declaration*, because it seemed to be important to know the mind of the Chapter on a particular point that was new to many Capitulants. The basic idea was to introduce new responses to the new needs that arise locally.

The new view of the religious life obviously also involves *objectives*

for action: spiritual renewal (*Declaration 3*), renewal of the spirit of zeal (*Declaration 22.3*), the personal freedom required for transcending the activity (*Declaration 27.1*), and community renewal for and by educating people and listening together to the Spirit in Scripture and in the calls of the world.

“The community effort to recognize and understand the problems of the youth of our time and to respond by a generous apostolic commitment is among the first of the objectives of the Institute” (*Declaration 23.3*).

b) The *Declaration* points out strategies to implement and to continue a policy of renewal in the Institute. The text employs the word *policy* when referring to the service of the poor. Diverse historical and sociological situations require that local Chapters clearly define an appropriate policy for directing personnel and projects to the service of the poor (*Declaration 28.3*).

The return to the poor, the catechetical renewal, the renewal of the schools, and the opening to other apostolic fields require a strategy for revising and evaluating existing works (*Declaration 28.2, 31.1–2, 38.3, 49.2–3*). At the same time, the *Declaration* calls for a *strategy of creativeness and mobility*. Changes in the world bring new appeals that require a policy on new foundations in different situations and environments and an imaginative effort in individual and community research to find new and adapted forms of educational presence among young people most in need (*Declaration 33.1–3, related to Declaration 49.5, 50–52*).

None of this can succeed without greater mobility. New creations and foundations will not be possible if we hang on to established positions (see, in particular, *Declaration 33.4, 24.2*).

Finally, the *Declaration* attaches particular importance to having a *formation strategy* and insists in every chapter on the importance of the formation of the Brothers. The language is vigorous about the characteristics, the extent, the stages, and the style of formation, as the index entries under *formation* show.

c) The *Declaration* designates the agents responsible for this renewal activity. These agents of renewal, essentially, are the individual persons—“The destiny of the Institute is in the hands of the Brothers” (*Declaration* 53.2)

The first major emphasis, an impressive feature of the *Declaration*, is the attention, respectful consideration, and openness it devotes to the person of each Brother. Section 13 in chapter III, “The Constitutive Elements of the Brother’s Vocation,” cannot be separated from section 14 in chapter IV, “Personal Synthesis.”

“A laudable desire for unity does not require that there be a changeless and universal type of brother to which all should conform. God calls each brother to make a personal response to the constitutive elements of this vocation as received from the Founder, and to adapt his response to the signs of the times which are manifest in the needs of the world today” (*Declaration* 14.3).

The *Declaration* adds that attention must be given to the personal charism of each Brother (*Declaration* 14.4), to the unique originality of his personal history (*Declaration* 14.2), and to the degree of *inner freedom necessary for him to take the initiative “to respond personally and to persevere in fidelity to the Holy Spirit... the unifying element in the brother’s life”* (*Declaration* 14.5). More radically, every person is sacred, a mystery in unique relationship with the God of love.

“Yet the religious consecration which the brother lives at the very heart of his apostolic activities is not confined to any one of them. Consecration reaches its full expression in the mystery of the personal relation each one has with God. It is, after all, a characteristic of the person to transcend his activity” (*Declaration* 27.1)

The current *Rule* repeats these orientations (articles 81 and 86), just as it recalls that the Institute has adopted the principle of subsidiarity (article 102). We might have hoped for a more frequent, bolder, more vehement clarification; there is never too much trust in personal freedom or too much reliance on personal creativity.

The *Declaration* invites the Brothers to become founders and challenges them to be more attentive to new calls, to renew and to create, and to be unafraid of inventing new responses. Such founders, then, sometimes are led to break away from and to question the planning of works and institutions, as well as their way of living as Church and in the religious life. Such founders are asked to experience the search for the will of God through personal initiative and obedience through dialogue. Is this not what the word *conversion* means?

“They must not expect those in authority to give ready-made solutions to the new problems that come from a world in evolution. It is up to each brother in the presence of God to start out along the path of spiritual conversion and determine to have a personal share in the great community work of renewal and adaptation” (*Declaration* 53.2).

Attention needs to be directed to these texts that highlight the tension between freedom and responsibility, the concern to develop personal talents and to replace self-interest with availability for the service of others, the personal interior life before God, the lively and constant attention to the demands of life, the originality of personal charisms, the respect for others and for the community, the personal initiative, and the concern for the common good.

Secondly, as the *Declaration* states, the locus of all renewal activity is *the community of Brothers in dialogue*, which is both the condition and the instrument:

“It is evident that community dialogue in all its forms is a privileged instrument of individual conversion and fraternal union. Each one should contribute to its issue in practical conclusions. The superior finds here one of his important roles...” (*Declaration* 20.8, see 20.4–5).

Agents of renewal, Chapters, and administrative personnel listen to the Brothers and to the calls of the world and remain in a state of constant renewal (*Declaration* 28.3, 49.2). The document men-

tions Chapters and councils in relation to every objective and strategy that I have mentioned. Their role is to define and to administer effectively the policies for returning to the poor, for revising works, for fostering creativity and mobility, and for the formation of the Brothers.

REREADING THE FINAL ITINERARY OF BROTHER MICHEL SAUVAGE

Miguel—In 1965, Brother Michel Sauvage was speaking about *adapted renewal*, in accord with the language of *Perfectae Caritatis*. It was not a matter of founding anew, much less about setting aside the origins. In 1997, however, in the text for Araruama that we have seen, Michel reaches the point of reinterpreting *Perfectae Caritatis*: “as a matter of fact... Vatican II required religious Institutes to undertake their renewal; in reality, it invited them to a refoundation” (*Cahiers lasalliens* 55, p. 248).

In the religious culture of a preconciliar, rigidly institutional Church in which the laity are subject to the hierarchical clergy and, in turn, are considered to be inferior to the religious, the word *refoundation* would be inappropriate. For the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the 39th General Chapter, in 1966–1967, certainly made bold decisions that marked a new beginning. At that time, it made no sense to speak about the refoundation of a Society of more than 15,000 Brothers, with a large number of the young members in houses of formation.

In this cultural context, the Brothers certainly defended their identity in relation to the laity and to the clergy, as well as the freedom to be an exclusively lay community. The fundamental question about the lay character was whether to admit some priests into the community. The discussion, therefore, did not refer to the laity in general. The answer was clear and unambiguous: there is no room for priests in the Institute.

In the post-Vatican II religious culture, the Church sees itself as the people of God progressing in history and not as a hierarchical institution. We all participate in the spiritual priesthood. We are all baptized, and because of that Baptism and that priesthood, we all participate in the Church’s

evangelizing mission. Laypeople, like the religious and the priests, have their proper and complementary roles in the shared mission.

The laity's domain is the earthly city, culture, and politics, as *Gaudium et Spes* proclaims, a world of professional life in various disciplines, of the family, of human and social rights, and of social relationships and politics. This ministry in the world is fundamentally lay. For their part, the Brothers engage in shared ministry with all laypeople in the world of learning and culture. They differ to the extent that they become witnesses and signs of the Kingdom by taking on the Gospel radicality of Jesus Christ.

In this cultural context, the questions shift. The issue of knowing whether we ought to accept priests in the Institute is no longer relevant. We habitually define ourselves as an exclusively lay community. Today, however, we have other questions:

- How to welcome and to prepare laypeople for the shared mission?
- To what extent do we accept them in association for the mission?
- How do we sustain “the form” of the Institute that is dying in some areas of the world and assist the new “forms” for sharing and for the mission?
- What organizational structures and what practices must be introduced to foster complementary in ministries within the Institute and in communion with the Church?

With this shift in questions, the experience of *refoundation* becomes a central topic in the reflection and the conversation of Brothers and laypeople who are disposed to rise above the distinction and are determined to live differently the way of being Church.

RETURN TO THE SOURCES OF THE LASALLIAN EXPERIENCE

John Baptist de La Salle was convinced that ecclesiastical approval would not strengthen the identity and the interior resilience of his Brothers. The Founder and his associates quickly understood that the success of their

ministry required a strong affirmation of an original identity and a respect for the community's autonomy. The *Rule* is the product of this community that structures its life as lay Brothers. The community itself becomes aware of its common project of nearly forty years to develop the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*. For them—for these lay Brothers—De La Salle develops a spiritual teaching that corresponds to their vocation in the Church and in the world.

The Brothers, consequently, are *men of a servant Church of their brothers*, not a powerful and clerical Church. They consider themselves members of a Church that is attuned to human culture, to politics, and to civic life, a Church that is present and is dedicated to the common good throughout human history.

Those who associate themselves with this renewal movement constitute an autonomous community that is directing its own destiny, a fraternity based on the equality of its members, men of a Church as the people of God rather than a clerical Church.

The debates and the tensions that this community experiences—with seventeenth-century ecclesiastical and civil authorities, since its origins—mark for us the process by which the Brothers affirm their identity and their independence with respect to existing authorities and structures.

This is the central question that arises, then, from a calm reading of Brother Michel's final texts: are we truly laypeople whom God consecrates to collaborate in the work of salvation, or are we clerics of a hierarchical Church?

A NEW READING OF THE ORIGINAL ITINERARY: A CHARISM OF FOUNDATION

How does Brother Michel Sauvage reach this conclusion? He looks again at the itinerary of the Lasallian foundation:

a) He reads it as a *spiritual journey*, that is, paying attention especially to the gentle but powerful “conduct” of God and to the experience of the irresistible power of the Spirit. The first two *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* begin with the recognition that God has established the Christian

Schools as part of a providential plan. This experiential and foundational principle is the basis for the itinerary of John Baptist de La Salle and, eventually, of everyone who will associate with him and participate in it. Without this basic, fundamental experience common to all his associates, it would be impossible to create either the community of Brothers or the Christian Schools. It is God who establishes and who founds. This means that we are called to be and to live in the Church in a different way: the priority of a Church of the Spirit, and consequently, not legalistic.

b) The Institute's foundation is *an itinerary of faith*, that is to say, with the conviction that God passes in history, across the total fabric of human relationships, and at the core of events in which God's WORK of salvation is accomplished and God's prodigies touch us. From this conviction comes the importance of being alert to discern the signs of the veritable presence of God: to look at everything, to do everything, and to attribute everything to God. The event is more important than the institution.

c) *Our passion for the poor* is inspired by the compassion of the Father who is present in events. This experience of zeal for the love of God and of humanity is the force that brings us to work solely for the greater glory of God by devoting ourselves to the service of the poor.

d) *Sustained by the power of Jesus*, we seek the most disenfranchised, the weakest, the most desperate, those who have no hope left. This means that our priority is the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the poor by traveling in the social, political, and economic periphery, where there is a need to proclaim Jesus Christ.

e) *To do that, we consecrate ourselves*, but in our itineraries it is life that consecrates us. It is the poor, the children, and the marginalized youth who consecrate us. Our consecration is not a juridical act. God consecrates us through the events and the people for whom we are called and sent. This signifies that the priority of the consecration, the evangelical life, lies beyond a supposed vowed superiority in the Church. The urgent situations of the people become the source of our total commitment.

At the beginning of the Institute, John Baptist de La Salle shares this experience with two of his closest associates, Brothers Gabriel Drolin and

Nicholas Vuyart. Three years later, twelve men become the visible sign of an association for the mission that they had prayed and lived. They form a cell of the Church—neither hierarchical nor clerical—in a Church of the Spirit, of salvation, and of brotherhood.

From that point on, when Brothers do not live this same experience, nothing else can ignite our passion, our identity, our mission—not a religious habit, not a new name, not strict observance, not blind obedience, not superhuman sacrifice, not brilliant studies, not prodigious success. Nothing can ever give us the identity and the freedom that come only from the Spirit.

A REFOUNDATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

John Baptist de La Salle, our holy Founder, is a companion on the Spirit's paths. New prophetic sources of inspiration can flow from his itinerary and his originality.

The *Declaration* invites the Brothers to be founders today. Since the 1960s, the Institute must have matured, perhaps, with a self-image less as a strong and stable institution than as a living community in the process of foundation and continuous renewal.

Nevertheless, in the past twenty-five years, this movement has led us to undertake new commitments, especially for the poor. It has made us more aware of the difficult and, at the same time, indispensable need to immerse ourselves in ordinary environments, to undergo an exodus from the isolated houses where we live. It has sensitized us to cooperative participation and to a commitment to justice, one example being the struggle to assure the employment of the young. The resulting diversification of amazing educational projects has not yet exhausted the possibilities. The diversity of options is already a reality in the Institute.

For a long time, the intent to *refound* has been thwarted and paralyzed by the weight of institutions and by habitual attitudes, customs, and conduct. Perhaps the years of renewal have not had the results we expected. Today, nearly fifty years after the *Declaration*, we are more limited, because of the aging of the Brothers, the scarcity of young peo-

ple interested in our specific vocation, the fatigue, and the dispersion of forces.

Paradoxically, at the same time as we experience a kenosis, a decline, thousands of men and women committed to the educational mission have unexpectedly arisen among us who appear to be a gift from God. They have heard a call and have responded to a vocation like ours. They are passionate about Jesus and wish to make the power of the Gospel available to those most in need, just as we ourselves do. They are thirsty for community, for fraternity.

The lay Lasallians have emerged with a vocation, a spirituality, and a life similar to ours, although different and complementary, *on the condition, to be sure, that we, the Brothers, become founders, spiritual companions, and witnesses of the prophetic gift of the Institute in the Church, and to the extent that we look with them to the future with hope, with eyes open to the present, with hearts expanded by the memory of the itinerary of the Lasallian foundation.*

NEW AND ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

In this book we have experienced dialogue with a privileged witness of a process of refoundation of the Institute that began timidly in the late 1960s. *The Christian Brother in the World Today: A Declaration* is the best expression of this process, but a text by itself remains a dead letter unless someone brings it to life.

For Brother Michel Sauvage, many topics remained suspended. His experience invites us also to engage in dialogue with other witnesses of these processes. We know that we need to listen to other voices and to discern new questions.

Today, as Brothers, we ask ourselves about the declining number of priests and of men and women religious in the world and especially about the shortage of young vocations. We are concerned about fundamentalism and religious extremism; about corruption in politics, in civil society, and in the Church; about sexual abuse, especially of minors; about new gender identities and new models of families; about economic crisis,

unemployment, and immigration; about intellectual dishonesty and cybernetic evangelism.

The many questions that we face every day surely indicate the need for serious reflection about the refoundation of the Institute. The society of the twenty-first century requires us, Brothers of the Christian Schools, to open our eyes to the Spirit's new activity and to be conscious of our charismatic responsibility to procure the glory of God through education.

Michel—When you gather around my mortal remains for this Eucharist, I want my last words to each and every one of you to be words of thanksgiving and of hope.

I thank God, father of tenderness and mercy. He called me to life, to love, to service.

Day after day, the risen Jesus Christ has given me the hope to start each morning believing that the forces of life prevail over the forces of death and the humble courage to try to be the servant of Life.

The Holy Spirit has been an inner voice for me, whispering endlessly in the depths of my heart, "Come to the Father, and go to your brothers." The Holy Spirit has been my source of prayer and of communion with the men and the women whom I encountered.

I have had the immense grace to experience the Church in the Council, and I hope that the image of herself that she then had and that she projected into the future will ultimately prevail in the reality.

Words of welcome,
read at the funeral of Brother Michel Sauvage,
Annappes, March 28, 2001

EPILOGUE

Brother Miguel Campos, FSC



Bucciras. pc 2013

EPILOGUE

Brother Miguel Campos, FSC

After Michel and I finished reading the interviews that stimulated our dialogue, we realized that they had led us to a summit of mutual discovery and also constituted an extraordinary effect of all our years of sharing our faith and our mission as Brothers. While recalling for ourselves this entire itinerary, we became keenly aware of certain *special places* where we had witnessed a new burst of hope, especially between 1970 and 1973. We remembered those years of enthusiasm and passion for the mission that were also marked by resistance, uncertainty, and controversy about the policies that the 39th General Chapter approved in 1966–1967.

To the extent that the interviews made us more aware of who we are and whom we serve, they also brought to light a much larger historical perspective. We understood that each major step along the way includes both a time *before* and a time *after*. Brother Michel always insisted on dialogue at every meeting point—with the two of us, with Brothers, and with lay colleagues. He suggested that dialogue arises from our sharing the events of personal itineraries and life histories, not from discussing theories, ideologies, and definitions. If dialogue is to expand and to strengthen the Institute's living memory, the conversation must go beyond simply relating anecdotes.

Dialogue will be critical and prophetic if it compares our itineraries with those of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his first associates between 1679 and 1719. Dialogue in today's worldwide context is connected with the Institute's foundational roots, and with the perspective of hope, it opens itself to a future that always arrives with unpredictable novelty.

Among my many experiences with Michel that were filled with significance and hope are the completion of my doctoral thesis, my preparation of its publication, and my pastoral ministry with Michel at the International Lasallian Center (CIL). The narrative of Michel's itinerary reminds me again of the uncertainties and the controversies of those years

of struggle and persecution in the 1970s.

During the course of our interviews, a parallel began to emerge between the crisis experienced by John Baptist de La Salle and his first associates and the crisis experienced by the Capitulants at the 1966–1967 General Chapter and also by the Brothers Assistants between 1966 and 1976. As the crisis that Michel and I experienced in those years grew in intensity, the Founder’s own crisis became more understandable, and vice versa. Encountering John Baptist de La Salle’s history and engaging in our own personal dialogue became the starting point of a more profound theological conversation between Michel and me.

In 1974, Michel wrote the Preface for the book based on my thesis, *L’Itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l’Écriture dans ses “Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite.”*¹ He quoted a portion of Charles Péguy’s poem on the virtue of hope (*the porch of the mystery of the second virtue*). Michel’s Preface left me astonished and thunderstruck.

*The bad days rain down; unhurriedly; tirelessly; hour after
hour, day after day.
The bad days rain down.
And with all the water that slips tirelessly from the sky,
(from the sky that they could call bad,)
With all this water that falls to earth, with all this slanting
rain,
(Others would make marshes and swamps full of fever and
peopled with dirty disgusting creatures.)
But they, the good soil, my light well-tilled soil,
Well prepared.
My good soil of souls, well tilled by my Son for centuries
and centuries,*

¹ Campos Marino, Miguel-Adolfo, FSC. *L’Itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l’Écriture dans ses “Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite.”* *Cahiers lasalliens* 45, 1974, Volume I, 392 p.; *Cahiers lasalliens* 46, 1974, Volume II, 392 p.

*They, my good healthy soil of Lorraine, collect all the rain
that falls.*

*And, for a wonder, they do not make of it marshes and mud and
slime.*

And algae and hart's-tongue and queer plants.

*But, for a wonder, it is this very water that they collect
and that does not trouble them.*

*Because, for a wonder, it is from this very water that they
produce the fountain.*

It is this water, the same water that flows through the meadows.

*It is the same pure water that climbs up the stalks of wheat
for the Bread.*

*It is the same pure water that climbs up the vine-shoots for
the Wine.*

*It is the same pure water that climbs up to the buds and the
budding,*

In both Laws.

*It is the same water, collected, the same water pure,
purified, that goes around the world.*

And returns, reappears, having flowed around my whole creation.

*It is the same collected water that gushes forth, that springs
forth.*

In the new fountain, in the young spring.

In the springing and respringing of hope.²

Bad water becomes healthy water. The threat of death is transformed into the experience of life. In De La Salle's Gospel journey, the personal, community, and school crises are *places* where new outbreaks of hope irrupt. The same water that causes death is transformed into a force for new life. The ever new surge of the charism manifests itself in history. I do not

² Péguy, Charles, *the portico of the mystery of the second virtue*. Translated by Dorothy Brown Aspinwall. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1970, pp. 115–16.

believe that in 1974 I understood the connection between Michel's insight about hope and my own experiences during those moments of crisis in the Institute. I was probably too young to understand.

Now, when I read the life story that Michel relates, I understand what he knew from his own personal experience about the significance of these crises, these waters that appear to threaten death. From the human suffering that we experience or witness in others, a new springtime can emerge. In the history of salvation, suffering, limitations, disappointment, and persecution come into play, not just the positive experiences. *Everything is a grace* for those who can *see*. The upsurge of hope is evident every time the human heart feels compassion in the face of human distress. This fundamental and foundational insight caught me by surprise in 1974. I consider it an initial peak that Michel and I surmounted, impelled by a fragile and vulnerable hope. This summit had a *before* and an *after*, as we later learned.

This reference to hope led us to decide to form an alliance, a few days before we were to say goodbye to Rome. We celebrated a private ritual to express our being called, together, to accompany our Brothers in their itineraries. By a secret act without any canonical or Institute implications, we evoked in our own way the *secret vow* of John Baptist de La Salle and his two associates, Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin. Ours was not an external or a sentimental imitation, but an act stemming from our conviction that the charism bestowed in the seventeenth century is leading the Brothers today in a new direction amidst all the bad storms and resistance.

We enclosed our private formula in an envelope labeled "*Open in case of death*":

O Father of Jesus Christ, I, ... and I, ..., thank you for the gift of your Spirit, who inspires us today to unite in memory and in hope with the charismatic movement manifested in the evangelical itinerary of John Baptist de La Salle and in the foundation of the Society.

We promise to remain associated with each other to procure, as far as we shall be able and as you will require of us, the good of the Society in fidelity to its spirit and to its evangelical view of incarnation, kenosis, and communion for the service of the poor.

To help us mutually live this fraternal alliance in your love, which you grant us, we commit ourselves to share our research with each other and to discern, with each other and with those in our midst, the calls that you address to us for the good of the Society and the responses that we make for that purpose.

We make these commitments of association and of union for our entire life, without being able to abandon them for any reason whatsoever, and we entrust ourselves to the bountiful fidelity of your love, O good Father.

I first met Brother Michel Sauvage at the Lateran University in Rome, in October 1962, the beginning of the academic year. After completing my preparatory year in 1961–62, I attended Michel's course, at the *Jesus Magister* Institute, on the consecrated life, specifically on the ministry of consecrated laypeople in the Church.

The first thing I learned about him is that we were both born on June 17, although fifteen years apart. From that moment on, the influence that Michel was to have in my life became more than an intellectual one. I did not know at the time that a team of French Brothers, including a well-prepared theologian, Brother Flavien-Marie (Michel Sauvage), had designed the program on which my Novitiate in 1959 in Santa María del Rosario (Havana, Cuba) was based.

I can say without exaggeration that Michel's thinking and his language about the theology of the apostolic religious life directly echoed and resonated with the questions that were troubling many young Brothers of my generation—identity and mission, professional and spiritual growth, religious consecration, ministry in the Church, integration of professional work and spirituality, and the social teaching of the Church, in a word, everything related to the vows and to the consecrated life in community for the mission.

Michel and I had an intellectual affinity, certainly, but at a deeper level, we had an affinity as conspirators seduced by the Spirit, who was leading us into the heart of the world and of history. Michel, as a theologian, led his students and his readers to the core of hope that manifests itself as the

central axis of human existence, but there is one condition: maintain a clear awareness of the diversity of contexts in today's world and of their differences with his own context. He and I came from quite diverse cultures, and our itineraries had diametrically opposed characteristics that militated against profound collaboration. Although we belonged to irreconcilable generations and styles of initial formation, we were honest with each other. We never abandoned our dialogue.

My conversation with Michel began, reached a peak (at times passing through obscure valleys), and developed over time, before coming to an end. Moreover, the conversation was never exclusively ours. We established an extensive global network of connections with esteemed Brothers and lay colleagues through correspondence, conferences, retreats, and workshops. The generations of Brothers and laypeople with whom we established a dialogue in the 1960s and 1970s were changing, and in the 1980s and 1990s, the conversation itself was changing.

Three generations of Brothers appear in Michel's itinerary: the generation that preceded him (that of the Institute's 38th General Chapter, 1946); his generation (that of Vatican Council II and the 39th General Chapter, 1966–1967), and the postconciliar generation, smaller in number. These three generations entered the Institute during its three decades of renewal (1967–2001). Today, most members of the new generations live in developing countries, whereas the Institute was founded and established primarily in the First World and with a Western and, at least nominally, Christian perspective.

During his years of initial formation in an Institute mainly devoted to the traditions and customs inherited from the nineteenth century, Brother Michel was fortunate to be in the good company of open and critical mentors who did not yield to the weight of a religious culture that was cut off from history. The questions that troubled Michel then did not allow him to be content with superficial *adaptations* of the religious life to modern times. The issues that concerned him were spirituality and professional commitment in the educational ministry for the earthly city, the transformation of society by the education of poor students, and the participation of the laypeople in the Church's ministry.

Although the preconiliar generation is aging and will inevitably disappear, certain features of this preconiliar culture persist, especially among new Brothers and young people who are seriously considering a vocation but who did not experience Vatican II. They cannot understand the tension in what then was a beleaguered Church, separated from the world and defending a fortress and its castle against the onslaught of what was called Modernism. Fascinated by ritual practices of no importance, these young people are not passionate about an evangelizing Church that is trying to renew itself in pastoral activity, in a new ecclesiology, in the participation of the baptized in ministry, and also in catechetics, liturgy, the patristic tradition, and the theology for a new world.

By convening the Council, the charismatic Pope John XXIII unleashed in the Church and in the religious life in general a renovating hurricane, *making all things new* by the power of the Spirit. For the Institute, the 39th General Chapter was a hoped-for and carefully prepared event in which it attempted to scrutinize the *signs of the times* for authentic signs of God's presence in history and to redefine the role of the Brothers in the Church and in the world today. In a climate of freedom, critical reflection, and searching, a new generation of Brothers entered the Community, loving life, academically better prepared, independent and intelligent to the point of arrogance, more passionate about serving the poor (to the point of rebellion) than about traditional works, eager for interpersonal communication in community, aware of their sexuality, and ready to combat any repression of emotion in authentic relationships.

During the years when Vatican Council II unfolded, in spite of the limited and varied reception of both the Council and the General Chapter, the Institute experienced a need to get in touch with its foundational roots in France in the seventeenth century. At the same time, it engaged in discussions about the Church's social doctrine, in order to strengthen the educational mission with laypeople who share the Institute's spirituality and pedagogy. In this context of conflict and confusion, Michel fostered a prophetic hope that at times faced rejection and contradiction.

Many of the expectations of Vatican II are yet to be realized. The presence of the Spirit at the heart of a changing world, still suffering and

marked by poverty, often encounters contradiction, rejection, and opposition. Among men and women in religious communities, the interaction between preconiliar and conciliar cultures has become more and more abrupt and jarring, sometimes almost tyrannical.

As a representative of a conciliar culture, Brother Michel Sauvage functions as a prophet, not predicting the future but participating in biblical prophecy, motivated by a passionate love of the compassionate God of Jesus Christ and of the children and young people who are abandoned and dislocated in society by an economic system that stresses inequality and also by violence and poverty. He is a prophet of the presence of God in history, who calls and forms men and women, making them disciples of Jesus and sending them as messengers at the heart of this unjust world. As ministers of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the Church, they are building a different Church with and for the young. God imposes no obligation other than to love and to *correct* like a prophet, passionately, and to accomplish the work of God as far as possible.

In spite of the Institute's heroic pastoral and its initial formation efforts, the generations of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s find themselves increasingly removed from the roots and the vigorous, coherent, cultural history that the Brothers habitually shared. In addition, the declining number and the general aging of the Brothers make it more difficult for them to offer, to initiate, and to continue the formation of this type of lay life in the Church. Like the Founder, the Brothers can feel themselves threatened today by death and by the fear of watching everything disappear. The danger is to be seduced by a nostalgia for a past that never existed and by a false promise of an illusory future.

Brother Michel Sauvage rejects both extremes. He returns to the roots, not to rescue a glorious past but to detect the development of a ministerial spirituality by means of the ordinary and extraordinary crises of history. The Institute has its own way of structuring its mission in its educational works by identifying new forms of poverty and by remaining open to the creation of new educational works while renewing the existing ones. The growing number of projects that serve an increasing number of young people, in spite of the decrease in the number of Brothers,

is leading the Institute to take a new look at the clearly lay character of the vocation of the Brothers and of their colleagues. The Institute is inviting them all to be the Church in another way and to embrace confidently all the lay vocations that God is sending.

Well aware of the difficulties of community life, Michel places at the center—in place of the *Rule* and obligations—the person of Jesus Christ, whom the Brothers represent in their work, and he highlights the associative dimension of the vows. Observing the growing number of men and women who identify with the Lasallian charism leads him to a new view of association since the beginning and to a clearer definition of what the association of Brothers and lay colleagues can become in the world today.

The new generations entering the religious life arrive with different concerns. Some are uncritical consumers of a preconiliar culture; others share the dream and the capacity to serve of a conciliar culture. Whether one or the other, all come with a passion for the media of communication, with a thirst to belong to social networks, and with considerable talent. They need to be more aware of the gifts and the weaknesses in the Institute's history, including the 37th General Chapter (1946) that cut off the Brothers from history and the 39th General Chapter (1966–1967) that repositioned the Brothers in the world and in the Church of today. They are more qualified to learn the lessons of the subsequent Chapters that developed the shared mission and the association for the mission.

None of these generations will find in Brother Michel Sauvage's itinerary easy recipes for solving problems. They will discover perspectives for a refoundation; they will celebrate the new outbreak of the charism today, and they will give the Bible its central place in discerning what Jesus is asking of the Brothers and their associated colleagues.

Brother Michel Sauvage completed his itinerary and his theological service in the Lasallian network of Brothers and lay colleagues. He did not abandon them in a dying or drifting Institute. He accompanied them to the heart of the current crisis. The new generation that associates with the Institute's previous generational groups can find in Brother Michel Sauvage powerful tools to confront today's challenges, sustained by a vul-

nerable yet powerful hope. Ours is a time of new outpouring, refoundation, and resurgence.

This book ends where it began, with the Institute's history. It highlights perspectives that need to be studied and translated into specific proposals. This activity, perhaps, is what Brother Michel Sauvage did: narrate a history with newly discerned perspectives for the Institute in the twenty-first century.

Personally, I believe that I experienced the most intense spiritual moment of my itinerary with Michel when we blessed each other and together sang one of his favorite Lenten hymns:

*Be strong, be faithful, Israel;
God leads you into the desert.
His sovereign arms opened a path
beneath your feet and into the sea.*

*Forget the supports of the past,
for he alone is your support.
He, like a consuming fire,
wills this crucible for your faith today.*

*He will lead you through the desert
and into rest.
In his eyes, the blood of the Lamb
slain in the night shines on you.*

*Follow your exodus, Israel;
walk on to reach your joy!
Life springs from death.
God is with you
and draws you away from the night.*

Rome, April 2014

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- 1953 “Vocations Évangéliques: SAINT PIERRE”, in *Journée de la Vocation* No. 2, 1953 novembre, pp. 5-9 (non signed).
- 1954 “Marie et l’Église (Grands adolescents)”, in *Catéchistes* No. 17, 1^{er} trimestre 1954, pp. 11-27 (signed Frère Michel, Lille-Rome).
- 1954 Au cœur du problème: De l’Évangélisation à l’Instruction religieuse (avec le Frère Vincent Ayel)”, in *Catéchistes* No. 18, 2^e trimestre 1954, pp. 83-96 (signed Fr. Michel, Fr. Vincent).
- 1954 “Le catéchiste à l’école de Saint Augustin, Le “De Catechizandis rudibus” – I. Le ministère du catéchiste”, in *Catéchistes* No. 20, 4^e trimestre 1954, pp. 281-290 (signed Fr. Michel, Annappes, Nord).
- 1955 “Le catéchiste à l’école de Saint Augustin (suite) – II. L’objet de la catéchèse”, in *Catéchistes* No. 21, 1^{er} trimestre 1955, pp. 19-28 (signed Frère Michel, Annappes, Nord).
- 1955 “Le catéchiste à l’école de Saint Augustin (fin) – III. Réflexions sur la méthode”, in *Catéchistes* No. 22, 2^e trimestre 1955, pp. 107-120 (signed Frère Michel, Annappes, Nord).

- 1955** “Catéchèse, de Jungmann s.j.”, in *Catéchistes* No. 23, Les grandes lois de la catéchèse, 3^e trimestre 1955, pp. 233-245 (signed Frère Michel, Scolasticat, Annappes Nord).
- 1955** “Le mystère du Christ, cours de religion pour le Noviciat”. Commission des Études Religieuses, Paris 78, rue de Sèvres ; parution en fascicules échelonnée au long de l’année 1955.
- 1956** “Le Mystère de la Résurrection – I. La Résurrection, Mystère – II. La Résurrection, Mystère de Salut”, in *Catéchistes* No. 25, 1^{er} trimestre 1956, pp. 5-33 (signed Frère Michel, Scolasticat d’Annappes, Nord).
- 1956** “La mission de catéchèse dans l’Église (Sens de notre vocation) – I. La construction de l’Église liée à la parole – II. Pour une catéchèse qui construise l’Église”, in *Catéchistes* No. 28, 4^e trimestre 1956, pp. 333-348 (signed F. Michel, Scolasticat d’Annappes, Nord).
- 1957** “La liturgie a-t-elle une valeur pastorale ? D’après le Congrès international de pastorale liturgique d’Assise”, in *Catéchistes* No. 30, Liturgie et Catéchèse 2^e trimestre 1957, pp. 131-142 (signed F. Michel, Scolasticat d’Annappes, Nord).
- 1957** “Portée catéchistique du Directoire pour la Pastorale de la Messe », in *Catéchistes* No. 30, Liturgie et Catéchèse, 2^e trimestre 1957, pp. 185-191 (signed F. Michel).
- 1957** “Ce que nous apprennent les rites de la pénitence”, in *Catéchistes* No. 33, 1^{er} octobre 1957, pp. 329-336 (signed Frère Michel, Scolasticat d’Annappes, Nord).
- 1957** Conférences sur la vie religieuse, par le Cher Frère FLAVIEN MARIE (Frère Michel Sauvage):
 1. Caractère théocentrique de la vocation ; 2. Notre vie religieuse consécration à Dieu, Vie d’union au Christ ; 3. Caractère ecclésial de notre vie religieuse ; 4. Caractère apostolique de notre vie religieuse ; 5. Sur la fidélité – piqûres de 12 à 16 pages, ronéotées Gestetner.
- 1957** “Pour une catéchèse de la vie religieuse. Annexe I: Enseignement religieux et vocation religieuse. Introduction à un carrefour lors du

- II^e Congrès National de l'Enseignement Religieux (Paris 24-26 avril 1957)", publié dans la Documentation Catéchistique et repris à la Session de Lille, 8-9-10 avril 1958, édité Hors Commerce par la Commission des Études religieuses, pp. 80-89 + 100.
- 1959** "Aspirations humaines et vie théologique", in *Catéchistes* No. 37, 1^{er} janvier 1959, pp. 21-37 (signed fr. Michel).
- 1959** "La vocation de Frère enseignant (Les Frères enseignants au service de l'Église)". En collaboration avec le Frère Armand Vital. In *Vocations Sacerdotales et Religieuses*. N° 206 – Paris avril 1959. 16 p. (tiré à part) – Republié dans *Lasallianum* de mars 1964 et en BEC, 1965 octobre: No. 183, pp. 20-26.
- 1959 ?** "Formation doctrinale et vie spirituelle", par le Frère Michel, professeur de religion au Scolasticat d'Annappes. Ronéoté. Commission des Études Religieuses pour la France. Secrétariat National des F. des E.C. Paris. *Sans date, après 1958 (on cite les sessions de Montmagny et de Beauvais)* ; 20 p.
- 1959** Frère Flavien-Marie, *Les citations néotestamentaires dans les Méditations pour le temps de la Retraite*. Présentation, examen critique et notes. *Cahiers lasalliens* No. 1. Rome 1959. 106 p.
- 1959** BIFEC No. 179, 195-206. Reprise d'une partie des pages écrites pour le Congrès Eucharistique national de Lyon (1959), éditées en *Lasallianum* de mars 1964: "L'Eucharistie et la vocation du Frère-Enseignant".
- 1960** "École chrétienne et fins dernières", in *Catéchistes* No. 43, *Les fins dernières*, 1^{er} juillet 1960, pp. 237-252 (signed Fr. Michel).
- 1961** "La vie religieuse", in *Vocations sacerdotales et religieuses*, N° 213, janvier 1961. [Reprint in part of *conférences sur la vie religieuse* of 1957].

2. His doctoral thesis, Vatican Council II, and courses at the Jesus Magister Institute in Rome

- 1961** "La finalité de l'Institut selon saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle", Étude publiée dans la revue *Lasallianum*. N° 2 (2^e éd.) – Rome

octobre 1965. Pages 233-270 (tiré à part). Excerpts published in BIFEC 1961 octobre, pp. 131-143.

1961 avril: *Bulletin de l'Institut des FEC* (BIFEC) No. 165, p. 4-13. Exposé de sa thèse pour la soutenance (09/01/1961): “La participation des laïcs au ministère de la parole de Dieu et la mission du frère-enseignant dans l'Église”.

1962 *Catéchèse et Laïcat. Participation des Laïcs au ministère de la parole et mission du Frère-enseignant dans l'Église*. LIGEL, N° 326, coll. Horizons de la Catéchèse. Paris 1962. 936 p. (This book was translated in Spanish and in English.).

1962 Conférences photocopied in 1962 and sent to our archives by the Brothers of Québec:

- “Vie religieuse et tâche profane du Frère enseignant et de la religieuse enseignante”. 29 typed pages. The text speaks only about teaching Brothers.
- “La vie religieuse à la lumière du Mystère du Christ”. 32 typed pages.
- “La vie religieuse à l'écoute de la Parole de Dieu”. 22 typed pages, citing *Catéchèse et Laïcat*.
- “Caractère ecclésial de la vie religieuse”. 25 typed pages. More developed than the third conference of 1957, the text devotes one page to Saint John Baptist de La Salle

1962 “Homme de la terre et homme du Ciel” in *L'Enseignement Chrétien des Disciplines Profanes*, Journées nationales d'études U. F. E. 4-7 Juillet 1962 – n° spécial d'*Orientations* (77, rue de Vaugirard, Paris), publié en 1964, pp. 221-267. Reprinted in *Études lasalliennes* n° 8. Rome, 2001.

[Présentation du Frère Michel Sauvage: D'abord professeur de littérature française et de philosophie à Saint-Pierre de Lille et au Scolasticat Missionnaire de Rome, puis Docteur en théologie, professeur à l'Institut *Jesus Magister* de l'Université du Latran, membre de la Commission théologique du Comité permanent des Religieux, auteur de bien des articles dans *Vocations sacerdotales et*

religieuses, Catéchistes, les Cahiers lasalliens, Orientations, Spiritus. (p. 4)].

- 1962** “L’enseignement chrétien des matières profanes”, in *Orientations* No. 3, 1962 juillet, pp. 5-42.
- 1963** “L’enseignement chrétien des matières profanes (suite)”, in *Orientations* No. 8, 1963 octobre, pp. 3-33.
- 1964** “École chrétienne et pastorale”, in *Orientations* No. 11, 1964 juillet, pp. 3-30.
- 1965** “Le catéchiste à l’école de Teilhard de Chardin ? À propos de trois études teilhardiennes”, in *Catéchistes* No. 63, juillet 1965, pp. 255-279 (signed Fr. Michel Sauvage).
- 1965** “La vocation du Frère Enseignant”, in *Lasallianum* No. 2, 2^e édition, oct. 1965, 476 Via Aurelia, Rome, 270 pages.
- 1966** janvier: BIFEC No. 184, 27-31. “Présentation de la Déclaration conciliaire sur l’éducation chrétienne”, promulguée le 28/10/1965 [Frère Michel Sauvage avait été chargé par un groupe d’évêques de rédiger de nombreux modi à la *Déclaration* approuvée en 1^{re} session, y compris la modification du plan].
- 1966** “L’École chrétienne et le Concile”, in *Orientations* No. 18. 1966 avril, pp. 3-18.
- 1966** “L’École chrétienne et le Concile (suite)”, in *Orientations* No. 20, 1966 novembre, pp. 1-30.
- 1967** Vatican II. L’adaptation et la rénovation de la vie religieuse, *Édition du CERF*, Collection *Unam Sanctam* 62, 1967– *Textes de Vatican II, Commentaire de Perfectae Caritatis* (593 p.), sous la direction du P. Tillard (This book was translated in Spanish). The chapter on “La vie religieuse laïque” (*Commentaire des numéros 10 et 15*) was confided to Brother Michel Sauvage, pp. 301-374.
- 1968** juillet: BIFEC No. 194, 49-52 + 105 “Pour une rénovation adaptée à la lumière de Vatican II” (excerpts from his article in *Unam Sanctam* n° 62, pp. 301-374 – see above).

- 1969** “Expérience du monde: expérience de Dieu ?”, in *Catéchistes* No. 77, janvier 1969, p. 585-599 (signed Michel Sauvage f.s.c.).
- 1969** Dans *Communication aux Frères, produit par les Frères Assistants francophones pour défendre le Frère Supérieur Charles Henry des critiques faites à ses deux conférences au CIL, le chapitre sur la conception du monde selon Vatican II a été probablement élaboré par le Frère Michel Sauvage, ayant commencé à traiter cette question lors de la 1^{re} session d’approfondissement spirituel à Saint-Prix, en 1968*. Rome septembre 1969.
- 1970** (En collaboration avec le Frère André Fermet) “La formation permanente dans notre Institut”. BIFEC No. 199, septembre 1970, pp. 3-17, 37 and 40.
- 1970** Réaction, au nom des Supérieurs généraux, à un projet de document romain sur la vie religieuse (1970), published in *EL* 10, in 2002.
- 1972** “Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle” (*Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Beauchesne, Paris 1972), repris dans CL 55 en 2001.
- 1973** “Les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse”, notes de cours 1971-1972 à *Jesus Magister*, in *Lasallianum* No. 16, mai 1973, pp. 5-95.
- 1973** “L’appel à l’aggiornamento”. BIFEC No. 209. 1973 mai-juin, pp. 21-36.
- 1974** “Signification de la consécration votale aux origines de l’Institut” (Commission Internationale des Vœux), handout reprinted in CL 55 en 2001.
- 1974** “Préface à la thèse du Frère Miguel Campos” (*Cahiers lasalliens* No. 45), included in CL 55 in 2001.
- 1975** “Sacerdoce et ministère: le donné de la tradition lasallienne” (groupe d’étude francophone, 1975), handout included in CL 55 in 2001.
- (1976) 3^e trimestre: BIFEC No. 218, 27 alludes to the conference of

Brother Michel Sauvage to the General Chapter (3rd Phase) “Le service éducatif des pauvres”.

- 1977** *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle. Expérience et enseignement spirituels. Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres.* En collaboration avec Miguel Campos, f.s.c. Beauchesne, Bibliothèque de Spiritualité No. 11 – Paris 1977. 511 pages. (This book was translated in Spanish and in English).
- 1980** “Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, formateur de formateurs” (dans la revue *Vocations*, 1980), included in CL 55 in 2001.
- 1980** (In collaboration with Brother Miguel Campos) *Lire Maillefer aujourd'hui*, in F.-E. Maillefer, *La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* MDCCXL. Maison Saint-Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 476 via Aurelia, Rome, 1980, pp. 7-29.
- 1982** “Ordres enseignants” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* Beauchesne, Paris, 1982, included in CL 55 in 2001.
- 1984** “L’itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle” (conférence au *Centre Saint-Louis-des-Français*, 1984). Text included in CL 55 in 2001.
- 1984-1985** “La vocation du Frère” (*Positio* pour la *Plenaria* de la Congrégation des Religieux en 1984-1985). Text included in EL 8 in 2001.
- 1986** “Spiritualité lasallienne: notre héritage” (article de 1986, *Lasalliana* No. 11). Text included in CL 55 in 2001.

3. Director of Études lasalliennes, final conferences

- 1988** “Le charisme de fondateur, d’après les Méditations sur les saints fondateurs” (simple schéma de conférence, 1988). Included in CL 55 in 2001.
- 1989** *Explication de la méthode d’oraison de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle.* Présentation du texte de 1739. Instrument de travail. En collaboration avec Miguel Campos, f.s.c. *Cahiers lasalliens* No. 50. Rome

1989. 668 pages. (This book was translated in Spanish and in English).
- 1990** “Le renouveau des Études lasalliennes”. *Bulletin de l’Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes* No. 232. Mars 1990, pp. 3-10.
- 1990** *Note sur le statut votal des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes en France au “temps de la Sécularisation”* (1990), dont le No. 2 d’*Études lasalliennes* n’avait publié qu’une partie: la note a été publiée en entier dans EL 10 en 2002, à la demande du Frère Michel Sauvage.
- 1991** *Frère Maurice Hermans (1911-1987) et les origines de l’Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes. Cahiers lasalliens No. 5.* Rome 1991. Présentation (et témoignage) de Michel Sauvage, f.s.c.
- 1992** *Préface* au livre de Sœur Brigitte Flourez *Marcheur dans la nuit* (éditions Saint-Paul 1992), sur la démarche spirituelle du P. Barré. Included in CL 55 in 2001.
- 1993** “Sacerdotes et vie consacrée”, dans “Vocation” (*Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Beauchesne, Paris 1993), II. Des vocations particulières: sacerdotes et vie consacrée. Col. 1092-1158. Repris en EL 8 en 2002.
- 1993** “Fidélité lasallienne et informatique”, in *Œuvres complètes de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*. Frères des Écoles chrétiennes, Rome, 1993, p. VII-XVI.
- 1994** “La lettre des Frères”, in *Parménie. La crise de Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et de son Institut (1712-1714)*. Leo Burkhard, f.s.c. avec la collaboration de Michel Sauvage, f.s.c. CL 57. Rome 1994. pp. 137-191. This book was translated in Spanish).
- 1997** *Perspectives de refondation* (RELAL, 1997, *Lasalliana* No. 41). Included in CL 55 in 2001.
- 1998** *L’association aux origines* (conférence à l’Association La Salle 1998). Included in CL 55 in 2001.
- 1999** *Faith and ministry in the writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle* (with Miguel Campos, fsc). Moraga 1999 (USA). 123 p.

1999 “Relecture de la fondation de l’Institut” (conférence rédigée, 1999). Included in CL 55 in 2001.

4. Collection of articles republished at the request of Brother Michel Sauvage in 2001–2002

Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et la Fondation de son Institut. “Frères consacrés” en Église pour le Monde. Cahiers lasalliens No. 55. Rome 2001. 355 p.

Vie religieuse laïque et vocation de Frère. Études lasalliennes No. 8. Rome, 2001. 313 p.

Vie religieuse: esprit et structure. Études lasalliennes No. 10, Rome 2002. 176 p.

Undated conferences after Vatican Council II:

“L’appel au renouveau” (1^{re} et 2^e conférences). 35 pages dactylographiées avec des corrections du Frère Michel. Le texte s’adresse à des FEC ; allusion à une revue bénédictine publiée en 1968.

“Vie religieuse et présence au monde” (5^e conférence) et “Vie religieuse et séparation du monde” (6^e conférence), pages manuscrites qui semblent une suite des conférences ci-dessus. “Le Renouveau des Œuvres” (7^e conférence), “Le Renouveau Communautaire” (8^e), “Le Renouveau communautaire: Élan et structures” (9^e) et “Le Renouveau des Structures de Prière Communautaire” (10^e) font partie du même ensemble.

Events in the Life of Brother Michel Sauvage, FSC

- 1923 Birth at Marcq-en-Barœul, Lille, France, June 17
- 1934 Enrollment in the Junior Novitiate at Annappes, France, July 29
- 1939 Enrollment in the Novitiate at Pecq, Belgium, July 12
- 1940 First vows, September 14
- 1941 Enrollment in the Scholasticate at Annappes
- 1942 Teacher in the Junior Novitiate at Annappes
- 1942 Enrollment at the Catholic University of Lille in *Lettres pures*
- 1945 Military service, February to July
- 1945 Certificate in Latin Studies
- 1946 Community of Saint Pierre in Lille, at Sudfec (until 1950),
Professor of French
- 1946 Certificate in French Literature
- 1946 30-day Retreat in the District of South Belgium
- 1948 Certificate in Greek Studies and in Grammar
- 1948 Perpetual Vows, September 5; end of his vocational crisis (1945–
1948)
- 1950 Studies for the Licentiate in Theology at Rome at the *Angelicum*
(1950–1954)
Community of the Missionary Scholasticate at the Generalate in
Rome, Italy
Beginning of his friendship with Brother Maurice-Auguste
- 1952 Collaborator on the journal *Catéchistes* with Brother Vincent Ayel
- 1954 Sub-Director of the Scholasticate at Annappes. Study for the doc-
torate at Lille (1954–1957)

- 1955** Professor of French Literature (1955–1957)
Participation in the reform of the system of religious studies for young French Brothers
- 1956** Collaboration with the edition of the vocal prayers of the Institute
- 1957** Total dedication to his doctoral thesis (1957–1960)
- 1959** Publication of the first number of the *Cahiers lasalliens* with Brother Maurice-Auguste as editor
- 1960** Participation in the Second Novitiate at Rome
- 1961** Professor in the *Jesus Magister* Institute at Rome and Thesis Director for the Licentiate in Religious Science
- 1962** Publication of his doctoral thesis, *Catéchèse et Laïcité*
Jean Sauvage (his eldest brother) is named Bishop of Annecy
Participation in the Second Vatican Council
- 1966** Participation as Consultant at the 39th General Chapter
Principal editor of *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*
Elected Assistant in charge of Formation at the 39th General Chapter
- 1976** Departure from Rome and participation at the School of Faith, Switzerland
Publication of the book, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*, with Brother Miguel Campos
Periodic presentations at CIL in Rome
- 1978** Régional for France (1978–1983)
- 1983** Experience of service at Loos with juvenile delinquents
- 1986** Return to Rome as Director of Lasallian Studies
- 1989** Publication of *Explication de la méthode d'oraison* with Brother Miguel Campos
- 1991** Community of Maison St Jean, Annappes, France

2001 Death at Annappes, France, March 22

Events in the Institute and in the world

1939 Outbreak of World War II

1945 End of World War II

1946 37th General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

1950 First issue of the journal *Catéchistes*

1955 Opening of the Pius X Institute at Salamanca, Spain

1956 38th General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

1956 Beginning of the Lasallian Studies series at the Generalate, Rome

1957 Opening of the *Jesus Magister* Institute, Rome

1958 Opening of the Centre de Préparation Apostolique (CPA) in France
Election of Pope John XXIII

1960 The French Brothers become salaried employees of the State (Debré Law)

1962 First issue of the journal *Orientations*

1962–1965 Second Vatican Council

1963 Questionnaire sent by Brother Superior Nicet-Joseph to the Institute

1966 First session of the 39th General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (April–June 1966)
Closing of the Second Novitiate at the Generalate, Rome

1966–1967 Intersession of the 39th General Chapter (July 1966–September 1967)

1966 Election of Brother Charles Henry as Superior General (1966–1976)

- 1967** Second session of the 39th General Chapter (October–December 1967)
- 1968** Final year of courses at the *Jesus Magister* Institute in Rome
- 1976** 40th General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools
Election of Brother José Pablo Basterrechea as Superior General (1976–1986)
- 1986** 41st General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools
Election of Brother John Johnston as Superior General (1986–1993)
Approbation of the definitive *Rule* by the Holy See
- 1993** 42nd General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools
Re-election of Brother John Johnston as Superior General (1993–2000)
- 2000** 43rd General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools
Election of Brother Álvaro Rodríguez as Superior General (2000–2007)

CAHIERS LASALLIENS

Textes, Études, Documents :

Publiés en collection non périodique ; centrés sur la personne de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, son œuvre écrite et les origines de l'Institut des Frères des écoles chrétiennes.

- 1 CL 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.
- 2-3 CL 2-3 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. — 1960. Deuxième partie : Les documents, 93 p. — 1960.
- 4 CL 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.
- 5 CL 5 - COLLECTIF, *Frère Maurice HERMANS (1911-1987) et les origines de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes,* Présentation de Michel Sauvage, FSC. 468 p. — 1991.
- 6 CL 6 - MAILLEFER, François-Élie. *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, prêtre, docteur en théologie, ancien chanoine de la cathédrale de Reims, et Instituteur des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes..., Édition comparée des manuscrits de 1723 et de 1740.* 313 p. — 1966.
- 7 CL 7 - BLAIN, Jean-Baptiste. *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes, Reproduction anastatique de l'édition de 1733.* Tome I, 444 p. — 1961.
- 8 CL 8 - *Idem,* Tome II, 123 p. — 1961.
- 9 CL 9 - COLLECTIF, Bernard, Maillefer, Blain: *Index cumulatifs des noms de lieux et des noms de personnes.* 288 p. — 1974.

- 10 CL 10 - COLLECTIF, Bernard, Maillefer, Blain: *Index analytique cumulatif, Relevé des dits et écrits attribués à saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, 215 p. — 1979.
- 11 CL 11 - F. MAURICE-AUGUSTE (Alphonse HERMANS, FSC). *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)*. VI-414 p. — 1962.
- 12 CL 12 - LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste de. *Méditations pour tous les Dimanches de l'année avec les Évangiles de tous les Dimanches. Première partie*. 236 p. *Méditations sur les principales Fêtes de l'année*. 274 p. Reproduction anastatique de l'édition originale: [1731]. — 1962.
- 13 CL 13 - LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste de. *Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite, à l'usage de toutes les personnes qui s'emploient à l'éducation de la jeunesse ; et particulièrement pour la retraite que font les Frères des Écoles chrétiennes pendant les vacances*. Reproduction anastatique de l'édition originale: [1730]. 84 p. — 1963.
- 14 CL 14 - LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste de. *Explication de la Méthode d'oraison*. Reproduction anastatique de l'édition de 1739. 130 p. — 1963.
- 15 CL 15 - LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste de. *Recueil de différents petits traités à l'usage des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*. Reproduction anastatique de l'édition de 1711. *Introduction, notes et tables*, XVI-132 p. — 1963.
- 16 CL 16 - MAURICE-AUGUSTE (Alphonse HERMANS), FSC, et JOSE-ARTURO (Arturo GAREIS), FSC. *Contribution à l'étude des sources du "Recueil de différents petits traités"*. 105 p. — 1964.
- 17 CL 17 - LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste de. *Instructions et prières pour la Sainte Messe, la Confession et la Communion, avec une Instruction Méthodique par demandes et réponses pour apprendre à se bien confesser*. Reproduction anastatique de l'édition de 1734. VI-284-IV p.
- 18 CL 18 - LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste de. *Exercices de piété qui se font pendant le jour dans les Écoles chrétiennes*. Reproduction anastatique de l'édition de 1760. XIII-140 p. — 1963.

- 19 CL 19 - LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste de. *Les Règles de la Bienséance et de la Civilité chrétienne, à l'usage des Écoles chrétiennes. Reproduction anastatique de l'édition de 1703.* XII-252-258 p. — 1964.
- 20 CL 20 - LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste de. *Les Devoirs d'un Chrétien envers Dieu et les moyens de pouvoir bien s'en acquitter. Reproduction anastatique de l'édition de 1703.* Tome I, XVIII-504 p. (exposé en discours suivi) — 1964.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter of presentation	5
Foreword – A “NARRATIVE” THAT EMERGES FROM A CONVERSATION	9
PREFACE	21
Part One – HOPE IN A CREATIVE BUT SMOTHERED ADAPTATION (1923–1956)	
Introduction – THE END OF AN ERA	35
Chapter 1 – A YOUNG RELIGIOUS IN A COLLAPSING CHRISTIAN CULTURE	39
The family experience	39
Family, parish, and schools	42
Initial formation	50
World War II	65
The postwar period	74
Chapter 2 – THE 1946 GENERAL CHAPTER TURNS ITS BACK ON HISTORY	81
The 1946 General Chapter	81
The lay status of the Institute	96
Revision of the <i>Rule</i>	100
Chapter 3 – CREATIVE FORCES IN THE LIFE OF THE INSTITUTE	119
Initial teaching experience	119
Experience of an international community	122

Brother Vincent Ayel and the journal <i>Catéchistes</i>	130
Decisive action of Brother Guillermo-Félix, advanced studies in Theology	133
Discoveries in biblical research	142
Positive critique by Brother Vincent Ayel	146
Friendship with Brother Maurice-Auguste	150
The International Missionary Scholasticate and Brother Adrien	153
Origin of the doctoral thesis in Theology	156
Chapter 4 – UNNOTICED BUT DECISIVE SEEDS OF THE 1956 GENERAL CHAPTER	161
The move from Rome to Annappes	161
Reform of the basic cycle of religious studies for the Brothers	165
Reform of the advanced cycle of religious studies for the Brothers	171
Preparing for the 1956 General Chapter: the issue of the Institute's vocal prayers	173
Chapter 5 – RESULTS AND ORIENTATIONS OF THE 1956 GENERAL CHAPTER	179
Results	179
A timid grooming of vocal prayers	182
Renewing the educational service of the poor: the role of Brother Honoré de Silvestri	188
Concern for the doctrinal and catechetical formation of the young Brothers	192
Three decisive orientations of the 1956 General Chapter	195
Chapter 6 – VITALITY AND TURMOIL IN THE INSTITUTE BETWEEN 1956 AND 1966	205
Events after the 1956 General Chapter	205
Brothers with salaries: poverty	215
Increasing professional preparation	217

<i>Orientations</i> : the journal's contribution to shared reflection	218
Identity crisis of the vocation of Brother	231
Chapter 7 – TWO MAJOR DECISIONS OF THE 1956 GENERAL CHAPTER	239
Revision of the <i>Rule</i> between 1956 and 1966	239
Audacity of the work of revision	240
Impasses during the work of revision	246
Decisive breakthroughs, thanks to revision work between 1956 and 1965	257
Return the Founder to history: renewing Lasallian Studies between 1956 and 1966	258
The <i>Cahiers lasalliens</i> and the research completed particularly between 1956 and 1966	259
<i>Catéchèse et Laïcat</i>	262
Completed thesis, Second Novitiate	278
Professor at the <i>Jesus Magister</i> Institute	283
Other courses: Québec, Brussels	293
Editors' Note	294
Part two – A PROPHETIC BUT CONTRADICTED HOPE IN THE RENEWAL (1956–1976)	
Introduction – AN IN-BETWEEN	297
Chapter 8 – VATICAN COUNCIL II	305
The Council experience	305
<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> and <i>Gravissimum Educationis</i>	310
New doctrinal approaches	319
Adapted renewal of the religious life	327
Chapter 9 – PREPARING AND LAUNCHING THE 1966–1967 GENERAL CHAPTER	337

1965–1966: anticipating the 1966 General Chapter	337
<i>Circular</i> 379 (December 18, 1963) and the Institute Questionnaire	338
Response of the Brothers to the Superior General’s Questionnaire	343
Preparation of the 1966 General Chapter	347
The beginning of the 1966 General Chapter	349
The need for a second session	352
The Intersession, the <i>Rule</i> , and the <i>Declaration</i>	353
Chapter 10 – THE 1966–1967 GENERAL CHAPTER: ITS UNIQUE IDENTITY AND THE INSTITUTE’S LAY CHARACTER	357
The Chapter’s awareness of itself	357
A Chapter that wills itself into existence	359
Initial agenda: the Brother’s identity and the priesthood	368
Chapter 11 – THE <i>DECLARATION</i>: BACKBONE OF THE 1966–1967 GENERAL CHAPTER	391
The <i>Declaration</i> ’s novelty: the educational service of the poor, the religious consecration of the Brother	391
A second session of the Chapter	396
A complex process of reflection	403
Chapter 12 – THE <i>RULE</i>: A SPIRITUAL RENEWAL OF THE BROTHER’S LIFE	431
The 39th General Chapter’s renewed view	431
Intersession of the 39th General Chapter	435
Second Session of the 39th General Chapter	437
Chapter 13 – PROGRESS AND CONTRADICTION AFTER THE 1966–1967 GENERAL CHAPTER	447
Government	447
Major guidelines and achievements in formation	460
The International Lasallian Center (CIL)	464

Part Three – A FRAGILE AND VULNERABLE HOPE IN THE REFOUNDATION (1976–2001)

Introduction – THE ALWAYS NEW RESURGENCE OF A FOUNDING CHARISM	477
Chapter 14 – NEW ACCENTS IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE	483
The religious life according to the thinking of Vatican Council II	483
New horizons of the religious life after Vatican II	506
Final notes on the experience of the 39th General Chapter	518
Chapter 15 – NEW HORIZONS FROM ATTENTIVE LISTENING TO THE URGENT NEEDS OF THE WORLD AND OF THE CHURCH	523
Historical note by the editors	523
Institute <i>Circulars</i> after the 40th General Chapter	526
The years between 1976 and 1986	531
Further progress of Lasallian Studies	535
The years between 1986 and 1993	540
New challenges for the Institute	541
Preparation and course of the 42nd General Chapter	547
Chapter 16 – A RADICAL SHIFT: FROM THE SEARCH FOR PERFECTION TO AN ITINERARY OF EXODUS, INCARNATION, AND SERVICE	551
Historical note by the editors	551
Experience at the School of Faith	553
Reflection on Lasallian association and the needs of the young	562
New experiences for Brother Michael Sauvage	567
Shifts in a Brother's life	582

Chapter 17 – “THE REFOUNDATION”: A CONTINUAL RESURGENCE OF AN EVER YOUNG WELLSPRING	589
Historical note	589
Theologian for whom?	590
An itinerary that continues to evolve	594
Araruama: perspectives on refoundation	597
Lima: a rereading of the <i>Declaration</i>	610
Rereading the final itinerary of Brother Michel Sauvage	616
Return to the sources of the Lasallian experience	617
A new reading of the original itinerary: a charism of foundation	618
A refoundation in the twenty-first century?	620
New and original questions	621
Epilogue	625
Bibliography	635
Chronological bibliography of Brother Michel Sauvage, FSC (1923–2001)	648
Events in the life of Brother Michel Sauvage, FSC	658