



# Lasallian Reflections

No. 12a

Brothers of the Christian Schools

January 2004

## Guide for reflection in community on the pastoral letter of Br. Alvaro “Associated with the God of the Poor”

Once again we are receiving our letter from the Superior-General. With it, Br. Alvaro helps us to strengthen the spirit of community with the whole Institute and throws light for us on some concrete aspects of our charism.

It will help us to enter into the sense of the present letter if we recall the letters written in previous years. Starting out from our vow of Association they have illuminated different dimensions of our life: Community, Prayer, Consecration.

### **2000. The Image of the Brother today.**

#### **2001. Associated with our Brothers.**

To be a Brother in Community: our first association.

#### **2002. Associated with the God of Life.**

Our life of prayer.

#### **2003. Associated with the God of the Poor.**

Our consecrated life in the light of the 4th Vow.

Our vow of association gives importance to persons. It associates us with God, with the Brothers, with the lay persons who share our Lasallian Mission; and all for the service of evangelizing the young, especially the poor.

The following reading guide divides Br. Superior's letter into four sections. In each of them, simple questions have been

formulated which may help to guide the dialogue. The questions are preceded by a quotation from the letter.

### **1. Historic evolution of the 4th Vow.**

“The fourth Vow opens us up to the needs of the world and makes us come out of ourselves in order to be open to new initiatives for its benefit not only on a personal level but also at Community and District level since we have already associated ourselves for this purpose...”

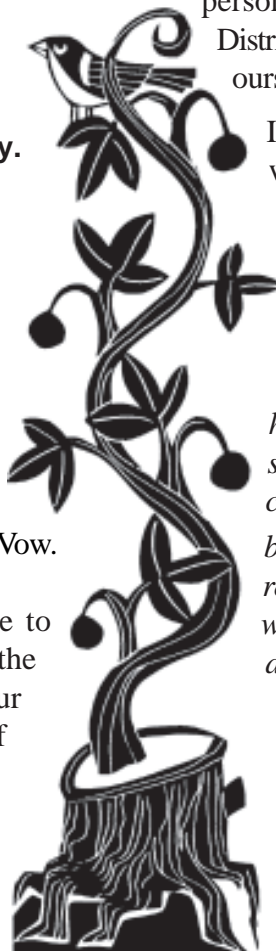
It is a fact that our present fourth Vow was the first Vow of the Founder and the first Brothers, and represented for them the expression of the charism and purpose of the Institute”.

*a. How has the understanding you have had of the Vow of association for service to the poor changed in the course of your life?*

*b. Today how do you think we could revitalize our life if, like the Founder, we considered this Vow as our first Vow and the expression of our charism?*

### **2. The living of the Vow of association is shared with our lay associates.**

“If at times collaboration was seen in terms of standing-in for, nowadays



it is born of the need to share responsibilities not only in running our works, but above all in our aspiration to live specific aspects and moments of the spirituality and the mission of the Institute”.

is our total consecration to God. But as we have seen from the beginning, for our Founder the best manner of procuring the glory of God is by means of association for the service of the poor”.

*Analyzing the practices of our Community and District,*

- a. *How do we carry out and give impetus to the sharing of responsibilities in our works?*
- b. *How do we work in order to share times of spirituality and mission?*

- a. *For each one of the vows: What orientation or phrase, of those offered to us by Br.Alvaro, opens most horizons to us and most motivates us to live our consecration to the full?*
- b. *What do we find new in the presentation which is made to us of the vow of stability?*

### **3. Our path towards the poor with the Founder. Images of a spirituality.**

“Giving Christian education to the children of artisans and the poor, ought to be, in the footsteps of the founder, a real school of spirituality”.

*Br. Alvaro gives us as many as 11 aspects of a spirituality which is born of our service to the poor.*

- a. *What aspects of this spirituality stimulate me most?*
- b. *Do any of these aspects suggest some practical commitment for community life?*

### **4. Our consecration in the light of the 4th Vow.**

“Today, the theology of the Religious Life speaks to us of three vows while, in reality, our one radical vow

### **5. The promotion of Justice and our 4th Vow. Preparation for a New Society.**

“The Brothers should always try to promote justice in the light of the Gospel and to serve the poor directly or indirectly, and they should make this the preferential part of their educational mission” (R.40).

“It is important to live within the school an experience of justice in which values such as solidarity, community and participation are given priority. When the opposite is the case the school runs the risk of reproducing the existing system and preparing our pupils for a society in which some are privileged, training them for competitive struggle and lack of solidarity. This is what we must try to avoid if we are to be faithful to our 4th Vow”.

- a. *Are we committed to some cause for justice?*
- b. *In our educational ministry, in what way are we faithful to our 4th Vow?*



**To help us remember the Vow of association of 1694,  
we offer the following presentation.**

1	2	3
I consecrate myself entirely to You	<b>and</b>	I promise and vow to unite myself and live in society with...
to procure your glory	<b>for</b>	to keep together and by association gratuitous schools
as far as I am able and as you will require of me.	<b>this</b>	wherever I may be, even if I were obliged to beg for alms and live on bread only
	<b>purpose</b>	or to do anything in the said Society at which I shall be employed.



We suggest a reading using the following key:

1. Read the entire vow. Read all the phrases in column number 1, then move on to column 2, and then to column 3.
2. Do a horizontal reading in lines. We are then left with the following equivalents.

<b>I consecrate myself entirely to You.</b>	<b>1</b>	I vow to unite myself and live in society.
<b>to procure your glory</b>	<b>1</b>	to keep together... gratuitous schools.
<b>as you will require of me</b>	<b>1</b>	obedience... at which I shall be employed.

- a. Consecration to God is lived in union and association with the Brothers.
- b. The glory of God consists in the good running of the Gratuitous Schools.
- c. We consecrate all our life when we serve the community in obedience and total availability for the mission.

*Note: This framework takes its inspiration from the presentation made by Bros. Miguel Campos and Michel Sauvage in their book "Announcing the Gospel to the Poor."*

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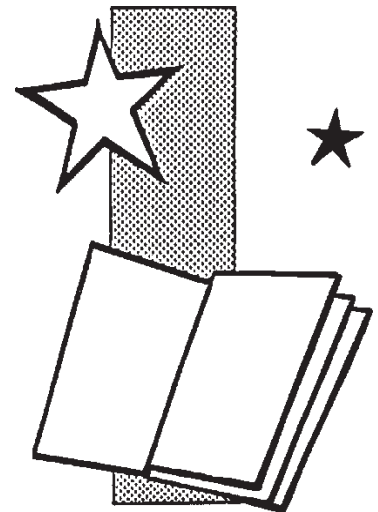
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*Discussion Questions for Brother Superior's 25 December 2003 Pastoral Letter*

## **“Associated with the God of the Poor. Our Consecrated Life in the Light of the Fourth Vow”**

*A Few Questions for Personal Reflection or Communal Sharing*

1. What two or three points in this letter seem most significant for your life and mission as a Brother of the Christian Schools?
2. How has your understanding of our “fourth vow” changed or grown from your reading of this letter?
3. Are the ideas presented in this letter consonant with your own ideas about “association” and “educational service of the poor”?
4. Can you imagine ways to strengthen your own commitment to our “association for the educational service of the poor”?



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## “Associated with the God of the Poor”

*(All the texts in inverted commas are from Br.Alvaro’s Pastoral Letter 2003)*

### 1. The Presence of God.

*“Serving the poor is an act of evangelization and, at the same time, a sign of evangelic authenticity and a stimulus for permanent conversion for the consecrated life, since, as St.Gregory the Great says, ‘when we lower ourselves to the lowest of our neighbours then we raise ourselves admirably to the highest form of charity, since, if we descend to the depths with kindness, we return bravely to the heights’”. (VC 82)*

There is your footstool  
And yet you rest your feet  
Among the poor,  
The humble and the lost.

I want to bow before You,  
But my inclining will never reach the depths  
Where your feet rest  
Among the poor,  
The humble and the lost.

Pride cannot approach You  
Since You walk  
With the clothing of the wretched,  
Among the poor,  
The humble and the lost.

My heart does not know how to find your path,  
The path of those who walk in solidarity,  
Where You go among the poor,  
The humble and the lost.

*Rabindranath Tagore  
Gitanjali, Song Offerings 10*



## 2. Hymn for meditation.

“To encounter the face of Jesus in the poor is a gift of God; how many times has it been granted to me to thus see the Lord? For his part, St. Vincent de Paul liked to say that, when he was obliged to interrupt his prayer in order to attend to a poor person in need, in reality the prayer was not interrupted, because ‘he was leaving God for God’ (VC 82). And the thinking of our Founder was no different: You should recognize Jesus Christ under the rags of the children you instruct (Med. 96,3).

*Hymn: [as appropriate]*

## 3. Reading of the Word of God

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring Good News  
to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim liberty to  
captives and to the blind new sight; to set the  
downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.*  
(Luke 4, 18-19).



## 4. Commentary of Br. Alvaro: Pastoral Letter 2003

“The Spirit of the Lord is also upon us and has anointed us to keep together and by association schools in the service of the poor (Rule 25); to free young victims of so many oppressions and who are at risk, helping them to meet the light which will give meaning to their lives. We are called to live associated with the God of the poor revealed by Jesus in the Gospel and which inspired in the Founder a style of religious life in the service of poor children and young persons and starting out from them, of all young persons, for the glory of the Trinity.

“The present-day value of our 4<sup>th</sup> Vow lies also in the fact that it opens us up to the dimensions of the world and makes us come out of ourselves in order to be open to the needs of poor young people. It is a call to creativity and to new initiatives for their benefit, not only at a personal level but also at Community and District level since we are associated for this purpose. This coming out of ourselves to avoid being self-centered is nowadays more necessary than ever in view of the difficulties which we are facing and which could lead us to withdraw into ourselves and hide behind our security.

“Professor Andrea Ricardi, founder of the Community of San Egidio, in a talk which he gave to us Superiors General in a recent USG Assembly, put us on our guard against this temptation with these words:

*‘Faced with the horizons of the contemporary world we run the risk of feeling ourselves out of place, dominated by the sheer size of the challenges and by the complexity of the problems... We too, in spite of our Christian history, can become prisoners of this sense of disorientation, leaving us leaning out of the window of life with love, or leaving us gripped by a sense of impotence, or, definitively, spending our lives behind the problems – and problems there will always be – of our institution.... preserving ourselves and not confronting the challenges of the present.’ ”*

## 5. A period of silence.

## 6. Shared Prayer

*For what do we pray?*

*For whom do we pray?*

## 7. Closing Prayer.

It helps from time to time to draw back and consider remote effects.

The Kingdom is not only centered around our efforts.

It is also to be found way beyond our vision.

Our efforts are only a tiny fraction of the magnificent undertaking of the work of God.

Nothing we do is complete,

which is another way of saying that the Kingdom of God is for ever expanding around us...

This is what it is about:

We plant seeds which one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted

knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations which will need further development.

We provide yeast which produces effects

beyond our own capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and being aware of this gives a feeling of freedom.

This enables us to do something and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,

an opportunity for the grace of God to enter and do the rest.

Perhaps we will never see the final results,

but there is a difference

between the master-builder and the builder.

We are the builders,

not the master-builders,

ministers not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future which does not belong to us.

*(Mons. Oscar Romero)*

## 8. Closing Hymn: Magnificat

