

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

CIRCULAR 406
December 25, 1977

**OUR CONSECRATED
LIFE**

GENERAL COUNCIL
Via Aurelia 476 - 00165 Roma
Italia

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PUBLICATION OF THE DOCUMENTS OF THE 40TH GENERAL CHAPTER

Already Published

- September 8, 1976: Circular 403 - 40th GENERAL CHAPTER - History - Presentation - Propositions
- May 15, 1977: Circular 404 - THE FOSTERING OF VOCATIONS - FORMATION (Published as a dossier)
- September 8, 1977: THE RULE AND THE CONSTITUTIONS AND THE BOOK OF GOVERNMENT (French)
- December 25, 1977: Circular 406 - OUR CONSECRATED LIFE (Published as a dossier)

To be published in 1978

**OUR MISSION
THE INSTITUTE IN THE YOUNG
CHURCHES
OUR COMMUNITY LIFE**

THE MEANING OF A DOSSIER

The General Chapter approved the following recommendation of the *ad hoc* commission on implementation of Chapter decisions:

"In order to sensitize the Brothers of the decisions, orientations, messages of the General Chapter;

in order to propose programs of renewal at the various levels: Brothers, communities, districts, regions, center;

in order to introduce and to apply to the life of each Brother and institution the decisions and guidelines of the Chapter; and

in order to evaluate these applications and their effects;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Center send documents, at various intervals, including questionnaires and study materials, for use of the communities."

This collection of General Chapter documents and study materials we call a DOSSIER.

READER'S GUIDE (1)

The General Council of the Institute presents to you a dossier on the *Consecrated Life* of the Brother.

Prepared at the expressed wish of the General Chapter, the document includes the following:

PART I - CHAPTER 1

The report and propositions on consecration and vows which were adopted by the General Chapter.

Some explanatory commentaries drawn up by the General Council.

PART II - CHAPTER 2 to 5

A study on the consecrated life of the Brother.

(This study, which makes up the major portion of the dossier, is found on pages 27-157).

CHAPTER 1
REPORT AND PROPOSITIONS OF THE
40TH GENERAL CHAPTER
FIRST REPORT

CONSECRATION

The first report presented by the Commission on Consecration and Vows was not accepted by the General Assembly of the Chapter. This report contained an analysis of current problems in the Institute relating to consecration and vows as well as a set of propositions. The delegates voted to return the report to the Commission for further consideration.

(See Circular 403, pages 51-56, for a discussion of the difficult problems and issues faced by both the Commission and the General Assembly.)

The following is the response of the Commission together with the proposition that was finally accepted by the General Assembly. (1)

The document C-R/1 having been rejected by the Assembly, the Commission considered the possibility of the following options:

- a) we will not submit this report to the Assembly,
- b) we will revise this report,

(1) All italicized passages in this section of the circular are General Council notes or commentaries.

c) we will submit a minority report,

d) we will suggest that a post-capitular commission be established to study the issue of consecration and vows.

Our discussion brought out the following points:

a) On the one hand, we have herein some very valuable and interesting material and it would be unfortunate that some part of it could not be retained.

Furthermore, our study has showed that this issue is an important one and one about which something must be said to the Brothers.

b) On the other hand, given the limited available time, it is not possible to develop a new in-depth text, utilizing other bases.

Consequently, the Commission has decided not to re-submit the text C-R/1 to the Assembly.

Finally, given the necessity of following-up and continuing reflection on the question, and considering the difficulties that the Commission itself faced in developing a text that was adequately thorough, the Commission submits the following proposition:

PROPOSITION 35

The Chapter asks the General Council to follow up the discussion and research that is going on concerning Consecration and also that it provide direction for the Institute in this area; that it make available to the Brothers instruments of research and discussion on the Founder's teaching on Consecration and the identity of the Brother.

SECOND REPORT
THE FORMS OF COMMITMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Requests of the Brothers and the Meeting of the Brothers Visitors

During their general meeting in Rome in 1971, the Brothers Visitors requested that "a study be undertaken both by the General Council and by study groups organized by the Brother Assistant for Formation, on commitment to religious life today as it is expressed by vows or by other forms, keeping in mind the situation in the world and the charism of the Institute..., organizing the study not only along historical and doctrinal lines but also in the light of actual experiments..."

In presenting this request, the Brother Visitors were responding to the questions being asked by the young Brothers on the present meaning of the vows, on the value of a definitive commitment, and the possibility of expressing it in some other way than by vows. At the same time, the Visitors had in mind their pastoral concern for such concrete problems as the many requests for dispensation from vows and for delays in making perpetual profession.

2. Report of the International Commission on Vows

In response to the questions raised by the Visitors in their meeting of 1971, the General Council formed the Inter-

national Commission on Vows (C.I.V.) to study these questions. The Commission met three times between 1972 and 1974, each meeting lasting for a week or more. In October 1974, the report was presented to the General Council; in March 1975, the Commission met with the members of C.I.L.; subsequently, the report was distributed in various ways to some parts of the Institute, while not at all to others. Submitted to the General Chapter, the report has been studied by the Chapter Commission on Consecration.

As directed by the General Council, the C.I.V. concentrated its efforts on the study of the various problems concerning Consecration and vows as they are perceived and experienced by the young.

A preliminary but not exhaustive survey of young Brothers and those in charge of formation revealed that there is widespread confusion in the Institute on the relationship of consecration and vows, the distinction between vows and promises, the meaning and purpose of *Renovationis Causam*, the relationship of temporary commitment to definitive commitment, the inconsistency between perpetual vows and the ease with which individuals are dispensed from them.

NOTE: Throughout this report the word commitment is used to translate the French word "engagement" which includes both an internal attitude ("commitment" in the usual English sense) and its external expression (e.g., by making vows or promises). It seems advisable to avoid the English word "engagement" which is most often used, in the USA, at least, to refer to a promise of marriage.

After a brief analysis of the fundamental dimensions of these problems, the C.I.V. emphasized the following guidelines: that the whole process of commitment in religious life be more personalized by respecting the personal itinerary of each Brother; that an element of personal choice and responsibility be introduced as to the timing, duration and formulation of each successive commitment; that the commitment be made in closer relation to the apostolic community in which the Brother lives; that forms other than perpetual vows

be accepted as a legitimate way of expressing definitive commitment.

The C.I.V. had neither the opportunity nor the intention of producing an exhaustive study of religious consecration and the vows. The study was not representative in the sense that not all possible points of view were taken into consideration. There was little attempt, for example, to repeat the well-known and traditional doctrine on vows, to represent the views generally held by older Brothers, or to limit the recommendations to what is presently allowed by Canon Law. In sum, the report is limited to the perspective of the young Brothers, and solutions are offered in that light. This involves both advantages and disadvantages.

3. The Questionnaire

A study of the results of the Questionnaire of December 8, 1974, forms the basis for the remarks that follow on the questions concerning consecration and vows.

DOES RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION REQUIRE THE TAKING OF VOWS?

In reply to this question, the majority of the Brothers in the Institute generally replied "Yes" (56%). In the age groups from 23 to 36 years of age, there was just about an even number of "yes" and "no" answers (between 42 and 44%). The percentage of "Yes" answers increases progressively as the age level advances.

THE MEANING OF THE VOWS TODAY

One Brother out of eight finds that the vows constitute a problem. Brothers in all the age groups find that the vows express their consecration, as many as 81% of the older

Brothers finding such. The weakest response comes from the age groups from 30-36 years old (47%).

DEFINITIVE COMMITMENT

Throughout the Institute in general, there is a weak but absolute majority (55%) in favor of maintaining definitive commitment as obligatory. The proportion of those who hold to the requirement of final vows increases accordingly with age, going from 30% for the group 23-29 years to 79% for the group of 65 years or older. Of those younger than 29 years old, 43% prefer a free option in the matter of definitive commitment.

All the Assistancies, except for that of Asia, show an absolute majority in favor of maintaining the definitive commitment as obligatory. The percentage of those who opt for a renewable commitment comes to about the same in all the different regions and reaches a total of 20% for the whole Institute.

4. Regional and District Chapters

Two regional Chapters request that the Brothers be allowed to remain indefinitely in the Institute with temporary vows or promises periodically renewed. A significant number of the Brothers of one district want to leave to the Brothers who so desire it the freedom of choice as regards the time of the definitive commitment.

Many regions or districts ask for a clarification of the distinction between vows and promises.

5. Notes of the Brothers on Consecration and the Vows

Thirty-two notes (from Spain, France, Egypt, Singapore, Chile, Ireland, USA, Italy, Isle of Mauritius, England, South Belgium: 115 Brothers) refer in a general way either to con-

secration or to the meaning and requirements of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Many of these speak specifically of the requirements of poverty.

Nineteen notes present strong reactions to the C.I.V. report: eleven of these are from the USA, one of which is signed by 200 Brothers of the District of New York; two are from Spain; two from Italy, one of which is signed by 18 Brothers. The others are individual notes from France, Austria, and the Isle of Mauritius. Sixteen of these notes treated of this topic at considerable length.

The ideas that most often recur in these notes are the following:

- appreciation of the attempt to develop our thinking, especially in relation to some of the ideas expressed on the meaning of the vows;

- acceptance of the suggestion of the C.I.V. relative to the apostolate;

- feeling that the document lacks balance and is biased;

- implication that this is creating a new Institute and something different from the Institute as it now exists;

- objection that the report does not reflect the spirit of the Founder and the tradition of the Institute;

- opposition to the elimination of perpetual vows and to the substitution of the vow of association as the single vow since this would change the nature of the Institute (this idea was perhaps the most strongly insisted on);

- opposition to the idea of admitting women into the congregation;

- request that the Chapter study with care all these aspects.

Six notes refer in particular to temporary and definitive commitment. Three notes (Penang, Australia, Ireland) ask that the Chapter study the possibility of substituting temporary commitments renewed indefinitely, for the obligatory definitive commitment by perpetual vows.

The other notes are favorable to the following points of view:

— preservation of the traditional practice of requiring everyone to make perpetual vows;

— respect for the freedom of each one to determine the time chosen to make one's commitment, taking into account personal maturity but keeping a variable age limit, for example 28 years, 30 or even 40 years of age;

— allowance for some exceptions for unusual cases, but then it is added that we ought not to consider those who benefit therefrom as true Brothers.

As far as temporary commitment is concerned, the opinions are divided: some prefer vows, several others prefer promises, while still others wish to have the freedom of choice between vows and promises.

6. Chapter Commission on Consecration

The Commission of the Chapter assigned to study this question finds itself divided into two positions, one opposed to the other. The differences of opinion are focused in a special way on the question of the definitive commitment. Although there is general agreement on the value and importance of a definitive commitment, some feel that such must be expressed by perpetual vows, while others are of the opinion that it is possible to express this definitive commitment by promises or other forms; some feel that a defi-

nite time limit should be set for entering upon a final commitment, while others would leave to each Brother the freedom to choose the appropriate moment for it; some feel that this commitment should be made once and for all, while others think that it can be expressed by vows, promises, or other forms renewed indefinitely. During the initial deliberations of the Commission, any propositions expressed strongly in one direction or the other found the opinion of the Commission divided just about equally: one half in favor and the other half opposed. The Commission has reason to believe that this same difference of opinion may exist in the Chapter itself, and, perhaps in the Institute as a whole.

7. Conclusions

On the basis of the data made available to it, the Commission concludes that it would be a mistake at this time to introduce any radical change in the fundamental and general norms by which the Brothers are invited to commit themselves in the religious life. On the other hand, it seems urgent to give some attention to the needs of the young Brothers in many countries who desire to express their consecration, and wish to move towards their definitive commitment, in a meaningful and personal way.

Finally, the propositions that follow are presented with the understanding that limited experimentation in the timing and expression of the various stages of commitment and consecration will take place and that such does not imply any change in the status of the Institute as a religious congregation in the canonical sense.

8. Definitive Commitment

After having taken into account all of this body of information, the Commission raised the following questions:

— is it necessary to retain in our Institute, and for all the Brothers, the obligation of making a definitive commitment?

— is it necessary to retain this obligation in the form of perpetual vows?

— is it possible to consider exceptional cases, and, if so, who must take the initiative for such: the Brother himself, the District, or the Region?

Given the impossibility of agreement between the divergent views on the matter, but yet aware of the fact that the Chapter must respond to those young Brothers who are experiencing difficulties in committing themselves by final vows — which difficulties should not imply any lack of fidelity as such — and who are asking, consequently, to commit themselves by vows or promises renewed indefinitely, the Commission submits for approval by the Chapter the following propositions:

PROPOSITIONS 36 37 38

36: The general rule is maintained that requires a definitive commitment.

37: The general rule is likewise maintained that the definitive commitment be expressed by Perpetual Vows.

38: By way of exception, in the judgment of the Brother Visitor and his Council and with the approbation of the Brother Superior, a Brother may be authorized:

A) To choose the moment of his definitive commitment;

B) To express his commitment by vows or promises indefinitely renewed.

Existing Church legislation, promulgated between the General Chapters of 1966-67 and of 1976, does not allow religious to extend the length of a temporary commitment beyond a period of nine years. Thus, our Proposition 38 could not be applicable without a departure from this provision of common law.

Having been duly informed of the issue, the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, the competent authority in the matter, ruled that such a departure was inopportune at this time. When Brother Superior was informed of this ruling, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation assured him that he was willing to entertain individual requests for exceptions to this provision of the law, if such were submitted.

Appropriately supported by a description of the motives involved by the candidate seeking such an exception, such requests must be recommended by the Chapter of Admission and the Visitor, and subsequently submitted to the Congregation for Religious by Brother Superior or on his behalf.

Therefore, at the very beginning of their formation program, postulants and novices should be informed of the general rule that was reaffirmed by Proposition 37 of The Book of Government.

(All italicized passages in this section of the circular are General Council notes or commentaries.)

9. Temporary Commitment

The document *Renovationis Causam* asked the General Chapter of each Institute to make precise its legislation on the subject of commitment to religious life in relation to the new provisions set forth in that document. The General in *Circular 392* then allowed a choice between temporary vows and promises.

The Commission proposes that during the whole period

of temporary commitment — looked upon as an extension of one's initial formation and as a progressive incorporation into the Institute — each subject be encouraged to personalize his on-going development.

Such a personalization, in harmony with the psychology of the young and with all due consideration for cultural differences, will make it possible to follow the spiritual itinerary of each subject, to dialogue with him, and to foster his introduction into the apostolate of the place where he is in residence.

This personalization can be expressed by a choice of the duration and form of the commitment and by a personal formulation of the essential content of the commitment. However, to the end of preserving unity and authenticity, the latter must be definite and according to the *Rule and Constitutions*.

PROPOSITIONS 39 40 41 42

- 39: During all the period preparatory to the definitive commitment, the Superiors of the Institute at every level shall be careful to foster the personalization of the progress of the young Brother within the framework of the constitutive elements in the vocation of a Brother.**
- 40: The period preparatory to the definitive commitment ought to favor a process of spiritual maturity, a growth in faith, and an appreciation of the values which motivate commitment.**
- 41: The Brother may express his temporary commitment in the Institute by either vows, promises or another form of commitment approved by the Brother Superior and his Council.**
- 42: While respecting the personalization that is necessary, even in the formulation of temporary commitment, its essential content will be determined in such a way that some points for consideration, related to the Rules and Constitutions, be furnished to those involved.**

For a proper understanding of these propositions on temporary commitment, the General Council strongly recommends a re-reading of Circular 392: Commentary on the Instruction of the Renewal of Religious Formation (Renovationis Causam), October 1, 1969.

While the entire Circular should be studied, especially by Visitors, District Council members, and formation personnel, sections 30 - 35 and the propositions which follow are particularly relevant.

In virtue of General Chapter Proposition 41, Brothers may express their temporary commitment by either vow, promise, or another form of commitment approved by Brother Superior General and his Council. (See also The Book of Government, article 157). Since the difference between temporary vows and other forms of commitment has not everywhere been well understood, it is useful to include here the following passages from Circular 392 concerning promises and other forms of commitment:

1. Fundamentally, it is the same act as a temporary profession. The novice, convinced that he is responding to a call from God, responds to that call with the utmost generosity. In his own mind, his consecration has no limits; "he consecrates himself to God entirely, to procure God's glory as far as he is able and as far as God requires of him."

2. This call from God invites him to enter the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Once admitted by the Superiors of that Institute, the novice who takes on his commitment is therefore incorporated in this Institute, and in a general way assumes all the obligations and rights that such incorporation entails.

3. Nevertheless, this commitment does not take on the public and canonical character inseparable from temporary profession. It may, therefore, be considered more prudent both on the part of the Brother who makes it and on that

of the Institute; for it does not impose any new obligations under pain of sin, nor has it any juridical effects reserved to ecclesiastical authority.

4. Perhaps, too, this commitment conveys more clearly than the vows that it is a preparation. There may seem to be a contradiction in the terms "temporary profession," but it is easy to see the connection between the idea of commitment and that of training, trial period and probation. (pp. 32-33)

9. In community, the Brother who has made a commitment is fully associated with the professed Brothers. In the Institute, the Brothers who have made a commitment and those professed with temporary vows enjoy the same rights and share the same advantages. (p. 34)

This last statement is particularly important since promises have sometimes been looked upon as "second-class" commitments. This understanding reflects a serious misinterpretation of the intent of Renovacionis Causam.

10. Degrees of Belonging to the Institute

The title of this set of propositions, "Degrees of Belonging to the Institute," should be interpreted in light of the introductory comments.

The focus of the propositions is not membership within the Institute, but rather the association of persons or groups with the members of the Institute.

The word "belonging," therefore, is used in a broad sense, to include both members of the Institute and those who are associated with it.

The three propositions that follow have as their purpose to establish a clear distinction between the members of the

Institute on the one hand and, on the other, those persons or groups that can have apostolic or spiritual ties with the Institute.

Within the Institute itself, there are no “degrees of belonging.” That would be contrary to the equality that ought to prevail among all the members. Two forms of association are here accepted:

— one implies the sharing of our apostolic activity and our community life;

— the other is rather like an extension of the “Lasallian family” to persons or groups of persons who would share in the apostolic activity and the spiritual life which animates the Institute.

PROPOSITIONS 43 44 45

43: The Novices and the Brothers who are bound to the Congregation by religious profession are members of the Institute.

44: In addition to the postulants, either young men or men of mature age can be associated with the apostolic activity and the community life of the Brothers without having to make religious profession (their status and contractual arrangements would have to be made precise by the community in agreement with the District).

45: Individual persons or groups of persons can be associated with the apostolic activity and to the life of prayer of the Brothers without sharing completely in their community life.

A number of associations such as those described in Propositions 44 and 45 are already in existence. In some instances they are associations of former students which have been enlarged in scope to include teachers and others interested in uniting themselves to the “Lasallian Family.” The General Council will make known developments as these become significant.

11. Admission to Profession

The propositions on admission to profession in the Institute are based on the following principles:

There ought always to be dialogue with the Brother who asks to be admitted to the Institute. That is why any "Chapter of Admission" ought to allow the candidate to express himself.

Because of the fact that this dialogue and the pastoral concern that goes with it take place in the context of the District, the responsibility for admitting candidates is left at that level. Nevertheless, the Brother always has the right to appeal to the Brother Superior for a final decision. The approval of the Brother Superior for the definitive commitment is necessary in order to maintain the unity of the Institute and to emphasize the universal character of this commitment.

PROPOSITIONS 46 47 48

- 46: Admission of a Brother to temporary profession is the responsibility of the District. In case of refusal the subject can make an appeal to the Brother Superior;**
- 47: It is a matter of obligation that definitive admission and refusal of admission of a Brother to the Institute, once it is decided within the District, be submitted to the approval of the Brother Superior.**
- 48: Admission of a Brother to temporary or to definitive commitment will be determined in the framework of the District. The request of the candidate will be examined in the course of one single Chapter of Vows whose composition will be determined by the District Chapter.**

This Chapter should allow dialogue between the Brother who asks for admission and his Community. The Brother may be present himself at the Chapter of Vows or he could explain by letter the basic reasons for his request.

See also Chapter 18, THE BOOK OF GOVERNMENT.

12. Frequency of Chapters

It has become apparent over the past ten years that it is often rather burdensome to have a Brother voted upon in Chapter each and every year in which he asks to renew his annual vows or promises. However, it could happen that a District or a candidate might very well want a Chapter to be held this frequently.

PROPOSITIONS 49 50

- 49: A Chapter, sometimes called a "Chapter of Vows," always takes place before the first commitment and also before definitive commitment.**
- 50: Other "Chapters of Vows" are left to the discretion of the District Chapters or District Councils, according to the situation and needs of each area.**

See also Chapter 18, THE BOOK OF GOVERNMENT.

READER'S GUIDE - II

This is the second part of the dossier on our consecrated life. The material was prepared by the General Council at the request of the Capitulants of 1976, as was mentioned above on page 3.

This part is made up of Chapters 2 to 5.

CHAPTER 2:

The General Council describes how it went about preparing the material.

CHAPTER 3:

A presentation of **FACTS**, and **REFLECTIONS** on the environment in which these facts are found.

CHAPTER 4:

Items for further study and reflection.

CHAPTER 5:

Materials for private or communal study.

CHAPTER 2

HOW DID THE GENERAL COUNCIL APPROACH THE ISSUE?

THE BASIC QUESTION

While the General Chapter entrusted to the Council, in Proposition 35, the task of producing a study document, it further stipulated that working research materials be developed on the life of consecration and on the matter of Lasallian identity. Since the term "identity" is used in many different ways, some preliminary ideas are herein presented:

Identity

Many of us ask ourselves at one time or other, and often with some insistence, "Who am I, me Brother so-and-so?" Assuredly, some of the answers are well-known, as found in *The Rule* and the *Declaration*, for example. But somehow such answers are external to one who so questions himself. Each of us must really adopt these, interiorize them, and translate them into the context of where we live and work. They must be integrated into one's person as molded by temperament, life history, and environment.

A Contemporary Problem

The issue of searching for one's identity must be put into proper perspective: far from being a malaise peculiar to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a deficiency for

which the Institute could be reproached, the question is one which contemporary man asks himself more pointedly. In the midst of accelerated change, which often initially seems to unduly influence his personality, modern man drudgingly seeks to discover some consistency in his life and his being. It always appears to him as something different from what it was yesterday. He is uncertain as to what it is today, and insecure as to what it will be tomorrow.

THE LASALLIAN IDENTITY

The features of the identity of the Brother of the Christian Schools cannot be drawn from formulae or definitions, but rather can be found as a result of each Brother's personal encounter with the Founder. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, John Baptist de La Salle gathered about him some disciples. The elements of their life together, some of which were retained and others discarded, constitute the fundamental traits of the Brother of the Christian Schools. In the footsteps of this initial group, come men who have recognized and continue to identify therein a model of essential features which, through discernment and the aid of the Holy Spirit, they themselves aspire to emulate. Thus, there arose a Tradition, wherein creativity and fidelity reciprocally stimulate themselves and to which we commit ourselves as responsible participants.

The Lasallian identity for each of us originates from this encounter with the Founder's legacy on the one hand and our personal life story on the other. This is why St. John Baptist de La Salle plays a key role in this dossier, and why it is that the Brothers and the communities are urged to discern and express those values of their life as consecrated men which they consider to be the very roots of their daily actions.

Further Study and Reflection...

The material herein presented is not intended to convey definite conclusions — it seeks rather to encourage serious reflection among the members of the Institute as a whole. Reality as lived and experienced will serve as a basis for such reflection, but this living reality will further be constantly illuminated and “discerned” by reference to the Bible, to the history of religious life, particularly that of the Founder, to doctrinal study, and, occasionally, to the human sciences.

...Starting with our Day-to-Day Life

As commonly used, the word “consecration” is frequently thought to be something external to us, whereas in reality we are talking about *men consecrated to God*, men who have chosen a way of life which is seen as being in conformity with what they believe to be God’s will in their regard. Our reflection, therefore, will be centered on the life of *men who have consecrated themselves to God*. In effect what is proposed is a discernment of just what it is that we choose or discard in our daily commitment; what it is that we face up to or that we set aside in our prayer or intimate personal reflection; and whether these choices fulfill or not that will of God which is the basis of our consecration to Him, and through which we aim to be of service to men.

...In a Spirit of Communal or Ecclesial Discernment

The Word of God is expressed in the context of the Church: our reflective activity cannot be allowed to deteriorate into solitary rumination. Shared with others in community, in the Institute, with other religious and lay persons, our reflection will produce a progressive discernment of the

answers that we must give and the commitments that we should make. Therefore, it is important to reflect in common, yet we must know how to listen to what others have to teach us, whether they be persons formally consecrated to God or not. Moreover, we must be concerned about our own personal contribution to people.

...By the Light of Faith

Furthermore, our reflection should not be reduced to a mere consideration of facts. St. John Baptist de La Salle reminds us at the very beginning of the First Meditation for the Time of Retreat that “God himself has enlightened the hearts of those whom He has destined to preach the Gospel to children.” We must remember, therefore, that this light of faith should be the first criterion used to give meaning to our life, and to help us determine what we are doing and what we are. If we are neglectful of this aspect of faith, we will in effect be merely wandering aimlessly.

The task of in-depth reflection that this dossier is initiating throughout the Institute will be effectively possible only if each one of us accepts to convey to himself and to share with others what his life is really like, and this in the light of the Word that the Spirit diffuses throughout the Church.

This dossier seeks to challenge the Institute to experience a religious encounter.

We are not encouraging superficial improvisations. We do ardently hope for a maturation of our reflective thought, together with a strengthening of our relationship with God and men, and this in line with our life as followers of De La Salle.

At the time of this, our presentation of the dossier, our communal conviction can be no better expressed than through the Formula of vows and its inherent dynamism. As men

consecrated to God for the service of youth, especially the poor, we offer Him the totality of our lives. This gift of ourselves is translated into the concrete by our commitment to do so in association with our Brothers and by means of vows, seeking thereby to express more effectively this self-giving.

Let us enter this depth — producing process wholeheartedly — entering upon such with the words of our Founder: *“God, Who conducts everything with wisdom and kindness, and Who ordinarily does not force man’s inclination, wishing to have me commit myself to the call of all the schools, did succeed in having me do so in an almost imperceptible manner and over a long period of time; such was His influence that, from the beginning, I found myself moving from one commitment to the next without realizing it.”* (Blain, I, p. 169).

READER'S GUIDE (3)

Chapter 3 contains two articles:

- The Concerns of the Brothers**
- Answering the Questions Raised - A Methodology**

The first article does not exhaust all the questions Brothers ask today. It is a gathering of some of the principal questions and situates them within the context of currents prevalent in society and in the Church today. It invites each of us to formulate his own questions and to search for his own answers.

Similarly, the second article does not attempt to give all the answers. It presents a list of means we can use — personally and communally — to find appropriate responses, always in view of translating these responses into action.

CHAPTER 3

SOME FACTS AND REFLECTIONS

THE CONCERNS OF THE BROTHERS

Is “religious consecration” a central concern of the Brothers of the Institute today?

If by “religious consecration” we mean an abstract category to which the Brothers refer immediately and frequently, the answer is “No!” If, however, we intend, in using the expression, to focus primarily, not on “religious consecration” considered theologically, historically, or canonically, but on the “lived experience” of the Brothers, then “religious consecration” is definitely a central concern.

If we speak of our life as “consecrated life,” and of our communities as “apostolic communities of consecrated men;” if, in other words, we mean by the term “consecration” our life itself, then “consecration” is a central concern.

From the Institute questionnaire results, from testimony of the Capitulants and from the CILists, from Brothers we have visited during the past year, we know that many Brothers are asking fundamental questions in regard to their life as Brothers.

We are not saying that every Brother is wrestling with profound questions of meaning and commitment. Many of the Brothers of the Institute today have, for a variety of reasons, weathered successfully the turmoil of the past decade. They are striving to grow in their understanding and appreciation of God’s call upon them, and to respond to that call

with greater faith and love. We hope this dossier will be of assistance to them.

But we are convinced that a significant number of Brothers (and certainly other religious men and women today) are, in varying degrees, disoriented by the changes of the past decade: changes in the world, changes in the Church, changes in the Institute. We have found that despite the excellent theoretical presentation of the 39th General Chapter, especially in the *Declaration*, the question of "who we are and what God expects of us" continues to be a central concern for many Brothers.

The purpose of this section of the dossier is to give expression to questions that some Brothers are asking. It is our hope that this discussion will help all of us come in contact with our own experience and will stimulate personal, communal, District, and Institute reflections that will assist us as we strive to deepen our commitment as consecrated men, as Brothers of the Christian Schools.

1. *Formerly I was quite sure I knew the meaning of the words of the vow formula: "I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory." Today, I'm confused. I'm not really certain what "being consecrated entirely to God" really means.*

Pluralism of theological thought, new teachings and changes in the Church and in the Institute, the process of secularization are all factors which partly explain the confusion that various Brothers experience today. There are Brothers who question the words and images they used in the past to express their idea of God. This questioning of fundamentals leads to problems in the Brothers' relationship with God in personal and community prayer, as well as in the liturgy.

2. Does the Brother's vocation have any real value, any real significance today?

We have heard this question (in one form or another) in every part of the world. There are many explanations for the frequency and universality of the question. Some Brothers, for example, find themselves in the minority in their schools. They are far outnumbered by lay teachers, many of whom are young, dynamic, and effective teachers. They wonder whether they have anything to offer their students that is distinctive, if not unique. They wonder if their mission as Brothers is still useful today, or whether the Institute is merely trying to perpetuate something that was needed in one historical period, but not really today. Some question whether the fact that they have professed vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience really adds anything of importance to their baptismal consecration.

There are other Brothers who find themselves asking about the value of their life not so much because of the circumstances and factors discussed above, but because they experience a certain boredom, apathy even. They feel they are losing their enthusiasm. As a result they ask whether this particular way of living is what they really want or God wants for them.

Still others think that the life of the Brother today has been so "watered down" that it has lost much of its significance. The more discussion they hear concerning proposals for such structural changes as reducing the vows to one vow, of professing "association," of making perpetual vows optional, etc. the more they fear that the value of their life as Brothers is being diminished or at least threatened. Some even worry that the Institute is being transformed from a religious congregation into some kind of "association" or secular Institute.

3. What in reality is the place of "community" in my life as a Brother?

Brothers question whether our communities really witness to Gospel values of faith, prayer, fraternity, love, and service of others. They think that our communities too often become "work teams" of men whose relationships among themselves are task-oriented rather than person-oriented.

Others, attracted to the highly structured communities of the past, with the emphasis on uniformity, are confused and irritated by the "new" theories relative to our life together. They believe there is more talk about what community prayer and fraternal living should be than there is actual living of community.

Still others honestly confess that because of greater openness today and the possibility (desirability even) of belonging to other "communities" (school, faculty, students, parents, prayer groups, teachers' association, etc.) that the Brothers' community is no longer the "core community" in their life.

4. Does my profession of "poverty" mean anything today?

There are Brothers who say that our communities have adopted a "bourgeois" life style that is a violation of the spirit of their vow, but they feel powerless to bring about any kind of change. Some think that it is hypocritical to claim to be "poor" because there is always security in an international congregation. They believe that if we don't really mean "poverty" but "sharing" or "simplicity of life," then we should employ these words instead of claiming to be "poor."

Others, attracted by the older concept of religious poverty with its emphasis on uniformity of life and on permissions are embittered by new approaches which they believe are in reality "abuses."

5. There are so few vocations today. Is not a major reason the vow of chastity? Is not the vow of chastity or celibacy the reason so many have left us?

There is no doubt that the numbers leaving to marry (or who marry soon after leaving), the emphasis on personal fulfillment, the “new freedom” in relationships, the arguments against clerical celibacy are all factors that have shaken the confidence of Brothers. This atmosphere has made the celibate life more difficult to adjust to and accept. Brothers find themselves wondering whether or not they can live or want to live celibacy.

5. Has obedience lost all its meaning?

Brothers question whether or not obedience is disappearing — or has already disappeared. They think that Brothers are “doing their own thing,” that Directors and Visitors fail in their responsibility. A number of Directors and Visitors are themselves confused about their role of authority. Some Brothers say that they have vowed a life of dependence but in reality are more independent than many of their married lay teachers. There are Brothers who have never accepted (or have not really understood) the chapter on Obedience in *The Rule*, with its emphasis on obedience to the community.

7. Do we really understand what our mission in the world is all about?

There are so many questions concerning “mission” that it is difficult to summarize them in a few words. Some are “tactical” questions and are not related directly to the question of identity. Others, however, strike at the heart of “who we are and what God expects of us.” There are still Brothers for whom the school is of the essence of their understanding of themselves as Brothers. When they perceive the school threatened externally by rising costs, government interven-

tion, or declining enrollment (for whatever reason), or threatened internally by the desire of Brothers for "diversification of the educational apostolate," they believe their vocation is threatened.

On the contrary, other Brothers believe the needs of the world, as well as the orientations of the 39th and 40th General Chapters, call for diversification, especially when the school is not adequately reaching the poor and those most in need of our services. They consider failure to diversify an infidelity to the "signs of the times" and an indication of excessive attachment to institutions.

Brothers question the necessity of our teaching apostolate today in view of governmental policies which make educational available to all. Some think we should devote ourselves exclusively to catechetics. Yet many Brothers do not consider themselves inclined towards or qualified for full-time religious instruction.

Still others think that direct service of the poor is of the essence of our vocation as Brothers. They call into question much of the work done by the Brothers today as being directed towards the middle and upper classes. Some, favoring more exclusive work with the poor, concentrate their attention on religious instruction of the poor, while others concentrate on identification with the oppressed in their struggle for social justice. There are Brothers who hold the opinion that educating middle and upper class students to a concern for social justice and peace is a legitimate response to our commitment to the poor, while others consider this stance as rationalization.

8. I must confess that my confidence in my consecration as Brother has been shaken by the number of withdrawals and by the lack of new candidates.

It is a well-known fact that our numbers have diminished drastically in the last twelve years. The total number of

deaths and the large number of dispensations have not been compensated for by the number of entries. In fact, there are districts with no novices at all. It is not surprising that this situation has adversely affected the morale of Brothers.

This discussion of concerns that some Brothers experience today, as they strive to understand the nature of their consecrated life as followers of St. De La Salle, is not intended to provide a documented or scientific analysis of current issues in the Institute. Our purpose is a simple one: to focus on questions that seem to us to need further clarification; questions that provide the basis for the thoughts that we intend to share with you, ideas that we hope will stimulate your own reflections and a sharing of those reflections with your Brothers in community.

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS RAISED — A METHODOLOGY

The foregoing pages presented the main questions that the Brothers are asking themselves, as per the Report of the General Chapter (cf. p. 7-23) and the article "The Concerns of the Brothers."

Syntheses generally tend to distort. It is safe to say that no one individual would identify totally with the categories of issues listed. Moreover, this is why in Chapter 5 there are proposed some "search" methods that could lead to a discovery and subsequent expression of both positive and negative aspects of our personal life; yet, the syntheses presented herein retain their value as means of stirring our interest.

Given the questions raised, and before suggesting a spiritual in-depth study, it would be helpful to indicate in this dossier some means that could profitably be utilized to assist each Brother formulate appropriate responses for himself.

1. Guidelines

Obviously, this dossier can not possibly proffer an extensive treatment of the issues raised in the questions. Such would require the involvement of specialists. Nevertheless, its own pastoral experience, the fruit of its contact with Brothers from different countries, and its valuable exchanges with persons in authority in other religious institutes enable the General Council to present some meaningful guidelines. We

believe it to be indispensable today for each Brother to be able to evaluate his personal life for himself.

2. A Coordination of the Relevant Issues

The various elements of study from which answers can be seen as forthcoming are drawn from diverse sources: theology, biblical research, the human sciences, the history of religious life, etc. The relationship of these to each other is not always easily established, as also their bearing on the specific problems of the Lasallian vocation. This dossier would like to assist in coordinating the relevancy of these various sources in the context of their importance and value for a better understanding of our life as consecrated men.

3. An Invitation to a Collective Search

As a Brother asks himself about the meaning of his mission, about the quality of his life in community, or about the value involved in the observance of his vows, the forthcoming answer is not merely dependent on himself but on the mutual commitment of his confreres in pursuing goals similar to his or, at the very least, objectives compatible with his own.

There exists at the heart of the Institute structures which enable us to express our "corporate" identity, to actualize it or to renew its content. These are the Chapters and Councils, Assemblies, retreats, international and regional Lasallian centers, etc.

The role of the General Chapter is capital to this structure. In 1966-67, and then in 1976, it carried on its fundamental role by producing the *Declaration* and *The Rule*, both of which express what the Brother of today is, and do so in total fidelity to St. John Baptist de La Salle.

However, the orientations of the General Chapter are put forth for the benefit of the whole Institute. Such directions in turn must be re-cast and modulated in keeping with the various cultures, regions, and concrete circumstances, in order to meet as closely as possible the needs of individual Brothers, while in no way sacrificing their specific Lasalian substance (cf. *Circular 403*, The Institute in the Young Churches, Prop. 19-34).

The effort at making our identity ever more specific also involves the Community Project. Though the basic features for such are furnished by *The Rule and Constitutions*, the local circumstances and the potentialities of each Brother — his gifts and his role in the Christian community — are key elements, for it is in the very midst of a particular locale and of a “local Church” that our life as consecrated men must be carried out.

Thus, it is at the very core of an Institute that is united at all levels in its search for renewal, that a Brother can undertake responsibly his own personal inquiry. The interdependent efforts of all can in no way substitute for the decision and commitment of each Brother, but can certainly render the latter more properly feasible.

4. Mindful of Misgivings

In the face of change, many feel that the Church and the Institute are moving ahead too rapidly. They fear the resulting abandonment of essentials; e.g., a weakening of community life, of the spirit of dependence and of poverty, and an omission of prayer. Yet, there are also those who believe that we are not advancing rapidly enough, that we are, in effect, camouflaging archaic institutions instead of developing new ones. Both are disappointed with the seemingly superficial aspects of the adaptations produced.

What concrete situation does the Institute offer to the misgivings of each of the above?

The basic feature that is affirmed more and more vigorously is the profound interest in the Founder. Concern for fidelity was one of the key work principles of the Chapter of 1967, as also with the Chapter of 1976. The *Declaration* and *The Rule* substantiate the very earnest examination accomplished by utilizing this criterion. Such a fidelity is not a mere reference to a type of Lasallian inspiration in a broad sense, but a veritable modern-day re-expression of the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle in all its depth and importance, and of the fine equilibrium established in the means by which this charism is manifested: relationship with God, service of the poor, fraternal association, etc. If this particular orientation is maintained, the Institute can indeed renew itself profoundly, being faithful not only to itself, but to its era.

Nevertheless, the truth should not be teared, for it produces freedom while purifying and stimulating. The last Chapter analyzed the deficiencies without any complacency. In describing this work, *Circular 403* mentions among others, the large number of withdrawals, the decrease of new vocations, and the crisis of prayer. In general, the judgment rendered in *Circular 404* on "The Fostering of Vocations - Formation" (p. 36) is valid: "*One observation is quite generalized. The General Chapter of 1966-67 was not sufficiently communicated to the Brothers. A pedagogy of change was lacking. Hence, certain resistance and blocks resulted in conflicts among the Brothers. Also, the misinterpretations of 'renewal' sometimes resulted in a superficial adaptation.*"

In the face of the objectives pursued and of the frank admission of insufficiency of effort, we are in a position to put two questions to those Brothers with misgivings about change:

— Do you agree to go beyond the legitimate feeling of dissatisfaction that you can claim, in order to work actively

for an in-depth renewal of our life as consecrated men and this to the degree for which you are responsible?

— Do you also agree to ask yourselves what might be the internal causes of your resistance to change?

Change necessarily creates tension: even when the need for and content of such have been rationally conceived, it is difficult to set oneself toward the unknown. Furthermore, the most formidable obstacle, yet often the least recognized, comes from the mind-set that we have developed over the years. For example, a person habitually accustomed to a certain degree of uniformity in his religious life accepts with great reservation the diversity resulting from modern change in the sphere of apostolic endeavors, in the types of community life, in the forms of prayers, etc. Inversely, some others have become so enamored with the atmosphere of rapid change around them that structures inherited from the past appear intolerable and they are in no way capable of seeing any value whatever in anything coming down from the past.

The Institute must lend an ear to those who wish to move forward more rapidly and also to those who have difficulty in keeping on. The General Council invites them to attempt a mutual understanding of their respective positions, as both seek to find means of promoting the deepening of their life as consecrated men.

5. Assistance to Discernment in the Whirling Current of Ideas

Many of the "Concerns of the Brothers" indicate the strong influence of ideas currently sweeping the world and the Church. We would like to refer to three such ideas: progress in the human sciences, secularization, and the value that sexuality holds for the modern world.

Developments in the human sciences make us somewhat skeptical about certain types of affective prayer wherein stirrings of the heart are recognized as the voice of God. A careful examination of the Founder's Meditations (among others, *Meditations for Feast Days*, § 18) on true and false spiritual consolations can provide considerable help in our discernment and in our efforts at improving our prayer life, instead of abandoning prayer altogether.

We have also become much more keenly aware of the quality of the motives which sustain our religious commitments. It is not unusual to have priests and religious resort to psychotherapy in order to obtain a clearer notion of the origin and development of their vocation.

Secularization influences all facets of our lives. Man is accustomed to thinking of a God-less universe; society and culture have freed themselves from all religious control and influence. The very reading of the Bible seems to have come under the influence of modern thought, ranging from the findings of exegesis to a wholly materialistic version of its message.

The shift from whirling current to whirlwind is a facile one. We often feel as if we were being literally tossed to and fro: "*Cultural changes, the proliferation of institutions, the new vocabulary of the Faith and the developments in ecclesiology directly influence the Brothers in their awareness of mission and identity.*" (Circular 404, p. 38).

An initial reaction — explainable by the fatigue which this whirlwind produces — expresses itself by means of a repudiation: we act as if nothing at all has taken place. Yet, this attitude is really untenable, for modern ideas exercise their effect through mass media. Such a mentality is equally improper for "*The Spirit of God is at work in the history of men and the progression of events...*" (Circular 404, p. 39).

The attitude that has evolved from faith and human wis-

dom is one of *discernment and culture*, both of which are closely linked. Discernment involves being able to distinguish from among a plethora of ideas, what is merely transitory and what is the result of idealogical fancy and of systemization (e.g., the "materialistic" interpretations of the Bible), from what can be considered more permanent. Discernment also means being able to set aside what smacks of excess and is self-defeating, to weed out a-priorities. However, discernment is also the ability to accept the issues that arise. The phenomenon of secularization constitutes a standing invitation to correct for ourselves our inadequate perceptions of God, of His Divine Providence, of man's role as God's minister on earth, of creation, etc. The human sciences are valuable for their contribution to an understanding of the many influences on our growth as persons, and for their help in the protection of our freedom.

The corollary to discernment is the necessity of culture. With regard to this topic, it would be well to keep in mind that section of *Circular 404* dealing with continuing Formation. One of this document's salient passages states that "*each Brother should continually work to inform himself of the present realities in the life of the Church, the world, religious life and profane culture.*" (p. 40).

The avenues to this culture are numerous both in the Church and in the Institute. In addition to various university programs, there are training sessions, publications, entities like our own CIL, and other regional centers. All who are in need of such have access to them. The personal interest of a Brother should be seconded by the district Council or his community.

A NEW APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING SEXUALITY

All that has been mentioned above about discernment and culture is applicable to the new manner of understanding sexuality in modern society. However, the issue is herein

treated separately because of its importance and of several particular characteristics.

The importance of the issue can be determined in the context of the following reality: the vow of chastity or celibacy, understood in the eyes of faith as being an imitation of Christ and a choice that is continually renewed in terms of one's person and one's service, is more and more being thought of as a unique manner of living one's human sexuality. The integration of human love in one's life as a person consecrated to God does not obliterate, the fact that the religious remains a sexual being, a being marked by lasting traits in his relationships with the men and women with whom he lives and works.

The significant point that the Chapter of 1976 recognized is the existence and the validity of this aforementioned fact: *"The internal life of the community must permit each Brother to develop normally and integrally. This principle affirmed by the Chapter calls for a truthful and realistic examination. For example, until now the affective life has all too often been spoken of as if it were an accidental dimension of the Brother's life. The truth is, however, that a deep personal life, solitude, and friendship are essential parts of our existence."* (Circular 403, p. 58). In the same context, Proposition 54 proposes the following: *"Each Brother should pay special attention to maintaining harmony in his affective life by a high degree of communication where each Brother can feel free to express his ideas, where he can enjoy his leisure, and where he can find some self-satisfying and worthwhile activity."* (Circular 403, p. 91).

We seem to have come to the threshold of a new phase of the study and communication of our experiences. A subsequent dossier could very well contain your suggestions and reactions to this issue. The fact that the totality of our affective life has been seen as an integral part of our life as consecrated men will enable us to move from generalities and

offer instead perspectives for reflection and orientation that are much more closely related to our daily life.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we can say that through the means at our disposal we are continually seeking to up-date our Lasallian spirituality in complete fidelity to the Founder. This effort involves the following different, yet integrated aspects:

— The historical and doctrinal research that specialists are currently engaged in;

— The meditation on and assimilation of the texts of the Founder, and the reflection upon the meaning of his life and of the decisions he made;

— The relationship of these findings to the developments of modern society, in order to realize an integration;

— The mutual reflection and orientations generated by Chapters, Councils, Assemblies, renewal sessions, the Community Projects, etc.;

— The commitment of individuals and of communities to attitudes and life styles that translate to a more faithful degree the Lasallian inspiration, for the benefit of modern society.

READER'S GUIDE (4)

Chapter 4 consists of a presentation of some fundamental ideas deemed to be helpful toward an in-depth consideration of our life and work. The principles elaborated upon are drawn from three sources:

- The history of the Institute
- The Bible
- The thinking of the Church on religious life.

Each of these sources is treated in a separate article. None of the articles is to be considered as a complete treatise but rather as containing material which will encourage reflection. Each of you will have his own preference as to use of the material, yet it does make available to you a method to foster further study and serious reflection that can subsequently be utilized profitably and according to one's personal needs.

CHAPTER 4

AN IN-DEPTH CONSIDERATION

HISTORY OF THE VOWS IN THE INSTITUTE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

SOME PROMINENT FEATURES

The Deeds of June 6 and 7, 1694

On June 6, 1694, at Vaugirard, De La Salle and twelve Brothers pronounce their perpetual vows of association to keep together the gratuitous schools, of obedience, and of stability. The next day, June 7, the twelve Brothers elect De La Salle Superior of their society.

We can consider these two acts directly since we have preserved the oldest formulas of vows and election. De La Salle and the Brothers took particular pain to assume the preservation of this material. They are found inscribed on the first pages of a small, black-covered register, which fortunately has been preserved intact over the years.

The act of electing the Superior sheds new light on the meaning of the vows pronounced the previous day:

“We the undersigned, Brothers Nicolas Vuyart, Gabriel Drolin (and the others), after having associated ourselves with John Baptist de La Salle, priest, in order to keep together and by association gratuitous schools by the vows that we made yesterday, do recognize that

as a result of our vows and of the association contracted by them, we have chosen as Superior John Baptist de La Salle, to whom, in virtue of our vow, as also to those who will be given to us by him as Superiors..."

In his own personal vow formula the day before, each of the twelve "professed" Brothers had designated by name the twelve colleagues to whom he was associating himself. This method was not utilized again; however, starting in 1695, each newly "professed" Brother would say: "*I promise and vow to unite myself and to live in society with the Brothers who have associated themselves.*"

The "Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools" is thus duly constituted by the act of association of June 6, 1694. Subsequently, those who would make vows would do so with clear knowledge that they were joining the group constituted by the initial act of that particular Trinity Sunday of 1694.

The First Pronouncement of Vows

The history of vows in the Institute does not actually begin in 1694. Biographers of the Founder make mention of temporary vows pronounced by a number of Brothers before that date. Though the documents could be considered deficient, we must remember that when Bernard, Maillefer, and Blain wrote the history of the first years of the "Community," they utilized a manuscript left by De La Salle himself, which details rather well "the plan of God in his regard" throughout the events of 1679 and the subsequent years. This *Memoire* ends precisely with a description of the events of 1694.

According to the biographers, it is De La Salle himself who suggests to the Brothers that they commit themselves

through vows — and this in 1686, at the latest. To those of his disciples who wanted to make a perpetual commitment, perhaps by means of the three vows then traditional in the religious state, the Founder advises prudence and moderation. His advice was so heeded that the Brothers are satisfied with a temporary vow of obedience. Effective for three years, this vow was then renewed annually for a new triennial period. The pronouncement of these very first vows must have taken place on the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, the formula used being similar to that which became traditional starting in 1694.

The “Heroic Vow” of November 21, 1691

At a time when the future of the community seemed more uncertain than ever, De La Salle, Nicolas Vuyart, and Gabriel Drolin commit themselves irrevocably. Knowledge of the event itself and the formula used for this commitment have come down to us from Blain only. The three signatories express themselves as follows: *“Most Holy Trinity,... we consecrate ourselves entirely to you to procure within our power and our means the establishment of the society of the Christian Schools in the manner that would seem to us to be most agreeable and advantageous to the said society...”* This commitment would be effective *“until the last survivors, or until the total disappearance of the said society.”* The commitment took the form of a *“vow of association and union for the purpose of realizing and maintaining the said establishment.”* It would be valid even if all the others abandoned the three or they had to subsist by bread and alms alone.

Some Certainties, Some Questions

Though we can say for sure that during the Founder’s life, some Brothers bound themselves by one or several vows,

it is equally difficult to answer, with the precision desired, several questions that arise today.

In the texts that he has left us, the Founder does not make his position clear in the matter of the vows. Factually, we see that the vows are proposed, though in no way imposed. Some Brothers make perpetual vows, some for three years only, while others pronounce no vow whatever. Furthermore, some Brothers are allowed to commit themselves definitively quite soon, yet never before the end of the two year period of probation: one year in the "house of the novitiate," and the other in the house of one of the schools, where the Brothers functioned as "employed novices."

According to Blain, the Founder had intended to have his Institute approved as a religious order and to have the Brothers eventually make the solemn vows of religion. Blain is our only source in this regard; and he clearly contradicts himself since he supposes that the Founder's wish was fully realized by the Bull of Benedict XIII.

The authentic Lasallian writings are more discreet concerning this matter of vows. The *Common Rules* of 1781 make no mention of vows except in reference to prayers for the deceased Brothers and to the traditional renovation of vows on the Feast of the Blessed Trinity. When drawing up a list of the obligations entailed by the vows, the Founder inserts the material, not in the *Rules* but in the *Collection*. Moreover, the explanation given is presented in a rather schematic fashion and in a manner strikingly different from the style found in the formula of vows. In the *Meditations* and in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, only two references to vows can be identified. Yet, these are so unusual that they are not to be considered reliable. What there is to be found more frequently, however, in the actual spiritual endeavors of the Saint, are his keen concern for the glory of God, and the strong conviction that the Brother can and must be an agent for this glory, if he is sensitive to corresponding to the grace of his vocation.

Every Brother Leads a Consecrated Life

During the Founder's lifetime, a Brother of the Christian Schools is not deemed to be such because of a commitment made explicit by making one or several vows. The *Memoire on the Habit*, the *Common Rules*, and the *Meditations* never identify a person as a Brother by referring to a "profession," more or less similar to the "regular profession."

The Brother is recognized as such by his observance of the *Rules*, quite independently of whether he has made vows or not. The Brother is "de facto" Brother and he takes on a special status that differentiates him from the lay person as well as from the clergy, even if he pronounces no vow.

The use of the term "Society" would ordinarily lead to the supposition that there was an association to which a certain number of Brothers vowed allegiance. It is not out of the question to suppose that a distinction, more or less notable, did indeed exist between those who did and did not pronounce vows. In fact, even if the *Rules* stipulate that there will be no differentiation of rank among the Brothers, and even if seniority is based on the date of entry into the Community, rather than on the date of one's first vows, it is to be noted, for example, that in 1717, all the members to the General Chapter are both "professed with perpetual vows" and directors of houses of the Institute.

Nevertheless, the Founder was speaking to all the Brothers when he says:

"It was by withdrawing from the world that you have consecrated yourselves to God in order to dwell in this Community, through a complete detachment from all in the world that could possibly satisfy your senses. You should look upon that day as the time when your happiness here on earth had its start, but to be made permanent one day in heaven. But, it certainly was not for that particular day alone that you con-

secrated yourself to God. Since you have consecrated your soul to Him and your soul is destined for eternal life, your dedication to God must be eternal..."

If such words are to be given their proper worth we can begin to understand to a greater extent the significance that the time of "entry into the Community of Christian Schools" took on for the Founder and our first Brothers. From the moment of his admission among the Brothers, the newcomer becomes "a person who is consecrated." His presence in their midst bears no other meaning; answering a call of God, he separates himself from the world, and takes his place among Christ's chosen ones.

As far as our earliest records are concerned, "entry" into the Community or the society is related neither to the taking of the habit, nor *a fortiori* to the making of vows. The very fact of entry, the entrance of the postulant and his admission to and by the Community — signifies a change of state. The Brother is no longer a secular, neither is he a "regular": he is simply and totally a Brother, consecrated to God, grasped by the exigencies of a mission and the duties of his particular state.

If later, the Brother does bind himself by vows, he begins by ratifying his first decision: "*Most Holy Trinity, I consecrate myself entirely to you, to procure your glory as far as you will require of me.*" It is only subsequently, and in keeping with his initial consecration, that he will make more explicit specific commitments of a more formal nature, and these as objects of distinct vows.

The Specific Vow

"And for this purpose, I, John Baptist de La Salle, priest, promise and vow to unite myself and to live in society with Brothers, Nicolas Vuyart, Gabriel Drolin

(and the others) to maintain, together and by association, gratuitous schools."

It was in such terms that the Founder, and after him each of his companions, on June 6, 1694, expressed his determination in answer to God's invitation to procure his glory. "For this purpose" — for them, procuring God's glory in the full measure required by Him meant first and foremost this step: uniting themselves and remaining so, working together, maintaining by association the gratuitous schools.

Their life as men consecrated to God would be lived in this Community of the Christian Schools and for a service of education of the poor in the faith. This life as Brothers, such as they had already lived it in the particular state that they had willingly assumed, a state with its *Rules* and duties accepted voluntarily, this is what they were vowing themselves to, without any reservation, and to the sole end of procuring God's glory.

Further on in the formula used for making their commitment, they would attempt to express its content more clearly, by speaking of a vow of association, of a vow of stability, and of a vow of obedience. The term association already connotes the idea of stability. However, the Founder felt that insistence on this fact was very important. Associating oneself to a group is not a question of a mere act; it involves a permanent linkage, an entrance into a specific state, an admittance to a society.

Thus, the two dimensions of the formula of vows are clearly delineated. The Founder and each of the Brothers address themselves to God; it is to Him and Him alone that they offer their entire being; it is to Him that they consecrate their lives. However, each of the vows that they pronounce has a social goal: association to maintain the gratuitous schools, stability in the society, and obedience to the superiors who will be at its head. There is in evidence here a vertical

dimension, since the Brother's entire being is dedicated to God. A horizontal dimension is equally included, since the Brother's life as a man consecrated to God will be experienced within the context of a communal-type existence and within the sphere of an apostolic mission.

In those communities which were not considered religious in the canonical sense of the term, or which were not "regular" — the expression more commonly utilized at that time — a promise, an oath, or even a vow of stability was common. Such commitments were intended to confirm a status that ecclesiastical laws did not yet fully recognize. The vow of obedience justifies itself and is self-explanatory. Having been judged essential to the cohesion of the Community, the vow of obedience is taken by many among the first Brothers, from at least 1686. Most likely the Brothers made no other vow before June 6, 1694.

Our specific vow, that which constituted our identity, is really that of "*association to keep gratuitous schools.*" Other communities in the same fashion made a vow which defined their status or their particular objective: vow of care for the sick, vow of union, vow of evangelization or educating the poor, etc.

While the Founder was still alive, the formula of the vow of association started to be differentiated in its various parts, and then actually divided into two parts, the vow of teaching gratuitously becoming, at least in the terminology used, a separate vow. Whence, the subsequent insistence on the two obligations: the one, to associate oneself with and to remain in association; the other, to teach gratuitously. However, in terms of exact terminology, we can speak of one specific vow: that of association to teach gratuitously. Association of itself was never sought, but rather "*to maintain by association the gratuitous schools.*"

The Vows According to the Bull of Benedict XIII

During the lifetime of the Founder, the Institute was not explicitly approved by any ecclesiastical authority. Established as it was in some fifteen dioceses of France, it could not possibly have continued to exist without at least a tacit approbation of the Bishops who allowed its establishment, or of those who invited the Brothers to come to their dioceses. Nevertheless, the clergy and the hierarchy were no doubt more interested in the success of the schools than in the status or official standing of the Community.

As early as 1721 for sure, Brother Timothy, incumbent Superior General, and his colleagues seek to obtain for the Institute a proper and official papal approbation. In the spring of 1722, a formal request is submitted to the Apostolic Datary. Twice, in both the request itself and in its summary form, mention is made of the five vows taken by the Brothers: poverty, chastity, obedience, stability, and teaching the poor gratuitously. Pronounced initially for three years, then renewed annually, these vows could subsequently become perpetual when the Brothers reached the age of 25.

In 1724, at the Council of the Roman Congregation, Cardinal Corsini, official liaison for our case, praises this particular status involving temporary vows followed by perpetual ones, while explicitly pointing out that there is question here only of simple vows, which can be dispensed from by the Sovereign Pontiff. In 1725, the Bull renders to us, practically without change, the propositions submitted by Brother Timothy, or in his name, clothing all of them, without distinction, with the authority of De La Salle, then sanctioning them by pontifical authority.

Introduction of the Vows of Poverty and Chastity

One question still remains unanswered: who influenced the Brothers to introduce the issue of the vows of poverty

and chastity, in addition the three others vows? Blain and an *addendum* inserted into the *Collection* state that the suggestion came from Rome. There is no reason whatever for questioning this declaration. But then, we must clearly admit that the suggestion was given to Brother Timothy before the request of 1722, mentioned above, was drawn up. It could have been the result of preliminary consultations undertaken officially at the Roman court, or at least in Rome, by one or other friend of the Brothers; for example, Canon Jean Vivant or the French courier Joseph Pigne, who were familiar with our case.

From various sources it would seem that the Brothers received more than one suggestion. The Brothers were supposedly informed that the Holy See would refuse to approve the Institute and its *Rules* if these did not make explicit mention of the vows of poverty and chastity. To involve the Holy See in such fashion could be rather presumptuous. Yet, it could very well be that a particular subaltern or consultant misunderstood the character of the Institute and the type of approbation that the Brothers were seeking. A reading of our *Rules* could have given the impression that we wanted to join the ranks of the religious orders. Aside from all the other obstacles that such an intention would bring forth, achievement of this objective would evidently entail the taking of the three traditional vows.

Again according to Blain, the Brothers quickly sought to accept the invitation which came from Rome. The Founder's biographer also assures his readers that this was no innovation, since the vows of poverty and chastity were actually understood as being contained in the vow of obedience that already bound the Brothers. This conclusion is rather hasty. It overlooks in particular one of the first treatises of the *Collection*: "The obligation of the vows." This material does not permit such an interpretation.

The issue thus remains unresolved. Why didn't the Founder encourage the Brothers to bind themselves by the

three traditional vows? Why, from among the three vows, did he retain only that of obedience?

The Silence of the Founder

On this precise point, the Founder did not explain himself. From the beginning, the life of a Brother presumed a renunciation of personal goods. As early as 1690, the *Memoire on the Habit* insists: "*We live without the ownership of anything personal,*" and "*the subjects have nothing of their own and use everything in common.*" The *Rules* also make mention of the matter: "*The Brothers will own nothing, but everything will be in common in each house.*" Thus the poverty of the Brother is considered as being similar to that of the first Christians, and to that which had become traditional in the religious life from its earliest times. Yet, this fundamental evangelical attitude is not explicitly found in the formula of vows before the issuance of the Bull of 1725.

The same situation exists with regard to celibacy. The biographers and before them the Brothers themselves in a *Memoire* written in 1721 at the latest, mentioned that as early as 1681 or 1682 the young men who joined and followed De La Salle were not married and preferred to live a secluded life. The *Rules* of 1705 are not silent in the matter of chastity any more than they are silent about obedience and poverty. But the perpetual vow of chastity in the celibate state was reserved to the Holy See and the object of a vow poverty that was not "solemn" was still badly defined. These two reasons alone would suffice to explain the prudent reserve of De La Salle, inasmuch as he did not seem to be very anxious to provide his Institute with the formal characteristics of a canonical state.

The Position of the Brothers

The Brothers themselves, even while the Founder was still alive, seem to have wanted to belong to a group whose status was more clearly defined and protected by the provisions of law. Their concern is perfectly understandable. The prestige and authority of De La Salle did not always prove adequate in the face of meddling by pastors, bishops, and other officials. After the Founder's death, they would be all the more vulnerable. A Papal Bull could provide assurance against further interference in the internal affairs of their Community, even if it wouldn't always protect them in their apostolic activities.

Having themselves solicited official recognition by the Church, the Brothers were evidently ready to accept the conditions that the Holy See would impose. Therefore we can understand the great care they took to have the full impact of the document of Benedict XIII appropriately known and recognised. The legal formalities having been fulfilled with the Parliament of Rouen, the Brothers requested the Archbishop to preside at St. Yon at the solemn ceremonies of the reception of the Bull. In fact, the Bull was promulgated by the Vicar of the Archdiocese.

The prelate then received the vows of Brother Timothy and the other Brothers who were with him. The ceremonies were carried out as if the Bull were one involving the establishment of a new monastery or a new order. Nothing like this was called for by the Bull itself. It was granted in response to our request (in canonical language, *in forma gratiosa*) and required no executory formality.

Perhaps the Brothers were not fully aware of the significance of the process they were initiating. In effect the Institute was setting out on a long trek that would draw it closer, often imperceptibly, to the canonical religious state. Judging from some decisions and especially from some practices they adopted from this time, it must be acknowledged

that the Brothers somewhat too easily allied the Institute of De La Salle to religious orders duly approved as such.

The Public Character of Our Vows

In the request submitted to Rome to obtain the Bull of Approbation, the Brothers give special prominence to the articles related to the vows. As for the *Common Rules*, only brief reference to the spirit of the Institute and their own professional obligation is made by the Brothers. From these *Rules*, the Brothers could not make any references to the vows, though they did mention, as being part of their "regulations," the three articles concerning the five vows, the age requirements for admission to vows, and the procedures for dispensation.

So, contrary to the way they were lived during the lifetime of the Founder, the vows of the Brothers of the Christian Schools now take on a public character in the Church. The Bull recognizes them as public, even though it places them in the category of simple vows, meaning that they could not subsequently become solemn vows of religion. A certain shift in this direction, however, is already evident in August, 1725, when the Brothers take their vows in the presence of the official representative of the hierarchy. Canonically, this attempted assimilation of solemn vows was inoperative. Blain himself errs in the matter when he states that the vows of the Brothers are indeed solemn vows of religion. Some Brothers and outsiders say the same thing, but apparently all in good faith. The idea of presenting themselves as "religious" without specifying the particular status did provoke justifiable protests. The Sorbonne was called upon to settle the question and did not hesitate to judge that the Bull "In Apostolicae Dignitatis Solio" does not establish the Institute in the juridical category of religious orders, since no part of the document recognizes the

vows of the Brothers as vows of religion nor the establishment of the Institute as a "regular" order with solemn vows.

From the Bull of 1725 to the Canon Law Code of 1917

We should not overemphasize this apparent "wavering" and lack of clarity. From its very origins, the Community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools never resembled a purely secular community. The religious habit already sufficed, in 1685, to mark quite clearly a separation from the world and a desire to live apart in the manner of communities, rather numerous at the time, which approximated quite closely the canonical religious state, without, however, being integrated into the state.

The Bull of Approbation confirms the Institute's status all the more clearly. The explicit mention of vows, the introduction of the vows of poverty and chastity, and the authority for dispensation from vows being reserved to the Holy Father — all these contributed in a singular manner to a closer similarity with the regulars who took solemn vows. In accepting such developments, and perhaps even in deliberately seeking them out, were the Brothers showing proper respect for the Founder's mind on the matter?

From the documentation available, it is impossible to answer such a question. Some Founders like Vincent de Paul expressed their views very strongly in opposition to any type of assimilation with male or female religious communities properly and legally canonical. Our Founder exercised more discretion, choosing to remain silent on the matter. What De La Salle lived with the Brothers was rather a type of life that we today would call "a society of common life without public vows." What the Brothers obtained by means of the Bull of Approbation was really approval of the Institute as a "congregation with both simple and public vows."

It is very improbable that the Brothers were then able

to differentiate as to their status, as we can do today. But even today, if we do differentiate in a legal context, we don't worry about such in actual daily life. No one takes it amiss when he meets the Daughters of Charity or the Vincentian Fathers at meetings of religious.

Some Traditions Considered Stronger than the Bull

Since 1725 and up to the present, the Brothers declare that they make their vows according to the Bull of Approbation of the Institute granted by Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XIII. Some minor contradictions exist between the words of the vow formula and the text of the Bull. The former mentions a vow of association, whereas the latter makes no mention of such. On the other hand, the Bull mentions the teaching of the poor gratuitously, but the words "the poor" do not appear in the vow formula before 1947. When such differences appear, the text of the Bull must be taken as the official source, and further, the integral text must be utilized. This has been the approach of the Holy See each time that it has been queried about the meaning of the vow of teaching the poor gratuitously.

Another provision of the Bull also frequently caused difficulties:

"The Brothers are admitted into the said Institute at the age of 16 or 17; they initially make vows for three years only, and they renew these vows each year, until they have reached the age of 25, at which time they will be allowed to make perpetual vows."

Nothing is said, therefore, of a probationary period prior to and in preparation for making the first vows. As for the vows, be they triennial or perpetual, nothing is said

about their being optional. The text of the Bull even gives the impression that all the Brothers will bind themselves by vows. In actuality, however, the contrary takes place. Some Brothers still make triennial vows after the age of 25; others spend their whole life in the Institute without ever making any vows whatever. In the official statistics of the Institute, between 1860 and 1880, from among the Brothers having completed the Novitiate, approximately one third are listed as "employed novices." These include Brothers who are still too young and who must wait until age 18 in order to ask for admission to first vows. But among these are also those of different age groups who have chosen not to make vows or have not been admitted to vows. At the time, non-admission to vows in no way signified a dismissal from the Institute.

How justify then a procedure so different from that which the Bull seemed to imply? The Brothers in 1725 considered the Bull the equivalent of an approval of what they were actually doing. Such approval was seen as extending considerably beyond the few articles inserted in the Papal document at their own request. These 18 articles having been reproduced, the Bull further expressly stated: "*This is the way you have lived up to the present and the way you continue to live.*" In addition, concerning this particular article on the vows, two different drafts had been sent from France to Rome, and one of these, dated October, 1722, stated more carefully: "*having reached the age of 25, the Brothers could be admitted to perpetual vows.*"

For two centuries the Brothers believed themselves to be in legitimate possession of practices going back to the origins of the Institute. The vows remained optional, and belonging to the Institute didn't require "*profession of the five vows.*" The Brothers also continued to "calculate" in a strange manner the period of their temporary vows. The first time that a Brother made vows, they were made for a three-year period; it was not necessary to wait until the end

of this three-year period to be admitted to perpetual vows; however, these same triennial vows were renewed annually for a new period of three years. Therefore, a Brother with temporary vows who wanted to remain without vows had to refrain from renewing them for two successive years. It was only in 1859 that annual vows were introduced in the Institute, and made a requisite for triennial vows.

Dispensation from vows was reserved to the Supreme Pontiff who exercised his authority through the Apostolic Penitentiary, which handled most of the dispensations from vows not recognized as vows of religion. During the Pontificate of Pius IX, however, because of the increasing number of what were called "congregations with simple vows," the Roman Congregation of Bishops and Regulars became the competent body for dispensations from our vows.

The Canon Law Code of 1917

The numerous institutes of Brothers and Sisters that were founded during the course of the 19th Century received from this Congregation of Bishops and Regulars directives more and more frequently concerning very minute details. During the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIII, a new Code of Canon Law was developed in the Church, dealing with Congregations, Societies, Communities, and other Institutions, with or without vows, which closely approximated the regular state in which solemn vows were made.

Our Bull of Approbation sheltered us from the majority of the directives of Rome. These were intended especially, if not uniquely, for those Congregations not yet approved by Rome, but which had sought such approbation.

Nevertheless, a two-fold development appears and affects us directly. Internally, the Institute is paying more and more attention to following voluntary directives of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Externally, the Holy See is

increasingly showing its desire to bring into line with a common law those older institutions, which until then were directed by their own particular law.

This development no doubt brings about a gradual abandonment of what until then were the special features of institutions, and the adoption of certain common traits imposed by legislation rather than from actual experience. However, if the superiors attempt to align themselves with many prescriptions of the new law, there is also widespread in the Institute a desire to approximate even more closely the regular state, in which solemn vows are made. There seems to exist among many Brothers, a slight malaise about not being officially considered religious.

The Brothers were not the only group in this ambivalent situation. Many other groups of Brothers and Sisters sought a clearer position of their status. Did the Church consider them religious or not? Each time that the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was consulted on the issue, it would answer: you are evidently not religious since you do not make solemn vows in a regular order.

The task of codification undertaken during the Pontificate of Pius X and subsequently continued under Benedict XV did not provide an adequate answer for quite a long time. However, in a rather unexpected manner, the last preparatory drafts of the project provided for a change of the canonical religious state itself, introducing into the category of "religious" those congregations of simple and public vows. Those societies with a common life only, remained closely related to, but still outside of, the canonical religious state.

There is no doubt whatever that from January 26, 1725, our Institute was an institution of Pontifical Right, with simple and public vows. Beyond any doubt either, the history of the Institute over the next two centuries maintained us in this category. There is no doubt, finally, that the evolution of the last half century had so affirmed our status, that the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law

did not present any surprises or cause us misgivings. We immediately recognized ourselves among those “congregations with simple and public vows” that the Code fully incorporated into the category of the canonical religious state.

Our Vows Become Vows of Religion

Promulgated on Pentecost Sunday, 1917, the Code became effective on the Feast of Pentecost, 1918. World War I was still going on and in Europe especially, many Brothers without vows or bound only by temporary vows were either in the military service or in prisoner-of-war camps. It was impossible to contact them and request them to abide by the provisions of the common law for religious as now applicable to them for the first time: the necessity of all Brothers to make vows, the need of renewing these vows as soon as the period of temporary vows expired, and the obligation for all Brothers to bind themselves by perpetual vows when the appropriate time came about.

Consequently, the Institute sought and received from the Holy See the authorization to delay until the retreats of 1921 the implementation of the new legislation concerning vows. The other provisions of the common law took effect immediately, including that provision requiring the making of vows at the end of the canonical novitiate period.

The shift of the Institute to the status of a religious congregation created the risk of reducing the importance of the vow of stability and even that of the specific vow of association to keep gratuitous schools. Wasn't stability now guaranteed by Canon Law itself? As for the specific vows, many canonists thought them superfluous. Was it possible to add to the value of the three vows considered as essential to the religious state?

New ideas at the time of Vatican II happily resolved some of these issues. In each Institute, the life of consecrated

persons must be in keeping with a particular charism proper to it. This charism is expressed very well through various steps taken by the Founder, through his decisions and, under his influence, those of the first disciples who lived with him in the initial stages of the group's establishment.

After some hesitation, the General Chapter of renewal of 1966-67 properly decided to keep the vows of stability and of association to keep gratuitous schools. If the Chapter proposed new terminology, this was to the end of generating a reevaluation of these traditional commitments, which have provided such strong support for generations of Brothers before us.

Our Life As Consecrated Men

Our life as consecrated men involves our entire life. The fact that we articulate our consecration by means of the formula of vows does not reduce to that particular moment the gift of ourselves to God. In point of fact, the gift was made before we made our vows, and this donation of self needs to be renewed regularly during the whole of our life.

To express this gift of self, the Founder and his first disciples chose words which demonstrate the profound commitment of their entire being to God for His glory, by means of communal work, the education of the poor in the faith.

That this total gift of self was manifested by the making of one, then three, and finally five distinct vows, and that there was confusion as to whether these commitments were vows of religion or not, in no way alters the significance of the initial option. On the contrary, it bears witness to an increasingly sharper awareness of the value inherent in such a choice. There is not only the awareness of the Brothers that is evidenced, but the awareness of the hierarchical Church,

keenly solicitous to nourish and help develop the seed planted by the Holy Spirit, acting in every foundation.

It is still too early to predict what the new law for "institutes of consecrated life" will be like. Already preparatory drafts have been circularized and have attracted a certain attention. Nevertheless, the probability of major modifications still exists, especially as a result of numerous consultations sought within the Church and notably from religious institutes themselves. Given the period of expectation and anticipation which we now are facing and will most likely continue to face for several years yet, it is more important than ever that we rediscover the very attitude of the Founder, who was more concerned with assuring the unique worth and internal cohesion of his Community than he was with seeking its protection by legal statutes.

THE WORD OF GOD:

A SOURCE OF LASALLIAN PROPHETIC WITNESS

In order to carry out the mandate entrusted to it by the Chapter, the General Council would like to propose to the Brothers some means by which they could deepen their life as men consecrated to God. It is hoped that the means herein presented are simple yet fertile, acceptable to all, oriented to the Brother's daily life, and capable of being personalized by each Brother as needed.

The Bible, particularly the New Testament, considered by De La Salle to be the first and principal Rule of the Brothers, still remains the basic inspiration. Coming into contact with Scripture helps us to discover "the ways of God," to review, and to renew unceasingly the process which brought about our personal vocation.

The two treatises presented here have no other objective than enabling the Brother to return to the rich values of the Word of God. Drawn up analogously, the studies look to two separate events in our life as persons whose lives are consecrated to God. Yet, these events are seen as somewhat successive in time. The first treatise relates to the issue of identity. As a man accepts the will of God in his regard, he enters a new world, that of an Alliance. As such, the distinctive traits of his personality crystallize themselves, not via a greater and clearer knowledge of his being, but rather through a reliance upon God's fidelity and grace to respond day after day to His loving designs in his regard, as also for those men entrusted to his care by God.

The second study utilizes the example of the prophets as its basis. It serves to extend and to deepen the first treatise. As a man is seized by the Word of God, he belongs less and less to himself, and in the details of his daily life, he tends to become himself a veritable Word of God.

The whole of the material relies upon the Old Testament as its point of departure, but in the latter portion of the presentation, studies demonstrate how all is eventually accomplished in Jesus Christ and is seen as continuing in His Church. For us Brothers, there is no difficulty in situating John Baptist de La Salle in the continuation of this permanent-type action by which God reserves to Himself the life and work of certain men and makes of these, living signs of His Glory.

TREATISE I

"Who am I?"

"I will be with you, go to my People!"

The Reality That Surrounds Us

Throughout this dossier, many references are made to the crisis of identity that clouds the idea that the Brothers have of themselves. It is also noted that this phenomenon more or less affects Christians in general. Caught up in the whirl of a rapidly evolving society, they feel as if they are giving up the essentials. They no longer can see for themselves where they will be tomorrow, nor are they able to find a sure path with which to progress to the future, without an exaggerated risk of losing their own identity.

Identity is a complex reality involving both a personal and a social component. As an individual asks himself "Who am I?," he must keep in mind what he himself perceives, as also the manner in which he is perceived by others, and which agrees or disagrees with the expression of his identity.

The personal component itself is a composite one. There is what is given to or imposed upon us, and what comes to us from birth, from heredity, from the various social influences which affect us. There is also that which results from our personal initiative and the proper use of our free will. "No one has chosen his race, sex, or name. These must be accepted. But the present is ours to organize, the future to plan for, a profession ours to choose, and a state

of life ours to constitute for ourselves.” (Loumier - *The Plan of Life of an Adolescent*, p. 37 - ISPC). However, in real life, things are seldom that clear cut. We need only recall the constraints that surround the choice of a career.

All these elements are closely interrelated and form a rather complex entity. Each of us, in effect, must accept a degree of ambiguity within himself, and yet go forward using as a point of departure one that cannot be fully elucidated.

Furthermore, the development of one’s identity involves an endeavor which unfolds over the course of a person’s entire life. Every person holds dearly to his self-esteem. No one readily gives up an ideal that has been freely opted for. Everyone has a need for perceiving evidence of some continuity in the very depths of his being. As the components of this ideal are seen as losing some of their value, or the ideal itself becomes less desirable, and less esteemed, the person wants to know in whose name he should change and to what he should then gear himself, in order to preserve this perception of continuity in the midst of and beyond what is transitory.

This is the reason why in the midst of the evolution going on around us so many Christians and religious refuse to give in passively to new modes of thought and action. They seek to preserve their freedom and to find ways and means of remaining faithful to themselves, despite the changes being proposed.

A New View of Our Life

The Bible offers us an opportunity to make significant changes in our manner of conceiving the idea of identity. In effect, under the predominant influence of Greco-Latin culture, our consideration of the question “Who am I?” comes down to an effort to discover the truth about ourselves and to make this truth clear and evident in our own mind. For example, we place a high priority on finding out the real

motives that led us to choose a life of consecration to God.

Such an effort is valuable! However, its results are relative, given man's nature. Forever in a state of becoming, he is vain enough to wish to fix as stable the characteristics of his nature. Ambiguous a task as it might seem, it is difficult to unravel the tangle that comprises one's motivations.

We must try to be attentive to the voice of the Bible in our search for truth. Scripture uses a totally different context as framework: in its article on "Truth," the *Vocabulary of Biblical Theology* states: "*Ours is ordinarily an intellectualistic conception as inherited from the Greeks. The Biblical notion of truth is very different, since it is based on a religious experience — that of an encounter with God.*" (p. 1092). The Bible invites us not to limit this encounter to our moments of prayer, but rather to extend it to all facets of our life, where we can learn to identify divine action at work at the very core of our existence.

The change that Scripture proposes is the development of our identity, using as a basis the role that each of us freely accepts to play in God's plan of salvation: "*I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory...*" This consecrative act introduces us to a new identity. The forms that this identity will take will be determined during the course of our life, as we discern in faith God at work in the depth of our being, and as we orient our personality so as to receive the Gift of God and allow it to fructify. The continuity established between "yesterday, today, and tomorrow" is taken over by God, whose love for us never waivers.

"Who am I?"

As God calls a person to a vocation of service for His People, He draws him into a personal covenant with Himself and proposes for him a new identity. Examples of God's

call about: Moses (Ex. 3 and 4), Jeremias (1, 4-10), Peter (Lk. 5, 1-12), Mary (Lk. 1, 26-38)... It all starts with a dialogue during the course of which the chosen one expresses both his confidence in the future and his fears: *"How will this be done?"* Yet, as the *"Yes!"* is given, God himself becomes the guarantor of the person's vocation.

The call of Moses is one of the most significant examples of God's action. Confronted by Yahweh Who wishes to entrust him with a very difficult mission, Moses exclaims: *"Who am I to go and meet Pharaoh?"* Faced with a situation which is clearly beyond his capacity, an awareness of his own weakness is his initial reaction. Quickly, however, he realizes what he can really become, for the divine call entails a veritable new being. Obviously, he will remain himself, but he is called upon to forget somewhat what he was and all that in effect constituted his existence and molded his personality. He crosses a threshold and opens himself up to a new manner of being.

As Peter realizes the power of his Master during the miraculous draft of fish, he exclaims, *"Leave me, Lord for I am a sinful man. For he and his companions were completely overcome."* (Lk. 5, 8-9). Jeremias also sought to draw away from his mission: *"Oh Lord Yahweh, look, I do not know how to speak: I am a child!"* (Jer. 1, 6).

"I will be with you!"

In both cases, wherein the question of one's future is contemplated and seen as awesome, no direct answer is forthcoming from God. No enlightenment, no elucidation, no explanation! In reality, God's answer is far richer: He promises His Presence: *"I will be with you!"* Not a presence of mere external support, but truly a complete possession of the individual: *"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you!"* (Jer. 1, 8). God invites the person whom He

has chosen to join Him in carrying out history together, in a personalized actualization of the Covenant. In his work *Man*, the eminent theologian Multmann speaks of this relationship thusly: *"A new possibility of being is proposed to man, a possibility of being in communion with God. Man doesn't subsequently see himself as a new being, rather he gradually realizes the change by means of the development of his historical call by God. When he answers this call of God and gives himself to it completely, he experiences his life to be a part of the history of God in his regard!"* (1)

Jesus Christ

In seeking to develop a Christian identity, an encounter with Jesus Christ is essential. In Him, knowledge of God and of self are integrated. Pascal explains it in this manner: *"Knowledge of God without a knowledge of one's own misery produces pride; knowledge of one's own misery without knowledge of the misery of Christ produces despair. Knowledge of Christ produces a happy medicine, for herein we find both God and our misery."* (Pascal, VII, 527).

In effect, Christ is the NEW MAN in person: *"This was to create one single New Man in himself out of the two of them (Jew and Pagan) and by restoring peace through the cross, to unite them both in a single Body and reconcile them with God. In his own person he killed the hostility."* (Ep. 3, 15-16).

This is the reason why the baptized person, called to his being in faith, must gradually allow himself to be enveloped by Christ: *"You have stripped off your old behaviour with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its creator..."* (Col. 3, 9-10).

(1) MULTMANN, *L'homme* (Ed. Cerf Marne, p. 28).

The importance of this attempt to follow Christ is emphasized in the document *Religious Consecration* published by the Chapter of renovation of 1966-67: "*The most ancient tradition of the religious life presents this following of Christ (sequela Christi) as the motive inspiring virgins and widows, cenobites and anchorites, to follow in his footsteps; not so much by despising this world, but rather by being in it to give witness to the fact it is possible to prefer Jesus Christ to all other things.. In fact, Christ is the only true religious. In Him God gives himself to man and man responds to God by the action of the Holy Spirit.*" (p. 20).

This theme of "following Christ" is more amply developed in another place; further treatment at this point is not necessary.

Through the Influence of the Holy Spirit

Is it not possible that this gradual enfolding of the baptized person by the influence of Christ be in effect reduced to a psychological process analogous to that by which adolescents, during a phase of their development, seek to identify with external models: singers, athletes, heroes? Aren't the baptized person and the religious being invited to engage themselves in a similar process, one whose basis is often merely the result of a burst of enthusiasm? Isn't there a risk of regression to a development stage presumably achieved in adolescence?

In reality, the Bible calls upon us to receive the Gift of the Holy spirit, which is the glory of the Lord within us, transforming us in His likeness: "*Now this Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.*" (II Cor. 3, 17-18).

This transformation into the likeness of Christ does not involve an obliteration of our original identity or a leveling-type process of all Christians so as to produce a uniformity, for the gift of the Spirit is infinitely diverse in keeping with the individual to whom it is addressed. This is what St. Paul reminds us of when he enumerates the different charisms (e.g., cf. I Cor. 12). This likeness to Christ does not come from outside to superimpose itself upon our personal identity and to do violence to such; it emerges from the depths of our being. Each person must identify for himself, the work and action of the Spirit of God in his daily life. From the Spirit, we have only a pledge and the first fruits (II Cor. 1, 22; Rom. 8, 23...) and He calls us to build up our life under His influence: "*Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit.*" (Gal. 5, 25).

In their material on the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, Brothers Michel Sauvage et Miguel Campos describe how De La Salle invites the Brothers to develop an openness of their whole being, rather than an introspection, to the plan of salvation of which they are the ministers:

"While he thus attempts to have the Brother focus on what he lives concretely each day by helping him to realize better that his work with students constitutes in effect the context of his religious experience, De La Salle calls upon the Brother to break down the walls of time and space by leading him to a discovery of the reality of God's mystery at the very core of this same work. This transcendental openness to mystery, far from diluting in any way the solid basis of the Brother's existence, produces in him a new perspective of the context of his work, that is, the 'today' of God, where God's work is visible and efficacious for the poorest of children. In urging the Brother in this manner, De La Salle does not commit him to introspection or excessive self-examination. Rather, he situates the Brother at the heart of the Mirabilia Dei that are found in his daily life, thus revealing to the Brother 'what God is saying today.'" (page 29).

In the Quality of One's Relationship to God

A Christian identity develops itself in the course of the life of the person that willingly receives the divine influence produced by the Holy Spirit. The reception of this influence is not so much a general and external assent. Rather, it is an acquisition that evolves at the very core of one's personal freedom and that results in a commitment, a "consecration" of one's existence to a point of no return. There inevitably comes that moment when a person must "lose his life" in order to follow Christ (cf. Matt. 16, 25) and "*no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*" (Lk. 9, 62).

The moment of truth occurs at that time when we ask ourselves: "Who is God for Me?" "What is His role in my life, what priority is given Him in the choices of my daily life?" The answer to these questions relates to a great extent the on-going quality of our relationship with God, to the image of God that we make for ourselves. It is well to recall the insistence of the Bible on eschewing false gods and on destroying those that could become as such. We must constantly strive to resist the temptation to create false images of God, that God of Jesus Christ Who cannot be reduced to a simple entity, but the knowledge of Whom is diffused in our hearts by the Holy Spirit; that God of Jesus Christ Who has chosen us, accompanies us, and sends us to make His presence known among men.

In Solidarity with the People of God

The life of the Christian is a "life-with." Moses, Jeremiah, Peter, Mary,... are men and a woman of a People, charged with the task of constituting it as a People, of enlightening it, and of leading it. In turn, the other members of the People recognize (often in a begrudging manner) the ministry

of Moses, Jeremiah, Peter, and Mary,... in relationship with their own. A two-fold relationship is thus established: integrated into a People, each Christian is in turn recognized and in a manner of speaking circumscribed by his fellow members. It is within the core of this relationship that the personality of the Christian forms itself.

An Institute such as ours allows the establishment of this two-fold relation, during the course of which we develop ourselves, all the while aiding the development of the Church within the context of the local community where we live and work. No Institute exists for itself. It must assist each of its members to live as an active component within the People of God.

In the Service of a Specific Mission

"Go to my People!" God chooses for Himself a man or a woman to the end of having them serve their fellow men. During the course of this mission of service the particular features of these chosen ones become discernible. *"I am putting my words into your mouth."* (Jer. 1, 9). *"...from now on it is men you will catch."* (Lk. 5, 10). A new being endowed of a new identity is visible throughout the life of the person. It is only as his life draws to its end that a man can trace his identity, that continuity which affirmed itself in the midst of numerous events, those features of his personality that have evolved gradually, that countenance marked for eternity.

In the Context of God's Fidelity

Since Christian identity is not something given to a person at the start of his life and subsequently preserved with great care, but rather comprises a series of deliberate

choices made over the course of a lifetime, can the Christian depend on some element of constancy. The insistence on change being an integral part of this on-going process could possibly be interpreted as an attempt to stress the value of change as being worthwhile in and of itself.

Yet, the permanence which the Christian depends upon as he goes about building his personal life does not consist of fixed structures similar to those employed (*a posteriori*) to identify a person as belonging to such and such an era or country. People are the essential features comprising the permanence involved: God and His salvific Will and the men in His Plan. As long as there exists a God who loves men and wills their salvation, and there are youth, particularly poor youth, who need to be loved and saved, there will be a mission for men who consecrate their life to God and to youth, as a service to God, in keeping with the charism of John Baptist de La Salle. Such are the permanent bases upon which our personal development is built.

Conclusions

Two types of conclusions can be drawn: the first, of a more theoretical nature, and the second of a more practical approach to our commitment.

The first conclusion entails a review of the life of the Brother and a new "reading" of that life in the light of what Scripture presents as the constitutive elements of a Christian's identity, that is, a man searching for God, solidly integrated in His People, and at the service of his Brothers. This relates closely to the Brother, associated with his colleagues for the service of the young and the poor, while living in a privileged relationship with God. While quite interesting, this particular parallel can still be considered deficient by some. For those who ask themselves the question, "Who am I?" need much more than a demonstration of what

others have done, which approach frequently remains foreign as a solution to their personal difficulties. The response, at once true, free, and subsequently valuable, can only come from the depth of the person who is questioning and searching.

A second conclusion, potentially a fruit of this study, consists in an invitation to each Brother to discern for himself the action of God at the core of his existence, and to rediscover his life in the light of faith. Knowledge of our weaknesses, of our remissness, of our compromising should not prevent us from taking stock of all that is positive and potentially valuable in ourselves. Life and death live side by side in us. It is possible, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to give that life in us a chance to grow and to guide this emergence of the self.

The mere fact of becoming actively conscious of what we live in a rather implicit manner is not only itself an answer to the question, "Who am I?" but it is also an invitation to self-development, via a commitment that is more firm, more rich, more deeply motivated, more comprehensive. Step by step, we are gradually led to change the goal of our life, that is, to re-direct the orientation of our existence. The question "Who am I?" is necessary at a certain phase of our life, as we seek to take in hand the direction of this life. Yet, it does involve a stage wherein the individual turns inwardly and interests himself in his own nature. Should the person linger too long a time in this particular situation, there is a definite risk of becoming self-centered.

The action of God vis-a-vis Moses reveals this type of re-orientation: "Who am I, Lord, to go to Pharaoh?" says the latter. The answer of Yahweh, "I will be with you, go to My People!" does not provide the enlightenment sought by Moses. Rather, it puts Moses in another sphere, within which he will be able to develop his true being. The People of God will recognize thus his word as being the word of Yahweh Himself, and Moses' life will become the sign and instrument of salvation.

We are invited to follow the same route, in order that the Spirit can abide in us and become part of our daily life, to the end of sharing to a greater degree with our fellow men of the hope that dwells in us.

TREATISE II

CONSECRATED LIFE AS A LIVING WITNESS OF THE LORD

Meaning of This Treatise

He Who responds to the call of God as perceived in his life is gradually brought to the point of "losing his life" and of becoming a "new man." Thus can the previous treatise be summarized.

In order to provide greater depth to the material previously presented, this second exposition again treats of this newly established identity, but now using the **PROPHETS** as a point of departure. The procedure is not a haphazard one. There is a clear similarity between the ministry of the Prophets and that of the Brother called to proclaim the Word.

Moreover, as men of action, as persons politically involved, as individuals enjoying a privileged and stable relationship with God, the Prophets show us and open for us the way to develop a meaningful unity and integration in our life of commitment to God.

The World We Live In

The situations that we would like to discuss herein are those that occasion difficulties, obstacles, or failures in the process of integrating our life as men consecrated to God.

One of these problems is caused by the insidious presence

of *formalism*: the tendency of us all to reduce the demands of a life of Gospel witness to mere superficial attitudes, attitudes which have no part in our personal life, and which have often no link whatever to our daily life. This difficulty appears when we tie ourselves down in excessive pharisaical minutiae, as well as when we continually act out of self-interest or passion, without relating our work to our commitment as men consecrated to God. From this results an enormous spiritual void. Since this happens in a subtle manner, rather than violently, we run the risk of tolerating the condition for some time, until that day that we regretfully realize the seriousness of the situation. Our life as men consecrated to God has lost its meaning for us, for having been relegated for all practical purposes to a level of worthlessness.

Another difficulty frequently mentioned by the Brothers comes from seeing our life as men consecrated to God as primarily oriented to privation. Vows are valuable only to the extent that they deprive a person of something. Formalism is not the issue. The individual is both serious and generous. The fact is that the life of consecration to God is identified almost solely with asceticism or with a life of prayer, and thus exercises little influence on the person's whole existence, and remains impotent in the development of the person's affective life, his relationships, the freedom to commit oneself, etc.

Inversely, it is easy to come to the opposite deduction: identification of one's life as a person consecrated to God as being equivalent to engaging in apostolic works; equating the proclamation of the Word with the promotion of human development. Obviously both of these attitudes manifest themselves to varying degrees.

Lastly, a final form of deterioration appears frequently enough and can be insidious: that of limiting the inspiration of our call from God to a life of consecration, to that committed at the moment of one's perpetual profession or first

vows. This type of thinking is often labelled "selectionism," because it involves the consideration of a particular moment, that of one's profession, as a "choice" that was made once and for all. Whereas, in reality, conditions change, and one's chronological development entails different issues that require new answers. It is not a matter of putting into question the commitment already made, but on the contrary to preserve the dynamism that was once present.

Language itself contributes to this problem, this tendency to separate things out in our life. While St. De La Salle, with many other Founders, describes the Brother who prays, works, teaches, relates to people, we his successors, often succumb to the temptation of concretizing abstract ideas; for example, consecration and mission. We also create various combinations to produce a hierarchy of such "values." It is not a matter of disdaining a vocabulary of analysis of valid merit, which can prove quite useful for study and reflection. However, these words have shown the dangers that are hidden therein. For example, as popularly held, the term "consecration" refers to one's relationship with God, while "mission" is considered as rather referring to apostolic activity. In this context, all emphasis given to the idea of mission appears as an attempt to minimize prayer.

Reciprocally, all reference to the value of consecration seems to be, in the mind of many, an attempt to stress monastic values.

This lack of integration of the two concepts often brings on repercussions in the manner of conceiving programs of initial formation: "Train the religious, then we can train the apostle," or inversely "Form the apostle, and the rest will develop of itself."

The Bible will help us to recapture the integrative meaning of these words and encourage us to go further in understanding the rich facets of the language. Scripture relates a story, a story of an encounter between a God Who loves and Who enters into a relationship with man; and a

God Who desires to save mankind and Who to accomplish such, calls to His service those Whom He has chosen to be the messengers of His love.

The Scope of Our Reflection

In the foregoing material, it is not our intention to demonstrate the biblical roots of the different ways of leading a life consecrated to God; for example, the scriptural bases for the traditional vows. The orientation envisioned is quite different. Actually, the Bible reveals a strong continuity in the manner by which persons chosen by God were gradually led to an integration of their life, including their personal life, with the Good News that they were called to proclaim. Examples from among the Prophets have been selected because of the similarities that can be easily drawn between their life consecrated to proclaiming the Word and our own particular mission as Brothers and educators. Also quite helpful to our presentation at this point will be a consideration of "the action of God" in the lives of the shepherds that He has chosen for His People.

The Demands of God in the Lives of the Prophets

Throughout the early history of the East, there lived "prophets" in the service of indigenous divinities. The Bible itself speaks of "groups of prophets" during the period of the Judges (cf. I Sam. 10, 5). Evidently, this category of prophets is not our point of reference.

On the other hand, from the period of the Judges with Elias and Eliseus, but particularly during the Exile, the role of the prophets crystallized and the influence of the Spirit is more clearly affirmed in the evolution of the vocation call of the prophets. By a study of the lives of these men we

can measure the gradual manner by which God takes over the lives of the men He has called to His service.

As spokesman of the Word, the prophet has been chosen by God: he is never allowed to forget the fact that God's initiative is at the root of his calling. God possesses the very person of the prophet. Such is the case with Moses, Samuel, Amos, Isaiah, Ezechiel, Jeremiah, etc.

God exercises dominion over the life of the prophet in varying degrees, as to its extensiveness and personal commitment. Thus, in a number of cases, the preaching of the prophets is accompanied by gestures and mimes which symbolize the Word being proclaimed; for example, the purchase of a field, the breaking of a vase, the piercing of a hole in a wall, the shaving of one's hair, the cutting up of one's clothing, etc.

All such gestures, significantly symbolic as they may be, still remain very clearly external to the personal life of the prophet. Such gestures involve only his facility for expressing himself and pedagogical skills of a sort. It is all the more striking, therefore, to consider that among the greatest of the prophets of which the Bible makes mention, the divine influence involves their intimate life, and their conjugal and family relationships.

Thus is it that Osee, the unfortunate husband, becomes the living word of God, as He forgives His people Israel. Jeremiah is told not to marry as a sign of the impending dangers in store for the Chosen People. To the same end, it is intimated to Ezechiel that he should not weep over the death of his wife.

A passage such as that found in Jeremiah (20, 7-18) expresses most appropriately the dominance over the prophet's life by the divine presence: a life of covenant with God, a life of total consecration to his service, a life based on a deep relationship of intimacy and trust. In spite of this relationship, there is still room for doubt, hesitancy, and even anger. *"You seduced me, Yahweh, and I allowed*

myself to be so deceived. You overpowered me because you were stronger. I'm always exposed to mockery,... The Word of Yahweh has been a source of opprobrium and derision every day. I would say to myself: I will no longer think of him and I will speak no longer in his name. But in my heart was a devouring fire. I exhausted myself of seeking to contain this fire, but did not succeed..."

Father Beaucamp describes the relationship between the message of the prophet and his life in this manner: *"The message cannot be external to its bearer: it is not a concept which the hearer understands; rather, it is the manifestation in him of the Living God (Elias) and the Holy God (Isaiah),..."* (*Vocabulaire de Théologie biblique*, article "Prophète", p. 872).

Jesus Christ

The close identification between the life of the Prophet and the Word entrusted to him is substantively completed in Jesus: *"At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything and through whom he made everything there is. He is the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature,..."* (Heb. 1, 1-3).

The Plan of God appears through what Jesus says and does. His words and parables, miracles, attitudes, relationships, all these are a reflection of the Father, in human language. Jesus acts with authority. He does not speak as the prophets of the old Ancient Covenant, as the "Oracle of Yahweh," rather He speaks in His own name: *"You have heard it said, ...but I tell you..."* His actions are accomplished in close relationship with His Father: *"To have seen me is to have seen the Father,..."* (Jn. 14, 9). *"Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the*

Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matt. 11, 27).

Saint Paul

Without being able to treat of the vocation of St. Paul as comprehensively as might be desirable, it is, nevertheless, useful at this point to stop for a moment to consider it, not only because of its exemplary value, but also because of our Founder's keen interest in the issue. The scriptural component woven through the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* and which is used by De La Salle to trace out the spiritual itinerary of the Brother is based on the words and examples of St. Paul.

The vocation of Paul, like that of the great prophets, is the result of a unique and unexpected encounter. The Acts of the Apostles (ch. 9, 1-30; ch. 22, 3-21) presents vividly the divine call that changes Paul's life completely and gives him his Mission: "*Go, I am sending you out to the pagans far away.*"

St. Paul describes on many occasions the transformation that subsequently occurred in his personal life. He even goes to the extent of saying that for him "*To live, is Christ*" (Ga. 2, 20). In a more audacious and expressive manner he also states: "*It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church.*" (Col. 1, 24). It is difficult to imagine a life that has been more drastically transformed by the Word than that of Paul, and a life that has expressed more vividly the Word.

The direct consequence for Paul is his unshakeable faith in his own personal vocation. The subsequent passage of the previously cited quotation expresses this well: "*I became*

the servant of the Church when God made me responsible for delivering God's message to you." In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he describes himself as an "ambassador," speaking in the name of Christ!

At this point, our reflection can't help but turn to John Baptist de La Salle as he describes our vocation and election, utilizing verbatim the words of St. Paul:

"Since you are AMBASSADORS AND MINISTERS OF JESUS CHRIST in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your teaching as IF HE WERE TEACHING THEM. They must be convinced that the truth of Jesus Christ comes from your mouth, that it is only in his name that you teach, that he has given you authority over them.

THEY ARE A LETTER WHICH CHRIST DICTATES TO YOU, WHICH YOU WRITE each day in THEIR HEARTS, NOT WITH INK, BUT BY THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD. For the Spirit acts in you and by you through the power of Jesus Christ. He helps you overcome all the obstacles to their salvation, enlightening them in the person of Jesus Christ and helping them avoid all that could be displeasing to him.

In order to fulfil your responsibility with as much perfection and care as God requires of you, frequently give yourself to the Spirit of our Lord to act only under his influence and not through any self-seeking. This Holy Spirit, then, will fill your students with Himself, and they will be able to possess fully the Christian spirit." (De La Salle, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 3rd Med., § 2).

Conclusions

The material heretofore presented describes a spiritual itinerary of several prophets, St. Paul, and St. John Baptist de La Salle. The point of reference for such is Jesus Christ, the central and essential point in any such itinerary, through

whom all is accomplished, and in whom the life of every baptized person finds its true meaning.

This type of itinerary can be traced through the lives of many other persons chosen by God, other prophets and leading figures of both the Old and New Testaments: Abraham, the poor of Yahweh, Mary, John the Baptist (cf. *Meditations 2, 3, 4, 138* to determine the importance of John the Baptist in Lasallian spirituality).

Our RELIGIOUS PROFESSION, that public act by which we consecrated our lives to God, for His service and in association with our Brothers, is profoundly inspired by the Bible. This Profession is a structure that the Founder proposes to us and which we have accepted for living out this inspiration in a predetermined context. For us this context is the Christian education of youth by Brothers associated in a celibate state and in a community.

For sure, this Profession is a public commitment to the Church. As such, it is subject to certain conditions. However, this should in no way detract from the spiritual Gift which brought the Profession about, nor from the spirit that vivifies the words of our commitment. Other Founders set out on the same itinerary as Moses, Mary, and John Baptist de La Salle. They followed the call of the Spirit who raised Jesus. Veritably seized by God in the very depths of their being, for His honor and service, they led a life that for us became a reference point. They interpreted the Bible with a very special charism, a Gift of the Spirit, to which charism we fully adhere through our religious Profession.

A similar reflective consideration of the Bible will provide us with an opportunity to reconstruct the genesis of our vocation to the end of producing a renovation or a renewal of this call of God:

"Often meditate on the words of Holy Scripture as an encouragement to well-doing, and in order to conduct yourself according to the spirit of your state. The word of God therein contained has this effect, for, according to St. Paul, God's

word to us is something alive, full of energy; it can penetrate deeper than any two-edged sword, reaching the very division between soul and spirit, between joints and marrow, quick to distinguish every thought and design in our hearts (Heb. 4, 12). Make use of it therefore, since it has such great advantages.” (De La Salle, Meditations for Sundays and Principal Feasts, 192nd Med., § 2).

One of the first steps in our reflection consists in asking ourselves what type of life it is that we are actually leading and to become more conscious of it, such as it may be.

Such a reflection does not aim exclusively or primarily at a discovery of our faults or deficiencies, but seeks to aid us to a much greater degree to discern the Spirit living and acting at the very core of our being. Many of our daily actions as teachers and educators are implicitly based on the priority that we give to Christ in our lives. It is essential, however, for the vigor of our life as men consecrated to God that we be able to explicitate the evangelical motives of our daily activities. (Cf. Study Aids, No. 8). Though the Bible does not treat of the issue of consecration as such, it does tell us about the lives of persons consecrated to God and thus leads us to consider the development of our own personal relationship with God, and this not only in the context of a few important moments in our life, but in the routine of our daily work.

As we go about gradually discovering who we really are, little by little we find ourselves telling others about it. For a person's life to become a living Word, that life must be shared. The men and women of Scripture are part of a People. They accept its questions and enter into on-going dialogue. Their words, their attitudes, their choices, their repudiations are much steeped in the language of this People, as together and in solidarity with this People they live out a common history.

We would like to bring this portion of the dossier to a close with some words from “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” the apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, published in 1975 as a

product of the Third Roman Synod. The words of Bishop Etchegaray, one of the Synod participants, summarize quite appropriately the thought of the group's work: "A Church that renews itself in order to evangelize is a Church that is willing to allow itself to be evangelized." The two citations that herein follow corroborate each other.

The first emphasizes the importance of the witness of our lives as a valuable means of evangelization:

"THE WITNESS OF LIFE - Without repeating everything that we have already mentioned, it is appropriate first of all to emphasize the following point: for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbour with limitless zeal. As we said recently to a group of lay people, MODERN MAN LISTENS MORE WILLINGLY TO WITNESSES THAN TO TEACHERS, AND IF HE DOES LISTEN TO TEACHERS, IT IS BECAUSE THEY ARE WITNESSES. Saint Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the word. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus — the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity." (Evangelii nuntiandi, No. 41).

The second passage repeats the same theme of witness, while applying it to religious:

"Religious, for their part, find in their consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelization. At the deepest level of their being they are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life which is thirsty for the divine Absolute and called to holiness. It is to this holiness that they bear witness. They embody the Church in her desire to give herself completely

to the radical demands of the beatitudes. By their lives they are a sign of total availability to God, the Church and the brethren.

“As such they have a special importance in the context of the witness which, as we have said, is of prime importance in evangelization. At the same time as being a challenge to the world and to the Church herself, this silent witness of poverty and abnegation, of purity and sincerity, of self-sacrifice in obedience, can become an eloquent witness capable of touching also non-Christians who have good will and are sensitive to certain values.” (Evangelii nuntiandi, No. 69).

FOLLOWING CHRIST

“It is your privilege to have followed Jesus and to have left the world. Have you really left all for him?” (Meditation 78, § 1).

These words of St. John Baptist de La Salle thrust us to the very core of our religious consecration: the *Sequela Christi*, the Following of Christ. Throughout the long history of the Church, moreover, the following of Christ was perceived as the very *raison d'être* of the religious life and the founders of religious orders always presented it as such: the Religious is one who wants to follow Christ. It is in this context that for some three hundred years the Institute has been able to number among its members so many educators of the faith, men whose faith led them to leave all things to follow Christ and to attach themselves to Him alone.

Varied Perspectives — A Singular Objective

The answers to the questions which come to mind with reference to the profound meaning of our life as men consecrated to God, and to the true significance of our vocation as Brothers, can be adequately formed only in the *Sequela Christi*, the firm basis of all life consecrated to God. No doubt the motives for which we have become Brothers are many and varied: The desire to sanctify ourselves, to lead a more Christian life, to “strive toward perfection” are motives that have inspired many to enter the religious life. These are the more

traditional perspectives of the gift of self to God. Though seemingly individualistic in orientation, they nevertheless maintain their value as proper reasons.

As Brothers, we have always been "entrusted with the instruction of children" (*Meditation* 64, § 2). Our Institute was established in view of a mission. We are all conscious of the fact that we have consecrated our lives to the apostolic service of youth. Our commitment to the Institute is also a commitment to the Church involved in the human problems of society, (cf. TILLARD, *Comment vivre les voeux aujourd'hui*).

These various points of view all express the essential truth of our Lasallian consecration. They meet the concrete realities of our life as religious in an apostolic Institute.

Nevertheless, if we limit ourselves to these aspects of personal sanctification and apostolic zeal, we will not find adequate answers to the current questions on the true meaning of our life as a Brother. The full development of our life as men consecrated to God can be achieved neither in our search for personal sanctity nor in profuse apostolic activity in the service of God's Kingdom.

Our life as men consecrated to God must first be rooted in God, in Jesus Christ, in order to grow in personal sanctity, and to bear witness to the Gospel. The theological order must enjoy primacy over the moral aspect of our lives as persons consecrated to God.

After some years in religious life, we realise better than when we entered, that we do not become religious, or to be more specific, we do not live in community, primarily to serve or to achieve our salvation. We enter religious life and we persevere therein because of Christ. The Apostles were initially attracted to Christ, and it was in His company that they progressively crystallized their mission of evangelization to men. It is because of Jesus Christ, that with St. Paul "we labor night and day for the Gospel" (TILLARD, *op. cit.*). This is the reason why a Brother decides to throw in his lot with youth and their future.

Attracted by Christ

Because we have been drawn to Christ, because we have met Him and He has invited us to follow Him, we are there, in community with our Brothers, committed with them to the service of youth. This primacy of Jesus Christ in our life as men consecrated to God is recalled by De La Salle when he tells us: "You are daily with the poor, and you are charged on the part of God with the duty of clothing them with Jesus Christ and with giving them His Spirit. Have You been careful, before entering upon so holy a ministry, to clothe yourself therewith..." (*Meditation* 189, § 1).

To cloak oneself with the Spirit of Christ is to place Him at the core of one's life, and in a more dynamic manner, to consider and accept Him as the unique point of attraction, to the exclusion of all other attractions. At the root of the Brother's vocation and his perseverance in it is the constantly renewed decision, made in a spirit of wonder and awe, to follow Christ.

Thus the discovery, or rather the re-discovery, of the meaning of our life as Brothers of the Christian Schools is closely linked to one's discovery of Christ, of the God-Man of the Gospel. Following Christ does not mean looking at Him from afar, but "cloaking oneself with His Spirit, possessing the same sentiments, conforming one's life to Him."

What Christ offers for imitation to those who wish to follow Him are His experience of God as Father and His total abandonment to the Father to the point of death. This death served to reveal the mystery of His personal and filial union with God the Father, through His resurrection. Moreover, Christ lived His life in a total presence to the gift of the Kingdom: that final Salvation which comes from God, which is already present and will manifest itself in its fulness at the end of time. Finally we may add that Christ's attitude before His brothers and His sisters was one of total love which actu-

alized itself in a personal commitment that would eventually lead Him to the Cross and redemption for all.

The Common Root of Our Consecration

In keeping with the tradition of the Church and the Institute, we have expressed our desire to follow Christ by making vows. We make five of these and do so publicly: — chastity, poverty, obedience, service of the poor through education and fidelity to the Institute. In a brief manner, but nevertheless rich in meaning, *The Rule* tells us what each of these vows should mean for us:

“A life of chastity in the celibate state is an expression of undivided love of God that leads the Brothers to love all men with the love of Christ himself. Poverty frees them completely for the ministry of the Word of God and makes them sensitive to the needs of those who are weak and abandoned. Obedience unites them to the will of the Father, even until death, in fidelity to the Institute and in the service of youth and of the poor through education.” (*The Rule* 4, f).

As the expression of our desire “to follow Christ with greater freedom and to imitate Him with greater fidelity,” (*The Rule* 4, a), these vows must not be considered in isolation, or as separated from each other. They are closely related; poverty is something transparent at the core of our life; obedience is a covenant; chastity is a poverty, as also a fidelity; the service of the poor is an obedience, a service stripped of all egoism and personal interest.

Our vows share a root in common: Christ. It is in Him that they find their necessary unity. In relating to Christ, the true theological foundation of our vows, every question concerning them can be very adequately answered. If voluntary poverty is chosen as a privileged component in our life, it is

to the end of following Christ as poor. The same is to be said for religious obedience. It has no meaning except in reference to the example of Christ seeking to do the will of His Father in all things. Lastly, the Brother, as all religious, commits himself to chastity for the purpose of following Christ as chaste. He chooses not to marry because of Christ and in imitation of Him. Such is his true motivation, and all other reasons are corollaries.

The Specific Lasallian Character

Another element can be introduced at this point, as we consider the aspect of convergence among the various commitments vowed in Christ. The element involves our special vows. If the Brother dedicates his entire life to the education of youth and of the poor, he does so to meet their immediate educational needs. More fundamentally, however, he imitates Christ, who travelled the highways and byways teaching the crowds and blessing the children, and exhorted His disciples to teach others all that He had taught them. This reference to Christ is recalled by De La Salle when he writes to his disciples:

“It is your duty daily to instruct the poor. Love them dearly... and thus follow the example of our divine Lord... It was they who ordinarily followed Jesus, and who showed themselves most disposed to receive His doctrine...” (*Meditation* 166, § 2).

Thus the Brother seeks to make more precise his manner of following Christ, inspiring himself in the charism of the Founder. St. John Baptist De La Salle translated this gift of self to God into a living reality by dedicating himself totally to poor and abandoned children, not as an individual but in association with his first disciples. Today, Brothers relive

this Lasallian inspiration: "Throughout their lives the Brothers maintain a special affection for this purpose of the Institute" (*The Rule* 8, d). This purpose is the promotion of God's Kingdom through Christian education of children and the poor "together and by association." In a desire to pursue this specific mission to the very end of his life, a Brother trusts in God's fidelity and strives to reciprocate through his own fidelity.

Our vows of religion, whatever their number may be, have one anchor point: Jesus Christ. When we make vows it is to provide ourselves with means to bring our life in line with that of the God-Man. While these means are undoubtedly important, they must nevertheless remain means, means to a concrete end that we are seeking to achieve: to live in conformity with Christ's life and to cloak ourselves with His Spirit.

CONSECRATED CHASTITY

Conditions Influencing Consecrated Celibacy

Today, consecrated chastity must face up to specific complex issues which affect the religious life of the Brother. Our modern society, characterized by rapid diffusion of information and by free and audacious expression, continually calls into question the values of consecrated chastity and its role in the contemporary world. The vast evolution of thought, as also the vital and spiritual thrust which is found within the Church itself, encourages an evaluation and deepening of the meaning of our consecrated celibacy.

Some typical features of our society and of the contemporary Church that in one way or another affect our religious consecration in terms of chastity can be signalled out for consideration:

— sexual freedom that is observable all around us and transforms the minds of people vis-a-vis values and human conduct, resulting in both positive and negative influences on our understanding of chastity;

— the movement, both within society and the Church, for the liberation of women has caused their presence to be felt in all spheres of social life. This development can very well foster affective maturity, the indispensable basis of consecrated celibacy;

— contemporary Biblical research questions the notion of the “Evangelical counsels” as being reserved exclusively to

religious. Rather, they are now interpreted as calls addressed to all disciples of Christ, whatever their vocation;

— the reevaluation of the spirituality of marriage which leads to a rethinking of the priorities of the Church concerning celibacy, but which also leads to a change in the esteem with which celibacy was considered when it was given priority over the married state.

Consecrated Chastity: in the Light of the Sequela Christi

Jesus understood very well the beauty and the value of conjugal love, but His whole life was consumed by a zeal for the Kingdom. Thus, He gave Himself exclusively to love for His Father and to His mission of fostering fraternity among men.

Our consecrated chastity is related to this perspective. It is identified by a special call of God and by our decision to follow Christ in His total gift of Himself to His Father, for the sake of the Kingdom. Our consecrated celibacy, therefore, has its source and basis in the following of Christ.

It is important to remind ourselves that consecrated chastity is a gift of God: "It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted" (Matt. 19, 10-12).

A new exegetical interpretation of this message has it apply to married men who have been abandoned by their wives, and who do not remarry because of Christ's condemnation of divorce and the impossibility of remarriage while the other spouse is still alive. Without wishing to dispute the value and merit of this contemporary exegesis, the Brother chooses not to marry because he believes himself to be totally committed to the Heavenly Kingdom, following the example of Christ Himself.

Referring to virginity or continence, St. Paul sees a

manifestation of the influence of the Spirit: "I should like everyone to be like me but everyone has his own particular gifts from God..." (I Cor. 7, 7). Here Paul is not setting up two categories of Christians, the perfect ones and the rest. He does not set virginity, a gift of God, up against marriage, a more common state. The one and the other are gifts of God. If the fulness of "God's love is ordinarily given and lived in the reciprocal love of spouses, it nevertheless remains that Christ lived in continence and presented Himself as being virginal. In this virginal state, His entire capacity for love is put to the service of the spiritual reality which He Himself came to give witness to: He is the Son of the Father and in His likeness. Among men He is the first-born from the dead, the new man, or better the complete man, *Ecce Homo*. Thus it is in Christ that the Brother observes how the consecrated celibate can express the most profound spiritual reality of his own person." (cf. *Seigneur, apprend-nous à prier*, André LOUF, p. 103).

The celibacy of the Brother would not be possible without that of Jesus. Moreover, Christ Himself must call him in a special manner. The Brother's chastity is justified only in terms of God's love for us, which love is the source of the special call. This love is also based on the Word of God, and the life of Christ, as also on the life of the Blessed Virgin, whose body and soul God reserved unto Himself as a means to her mission as Mother of the Saviour.

For our part, there is basically our "Yes!" to Christ — given with our whole heart, our whole body, our whole power to love; and this in preference to a "Yes!" to a woman. This is a decision taken once and for all, yet continually renewed, by which we acknowledge the primacy of God and of the grace of the Kingdom, given in the person of Christ. This "Yes!" is given in faith, is also an expression of our faith, and commits at once and totally our life. It is this very attraction for the Lord, Who for His part loved us first, that the Founder seeks to enkindle in us when he writes:

“You are in a profession in which you need to be honoured with the friendship of Jesus. Cherish this virtue, therefore, which was Jesus’ favourite, so that our Divine Saviour may love you tenderly and may take pleasure in remaining with you. His delight is to be with pure men.” (*Meditation* 88, § 1).

A Prophetic and Spiritual Sign

The reign of God infuses itself into the world in which we live. It grows and develops through the fecundity that God has given to men. Within this reign number men born of women, but who earn citizenship in the Kingdom only through a re-birth with water and the Spirit. To this Kingdom yet to come but already present, the Brother is called to give witness by his consecrated chastity. In Christian eschatology the future and the present are indivisible. Our chastity is a sign which bears within itself the anticipated realization of the human community’s participation in the life of Christ.

Our chastity does not lead to a renunciation of love. Rather, we open our heart to a universal love. What we do exclude is conjugal love and the restrictive love (a union of two persons) entailed in it. This we do to give ourselves to all men as Christ did. The assent that we have given to Christ opens our heart to a universal love. This is precisely where our mission to youth takes its roots, not as if it were something from the outside added to our personal gift of self. Rather, it is the joining of our assent to that given by Christ to His Father, which made Him the friend of all men, even the publican and sinner. This indicates that our consecrated chastity does not constrain our love of men and of those who are close to us. Further, it demonstrates that our chastity roots this love in God.

Just as Christ in becoming man placed Himself at the

service of men, the Brother receives the gift of consecrated chastity for service of the human community in order to manifest God's unlimited love for men. All of humanity becomes the Brother's family: all those loved and cared for by the Father, especially the young and the humble.

Lived out in this thrust of universal love and channelled as well as purified by Christ, our consecrated celibacy becomes a most opportune answer to the serious deficiency of love that the world is presently experiencing. Our consecrated celibacy is the sign by which men will know that God is love (I Jn. 4, 8-16), that He became incarnate in Jesus Christ, Who loved all men as His brothers, especially those most needful of love and help, that is, the poor.

The Brother is conscious of the fact that for modern man, as also for men over the ages, being a "eunuch for the sake of God's Kingdom" is not an enviable social advantage. There are those who consider celibacy a social humiliation, a deficiency in one's being. The Brother must then realize that it is only within the context of the strength given him by the Holy Spirit that his chastity can assume the features of important value. Then only can he sing out joyfully in union with the Virgin Mary in her Magnificat.

Demand for a True Love

While evangelical celibacy involves a personal gift of one's self to the Lord and a freedom for greater service for one's neighbor, it also entails another element, one that leaves a person the liberty to function as a critical, reflective conscience of society, with all the risks and dangers that go with such a role. In effect, we choose the celibate state for the sake of the Gospel, out of love for the Kingdom of God which we must ever strive to promote in the world around us. Consecrated for the purpose of aiding the Kingdom to develop, we are called to a commitment that seeks to foster

justice, peace, love — true symbols of the presence of God's Kingdom. We work that these will be seen as objectives by those with whom we live. We have the responsibility of opening ourselves to this politico-theological aspect of our religious consecration.

The Brother realizes the challenging impact that his chastity produces on contemporary civilization in which eroticism is a dominant characteristic. He sees that at this level dialogue with modern or traditional culture, depending on the milieu, is not an easy task. In this environment, chastity is considered a folly!

By means of his consecrated celibacy the Brother stands as a critical observer of the negative features and the excesses of contemporary liberal sexuality. His vow of chastity reminds him that he is manifestly different from the rest of society and that he is called to witness, in the face of a ravaging eroticism, to a love that is not self-seeking, and to a love that is received while it is being given.

“It seems that in our modern world, one of the traits common to all who profess consecrated celibacy, is that they shock people. The religious intrigues others much more than he induces fear or respect in them. His value lies in being an enigma, rather than in being a model. Like something hidden, he fascinates people, all the while being considered as an outdated object, something from a society long vanished.” (M. DE CERTEAU, *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, No. 381, p. 15).

In a world that is so erotic, the consecrated celibacy of religious, including that of the Brothers, is an enigma. It fascinates and intrigues a world wounded by egotism, but not irretrievably lost.

Knowing that he is living a society that is far from understanding his consecrated chastity, and realizing that egoistical love lives on in man, the Brother will guard against a

childish naivete and a presumptuous audacity, remembering that “we carry this treasure in earthen vessels.”

“This gift, fragile and vulnerable because of human weakness, remains open to the contradictions of mere reason and is in part incomprehensible to those to whom the light of the Word Incarnate has not revealed how he who loses his life for Him will find it” (*Evangelica Testificatio*, No. 15).

As a symbol of protest in a world of eroticism, the celibacy of the Brother must become a sign that the new creation has indeed begun and that God is near. His celibacy will also provide the Brother with a greater sensitivity to his mission of service. This service will be for the “new world” already present, as also for the eschatological world which is yet to come and to which the Brother is committed to make more and more a reality in the here and now.

Affective Maturity with Christ

Maturation is an on-going process. There is no end to the efforts of men to become adult. A number of elements must be integrated to help in the acquisition of maturity by man; for example, capacity to make decisions and carry them out, willing acceptance of dialogue, openness to a sense of community, of tolerance, of hospitality. Sexual maturity is one of the elements which must be integrated into man's maturation process. It is the very foundation of the Brother's consecrated chastity, which involves a renunciation of sexual pleasure so as to be able to give oneself freely and completely to others. By the gift of himself to his students and by the sacrifice he makes of himself for those he is educating, the Brother contributes to the growth of his pupils' personality and spiritual life.

The Brother is called to realize and to live this affective maturity in Christ. This supposes the integration of his human maturity into the process of his growth in Christ. This further supposes that the love of Christ be a love of man, Christ's brother, whom we see, and that our psychological liberation be a gift of ourselves to the Lord.

"It is in Jesus that we can see how consecrated celibacy can express the deepest spiritual reality of a person. God and man at the same time, He is the perfect personal link between God Redeemer and redeemed man. As God, He is a gift without measure. As Man, he is charity and sensitive openness." (cf. André LOUT, *op. cit.*).

POVERTY

Among the vows made in the religious life, the vow of poverty is probably the least understood today. We will attempt a new consideration of this particular commitment by linking it to its source of inspiration, that to which *The Rule* gives great importance:

“The Brothers choose to be poor because Christ was poor. They choose poverty in order to understand and practice Christ’s teaching more completely and to serve men as their brothers...” (*The Rule*, 6, a).

Committed to the Poor, Following Christ

In His initial discourse in the synagogue (Lk. 4, 17-19), and in His answer to the disciples of St. John the Baptist who sought to know if He were indeed the one who is to come (Lk. 7, 19-22), Jesus identifies Himself with the one sent or the messenger of which Isaiah speaks (Is. 61, 1-3). He is the one whom God has anointed with His Spirit that he might bring the Good News to the poor and the suffering.

This same text of Isaiah can be related to the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount which are the concrete and specific expression of the Good News announced to the poor. “Blessed are the poor for their is the Kingdom of God.”

From a reading of these texts we see that the authentic *Sequela Christi* must be in accord with the mission of Jesus to His contemporaries: “to announce the Good News to the poor.” It is this poverty in the service of the poor that St. De La Salle recalls:

“Your ministry requires that you should devote yourself to the well-being of the poor, since it is your duty to instruct them... look upon them as the image of Jesus Christ, and as being the best disposed to receive His Spirit abundantly. In this way, the more you cherish them, the more you will be united to Jesus Christ.” (*Meditation* 173, § 5).

Since God and Christ turned toward the poor, we cannot claim to be with God and Christ unless we come into close contact with the poor, sharing their lot, working at their liberation from want with zeal and courage, while seeking their collaboration and involvement.

If Jesus does not want his disciples to take on the poverty of those who have nothing, neither clothing nor shelter, it is nevertheless very clear that from those He calls to follow Him, Christ demands a total renunciation of what they possess in this world. This detachment from terrestrial things has as its first objective our becoming dependent on God and, subsequently, our commitment to a full confidence in and abandonment to our Heavenly Father.

In calling us to “give up our goods” — whether these be plentiful or meager — Christ invites us to look beyond material things and to place our total and exclusive trust in God.

The first Christians, who were our forerunners in the practice of the evangelical counsels, stripped themselves of their goods. Their purpose was not principally to pursue the ideal of poverty. On the contrary, by “putting everything in common” their idea was rather to eliminate poverty in their midst, and to enable each person to have what was necessary. Following their example, we renounce everything we have and we choose to live “sino proprio,” in order to be able to share with the poor. (cf. *Evangelica Testificatio*, No. 17 to 20).

If poverty involves the standard of living of the Brothers, as it relates to a given social context, it also involves in a fundamental manner the attempt of those who seek to share of themselves — their time, their knowledge, and their culture.

To Live in Poverty, Following Christ as Poor

AN ASCETICAL CONSIDERATION

Saint Paul presents us with what may be called the mystery of poverty, another aspect of the Mystery of the Cross. After having urged the Corinthians to show the sincerity of their charity by coming to the aid of their colleagues of Jerusalem who were in dire need, he adds: "Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich, but He became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of His poverty" (II Cor. 8, 9).

The voluntary renunciation that Christ accomplished can be explained and understood only in the context of His boundless love for His brothers and His sisters. Paul proposes this love of Christ as a model.

The traditional way of presenting the Mystery of Christ as a mystery of renunciation and voluntary poverty, also helps to explain our need of sharing in the Cross of Christ and taking part in His suffering. We must give witness to this love of which Christ gave the example. We must give witness also to His humility, His abasement, His real poverty. This is what De La Salle tells us, in what now seems rather strong language: "In choosing our present state, we should have prepared ourselves for abasement, like the Son of God when He became man..." (*Meditation* 86, § 2).

The ascetical aspect of poverty remains an inseparable element of our life as men consecrated to God, of our *Sequela Christi*. It is not a question of an attitude that is purely negative and which looks to privation for its own sake. Rather, it is a matter of looking to Christ who "...was rich but became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of His poverty" (II Cor. 8, 9). It is to manifest our participation in this mystery of Christ's renunciation and poverty that we choose to "live without personal property," and that we adopt a life style at once simple and poor. Further, we are urged

to witness continuously to this poverty and this simplicity of life, both personally and in community.

SHARING WHAT WE POSSESS

We are accustomed to hearing poverty discussed in terms of "having." The emphasis is on the horizontal dimension of poverty, that is, to the sociological circumstances of poor persons. In this context poverty in religious communities has been seen as related to the use of money, physical well-being, and comfort, with penury even considered praiseworthy. Times have changed, as have economic realities.

From a position of persons who possessed little, our communities have shifted, in general, to a position of men who have what they need. The Brothers are not poor in the socio-economic meaning of the term. Undoubtedly there are some communities in which conditions of real poverty do exist. However, in comparison to the lowly worker, the marginal laborer, and the underemployed workingman, many of our communities live very well. True, such communities do live modestly and do keep to economic and financial standards that are simple, but to label this as poverty is not too convincing, either for ourselves or for others. The Brothers, as well as the community that wish to share in the evangelization effort on behalf of the poor, cannot lead a life isolated from the joy and suffering, from the hopes and anxieties of those to whom they bring the Good News. If life in a particular community offers a Brother a degree of material security, a phenomenon that so few among the poor enjoy, his concern for the Kingdom of God should be all the greater. Furthermore, the Brothers, as also the community, will always be ready to give freely of their goods, individually or communally, to help the needy, when, after proper discernment, a decision is taken to "share with the poor" as Saint De La Salle did with his personal goods.

SHARING WHAT WE ARE

It is not sufficient to speak of poverty only in terms of possessions. We run the risk of placing excessive value on penury, and in a way disparaging so many men steeped in sub-human misery. Also, we risk putting too much emphasis on interior detachment which is of little interest to persons feeling the harsh realities of daily economic problems. To conceive of poverty and speak of it strictly in terms of possessions does not allow for a grasp of its inherent dynamism. We must broaden our perspective and live poverty in the context of human relations. It then takes on the aspect of "sharing" and of reciprocal exchange.

This notion of reciprocity is rooted in the *Sequela Christ*, Jesus does not merely give bread or health to persons who meet Him. He gives Himself. He does not simply receive food and hospitality from others, He accepts their personalities, their humanity, just as they are. He benefits from having met people, from speaking with them, as He did with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4, 7). He demonstrates a level of reciprocity which involves not only what people possess, but who they are in themselves.

Within this perspective of sharing and exchange, poverty can be grasped as a requirement that must be lived in reciprocity with other persons, specifically our Brothers. While choosing to live among the Brothers, we do not choose any particular group of persons. We agreed, however, to receive from our Brothers not merely their help, but also their evangelical richness, human as well as Christian, just as we ourselves have agreed to share with them our own.

Therefore, the vow of poverty is not a commitment made by individuals only, each of whom would make it his duty not to own anything. It entails something far greater: a commitment of reciprocity among the Brothers, of mutual assistance to the end of educating the poor and in turn being educated by them.

FREEDOM FROM THE COERCION OF MONEY

In the concrete reality of our modern society, money is the greatest symbol of earthly goods. Though a necessary means of assuring a livelihood, it can also be transformed into an enslaving master and into a force to coerce others. If evangelical poverty is not merely the renunciation of the power of ownership of goods and money, and if it is not an apologia for poverty as an ideal to be sought, it must then involve freedom from enslavement by the power of money. We do live within a certain economic structure of our area and place, but what evangelical poverty exacts of us is that we live in but not of the world, that we live as if we had nothing of our own (I Cor. 7, 30-31). Poverty requires in a very positive fashion that we work for the liberation of the oppressed, that we involve ourselves in the establishment of a society, at once more just and equitable, and this without allowing ourselves to be compromised by unjust power structures.

Thus the evangelical poverty that we vowed should leave us completely free to assume a critical attitude toward the coercive power of money and its socio-political influence. It should free us from the dominance even of our own institutions, particularly those that enjoy extraordinary prestige, permitting us to maintain a vigilant and critical stance at all times. Evangelical poverty presupposes that we neither personally nor communally use money as an oppressive force toward our students, our collaborators, and those that we support. All the goods that we possess and all the advantages at our disposal should be totally oriented to the service of persons, especially the poor.

OBEDIENCE

Introduction

We observe today that in the Institute and in the Church there is a search for the real meaning of obedience and authority.

This phenomenon no doubt reflects the historical influences of our period. Modern society is strongly characterized by its emphasis on autonomy and by its physical and moral respect of the individual person. From this development has come a keener consciousness of certain anthropological, personal, and communal values, such as liberty, capacity for initiative, and personal responsibility. This situation encourages us to clarify our ideas on obedience and invites us to make more precise our concepts of freedom and obedience in relation to obedience.

The desire of man to experience everything personally and his need to criticize everything he comes across are indications that the wish for authority is one that is deeply rooted in the contemporary mentality. Without emphasizing the negative aspect of this spirit of freedom, it nevertheless creates a problem for us: that of integrating harmoniously this aspiration for autonomy with religious obedience, which has always involved commitment to the *kenosis* of Christ. An examination of the issue of obedience is indispensable today, in order to rediscover its true basis and to understand its meaning in our day and age.

The Will of God for the Salvation of Men

The ultimate focal point of all religious obedience, as well as all Christian obedience, is the will of God. God seeks the salvation of the human race. *“His plan was to dignify men with a participation in His own divine life”* (Lumen Gentium No. 2). He sent His Son to effect this salvific plan. Christ came to fulfil the will of the Father: *“Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of the Father. By His obedience He brought redemption”* (Lumen Gentium No. 3).

In the sphere of providing service to others, there are some means that a Brother and the community cannot renounce lightly; for example, adequacy of cultural and professional competence or educational materials of significant value. We often hear it said that the Brother must renounce the use of expensive means, in order to witness to poverty and his fellow men. The difficulty of witnessing to poverty and yet serving the poor with the proper means is not easily resolved at the theoretical level. Circumstances surrounding a particular situation must dictate whether one or the other should be given priority. Whatever the solution adopted, it should always reflect a spirit of detachment, of personal and communal availability, out of love for and in imitation of Christ as poor.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Brother by his vow of poverty chooses to imitate Christ's poverty effectively, with all that this entails in terms of privation, renunciation, real poverty, whether it be personal or in community. Thereby, the Brother affirms his attitude of freedom from and control over all temporal goods, all earthly advantages, whether he enjoys them or not. He doesn't consider himself as being bound or coerced by these goods and he doesn't allow himself to be compromised by them. His evangelical mission is to stand and work for justice, to witness to the

ultimate value of the human person, which, in the end, outweighs all temporal significance.

By his religious consecration, the Brother is called upon to enter fully this salvific plan. He offers his will to God without reserve in order to "*enter more decisively and more surely into this plan of salvation.*" (*Evangelica Testificatio* No. 23). In imitation of Christ, Who came to accomplish the Will of the Father, he has "*assumed a firmer commitment to the ministry of the Church and of his brethren.*" (*Evangelica Testificatio* No. 23).

Obedience by Following Christ

IN THE SERVICE OF GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

St. Paul presents Christ's life as one of obedience. The fundamental idea that the Apostle wants to bring out is that Christ personally is the perpetual "YES!" to the salvific will of His Father, and that by His "Obedience many will be made righteous" (R.M. 5, 19; II Cor. 1, 19-20). John the evangelist for his part emphasizes with considerable vigor the fact that Christ always did the will of His Father. (Jn. 4, 38 and 14, 31).

IN UNION WITH THE FATHER

The obedient Christ always presents Himself as a man who, having fully complied with the will of His Father, shows that all His acts of obedience emanate from His own personal choice: "No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my free will" (Jn. 10, 18). Christ's personal choices are made in the context of His relation with His Father, from whom He holds His identity and with whom He lives in a reciprocity that is the Spirit.

In all earthly situations, Jesus consistently referred to

the wishes of His Father (Jn. 5, 30). Yet, He is not the "subject" of His Father, He is his equal. Christ obeys, but He does so by voluntary acts, choices emanating from the depth of His being (Jn. 10, 17-18).

The obedience of Christ is neither a submission nor a surrender to another. Rather it is an obedience that seeks union with the Father, that seeks to listen to his voice. His food is to do the Will of His Father (Jn. 4, 34). For Christ, obedience is not merely to be in agreement with the Father, or to come to an understanding with him; it is rather to give expression of His own deepest being. Christ is what He is through His obedience, which is union with the Father.

THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF THE CROSS

There is no doubt that the obedience of Christ is the expression of the relationship of the Son with the Father. From that point of view, it is not painful. Nevertheless, in assuming responsibility for the redemption of sin, He took on an obedience that would lead Him to death on the Cross (Phil. 2, 8). The sorrow and detachment that were involved in this dolorous obedience of Christ are for us a condition to be experienced to achieve union with God and with men.

OBEDIENCE IN IMITATION OF CHRIST

By his consecration, the Brother shares in the obedience of Christ, "obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross." This is the sacrificial feature of obedience by which the Brother unites to that of Christ the sacrifice that he makes of his own will.

"The profound meaning of obedience is revealed in the the fulness of this mystery of death and resurrection in which the supernatural destiny of man is brought to realization in

a perfect manner. It is in fact through sacrifice, suffering and death that man attains life." (*Evangelica Testificatio* No. 24).

This holocaust-type obedience also involves a complementary feature that the Brother must live as part of his consecration. Jesus repeats many times that He came to do the Will of him who sent Him (Jn. 4, 34; 5, 30; 6, 38...). The will of Jesus is so identified with the will of the Father, that in accomplishing this will, Jesus fulfills Himself completely. In imitation of Christ, the Brother finds his complete fulfillment in seeking the will of God: the salvation of all.

This will is crystallized in the salvific mission that the Father confided to the Son and through Him to the Church. The obedience of the Brother, similar to the "obedience-union" of Christ, will have to be accomplished within the context of the Church and for the Church. Practically speaking, this means that this obedience refers in a specific manner to the Institute as a whole, to the district and the local community where the Brother lives "*in obedientia.*"

In summary, we may say that our obedience integrates two elements: 1. the realization of the salvific plan of God; 2. the realization of this plan by a sacrifice that entails death and death on the cross.

Community Integration

At the very heart of Christ's obedience there is the relentless search to know the will of the Father. Having been called by Christ and having decided to follow Him, the Brother seeks "in imitation of the divine Saviour to desire only what God wishes, when He wishes, and how He wishes" (*Meditation* 24, § 1). However, by his entry into a community and by his vow of obedience the Brother chooses to broaden his evangelical perspective by union with other Brothers,

who are like him in intention. He will find himself obeying that will of God which he alone would not have perceived, and which he can fulfill with the help of others.

“The ordinary way in which the Spirit reveals himself is through a community working together to discover the divine will in the needs of the world and the Church. Each member of the community ought to be heard, since the Spirit speaks and acts in every Brother” (*The Rule* 7, b).

In the midst of its historical manifestation, the will of God which the Brother wishes to obey involves a reality so broad and so vast in time that it remains one of God’s mysteries. He alone has a total over-all view of the salvific plan and such a plan forces us to keep up our search for it all the time. This search is not an individual endeavor. It is done in the context of a People and of a Church with whom God has made a covenant: “Step by step He taught this people by manifesting in its history both Himself and the decree of His will...” (*Lumen Gentium* No. 9). It follows, therefore, that for the Brother obedience to the will of God is not possible except within the Church and in union with the People of God which is represented in a direct manner by his Institute, his district, his community.

At the level of the community, as well as with all other levels, the search for a knowledge of God’s will is a communal endeavor, which can only be carried out by an exchange of ideas, by communal reflection and actions, and by dialogue — all of which favor an identification of the various manifestations of God’s will. This identification is ordinarily made within the community, or at least by utilizing it as an intermediary instrument.

Thus the Brother always lives his religious obedience in reference to his community. The community is not an abstract entity. It is made up of active and responsible persons, each having a specific mission of service within a broader

framework, very similar to that of the parts of the body in relation to the whole (I Cor. 12, 12-30). It is by making himself available to this community of persons, built upon bonds of love, that the Brother exercises his obedience. By exercising it, he helps build his community. This obedience, at once part of the community and serving as its foundation, was referred to by the Founder when he stated:

“Obedience is the very foundation of a community, without which it will fall into ruin..., a community cannot continue without obedience, and does not even deserve the name community if this virtue is not observed, even were all the other virtues most excellently practiced.” (*Meditation 7, § 2*).

Obedience and Authority

In the Bible, to obey is to listen to the voice of the other, to keep one’s eyes and ears attentive to the Word of God (Jer. 7, 23-24). Obedience, therefore, is an interpersonal relationship, and in an evangelical context this relationship is similar to a reciprocity of love and union with the Spirit.

It is within this union and in this reciprocity of love that the “obedience-authority” relationship must be viewed. Among us these two terms involve a community of Brothers, who communicate God’s will to each other. Our apostolic activity involves corporate planning. We engage ourselves with persons who like us have the same vocation.

The two-fold reality of obedience-authority is thus normally integrated into the perspective of the common ideal: the *Sequela Christi*. The very first task is the realization that fraternal union is of prime importance. He who exercises authority, as well as he who obeys are at the service of Christ, of the Church, of humanity.

“...authority and obedience are exercised in the service of the common good as two complementary aspects of the

same participation in Christ's offering. For those in authority, it is a matter of serving in their brothers the design of the Father's love; while, in accepting their directives, the work of salvation." (*Evangelica Testificatio* No. 25).

The exercise of authority, situated as it is at the very heart of the community, is then a form of obedience to the salvific will of God, Who calls persons as individuals and the community as a whole. The obedience of the one who commands and that of the one who obeys are manifestations of evangelical community living and reflect fidelity to the will of God.

Liberation through Christ

The Brother exemplifies the plan of Christ's life. By his own life he carries on in the Church, in society, and with youth in particular, the evangelical mission of Christ and His plan of Salvation. Within this perspective, obedience for the sake of the Kingdom will be such to the extent that he succeeds in achieving and sharing this interior freedom that Christ offers him and which makes him capable of ruling others and himself in imitation of the Master.

Obedience does not consist in allowing oneself to be ensnared by the varied needs of institutions. On the contrary, it should produce an attitude of positive criticism of the existing situation and circumstances, to the end of determining how best the Kingdom of God can be achieved. This attitude of sound criticism must be utilized by the Brothers, individually or communally, within their own institutions and upon the work chosen and accomplished in them.

When God is present, His will and His salvific plan express themselves and are revealed to us in the course of human events. Every new situation and every historical

event provides us with an invitation to discover the will of God.

Far from being a form of unsound adherence to a structure, whether it be internal or external to the community, evangelical obedience is in fact a liberation from any such submission because it is a dynamic and an ongoing search for the will of God. Since this will always manifests itself within the contingency of human events, it is the fruit of an active, often painful, search by each Brother, to be undertaken within the community. Carried out prayerfully and in faith, this search for the will of God is effected by the process of discernment and through a reading of the signs of the times, in the light of the Gospel and of the tradition of the Church and of the Institute.

Thus evangelically lived, religious obedience is a prophetic witness in relation to any established society, whether civil, ecclesiastical, or religious. The danger of institutions becoming absolutized is always present. Realizing the relative status of every institution, every law, and every human structure, the Brother by his evangelical obedience seeks to express by words and action, that law must be at the service of man, and that every institution is principally intended to serve to liberate man.

SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR LASALLIAN VOCATION

The preceding pages constitute a study of the meaning of our consecrated life and of chastity, poverty, and obedience, all considered within the context of our specific vocation. There has been constant reference to St. John Baptist de La Salle, not simply from the perspective of “devotion,” but because an investigation of his understanding of the life of Brother is essential.

We make this comment because there is a risk that in studying those characteristics common to all religious institutes — celibacy, poverty, obedience, common life, perpetual vows, “separation from the world,” visibility — we might conclude that “religious life in general” really exists *as such*. It does not. Only concrete, specific religious institutes exist. The history of the Church clearly reveals that groups of consecrated men and women have consistently come into existence under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Even if some of these groups have adopted common traits and have become religious institutes in the canonical sense, they have always lived these common traits in their own particular manner, in fidelity to their own unique gift, their original charism.

Why are we Brothers of the Christian Schools? The most basic response we can give is that a Founder proposed an original reading of the gospel, a specific manner of following Jesus, and that after him, an entire religious family followed this particular form of consecrated life. Each of us agreed — and continues to agree day after day — to

insert our own existence within this tradition. In this way we participate in the living charism of the Founder, in the gift of the Spirit to our religious family. We are responsible for its continuity, for its realization in our day, and for its enrichment.

“I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory”

This formula is bold. As we mentioned earlier, the words do not mean we consecrate our life in order to multiply apostolic activities; they do not establish a kind of “equality” between the “interior life” and “exterior activities.” The words of our consecration simply transmit De La Salle’s conception of the conversion of youth to Jesus Christ. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* reveal his thought clearly: “This had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you teach, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education...” (MTR 9 §3). And again: “... frequently give yourself to the Spirit of our Lord to act only under his influence and not through any self-seeking. This Holy Spirit, then, will fill your students with Himself and they will be able to possess fully the Christian spirit.” (MTR. 3, § 2). The same Spirit which consecrated the Brother to Jesus Christ converts the heart of his students. It is at this level and this level only that we look for convergence of the love of God and the love of youth. Both are totally gifts of the Risen Lord, expressions of His plan of Salvation.

“I promise to unite myself and to live in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools”

Although we no longer make a “vow of association to keep gratuitous schools,” as our first Brothers did, we do pronounce a promise of association; the promise is incor-

porated in our formula of consecration, expressed in explicit, even somewhat redundant, terms. Moreover, during the last ten years numerous Brothers and some district and regional chapters have expressed interest in "association" as a value among the Brothers. This interest is motivated by both spiritual and apostolic considerations. Because we live in a period of rapid evolution, we are obliged to create **continuously**. For this reason it is necessary to grasp again, in some way, the dynamism of the time of our foundation. Furthermore, some Brothers see in the notion of "association" a means to help us live in unity and peace, and of grounding our apostolic community life in profound harmony and love of God. Finally, in our day, when conditions promote a certain dispersion of the Brothers, the will to be associated for Christian education can help us recapture a sense of cohesion. It can assist Brothers who are obliged to work isolated to discover anew their links with the Brothers. It can help the communities of Brothers who work together, in their process of becoming more effective apostolic teams.

It is clear that this "association" cannot be reduced to a regrouping for the sake of effectiveness: it is in the service of our consecrated life, in the service of the evangelization of youth and of the poor. The Founder understood "association" in this manner. It is this meaning that can give new "sense" to our life as Brothers.

"Associated together to engage in educational work for the service of the poor"

John Baptist de La Salle "left home" and made himself literally poor in order to "announce the Word to the poor from the world of the poor." (1) *The Rule* asks us to

(1) Cf. MICHEL SAUVAGE and MIGUEL CAMPOS: *Annonce l'Evangile aux Pauvres*, p. 305-354.

relate "poverty" and the "service of the poor through education": "The Brothers choose to be poor because Christ was poor. They choose poverty in order to understand and practice Christ's teaching more completely and to serve men as their brothers, especially those most in need. ... They do not seek wealth that they may seek the poor effectively and be accepted by them." Service of the poor, then, is not appended to our consecrated life, independent of our relationship with God; on the contrary, it is integral to our consecration.

Recalling these orientations creates, at times, uneasiness or irritation. Perhaps it seems our own emphasis is out of place today: for "times have changed, and St. De La Salle himself did not limit himself to the poor." It might even seem unfair: "We have not chosen our assignment; it is not our fault if the Institute has moved away from the practice of the Founder."

Times *have* changed; but, unfortunately, the poor are still among us. Contemporary studies reveal the full dimensions of the evils of poverty: its socio-economic components, its links with oppression and injustice. Our purpose is not to accuse anyone, but to attempt to stir ourselves to respond to the challenge of the poor today and to place ourselves in their service. *The Rule* and the 1976 Chapter recall the personal and the corporate dimensions of this renewal effort: "The Brothers assume a personal responsibility to further this mission of the Institute." (*The Rule* 8, a). "The Chapter invites the *districts* to see to it that the orientation towards the direct service of the poor becomes the rule rather than the exception in district priorities." (*Circular* 408, Prop. 13 B).

Our consecration as Brothers would not ring true if it lacked this fundamental characteristic. Moreover, we align ourselves in this regard with a concern which is general in the Church. Both the synods and the Pope have consistently taught, emphasized, and promoted justice and peace. Let us, therefore, accept this challenge, in all its severity.

Following the chapter of renewal of 1967, a number of Brothers, as well as communities and districts, committed themselves in this direction. Some of the initiatives were successful; others were not. But to conclude, on the basis of errors that were made, that we should maintain the *status quo* is not just. It is more fraternal and more realistic to start from where we are, adopt a positive attitude, and move forward to renew our commitment to serve the poor. (1)

“All my life”

The perpetuity of commitment is so integral to religious profession that it would seem almost useless to express it explicitly. Furthermore, the significant number of withdrawals is evidence that perseverance is an acute problem. It is not within the scope of this paper to treat the subject in depth, but to give the “sense” of fidelity.

When a Brother makes his profession, he commits himself in reference to three persons or groups of persons: God, youth, his Brothers. This reference to real persons is indispensable. We do not commit ourselves or behalf of an ideal, but on behalf of living persons, persons whom we love with our whole heart and whom we would no more abandon than a father of a family would leave his wife and children. Perpetual profession roots our being in a network of relationships, obligations, and service.

If we accept this emphasis on the *personal* and on the *real*, we have less fear of being deceived: “Neither my Brothers, my community, nor youth give me the support I expect.” We have less fear because we realize that it is best to expect nothing, and to be disposed to give everything: this

(1) The dossier on “Our Mission”, which will appear in 1978, will look more deeply at concrete aspects of this problem, such as the difficulty of giving new orientations to our existing institutions. Similarly, in his Christmas letter Brother Superior has recalled the report each district is to prepare on this subject by the end of 1978.

attitude reflects the true meaning of "giving," "consecrating," "being consumed." Each of us, of course, has need for a return of affection, but we can count on receiving it only if we begin by giving.

Our fidelity, according to *The Rule* (8, e) is based on the fidelity of God. Earlier in this dossier we spoke of the new being that God creates in us when we accept His call. God does not "define" our being, He develops it during the course of our existence. This long familiarity with God transcends time. It carries in itself the continuity of our vocation. God does not promise us perpetual repetition of the situation which prevailed at the time of our profession. Rather, he sends us always towards youth, towards the poor, with our Brothers. The message of the scriptures is clear: "Ah, Lord Yahweh; look, I do not know how to speak! (... I do not know how to commit myself!) I am a child! But Yahweh replied: Do not say, I am a child! Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you... I consecrated you; I have appointed prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1, 4-8).

The gift of God does not change: "I consecrated you; I have appointed you prophet." Do we realize sufficiently that we have received a gift? Do we not often mistake our own response to the gift? Consecrated life is a life of relationships. If we are completely absorbed in "the sound of our own voice" or in our desire of the moment, our vocation falls prey to our whims.

The solution to the problem of fidelity depends on our response to these questions: "Do we think of fidelity in the abstract?" "Why am I a Brother?" Or in the concrete, as a network of relationships? "For whom and with whom am I Brother?" Do we think of fidelity as a movement of generosity coming from us, or as a process of discerning God's action in our life and responding to it faithfully, day after day?

READER'S GUIDE (5)

This last section of the dossier presents some study materials — as specifically recommended by the 40th General Chapter — which are intended to permit the Brothers and communities to go beyond the stages of reflection and analysis and to undertake a discernment, an affirmation, and a choice of the particular orientation that our lives as men consecrated to God require.

Rather than spend more time scrutinizing the problems of society, the Church, or the Institute, it is more important and urgent at this point to reaffirm our adherence to fundamental values. There has been more than sufficient self-questioning. What is now needed are positive answers that will demonstrate conviction, fidelity, joy, serenity, and hope.

The materials herein presented have little value in and of themselves, but do have value to the extent that they can prove useful to individuals and communities. The materials are flexible and can be readily adapted to particular needs and circumstances.

We trust that the influence of the Spirit will manifest itself in the quality of ideas developed and the subsequent decisions taken, rather than in blind fidelity to the materials themselves.

Our principal objective in presenting these study materials is not the creation of a mere theoretical judgment, an exchange of ideas, or even a pedagogical technique, important as all of these may be in themselves. Our purpose really involves the achievement of deep religious experience which will encompass our affective and intellectual activity, and this in the light of the Gospel.

In this part of the document, several study tools or instruments are presented for personal, community or district use. Several of these materials are intended to encourage meditation, reflection, and an exchange of ideas, while others involve symbolic gestures or specific acts to be carried out at the community or district level.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY MATERIALS

FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Instrument No. 1

CONSCIENTIZATION AND PARTICIPATION

Objectives:

- To deepen and share the experience that each of the Brothers is living or has lived in his life as a person consecrated to God.
- To communicate to the community in all simplicity some of the deepest facets of one's personal life.
- To know and understand better the Brothers with whom we live.

Methodology

1. Each Brother retires to a quiet place in order to have some extra time for prayer and reflection. In such an atmosphere, the Brother would ask himself some questions on the following topics:
 - What have been the moments or occasions, of your life during which you have experienced in a particularly deep and profound manner the fact that your life is one consecrated to God?
 - Which moments have provided the most negative experience —what were the causes of such?
 - In your actual daily life, what factors would you consider to be a help or a hindrance to having your life as a person consecrated to God form an integral part of your daily existence?

- Put yourself in the midst of the persons with whom you ordinarily spend your time — what do they think of your life as one consecrated to God?
 - Do you believe that your life as a person consecrated to God as any effect on the political life, on the social relationships, and on the producer/consumer society in which you live? If yes, Why? If no, Why? It is often said that the lives of persons consecrated to God involve the function of prophetic witness — do you think that your life and that of your fellow Brothers actually bear such witness?
 - Is your life as a person consecrated to God related to your private life and limited to that in community or the Institute; or is it related to the life of the local and universal Church?
 - Do you feel that your life as a person consecrated to God involves in effect for you a type of liberation, and a lifestyle that is more evangelical, or do you consider it rather as a constraint or maybe even as an alienation.
2. After allowing sufficient time for reflection, the Brothers gather in small groups. Within each group, each one of them expresses his own ideas in rotation. After this, the discussion can continue on a more spontaneous basis. If appropriate, the session can be brought to a close with personal or shared prayer.

Instrument No. 2

IDENTITY: A MEANS TO SELF-REALIZATION

"Consider your present state and how you came to it, and whether it was done in response to the call of God and to fulfill his Will."

(Collection, *Cahiers Lasalliens*, No. 15, page 94)

Objectives:

- To rediscover my deep personal motives in terms of the process of development of my life as a person consecrated to God.
- To restructure my choices and the hierarchy of my values and determine how one and the other are related to the fundamental basis of my life as a Lasallian consecrated to God.

1. Principle

"The life of the Brother as a person consecrated to God, as all other of life's features, must offer him the possibility of self-development to the highest degree possible; however, his life is of a special type, it must also provide him with an opportunity for a specific form of self-realization."

2. Some questions:

- What do I understand by "personal development"?
- What do I envision this development to be?
- What is the potential that I must possess?
- Can a person indeed actualize all his potentialities?
- Within certain limits, how can I actualize what there is of the limitless in my potentialities?
- When can I say that I have fully developed myself?
- When can I say that my aspirations have been completely fulfilled?
- Amidst the plan of my auto-actualization, there are certain allocentric and egocentric tendencies — to which of these do I give preference and is there a hierarchy among them?

- How do I react in the face of difficulties?
- Isn't it a fact that in the matter of his self-development, each man has a path, his own rhythm, his own opportunities, and finally his own itinerary?
- Accepting the previous statement as a premise, what do we mean when we say that the Institute and the community must offer to all their members the conditions favorable to their full personal development?
- Do you think that self-development necessarily requires specialized studies and professional training?
- Is it "who am I" or "what I do" which determines my identity?
- Or is it rather the way I live and the way I work? (Blessed Mutien and Miguel)
- What do you think is more important for one's identity — pursuing a program of studies? or rather the spirit and motivation with which we study or carry out our professional activity?
- If I have achieved a certain professional status, am I like everybody else who has done so, or have I developed a life and work style in keeping with my being a Lasallian religious?
- Or is it that in my life the religious consecration dimension goes unnoticed? Then, why have I become a religious?

3. Self-realization and the basic meaning of life

In making my vows, as an expression of my life consecrated to God, I expressed myself as follows: "Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — I consecrate myself entirely to you, to procure your glory as far as I am able and as far as you will require of me..."

- At that moment, was there involved an absolute choice in so far as my life is concerned?
- Do most of the difficulties that I face come from lack of integration between structures and my actual life? from a lack of dialogue in the community? from new social circumstances? or from a deficiency in the development of the Absolute in my life, in keeping with what I explicitly vowed on the occasion of my profession?
- Have I felt that living as a person consecrated to God constitutes in and of itself a specific way of life in society — a way that includes seeing all things with the eyes of faith and living in the presence of God.

4. Confrontation

Through identification with our misery and our flesh, Christ Himself revealed the Love of the Father:

- He loves sinners (Matt. 5, 45).
- He loved us when we were still his enemies (Rom. 5, 6-10).
- He urges us to imitate the Father, whose love is so strong that he can exist fully and accommodate himself to all the negative features of our life (Matt. 5, 48).

“If any man wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily follow me.” (Lk. 9, 23).

“— unless a grain of wheat falls into the earch and dies, it remains alone; but it it dies, it bears much fruit.” (Jn. 12, 24-26).

“For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it.” (Lk. 9, 24).

Instrument No. 3

THE HISTORY OF MY CONSECRATION (Personal reflection)

Objectives:

- To understand and to trace the development of my life as a person consecrated to God, as I have lived it up to the present.
- To discern to a clearer degree my present status.
- To reanimate my motives in order to continue to lead my life as a person consecrated to God in accordance with the plan of God for me.

Methodology

Each Brother will undertake to review the questions presented earlier and the answers formulated thereto, and keep these in mind while reading and studying the dossier. The former material could very well serve as subject matter for his daily meditation, as also during a retreat. An existential synthesis of one's life as a person consecrated to God gradually evolves.

1. I remember persons, facts, and events of my past life which constitute important reference points in my life as a Christian and as a Brother — baptism, novitiate, apostolic endeavors...
2. Am I able to identify different phases in the history of my life as a person consecrated to God? How do I distinguish between such phases — an attitude of greater commitment? A different understanding of my commitment? A different apostolic commitment?
 - In all of this, am I able to perceive the benevolent action of God?
 - What have been my happiest moments as a Brother? Why do I consider them such? What benefit have I drawn from them?

- What have been the biggest difficulties that I have encountered in my life as a person consecrated to God? How have I overcome these?
3. In a particular manner, what influence have the rapid changes of the past 15 years had on me? What has been my attitude toward these changes?
 - Did I easily adapt myself to these? Why?
 - Did I resist the changes? Why?
 - Do I just let them pass me by? Do I have difficulty keeping up with these changes?
 - Have I appropriated for myself some of the new values, in a prudent manner?
 4. At the present time, do I have clear ideas and convictions based on faith? Especially, on the following points related to my life as a Brother consecrated to God: (make these explicit for yourself)
 5. The motives that inspire and support me at present are the following: (make these explicit for yourself)
 6. Nevertheless, I do have some doubts and some apprehension concerning my life as a person consecrated to God, such as this life is lived out today: (make these explicit for yourself). Do I know the cause of these doubts and this apprehension?
 7. In order to be faithful to my life as a person totally consecrated to God for the service of youth, in imitation of De La Salle, I commit myself to the following: (make these explicit for yourself).

Instrument No. 4

ROLE PLAYING

Objective:

To experience in a concrete manner, through assumption of a particular role, how each participant involved in this group session lives out his life as a person consecrated to God. To develop therefrom a greater capacity to listen, to exchange views and understand others. This particular group technique can prove useful especially at the time of a district or community retreat.

Methodology

Five Brothers are requested to participate in a simulated presentation of a community whose members are attempting to discern whether their daily life, as individuals and in community, does express in reality a life consecrated to God. If their life does seem to do so, how can this dynamism be maintained; if a deficiency is identified, how can a change be effected.

1. Each of the five participants in the simulated presentation, individually, is given in writing the particular role that he is being asked to act out. The other participants and group members are not informed of the specific roles assigned.
2. The roles are so selected as to produce a realistic community situation. Herein follow several types of role that could be utilized:
 - a. A Brother who feels that the manner in which he is living out his life as one consecrated to God does not express his initial desire to give himself entirely and completely.
 - b. Another Brother proposes some radical changes both in the community itself, as also in the apostolate currently engaged in by the community.
 - c. A third participant suggests radical changes in terms of the vows that have been made.

- d. The remaining two participants present their own views. In effect, they act out their life as they are actually living it.
3. The simulated situation is presented to the group as a whole for approximately a half hour. Where the community is small in number, all of its members can participate as role players.
4. The community reflects on what has been presented: first the role players themselves tell of their feelings as they acted out their particular roles; then the spectators do the same; the assigned roles are then revealed to the group. The session is closed out by a summary of the ideas and thoughts expressed.

Instrument No. 5

COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT ON A CONCRETE SITUATION

Objective:

To see to what extent the community is able to find appropriate solutions to an issue, in the light of human and evangelical truths, via a communal process of discernment.

Methodology

1. For a few moments, each Brother tries to think of a concrete situation or a specific problem related to his life as a person consecrated to God.
2. Each Brother then briefly describes to the others the particular situation or problem that interests him.
3. The group selects that situation or issue that is of greatest interest to the community.
4. Once the specific issue has been chosen, an explanation of such is made. A brief summary of the issue can be drawn up so that each Brother will be in a position to understand better the material. Generally, difficulties arise as part of the discernment process, when the issue under consideration is not clear in the minds of the members of the group.
5. Reasons for and against:
In as objective a manner as possible, the reasons favoring the situation are presented. Then, the reasons militating against it are brought forth. This is done in a spirit of honestly trying to understand the person involved in the particular situation, and not for the purpose of expressing one's personal position on the matter.
6. The group looks for similar type of situations in the Scripture and the attitudes, actions, and solutions observed therein are examined.

7. An atmosphere of prayer having been evolved, the discussion is interrupted and moments of quiet thought are encouraged, to enable each Brother to discern individually.
8. In a spirit of simplicity, each participant reveals to his colleagues the solution to which he has arrived.
9. A brief resume of the points on which the group agrees and of those ideas on which there are some divergent views serves to bring the session to a close.

Instrument No. 6

CONTACT WITH THE FOUNDER

Objectives:

1. To discover the significance of the Founder in our lives.
2. To become more conscious of the ideas and interior strength that the Founder communicates to us.
3. To actualize and express concretely these in our life.

Methodology

A. TO SENSITIZE

1. After agreeing as a community to come together for this activity, each Brother draws apart in order to reflect personally, seeking to recall when his contact with the Founder first took place (in a Brothers' school, through contact with a Brother, etc.).

What are my Lasallian roots?

2. During the course of my life as a Brother, when have I experienced a close relationship with the Founder?
3. Did this experience lead to the development of the "spirit" of the Founder within me, or was it something rather superficial and in keeping with what everyone else was doing?

B. TO DEEPEN

1. Write up succinctly your feelings about "What the Founder means to me today."
2. Try to establish a personal relationship with the Founder — meet him as someone who forms part of your daily life; speak to him of those experiences of your life that you feel have been significant. If you want, make a list of these.

C. TO SHARE

When the group comes together again, share with your Brothers your feelings and reactions. Possibly, a realization will crystallize, thus revealing that the spirit of the Founder involves more than just discussing about him occasionally — that such a spirit should rather be something that animates our life and constitutes its vitality.

Instrument No. 7

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR PREDECESSORS

Objective:

To benefit from the occasion of the Beatification of Brothers Miguel and Mutien to find new inspiration for our life as persons consecrated to God. The lives of other deceased Brothers could also serve as models of renewed motivation.

Objectives:

1. Specifically, the lives of the new Blessed can be read, in order to see how they lived as persons consecrated to God; to become aware of their zeal, their availability to others; their detachment; to learn the source of their life-long fidelity; to determine the basis of their simplicity, humility, and obedience; to discover the powerful motives which vitalized their existence.

The same could be attempted, utilizing as models Brothers of the district who have passed away.

2. As a community, a plan can be drawn up by which the example of these Brothers can be reflected upon in prayer sessions and group meetings.

SCHEMA FOR A STUDY OF OUR LIFE AS MEN CONSECRATED TO GOD

The next page of this material contains a plan for a realistic study of our life as persons consecrated to God.

As with all such "models," situations A, B, and C do not exist in their totality in the concrete world around us. Furthermore, a person may find himself simultaneously fitting into one sector of A and in another sector of situation C.

To a certain degree, all the situations presented are "real" to the extent that they can be found in the actual life of a Brother. However, without being mutually exclusive, they involve issues that are related, that refer to diverse values, and that lend themselves to our life as members of the People of God.

This "truth" in diversity poses a considerable problem for individuals and for the community. On the one hand, there is no doubt of the need that we have of seeking to achieve the ideal presented to us by the Church and the Institute documents.

On the other hand, we must accept the fact that within ourselves as individuals and that within the community there exist various beliefs, values, and models concerning behavior. How do we go about achieving an integration between the ideal of our Institute documents and the concrete life situations in which we as individuals and as a community exist?

POINTS OF REFERENCE	SITUATION "A"	SITUATION "B"	SITUATION "C"
I consider my life as a person consecrated to God as:	A renunciation of the world in order to give myself entirely to God	A gift of myself to God to be used as an instrument for the salvation of others	A gift of myself to God in order to be a prophetic sign in the world that I live in
The basic element of my life as a person consecrated to God is:	The totality of my life committed "once and for all"	The totality of my life committed in successive steps	A commitment of my whole being and this forever
The inspiration for my life of commitment comes from:	Those who have gone before me	The three evangelical counsels	An encounter with God revealed through Christ in the Gospels
I express my life of commitment by:	The five vows	An apostolic life	My total life
In my own personal life of commitment, the vows are:	Necessary - required by the Church	An historical expression subject to change	A concrete expression of the essentials of my total commitment to God
Concerning the specific vows, I believe that:	They round out the "traditional triad"	They are useless additions, since they are already contained in the three vows	They particularize my commitment and constitute a unique element of this commitment
For me, the Founder is above all:	A great man, a pedagogical innovator	A great Saint who founded a new type of religious life in the Church	A living person who inspires me and with whom I dialogue and to whom I frequently listen
My community and my life of commitment:	It doesn't help or hinder me, since my commitment is to God alone	My commitment is one of solidarity. My community plays a key role in my life as one consecrated to God	My commitment is related to my community in terms of a mission. Our common commitment is an expression of our shared faith
In my life of commitment, the role of my social milieu:	Is almost non-existent. I'm committed to God and all exterior circumstances are not important	Is important - I live my life of commitment in harmony with my milieu and culture	I must integrate myself therein. Yet, I must be a prophetic conscience therein, and often be a "counter-culture" factor therein
Fidelity for me is:	Trying to avoid anything that would endanger perseverance in my vocation	On the day of my perpetual profession, I committed myself totally and irrevocably to God	An on-going process of the actualization of my commitment, which I daily choose to renew

Instrument No. 9

APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY OF MEN CONSECRATED TO GOD Catechesis-Witness

Objectives:

- To undertake a community reflection to the end of studying carefully our life of commitment as being a sign and a witness.
- To make more explicit and to communicate in adequate terms and by appropriate means the meaning of our life as persons consecrated to God.

Methodology

All the members of the community should be encouraged to participate in this activity. The following are presented as guidelines for proceeding:

1. To gather from the persons who are habitually in contact with Brothers (faculty, pupils, parents, neighbors, etc.) their ideas on the following: what do they think of the religious life in general or that of the Brothers in particular: what do they believe the meaning and utility of such a life to be?

The specific manner of gathering such data should be determined: interview, questionnaire, etc.

2. To reflect as a community on the data collected, and this in the light of the doctrinal content of this dossier.
3. To spell out clearly the message that the community feels that it wishes to convey concerning its life of commitment. Why such a message? A message for whom? When is the message to be so conveyed? Where should it be thus conveyed?
4. Each Brother is asked to prepare that part of the message that he feels involves him.
5. Finalize the material, evaluate the final product, and take definite steps for its implementation.

Instrument No. 10

SYMBOLIC GESTURES AND ACTIONS

Objectives:

- To engage oneself concretely and graphically in the process of deepening and renewing our life of commitment.
- To strengthen those elements of community support on behalf of our life as men consecrated to God.

Methodology

The symbolic gestures and actions should form part of the liturgical activities of the community. The latter should serve as a crystallization of the reflection and study of our life of commitment and also as a source of light and encouragement in our efforts to implement in a concrete manner proposed solutions. As such, these same signs and acts should be made an integral part of the whole process of deepening our understanding of our life of commitment; e.g., content, organization, implementation of various phases of the process.

Whether they involve individual Brothers or the community as a group, appropriate circumstances should be chosen within which to carry out the symbolic activity.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. A gesture symbolic of one's personal circumstances: each Brother chooses a specific gesture by which he will seek to express in a concrete manner his desire to renew and rededicate himself to his life of commitment. For example: to take on and accomplish willingly certain community decisions; to read a book on some spiritual subject and give up the reading of some superficial and unwholesome material; to develop vocational recruitment materials; to turn in to the community the whole of one's earnings, should this not have been heretofore done, etc.
2. Community Commitment: the material presented above is also applicable to the community. The community itself can produce in a concrete manner its commitment. Such could well be

integrated into and form part of the Community Project. For example: take a critical stand on the matter of public advertising; refrain from attending mundane presentations or spectacles; undertake to serve the materially poor; improve the quality of the community prayers.

3. External manifestation of the various decisions and actions to be accomplished by the community, as part of a celebration, or a liturgy of the Word. Such a manifestation could well be organized to cap the development of the Community Project, demonstrating the meaning and value attached thereto, and testifying that such is being done in keeping with God's will. Special emphasis will be placed on those elements involving the Brothers' life of commitment.
4. The district can also undertake to symbolize its commitments by means of signs and symbolic acts. For example: serious involvement in the recruitment of vocations, as a sign of our faith in our life of commitment and the mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; establishment or reorganization of a program on behalf the materially poor; active participation in the activity of the local Church, as well as seeking to integrate such activity in the over-all thrust of the Church, and this as an expression of our obedience with the Church of Christ, etc.
5. The holding of the ceremony of religious profession (temporary or perpetual) in the local ecclesial community, after having taken appropriate steps to educate the members of the community as to the meaning and significance of the ceremony. In this manner, a religious profession introduced as part of the Mass could very well serve to express the rich meaning of this act of commitment, as also encourage a better working relationship between the various groups involved.
6. Jubilees of religious profession (25, 50... years). The involvement of the Brothers' community, the school community, and the ecclesial community in the commemoration of the event. Such a ceremony puts emphasis on the value of fidelity to the call of God, as lived day after day over long years. The affair can also be an appropriate occasion for thanksgiving to God, for deepening our life of commitment, for witnessing before the People of God.
7. Renewal of commitments made to God and to the community, on the occasion of the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, at the time

of the approval of the Community Project (cf. suggestion § 3), or on some other date deemed significant by the community. The preparation for and the very act itself could involve the use of formula utilized at the time of the Founder, by him and his colleagues. The vow formula of June 6, 1694, could be used for this purpose.

In order to note the community solidarity of the act, and to mark the fact that it is made in association with the living members of the Institute, each Brother could state the name of his confreres present, as also the name of the Brother Visitor and the Brother Superior General, or of other Brothers representing the district and the Institute.

Instrument No. 11

A COMMITMENT OF SOLIDARITY (Organization Aspect)

N.B. — *This particular "instrument" is intended for use by district Councils and Chapters.*

Objectives:

- To organize, to animate, and to support the whole process of development of the life of commitment of the Brothers at the district-wide level.
- To discern at the same broad level, the demands on the life of commitment of the Brothers, whether these be internal or external to the Institute.

Methodology

1. The district Chapter or, if possible, Brother Visitor and his Council begin by familiarizing themselves with the present dossier and then planning on how to go about developing the interest of the Brothers in the material itself and the various suggestions proposed for study and implementation.
2. Provide for the appropriate exchange of ideas on the material, at the district-wide level, while the study and reflection are going on.
3. Collect the notes and suggestions of the Brothers and the communities and organize the material for proper study and utilization.
4. Introduce new and fresh features to the process of reflection and study. The following method is suggested: a new draft of the dossier is drawn up, incorporating therein the various elements that were produced as a result of the study efforts at the community level.
5. Forward to the General Council of the Institute the reactions, notes, and suggestions arising from within the district.
6. The importance and value of this material could be highlighted by organizing a *Year of Commitment of the La Salle Brother*.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Must this dossier end at this point?

Having reached this final part of the dossier, it seems that it cannot be terminated just yet. There exists an invitation for each of us to go on...

Certainly, we can never count on saying everything when treating of such vital topics. The task is even more difficult when there is question of issues related to our whole life, issues which are developed and resolved on a day-to-day basis, as we move through our daily routine. In the course of this dossier, areas of interest to all of us have been treated. It is now the responsibility of each Brother, and of each community out of a sense of responsible loyalty to give them the attention they deserve and to see how they can be understood, assimilated, and lived in each group and in each culture, while not losing any of their value and importance.

The on-going reflection and study that these issues require must also be accompanied by prayer. It is only in deep dialogue with God that we will manage to understand somewhat better the vital meaning of our religious commitments, which are also a dialogue in themselves. God is the goal, and the guarantee of our consecration to Him. He is in our midst, there where "He has pitched his tent" (Jn. 1, 14) in order to aid us discover that reality which would forever remain hidden to the human mind. God makes possible in us a dedication and a fidelity which defy all human resources.

We are aware of the fact that many Brothers will be prone to remark: "More words! We have had enough of these — what we want are clearcut and concrete norms." We feel, however, that such specific rules and regulations are not lacking! These take on significance for us only to the extent that the principles from which they draw their meaning and value are understood and assimilated, and to the extent that the love of God, who constitutes their very goal, really reigns in us.

As a result of the various evaluations made on the occasion of the last General Chapter, our understanding of our life as men consecrated to God was seen to vary considerably and in general to be rather inadequate. It is only through serious study and reflection, pursued in common with others, that we can expect to discover the solid foundation upon which to develop that integration of our life so necessary for our service among men. Let us undertake such to the end of better serving the youth entrusted to us, who are by baptism, "like you consecrated to the Most Holy Trinity." (*Meditation 46, § 3*).

Brother JOSE PABLO BASTERRECHEA
Superior General
and
General Councillors

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