



01-E-01

ASSOCIATION TO-DAY

It was three hundred years ago and it's a very nice story!... No! It's to-day and right where I'm living!

By comparison with the rest of the world, the young people of my country are by no means the most deprived but they do not know how to find happiness. Who is going to help them find the liberating message of Jesus Christ? The Brothers' Institute is responsive to this situation. As the number of religious is insufficient to provide solutions to all the problems posed the Institute is constantly searching for new solutions.

Instead of withdrawing fearfully into itself and thinking nostalgically of the past it is looking objectively at the situation and investing in the future. It can no longer fulfil its mission by itself. What of it! Like John Baptist de La Salle it is content to work with those who come to it.

Lay collaborators want to become progressively involved in the lasallian project. The Institute welcomes this desire and works with them. The Brothers Visitors' conference has said so publicly.

Together and by association, Brothers and lay teachers accept their differences, share their respective riches and try to find new forms of living together. Thus, for the past several years we find joint teams of Brothers and laymen forming school administrations where responsibility sharing is effective. Educational establishments run by laymen voluntarily maintain relations with the Institute. Brothers Visitors in all the French districts meet regularly and for long periods with lay principals and take part in faculty discussions. The members challenge the Institute as to its objectives in order to know what position they could agree to accept in its structures.

Lasallian establishments under lay administration are visited by joint teams of Brothers and laymen. As these visits are carried out in a spirit of real fraternity the experience has proved extremely beneficial to both visitors and visited.

Finally, week-ends of reflection, formation and sharing are organised for the human and spiritual satisfaction of both Brothers and laymen. The latter are often accompanied by their wives.

"TOGETHER AND BY ASSOCIATION"

Here is the testimony of the lay Principal of a Technical High School where a community of Brothers also works.

BEAUVAIS, 1980: Five hundred Brothers met on the occasion of the commemoration of the third centenary.

At the close of this special event at which I had the good fortune to be present Brother Jacques d'Huitemau drew this conclusion which attracted my attention on re-reading the report of the meeting: "I believe the Institute has re-lived the experience of Sarah. She laughed when the angel told her she would become a mother. You could laugh, or sneer, on seeing the average age of the Brothers. Nevertheless, at no time did I feel nostalgia for the glorious past nor fear of the uncertain future. Those who were present were living fully in the present... Sarah has given birth!..."

It is my profound conviction at this moment that the Brothers' Institute is living fully in the present and that it shows by its actions that it has no fear of the future.

A layman, married and with two children, I have been, for the past ten years, head of a Technical High School which has been in the charge of the Brothers since 1941. I am convinced that John Baptist de La Salle created, three centuries ago, a cell in the Church which has not ceased to grow and regenerate itself. That basic cell is the spirit of association.

ASSOCIATION DESIRED BY DE LA SALLE

The lasting success of the work of De La Salle does not rest solely on that basic idea but it seems extremely important to me to examine, in our time, how the Brothers' Institute continues the work begun through its commitment to association.

John Baptist de La Salle appears to me, as I gradually get to know him, an extremely pragmatic man. All through his life he observed, he saw, he calculated, not grudgingly, but with a generous, courageous realism and then acted. Living in community must certainly have been, for a man who was essentially contemplative, a form of action. What else could he have done to solve the problems which confronted him? His action seems logical in the face of the diverse origins of the first schoolmasters and especially in view of the enormous difference in education which existed between the wealthy nobleman and those men of the people.

Only a common life shared at every moment of the day could provide mutual self-education. Besides, John Baptist de La Salle could only convince his schoolmasters by living with them, like them and for them. In so doing he followed the teaching method of Jesus Christ.

I like to think that this osmosis took place little by little. John Baptist de La Salle was no longer quite as he had been, he had become a little of them and entered the hearts of the men whom he was able to call Brothers.

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Obviously this new form of association does not develop without some clashes and difficulties.

The situation is not idyllic, reactions and expectations of the various partners are sometimes, perhaps often, surprising; analyses of a situation are not always the same.

However, those who are experiencing these changes are decided to continue their experiments along these lines. Each one is aware that he must get accustomed to his partner and that requires a lot of time, patience and self-denial.

The Brothers' Institute, by agreeing to follow the road opened up by Vatican II, assumes the role of pioneer. There is no question of forming a third order but of finding a form of partnership between consecrated men and men living in the world which can offer a challenge to those who attend our schools.

The Brothers, by re-thinking the forms of their action and by agreeing to work through intermediaries, risk seeing, in a few years, the Institute in the forefront of the Church's educational apostolate, because the lasallian virtues are quite capable of filling the void that many teachers experience who want to carry out their work conscious of their responsibilities.

We are witnessing the birth of new cells in the Church.

Sarah has given birth!

Christian Joly

*Directeur du Lycée Technoque Saint Jo.
21, rue du Cloître Saint Etienne
10042 Troyes, Cedex - France*