



06-D-12

TWO DAYS AT PARMENIE With the SIGNUM FIDEI of France

At Whitsun 1984, an event, modest but significant for the Lasallian movement, especially in France, took place at Parmenie.

AS BROTHERS

Over the week-end we formed a veritable Lasallian community in the spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle. We strove to deepen that spirit in ourselves and to find the meaning of our own vocation. The group was composed of people of all ages: men and women, Brothers and lay people, parents of families, teachers and headmasters, students and former students, all members of Signum Fidei.

In all about twenty people came together to form a community, to pray together, to exchange views, to grow in the knowledge and love of God and of his servant St. John Baptist de La Salle.

Everybody wanted to make the occasion a worthwhile experience and so took the necessary steps to make it such. It required a real effort, in the beautiful spring sunshine, to drag oneself away from one's accustomed activities and to travel, as many did, across the length and breadth of France to this hallowed hillside.

AS LASALLIANS

We look back on the long hours spent in discussion in groups or teams and to the first meeting in the dining room where we had the opportunity to introduce ourselves and to say in what way we felt ourselves Lasallian. We preferred to start from our own experience before trying to define terms which we find too imprecise. Though the words "Lasallian" and "Signum Fidei" are much used (perhaps too much used) in our country few know exactly what they stand for. We experienced a moment of intense faith and hope as we listened to these personal revelations of attitudes which were genuinely Lasallian.

"Claude (Brother), it did us good to hear you say, "Since 1942 I have never looked back". "And you, Alain (former student), when you quite naturally quoted the Founder in telling us that you were imperceptibly led" to feel yourself Lasallian". I imagine that the Brothers, especially, felt themselves one with you. As for you, Jean-Marc (lay teacher), you made a profession of faith when you said, "For me everything revolves around the school" and your wife added, "For the past twenty years I have been growing into the great Lasallian family."

PRESENT AND FUTURE

There are times like these when the witness given by members creates real unity and strengthens human and spiritual ties in a durable manner. Another period of discussion and exchange of views provided an occasion for considering the present situation of Signum Fidei and the future we foresee for it in our country. Signs of hope and causes for disquiet were analysed and modest but concrete and realistic

proposals were put forward. First of all Brothers and lay people must together define the terms and explain the words which are now part of our vocabulary. How can one speak clearly about something that is ill defined.

These vocabulary problems, and they are not the only ones, do not always make for clarity nor do they help us to see things in the light of the Gospel. Brothers and lay people do not really know one another and each side often regards the other with a certain degree of suspicion. Some lay people find it hard to accept the renewal of our Associations and are unwilling to commit themselves while some Brothers are unaware of developments among Lasallian lay people. "The Brothers must be shaken up", was someone's rather blunt summing up of the situation. Hence the need to take seriously the preparation for the General Chapter to which, according to Circular 419, lay people are invited to contribute.

OUR CONVICTIONS

The last session, when the participants worked in groups, was devoted to drawing up a summary of the convictions expressed by each one. The following gives the opinions of the teacher-headmasters group:

"In our profession we have chosen to pay attention to the young and especially to the most deprived amongst them: those who have problems at home or in school or who suffer material want — those "who are furthest from salvation"...

..."the least of these my brethren."

To be closer to these young people we believe in the creation of a community of educators who have the same mission and employ the same means.

"That they may be one..."

We believe that our mission is a "ministry". Our profession becomes then, the means employed by God for the evangelization of the young.

"Go ye therefore, teach..."

Today it is St. John Baptist de La Salle who inspires our activities in favour of the young. We hope that other educators like ourselves will come to know the Lasallian spirit and that our community will grow stronger and become more and more available for the service of young people."

TWO LEADERS

Besides the periods of community prayer and of formal and informal discussion two people helped us to gain a better knowledge and a deeper appreciation of the evangelical inspiration that guided him. They were: Brother Charles Lapierre who underlined the significance of Parmenie in the life of de La Salle and Brother Jean-Marie Thouard, Regional President of France, who showed us how the Founder was led from "one commitment to another" until he surrendered himself totally to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

NIMES 1985

The week-end was for all of us a time of grace. One concrete decision was taken as a logical "follow-up" to our discussions and is now in the course of realization. All Lasallians interested in the Founder will meet in Nimes, in the south of France, at the end of June 1985. We are convinced that like Mexico this meeting will be for our Associations and for the Institute a time of grace.

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