

I READ THE RULE AND BEGIN TO DREAM...

As I read the **Rule**, I seem to discover a new message in the text which affects me deeply.

As I read the **Rule**, I feel new power bursting from this simple, warm, direct, spiritual and fraternal text.

As I read the **Rule**, I think of all the things going on in the Institute which reflect the wisdom and realism of the Chapter members of 1986 – things that are so varied, so open in character, and things that remain to be completed.

As I read the **Rule**, I begin to dream how different our lives would be if we fully accepted this inspiring text and lived it naturally, simply, with affection and courage, with creativity and daring.

I feel that there is more inspiration in the text of the **Rule** than in all the things we do or will do. The reason for this is that the **Rule** is based on truths that inspire our work and, in a special way, our **conversion** and interior freedom.

These truths come from the Spirit, for the **Rule** as well as the whole Institute are the work of the Spirit. «The spirit of the Lord, indeed, fills the whole world, and that which holds all things together knows every word that is said» (Wis.1:7).

As I read the **Rule**, I see the importance of living as one: unity in diversity. For, although the **Rule** was written by the Brothers and for the Brothers, it is already a source of inspiration for so-called "Lasallian groups" and for the "**Lasallian Family**" which include in their number both lay people and Brothers.

As I read the **Rule**, I feel that the Institute, that is, we the Brothers, must come to accept this new situation. In order to do this, we must become aware of and accept at this particular moment in history a certain number of significant things that are taking place in our midst and all around us.

What, then, in real terms, is the message contained in an article of the **Rule** such as the following?

«The spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St. John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded.

The Institute sees the existence of the various Lasallian movements as a grace from God renewing its own vitality.

The Institute can associate with itself those lay people who want to lead the life of perfection that the Gospel demands, by living according to the spirit of the Institute and by participating in its mission.

The Institute helps them achieve their proper autonomy. At the same time it creates appropriate ties with them and evaluates the authenticity of their Lasallian character« (Rule 146).

The kind of life the Institute led for the first 300 years of its life, and which it considered to be its private and exclusive property, now has to be shared with others if its vitality is to be renewed. The Institute is the work of God, as St. La Salle used to say, and as the **Rule** says again in our days (articles 141, 143, 66, 15c, and 21). The God of the Covenant, who is able to make all things new (Apoc 21:5) and «because the time has come» (Mk 1:5; cf. Gal 4:4), has chosen to act in a new way and to make his message known beyond the vicissitudes of our history and human fragility on both a personal and community level (cf. Rule 144).

THE GIFT OF GOD

As I read article 146 of the **Rule**, I stop with a sense of satisfaction at some paragraphs:

- «St. John Baptist is a gift of God. God has acted through him and has revealed himself in him, in his life's journey, and in his work as Founder. And thus the **Rule** states with joy and hope that St. John Baptist de La Salle goes far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded».

- In the same way, the Institute he founded is a gift from God and that is why there is a very great need of it for a great many people who see it as a hopeful means for salvation. That is why the **Rule** urges us to **SHARE ITS MISSION** (N° 17a, 132c, 146) and its **SPIRITUALITY** (N° 17c).

- Finally, Lasallian movements which have appeared and established themselves among us are also "gifts of God". We might even say that these are in a manner of speaking a "renovative gift within the Institute because they contribute to the feeling that through them the Institute is renewing its own vitality. The **RULE** is even tentatively beginning to refer to "**THE LASALLIAN FAMILY**" (N° 64).

The **RULE** speaks of "Lasallian movements" as though the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle is now reaching out beyond the Institute proper and creating many other groups and communities which have and live with a sense of "belonging", a "belonging" not so much to the Institute as to the "Lasallian heritage" which has been preserved and developed within the Institute.

Since it is an "inheritance" which maintains its richness and which grows in the measure in which it is shared, the Institute invites those who wish "to strive for evangelical perfection according to the spirit proper to the Institute and in accord with its mission to **ASSOCIATE** themselves with it, be they men or women, Religious or lay.

And so, in all that concerns this **ASSOCIATION** which is somewhat unique to the Institute of the Christian Brothers in that it involves a commitment by **VOW** to «**ASSOCIATION** for the service of the poor», we must delve into it more deeply and live it in conjunction with the various

LASALLIAN GROUPS which have come into being. Here we are launching into uncharted waters, far beyond the traditional understandings we have had.

I CONTINUE TO READ...

I read the Rule and dream of the progressive extension of such statements as: «the spirit of God has given the Church in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle a charim which still animates the Brothers and many other teachers» (Nº 20).

Because the **LASALLIAN CHARISM** is confided to the Brothers and resides in their hearts and in those of many other educators, I dream of how the following texts may read:

«This Institute... creates, renews and diversifies its works according to the needs of the kingdom of God.» (Nº 11)

«In spite of difficulties, by Faith, the Brothers realize that God does not abandon "His work" but rather "He takes pleasure in making it more fruitful day by day"» (Nº 141).

«From the very beginnings of the Institute the Brothers fulfilled their mission "together and by association", exercising their apostolate as members of a community in which they are accepted, supported and affirmed.

... By the fulfillment of their mission, whatever it may be, they contribute to the realization as a community of the unique and ecclesial mission of the Institute» (Nº 16).

All of these statements of the Rule, naturally, are **FROM** the Brothers and destined **FOR** them, because they have originated from their manner of life as Christian Brothers and from the charism of their Founder. However, from the moment we personally and institutionally accept that our holy Founder does not belong to us exclusively, then we must also accept that he is free to continue to be the **GIFT OF GOD**, the evangelical Way for many within and beyond the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, within and beyond all Lasallian groups. And we must always recognize that he has this freedom!

AND I CONTINUE TO DREAM...

As I read the above quoted articles of the Rule, then, I am envisioning a **CONVERSION** of attitudes and structures: a conversion which frees hearts from fear and self-doubt. This must be a conversion which opens our Communities of Brothers to initiate relationships with Christian teachers and which makes our "together and by association" a reality in the here and now among the diverse elements and levels of the Lasallian Educational Community. It must be "together and by association" that we develop our educational system in study sessions, evaluations, relaxation, prayer and in the celebration of our common Faith. "Together and by association" because we share the same Spirituality and Mission, we drink at the same Lasallian fountain, we are drawn by the same social and ecclesial needs and challenges in the areas

of education and evangelization. Above all, we are "together and by association" in the **SPIRIT**. The Lasallian experience was born as an experience of the **SPIRIT** and we must not allow it to become primarily an experience of workers and of Labor Unions. The necessary steps must be taken so that, in accord with the educational systems of particular places, both Brothers and Lay collaborators may develop complete understanding, openness, creativity, mutual collaboration and enthusiastic confidence.

I dream of Brothers and Communities in which there is no diffidence toward lay teachers because of an awareness of the richness of our Baptismal commitment and the efforts being made to "make their work a truly evangelical ministry" (Nº 17).

I dream of Brothers and Communities which generously open the rich treasures of Lasallian tradition to all those teachers, young people and families who wish to enhance their Christian way of life by means of the teaching of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

I am dreaming of Lasallian Teachers who are serene, open and dedicated to the most needy students, who are able to rise above the tensions of Unions and salary conflicts... who seek only to be real teachers dedicated to the wholesome development of their students, who dedicate themselves totally to teamwork within the Lasallian educational and pastoral system.

I am dreaming of a better definition and description of the **NEW** place and the **NEW** role of the Brothers in Lasallian Educational Centers.

I am dreaming of a better distribution of responsibilities in Lasallian Schools consistent with the educational outcomes envisioned and with a recognition of the quality of the commitment invested, together with a reasonable amount of scholarship grants for the needy. Because it is an "experience of the Spirit" the Lasallian experience must always rely on a certain quota of gratuity on the part of both the Brothers and the Laity, always taking into consideration their means, times and places.

I am dreaming of the growth of the **SENSE OF FAMILY** among all Lasallians whose common Father and Founder is St. John Baptist de La Salle. There are myriads of experiences of "together and by association", thanks to the many efforts being made to assure that **LASALLIAN INSTITUTIONS** be identified by their will to put all the means of salvation within the reach of youth so that they may achieve a high degree of excellent formation as persons while publicly acclaiming Jesus Christ (Nº 13).

I dream while I read, share and meditate on the **RULE...** and this fills my heart with hope and patience!

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