

## THE «AUTORS» OF THE ORIGINAL RULE

To ask ourselves who the authors were of our original Rule is not simply an academic question. It is a crucial one, because the true understanding of our identity and mission depends on it.

### I. DE LA SALLE IN ASSOCIATION WITH HIS BROTHERS

1. Biographers make **two statements** with regard to the authorship of the Rule:

a/ It was De La Salle who wrote the Rule. The biographers see three dates as being important before 1726, the year when the Rule was first printed:

- 1682: Practice of the Daily Regulation (community exercises).
- 1694: Collection of Rules (the copy we have is dated 1705).
- 1718: Chapters on modesty and regularity are added.

In this edition, De La Salle was inspired by the Spirit according to Blain, who writes: «And if this is so... we should not think he was only half inspired. All must follow him to the letter, without exception, without modification.» This is moreover the spirit of the preface of the 1726 Rule. It is probable that Blain wrote it, but his style has improved. It is noticeable that its contents differ from what the Founder profoundly believed. Let us take only two facts: there is no mention of young people, and community is defined in terms of three vows and not consecration. De La Salle wanted men who were totally consecrated to God, living in community, with a view to pursuing their apostolate. This preface was omitted in 1901.

### 2. Many authors.

It is clear there were several authors, but not in the sense that different persons wrote different parts: techniques used for the Gospel cannot be applied to work out if De La Salle wrote this or that. The whole text was written by De La Salle and by all the Brothers. De La Salle obviously had a leading role in forming a community out of a group of individual and free persons for the salvation of young people. The Rule brought them together and gave them unity.

## II. AUTHORS WHO LIVED IN A CHURCH IN THE MIDST OF THE WORLD.

### 1. A Church in the world.

a/ This was a **Church that was weighed down** by rigid structures, political and religious conflicts (eg. Fenelon and Bossuet, jansenism and quietism, etc.).

De La Salle did not change the Church, but he wanted a Church that would set out on its way, reach out to the world, to the poor. When he was a Canon he went against social convention and associated with men inferior to his footman, as Blain says (Vol. I, p. 169).

De La Salle wanted people to be prepared to move from a clerical Church into a Church that was the People of God. This dynamic thinking regarding the Church can be seen in the Rule (cf. insistence on the lay nature, brotherhood, community spirit...)

b/ It was a **Church that was carried along** on a wave of spiritual enthusiasm. There were spiritual, pastoral and missionary renewal movements. From the point of religion, the 17th century has been called the «grand siècle» of the soul (Daniel Rops).

- It was a century when the Bible came to the fore, and changes in attitude to communion occurred regarding frequency of reception, for example.
- There was a renewal in parish life
- Liturgical prayer was restored
- Men and women came together for prayer and to deepen their spiritual life, as well as for the purpose of organising the renewal of the Church.

In a word, there was much spiritual searching going on. (Moliere would have something to say about religious hypocrites in his *Tartuffe*). There was also a desire for prayer. «Methods of mental prayer were all the rage» wrote H. Brenond.

As far as the Brothers were concerned, De La Salle gave priority to mental prayer, the spirit of faith, the presence of God, and interior recollection as an interior support of the Institute. All these enabled the Brothers to live with throes of a mass mystical movement.

c/ It was a **Church in the midst of the world tortured** by the cries of young people deprived of education and of the Gospel. Article 1 of the Rule speaks of this:

«As he became aware, by God's grace, of the human and spiritual distress of "the children of the artisans and the poor", John Baptist de La Salle devoted himself to forming schoolmasters totally dedicated to teaching and to Christian education.»

The basis and justification of our identity and mission are to be found in these cries of distress from society. And so, consecration, Christian education especially through the school, free education, special

concern for poor children, faith and zeal manifested in a lay community are the basic values on which the Lasallian community is founded. The Founder wanted schools «to be well run» and the Good News to be preached to the poor.

d/ It was a **Church in the midst of the world marked** by the foundation of traditional and new types of communities. By way of illustration, there were among others:

– The Salon of Mme Acarie (Barbe Aurilot, cousin of Berulle) in Paris. Its members discussed the reform of the monasteries and the foundation of new congregations.

– The Tuesday Conferences. This was a gathering of ecclesiastics which took place every Tuesday at St. Lazare and was led by St. Vincent de Paul. Its purpose was «to speak about virtue and the duties of state». Or their number, about 20 became bishops, including Godeau, Pavillon and J. B. Bossuet.

– The Company of the Blessed Sacrament. It was founded in Paris in 1627 by the duc de Ventadour. Its membership was mainly lay, but included priests also like Olier, Vincent de Paul and later, Bossuet. The Company did charitable work (hospitals, prisons, ill and afflicted people); worked for the protection of Christian morals; strove to awaken the consciences of those in power (clergy, magistrates, the Court), and to offer support to organisations not belonging to it. Gaston de Renty (1611-1649), a married person with a family, was the leading light in the Company for many years.

### III. AUTHORS... INSPIRED AND SUPPORTED BY THREE INSEPARABLE FACTORS.

At this point, we should say that, basically, what is essential is not to know who wrote the Rule, for it is something the whole community contributed to. What is important is to realise that:

1/ De La Salle and Brothers did not form an association in order to write a Rule. The Rule was not the point of departure. That was God. God who had seen the human and spiritual distress of poor children.

2/ The text produced by the community was meant to help the community life of its members who had accepted to bear witness «together and by association». By association, because all:

a. had allowed God into their lives. It was their call to help one another to search for God.

b. had been moved by the distress of children to help them to have life, and have it more abundantly. They were associated by and in a God of love for the sake of an apostolate.

c. had accepted to belong to the one and same fraternity.

3/ It is in the name of this fraternity that the community gradually set up structures (schools, communities with rules, assemblies, vows) for the Christian education of poor children.

These factors are central to the observance of the Rule. Brothers who became holy did so not by the literal observance of the Rule, but because they understood these factors enshrined by the Rule and based their lives on them. In this sense, the Rule is spiritual. The spiritual dimension includes life in its entirety and consists in fidelity to the Spirit. It is not like an extra floor you add to life. These factors (God, the needs of children and fraternity) are inseparable.

### IV. WHAT DOES ALL THIS IMPLY FOR US TODAY?

1. The 1987 General Chapter and Rule were of historic importance for the Institute. They call upon us to look into the future, if only just a little. As Gaston Berger said, we Brothers should not «crawl backwards into the future», with our eyes steadily fixed on the past. In his January 1988 Letter, Brother Superior calls upon us to «let go of whatever is holding us back and move off in the direction indicated to us by our new Rule» (p. 38). This is not meant to be a Lasallian version of a general clear-out; but past models that paralyse, that inhibit or prevent the growth of the Institute must be abandoned.

2. We have to admit this is a demanding task. Our Rule is demanding.

Less prescriptive and normative, the Rule appeals more to the creativity of Brothers. It is a Rule that inspires, that is spiritual and creative. To abandon accepted models and to strike out in a new direction is never easy. For most of us, change is difficult; for some, extremely difficult.

3. It has to be said finally that we need God's grace and mutual support. Faithful to Jesus Christ, to his Gospel and to his Spirit (Rule 142); convinced that God does not abandon his work but is pleased to make it bring forth more fruit each day, (Rule 141); we must have faith in the future because we know in whom we have placed our trust. Let us always work «together and by association» for the vitality of the Lasallian Institute, convinced as was our Founder that «there is a great need for our Institute».

**Brother Crispin Kukwikila**