

"MOVING FORWARD"
Reflections
(1/2)

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Some years ago, 14 Brothers from the District of France (Centre-East sector) met at Parménie to celebrate their 75th birthday by the joy of seeing one another again, praying, reflecting on their past lives, thanking God, and for the purpose of "moving forward". This meeting, other sector meetings, the Viviers tercentenary, the General Chapter meetings and those of "Lasallian movements", all enabled us to understand better the meaning of "aggiornamento" and of "setting out to sea" with fidelity to the spirit of the Founder, in order to share in the constant re-creation of the Institute in the multiple different facets of its unity.

As a Japanese poet once said: "The most beautiful thing in the world is when a little girl comes to ask you the way and, having been told, goes off singing".

To go off singing, to go forward full of joy, to be constantly starting off anew, to be always going forward in spite of difficulties, is the most beautiful thing in the world, because it is the law governing all living things, the law of life which never stops in its stride, which grows and develops, which goes straight forward, always forward and further, till finally it finds the only repose that is a victory, the fulness of repose in the heart of the Living One.

Some observations

1. The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a "movement".

When we say "movement" we mean life, we mean something that moves, goes forward, grows and develops. The Institute of the Brothers seeks to be like this. If it did not move, did not go forward, it would be a bad sign, a sign that it was inert, anaemic, on the point of death or extinction. This is not going to happen. Since no one wants it to happen, we must all assume our responsibilities, by our prayers, our invitations to others, by the witness of our lives. This, however, will not constitute movement that is full of life and dynamic, unless we ourselves are willing to be living beings that grow; unless we accept the law of life which is development; unless we want to "move forward" with our Institute, through our Institute and for our Institute, so that we can grow through it and make it grow through us, for the glory of God, the salvation of souls and our sanctification in the service of the Church.

2. In years past during the annual retreats, certain topics or certain ideas to develop were sometimes suggested to us for our reflection. We can still remember some of these topics relating to religious life, the apostolate, school, sin, community life, "living", "loving", "crossing frontiers", etc. During the course of the years many of these have served to

nourish our reflections, so that by sharing and implementation, the essence of each could be integrated into our religious and apostolic life.

At the Beauvais Brothers' Assembly, one of the Brothers said the following: "After the experience we've had here together it is time to move forward, and to move forward means to make a commitment, to make a personal commitment and, for us, to make a commitment together, to undertake commitments which we will fulfil by being faithful through joyful service".

A practical form of commitment was suggested to us at the Parménie meeting when we were invited to move forward on a particular point: "*To become acquainted*". This "becoming acquainted" is the first stage of our "moving forward".

All this is very much in line with what the Institute wants. It takes us as it finds us, at the point we have reached. But, when the need arises, it sets us or sets us back on the road: it invites us to move forward and to grow. By doing this, it is faithful to itself in its role as a movement: it is faithful to its Brothers and to the young people it wishes to help to grow and to take their place in society, in the Church, in education or in some other profession. This it does by giving them the opportunity of "moving forward", because moving forward is a necessity of life.

3. Moving forward, a necessity of life

It is not enough for a person to have been or to be what he is today: he must become, he must advance, move forward. Whatever the way he advances, whether it be with difficulty or with great ease, the essential thing is to advance with confidence and hope. As the Apostle Paul said after 20 years of Christianity: "Only one thing counts: forgetting the past, striving towards the future, I run towards the goal". Striving towards the future, moving forward, this is the true meaning of our life as Brothers.

1. This concerns us as creatures

To be a creature means to recognise a Creator in whom we have our beginning and end. Being a creature, a man, a Brother is a blueprint for the future and for freedom: it is a call to grow, to develop, to perfect oneself, to become more, to make one's life a constant process of going higher. It implies total dedication to the process, the dedication of all our talents throughout our life to fulfil the Creator's plan for us, for our Institute. Being a man is to find oneself face to face with this destiny, and to accept or reject this plan, for everyone's life tends towards the future, moves forward to an increase of being: it has to do with winning the freedom to act, love and serve. It is through this striving, of this journey, of this going forward that a person moulds himself as a person, as a religious, and as an educator. He cannot, therefore, lay aside this fundamental duty which is engraved in his nature.

2. This concerns us as baptised persons

A baptised person is a creature, but he is also a son of God and he knows this. He is part of God's plan, a plan concerning the future, but also a leaven of hope:

- his life is open to something greater than itself;
- it is open to the very mystery of God's life and becomes a part of it;
- the baptised person is a son of God as of now, and as of now God's heir.

Being baptised means having a vocation and being able to fulfil a ministry in the Church.

- it means being called, becoming or rather fulfilling and living what one is;

- it means having received the word of life and making it bear fruit a hundredfold in one's own state of life;
- it means having received salvation and making it bear as much fruit as possible.

For this purpose, the baptised person is called:

- to raise his sails to catch the wind of the open sea and of freedom;
- to invent a straight road ahead and forever go forward;
- to develop to the maximum degree his human and spiritual resources;
- to open his soul to the breath of God and of the Spirit of love;
- to grow personally as a son of God in the image of Christ, the perfect Adorer of the Father and a faithful servant of his will;
- to respond to the divine call and to live out fully his own charisms, those of his Founder, those of his Congregation, those of the Brothers who have died and those of the Brothers still living around us. "Going forward" is, therefore, the vocation of all Christians, of the Brothers, and it is also their responsibility. They will have to render an account of how they have fulfilled it. "What did you do with your life ? with your soul ? with your brothers ? with your pupils ? "

Being baptised means, therefore, being called to go forward according to one's own vocation.

3. As Brothers

We are not Brothers simply because we have joined a group of Brothers, or because our name has been entered in a Congregation register. We enter a Brothers' institute in order to become religious Brothers. Joining the Brothers means responding to the Lord's call and wishing to live with other Brothers, as children of God, as religious,

- contemplating and listening to Mary so as to be able to accept Christ with her and like her,
- so that we can make our lives as fruitful as hers, through the Spirit, in the service of all mankind, and especially of those who are poor in their mind and their body; who lack money, work, social facilities, good health, a pension, family life and a spiritual dimension in their lives.

This means, therefore, that all Brothers are called to grow by putting to work in themselves and in their lives the grace of the contemplation and imitation of Mary and the Founder, St John Baptist de La Salle. This desire to go forward with Mary can be seen in the Institute at various stages:

- on entering, in the human and spiritual journey in the Institute;
- in the postulancy, novitiate, in the promise and total consecration by vows of religion, after long secular, religious, theological, pedagogical and social studies.

These are various stages which enable the individual to go constantly forward. They are part of the very life of the Institute and of its dynamism. They are intended also to implement the guidelines of the Institute of the Brothers through its never-ending aggiornamento in response to the wishes of the Church and the needs of the moment.

Going forward means acquiring the soul of a Brother

To grow and develop in order to go forward and further constantly means

- you must have a dynamic force inside you, there must be this vital energy within you;
- you must have a soul:

a soul is what gives life to a body, makes it live, act and develop;

a soul is what makes you creative, broaden your outlook, surpass yourself;

the soul is what gives you an attitude to life, great and deep progress;

the soul is what directs the movement towards self-fulfilment, making it easier to search for God and encounter him, and to give him to others.

*** What means are available to help us to develop and go forward?**

– there are one's own guidelines for going forward, and therefore to take this going forward really seriously. There is the Institute, but each Brother must have interior dynamism. Each Brother must strive to acquire the soul of a Brother, that is:

- a soul thirsting for light;
- a soul that wants to live according to the light given it;
- a soul that wants to share its communion of love in the service it renders, whether the person is well or ill, young or old.

*** A soul thirsting for light**

A person cannot live superficially for any length of time, or in a one-dimensional closed universe: there are horizons and certain dimensions which are an indispensable part of his life and development. He needs to find his own measure, to confront what is greater than himself and all that is around him.

– To be enlightened regarding the mystery of oneself and one's religious, educational and secular environment, one has to open one's eyes, learn how to look and recognise. One has to be constantly breaking down barriers, knocking down partitions, going beyond appearances, looking more deeply, leaving one's prejudices behind, fighting for justice, defending the weak, so as to become open to what is Real, True, the Meaning of life, of one's life, of one's life as a religious, of one's community, of educational and apostolic life.

To *bring about* all this it is important to take the time to:

- look at oneself, at the world, at others;
- open one's mind and one's heart to the presence of Another, the God of Love;
- to listen to his word so as to be motivated and to understand others;
- to seek him in silence, prayer, contemplation and meditation.

Contemplating consists in taking the means to go forward, because it involves:

- opening oneself to someone who is Light, Truth and the Way to Life;
- drawing from him the Living Water of the Gospel, water that brings life;
- feeling called to be reborn, to accept a never-ending renaissance;
- bringing light to the depths of one's own darkness, bringing spring to one's wintry heart;
- driven from within, moved by love, wanting to set out, come what may, whatever the signs prophesy about the future;
- being ready to open up the road of Hope of a religious, cultural, pedagogical, missionary and pastoral Renewal.

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