

**THE LASALLIAN CHARISM
AND THE UNITING CHURCH
(2/2)**

Brother Jeffrey Gros,
Associate Director Secretariat
for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
National Conference of Catholic Bishops

LEADERSHIP FROM THE CHURCH

Experiential routes to spiritual communion and collaboration in ministry are paralleled by the motivational leadership provided by the magisterium. There are an abundance of ecumenical initiatives at the international level in the Catholic Church.

The new codes of canon law, 1983 and 1991; the apostolic letters, *Tertio Millenno Adveniente* (1994) and *Oriente Lumen* (1995); the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1995); the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995); and *Vita Consecrata* (1996) all lay out a significant set of institutional resources for Lasallian formation and the education of colleagues. These can both enhance their zeal for the unity of the Church from deep resources in Scripture and the Tradition, and provide a rich agenda for formation, ministry development and education.

As consecrated religious, the Brothers have a unique role among the Lasallian community in providing for motivation and leadership in promoting the unity of the Church:

Christ's prayer to the Father before his passion, that his disciples may be one, lives on in the church's prayer and activity. How can those called to the consecrated life not feel themselves involved? The wound of disunity still existing between believers in Christ, and the urgent need to pray and work for the promotion of Christian unity were deeply felt at the synod. The ecumenical sensitivity of consecrated persons is heightened also by the awareness that in other churches and ecclesial communities monasticism has been preserved and is flourishing, as is the case in the Eastern churches, and that there is a renewal of the profession of the evangelical counsels, as in the Anglican Communion and in the communities of the Reformation. The synod emphasized the close connection between the consecrated life and the cause of ecumenism, and the urgent need for a more intense witness in this area. Since the soul of ecumenism is prayer and conversion, institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life certainly have a special duty to foster this commitment. There is an urgent need for consecrated

persons to give more space in their lives to ecumenical prayer and genuine evangelical witness, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit the walls of division and prejudice between Christians can be broken down. *Vita Consecrata* #100

However, in addition to this very explicit commitment of Brothers to the unity of the Church, enunciated by the synod, there is also a special role developed for religious in their witness of communion. It is the theology of communion (*koinonia*) that has become the back bone of the ecumenical movement, from the 1948 constitution of the World Council of Churches, through the ecclesiology adopted by the Catholic Church in Vatican II and reiterated in the extraordinary synod, 1985, to the most recent theological proposals before the Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic churches for action. The process of building communion among the Brothers and their colleagues in shared mission, of developing solidarity and sensitivity between Lasallians and those to whom they minister in schools and ministries, and the deepening communion among separated churches, is all part of our common calling to deeper communion in the Triune God and with one another in love.

The Catholic Church believes itself to be in real, if imperfect, communion with all who are baptized and share the apostolic faith. The ecumenical task before us as Lasallians is one of perfecting that unity, through charity, the dialogue of truth, and educating for unity, until full eucharistic communion is achieved. In this Brothers are called to be both models and instruments:

A great task also belongs to the consecrated life in the light of the teaching about the church as communion... Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practice the spirituality of communion as "witnesses and architects of the plan of unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design." The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a spirituality of communion, promotes a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the church to grow in depth and extension. (VC # 46)

In this, the Brothers are joined with their Lasallian colleagues, especially as they carry forward and witness to the educational dimension of this calling.

However, the **why** and **how** of Lasallian commitment to the unity of the Church does not stop with the spiritual conversion and the witness to communion. It also entails informing our ministries with the content and practice of an ecumenical life style:

Sharing of the *lectio divina* in the search for the truth, a participation in common prayer, in which the Lord assures us of his presence, the dialogue of friendship and charity which makes us feel how pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] dwell in unity, cordial hospitality shown to brothers and sisters of the various Christian confessions, mutual knowledge and the exchange of gifts, cooperation in common undertakings of service and of witness: These are among the many forms of ecumenical dialogue. They are actions pleasing to our common Father which show the will to journey together toward perfect unity along the path of truth and love. Likewise, the knowledge of history, doctrine, liturgy and charitable and apostolic activity of other Christians cannot but help to make ecumenical activity even more fruitful. (VC #101)

It is against this background of the challenge to leadership in reconciliation, inherent in the Gospel, religious consecration, and the educational calling within the Church, that we can indicate some of the directions that Lasallians might take in developing institutional supports for the spirituality of the Church. In the next article we will focus on elements of Lasallian leadership and formation that can serve this dimension of our calling together.

READINGS

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