

## Under the guidance of the Spirit (1/3)

### Brother Richard Dupont

Brother Richard Dupont begins his work «The search for the will of God according to St John Baptist de La Salle» by speaking about the Vatican II Council and how it envisaged religious life. He goes on to shed new light on the ideas of the Founder of the Brothers, and concludes his work with chapter 4, entitled «Under the guidance of the Spirit». The article that follows gives the essence of this chapter.

What is said of the Brothers can be said also, *mutatis mutandis*, of all Christian educators, who also have baptismal consecration for the glory of God, and a similar commitment to the education of youth, but who have no rule of life or community «exercises». Discernment regarding the will of God by married lay people involves necessarily their families. Obedience to Christ concerns lay people also, but they do not make a vow of obedience.

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Taking as his point of departure the Vatican II Council, which brought about a renewal in ecclesiology and, by the same token, in the understanding of religious life, Brother Richard shows how we can implement today the fundamental thinking of the Founder, especially regarding the aspect of the spirit of faith which leads a Brother «not to do anything but in view of God». We shall begin by some considerations on seeking the glory of God, and then examine the means available to the Brother of today which can enable him to procure it «as far as I shall be able and as you will require of me», as we read in the formula of vows.

### The glory of God

The formula of vows of the Brothers, which goes back to the beginnings of the Institute, begins by establishing a Trinitarian context: «Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with profound respect before your infinite majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I shall be able and as you will require of me».

The formula reveals the Founder's basic conviction that God the Father created man out of his goodness and invited him to share his life (his truth and his salvation). To achieve this, he sent his Son, a man among men, to be, by his death and resurrection, the «first to be born from the dead» (Col 1,18). Christ left them his Spirit to make them conformable to him and to draw all things after himself to the Father. In this way, the whole Trinity is present in the history of salvation from the first instant to its completion at the end of time.

As the Son «is the radiant light of God's glory» (Heb 1,3), so also the Christian, to the extent that he conforms to Christ, is radiant with God's glory and his light shines before the eyes of men so that, seeing his good works, they may give praise to the Father (cf. Mt 5,16). «The Father is glorified in us to the extent that through us shines the glory of the Father, who is Jesus, with whom we become God's glory» (A. Andres Ortega, *Cuerpo místico y vida religiosa*). The union of the Brother with Christ consists less in the imitation

of his earthly life than in conformity to him, which is revealed in all the aspects of his life. If imitation is the effort made by man to resemble Christ, conformity to him is the work of the Spirit. «Being a brother of Jesus is not a title which is simply juridical and moral. The title of son which is given to us makes us similar to the eternal Son more than simply on the level of exemplarity» (Y. Congar, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint*).

If the Brother wishes to resemble Christ, the eternal Son, he has to learn, as he did, to «turn to the Father» (1 Jn 1,2), with an attitude of filial relationship, obedience and love (agape). The love and friendship expressed by the word «agape», consists not only in seeking the company of a friend, but also in accepting his will. And so, the Brother, inspired by the Spirit, will try to do God's will, not like a slave in a servile fashion, but as his child, that is to say, freely, like Christ Jesus, whose eyes were constantly turned towards the Father even while on earth (cf. 1 Jn 1,2; Jn 5,19-30). «The spirit you received is not the spirit of slaves bringing fear into your lives again; it is the spirit of sons» (Rm 8,15).

For the Brother, seeking to do the will of God consists in clothing himself with Jesus Christ: «Put on the Lord Jesus Christ» (Rm 8,14; cf. Ga 3,27; Ep 4,24), allowing him to live in himself: «I live now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ» (Ga 2,20). Moreover, did not Christ say: «I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that has been given me» (Jn 6,38-39). This was true to the extent that his whole life consisted in doing the will of his Father: «My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work» (Jn 4,34). And so, for the Brother, putting the second aspect of the spirit of faith into practice, that is, «not doing anything but in view of God», consists in his making himself more and more conformable to Jesus Christ till he is one with him: «They are the ones he chose specially long ago and intended to become true images of his Son, so that his Son might be the eldest of many brothers» (Rm 8,29).

In response both to the call of youth and to the contemplation of this mystery of the love and communion of the Trinity, the Brother consecrates himself entirely to becoming conformable to Jesus Christ under the impulse of the Spirit, in order to continue Christ's mission among young people to reveal his Father's love for them. It is by giving his life for them day after day, like Christ, so that they can attain the truth and salvation, that the Brother participates in a concrete manner in this flow of Agape which comes from the Father so that it can return to him.

This profound intimacy with Jesus Christ makes the Brother a witness worthy of trust. He is able to speak of the mystery of Christ as of something he has experienced personally (cf. 1 Jn 1,1-4), and not as if he were explaining more or less abstract truths he has been asked to teach. For young people, his words and actions will speak of personal experience, and they will not feel they are listening to the lifeless tone of a tourist guide. That is why he must try to embody Christ for the young people entrusted to him. As the Founder says: «In carrying out your service to children, you will not fulfil your ministry adequately if you conform only to the external actions of Jesus Christ in his guidance and in his conversion of souls. You must also enter into his way of thinking, and adopt his goals. He came on earth, as he himself said, that all might have life and have it to the full. This is why he said in another place that his words are spirit and life. By this he meant that his words procure the true life, which is the life of the soul - for those who hear them and, with gladness over what they have heard, act on them with love. This must be your goal when you teach your disciples, that they live a Christian life and that your words become spirit and life for them. Your words will accomplish this, first, because they will be produced by the Spirit of God living in you, and second, because they will procure for your disciples the Christian spirit. In possessing this spirit, which is the very Spirit of Jesus Christ, they will live that

true life which is so valuable because it leads surely to eternal life» (MR 196,3).

And so, the search for the will of God is not a search for the philosophical stone or some treasure, but the conforming of one's whole being to that of Christ through the action of the Spirit. That is why the Brother should frequently give himself to the Spirit of Jesus (cf. MR 195,2) so as to act constantly under his influence. There will no longer be any difference for him between meditation and more concrete and material activities, because both will be accomplished through the Spirit; and having become agape, they will participate in the infinite plan of the Father who is Agape.

In order to be able to participate in this plan as fully as he is able and as the Trinity will require of him, the Brother will need various means to help him discover day after day the will of God for him. We should like to consider the means put at his disposal so that he can become more and more like Christ, as he seeks the will of the Father who has chosen him «to help in this work by announcing to children the Gospel of his Son and the truths that are contained in it» (MR 193,3).

### The action of the Holy Spirit

In the pyramid model of the Church and in the kind of religious life it inspired, God's action was seen as being transmitted vertically from above: God, the Rule, the Director, the Brother. In the ecclesiology of communion, religious life also is seen as communion, and the line of transmission is different, with community exercising an important role. This being so, the second part of this article will group the various «lines of transmission» under two main headings: The Holy Spirit and Community as the Body of Christ.

«This spiritual, "mystical" identification with Christ, this absolute trust we place in him to take over our whole lives, are brought about by the intimate and transcendent action of the Holy Spirit [...] but it is faith which transforms them into dispositions in us» (Y. Congar, op.cit.). It is God the Father, through his Spirit, who makes Christ live in the depths of the hearts of the faithful, in which the direction their life will take is decided: «Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith» (cf. Ep 3,16-17). This faith is a gift from God which grows through the action of the Spirit: «It is God himself who assures us all, and you, of our standing in Christ, and has anointed us, marking us with his seal and giving us the pledge, the Spirit, that we carry in our hearts» (2 Co 1,21-22).

Jesus was filled with the Spirit: «The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor» (Lk 4,18). He was the source of his message and work of salvation. That is why the Founder says to his Brothers: «Thus should the Holy Spirit make his indwelling in you today, that you may no longer live or have movement but by him. Endeavour to draw him down by a well-disposed heart» (MD 43,1). He adds: «In your state, you need the plenitude of God's Holy Spirit, since you should live therein and be conducted solely by the spirit and the light of faith. Only the Holy Spirit can give you these dispositions» (MD 43,2). He gives them the example of the Apostles who were so filled with the Holy Spirit that they «spoke only of the risen Christ. They constantly had the words of holy Scripture on their lips, and these served them as guide for their conduct» (MD 43,2). In the same way, the Brothers must be filled with the Holy Spirit «by which they [you] will be confirmed in good by his dwelling in them [you]» (MD 4,3).

During his life, Jesus showed people how to behave as children of God: he revealed to them the filial attitude they should have towards the Father. The Brother who wishes to live according to the spirit of faith must imitate Jesus in his obedience, in his constant search for loving and faithful con-

formity to the will of God, and in his filial prayer: «An understanding of the mystery of Christ, the daily practice of obedience, praying to the Father as a son - all this is necessary if we are to be transfigured into the image of the Son by the Lord, who is the Spirit [cf. 2 Co 3,18] (Y. Congar, op.cit.).

### The obedience of the Brother

Religious obedience has to be seen in the context of openness and acceptance of the Spirit. The 1987 Rule says the following: «Obedience based on the Gospel is a communion with the Holy Spirit which unites the will of the Brothers progressively to that of Christ who became obedient unto death» (art. 36). It derives all its meaning from Christ's attitude of filial obedience towards the Father, under both its aspects of exemplarity and redemptiveness.

By our obedience «we allow ourselves to be saved» by God, and we transform ourselves into a means of salvation for others, by allowing God to save them through us. By obedience, «we unite ourselves to the salvific will of God» (PC 14), «we enter more firmly and with greater assurance into his plan of salvation» (ET 25). To disobey is to stop being an instrument of salvation. That is why, without obedience, true apostolate, which is a supernatural service of salvation, is not possible. (S. M. Alonso, *La vida consagrada*, 319).

The life of Jesus was characterised by a permanent attitude of obedience towards his Father. This obedience was either direct, or given through the intermediary institutions of his historical context: the Mosaic Law, his family, authorities. The Gospel message he has left us through his life and death is an attitude of complete openness and an acceptance without reserve of the Father's will.

The first effect which the Holy Spirit produces by his presence in a Brother is «to make him see things in quite a different light from that in which those who live according to the spirit of the world view things». It is the Spirit who will teach them all truth (cf. Jn 16,13), «because he will make everything known, and by showing everything not only in its apparent form, but as it really is in itself, and as it is seen when scrutinised by eyes of faith» (MD 44,1). A study of these Pentecost meditations shows how the Spirit leads people to see things with the eyes of faith.

The presence of the Spirit not only fills each individual, but it unites individuals together: «They had all dispersed [...] and had hidden for fear of death. After receiving the Holy Spirit, however, they again united and assembled in one place, encouraging one another to rejoice in suffering indignity for the sake of Jesus' name» (MD 43,2). This is how the Spirit must unite the Brothers in *koinonia* (union, communion), so that they have «but one heart and one soul» (MF 113,2).

The presence of the Spirit is just as important for the ministry of the Brother: «You are engaged in a ministry wherein you have to touch hearts. But you cannot possibly do this without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Beseech God to confer on you today the same grace as he gave the Apostles, so that after filling you with his spirit for your own sanctification, he may confer it on you for the salvation of others also» (MD 43,3). In view of their ministry as co-workers and ministers of Jesus Christ, the Founder exhorts them as follows: «In order to fulfil your responsibility with as much perfection and care as God requires of you» (another reference to the formula of vows), «frequently give yourself to the Spirit of our Lord to act only under his influence and not through any self-seeking. This Holy Spirit, then, will fill your students with himself, and they will be able to possess fully the Christian Spirit» (MR 195,2)

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