

## Mission, Consecration, Community (1/2)

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The Declaration on The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today defined «the elements that constitute the Brother's vocation, apart from which he could not be considered a member of the Institute» (N° 12). The young professed Brother, in the first years of his apostolic and community life, learns what these elements are. He discovers gradually that the mission of the Institute has meaning only because its members are «irrevocably committed to follow Christ», as the title of the Superior's 1991 Pastoral Letter reminds us. It seems important, therefore, for the young Brother to be able to reflect on the close links that exist between mission, consecration and community. Called to devote his life to the following of Christ, he consecrates himself to God for the service of young people, especially the poor, while living in a community. Consecration takes on meaning through the mission, and mission defines in concrete terms the manner in which the community lives out its consecration. One cannot exist without the other. It is good for the young Brother to reflect on this link before he commits himself to the Institute in a definitive manner.

The vow formula offers a good means on which to base this reflection. The advantage of this formula, even because of its brevity, is that it provides a good summary of the elements which constitute the Brother's life. Before pronouncing this formula with great solemnity on the day of his profession, it would be useful for the Brother to be aware of both its richness and meaning, so that it will express clearly the meaning he will attach to his definitive commitment.

### Study of the formula of the vows

The formula of the vows can be found in article 25 of the Rule. Here is a study guide.

#### 1. Discover the inspiration of St John and St Paul in the formula of vows

- *Read the following references in the light of certain words or expressions of the formula. What conclusions can we draw?*

References	Words or expressions
Jn 14:16-18 (Trinity)	Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Ep 3:14-17 (adoration of the Trinity)	with profound respect
Jn 17:17 (consecrate them)	I consecrate myself entirely to you
Jn 17:4-5 (glory)	to procure your glory
Ph 3:12-13 (trying)	as far as I shall be able
Jn 17:21-22 (union)	I promise to unite myself
Jn 15:4-10 and Jn 1:39 (meaning of remaining)	and to remain
1 Co 4:1-2 (faithful servant)	wherever I may be sent

- *Some remarks about this research*

The similarity between certain expressions in the formula of vows and the prayer of Jesus after the Last Supper is striking. The context of the complete gift of oneself in the following of Jesus «who loved his own till the very end» gives meaning to the Brother's consecration.

- The meaning of the verb «unite» is interesting: at the same time to be part, to be linked to the others (vow of association) and therefore with God, but also to maintain unity as a sign for the world.
- The meaning of the verb «remain» is likewise rich: at the same time to remain attached to the body of the Society (vow of stability) as the branch to the vine, but also to live with one's Brothers, to last, to spend time with them, like the first disciples with Jesus.
- The reference to St Paul's letter to the Philippians shows that whoever is «caught up» by Christ cannot turn back. His whole life is directed towards the one who called him. The Brother commits himself to give himself entirely to the mission.
- The consecration of the Brother is first of all a response to a call. It is God who consecrates the one who wishes to consecrate himself to him.

## 2. The structure of the formula

- Study its structure: its beginning, its end, connecting words.
- To whom is each paragraph addressed? Which persons are referred to by name?
- What is the ultimate aim? By what means does one attain it?
- At which point are the vows made? Why?
- Why are the Bull of Approbation and the Rule mentioned?
- Why are the 3 constitutive elements included in the formula?

## 3. Detailed study

- Pick out all the verbs in the infinitive. What do they mean?
- Pick out all the verbs used in the passive. What fundamental attitude of the Brother do they stress?
- Pick out all the verbs in the active form with their subject. How do they highlight the free gift of oneself?
- How is the link between association and mission expressed? Under what conditions is it possible (2\_ §)?
- Note the use of the two verbs «promise» and «vow». What is the difference between them?
- How does paragraph 3 («Wherefore...») sum up consecration, mission and community?
- What is the importance of the final formula «in testimony thereof, I have signed»? How should the verb «sign» be understood?

### • *A few points to note*

- The formula begins with the Trinity, to whom the Brother consecrates himself, and ends with his signature, the sign of his free commitment, made in public, to live out this consecration: «Your Amen, is your signature» (St Justin).
- The essential part of the consecration is to be found in the first two paragraphs, which express explicitly the purpose (the glory of God), the partners (The Brothers of the Christian Schools) and the mission (to conduct schools for the service of the poor). Community and mission serve to give expression to the consecration to God (and, for this purpose).
- The vows properly so called are only a means to achieve this purpose. Their position is significant. They do not come first, unlike the Rule and the Bull.
- It should be noted also that the verbs in the passive form (I may be sent, I may be assigned) stress dispossession of oneself and an attitude of obedience characteristic of the Founder and of the first Brothers.
- The verbs in the active voice stress the will of the Brother to commit himself freely to do all that he can to ensure that the glory of God is brought about by association with others in the service of a mission. The verbs in the infinitive stress at the same time acting (to procure, to do) and the need for stability in the association, and duration (to unite myself, to remain, to conduct, to keep). They highlight the need for the institution, for a stable basis, as a guarantee for the mission of the community.
- As a particularly rich form of condensed expression, the formula of vows is an excellent summary of the elements which constitute the life of the Brother. The Brother is a person consecrated to God (and by God) for an educational and community-based mission for the service of the poor.

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