

Mission, Consecration, Community (2/2)

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The formula of vows and the Declaration

It would be interesting to re-read the Declaration as a summary of the identity of the Brother as it appears in the formula of vows. What we suggest here is more modest. It consists in reading article 13 of the Declaration, which defines «the elements which constitute the Brother of the Christian Schools» and to compare it with the formula of vows.

- Re-read N° 13 of the Declaration and pick out the direct borrowings from the formula of vows (13.1; 13.3; 13.4).
- Note references to the formula: community (13.3), public vows (13.3), role of the Church (13.2; 13.3), the poor (13.4).
- Note the new points of emphasis and shades of meaning contributed by the Declaration: the baptismal dimension of consecration (13.1), the emphasis on the Kingdom (13.3), the lay nature of the Institute (13.2), the school as a non-exclusive means (13.6), the emphasis on learning (13.5), the salvation brought by Christ (13.4).
- How is this article of the Declaration similar to the formula of the vows in its definition of the identity of the Brother today?

N.B. As the Declaration invites us, we can continue our reflection by reading articles 16 to 52 which develop the material in article 13. We suggest the following reading guide for articles 16 to 27. It points out the articles referring to each of the elements mentioned above: consecration (N° 17-18); community (N° 19-21); mission (N° 22-24); integration of the 3 elements (N° 25-26).

- Note each time how the 3 elements are closely linked.
- What means are suggested for making them part of our lives?
- What is said about formation?
- What do you feel you are called to do now that you have read all this?

As a follow-up to this study, it would be good to re-read the Pastoral Letter of the Superior, entitled «Being Brothers Today» (January, 1st 1997), especially pages 14 to 52.

The formula of vows and the Meditations for the Time of Retreat

Re-reading the Meditations for the Time of Retreat in the light of the formula of vows enables us to understand the identity of the Brother in his consecration for the mission. A detailed study would be interesting. I shall limit myself here to suggesting a few lines of research based on some direct quotations by the MR from the formula of vows.

First stage

- Re-read the following MR: 193, 194, 197 and 201. Pick out the borrowings from the formula of vows: for the glory of God, as far as God will require, as far as I shall be able.
- Now read the meditations that follow and do the work indicated after each heading:
 1. *To procure the glory of God.* Pick out the words or expressions which accompany the verb «procure» or the expression «glory of God». For example: 193.3: (procure the means of salvation); 194.1: (teach for the glory of God); 194.1: (procure for children such great benefits); 199.1: (procure for children the knowledge of our religion). Now do the same for: 197.1; 200.2; 201.2; 201.3; 202.1; 202.2; 206.1.

2. *As far as God will require of you*: Pick out the expressions which illustrate what this formula means (for example: 193.3: (contributing to the salvation of those entrusted to you): 195.2; 197.1.

3. *As far as I shall be able*. Pick out the different uses of this formula as, for example, 193,2 (using all the care and application possible): 201.3; 202.1; 205.2; 206.2.

- How was the mission inseparable from consecration for the Founder?
- Where does the Brother's spiritual experience take place?
- Why is community not mentioned in so many words?

Second stage

Study of Meditations 201 and 202 on zeal.

- Read the two meditations and note how they summarise the preceding aspects of the formula of vows.
- How are the call of God and commitment to the Institute closely linked with the mission in the eyes of the Founder?
- What are the principal characteristics of this saving mission?
- What educational and spiritual attitudes must the Brothers develop in their work? What is the value of example?
- How does the Founder speak of the Church? How is this work a ministry?
- How is the total gift on oneself indispensable in order to fulfil this mission (Cf. end of meditation 201)?
- How does the reading of these meditations renew your understanding of your own vocation as a Brother?
- How do you show zeal today? What new work or ways of acting are you stimulated to undertake? In what sense do you think you have the «ability to be a saviour» necessary for your work?

A few personal reflections

– This work on the Meditations should help a renewed understanding of the link between mission and consecration. Although the MR are not intended solely for the Brothers (Cf. the title of the work), which probably explains why community is not mentioned, they are still very much in line with the formula of vows and the idea that the Brother is a consecrated person. It should be noted also that the vows are not mentioned either.

– It is striking to note that, for the Founder, the call of God is inseparable from the mission he entrusts. This clearly implies «making the means of salvation accessible to children». What he says about «procuring the glory of God» is significant. The glory of God consists in procuring for children «the knowledge of our religion», but also «the help of instruction», or «the salvation of souls». For the Founder, there is no separation between the «affairs of one's state and those of employment». It is by fulfilling his mission as an educator that the Brother lives out his total consecration to God.

– The principal educational attitude is to work with «all the affection of one's heart» by giving «tangible signs» of the zeal that inspires us. The qualities of the heart, linked to example, are at the same time educational and spiritual qualities, because the aim is «the love and the glory of God». Zeal for the salvation of children and zeal for the glory of God are one and the same thing.

– The last part of Meditation 201 uses a provocative expression to sum up the motives which should inspire the Brother's whole life. The mission for the salvation of children calls for a total consecration of oneself: it involves «wearing out one's whole life», «sacrificing oneself» completely, because «it is the work of God». And this is exactly what is expressed by the formula of vows.

Resources used for this article

- Course given by Br Donald Mouton on the MR: *The mystery of God and the Ministry of the Brother*.
- Course given by Br Antonio Botana: *The Ministry of the Brother, the context of his spiritual experience*.
- Course given by Br Miguel Campos: *De La Salle, spiritual guide*.
- The Declaration
- The Rule
- The Meditations for the Time of Retreat

Articles:

- Timothy Radcliffe, Donner sa vie pour la mission. Documentation catholique, N° 2106, Dec. 1994.
- Timothy Radcliffe, La vocation religieuse aujourd'hui. Laisser derrière soi les signes habituels de l'identité. Documentation catholique, N° 2148, Nov. 1996. •