

**For a better understanding
of the lasallian association (6/6)**

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7. An association FOR the evangelisation of abandoned youth.

The association arose from the desire to answer an urgent need of young people far from salvation. It was sustained by this awareness in the numerous times of crisis. Finally, what is essential to the association, is the dynamic link between *raison d'être* and way of living.

7.1. It was the desire to answer an urgent need of abandoned young people «far from salvation» which brought about the birth of the association.

It was the experience of the Founder himself. He was bred to his mission by the awareness that he had of the distress of numerous youngsters and the urgent necessity to means of salvation within their reach by establishing a Society of ministers of God at their service.

It was the experience of the birth of the community, when young people desirous of following Jesus Christ and of fulfilling *the most useful ministry to the poor (17)*, came forward to replace John Baptist's first companions disconcerted by the evangelical views which they did not have when they became schoolmasters.

It was the awareness which the ecclesial environment of the community rapidly gained, bringing in its wake numerous appeals and the relatively fast growth of the community which made it tend to become a «society».

7.2. It was the awareness of answering an urgent need for young people which sustained the association, particularly in the numerous times of crisis.

It was true for the Founder. From the moment he realised with certainty that his «vocation» was to set up that community, he threw himself almost totally into the project. His action was inseparably one of «structuring» and «leading» the society. *The establishment and the running of the community was, for him, God's work (18).*

We could add to the fundamental project of establishing and sustaining the association:

– His concerns with regard to discerning vocations, the initial formation of the Brothers, supporting them and giving them spiritual sustenance.

– His efforts, in particular, to clarify the common progress of the Brothers by feeding their «spirit of faith, of zeal and of community» by his spiritual writings.

– His vigorous reaction when he had to defend the work and the originality of the association: from the *Memoire sur l'habit* to the disagreements which could put him at variance with such and such a bishop – passing through the struggle for gratuity – and the school innovations.

– The criteria which determined the reaffirming of his definitive choice after times of crisis, and the renewal of his initiatives as Founder (for example the programme in four stages at the time of the crisis of 1691).

It was true for the Institute. In the first part of this presentation, I recalled how certain remarkable acts of the association punctuate the foundation of the Institute. By virtue of the will of John Baptist de La Salle, the Brothers took up their way of life and their very destiny. This appeared at the time of the vow of 1694 and the act of election which followed, and also when the Archbishop of Paris wanted to impose an ecclesiastical Superior on the community in 1701 – and especially in 1714, at a critical time for the survival of their society, the decisive step of recalling the Founder by a group of Brothers who had assembled together of their own accord.

7.3. What is essential to the association: the dynamic «link» between its «way of living» and its «raison d'être».

Why schools? Because, in the context, they seemed to be a structure which was at the same time ecclesial and human allowing «those» young people access to the salvation of Jesus Christ. It was to this end that the Brothers joined together to keep schools. It was this aim that they would take to heart:

- to promote and defend the gratuity of schools;
- to transform the school in order to adapt it to the reality of young people, on the cultural and community level and to prepare them for life (human, social, professional, ecclesial).
- to make the school a catechetical place, a place for proclaiming the gospel.

Such thoughts were at the heart of the association; because it was only together that the Brothers could manage to change anything in the situation.

Why a total consecration to God? Because his call, his presence, his action in the history of the discovery of the need for «salvation» were recognised, and also because the educational service to those young people is a concrete way of serving the glory of God; because one was engaged in an evangelical undertaking and one should be «consistent» with the mission.

These ideas are at the heart of the association more and more understood and lived as requiring a communion in the faith and the uplift of zeal.

Yes, when all is said and done, why the association?
Surely to constitute a new body of men in the Church totally consecrated to God with the aim of allowing «abandoned» young people to have «*access to the promises of God in Jesus Christ* (19)».

Live Jesus in our hearts. For ever !

(17) Blain 1,224.

(18) R.I.8.

(19) MR I99.3, quoting Ep 2,12,19; 205,3, quoting Ep 3,6.