

**SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT  
THE MEANING OF ASSOCIATION  
IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR VOWS**

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### Introduction

In order to understand the meaning of association in the context of our vows, I suggest we examine the structure of our formula of vows. The formula we will examine is the one in St John Baptist de La Salle's own hand dated June 1694.

### 1. Structure of our formula of vows

Our formula of vows is involved, one might even say, tangled. ¥How can it be untangled?£ If we examine it closely, we can see that it composed of the following sections: 1. a prologue expressing our total consecration; 2. an explanation of the commitment in 2 sections: 2a. association-permanence; 2b. extent-obedience; 3. restatement of the commitment in a summarised form; 4. authentication of the commitment (place, date, signature).

• 1. *Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate before your infinite and adorable majesty, I CONSECRATE MYSELF ENTIRELY TO YOU TO PROCURE YOUR GLORY as far as it will be possible for me and as you will require of me.*

• 2. *And for this purpose, I...John Baptist de La Salle, priest, promise and vow*

• 2a. *to unite myself and live in society with Brothers Nicolas Vuyart, Gabriel Drolin, Jean Partois, Gabriel Charles Rasigarde, Jean Henri, Jacques Compain, Jean Jacquot, Jean Louis de Marcheville, Michel Barthelemy Jacquinot, Edme Leguillon, Gilles Pierre and Claude Roussel..*

*to conduct together [with them] and by association [as a result of association] gratuitous schools*

*wherever this may be*  
– *even if I were obliged in order to do so to beg for alms and live on bread alone*

### Explanation given in the Collection

The vows impose 4 obligations:

- (1) **to conduct schools wherever one may be sent;**
- (2) **to remain in the society** for all the time one has promised, without being able to leave it for whatever reason;
- (3) and if it happens that one is destitute of everything in the society, **NEVER TO LEAVE IT FOR THAT REASON**, but rather to resolve to beg for alms and to live on bread alone in order not to abandon the society or the schools
- (4)...

• 2b. **OR TO DO** *in the said society whatever I shall be assigned*

- *either by the body of the society [chapter]*
- *or by the superiors thereof*

• 3. *For this purpose I PROMISE AND VOW obedience to the body of this society and to the superiors, which vows of ASSOCIATION and stability in the said society I promise to keep inviolably all my lifetime.*

• 4. *In witness of which I have signed...June 6th, feastday of the Most Holy Trinity, in the year 1694. De La Salle (CL 2).*

Following these clear explanations, the Founder states that the Brother is under the obligation of obeying “the above superiors” (under pain of mortal sin), when they command in virtue of the vow.

### 2. Belonging to the society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the 17th century. What association is created by the vows?

On the basis of our examination of the organic structure of the formula, it is clear that the text says the following:

2.1 Association exists in order to conduct gratuitous schools or to do whatever I shall be assigned (serving Brothers, officers)

2.2 Stability will be maintained wherever I am sent, and despite difficult living conditions (alms and bread alone)

2.3 Stability is a result of association (conducting schools...wherever they may be, without being able to leave of one's own accord)

2.4 Obedience covers work both in school and out of school.

It is important to understand that for the Brother, association is not simply membership of “the club”. It's not the result of a decision by an interested person

to give a helping hand. **The association of the Brother** with other associates involves an **inherent obligation to work** according to the aims of the society, or to do some related work like looking after the poor. There is also the obligation of *mobility* (wherever I may be sent), of permanence in spite of the worst (never to leave the society even if I were obliged to beg or live on bread alone), of *obedience* to the representatives of the society and to specific directors. Association meant all this in the conditions in which our first Brothers lived. We too are called to live in this way. Excluded, however, are the “extreme” conditions of begging or living on bread alone: these requirements were dropped after the approbation of the Institute and even as early as 1716. They are still mentioned in Meditation 153,3.

Within the context of association, it is obedience that governs the life and work of the Brothers, whether directly in education or otherwise. Obedience is the fundamental virtue that “*establishes order and maintains union*” (Med 7,2) (or whatever I shall be assigned by the superiors).

Consecration comes first and covers everything: “I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory, and *for this purpose...*”

The *mission* is specific: *...to conduct gratuitous schools accessible to all, especially the poor;*

- respond to the needs of Christian education wherever the need arises
- without giving up (stability)

**Community** is not association, although this is the result, because our society is spread out among different houses. What is **linked to association and permanence is the mission** of the Institute to work wherever it may be, without giving up.

To work “in association” is not to work “as one mass of people”, nor to work “together”: it is to work “**in union with**” the Institute as a whole. This was the (exceptional) case of Gabriel Drolin who lived alone in Rome for 26 years and worked “by association”; and the communities at Mende, Moulins, Les Vans, Marseille, Dijon, Darnßéstal, St Denis and Troyes, which were made up of only two Brothers in 1717, they too did not work “as one mass of people” but “by association”, that is, *in union* with the Institute as a

whole, and in line with its aims **because of their association**.

A **community** is bound together and sustained by obedience, the “community virtue” (Meditations); by sharing (goods in common, equality); by charity (like the first Christians - “*this small FAMILY...this Church of Christ, our Institute*” (Med 169,3); by prayer: “*You are in a house of prayer*” (Med 62,1); by sharing one’s faith (recreation, talks). It is not only consecration which calls us to a life of prayer: it is also community which has a duty to praise God, to build up fraternal charity and to nourish the spiritual tenor of life in the locality. Poverty promotes sharing; chastity promotes charity.

These are the many benefits of true association.

### 3. Prospective associates

In 1694, 12 Brothers made a perpetual vow of association (to conduct gratuitous schools or to...), stability and obedience. With De La Salle, they formed a solid group (for how long?) of 13 associates. They worked in various schools in Rheims, Laon, Guise, Rethel and Paris. There were 7 schools. Although the Brothers lived at rue Neuve, their school was in the parish of St Symphorien (CL 37, p.55). The school in the parish of St Jacques had failed (cf. MH). In Paris, Vaugirard was not a school.

Other Brothers apart from these 12 belonged to the society: Bernard Legentil and some others who had recently joined; Thomas Frappet, Jean Françoise Bouqueton (1691), Philippe Police (1692), Ambroise Blin (1693), Pierre Raimbault (professed 1695 and died the same year), and others like Joseph Paris (B2abr. p.69) not mentioned in the book of vows because they either left or died before a register was begun in 1714 or so. They can be called prospective associates. They probably had triennial vows, renewable till they made their perpetual profession. They were fully committed, therefore, by their vows of obedience and association.

It would be good to bear this in mind when speaking about **association**. It would help to clarify its fundamental significance for Brothers. •