

## ASSOCIATION AND COMMUNION (3/3)

**Brother Gerard Oustric**

### VI. «THE BROTHERS GLADLY ASSOCIATE LAY PERSONS WITH THEM IN THEIR EDUCATIONAL MISSION» (24)

We have here a reality lived now for some decades and systematised by the Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools of 1987. The words that follow are important also: “They provide, for those who desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit.” (25)

The 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter spent a long time studying this theme expressed as “Shared Mission”. The purpose of this short article is not to present an exhaustive study of how the Brothers are invited to collaborate with lay persons. In these few lines we have highlighted certain terms which are used to identify this reality: association, sharing, collaboration, partnership...but however...

If we place ourselves in the light of what we have attempted to set out above, it is surely proper to use the term “association” knowing that every significant term implies a specific activity.

I think that we, Brothers and lay persons, are agreed to concur about what our educational mission is. There remain the means to be determined... In a certain manner, what does the term “associate” cover when it is addressed to the lay-educators who “want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry” (26).

If we go back to the *Mémoire sur l’habit* of De La Salle, a very clear distinction is drawn between the Brothers of the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the country schoolteachers. All the same, we can note the following indication of the Founder concerning essentials:

“Care is also given to the training of teachers for country districts, in a house separate from the community, and which is called a seminary.

Those who are trained there remain only a few years until they are fully prepared both with regard to piety and their employment”. (27)

We note the two terms *piety* and *employment*, and the Founder hastens to add, a few lines further on:

“and when they have secured a post, they have no further connection with the community except in so far as is *polite and becoming*. They are, however, welcomed back for the purpose of making retreats.” (28)

There can be no doubt about it, the Founder is in no way seeking to keep them at a distance, but he dictates a line

according to which these teachers are not destined to live according to the same criteria as the community. All the same, the expression *polite and becoming* is not to be understood in a restrictive sense, to remain aloof. Quite the contrary, the relationships with the community are maintained “according to what is proper”, that is to say according to *piety and the employment* to which they have been trained, but not by invoking a similarity in life-style. In addition he insists strongly on the possibility of an annual retreat, and one has only to read the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, which are addressed equally to Brothers and teachers, to be convinced of this point.

Let us come now to what Brother Maurice Auguste qualifies as “omissions”: the almost absolute silence in the *Common Rules* and elsewhere about vows... and in particular that of obedience (29) up until 1725.

Brother Maurice Auguste justifies this fact on the basis that all the Brothers not having made vows, temporary or perpetual, the Founder did not wish to create differences between them, the essential being found elsewhere. The Brother is above all member of the “Society” and the fact of being admitted to same, in this case by having entered the Novitiate, committed him by this deed to live and to act within the Society, that is to say, to keep schools gratuitously, together and by association with all the other Brothers. Nevertheless, it was essential to the Society that the “principal” Brothers should have made the vows of association, stability and obedience, because this was a primordial factor for the cohesion of the society. As things turned out, the Bull of Approbation of 1725 and the new Code of Canon Law of 1918 changed matters, but up till then the Brothers *could*, but not *must*, make vows.

In the present state of discussion, it is perhaps proper not to consider as being synonymous, certain terms which do not refer to the same process. This is the case with: *Association with lay persons*, *Association of lay persons* and even *The 1901 Law of Association*. (Translator’s note: The last of these terms has relevance, and great relevance at that, for France only. Some of the material of the following paragraphs has reference to this).

If we refer to the thought of John Baptist de La Salle and to the position of the Institute, the mission of evangelising youth, in particular by “the service of the poor through education” (30) can only be effected by a process of Association, as defined above. Association is in some way a communion lived between all those who feel themselves associated or who have made a particular move...It is thus with the Brother by the vow of Association. What then of lay persons? Is it enough to invite them to subscribe to the same Association under the Law of 1901, whose inspiration (or object) however laudable, will never attain the intuition of John Baptist de La Salle, namely an association which is a communion with the Church and the Trinity. Then too this Law-of-1901 type of association brings with it a complexity and an administrative legality which is necessary but in no way inspiring? Should we be aiming at a group of lay persons, organised certainly, but whose first concern, inherent in this choice, is to organise everything in terms of efficacy, to the detriment of a powerful spiritual inspiration, even if the leaders deny this?

It seems useful at this juncture to define the type of “Association movement” so as to clarify different situations. Is it enough to define this movement, all in all a personal matter to begin with, as a simple step, namely “to join in with an existing group more or less in direct and clear

relation with the Brothers?” For example is it enough to be a teacher in an establishment historically connected with the Institute of the Brothers to be by this fact “an Associate”? Is it enough to be part of the administration of a Lasallian establishment to be by this fact “an Associate”? Is it enough to be a parent of a student for two or three years to be by this fact “an Associate”? and so on. If the “keep together” is fundamental in the movement of association, it remains no less important to link practice to founding inspiration and to a spiritual process. In some ways the “praxis”, however necessary it may be, is not enough. It must be accompanied by this profound sense of communion, which at the same time inspires the educational movement and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

To put it another way, a lived Association, broadly and organisationally speaking, can be set up in each establishment, that is to say all the component elements can be involved in the undertaking and the development of the educational endeavour. In fact this is what is happening more or less in each establishment.

Such activity can only be effective and permanent if certain members are in some ways determined to live personally and in community an Association which inspires communion in the service of youth, of adults, having in view the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Such Association is precisely that lived by and with the Institute of the Brothers, according to the founding charism.

It does not seem fruitful to enter into a development based on merging which ends up as reducing, or an expanding galaxy whose centre of gravity is constantly in question. Associating is not annexing or regrouping. It is a specific movement which it would be appropriate to deepen at the theological level because it is a way towards a “ministry”, at the canonical level, because it engages a process of common decision-taking at the level of law because it very likely involves a specific responsibility.

At the limit it is still necessary to make the Association dependent on the practice of the “Tutelle”, (Translator’s note: this refers to current practice in France. “Tutelle” means in this case organised supervision.) as seems to be the present tendency, or should we take a broader view in which the supervision of the school establishments would be just one element among others? Neither what is being said or what is being done about the question is very clear at present.

In some ways we have arrived at a point where we must decide with the lay persons themselves upon a way of Association. Brothers make vows of association for the educational service of the poor. How can lay persons associate themselves (rather than: be associated) with the Institute of the Brothers in order to respond to the common call to “associate themselves together and by association for

the educational service of the poor and the evangelisation of youth” and to thus share the same inspiration and the same dynamic?

## CONCLUSION

It’s no small undertaking. It’s a question of rewriting a founding inspiration in a new context of society and of the Church. It’s a matter of: Brothers and lay persons living a “together and by association”, in a communion where the identity of each person is respected, where the spirit of faith inspires every action, where the process is that of the Trinity, where the zeal is that of the Church.

*“The spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded.*

*The Institute sees the existence of the various Lasallian movements as a grace from God renewing its own vitality. The Institute can associate with itself lay people who want to lead the life of perfection that the Gospel demands, by living according to the spirit of the Institute and by participating in its mission.*

*The Institute helps them achieve their proper autonomy. At the same time it creates appropriate ties with them and evaluates the authenticity of their Lasallian character.”*

(31) •

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(24) Règle des F.E.C. Art 17.

(25) Id.

(26) Id., Art 17.

(27) JB de La Salle. M.H. 0,0,4.

(28) JB de La Salle. M.H. 0,0,6.

(29) Maurice Auguste C.L. n°2 p 104.

(30) Règle des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes Art 25 (formule des vœux).

(31) Règle des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes art 146.