



**Intervention – General Chapter May 5, 2007
Brother John Johnston**

In true Lasallian fashion I have three points, all of them referring to association from different perspectives.

1. Since last October I have come to understand and appreciate association in a new way. I had previously experienced association as a communion of persons united in their commitment to Lasallian mission. But during the past seven months, I have had an experience of association that I have never had before. The number and content of e-mail messages, letters, cards, telephone calls, visits, from Lasallians, both Brother and lay, have astounded me. The expressions of loving concern of so many have moved me profoundly. .

I have been deeply touched by the concern of Brother Alvaro, Superior. He visited me in December and maintains regular contact by email. Brothers Bill Mann, Vicar, Miguel Campos, Gerard Rummery, and Rodolfo Meoli, Postulator, have all visited me in Memphis, visits I profoundly appreciate. Brother Frank Carr, my Visitor, has manifested consistent concern and has accompanied me through these months – and through this week.

And what can I say about Brother Alvaro’s beautiful tribute in his opening address and your warm response. I thank you sincerely. I now have a much deeper understanding of association because I have experienced it in a new way.

What I have asked from you from the very beginning is that you pray that I am able to say YES to whatever the Lord asks of me now and in the future. I ask you to pray that I can drink the cup the Lord asks me to drink. That to me is what following Christ is all about.

2. We Lasallians live in unity, a unity very evident in this Chapter, but we live very different realities. A number of you represent areas that are blessed with vocations. You look at your institutions and are confident that their future is assured.

Others of you have had few or even no vocations in the last decade or several decades. You have numerous Lasallian institutions. What is your plan? Do you intend to turn the schools over to others who will conduct them without direct reference to our Lasallian heritage? Or are you in the process of creatively, dynamically, courageously creating structures that will assure that our institutions continue as

Lasallian – with Brothers we hope, but without Brothers if necessary. To create such structures of governance and of Lasallian formation is a formidable task. We have no time to waste.

It is my hope that the delegates consider this question seriously, inform themselves on initiatives in process, give their recommendations, and, above all, their encouragement.

3. My third point touches Evelyn’s observation this morning on the confusion surrounding the meaning of association as distinct from the Brothers’ vow. My comments will not resolve the confusion. Nevertheless, I am convinced that clarifying the meaning of the Brothers’ vow of association is very necessary and will contribute to an understanding of association in general. Whether we are enthusiastic about the generalized use of the word “association” in the Institute or whether we have reservations, it is clear that the vow of association is something very different.

Our magnificent, theologically profound formula of consecration is as clear as clear can be. Nevertheless, a faulty and superficial interpretation over the centuries has led to a watered-down understanding of our consecration and of the vows that express that consecration.

Our Founder and the early Brothers understood the three vows they professed. In a sense the first paragraph of the formula, which expresses their act of total consecration to the Trinity said everything, because the Brothers knew what was coming later in the formula.

But each paragraph of the formula makes explicit and unambiguous the meaning of the preceding paragraph and makes more explicit the meaning of their total consecration. The second paragraph begins, *Pour cet effet*, for this purpose – what purpose?: living the consecration to the Trinity just expressed. For this purpose they promise **and vow** to unite themselves (association for mission) and remain in the Society (stability) with Brothers who are associated to educate youth, poor youth especially, gratuitously. They then express their total availability for service. The following paragraph begins. *C’est pourquoi* - that is why, wherefore - we make the vows. The early Brothers vow association for mission, and render the vow more precise by the vows of stability and obedience.

At the time of the Bull of Approbation, the Brothers adopt vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, counsels lived by the Brothers from the beginning, but not expressed by vow.. Stability and teaching gratuitously are added in the next paragraph. Association is no longer at the center of the Brothers’ consecration. In fact, it is not listed as a vow.

Two words in the original formula are precious to me. In the second paragraph each Brother said *I promise and vow* to unite themselves and remain in the society with a commitment to mission.

The words **and vow** remained in the formula until the early 20th century. Why they were removed, I do not know. But from that time, the Brothers say only *I promise*. Instead of professing four vows in view of association for mission, the integrating dimension of our vocation, the Brothers make vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, stability, and teaching gratuitously. The notion of vowed association, probably already meaningless to most Brothers, is simply ignored.

Today, instead of vowing association explicitly in the second paragraph, we *promise* association. We then proceed to profess vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, association for the educational service of the poor, and stability. Association is now an extra vow, our 4th vow, instead of the integrating vow of our consecrated life.

My personal view is that it is possible canonically to revise the formula by adding the *and vow* and by editing slightly other parts of the formula. The addition does not add another vow, but does in fact place our other vows at the service of association for mission. It is my experience that when we can show the Holy See that a change is fully justified in the light of our heritage, we succeed in effecting change.

It is my sincere hope that the delegates will consider the possibility of this change with documentation that will help our present and future Brothers understand the profound significance of the vow of association for the identity of the Brother.