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Associative Belonging

Sociological considerations

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Introduction

For some time now, practically all Religious Institutes and Congregations have been considering, with special interest, the theme of association and have converted it into the central axis of their General and Provincial Chapters. There are reasons for this. The effort made in our Institute concerning this has been remarkable. In this sense, there are very clear signs of the interest in Lasallian formation and the new forms of understanding the mission.

Leaving aside the numerous documentation which exists on the theme of association, the 43rd General Chapter gave very valid orientations to face the new challenges which we have before us. In turn, the District Chapters have made serious efforts to adapt and give impetus to these orientations which were given by the Center of the Institute.

I give as an example, some of the Chapter orientations or proposals which can very well serve as an introduction to the reflections which I wish to develop, from a sociological point of view, concerning the concept of belonging.

- *“The Brothers need to question themselves continually on **how, in practice, they are associated among themselves**, so that this association may be a source of nourishment for them, and stimulate their growth as persons, [...]. This has consequences for their lifestyle, relationships, fidelity and **their various loyalties**”.*

(Acts of 43rd Gen. Chapter, Circular 447, p. 3-4, n.1).

- *“We need to reflect on the process they need to follow (the partners) to become associates, if they so wish”.*

(Ibidem, p. 4, n. 2).

- *“We call them '**intentional groups**' when their members, in response to an interior call, **come together voluntarily to practise some aspects of Lassalian life** [...]”.*

(Ibidem, p. 5, B).

- *“In fact, these groups already exist, although they may have **not juridical structure**”.*

(Ibidem, p. 6, C).

- (International meetings) *“to **analysing** and **evaluating** the implementation of the processes of association”.*
(Ibidem, p. 8 Proposal 3).
- *“There is a need to foster in all these experiments a **deep sense of belonging**”.*
(Ibidem, p. 9, n. 4).
- *“The need for a multiplicity of (associative) experiences for a limited period, so that they can be **examined** and **evaluated** when they end”.*
(Ibidem, p. 9, n. 5).
- *“The District will need to assume responsibility for **evaluating** these experiments, in order to authenticate their commitment as Associates of the Institute”.*
(Ibidem, p. 11, 2 E).
- *Association develops especially when leadership and accompaniment are provided. Such structures are developed in full collaboration with the local community of Brothers and with a **strong conviction of belonging** to the District [...].*
(Ibidem, p. 11, 3 A).
- *“That the Regions, [...] **evaluate** and strengthen present forms of leadership and accompaniment offered to partners in Lasalian establishments”.*
(Acts 43rd Gen. Chapter, Circular 447, p. 12, prop. 4).

At first sight, the reading of these references gives rise to a series of reflections and questions.

- *“The Brothers need to question themselves continually on **how, in practice, they are associated among themselves...**”*

To begin with we find ourselves with a conviction which leaves no room for doubt. It is a call to the personal responsibility of the Brother in what refers to associative belonging. He is invited to question himself, not only on the days previous to temporal or perpetual profession, but continuously. And this because it has consequences in his life and in the mission of the Brother.

It is a question, then, of interior self-reflection which should be carried on continuously during the time of associative belonging. But it is not a theoretical, abstract reflection. It is not simply a sub-

jective opinion out of context. It is a concrete, vital, practical reflection. We are speaking about the dimensional aspects of the associative fact and not of secondary, theoretical elements.

How will the Brothers be able to carry out this recommendation of the Chapter? Concretely, what is being asked of us? We will come back to this theme later on. At present, it is only necessary to add to these introductory lines a brief comment on something to which we have already referred to and which is part of the thought of the Chapter concerning the associative concept such as *the sense of belonging, the intentional groups and their juridical structure and the evaluation of associative forms*.

Sense of Belonging

To speak about the sense of belonging is to speak about the concept of belonging itself. Belonging is not a concrete, formal, purely ritualistic fact, but it includes a sense, an awareness or consciousness, something which goes beyond pronouncing a formula or the reception of certain symbols at the moment of entering a given institution. Belonging is a process which is created day after day. This process generates a sense, a psychological conscience of belonging. And, precisely, those *who wish to become associates should reflect on these types of processes* (Circular 447, p. 5, B), since their associative stage should create in them not a half-way belonging, but a **“deep sense of belonging”** (Circular 447, p. 9, n. 4).

Intentional Groups and their Juridical Structure

The General Chapter in defining the intentional groups pointed out as a basic characteristic of belonging, *the interior call*. Only the members of these groups can have free access to the true reason which led them to form part of such groups.

The intentional groups are groups of volunteers who associate themselves to **live** some *Lasallian characteristics* (according to modality and duration). This nuance is important since, on the one hand, it is not a simple group of friends. It is, above all, an association in view of life, of a living experience, of an existential, integral dimension. And, on the other hand, the intentional groups refer to the respective identities of the different types of associates.

Evidently, the juridical structure will differentiate some Lasallian groups from others. There are and there will be, groups which have no juridical formal structure, because what really makes some groups different from others is not the structure but the contents. And the true, *direct or indirect content* of Lasallian Associationism cannot be clearer: "*the educational service of the poor*" (Circular 447, p. 8, Proposal 1).

Analysis and evaluation of the implementation of the process of association

The international meeting of 2006 will have, among other objectives, to analyze and evaluate the **processes** of association. It speaks about processes, not of associative facts. This will require the drawing up, application and interpretation of a fine instrument of analysis and evaluation.

From what has been said before, the profound implication of sociological sciences can be deduced, in understanding associationism such as expressed by the 43rd General Chapter. This is precisely what I intend to do in these pages: to get close to the associative phenomenon different from the theological or Lasallian point of view in such a way that it can complement but never substitute for, the previous perspectives.

1. The associative forms

1.1. General Considerations

If we look around us we can contemplate the greatest possible variety of groups and organizations. The groups win us over and, it is not a question of the weakness or strength of predilection or aversion, since we are all influenced and coerced by such groups. But, at the same time, we contribute to forming and reforming them.

At least in complex societies, such as ours, individuals form part of numerous social groups, groups which supposedly are totally significant for individual well-being.

A psychological group may be defined as *“two or more persons who have the following conditions: 1) the relations among the members are **inter-dependent**, that is, the behaviour of one of them influences the behaviour of others; 2) its members **share an ideology**, that is, a series of values, beliefs and norms which govern their mutual behaviour. This ideology develops when the members of the group act in common tasks and, at the same time, the ideology ends by being, up to a certain point, peculiar to them as members of the group and separates them from other groupings”*.¹

When the groups relate with others they form together the so called **social organizations** which are defined as *“integrated systems of psychological groups related among themselves and which are structured to fulfill an objective previously established”*.²

In Sociology, on the one hand, the distinction between primary and secondary groups is classical. On the other hand, there is the distinction between *groups of belonging and groups of reference*.³

¹. Cf. D. KRECH, *Psicología Social*, (Social Psychology) Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid 1972, 395.

². Cf. Op. cit. 396.

³. F. Gil and C.M. Alcover de la Hera, *Introducción a la Psicología de los Grupos* (Introduction to the Psychology of the Groups), Piramide, Madrid, 1999, 93 and ff.

The primary groups are fundamentally characterized by:

- a reduced number of members, which makes it possible to have direct relations, face to face, and a certain affective bond among them;
- a relative duration in time;
- the existence of a strong solidarity, cohesion and identification among the members, by whom the awareness of “WE” is sustained;
- serving as agents of identity and social integration of individuals who form part of these groups.

In sociological tradition these social formations (groups) have always been considered in a clearly emotional way, based on sentiment, in the center of which each individual considers the other individual as *an end* in himself; in these the individuals know one another personally and mutually participate in their private lives. The members of these groups (formations) value their relationships intrinsically. The family, the team or band of friends, the neighbours of a small town, etc. are examples of these groups. Ferdinand Tonnies, the German sociologist called them **Gemeinschaft** or **Community**.⁴

The secondary groups are of a broader character and are formed, in general, for a specific purpose. They are social formations, (groups) based on *utilitarian interests*; in them the individual considers the other individuals as *means* to obtain his end; the members of the association are known in an impersonal way, and external or political life is shared with them. The individuals value their belonging to the group in an extrinsic way. Associations, groupings, governments, States, etc. would belong to these groups. Tonnies calls these **Gesellschaft** or **Association**.

Strictly speaking the *groups of belonging* are those to which an individual belongs by virtue of his birth or of other circumstances of life for which he is not responsible: race, ethnos, nationality or sex. It is evident that in some cases it is possible to change the group of belonging, at least apparently or nominally.

The groups of reference can be defined as those which individuals choose or select as paradigms and according to which they

⁴. Cf. S. GINER, *Sociología*, (Sociology) Peninsula, Barcelona 1975, 111.

model their values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviour, sentiments, etc. adapting themselves to their norms and regulating their thoughts and acts in conformity to them.

The reference groups are perceived and valued by their members as attractive, desirable, positive for them. But, also, on some occasions, these groups may even modify the primitive formulation of the individuals and take a negative direction, as happens with the elaboration of stereotypes and prejudices or with *brain washing*, practiced by certain sects.

An example of reference groups may be any one which an individual chooses – political, cultural, religious, social, professional, etc.

Authors, such as Speltini and Palmonari stress not so much the influence exercised by the reference groups on the decisions or situations, but rather the fact of the identification or desire of belonging which has a certain importance. For Italian Sociologists, the reference groups *“are those with which the individual identifies himself or to which he wants or desires to belong”*.⁵ We will come back to this point when we speak about the conflicts of belonging.

1.2. Association and Associates: clarification of terminology

The term Association is a broad term applied in Sociology⁶ to the relations of reciprocal action which are relatively lasting. Such a relation is that which unites the individuals in groups or societies.

A second feature of association refers to the organizational aspects concerning the obtaining of some common interest, which involves the existence of a determined structure and the distribution of some determined roles.

There are some associations, the principal end of which depends

⁵. Cf. SPELTINI G. and PALMONARI, A., *I Gruppi Sociali*, (The Social Groups) Il Mulino, Bologna 1999, 87.

⁶. Cf. *Diccionario de Sociología*, (Dictionary of Sociology) Fondo de Cultura Económica, México 1984. *Diccionario de Sociología*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1998.

on the members of their own association (for example, Night Adoration) and associations, the principal aims of which depend on the persons or things foreign to them (for example, an association to fight against cancer). There are some associations which combine both of these ends (for example, a Christian community which also has a determined social commitment).

The associate is the person who participates in any form of social interaction, whether to attain something in common, or to oppose himself/herself to something in common. More correctly, he/she joins other persons without considering the psychological motivations which lead to it.

The terms association, associate, considered in themselves, are general terms, very broad and not too specific. The importance of the associative act will be in function of the type of group, organization or institution under consideration as well as the conditions or motivations of the affiliation. Thus, it will be important to know very well *to what I associate myself, with whom, for what*, etc.

Therefore, there are associations and associations, associates and associates. It would be a great error to designate with the same concept different realities of a very diverse nature and importance.

1.3. Types of associative forms

In the light of what has been said above, it is well to consider different associative forms in order to be able to better contextualize the corresponding Lasallian associative forms. The two first ones would have to be considered as elementary forms of association and the other three as progressive forms.

1.3.1. Involuntary Groupings

One may belong to these by the simple fact of possessing a given category: (age, nationality, profession, etc). but in which there is no relationship. It is a non active but passive type of belonging.

1.3.2. Neighbouring Groupings

Some sociologists call them simply *groupings* and these are formed by the persons who occasionally or temporarily find themselves in a given place, but who have no other type of bond

of union. The predominant element is the physical closeness. It surpasses somewhat the passive type of belonging. An example of this is the people who are in a train or bus station, in the airport, at a conference, at any spectacle, etc.

1.3.3. Defensive Groupings

Individuals group themselves with the sole purpose of defending economic or labour interests. There exists a certain associative intention, but it arises solely from exclusive individual interests. The Medieval Guilds or trade unions are a clear example of these groupings.

1.3.4. Formative, Cultural, Recreational and Sports Groupings

The individuals who enter to form part of these groupings do it because they consider that this is a way which facilitates the attainment of their legitimate desires for personal formation, for increasing their cultural level, for practicing some sport, for enjoying leisure and free time, etc. These associative forms are similar to the defensive ones, but the difference is that here they go beyond the level of needs which they wish to satisfy.

1.3.5. Intentional Groupings

These integrate a good number of the elements mentioned above and add the intentional character of the project and the free will of the members to participate in the formulation of its objectives and the obtaining of its ends. Nothing of this would be possible without a certain inter-dependence and a special relationship among the members. The members seek their happiness, in something which is beyond what is strictly personal: they are altruistic or transcendent objectives. Examples of these groupings are the Boy Scouts, the NGO's or the Christian and Religious communities.

The five different associative types do not exclude one another but are rather inclusive. The fact that one association can be catalogued as being of one type or other is seen by the greater or smaller presence of the distinctive traits of each level. Some associations come into being already with a very mature profile, others gradually acquire it during the associative process and there are some which opt for the initial *status quo* and ultraconservatism.

1.4. The Lasallian Associative Reality⁷

In this section we are going to consider the Lasallian associative reality in three different stages: the stage of the foundational origin and the present stage subdivided into the present-past and into the present-future. The first one can be a significant point of reference for the second one.

1.4.1. The first stage of the Lasallian association: The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools alone

One of the aspects which becomes evident at first sight in this first stage of the origin of this Institute is the close relation between the associative fact (community) and the associative end the (mission). The second is the reason for being of the first one. But from the very beginning the center of the associative seriousness or importance is situated in *communion*, in that fraternal relation among those who form the Society, rather than in the mission as such, even though the mission is the end of the first one.

The association is conceived as a *macro-community* the objective of which is to help the community to be rooted in and radical in its internal links or bonds of union in order to serve the mission better.

The association comes into being in order to *universalize*, in space and time, the experience of the community for the education of the poor. It guarantees the continuity of the community beyond its concrete existence in a given time and place.

We will now consider some distinctive traits of these two poles of the Lasallian associative reality.

a. The community

It is formed by a group of laity (men) who are celibate and agree to live according to a Rule, which:

- creates a uniform life-style for the human group (living under the same roof, following a community regulation, etc.);

⁷. In this part I will base myself on the article of Br. Antonio Botana, *Asociados para el Servicio Educativo de los Pobres*. (Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor) This is a working document offered by ARLEP to the 43rd General Chapter. April 2000.

- it serves as an important factor of internal cohesion for the group;
- it provides a valid and most favourable platform for the mission;
- has received different names: *community of the Christian Schools, Society of the Christian Schools, Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*⁸.

Those who belong to this community wear a *habit* which:

- is a sign which distinguishes them outside the community, not inside;
- externally it shows the belonging to a new association of teachers and is a distinctive sign before other religious and civil communities (the Sulpicians, Calligraphers, Ecclesiastics, etc.).
- it is also an element which distinguishes them before the parents of the pupils and other persons for whom the habit represents the symbol of a vocation dedicated to the work in schools.

In the same way, those who belong to this community live the *commitment* through some concrete means:

- *The promise of Association* which was essential to form part of the society (the vows did not define the belonging to the new community. They were optional).
- But the vows of 1691 and 1694 constitute the threshold and the nucleus of the first Lasallian Association:
 - Together they express the bond or connection which is established between the *community (together)* dimension and the dimension of the *association for the mission*.
 - they represent a commitment not with the work of the schools but with the Association which has just been created (with the community for the Christian Schools); the vows, though addressed to God, all go through the Brothers with whom each one is associated. The fulfillment of these is realized *in and with the Brothers*.

b. The Mission

- It is centered on Evangelization and the educational service to the poor.

⁸. On this point the Cahier Lasallien is very clear.

- The poor are the preferred recipients – though not exclusively so – of the mission.
- The mission is assumed by the newly created society, not by each member in an isolated way.
- The Lasallian School has some clear signs of content and expression which are indicated in the *“The conduct of schools”*.

c. The relation community-association-mission⁹

- The local community feels that it is an integral part of the Association. From its feeling of belonging it acts as delegate or mediator of the association to guarantee the local project so that it will tend towards the end of the association.
- All the communities - *the community of the Christian Schools* - assume, in solidarity, responsibility for the educational works. The problem or need of a local community is considered a problem or need of the whole.
- The association develops bonds of communion among the persons who are integrated in it in such a way that the collective structures which characterize the Lasallian Association tend to constitute themselves as communities which strengthen the personal relations, and not just as organizations for the good functioning of the works.
- The association proposes as its first objective to create living communities which will be a sign for the mission. The associated members assume as a first commitment their contribution to the formation of the communities.

1.4.2. The second stage of the Lasallian association: the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Laity.

The novelty of the Second Stage is the incorporation of the Laity in the educational work which before was exclusively carried out by the Brothers, since now they are not sufficient to be able to cover the existing educational needs. Strictly speaking, it is not always possible to speak in these incorporations, of association, in the strict and full sense of the word (*intentional association*). But, there is a living together of the Brothers and the Laity, but not necessarily a union of sentiments and of actions for the basic

⁹. Cfr. Antonio Botana, Op. Cit. 5.

objective of the Lasallian School: *to give human and Christian education to the sons of the artisan or craftsman and of the poor.* There is rather mutual collaboration, the involvement in common tasks, more than the knowledge and the personal adherence to the Lasallian identity of the educational work.

In this stage three associative manifestations can be fundamentally distinguished:

- a. concerning the educational mission
- b. concerning Lasallian spirituality
- c. concerning the educational mission and Lasallian spirituality

a. Concerning the educational mission

- The Laity incorporate themselves in the work of the school as mere collaborators and in determined cases, directive responsibilities are entrusted to them;
- the management positions are in the hands of the Brothers;
- the consciousness of belonging is local more than institutional;
- even though there are lay persons who have the Lasallian spirituality, there is no institutional offer of that spirituality;
- it is a group constituted especially by teachers (men and women), collaborators in extra-curriculum tasks (religious and not religious), and to a lesser extent, by the personnel of the administration and of services.

b. Concerning the Lasallian spirituality

- The Institute of La Salle Brothers opens its spirituality to the Laity, especially to those who collaborate in Lasallian educational works;
- it is important to underline that this openness, from the point of view of the local reality, does not exist totally on the part of all the members of the Lasallian collectives - Brothers and Laity-, with the logical consequences which this implies in the associative traditional framework, since it produces a rupture in the existing *status quo*;
- the opening of Lasallian spirituality to the Laity creates a new group of persons united by a *common spirit*, which gives a deeper sense to the educational work, including the pastoral work;

– this new human group can be called a *community of faith* or a *spiritual Lasallian family*¹⁰, and it will be characterized by:

- sharing the mission even if with the limitations proper to personal situations;
- sharing diverse aspects of the fraternal life and the spirituality;
- the fact of not having the requirement of the *explicit commitment* in the respective local communities and in the concrete projects, and this has as consequence that the continuation of the Lasallian project is not assured.

c. Concerning the Educational Mission and Lasallian Spirituality

It is a combination of the two previous manifestations.

1.4.3. The third stage of the Lasallian association: a future being constructed

There are two principal alternatives that an institution, such as that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools has, when it proves that:

- its *raison d'être*, *its Project*, *its Charism*, continue to have validity in the present time;
- the rapid ageing of its members and the scarcity and slow incorporation of new members;
- Laity and other Consecrated persons, identified with this *Project*, with this *Charism*, manifest their desire to be united to the Institution in order to carry it out better.

The two alternatives to which we refer are:

- to continue in the existing associative inertia until this is possible;
- to initiate new associative forms which will revitalize the Lasallian Charism.

A model which can well explain the new associative form is the one designed by A. Botana and which he has called the *solar planetary system*¹¹ in the center of which is the sun, the Lasallian star, that is, the mission which convokes all and around which all

¹⁰. Cfr. Antonio Botana, *Op. Cit.*, 8

¹¹. *Idem*, 12-14.

move. It is necessary to know how to situate oneself in the system, knowing well the identity of each associated entity and its way of belonging to it.

For A. Botana the schema has two external alternatives:

In the *first one*, the Institute of the Brothers would appear as the sole planet which turns around the Lasallian mission. Around such a planet diverse satellites turn which would be the new Lasallian associates, whether individually or in homogeneous groups.

These associates would add to the requirements indicated in section 1.4.2 the explicit association commitment, temporal or definitive, with other companions, so that in this way they make more viable the Lasallian Charism. This is the situation which has existed up until now.

In the *second*, which presupposes a radical change concerning the previous institutional structure; there would be diverse planets forming the solar system. Brothers of the Christian Schools, Guadalupana de La Salle Sisters, Signum Fidei, the Institute of the Crucified Jesus, La Salle Christian Communities, etc. Each one of these keeping its own juridical structure and respective signs of identity, that is, being true *planets*, would turn around that *star* which represents the Lasallian educational mission.

The Charism bequeathed to the Brothers by John Baptist de La Salle, and which they continue to guarantee, will be, beginning now, shared by other associated groups which also have to succeed, in some way, in being the *guarantee* of the Lasallian Charism.

A new associative whole comes into being which logically should have its own name, and where each one of the parts will continue to show its own denomination and existing functional dynamism.

But the principal novelty which gets close to the associative structure, on which we are commenting, will not be the name, nor the juridical aspects, concerning the appropriate ecclesial recognition which affect the associations of a religious type. From our own point of view the principal novelties are centered in the domain of inter-personal relations and in the new roles which the different members of the parts of a whole, have to assume, in the whole of their own associative forms as well as in the whole of that new

associative entity, of that *planetary system*, which turns around the star of the Lasallian educational mission.

In the new associative structure we have to learn to identify ourselves and to identify the other associates in a different way; there will be an internal and external chart, different from the communitarian reality; the possessive pronouns: *mine, yours, their, ours, yours* will be interpreted differently in reference to the Charism, the Founder, the mission, etc.

The Brother will no longer associate himself only with other Brothers for the mission, but he will also do it with other persons who, in turn, will belong to other institutional groupings. Both will plan, project, carry out the mission, will share the faith together. etc. It is a new way of being and of acting and this substantially changes the existing *status quo*.

The relation among the parts (planets) and the whole (planetary system) is taken care of by the *instrument of analytic perception* integrated in the Cognitive Structural Modification Theory, of R. Feuerstein. It is worthwhile recalling some of the more significant principles. We will see the great utility which this may have for the theme under consideration.

- It is necessary to know how to differentiate the limits between each part and the whole;
- a whole is composed of parts which, in turn, constitute the whole;
- the whole is divided into parts to respond to specific needs;
- we should be capable of identifying, recognizing and naming each part so as to be capable of using them;
- the whole depends on the parts and on the relation with one another;
- a whole can be identified by its elements;
- the parts of a whole seem very different when they are isolated from the whole in which they are included and integrated;
- when adequate strategies are applied it is easier to see the likeness and differences among the parts;
- a whole is not only composed of a determined number of parts, but of the relation which exists among them.

What we have just presented can give ideas to go from the concrete and that which is close to us, which is local, to the concrete (or abstract) and which is at a distance (district, regional, universal). In this:

- the Lasallian association, macro or micro, has to be characterized by the participation in its own concrete projects of intentional communities. As A. Botana affirms very well, the association can only emerge from the itinerary followed in community to give a response to the educational needs of the poor;
- the local community is the first step to establish bonds of communion and solidarity with the other members of the Lasallian community.
- In this local community it is necessary to distinguish:
 - the educational community (in the broadest sense)
 - the Christian community or communities.

The basic suppositions, seen from a purely sociological point of view would be the following:

- a deep knowledge of the Institutional Charism and of the Lasallian Educational Project;
- an expressed commitment to remain with the other members of the association rather than with the educational task;
- to make explicit the associative geographical level: local, district, regional, etc.;
- availability of the associate concerning the mission or the end of the association;
- framework of reference where the Lasallian Charism can be incarnated (Rule, for the Brothers; *Life Style* for the Signum Fidei, etc.).

2. The concept of belonging

2.1. The diverse meanings or senses

When we go to the dictionaries to find the meaning of the word "*belonging*" we find a vast list of meanings or senses. A good number of these identify belonging with *property* whether of cultural goods (human rights, for example) or of material goods (financial area, especially).

We also find explicit references to social contexts. The member of a group or association must consider the associative entity as something of his *property*, but a property which is not exclusive but which is shared. We must say, besides, that the psycho-sociological belonging surpasses, in complexity, the property or ownership of material goods.

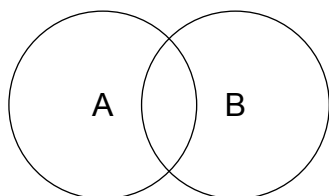
Other meanings or senses consider a new modality of this property which surpasses the economic domain. And, thus we find this definition: *To be the possession of someone, is that something corresponds to him, that it is his duty or mission*¹², (e.g. "this is an affair of my exclusive ownership or possession"). This involves implication, responsibility, with respect to the associative entity, to be and not only "being" in it.

A member of a group is *part of it*, but not merely a quantitative part like the pieces of a puzzle, but interactive parts which are essential to give that group a well-defined identity and an effective functioning. That is why an *active* member is co-responsible and should be interested in any affair, in anything which affects the whole even if he does not have a direct responsibility for it.

I think that there is a closer relation between sociological belonging and logical belonging or with the concept of mathematical possession. In Philosophy, by logical possession is understood the **relation of the individual with the class of which he is a part**. In mathematics, it speaks about the relation of possession to refer to the property of certain objects being elements of a whole.

¹². Cf. Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europea-Americana. Espasa Calpe. T. 43.

The mathematical concept of ownership applied to the theme under consideration here is very suggestive. Let us see the following graphic.



As may be observed that which belongs to A as well as what belongs to B and what belongs to A and B, is perfectly delimited. That is, the wholes are identified in their own characteristics, as well as in the characteristics which they share. This graphic or design may clarify things when later on we will speak about the characteristics of the concept of belonging or when we see more concrete applications to the Lasallian Associative world.

Another extremely interesting meaning of belonging is that of *referring or relating one thing to another or being an integral part of it*.¹³ This sense or meaning seems to be interesting since it refers to the involvement of the members of one group in relation to the other members of the same group. The fact of being aware that one forms part of one group has some implications in relation to the rest of the members. That is why, for some analysts of the term, belonging means *to be at the service of someone, to be associated, bound, related with, being one for the other...*

Finally, we can say concerning the concept of associate belonging that this never implies the annulment of personal identity or of the personality of each one of the associates. Before belonging to any exterior entity one has to *belong to or possess oneself*, that is, *be absolute owner of one's own actions*.¹⁴ Then, associative belonging cannot be alienating, but rather it strengthens the personal "I". This has to be one of the principal functions of any human grouping: to develop to the maximum the individual potential of each one of the components.

¹³. Cf. *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europea-Americana*. Espasa Calpe. T. 43.

¹⁴. Cf. *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europea-Americana*. Espasa Calpe. T. 43.

2.2. Components of the sense of belonging¹⁵

From our point of view, belonging or ownership has the following four principal components:

- a. cognitive
- b. valued (that it can be valued)
- c. affective
- d. social

We will describe each one of these:

a. Cognitive

To speak about the cognitive component of belonging or possession is to speak of the nature itself of the groups, that is, of their objectives or ends and of the means which the group has established to obtain them.

When a person opts to enter into a group, association or institution, it is supposed that he carries out a free and voluntary act. But this would not be possible if the person does not know at depth both the objectives and the means.

The practice of associative belonging speaks about a person who may decide to associate himself with others, not so much because of the identity of the group, which perhaps he does not even know, but because of the fact that in the group he will meet persons who are very significant for him. The requirement of interdependence is connatural to every person, but it cannot be the principal reason to remain within a determined association.

Entering and remaining in the association has to be always, at every moment, an intentional and fully conscious act. Both of these are expressed in the *active voice* and never in the *passive voice*. Belonging is lived, not borne or endured as a burden.

b. Valued (That it can be valued)

It is not sufficient for the subject to be aware of his situation of belonging. It is also necessary for him to be conscious of the type of repercussion that this belonging has on him: positive, negative or indifferent, as well as the corresponding intensity. This will

¹⁵. Cf. *Introducción a la Psicología de los Grupos. Op. cit. 108 ss.* (Introduction to the Psychology of Groups).

serve him to revise or verify the sense of belonging, to strengthen it, modify it if necessary or abandon the associative belonging, considering it useless or harmful for his interests.

This component of value also refers to the repercussion of the associative fact on the family, working and social environment of the subject. In other words, in which way and in what measure belonging to a group, association or institution has repercussions on the family or communitarian milieu, on the working environment or on the social relations of persons. This is probably the component which speaks more clearly about the sense of belonging, that is, of associative purity.

c. Emotional

The two previous components, of a more rational kind, must be accompanied by the emotional component which integrates both and gives belonging an existential tone, where the sentiments and emotions play an important role!

The social group has to be for any of its members a *source of optimism*. To feel at ease or not is of key importance for the psychic health of the one who belongs to a social group. It is not a question of *material advantages*, which are more proper to the value component, but of *advantages for the personality itself* of the associate. In this sense the associative framework has to constitute a positive socio-emotional area which knows how to give joy to each one of the components, where there is good humor and where satisfactions surpass disillusionment. If the contrary is the case, the subject will opt for abandoning the group.

The associative belonging necessarily has to be for the individual a powerful ally which provides affective stability, and leads him to attain personal fulfillment and total integration. If the contrary is the case, the person himself has to opt for abandoning the group, or the group itself would have to advise him to abandon it, providing, if necessary, new associative ways.

d. Social

One of the factors which, more frequently, is responsible for the formation and vitality of the groups is *the physical surrounding* and, in a special way, the proximity or nearness of its members. In popular jargon it is affirmed that "*close contact breeds affection*". And this is right. When in the primary groups or those of

belonging, this trait of *looking at each other face to face*, is missing, then the affectionate bonds are weakened very much and, on the contrary, when in the secondary or reference groups, physical presence of the components is strengthened, those bonds are strengthened and individuals feel more comfortable in them, and prefer to be there more often than in the other groups.

The circumstance of visiting frequently certain places or spaces linked to a determined organization or association, can ensure that some affinity or common interests may arise which can shape or strengthen the sense of the group.

The social surrounding is also determinate for the fact that a person decides to enter an already constituted group or into the formation of new groups. The more numerous the *social networks* are, that is, opportunities for interpersonal knowledge are created, the greater will be the opportunities for associative belonging.

In the world today there exists a chronic fear concerning solitude. People need to be with people. And when one is alone one has to put on the earphones or relate with others through the mobile phone and many times, as has been proven by some studies, not to communicate anything concrete but simply to know that the other person is *there*, and, therefore, I am not alone. Well, the desire and the need for inter-dependence can annul the cognitive component of associate belonging instead of carrying out its agglutinating and catalyzing role.

3. Types of belonging

It would be naïve to think, after all that has been said before, that belonging is a simple reality, uniform and plain. Rather one would have to speak about a complex, multiform or polyhedral reality.

According to our point of view¹⁶ we distinguish two principal types of belonging: the identifiable and the non-identifiable.

3.1. Identifiable Belonging

This is characterized by a high psycho-sociological consciousness that one *is related with, belongs to oneself, is linked to*, one no longer *belongs only to oneself*, but *is one for the other, is at the service of, forms part of*, etc.

Evidently to reach this state of high psycho-sociological consciousness of belonging, is not a question of concrete acts, of fulfillment of more or less rigorous rituals, of formal moments of exaltation, of the fulfillment of certain requirements, etc. It is the result of a whole process which is more or less lasting. The rites of entrance into the different associative modalities, in themselves, do not provide this consciousness, though they can help, no doubt, to create it and/or to strengthen it, if there are a series of circumstances and of coadjutant factors.

The members who enjoy an identifiable belonging with the association, community, institution, group, etc., consider each one of the associative instances as something of their own. There is a mutual, individual and collective enrichment. And thus, their belonging is more lasting, and since there is greater support, personal and group conflicts are more easily solved, there is greater interior satisfaction, and above all, a greater degree of personal self-realization.

But it would be difficult to understand the concept of identifiable belonging without taking into account the identity of the members

¹⁶. Cfr. RIVERA MORENO, J.A., *Sociología del hecho religioso cristiano*, San Pío X, Madrid 2001, 109-111.

who associate themselves, the ends and activities proper of the association and its size.

Identity

The greatest wealth of a group or association is its members. The different associative forms cannot be centered exclusively on its specific ends leaving "to their own devices" the members who form it. No. As the name itself indicates, belonging if it is identifiable, strengthens, fortifies, serves as platform for a better and more complete self-realization of the personal "I". On the contrary, with a group which absorbs, annuls, dissolves, alienates, alternates negatively the "I", etc. belonging will never be identifiable. In a mature associative entity, the identity of its members and the pursuing of its own ends are perfectly compatible. The binomial individual identity - group identity, is something which has to be in constant dialectic relation. That will serve to clarify the belonging, to strengthen it or to avoid conflicts which may lead to personal frustration or to the associative abandonment.

The Lasallian identity, according to Pedro Gil, is nourished on two poles which must mutually nourish one another: *mission and spirituality*. The Rule and with it, in a certain way, all the Lasallian writings, move between those two poles. As the author affirms so well: *"When the mission which a religious community lives does not correspond to that other Mission for which it was established... the observance of the Rule is impossible. When the Spirituality, that is, the style of relation with God, does not correspond to what is lived as mission, the observance of the Rule is impossible. When... We can imagine all the cases of lack of adjustment between Mission and spirituality: in all of them the observance of the established Rules is impossible. In all of them the identity suffers, it is at the point of schizophrenia".*¹⁷

It is not by chance that the first proposal of the 43rd General Chapter explicitly considers the theme of identity: *"In order to encourage and support the development of Lasallian association for the educational service of the poor: that, in the next seven years, each Region, District, Sub-District and Delegation decides on practical steps to promote the creation and development of*

¹⁷. Cfr. Pedro Gil, *Tres siglos de identidad lasaliana*. (Three centuries of Lasallian identity) *Maison Generalice FSC, Rome, 1994*. p. 28.

groups [...] of Partners and/or Associates among themselves, which will reflect on their identity in the context of the Lasallian mission, and to develop forms of association”.

The different associative forms suggested for the same mission should be clarified according to the identifiable profile. This profile should be well known by the members who, after the necessary deliberative process, decide to enter this or that associative entity. We have just referred to the importance of an identifiable belonging with what this presupposes in relation to a more qualified and lasting stability of the members.

Ends and activities proper to the association

No association exists without having some ends. On the nature and importance of these ends will depend not only the identifiable profile, but also the common and specific activities of the different associative entities.

There is a denominator common to the three Lasallian associative forms which became official in the 43rd General Chapter (Brothers, Collaborators - men and women - Associates - men and women): the **mission**. And this mission, as the Chapter itself recognizes, from the origin of the Institute is in relation to **evangelization and the educational service to the poor**.

To **summarize**, in the identifiable belonging there are:

- a. the identification in an acceptable degree, at least, with the objectives proper to the association, group, community or institution.
- b. a high rate of participation in the activities proper to the collectivity.
- c. close relations with the associated members.

A special category of identifiable belonging would be that of those persons who without having a bond of union “de iure” with a determined association, maintain a bond of union “de facto”. Without being united by formal bonds: promises, vows, declaration, etc. they are bound to the associative entity by their life commitments, their constant participation in the activities, their identification with the spirit and the end of the group or respective community, the dedication of their free time, etc.

Size of the association

The fact that an associative entity is of a determinate size is of key importance for the acquisition, preservation and strengthening of the sense of identifiable belonging. It is easier to achieve a sense of belonging in a small group than in a macro-institution.

Belonging to this new Lasallian macro institution could be achieved through belonging to the corresponding micro-institutions. The associative process begins by a micro-belonging (one enters to form part of a group, community, association, etc.) but must end in the macro-belonging (to have a clear experience that this group, community, association, etc. is integrated in a superior or organizational structure).

The jump from the micro to the macro in belonging is the challenge that has to be overcome. A structure of *communication elements* among the different parts of this associative whole imposes itself.

3.2. Non-Identifiable Belonging

Belonging may be considered as not identifiable when there is only a juridical, formal, geographic, ritual link, etc. Together with it is presented a scarce or null psycho-sociological experience.

The non-identifiable belonging has a great number of manifestations. Let us consider some of them:

- a. When the entry and permanence in a group, association, movement, institution, etc. is in function of motivations different from the attraction which the ends and specific means may arouse in the subject. If in a group the only thing which attracts me is the presence in it of one or several persons, there is no identifiable belonging in it since it is not based on something substantial, of specific content, but on something relational. When the thirst of inter-dependence within is not satiated, it is necessary to satisfy it outside.
- b. The same thing can be said when belonging to a group only serves to provide *individualized nourishment* to the subject, that is, personal satisfactions at the margin of whether the ends, which are the reason for being of the group, are fulfilled or not. In this case the step from the "I" to the "We" has not as

yet been taken. Therefore, we cannot speak of identifiable belonging, because this always has to relate to something outside the subject, even if it also includes the subject.

- c. A third form of non-identifiable belonging exists when belonging is not ascribable, that is, intentional, but is passive or inherited. It is the influence of the environment (family, work, social) which has a decisive influence at the moment of the associative option and not the true personal knowledge of the ends and activities of the associative entity. It is certain that the personal and the environmental do not exclude one another. On the contrary, on some occasions this may even contribute positively to the taking of decisions which is the exclusive competence of the person who associates himself. What we mean is that the environmental factor should not be the only decisive factor in the associative fact. If this exists, it must always be subject to the cognitive and the valued components.
- d. It is a reality today that persons do not have a unique associative belonging. This is impossible in such a diversified modern society. We belong to multiple and varied groups. Theoretically, this multiple belonging is possible and in practice also, but always and when there exists in the subject a well established hierarchy of values. If this does not exist then we enter into an unavoidable conflict of belongings. For the subject then, there are only two ways out, to abandon the association or to remain in it just in a purely formal, passive way, but far from an identifiable belonging. This is the case of the members who hardly participate in the acts proper to their association, because they are more identified with other associations which like a powerful magnet draw them, arousing in them a greater attraction.

One of the more concrete and real images of non-identifiable belonging is found in the Rules written by Saint John Baptist De La Salle: *“What is more important, and which must be more carefully taken care of in the Community, is that all the members have the spirit which is peculiar to them. The novices, then apply themselves to acquire it, and those who are already bound to them, take care, above all to preserve and increase it in themselves. Because this is the spirit which has to animate all your works and be the reason for all your*

*behaviour; and those who do not have it and have lost it, must be considered and consider themselves as **dead members**, because they are deprived of life and the grace of state and have to persuade themselves also that it will be very difficult for them to keep themselves in the grace of God".¹⁸*

The **dead members**, therefore a juridical, formal belonging, but not an identifiable belonging. Numerically, they form part of the group or association, but do not form part existentially. They are within because they have the formal associative links, but they are outside because they are not contributing by their presence to the vitality of the group.

¹⁸. Cf. Obras Completas de San Juan Bautista de La Salle. (Complete Works of St. John Baptist de La Salle) San Pio X. Madrid 2001. Tomo 1, 13-14.

4. The conflicts of belonging

There are some types of belonging which may be contradictory and may cause conflicts. Others are compatible among themselves and there is no problem among them. In this section we are going to refer to the first type.

4.1 Origin and Nature

The social groups are or have to be living entities and alternating between calm and restless situations is proper to living beings. As it is usually said, the greatest conflict in a group is the absence of all types of conflicts. The internal discrepancies are indicators of autonomy and freedom of thought. These discrepancies must be compatible with some internal relations which converge in the attainment of the objectives of the group and which do not seriously harm its identity.

In general, it can be affirmed that a conflict of belonging presupposes the alteration of a calm associative situation because of reasons, external or internal, to the associated person. It is the rupture of the existing *status quo*.

As has been affirmed above, in modern societies, like ours, unique belonging is practically non-existent. Each individual belongs to one or more primary groups and to one or more secondary groups. There are multiple incorporations and abandonments in each one of them throughout our life. In each group the person learns the behaviour adequate to the role that he has to play. Throughout one day, the individual may play the most varied roles: member of a religious community, professor in a public school, president of an association of neighbours, animator of a sports group, person responsible for a leisure group, etc.

When all these roles are played one after the other, most probably there will be no conflict. But when this does not happen, and the roles have to be carried out simultaneously, one activity has to be left aside, to the benefit of another. If this situation repeats itself frequently, the logical thing is that there will be incompatibility of belonging, a situation of conflict which obliges the sub-

ject to live with the conflict or to solve it, temporarily or definitively. It may also happen that an individual has to carry out roles which are antagonistic. For example, a doctor who, at the same time, is a surgeon and a "Jehovah Witness". Such a doctor will, most certainly, find himself with difficulties, which render him incapable of carrying out both roles adequately.

There are three elements which must be distinguished in every conflict: The subject who creates it and/or suffers it, the object of the conflict and the environmental circumstances or factors which explain it. The conflict arises in the individual-object relation within a determinate context, an environmental milieu.

The **subject**¹⁹. The active subject is the one who causes the rupture in the situation of happiness which he himself or another person within the group lives. The other person would be the passive subject.

There are persons who are apt for the associative life and others who really are a problem and on some occasions are incompatible with that type of life. There are persons who carry out their role perfectly within the group and others who do not. There are persons in a group with a zero degree of tolerance and there are others with a high degree of tolerance, etc. Definitively, the type of personality of the members of a group is a key element in the quality of the associative belonging.

By **Object** of the conflict is understood the fact, the theme, the affair, etc. which nourishes the conflict. There is no fact which is conflictive in itself. The conflicts of belonging arise in relation to the object, with someone or with several of the individuals who form part of the groups, associations or organizations. The possible objects are numerous:

- decision making
- the carrying out of roles
- interpersonal relations
- time tables and activities
- multiple belonging of the members
- etc.

¹⁹. We shall speak here about the (active-passive) subject in the singular even though evidently it is very common in conflicts to have the existence of subjects in the plural.

The theme-object of conflict may increase or decrease by a series of **environmental circumstances** or **explicative factors** which offer the keys of the origin as well as the possible ways of solution. Some of these factors could be the following:

- ignorance or lack of knowledge of the identity of the group
- confusion between what is essential and what is accidental in the group identity
- crisis of personality in the members
- inadequate hierarchy in the case of multiple belonging
- lack of spaces for self and hetero-evaluative elements
- etc.

If we consider the nature of the associative conflicts we can see that not all have the same importance. There are some which are *peripheral* (they affect the *ectoderm* of the conflict), *intermediate* (which affect the *mesoderm*) and *nuclear* (which affect the *endoderm* of the conflict). An associative conflict having its origin in the change of time or day of an activity, is not the same as one having its origin in the way of taking decisions within the group or by the deviation which an institution is taking concerning its identity or mission.

Neither do all conflicts present themselves with the same visibility: some are latent, dormant or hidden or covered and others are manifest and very visible. The first ones, because of their nature are more difficult to solve than the second ones.

4.2. Resolution

The most decisive step in the resolution of a conflict of belonging is its acknowledgment. Without this it is impossible to come out of a conflictive situation within the group.

To acknowledge a conflict means that the part of a sector or the totality of the group is aware that an associative anomaly, greater or smaller, exists. Together with this first step there has to be the explicit personal and/or institutional will to seek a positive solution or way out. Finally, the organization itself has to dispose of mechanisms and structures which will facilitate the self and the evaluative hetero-analysis.

We are not entering into details in dealing with these resolution techniques since this does not constitute the object of these pages.

5. The measurement of belonging

5.1. Theoretical Aspects

In what has been published concerning belonging to groups, institutions, organizations and other associative forms it is seldom that one finds scales or tests which measure this sociological construction²⁰. And the reason may be the difficulty in measuring the nature of belonging itself for as we have said before, from our point of view, it has four important components:

- cognitive
- valued - that can be valued
- affective
- social

Is associative belonging an external, formal, juridical, etc. fact, or on the contrary, is it an experience of a process which starts when a person decided to form part of a determinate collective and which ends, either with death or when the person abandons that collective? Or is it both of these things at the same time?

The juridical, formal, external, etc. belonging whether it is identifiable or not, is easy to measure. It is sufficient to verify if the individual has formalized the requirements which such and such a group demands in order to form part of it.

The problem of measurement of associative belonging originates when it wants to center itself in the **experience** or **sense of belonging**. Or as we have said before, in the **psycho-sociological awareness of belonging**.

There are some objective indicators which can contribute elements of interest for this measurement, but, no doubt, the sense of belonging, its psycho-sociological consciousness contains a greater number of subjective indicators. The sum of these two types of indicators will give us the authentic measure of associative belonging. To want to dispose of all the indicators of both one

²⁰. One of these studies is the *Commitment to Organizations and Occupations. Extension and Test of a Three-Component Conceptualization*, of J. Meyer, N.J. Allen, and C.A. Smith, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 1993, Vol. 78, N° 4, 538-551.

the and other type is an almost impossible and useless task since it is impossible and useless to control the variables which enter into play in the associative processes.

From everything which has been said, we dare to formulate a first intent of a scale of associative belonging with the resolution of improving it progressively. The next applications of the same will give us sufficient light to obtain an instrument of measurement which is more valid and feasible.

5.2 A practical example of measuring belonging

As something experimental we include together two Questionnaires (Brothers and Laity), accompanied by their corresponding orientations. Their use may vary very much: for personal evaluation, to share in the group, for an analysis of tendencies in an educational community or in a District...

Questionnaire which applies to the Brothers

Part I

Express the degree of agreement with the following phrases using one of the following numbers:

4 (very much in agreement); 3 (in agreement); 2 (neither in agreement nor in disagreement); 1 (in disagreement), 0 (very much in disagreement).

1. To belong to the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, is important for the configuration or shaping of my own **personal identity** ____
2. I am very **happy to belong** to the Lasallian Institute as a Brother of the Christian Schools ____
3. I am not pleased with the **task/s** that I carry out or with the **responsibility/ies** which I have at present in the Community ____
4. What I **do** or **live in my community** stimulates my identity as a Brother ____
5. Belonging to a Community of Brothers, in fact, exercises influence, in the use of my **free time and of leisure time** ____
6. The **concerns, problems, needs, lacks, etc.** of my Brothers in the Community affect me as if they were my own ____
7. Belonging to a community of Brothers of the Christian Schools, in fact, conditions the type and duration of the **relations with friends and persons we know** ____
8. I am very happy when I work or use my **time** in the tasks or activities organized at community, District or Regional level ____
9. The **joys, triumphs, successes, achievements, etc.** of the Community, District, Sub-District, Delegation or of some of its members affect me as if they were my own ____

Part II

10. Value from 1 to 7 each one of the *Lasallian formative experiences* in which you have participated, in so far as they have helped you to understand better the sense of belonging to the Lasallian Institute.

- 10.1 Workshops on Lasallian themes ____
- 10.2 Live-in meetings or retreats ____
- 10.3 Lasallian national or international Congresses or Assemblies
..... ____
- 10.4 Community or District meetings ____
- 10.5 National or international special Lasallian courses or programs
..... ____
- 10.6 Lasallian prayer groups ____
- 10.7 others (.....) indicate which one/ones ____
(.....) ____

11. Indicate the degree of intensity with which you feel you belong to the different organizational structures which exist in each one of the following sections:

4 (very high); 3 (high); 2 (medium); 1 (low); 0 (very low)

- 11.1 Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools ____
- 11.2 Region ____
- 11.3 District, Sub-District, Delegation ____
- 11.4 Religious Community ____
- 11.5 Educational community ____

12. Say how you feel accepted in each one of the following organizational structures:

4 (very well); 3 (well); 2 (regularly); 1 (not well); 0 (very badly)

- 12.1 In the Community of the Brothers ____
- 12.2 In the Educational Community of the School ____
- 12.3 In the District, Sub-District, Delegation ____

13. Express the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each one of the following phrases:

4 (very much); 3 (enough); 2 (moderate);
1 (very little); 0 (not at all)

- 13.1 The fact of living associated with other Brothers helps me positively to grow as a person ____
- 13.2 The fact of living associated with other Brothers helps me positively to grow as a believer ____
- 13.3 The fact of living associated with other Brothers helps me positively to follow Jesus better on the way traced by La Salle ____
- 13.4 The fact of living associated with other Brothers has nothing to do with the three previous epigraphs ____

14. The time which I voluntarily dedicate to the different community services, activities and life is: (mark only one option with an X)

- 14.1 Practically all the time which I have available ____
- 14.2 Quite a lot of the time I have available ____
- 14.3 Some of the time I have available ____
- 14.4 The minimum time that I have available ____
- 14.5 I do not dedicate any of the time I have available ____

15. In general, my attitude in community acts usually is: (mark with the corresponding number each one of the options)

4 (always); 3 (almost always); 2 (normally);
1 (a few times); 0 (never)

- 15.1 of positive collaboration ____
- 15.2 of passivity or indifference ____
- 15.3 rather negative ____

Part III

16. Describe how you understand the sentiment or feeling of belonging:

16.1 To the Community ____

16.2 To the District, Sub-District, Delegation ____

16.3 To the Institute ____

17. Complete the question above, how do you believe:

17. 1 That it is born ____

17.2 That it develops and ____

17.3 That such a sentiment extinguishes ____

18. Other ideas that you want to add on the Lasallian associative belonging

Questionnaire which applies to the lay Lasallians

Part I

Express the degree of agreement with the following phrases using **one** of the numbers below:

4 (very much in agreement); 3 (in agreement); 2 (neither in agreement nor in disagreement), 1 (in disagreement); 0 (very much in disagreement).

1. To be a professor (collaborator - man or woman) in La Salle is important for the configuration or shaping of my own **personal identity** ____
2. I am **very happy being** a professor (to work, collaborate) in La Salle ____
3. I do not feel at ease with the **task/s** which I carry out or the **responsibility/ies** that I have as professor/collaborator ____
4. **What I do or what I live in the school environment** stimulates my identity as a Lasallian ____
5. My Lasallian Associative commitment, in fact, influences the distribution of **the free time and leisure time** which I have available ____
6. The **concerns, problems, needs, lacks, etc.** of the other companions, collaborators or associates with whom I am related affect me as if they were my own ____
7. My Lasallian commitment conditions, in fact, the type and duration of the **relations with friends and/or persons whom I know** ____
8. I am very **happy** when I work or use my **free time**, in tasks or school or associative activities ____
9. The **joys, triumphs, successes, achievements, etc.** of the other companions, collaborators or associates with whom I relate affect me as if they were my own ____

Part II

10. Value from 1 to 7 each one of the *Lasallian formative experiences* in which you have participated, in so far as they have served to understand better the sense of belonging to the Lasallian Institute.

- 10.1 Workshops on Lasallian themes ____
- 10.2 Living-in meetings or retreats ____
- 10.3 National or international Lasallian Congresses or Assemblies ____
- 10.4 Relations with a community or with a Brother ____
- 10.5 National or international special courses or programs ____
- 10.6 Lasallian prayer groups ____
- 10.7 Others (.....) ____

11. Indicate the degree of intensity with which *you feel united* with the different organizational structures shown in each one of the following sections:

4 (very high); 3 (high); 2 (medium); 1 (low); 0 (very low)

- 11.1 Lasallian Institute ____
- 11.2 Region ____
- 11.3 District, Sub-District, Delegation ____
- 11.4 Community/School ____

12. Indicate how you feel accepted by each one of the following organizational structures:

4 (very well); 3 (well); 2 (moderately); 1 (badly); 0 (very badly)

- 12.1 Educational Community ____
- 12.2 Lasallian groups or associations to which you belong ____
- 12.3 District, Sub-District, Delegation ____

13. Express the degree of agreement or disagreement with each one of the following phrases:

4 (very much); 3 (quite a bit); 2 (moderate); 1 (little); 0 (none at all)

13.1 The fact of living united/associated with others in the Lasallian educational mission helps me positively to grow as a person ____

13.2 The fact of living united/associated to others in the Lasallian educational mission helps me positively to grow as a believer..... ____

13.3 The fact of living united/associated to others in the Lasallian educational mission helps me positively to follow Jesus on the path traced by La Salle ____

14. The time which I dedicate voluntarily to the different services or activities as a Lasallian collaborator, associate is: (mark only one option with a X)

14.1 Practically all the time which I have available ____

14.2 Enough of my available time ____

14.3 Some of my available time ____

14.4 The minimum of my available time ____

14.5 I do not dedicate any of my available time ____

14.6 I do not know ____

15. My attitude in the activities or in the service rendered as *collaborator or associate* is: (mark with the corresponding number each one of the options):

15.1 of positive collaboration ____

15.2 of passivity and indifference ____

15.3 rather negative ____

Part III

16. Describe how you understand the sentiment or feeling of being bound or being associated:

16.1 To your reference Lasallian community ____

16.2 To your reference Lasallian District, Sub-District, Delegation ____

16.3 To the Lasallian Institute ____

17. In completing the previous question, how do you believe that:

17.1 It is born ____

17.2 It develops and ____

17.3 Such a sentiment dies out ____

18. Other ideas that you wish to add concerning the Lasallian associative linking/belonging

Conclusion

In the previous pages we intended to make a sociological reflection on associative belonging. We began with diverse references to the 43rd General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools where it spoke about the nature, importance and the urgency of this reality.

We thought it was very opportune to bring back to light some old *psychological traditions* in relation to the groups and associations. One of these is that which compares *primary groups and secondary groups*. The latter are formed with one objective or some concrete objectives. But these objectives should in no way drown the principal traits of the primary groups, that is, the direct relation between its members, the establishment of affective levels, the strengthening of a strong consciousness of solidarity, the favouring of internal coherence and the sense of identification among its members, the development of the consciousness of the "We" and not only the consciousness of the "I", etc.

In the same way in Lasallian associationism, the concept of the reference group must be always present. In fact, in the face of the concept of *group of belonging*, more based on a type of associative obligation, or of associative mode, there is the other *reference group* which is more a place where values, beliefs, attitudes, conduct and behaviour, the sentiments of the members who integrate the group, are shaped. These groups have to be structures which arouse vivid desires of belonging.

The diverse Lasallian associative forms should not be formed by persons whose common basic characteristic is passive belonging (the case of involuntary groupings, "I belong to this country or I am of this race because I can do nothing about it", nor simply a belonging characterized by the coexistence of physical living (in the case of groupings of neighbours). Neither are they for "fleeing" from a hypothetic religious or social danger (case of the defensive groupings) and not even for purely personal comfort or relief (recreational or sport groupings or of clubs of friends).

Lasallian associationism must be formed by intentional groupings that, as has been said before, are characterized by the free will of

the members to participate in the formulation of the objectives and the attainment of its ends. For this, the intra and inter-group relations are of capital importance. To be a Lasallian associate from this sociological point of view of intentional belonging is not something which is attained through some rituals of entry or some concrete prescriptions, but rather it forms part of a continuous process of association. The intentional associationism is not a reality with a predetermined end but rather with an open and incomplete end that is, a reality constantly being constructed.

The future Lasallian associative reality presupposes passing from a *religious homogeneous associationism* characterized by some members whose profile was quite uniform (men, laity, celibates, who formulate the vows of religion in addition to two specific vows, who live forming a community, generally in the same building where they carry out their professional work, who have a very restrictive concept of belonging: locality or district, at most), with an apostolic mission centered on teaching in schools, with few inter-institutional relations, etc. to a *religious heterogeneous associationism* characterized by a pluralistic profile of its members (men and women, celibates and married persons, with vows and without vows, where not all live under the same roof), having an educational project where the academic aspect is only one part, with a type of belonging which goes beyond not only the school walls but also those of their own center, their own District and their own Region. The passing from homogeneous associationism to heterogeneous associationism demands from all a remarkable capacity for adaptation, certainly from some more than from others.

The number and types of participation in the Charism is broadened. In some places this broadening may be interpreted as a loss of a possession which before seemed to be exclusive to the Brothers.

The living together of the old and the new associative structures, no doubt, will generate a series of intra and inter-group conflicts which have to be perceived and resolved with sufficient maturity. Such conflicts are absolutely necessary so that the new Lasallian associative reality may be born, grow and be strengthened. For this it will be convenient and necessary to analyze periodically the associative belonging both of the Brothers and of the Laity. Personal and institutional evaluation of the associative life is

essential for the new groups and Lasallian communities. The corresponding stages of evaluation may be helpful in this task.

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