Brother Pedro Gil: ‘The discourse of Association is the discourse of the first community’

‘Lasallian Association for Mission, its Development for the Future’ was the theme of the Seminar on Lasallian Research, led by the Office of Lasallian Patrimony and Research, together with the Commission on Association of the Institute. For the occasion, Brother Pedro Gil, from the Arlep District (Spain – Portugal), presented some reflections which contributed significantly to the reflection process of the participants, more than 50 Brothers and lay Lasallians from the five Regions of the Institute.

In this interview Brother Pedro shares some points of view on Lasallian Association in the present context and in the context of the celebration of the Tercentenary of the Bull of Approbation of the Institute.

LaSalle.Org: How do you understand Association in the process that the Institute is currently undergoing, in the light of the journey we have gone through over the last few years?

Br. Pedro Gil: (…) We tend to contemplate Association from the knowledge that we have of the origins of the La Salle institution; that is to say, we recognise the present from the point of view of the past. It is logical; it is logical that those who have spent a whole life dedicated to this and have been involved in the life of an institution for three centuries, it is logical that they recognise the present from the point of view of the past (…).

However, I understand that the subject can gain a lot if we also consider it the other way round, or in a complementary way. Let’s put it this way: what would happen if we considered the past from the point of view of the present? It may seem shocking. It is not. To consider the past from the point of view of the present implies to ask ourselves, how are the present and past alike? (…) That was the days after Trent, a regime of Christianity, and this is after Vatican II, a global world and a time of new evangelisation. They are nothing alike at all. Yes, they are alike (…). That is to say, they need each other for a new institution, a new

institutional form for the same objective. That is how they are alike. And then, when we realise that they are similar because they are different, then we say: the form must also be different. The project must also be different and then suddenly we jump back to the days of the first community before the Bull of Approbation. It is worth remembering this point.

LaSalle.Org: It is precisely the 300th anniversary of the Bull of Approbation of the Institute. How does this Bull of Approbation relate to the processes of Association, or what interpretations can we make today to understand its meaning?

Br. Pedro Gil: The reference of the Bull is very important, very useful in this thought that we are referring to. We say that the past can be considered from the point of view of the present. That is true. If we apply it, we find ourselves in a sort of intrigued surprise with the times before the Bull, that is to say, the only ones who knew Monsieur de La Salle when they took vows, of course they took vows: vows of stability, vows of obedience. Were they really vows? That is the question I ask myself: were they secular or religious vows? If we can make the distinction. In the sense that we are talking about, this distinction can be made.

LaSalle.Org: What is a secular vow?

Br. Pedro Gil: Secular vow means a vow that is not close to the structure of consecrated life. It is a vow that expresses the commitment of a group of people who are neither clerics nor live in a cloister. They live together, they commit themselves together, in a way that is inexplicable to the eyes of reason and society. They live together committed to do something, they vow to do something. And they believe that their God calls them to this. This was not a religious vow at that time. Since the Bull, it has been called a religious vow. Substantially it remains the same as before.

It is important for us today to remember the history of Association; it is important for us to remember that. And then to understand the past from the point of view of the present, that is to say: what if they were doing at that time what we are hesitating to do now? If what we are doing now, tentatively, little by little, in the midst of perplexities… What if this was the same thing they had to do at the time, only at a totally different time?

It is a time of new evangelisation as opposed to a time of old Christianity. It is a

time not of the Council of Trent but, if you like, of the Council of Jerusalem. It is a time like the previous one insofar as both of us, let us take note of this, both of us are applied to, are sustained by the Meditations of the Time of Retreat, which are our identity. God has always thought of us, of our community, has always lived in us, has always lived in us, is waiting for us in his eternal plan, and sustains us in our dedication. This is our commitment. This is Association all about. To live that in network. This is what they were committed to. When they said their expression 'together and by association' they meant this. We are a community and a network of communities.

It is possible that looking at things in this way might make more than one Brother's life easier. More than one Brother, more than one community in fact think, and say to themselves, already a little resignedly, 'there are no more vocations for Brotherhood; now there are other vocations'. And if one says, if these new vocations were the same form as the old ones, if these vocations were the same form as the old vocations… only three centuries later? It would then turn out that the discourse of Association is the discourse of the first community.

Watch the full interview here.