



Pedro María Gil

From one community to another

I. A century of signs

LASALLIAN STUDIES 19

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of signs**

Brother Pedro María Gil, FSC

BROTHERS OF
THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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**Brothers of
the Christian
Schools**

LASALLIAN STUDIES No. 19

Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

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1. A century of signs

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Dedication

To Itziar Muniozguren,

who passed away while this book was in press;

for twenty years, in her family and in her community, she showed us that all of this could become true: in her life, the future was already present.

From this first page, our acknowledgement to:

Ferdinand Biziaremye, Michael Valenzuela, Colette Allix, Antonio Botana, Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, Heather Ruple and Paco Chiva for their contribution from their chronicles and reflections on the daily reality of this discourse in territories they know well;

also, to the organisers and participants of the Seminar held in Rome between 28 October and 1 November, 2024:

without all of them, it would not have been possible to move from the first to the second part of this paper, so that there is no longer a first or a second ones, but only one reflection from two perspectives.

Let them be the first recipients of these pages.

History has revealed to us that religious life will last as long as the Church. It has shown a remarkable power of survival, a marvellous capacity to develop and adapt, in spite of periods of crisis, in spite of the ups and downs that religious life has known. If we have the courage, the openness and the willingness to be led by the Spirit, the work begun by Saint La Salle and developed by generations of his children over nearly three centuries will see a new flowering of its dynamism in the next generation, that is, over the next century.

Br. Charles-Henry, *Address to the General Chapter*, 23 April 1976.¹

1 In the Report of the Brother Superior to the 40th General Chapter. Cf. AMG, ED 278/1.

Introduction

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools commemorates this year 2025 the 300th anniversary of its recognition as a social institution. It is a good occasion to look to the future and to ask ourselves about the meaning of its journey through these three long centuries of life.

This reflection aims to help in that task and therefore opens by recalling those dates.

It all began around 1680, with the successive crossings of the itineraries of Roland, De La Salle, Nyel and Barré. This is not the time to detail those encounters, but it is the time to situate them half a century or so before the date whose tercentenary is being celebrated these days.

In Reims, the lives of those four people had been converging on a common point: the education of the children, both boys and girls, of the poor. From the beginning, they knew that nothing could be achieved without bringing together groups of people committed to the task. That was the place of convergence: the group, which soon became a community. Today, from the perspective of history and the present situation of their heritage, we can affirm this without any doubt.

And in one way or another they tried to safeguard it.

In the case of the Lasallian Institution, this stability would be achieved by the first years of the new century, at the end of its first twenty-five or thirty years. This was clearly the case by 1710. We can therefore say that this institution entered the 18th century with the internal configuration that would maintain it for the next three centuries.

It lacked, however, legal recognition. In the eyes of the law, it was an aggregate of persons attending a handful of schools. Nothing else; so that as a whole it lacked legal personality. This, understandably, must have been of concern to its members as they faced the challenge of passing on their commitment to the next generation.

This concern would play the leading role of the next fifteen years, after which it was finally fulfilled with the Bull *In Apostolicae dignitatis solio* of Benedict XIII at the end of January, 1725. In it, the Pope recognised, approved and confirmed the existence of a small community with its headquarters in Rouen, in the suburb of Saint Yon. And he encouraged it to continue to live as they had done until then.

It was the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.²

In those days, their schools had no serious problems: they ran well, based on a pedagogy of the continuous atten-

2 About all around this topic of the Bull of Approbation of the Lasallian Institute, cf. Fr. Maurice-Auguste, *L’Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)*, Cahiers lasalliens, II, Rome, 1962, vi+416pp. A magnificent work, full of nuances, very well documented.

tion of the teacher and his application of logic and order to learning; they also constituted a network, so that as a whole they ensured the successes and corrected the errors of each place. Society knew this, recognised it and was prepared to entrust its children to them, provided that someone with a good heart and a good money came along to support the school project.

From its beginnings, as we have recalled, its need was different: it was about the institution itself, the society or community that its teachers had established.

While its first founder was alive, the institution was himself, one could say. He, in fact, represented for the society and for the Brothers the continuity, the coherence maintained, the identity. Now that he was dead, that is to say, since 1719, there was no longer any sign of the autonomy of their collective identity. They and their pedagogical and organisational technique remained, but they were nobody in the eyes of the legal order of society.

There was a need for them to exist as a corporation responsible for a network of schools. And it cost them a lot, but they succeeded. Everything was settled between September 1724 and January 1725, the final five months of four years of negotiations.

There were two areas, the State and the Church, neither of which could be described as first or second. And perhaps, on closer inspection, this simultaneity helps us to understand what it is all about and in what sense it can help us to understand the present.

Recognition by the State was achieved first: the Letters Patent at the end of September. The Regent, the Duc d'Orléans, had refused to grant them several times, for whatever reasons. Perhaps because he was more inclined towards Jansenism (which was not seen in the Brothers), perhaps simply because he did not want to burden the State Administration with another more or less religious or semi-monastic institution. The fact was that, at his death, the very young king, Louis XV, agreed to sign the document presented to him.

Then, without being influenced by that of the King, acceptance from Rome was obtained. It was the Congregations or Dicasteries of the Pontifical Secretariat and of the Council which, by December of the same year, had already agreed to accept the request of the Brothers. The Pope took it up on the date we know, 26 January.

The King and the Pope: in every negotiation there had been a moment when recognition A was sought in order to guarantee recognition B, which in the end seemed to be of greater interest. Thus, sometimes they thought that the Letters Patent would facilitate the Bull and sometimes that the Bull would facilitate the Letters Patent. In reality, either was enough for them: the other would come on its own, in due course.

... This is history. Today, three centuries later, it is important to bear in mind the implications of this fact.

Indeed, the fact that both recognitions imply the social acceptance of a religious institution means that certain features of its definition may have a civil form and a

religious scope, and vice versa. For example, that the profession of the monastic triad implies a specific economic, occupational, social status.

This was the case of institutions such as the Lasallian. Thus we understand, for example, that the suppression of those vows by the civil authority meant the suppression of all the institutions defined by their profession. It happened in August 1792, in the days of the Revolution.

1726, 1792: it might seem that with these references we are suggesting questions from the days of the Ancient Regime, which do not affect us today, but this may not be the case.

For example: what was the meaning of those vows: to conclude an employment contract or to bear witness to the kingdom of God? In consequence, what was the meaning of those vows, a consecration or a contract? was it possible to express the institutional link and their social commitment in any other way? and, thinking from today's perspective, what would have been their way of expressing their commitment to the popular school today and thus become an entity recognisable by the law?

So it turns out that, three centuries later, that Bull offers the Lasallian Institution a very useful watchtower in the face of the challenge of its future.

For example, we cannot recall the bewilderment of the members of the last General Chapter on the subject of association without encountering questions such as those we have just enunciated. The difficulty of their answers is

due to the difficult harmony between the different models that were found in that assembly.

That is why we say that the Bull, on this anniversary, helps us to ask ourselves in a new way about the identity both of the Lasallian community and of its members. Perhaps it directs more to a question than to an answer, it is true; but it prevents us from remaining in superficial formulas, out of touch with history or simply repeated.

The Bull showed the relationship between Identity and Network: on the one hand, it took up the Brothers' conviction that without a network the Identity of each school would not be sustained; and on the other hand it assumed that without the Identity of each community the Network would not be possible. The Network and the Identity were mutually possible.

That was the Bull.

Its contribution is not insignificant, especially if we bear in mind that the great question of the last century in the Lasallian world has been the definition of its community. And that community, like so many others, is usually defined by the vows (according to the most common theology).

For that reason, we must recall from this first page a fact well known from the first Lasallian biographers: the first request that the Brothers sent to Rome for recognition did not include the conventional religious vows. It spoke of other vows: obedience and stability in the educational service of the poor.

These were vows, to be sure. But they were vows that expressed an existential commitment to a Christian project to which the members of the community believed themselves to be called by God. And that call and that commitment logically implied a concrete way of living.

Of that shared faith which animated their commitment we say that it defined and defines the Lasallian community.

And of it, three hundred years after that Bull, we say that it has been making its way through the last century of this institution. This study aims to show this.

Part One: A century of signs

Three stages in the Emergence of a New Model

We initiated this study with the date of the Bull, 1725, but the Lasallian Institution had been born almost fifty years earlier, as we have also recalled. It is essential to bear this in mind in order to understand both its relevance and its more than three-hundred-year development.

If we look at the period preceding the Bull, we find the movement that historians have called Modernity. The Bull is one of its initial moments, in terms of the inclusion of the Lasallian community in the historical dynamic initiated with this name.

And that is why we see its memory reappearing when this great time in history shows signs of exhaustion or of transformation which will necessarily affect all its creatures.

The Lasallian Community, in fact, had been born with Modernity, in the last third of the 17th century in France. The Bull recognised this, without, of course, using historical categories which only became visible much later. It was already a century old, a hundred years old, when it underwent the great test of the Revolution. Then it disappeared, or almost disappeared for a decade or so, only to be reborn with the new forms of social animation created by the new administration.

It was not reborn alone, moreover. Because many institutions with the same objectives and similar structures, differing only in terms of their geographical location, emerged along the lines of the model. The huge development of the model meant for the others an implicit recognition of the guarantee they offered in the face of the new social realities.

It is easy to understand that institutional consolidation in the 19th century, the new century, must have posed a major challenge to the spirit that had animated it in the 18th century. It turned out that a movement inspired simultaneously by the Gospel and by the society of the Ancient Regime was now being taken up in the functional design of bourgeois society.

That is why we accept today with all serenity the question of the relationship between the deep life of the Lasallian community and its different historical and geographical configurations. It has been a fact not only in its country of origin but all over the world where this bourgeois model of social administration reached.³

3 From these first pages we bridge the gap to the beginning of *Part Two* of this study: *I. An Institution in History*.

Perceiving the ‘signs of the times’

We have recalled a moment in the French Revolution, 1792. In the religious institutions dedicated to education, there was a similar trial. It was at the end of another century, now at the beginning of the 20th century, and it happened again in France between 1901 and 1905. It affected all religious institutions, without exclusion: it began with the orders and congregations and ended with the separation of Church and State.

This time the crisis had a larger scope. Initially it may have been triggered in one particular place, in one particular country, but it would soon spread to several others. The traumatic nature of the ensuing fifty-year period made it difficult to be perceived. Indeed, because of the bloody nature of many situations, it was seen mainly in terms of martyrdom, rather than as a challenge from History to the institution.

Today we can consider that second test as a failed occasion. Both for this Institution and for the various State Administrations. When that terrible half-century passed, nothing was what it had been before. Neither the Administration nor the social Institutions.

New forms had emerged everywhere. This had happened in school models, in the design of education, in resources and in methodology. And thinking and language had also changed. Helped by the dynamics of history and social upheavals, catalysed by the Council, all this would become definitively evident between 1960 and 1970.

From that decade onwards, everything began to look different.

Important: it was not the Council that caused the change. At the Council the world saw a major sign that everything was different and that the real condition of the faith and of all the Institutions of faith had to be examined. It was history, which began by surprising, then overwhelming and finally opening the way to a new time.

The movement came from much further afield. It will appear between the lines again and again throughout this study.

The scholars had clearly located its presence already in the last days of the 19th century. Thus, they could speak of a generation of change, a symptom of the exhaustion of the previous model or simply the vanguard of a new way of looking at the life of peoples.⁴ It may suffice to recall Leo XIII and his social encyclicals, pointing to the changes in societies; the entry of parties and trade unions into the configuration of social bodies; the general radicalisation of political options; and the new orientation in philosophy as well as in aesthetics and theology.

The first half of the 20th century, in fact, is an example of what happens when culture exchanges ethics for economics. That shift is one of belonging and community drowned out by profitability and exploitation. In such cases, progress is often measured by the efficiency of social organisa-

4 This is the thesis, for example, of Norman Stone, in his work *Europe Transformed, 1878-1919*, 20th Fontana Press, 1983, 448 pages.

tions; not necessarily by their meaning.⁵ Logically, everything goes into crisis.

That movement or that process of change would lead up to new wars and new political modes. It would collapse previous economic systems and force a rethink of everything. On the threshold of the 1950s, it would finally end up proposing a new world order, politically and commercially⁶. The world needed a different model.

The Council emerged that way, in those days. As one of the manifestations of the new order, perhaps the most significant and far-reaching, justifying others and provoking many more. In its light, the whole Church would enter on a different path.

Everything would be marked by the principle we have evoked: the origins, the initial faith. The path would consist and consists in matching the faith that founded the institutions with the faith that maintained and maintains them. More specifically: to consider the professional achievements, the structures of service to the Church and to society, in dialogue with those of centuries ago and their evolution.

5 Alves represented it with the comparison of dinosaurs and dragonflies, contemporaries a very long time ago, some of which have disappeared today while the others are still alive. Cf. his *Hijos del mañana*, Sígueme, 1976, 231 pages.

6 We refer to the movement from the Bretton Woods Agreements to the Declaration of Human Rights, 1944-1948. In this space, the World Bank, the IMF and the GATT were born.

It was, precisely, to submit our forms, all of them, to an audit in the style of Lavoisier's principles on matter and the conservation of energy. It was a matter of finding the spirit of what was called the founding charism, auditing its presumed presences, scrutinising possible novelties, transformations.

Three attitudes, three moments

In this process, logically, a new factor had to appear: the reconfiguration of the educating group, specifically, the relationship between the 'consecrated' and the 'lay' at the service of the same project⁷. Its emergence has developed in three phases, clearly present in the Lasallian itinerary of the 20th century.

The first is rejection. Lasallian community cannot accept the presence of the non-religious within its school: since the dimensions of one and the other coincide, it makes no sense to admit to one those who cannot be admitted to the other. Instead, rigorous and austere behaviour on the part of the former members of the group is proposed.

This is clearly the tone of the first fifty years of the Lasallian 20th century. That is why we characterise them as **Restoration**.

The second phase is the admission of the laity into the work of the school. In the middle of the 20th century, edu-

7 This 'consecrate/lay' set is the backbone of our study and will logically reappear in the final pages of our study, in *Part Two*.

cation underwent an unprecedented expansion, with the inclusion of a series of specialisations to which the initial community could not respond, and so the lay person was accepted. Experience will show, however, that, in spite of institutional goodwill, the lay person is received more as a worker than as a sharer in the same spirit.

It is also clearly part of the period between the Council and the Lasallian Chapter of 1993. It is another time: **Renewal**.

The third is the admission of the lay person into the Lasallian community. In this case a new and very significant factor appears: the interest of the lay person to take part in the spirit of the Lasallian community. This affected, logically, the definition of that community, exclusive to the Brothers up to that time, and caused great confusion, followed by either hope or disappointment.

It had been anticipated since the 1970s in several sectors and has been all-pervasive since 2000. Clearly: it is time for **Refoundation**.

In this general itinerary, there are areas in the Lasallian world where all three have taken place successively; in others, the second or the third have not yet been reached; and there are those where the second or even the third have arrived without having experienced the previous ones. This phenomenon is very important when it comes to understanding the relations between some sectors and others.

This is the way it has been; this is the way it is. And because of its transcendence, it must mean something.

This process has meant the total alteration of the Lasallian community. Perhaps we should even say that we are not dealing with a modification of the previous formula, but with its disappearance. Insensibly, what was once a Community had become an Organisation. That is why it is sometimes so difficult or even impossible to reach the third phase of the process we have just mentioned.

If the Lasallian origins - like those of all religious institutions born in modern times for the ministry of education - if all the congregations were born as a community of communities capable of animating schools, it can now turn out that they no longer exist, that they have disappeared, absorbed by the educational organisation.

That is why we say that everything depends on whether the third phase can be reached or whether the transformation does not go beyond the second. If the third stage is not reached, then, taking into account the age averages, we have to say that only one generation is left. In this case, our institutions, which were born with modernity, will die with it.

On the other hand, if the third phase is reached, we will be experiencing the real transformation of energy: we will have passed from one community to another, in a process of re-foundation and always within the same design.⁸

8 It is surely the same process that J. Chittister describes in *The way we were, A story of conversion and renewal*, New York, 2005. In this case it is a very local and personal narrative, but its dynamics are very close to those of any institution. Like the Lasallian one, in this case.

Obviously, we do not intend to resolve this dilemma from this first page. First of all, because the very possibility of the third phase has to be carefully grounded. This is, once again, the challenge of the Bull: fidelity to and continuity of what has been established.

Indeed, it is not enough to consider goodwill, a mutual acceptance based more on the pleasantness of relations than on their truth. Pleasure, the satisfaction perhaps of a job well done, are not enough to resolve the question of the compatibility of two identities which for centuries have been separated or even opposed.

In the Lasallian community, as in any other community, there are two identities to be defined: we and I, plural and singular. And they must be resolved simultaneously, that is to say, by arriving at a common definition, as in any other community. One is as much as one belongs, and vice versa. This does not annul either the community or the person: it leads them to define each other. Neither the community is a sum, nor the persons numbers. We all know that.

And there is another reason not to rush the answer: the risk of turning the survival instinct into a guide for the future.

Here again, goodwill is not enough, because it can very well vitiate the whole discourse by dressing despair in hope. In the Lasallian community, as in any other community, at one time or another, this distortion of data will occur.

In this case, the alternative is usually to clarify them or disappear.

And a word of warning: language can be a trap

In this reflection on the history of the forms of an institution, we must include the issue of the language of that institution. It is perhaps the most important of its forms.

The social or historical circumstances influence the physical or material configuration of the gestures of that initial faith and energy; it also affects the thinking and the linguistic codes that express those forms.

Language is one of the historical forms of the faith and energy that animate the institutions. For the same reason, language is also affected by the process of that law of physics: at one moment it appears and at another it is transformed. At one moment it responds and adjusts to the project and at another it remains empty, even though it may continue to be used within the institution without serving any purpose.

Language tends to be one of the most recalcitrant forms in the face of change or the transformation of institutional systems. This is because people often do not perceive it as such, they do not realise that language also changes like institutions. On the contrary, they understand that language can remain fixed forever, perfectly valid in formulas inherited from earlier times.

That is why we say that its relation to historical or social processes is often unconscious, unperceived. In institutions it is often understood that their physical forms have to change, but not so much their language, their theoretical discourse.

Thus, it can happen that an institution is created in line with the transformations of history because it is transforming its facilities, and yet it remains anchored to or imprisoned by its own language. In such cases, language, which was once thought, remains ideology.

When this happens, the initial energy has not disappeared. It has only transformed its appearance, it has evaded, it is animating other situations and gives rise to an apparently unknown institutional vocabulary.

To begin with a precise reference, we open this story in 1904: on 7 July the Brothers of the Christian Schools were banned from their native land. We are in France and the General Government of the Lasallian Institute still resides in Paris...

First Movement: Restoring

... III. It is important that we proceed to a religious reorganisation of our schools: a) by the urgent elimination of the female element, used in certain places because of the circumstances of the war; b) by the progressive reduction of the civilian element, Superiors should not consent to any opening of new schools which would lead to an increase of this personnel in the District; c) by the revision of school timetables, in order to lighten the work of the Brothers in all types of schools, especially in boarding

schools, and thus give them the possibility of meeting the demands of their religious and professional life.

1946. *General Chapter*⁹

Within the period we are studying, this first period is clearly delimited by the presence of the Bull in Lasallian documents.

It can thus be fixed chronologically between 1903 and 1950: first, a Circular on the Bull, and then its inclusion as a prologue in the new edition of the *Rules*.

In it we find, in addition to two World Wars, the emergence of fascism, the economic crises around 1930 and three Lasallian dramas: their expulsion from France and the persecutions in Mexico and Spain. The latter were not exclusive, as is logical, but affected all the institutions of the Church.

9 Circ. 318 (16/7/46) *Résultats du Chapitre Général*, p. 90. In the Commission's proposal to the Chapter there was a significant and endearing nuance: it said 'urgent elimination' with regard to the female staff, and 'prudent elimination' of the civilian, i.e. male, staff. (AMG, typewritten) From 1956: «5. *Que le choix des maîtres laïcs soit tel qu'il n'engage que d'authentiques chrétiens, pouvant devenir de vrais collaborateurs à notre mission d'Eglise.* 6. *Que la clôture de la communauté soit respectée par nos professeurs laïcs et que, dans l'emploi du personnel enseignant féminin, réduit au minimum, soient observées les règles de la prudence.*» Circulars 318 (for 1946) and 354 (for 1956).

Hard times, of great confusion.

We develop it in three steps:

1. Two Circulars and a Prologue: the presence of the Bull as a guiding criterion, direct or implicit, in times of perplexity.
2. From the events of 1904: the awareness of Lasallian identity in the face of the suppression in France.
3. Half a century later, the *Rules* again: the final moment of the Restoration, after the Second World War.

1. Two Circulars and a Prologue

We are talking about two, but we could say three Circulars, or even four.

In fact, already on 14 January 1825, Brother Guillaume-de-Jésus, Superior General, had written an attractive Circular reminding all the communities of the centenary of the Bull.

It is four pages long. In them, the Superior, full of joy, evokes the disasters of the days of the Revolution and compares them with those they are living through, a generation later. He finds reason for satisfaction and even pride, one might say, in seeing the number of new professions and the demand for schools and Brothers springing up everywhere.

He attributes it to regularity and celebrates it on the anniversary of the approbation of the *Rules*. He understood the Bull, in fact, as its approbation, the great evidence that the Institute had been recognised. The *Rules* are its soul.

That is why he invites all the communities to give a day of holiday in all the schools¹⁰ and to dedicate it to prayer, the whole day, in thanksgiving and examination of regularity.

10 The Superior noted that, if the notice of the Circular did not arrive on its proper date (from 14 to 26 January, which was too short a period), the consequent holiday and celebration had to take place at an early date.

It goes without saying that for the Superior there is neither the uprooting of bourgeois administration in European societies, nor the development of basic knowledge in society, nor the promotion of the welfare of the working classes. All this is an anachronistic kind of analysis, only possible many years later. And yet it is true, as much as the goodwill of the social administrators of the time.

On 19 February 1903, Brother Gabriel-Marie sent another Circular to the Institute. It is number 119 and is entitled *Historique de la Bulle d'Approbation*. This time it is something else, from 4 to 62 pages, and the approach is much more solemn.

Here again, there is neither the crisis of bourgeois society, nor the emerge of new political models, nor the acceptance or rejection of social participation, nor the change in the cultural frame of mind, nor social instability.

It was 19 February: a month later, on 18 March, the Chambers would reject all religious teaching congregations. The Superior knew what was coming and signed the Circular. He had been drafting it for some time.

The issue, as we must expect, was the possible dispensation from vows of several tens of thousands of religious men who were not going to leave their country and would remain in their teaching jobs in another school or perhaps in their own. The Superior, all the Superiors in fact, all forswore it. For his part, Brother Gabriel-Marie recalled the Bull.

There was no celebration, no joy, no invitation to regularity. In its materiality, it is a deliberately timeless text. One

could say that it was written more for the outside than for the inside of the Lasallian community: let it be known who we are.

Its intention is another issue. The Superior knew that the forthcoming suppression of the congregations would not affect the Lasallian Community by virtue of its particular recognition since the days of Napoleon. But he also knew that this same recognition could be revoked, which means that even in his community they would have to face a problem which for the moment was external to them.

And so he argues: no bishop has the power to dispense from vows. This is reserved to the Pope, and on the proposal of the Superiors. Let this be very clear to all, Brothers, Bishops and founders of schools.

Once again, the relationship between the law of the State and the notion of consecrated life.

Basically, it is the same thing that we find twenty years later, 1 November 1924, in Circular 241 on the Second Centenary of the Bull. The Superior, at that time, was Br. Alais-Charles. And there are 43 pages.

The Circular takes up, sometimes verbatim, paragraphs and even pages from 1903 on the origin and reception of the Bull. It adds two themes: reverence for the Pope and some practical observations on school work.

The reference to the Pope is understandable, not least because a year and a half earlier he had intervened to settle the Latin Issue, in the general context of the Lateran Treaty.

ties¹¹. Many in the Lasallian Institute found this difficult to accept, determined to maintain a model of basic and middle school inherited from the origins.

There are three specific comments. They refer firstly to the spirit of the Institute, as it can be understood from the patronage and devotion to St Joseph and the Child Jesus; then on the subject of free education; and finally on the care of the religion class.

In accordance with all this, he proposes the celebration of a novena, prior to the following 26 January.

The Institute would find this Circular 241 again in 1950, in a 384-page volume entitled *Régularité et Sainteté*¹². In relation to what was presented in 1924, this edition adds a letter of Pius XI to the Superior and to the Institute, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Bull, one month after the publication of the Circular.

As a whole, the focus of the Circular is not the vows but the *Rule*, so the volume collects eleven other Circulars of the Institute on this subject. For our study, the collection is important because in 1947 the new edition of the *Rule* had reached the communities with the Bull as its prologue.

11 For guidance on this subject, see Br. Bédel, in the fourth volume of his *Introduction to the history of the Institute...* (Lasallian Studies II, Rome, 2006), chap. 4.

12 Published in the *Procure Générale*, Paris.

As can be seen, within this half-century arc, the Bull receives a reading first from the vows and then from the *Rule*. And it is striking that neither of these two themes appeared when the Brothers presented their portrait, the regulation of their life, before the tribunal in Rome. Neither the vows (the ‘triad’), which were included at the Roman suggestion in order to facilitate approval, nor the *Rule*, which had been presented concentrated in around twenty themes and ended up in a block of eighteen.¹³

13 Cf. Maurice-Auguste, *Les Frères...*, Cahiers Lasalliens 11, pp. 138-148.

2. In the events of 1904

This presence of the Bull on the horizon of the Institute shows that going back to the beginning of the 20th century is not going too far to study the present and the immediate future of the Lasallian Institution. It was in those days that the conditions of the mission-consecration-community game were fixed for a century.

In those days we find a very precise light to understand both the identity of the Brother and the development of our theme throughout the century that is beginning. Many elements are missing, certainly, because the world and mentality have changed, but that light continues to hold and provide meaning to what we are living today.

The suppression of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in July 1904 completed the suppression of all the others during the previous year, 1903, as Associations not recognised by law.

As we say, that was not the first time and many felt driven to remember it¹⁴. This was a pairing of two junctures, without the century that had passed bringing about any change in their appreciation of the very fact of suppression. It had happened in August 1792. Then, as in 1904, the argumentation of the legislators denounced: there was something in the statute of the Congregation that clashed with the nature of society, to the point of making it inadmissible.

14 On all this, see Rigault, Georges, *Les Temps de la sécularisation, 1904-1914*, Rome, 1991, 307 pages.

In the days of the Revolution, the vows were the obstacle, because they were incompatible with the revolutionary motto of liberty and the rights of the citizen. In 1904, the issue returned, but perhaps more comprehensively: if an institution makes a profession of renunciation of this world (the vows), it cannot be recognised as valid for educating the children of this world.

This is the issue and the first of the two main forces shaping the attitude of the Lasallian Institution towards the future: society, through its Administration, interprets that there is incompatibility between religious consecration and the educational ministry¹⁵. The second - faith, expressed in the letter of Saint Pius X - will come up shortly, but for the moment we will point out the first: both in 1904 and in 1792 there is a distance between the creed which sustains the Lasallian Community and that of the Republic. Perhaps even opposition.

Today, it seems clear to us that, in addition to this type of approach, theoretical or doctrinal, there were others of a much more petty, competitive and even economic nature¹⁶. The educational network of the religious Congrega-

15 It is worth recalling here Harnack's *Das Mönchtum, seine Ideale und seine Geschichte*, published as early as 1881 and with five German editions in the following twenty years. There must have been more literature on the subject, but this important and much discussed theologian's work suffices to catalyse the social interpretation of the relationship between religious consecration and educational ministry.

16 This has been studied by Tronchot, Robert, *Les Temps de la sécularisation, 1904-1914, La Liquidation des biens de la Congrégation des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, Rome, 1991, 272 pages.

tions was of extraordinary importance and volume. It also had quality, as could be seen in the awards at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900¹⁷. And it was highly coveted, from several points of view.

In this essay, we are only interested in one, the theoretical, identitarian one, although we recognise the influence of the others on it. Thus, we understand, for example, that their consciousness was clearly dependent on their awareness of everything else, social and political. It was impossible, for example, to be sufficiently objective when the young Brothers, assigned like all other young Frenchmen to military service, had to serve not one year, like their peers in public education, but three.¹⁸

It is therefore unimaginable that they were sufficiently serene in the midst of the diatribes with the Third Republic when the Church in France had refused to accept

17 Collected in Circular 96, 2 October 1900. In the words of Br. N. Capelle, referring to the last decade of the 19th century: "During these years, the pedagogical activity was overwhelming and reached its climax on the occasion of the Universal Exhibition of 1900, during which the jury awarded the Institute more than 60 prizes, 4 of them "Grand Prix", 14 gold medals and 21 silver medals". Cf. *The FSC in the 20th century*, p.11.

18 Cf. Bedel, H., *Initiation..., XIX-XX Centuries* (1875-1928), p. 31. Rigault, G., *Histoire Générale...*, volume 7, 216-220.

the Pope's calls for a '*ralliement*'¹⁹ with the forms of social management of the Republic. There were two or even three decades - between 1880 and 1910 - of serious alterations in institutional life. At its peak was the separation of Church and State at the beginning of December 1905.

We can imagine, that same year, the atmosphere of the General Chapter at Lembecq²⁰. It lasted two and a half weeks, in the second half of May. In less than a year, eight hundred schools had closed, or were about to close. This must have affected three or four thousand Brothers, many of whom were torn between the alternatives of going abroad, leaving the Institute or becoming apparently secularised. Terrible days.

A consultation with Rome and the Pope's response

It was precisely these last possibilities that prompted Brother Assistant Louis de Poissy to consult the Pope, Pius

19 Leo XIII tried to encourage French Catholics to collaborate with the Republic, but he did not succeed. He invited them to a '*ralliement*', that is to say, to meet and accept the system of government. He first proposed it with the encyclical *Nobilissima Gallorum gens* (1884) and eight years later, in French, with *Au milieu des sollicitudes* (1892). It was not to be. Rightly or wrongly, the majority of French Catholics understood that the mood of that Republic was anti-Christian.

20 Faced with the events of July 1904, the Superiors tried to set up the government of the Institute in foreign places close to the borders of France. Thus, in Belgium, in Lembecq-lez-Hal, they bought a *chateau*, where the Superior eventually resided and where several formation groups settled. The following General Chapters were held there.

X, in Rome: they needed to know what position to take on the dispensations from vows, whether local bishops could intervene or whether they were the exclusive preserve of the Roman body. It was a serious, very serious matter, with spiritual, institutional and economic implications. There were local bishops who, in order to keep schools in their diocese, felt that it was up to them to grant dispensation from vows or to accept the apparent secularisation of their teachers.²¹

The response would catalyse the conscience of the Superiors, the Chapter and all the Brothers. A century and a bit later, we are still able to interpret it with certainty.

The Pope had replied on 23 April, just a month before the Chapter, reserving the whole question of dispensations to Rome²². In itself, this was an answer to be expected, since it was an institution of pontifical right, and for that reason it would not justify our referring to it. What matters to us is its rationale.

21 Cf. Rigault, G., *Les temps...* The text of the Pope's reply, pp. 176-177. In the AMG, DD 284. To transcend the intimacy of these reflections and frame them in the context of the French Church and its institutions as a whole, cf, Lanfrey, André, *Sécularisation, séparation et guerre scolaire (les catholiques français et l'école, 1901-1904)*, Cerf, Paris, 2003, 639pp. and Sorrel, Christian, *La République contre les Congrégations (histoire d'une passion française, 1899-1904)*, Cerf, Paris, 2003, 265pp.

22 It is the Letter entitled *Quum propediem*; see <https://www.vatican.va>.

It is the second of the two great forces that mark the space for the Lasallian Community. The first - expressed in the law of July 1904 - formulates civil, external legality. The other, canon law, defines its interior. Between the two, the limits of the Lasallian community are marked out.

A month before the Pope's reply, discussion of the draft law on the Separation of Church and State had begun in the Chamber of Deputies (it would culminate in December of the same year, 1905). And by the following month, May, the Chapter was convened, a year had not yet passed since the suppression of the Institute in education in France. In this context, it is worth recalling the Pope's letter, and even reading it in its entirety.

Brief, a couple of pages, six paragraphs, it begins by assuring the Brothers of his affection and lamenting the atmosphere of "war" against the Church and in particular against those who, like them, had served their country so well. He knows what is happening and wishes them and asks them to be strong and to keep their *Rules* as long as the times permit. And he adds (this is the third paragraph):

But what we do not want in any way is that among you and in Institutes similar to yours, which have as their aim the education of children, the opinion be introduced (which we know is spreading) according to which you should give first place to the education of children and only second place to religious profession, under the

pretext that the spirit and the needs of these times require it so²³.

In the two preceding and following paragraphs, which qualify these affirmations, the Pope recognises that it may sometimes be necessary to yield or to correct or modify behaviour, ‘as much as possible’, ‘as much as the times require’. And these are important nuances, because they prevent maximalist interpretations of the principle invoked.

But the principle is there: it is a reflection of the scholastic doctrine of the two ends, applied to the institutions of apostolic life²⁴. Two purposes: one thing is the sanctification of the committed person himself and another his commitment and those to whom he is addressed. The Pope points out that the latter does not come before the former; on the contrary, sanctification comes before commitment. There is no room for a synthesis in which one and the other animate each other. They are juxtaposed.

23 “*Omnino nolimus, apud vos ceterosque vestri similes, quorum religiosum munus est erudire adolescentulos, ea quam pervulgari audimus, quidquam valeat opinio, institutioni puerili primas vobis dandas esse, religiosae professioni secundas; idque aetatis huius ingenio et necessitatibus postulari.*”

24 The reference, in the *Summa Theologiae*, of St. Thomas, II-II, q. 188. In any case, the Pope leaves the door open to various possible arrangements: “*Etsi enim his tantis malis, quae premunt, quoad potest, medendum est, proptereaque in multis rebus cedendum tempori, non eatenus tamen descendendum, ut de sanctissimorum institutorum dignitate atque adeo de ipso doctrinae sacrae patrimonio quid decedat*”.

And we are immediately reminded of the Founder's conduct, who was determined that the Brothers should make neither solemn nor simple religious vows. The same is true of Brother Timothy and his first community, when sending their institutional synthesis to Rome: as we have recalled, they had not included the vows, which they neither professed nor expected to do so...

The Pope's text continues, in its fifth paragraph:

Let it therefore be well established, as far as you are concerned, that the religious life is by far superior to the common life of the faithful and that, if in principle you are bound to your neighbour by the duty of teaching, much stronger are the bonds which enchain (*enchaînent*) you to God.²⁵

This time it is not the discourse of the two purposes, but that of the excellence of the religious life above the 'common' life. Exactly, 'far above' (*longe vitae communi praestare*).

Underneath is again the scholastic discourse distinguishing now between precepts and evangelical counsels. The former concern everyone; the latter concern those who aspire to perfection. From there the conclusion is clear: those who aspire to perfection are above the rest. Now, if we disregard the fact that the so-called evangelical counsels are not exclusive to anyone but are as much for every-

25 The Latin text reads: "...Itaque in vestra causa illud maneat, religiosae vitae genus longe communi vitae praestare; atque, si magno obstricti estis erga proximos officio docendi, multo maiora esse vincula, quibus Deo obligamini." Although it speaks of 'vincula', it is striking to translate the verb 'obligare' by 'enchain' and to present it in this way to the Brothers in general and to the Chapter in particular.

one as the so-called precepts, if we look for the root of this presumed advantage, we find that their value is a direct function of renunciation, of sacrifice. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the excellence.²⁶

Only one nuance remains: the document speaks of the Brothers' community as a Congregation, Order and Institute. It begins with 'your Congregation', then 'the *Rules* of your Institute', then 'the *Rules* of your Order'. We must assume that, coming from Rome, the writer understood the scope of the terms.

It therefore leaves us with a very thoughtful question: what idea does the writer have of the nature of the Institution to which he is addressing his letter? And, if his idea is not very precise, what value do his considerations have? the same as his institutional qualification?

The Constitution *Conditae a Christo*

All this was happening in 1905: four or five years earlier, with the *Conditae a Christo*²⁷, the canonical imprecision of the Lasallian Institution (and of many others) had become evident. It was a symptom that something very important

26 This would be the criterion of the CCC of 1917, see c. 487.

27 Leo XIII, *Apostolic Constitution*, 8.12.1900. The text, at <https://www.vatican.va>. On 28.06.1901 the *Normae* would follow, for its concretisation. The Church failed to see what this meant. This is one of the sensations that the monumental work of C. Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin, Les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle* (Paris, Cerf, 1985, 776 pages) leaves us with very clearly.

was wrong. Recalling this helps to understand the new Pope's letter.

Indeed, the Constitution indicated that all members of such an Institution had to profess, to take vows; yet, at that time, 1900, December, 13 or 14 out of 100 Brothers had not taken vows, nor were they thinking of doing so. They were called 'employed novices'. As such, they were still in the Community and would normally throughout their lives either take vows or leave the Community, but they did not feel obliged to take vows in order to be considered members²⁸. How to interpret the identity of those religious men?

The uproar was enormous and it had also fallen to Brother Assistant Louis de Poissy to sort out what could be sorted out. But the message was delivered: what defined the Brothers? and how to understand, five years later, the rationale of the papal document?

At the time - 1900, 1905 - these were unanswered questions. And not because we cannot reasonably imagine it in the minds of one or the other, but because the situation that everyone was living through should make us extremely cautious in our deductions. It was indeed impossible for these questions to be posed with serenity in the context of the last decade of the 19th century, in the midst of the Dreyfuss trial, that of Br. Flamidien, the *Re-*

28 Cf. on this subject the *Note sur le statut votal des Frères des Écoles Chrétaines en France au 'temps de la sécularisation'*, by M. Sauvage in *Les Temps de la Sécularisation, 1904-1914, Notes et Réflexions*, Rome, 1991, pp.127-156.

vue Gerson, and the third of Zola's Four Gospels²⁹. Plus the 1901 Law on Associations and its application over the next two years. Apart from the uncompromising distancing of Lasallians from other religious educators.

But the questions were, and still are: what defined - and still defines - the Brothers?

Yes, the context of the *Conditae a Christo* is essential to understand the path of the 20th century for all the institutions of consecrated life. We must probably recognise that the time was not ripe to perceive it, both in the congregations affected by the document and in the ecclesiastical bodies responsible for its regulation.

The fact with which the Constitution was confronted was the canonical irregularity of those institutions. Thousands of people were giving their lives in a legally non-existent institutional system. They were living in non-approved structures, the fruit more of circumstances and good faith than of legal normality. Everyone could recognise them, but they

29 The Dreyfuss Trial is well known; it is cited here for the placement of the Brothers against it, alongside other clearly anti-Jewish movements; Br. Flamidien was a member of the Lasallian community in Lille, accused of rape and murder of a pupil: the trial was scandalous for the six months it lasted and ended in a finding of innocence for lack of evidence; the journal *Gerson* was a publication of a group of religious educators, Paris, 1895-1896, strongly critical of their own institutions; the third in Zola's series *The Four Gospels* was entitled *Truth*; It was his last work, as he did not finish the fourth volume of the series and even this third volume was published a few months after his death, 1902 and 1903; we quote it here because its plot is a replica of the unfortunate Flamidien affair, with the Brothers playing a leading role.

had no place in the eyes of the law. And not only before the laws of the Church, but also before the general laws of society.

It was an '*effrayant*', terrifying panorama, as a canonist described it in 1902³⁰, commenting on that Constitution. And there is no doubt that it was, it had to be, if one did not have another viewpoint when considering it.

Indeed, if we consider the phenomenon of religious congregations during the 19th century from the point of view of their canonicity, it was chaos. The canonist was quite right to be overwhelmed by the task that awaited the Church. Throughout that century and at the beginning of the next century, if a group of Christians wanted to commit themselves to the education of the working classes, and in an associated, communitarian way, they had no other way than to constitute themselves as a religious or consecrated community.³¹

30 Pierre Bastien, a Benedictine, presenting and commenting on the text of the Constitution, in 1902: "...la propagation presque effrayante, dirais-je, de congrégations a voeux simples...". In *Constitution Conditae a Christo, de Léon XIII, texte et commentaire*, Paris, Bruges, Rome, (1902), 102 pages. The quotation, on p. 26.

31 Such institutions were more or less defined since at least Benedict XIV's *Quamvis iusto*, in 1749. It is the recognition of the work of Mary Ward, 'The English Ladies' (as they were called during the founder's lifetime), the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, henceforth (IBVM). Its historical significance lies in the fact that it does not recognise the Foundress but the Institute founded: it was not intended to be done otherwise because everything - foundation and foundress - had been suppressed by Urban VIII, a century earlier, during the lifetime of the Foundress. Henceforth, *Quamvis iusto* would be a reference to the fact that something was not fully mature in terms of religious consecration and apostolic life.

Let us look carefully: there was no concern to perpetuate the problem of the incompatibility between renunciation of the world and commitment to society. Nor, in fact, to separate consecration or community from the apostolic mission: one was part of a consecrated community in order to be freer for commitment, not to live in a monastery. It was possible to live with a theological background for which both situations were not a problem.

In addition, and above all, what was not a problem was history. It was not a problem to forget that the Middle Ages were long gone and that now, as the 19th century unfolded, the peoples of Europe were entering an unknown way of life. Certainly, Gregory XVI and later the *Syllabus*³² had not helped much.

For if this phenomenon of the commitment of thousands of young believers all over Europe were to be interpreted as the emergence of a new way of being a Christian, then everything would be different. What could be more hopeful than young people ready to commit themselves to the Gospel?

But they could no more see it than the canonist commenting on the *Conditae* could see it.

32 Pius IX, 1864. If his predecessor, Gregory XVI, was disastrous in the Church's pathway towards modernity, his was to be more negative. After a start to his pontificate of a different sign, he returned to an attitude of rejection. His great reference, the *Syllabus*, a list of the errors of modernity, was published together with the *Quanta cura*. It was not a great help for the direction of the Church in the 19th century.

It was the future and they treated it as the past. That is why they had to organise a clearly ideological legitimising discourse based on medieval vocabulary: the distinction between precepts and counsels, the two ends of the religious life, the disregard for the world, the equivalence between sacrifice and merit, and so on. This is the background to the Pope's letter: an ideological discourse rather than the embodiment of the charism in history.³³

The situation would eventually deliver the catastrophe of the suppression of those institutions and, months later, the rupture between Church and State in France.

Yes, Circular 119 of 19 February 1903 made a lot of sense. It was mentioned above. Thus, we see that the absence of occasion or reason for sending it to the Institute was more apparent than real. They did not say so, but they knew why they were writing it.

33 Elzo, Javier, in his *Jóvenes españoles 2002 y vocación* (published in *Seminarios*, vol. 50, 2004, 249 pages) quotes Gerard Lachivert, Secretary General of the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious in France, who in December 2000 stated: "in general, we can speak of a certain death for the religious families which emerged in the 19th century for educational, charitable or health purposes" ... He also added that there had been "an unexpected boom in the new forms of consecrated life". He said this in Lourdes, at a meeting of Major Men and Women Superiors of religious orders and congregations in France. O.c., p.91.

From the three General Chapters

From the *Conditae* and the letter of St. Pius X it is easier to imagine not only the 1905 Chapter, but also the other two General Chapters, 1901 and 1907.³⁴

The 1901 Chapter has the particular interest of having been convened to revise the *Rules*. In principle, therefore, it can be considered as a privileged moment of awareness on the part of the Lasallian Institution as a whole. Looking at its results, however, it is clear that the legislators' point of view was only in the past, that is to say, that the two decades immediately preceding it did not merit any other reading than a martyr's one.

The immediate past and present were only the occasion of trials, 'wars' (as the letter of St. Pius X would soon say), but in no way a situation of change, of historical novelty. Therefore, we understand that the result was to reproduce as literally as possible the version of 1717. This was the culmination of a very clear state of awareness which had been going on for more than thirty years and which had delivered the subject of the *Rule* to almost all the previous General Chapters. The answer was always to restore, to go back. And we will find it again forty and fifty years later.

In this regard, a couple of features which had already appeared in 1875, and which are important from the point of view of this study, are striking. The first: in that Assembly, we read the question of the advisability of the Insti-

34 During this period, General Chapters were convoked in 1894, 1897, 1901, 1905, 1907 and 1913.

tute being endowed with something like a ‘Third Order’: the subject was postponed because it was not considered sufficiently mature, as Bédel notes³⁵. The second was the question of the Brothers who remained in the Institute without vows. No progress was made on this question either, no doubt because there was no basis for studying it and reacting to it.

We must not forget that in 1875 the Institute had not yet established the Scholasticates, which means that the initial formation of the Brothers clearly left much to be desired. They must have carried with them throughout their lives a notable deficit in their ability to understand the ‘signs of the times’ and to share their reflections with similar institutions of ‘free education’ or of the ‘public’ administration. The Scholasticates were established in 1882³⁶ and soon spread throughout the Institute.

The fact is that the Lasallian Institution could not perceive the great sign that, for example, Leo XIII was inviting them to consider: the widening of its field of aposto-

35 Cf. *Initiation... XIX-XX siècles*, Lasallian Studies II, p.53.

36 On 6 January 1881, the Superior General, Br. Irlide, communicated this to the Institute with his *Circular 21, Bonne année; conséquences du IIe. Centenaire*. It is very significant that in fact the institution of the Scholasticates, as a higher or second degree formation, had already been established by Br. Agathon, Superior, on the eve of the Revolution. Brother Salomon, for example, collaborated as formator in the one set up in Melun. At the time of the Restoration of the Institute and throughout the 19th century, formation was limited to the Novitiate. Now, two hundred years after the first beginning, there is a qualitative leap in the professional preparation of the Brothers.

late, which should entail modification of its institutional design. It is true that in certain places there were magnificent gestures of remarkable creativity³⁷. But successive Chapters determined that, above and beyond the service of such works or programmes, the inconveniences of their management with respect to community order and customs were more important.

Possibly their very size made them at that time incapable of connecting with the change in life and in the world. They needed all their energy to find patterns of survival when they were expelled from public school and had to sustain a powerful network of schools, now without municipal or state funding.

Their size and their memory did not make it easy for them to perceive the distinction that was opening up in those same days between Organisation and Community or Society and Association³⁸ (which we will meet again and again in the course of our reflection). This explains a study of the *Rules* always looking backwards, as we will see again in the attempt of 1901 and again in 1946.

37 In the field of social action, it is worth mentioning the creation of the *Syndicat des employés du commerce et de l'industrie*, the work of Brother Hiéron, Paris, 1887. Cf. Bédel, Lasallian Studies 11, p.48f. In 1914, in Tenerife, where the Brothers expelled from Algiers had just opened a school, they did the same thing. This time the Brother's name was Apollinaire. The two syndicates still exist at the time of writing.

38 This is the distinction made by Ferdinand Tönnies in his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, of 1887. In the Spanish edition we use (Granada, 2009), these concepts are developed in the first part, pp. 5-68.

For 1905 and 1907, and taking into account the Pope's letter, the attitude could not have been otherwise. These two Chapters were very easy to interpret: the definition was clear, and all that was left for them to do was to study each situation, faced with the alternative of dissolution or expatriation. Given that, in addition, the secularised, real or apparent, could not take part in the Assemblies in any way, the tone was the same.³⁹

On the whole, the attitude of distance, which became suicidal sufficiency and autonomy, stands out. Like someone who is clear about what is rightfully his and knows that, if one cannot achieve it, it is always due to the wickedness or clumsiness of others.⁴⁰

39 For the 1905 Chapter it was logically not possible to apply any process of delegate elections. So they opted to call the members of the previous Chapter, 1901. On that list were six secularised Capitulants: the convenors preferred not to have them present. And they reasoned their decision thus, in the minutes: "en acceptant la sécularisation, ils se sont placés, administrativement, en dehors de l'Institut" (AMG, Register of General Chapters, 1905, Doss. 2) Nor for the following Chapter, 1907, were they able to convoke elections. Their basis remained the same as in 1901.

40 After a couple of years, the Chapter of 1907, and with the aim of maintaining or recovering faith in the Institute, they established a periodical publication called *Bulletin de l'Institut*. This was stated in its first issue. Over the next forty years, its publication did a great service in maintaining the spirit among the Brothers, now spread throughout the world. In fact, today it is above all an extraordinary source of information about situations, people and places of other times, and also about the state of mind, the spirit in which all this was considered, at least in the direction of the publication. Gradually, and especially after the Second World War, its tone became more panegyric, so that its lack of self-criticism, or at least the inadequacy of its historical awareness, became quite evident.

This is not a new attitude. The only novelty lies in the feeling of security they find in the Pope's message, which in that sense helps us a lot to understand what was happening.

They had already shown this by agreeing to deal financially with the Administration on the fringes of the other Congregations: they did not feel as affected or as close to collapse as the others in the face of the new tax conditions.⁴¹ They had repeated this in 1901 when, instead of examining the implications of the new Law of Associations, which had appeared only months before the Chapter, they focused on the *Rules*, calculating that the Law might not affect them since they had a recognition of the days of the Empire which the others did not. The same was true, definitively, when in 1903, faced with the merciless and sectarian rejection of the Congregations concerned by the Government, they refused to make common cause and again calculated that they would not be affected.

These are serious institutional sins, of course, which are the ultimate: living with their backs turned not only to others but to what is in front of them. That is to say, they ignore the possible inadequacy of the structures of the

41 The new tax laws of the Republic were clearly detrimental to religious congregations. They sought first and foremost their disappearance, but at the same time to tax their properties with a system of taxes that would provide the state with considerable revenues. Until 1895, the Congregations joined forces and resisted the alleged tax innovations. But after that date legislation introduced the possibility of less oppressive treatment in certain circumstances. That was the end of the unity of the Congregationalist front.

great Lasallian community with regard to the reality of its mission.

Surely this is a reflection of the pending task in the discourse on its identity: the relationship between consecration and mission. It is the question still unresolved since three or four centuries earlier the institutions of consecrated life had incorporated the apostolic life. Or, perhaps better: the unresolved question about the implications of including the vow regime in a life dedicated to secular commitment from the Gospel.

In the Brothers - and in all similar Congregations - there is at that moment a deficit that can lead them all to ruin: for them consecration consists first and foremost and perhaps only in the renunciation of certain areas of life, so that everything is reduced to being more available for educational work. This is what the usual doctrine, inherited from pre-Trent times, tells them. It is therefore necessary to maintain a life that is so ordered and distant as to guarantee the continuity of the inherited order.

If something new should appear in the field of mission which could alter this distance, forcing us to consider the life of the people as bringing about significant changes, we will respond by reinforcing pedagogical effectiveness... in the areas already mastered.

What is striking about this deficit is that it brings us back to the other dimension of its institutional identity: the Community. And it is here that we find the clue that can guide us along the path of this century.

Indeed, if we do not perceive the juxtaposition between consecration and mission, there will be no reason to reconsider the Community, which will remain equally juxtaposed with regard to educational action, that is to say, outside whatever happens. We will not be faced with a synthesis but with the interplay of three truly autonomous realities, incapable of enlightening one another.

The key lies in the notion of consecration. If by consecration we mean above all renunciation, austerity, detachment from anything that might distract, we will have a model of consecrated life. However, consecration is much more than utility: it consists in living in this world as a living reference to its transcendence.

It is another model. In it we find that the inclusion of the vows - consecration - in the apostolic life implies much more than a new availability for commitment. With it we find a substantial modification of the mission: it no longer consists only in what is done, but in the Sign of the beyond that appears in what is done.

This is why the Community is no longer a working group, but the place of the Sign, of the Mission. It is the place where the other two dimensions, consecration and mission, come together and emerge.

But in those days they could not see it, in the climate exemplified by the *Conditae* and the Pope's Letter. Or, quite simply, in their understanding of the Bull. And the same would be true in later decades, as long as the theology of the background of these documents continued among them. In this sense we speak of those days as marking

the institutional playing field of the century that was beginning. As long as it was maintained, especially at the pre-conscious level, the Lasallian Institute would face impossible issues.

From the Autumn of 1904 onwards, events would direct them into practices they had not previously imagined.⁴² It would always be in spite of themselves, blind to what it meant, as something that would sooner or later have to be put back together again. Unfortunately, forty terrible years awaited them in which everything would become both more urgent and more difficult.

42 In this connection, it is worth mentioning again G. Rigault and his already quoted last volume of the History of the Lasallian Institute, posthumously published, *Les temps...* Written on the basis of the testimonies he collected 30 or 40 years after the events, it sheds an extraordinary light on what happened and on the conscience of the Brothers. There are further references, such as the corresponding volume in the monumental work of Br. Henri Bédel, *Initiation to the history of the Institute..., 1875-1928* (Lasallian Studies 11, 2006, 300 pages). On these subjects, the AMG, in addition to other treasures, have a 29-page, typewritten booklet containing the chronicle written by Br. Dosithée-Yves on the days of secularisation in Brittany, formerly the District of Quimper: he read it on 27 November 1929 at the Second Novitiate, in Lembecq. It was another way of looking at secularisation. It deserves to be known. In one way or another, a new era was beginning at that time.

3. Half a century later, the *Rules* again

The next forty years were truly awful. We have mentioned it above.

On their suppression in France and their dispersion throughout the world fell the European War, the first World War. They were four years intensely lived, present or absent from a land they had had to abandon.

Then came the two political forms of totalitarianism: fascism and communism, which were to prove so decisive in their institutional future. At least two more wars broke, this time partial, local, but which hit them full on: Mexico and Spain would be the occasion of all kinds of physical and moral atrocities. After them came the Second World War, another five and six years of bloodshed and the collapse of everything they had ever known.

In those days, the philosophies of values and absolute logics would appear within societies; with them would come the existentialist, intimate currents, or at least those centred on the subject rather than on ideas. At their side would be born, consolidated and proscribed the religious orientation we call Modernism, with its experiential, intimate or personal emphasis⁴³, sometimes narcissistic.

And in the Lasallian Institution, the succession of five very short terms fo the Superiors General, which would prove

43 Just to give a few examples to facilitate the understanding of these statements: we refer to figures such as M. Scheler and L. Wittgenstein; L. Laberthonnière and E. Mounier.

incapable of sustaining a vision or a management longer than five years, and which would almost necessarily deliver the Community into a situation much more perplexed than serene or far-sighted.⁴⁴

It is striking - and we underline this because of its proximity to certain gestures of today - that such a moment of worldwide dispersion was nevertheless a moment of local rather than global reading. In fact, at every moment it was a matter of understanding what was closest to home and accommodating oneself.

What was not perceived was the universal constant of a historical cycle that was exhausted or on the verge of exhaustion. This made it necessary to compare what was closest to us with what had been inherited, yes, but also with all the situations and their constants.

1946: Starting over

It is essential to remember all this in order to understand how the 1946 General Chapter could hardly bring anything more than a measure of calm or silence after so much noise. We understand this when we realise that the

44 Brothers: Imier de Jésus (1913-1923; ten years, with four years of World War); Allais-Charles (1923-1928); Adrien (1928-1934); Junien-Victor (1934-1940); Arèse-Casimir (Vicar General, 1940-1946) Athanase-Émile (1946-1952); Denis (1952-1956).

Chapter itself was convoked from... Mauleón⁴⁵, in that beautiful corner of the Pyrenees, more a refuge than the headquarters of government of the Congregation. This did not exactly mean stability in the animation of the collective and in its thinking. It also meant that the premises where the meeting was to be held were not being used only a few months earlier, having been a field hospital for both sides in recent years.

It is therefore not an illusion to imagine that May 1946 as the end of a forty-year marathon, whose runners are coming together to be recomposed, without being entirely convinced that the race is over. Although six or seven more Chapters have been held since its first reading, the letter of St. Pius X is very much present, as is the mood of the four Chapters held before the European War.⁴⁶

To understand its scope in our reflection, we place ourselves with the Chapter between two books widely distributed in France at the time: *The Cult of the Rule* (and *The Cult of the Vows*), by J. Colin, and *France, Land of Mission?* by Godin and Daniel. The first represents the continuity of the ascetic or renouncing conception of religious consecration, it is slightly earlier than the Second World War and will still be used in milieux such as the Lasallians for

45 In November 1945, Brother Assistants Athanase-Emile and Zacharias moved from Mauleón to Rome to prepare the sessions of the Chapter, which was to open six months later.

46 On the Chapter, it is worth reading the synthesis proposed by Bédel in the last of his five volumes on *An Introduction...*, the one on the 20th Century, 1928-1946 (Rome, 2008), 12 serene and documented pages. They are the last of his formidable work. He too places the symbolic date of 1904 as the Chapter reference.

the next twenty years, almost up to the time of the Council. The second, from 1943, was the work of two priests, encouraged by the Cardinal of Paris, Suhard, and by the time of the Chapter it was revolutionising the understanding of the Christian and the social, as well as pastoral models. Even before the end of the war, they pointed out that nothing would ever be the same again.

It is likely that someone quoted them during the Chapter, though it would not be relevant in itself. If we recall them, it is to understand the attitude of that Assembly towards our reflection. The Chapter is attentive: it has both approaches in mind. It recognises, at least implicitly, that of the two Young Cristian Worker priests, by focusing on the imbalances between educational institutions and the disruption of regularity, as well as the difficulty of living free schooling. But the Chapter members do not dare to reach to conclusions. Perhaps it is not possible.

It is clear from the Chapter documentation as a whole that there was unease about the lack of correspondence between the social conditions of the mission and the maintenance of the regular order. The Chapter is unanimous in this, as can be seen from its proposals both on lay personnel in the schools and on the dedication to extra-academic works. On both subjects, it was clearly restrictive.

Brother Clodoald began his presentation of the Report of the Fifth Commission on Schools and Gratuity and on the

works of Catholic Action in the following way: “In this second year of the atomic era...”⁴⁷

He wanted to use the idea of ‘disintegration’ and apply it to the hypothetical fragmentation and dispersion of the Lasallian heritage. He immediately answered himself by proving that there was no such thing, but that he found very much alive realities. The awareness of all of them had to be clear and unanimous: we need to recover the matching between the Institute and the Mission; right now we can do nothing other than reinforce the inherited order and look to the Origins, as was done in 1901.

In December 1940, writing from Mauleon, after the death of Brother Superior Junien-Victor, Brother Athanase-Emile said: “It is important... that the Regime have something well prepared so as not to be overtaken by elements liable to ‘eventually’ take too much liberty with Traditional Regularity.”⁴⁸

They did. Colin would applaud them; Godin and Daniel would be perplexed. In fact, in the following years, the

47 Cf. AMG, ED 238. Brother Clodoald (1899-1980) would be Director of the Second Novitiate in Rome from 1956. He succeeded Br. Nicet until 1964. We meet him again ten years later. See also in the archives of Maurice-Auguste, DC401-1 (Doss.1).

48 AMG. Br. Athanase-Emile, writing from Mauleon, 3.12.40. The Superior, Br. Junien, had died on 15 October.

former would be much more present than the latter ones in the formation of the Brothers.⁴⁹

The restorative mood of the Chapter seems evident, their acceptance that they were lagging far behind in regaining identity and initiative. Thus, not only did they not modify the *Rules*, but their study was reserved to Brother Superior and the corresponding post-Chapter Commission, with the result that the following year they were all recognised by the Sacred Congregation.

Instead of adjustment, fixity was added. And it was intended to reinforce it by placing the Bull as a prologue, even though its definition of the Lasallian Institute had been superseded by elevation: the Bull had not confirmed that *Rule*.

However, it was also clear to all of them that it could no longer regulate their lives as in past centuries. Their option, instead of modifying anything, was to restrict the educational area. For example, the communities were less troubled by six new primary schools than by six Brothers attending adult evening classes or working-class youth outside school. The newly approved *Rule* would set the limits of this restriction. There would therefore be no room for any remodelling either in the discourse or in the Community.

49 It is impressive, in this sense, and eighty years later verging on the ridiculous, the panorama of Circular 321, dated 24.4.1947, presenting the new wording of the *Rules*, after their Vatican approbation: the Circular is 49 pages long, of which blocks 6 to 32 are a series of textual quotations from Colin. It can be said that this author wrote half of the Circular presenting the new edition of the *Rules*. It is understandable that in the houses of formation his works were obligatory study.

We repeat: they could hardly have come up with anything else. We must assume that everyone left the Chapter looking more towards the next one: then things would be different, once the chaos of half a century had been overcome.

It had been three weeks: from 15 May, Wednesday, to 6 June, Thursday. Enveloping them was a world in ruins, morally and materially.⁵⁰

1956: Adequacies and inadequacies of the Restoration

The 1956 Chapter lasted two weeks longer than the previous one. It opened with five/six days of Retreat followed by twelve more to constitute the Chapter, elect the Superior General, the Assistants and the Vicar General.

It should be noted because it shows us something that is not unimportant: the first half of the time was spent on structures; the second half on responding to the Brothers' notes. This meant that what was really important was the general animation team, the Regime, as it was then called. The rest, the questions raised by the Brothers, would be dealt with in the first instance in the Chapter itself, but then, in a definitive way, in the management of the general government team. At the present time, the Chapter is not so much a place for raising awareness but above all for organising government. It is important to point this out.

50 There was also, after the Chapter, a Circular 320 bis, entitled *L'Institut et le Sacerdoce*, 19 March 1947, of only 32 pages. It does not seem significant, so we do not comment on it in text. Its reference remains here.

The clearest symptom of this way of interpreting things is the question of the Rules.

The previous Chapter had left the matter provisionally closed: it had entrusted it to the Superior General and he had proceeded not so much to its study as to its approval and confirmation from the Vatican. But everyone understood that it was a provisional solution, that is to say, something that would be difficult to sustain if things in society continued to evolve as foreseeable. For this reason, in addition to the sensitivities of the capitulants themselves, a good number of notes suggested to the new Chapter a more careful revision of the Institute's code.

The Chapter took note, responded succinctly and entrusted it to the General Council. The General Council, encouraged by the Council which was to be announced three years later⁵¹ and thinking of the next Chapter, set up a commission as the Chapter Assembly had indicated. In any case, the pace of events meant that everything was precipitated, gaining in the dimensions of the possible, until it became the theme of the 1966 Chapter.

If this was the general procedure followed on all the themes, it was primarily due to the effervescence in educational models. As the post-war days were left behind and as the so-called Cold War moved into a time of global development, educational institutions underwent significant mutations, not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of the diversification of problems and solutions. Even today, seventy years later, we can read with interest and profit the paper

51 At St. Paul Outside the Walls, 25 January 1959.

on Education and apostolic works, an excellent example of understanding the present and projecting the future.

This fact gave rise to institutional issues of great importance. It obliged us to enlarge the teaching teams and to modify the relationship between the Lasallian school and the administrative framework of local governments. During this time, for example, the boundaries of elementary education and formal education were definitively broken down, advancing everywhere, both in higher education and in vocational training and non-formal education.

Remembering this and taking it on board was more than enough for the Chapter. This is how we understand these two paragraphs, from the aforementioned report of the Fifth Commission⁵². The first is a question that the Commission asked itself and proposes to the Assembly:

Can it be affirmed that today, faced with the intensity and diversity of the needs of young people and in particular of the humble majority, the Institute has maintained and continues to strive with all its might to respect the very principles which are at the origin of the foundation?

The answer is yes, and that means adapting to the present, which is already being done. And in this effort, the issue of the extension of the number of teachers comes up. This is where the Commission states:

The Commission thinks that, in order to judge this question sanely, it is necessary to separate: religious life,

which is our business (*'notre fait'*) and which must be safeguarded by all means, and professional and apostolic life, in which the collaboration of those who wish to work in the same spirit, even if they are not religious, can very well be associated (*'s'associer'*).⁵³

These two paragraphs clearly present the spirit not only of that Commission but of the whole Assembly: the task of adjusment is very great, it is well accepted, and lay people can take part in it as long as they share the Lasallian notion of education.

The second paragraph can raise major issues. Its scope depends on what the Capitulants understand by *'le même esprit'*. Thus, recalling the letter of St. Pius X in 1905, and bearing in mind that the discourse of the two ends of the apostolic religious life is still very much in force at this time, it may turn out that non-religious personnel are in fact associated with something outside the religious life of the Brother. To put it more clearly: the lay person can be associated with the Lasallian project because religious life is not strictly necessary for the work of the Brother at this particular time of renewal of education.

Obviously, things were not formulated in this way, but it is impossible that no one thought about it and perhaps made it explicit in particular colloquia. On Sunday 3 June, for example, in the first hour and a half that the Commission

53 This reflection or recommendation leads us to suppose that it was in this Commission that the proposal of the Association of Christian Educators was born, which we mention a little further on, under the subtitle *An Appendix*.

had at its disposal to present its report (five others would follow, all of the same length), the expression ‘Third Order’ appeared, among other things, in relation to lay teachers...

At the beginning of the Chapter, during the three days of preparation for the election of the new Superior General, Br. Denis, until then Vicar General, gave the last address to the Chapter. It was on “*l’Obeissance, qui fait l’essence et l’excellence de notre vie religieuse*”. It is enough to read this title to feel uncomfortable with the theology of consecration that underlies it.

It is true that the election of Br. Nicet-Joseph broke with the custom of appointing an Assistant, a member of the previous Regime, as Superior, thus orienting life more towards the spiritual than the organisational (the one elected had already been in charge of the Second Novitiate in Rome for ten years); but it is also true that it was on the second ballot and with the result of 53 votes against 47 for Br. Philip Antoon, of the previous Regime and closer to the spirit of the outgoing Vicar.

It may even help to understand things better to remember that also at this Chapter, 70 notes were received on the subject of the priesthood, not the 428 of 1966, but not the 16 of 1946 either. That is to say, in the Institute the identity of the Brother was important and the object of reflection (and of controversy), but more from the point of view of his relationship with the priesthood than with the Lasallian laity.

Perhaps in this way we can also better understand the sense of little urgency or even little ambition with regard

to the subject of the *Rules*, entrusted to the new Council of the Regime.

Judging by the three drafts which would be produced between 1961 and 1964 (the last of which would merit a negative opinion from some Roman expert⁵⁴ because of its lack of topicality or consistency with the Council), we understand that in 1956 the Regime was closer to 1905 than to 1966. They still have the issue, or the problem, before their eyes, but they do not yet have the instruments to solve it. And this is true both in their thinking and in their institutional structure.

They are aware of the need (but not of the answer, obviously) and that is perhaps why their great service to the Institute was the improvement of formation. They felt secure, more numerous than ever, well established in the society of the time which, still in the midst of the Cold War, was sending abundant vocations to their formation groups. That is why they insist. They have the experience, the formulas; they will expand them on the technical side and on the spiritual and theological side. It should be enough to strengthen both the novitiate and the scholasticate. In due course the fruits will be reaped.

But we must not get ahead of ourselves. It was still 1956, and before moving on, it was necessary to underline a possibly very significant circumstance: the first Circular of the new Superior, Circular 353 of 17 June, was on “*Notre*

54 It was Fr. Beyer, a Jesuit from the Gregorian University. As a result, they drew up a Fourth Draft, which was to be superseded by a Fifth Draft at the Chapter itself.

vocation de Religieux-Educateur”. The Institute had to wait a month to receive Circular 354, from 16 July, to know the results of the General Chapter.

It so happened that the first Circular⁵⁵ of the previous Superior, Br. Denis, had also dealt with ‘*Notre vie de religieux-éducateur*’ (Circ. 340, 6.1.1953). And in it he expressly returned to the doctrine of St. Pius X, with which we are familiar. It was reinforced in this case by a reference to a recent address of Pius XII to the Discalced Carmelites, along the same lines as his predecessor.⁵⁶

The Circular of Br. Denis, in keeping with his conception of Lasallian Identity, continues to underline the difference between the married state and the religious state: it defines from the difference. And, what is perhaps even more important: just as religious life is above married life, so too is it above the life of the educator. There are twenty pages to speak of Identity in a predominantly laudatory and exhortative tone⁵⁷. Br Nicet’s, on the other hand, defines from the point of view of integration: he considers

55 First: it can be considered as such, since the three previous ones (337, on the health of Br. Athanase; 338, on his death; and 339, on 11 October) reported on the Meeting of the Electoral Commission for the new Superior. It is presumed that he was involved in all three, as Vicar General. This one, 340, is dated 6.1.1953, with his first greeting at the beginning of the year.

56 It is the *Magis quam ineuntis* of 23.9.1951.

57 On page 13: “*Réformons donc une bonne fois notre opinion sur nous-mêmes et surtout, N.T.C.F., ne nous laissons plus impressionner par des insinuations tendancieuses, susceptibles de nous faire croire que nous sommes arrêtés à mi-chemin de notre développement organique*”.

the Brother's vocation from the actuality of the synthesis of religious and educator. Only six pages.

In his first greeting to the Brothers, the new Superior made his own and expressed the feeling already widespread in Lasallian circles that the world of education was changing. That is why his proposal, brief of course, is to find the identity of religious educators committed to renewing education. It is brief, as we have pointed out, but its importance lies in the change of perspective, the passage from opposition to integration. And integration by way of updating. This presupposed at least two things: that something was moving in the communities and in the Church and that this something was taken up as a matter of interest by the team of the General Presidency of the Lasallian Institution.

It is hard to believe that the coincidence of the title with that other text of his predecessor was not perceived. Something was urgently needed, as its publication anticipated that which was to come later on the General Chapter (16.7.1956).

An appendix

And it is precisely in this Circular on the Chapter where we find a very suggestive clue for our reflection. It guarantees the continuity of the matter and helps to ensure that what follows is included in a process of a hundred years. It is in its First Appendix.⁵⁸

58 The text, in Circular 354, *Resultats du Chapitre Général*, p. 119.

Six years earlier, on 15 May, the Pope had declared St John Baptist de La Salle Patron Saint of all Christian Educators. At the Chapter, they found that this opened a door to redirect the whole question of lay teachers in Lasallian establishments. Thus, they proposed the creation of an *“Association of Christian Educators, under the patronage of St. John Baptist de la Salle”*.

Its aim was “to deepen in Christian Educators the sense of responsibility and the dignity of their vocation, through devotion to their Patron Saint and the ideal he represents”.

For this purpose, a Register of the Association was established at the ‘Centro Lasalliano (C.P. 99B) Roma’. Anyone could be enrolled in it, provided they were faithful to their Christian duties and recited the Prayer of the Teacher before School and the invocation to the Patron Saint every school day.

Frequent confession and communion, a daily quarter of an hour of spiritual reading, a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament, a novena to the Saint in preparation for his feast and an annual retreat or recollection were recommended. The text underlines in italics that such practices were recommended.

It is worth re-reading these last paragraphs, a verbatim reproduction of what is expressed in the Appendix to the Circular. On closer inspection, that is, if properly contextualised, it appears that there is hardly any difference between what it proposes and what will be felt, for example, around the General Chapter of the year 2000, half a century later.

It seems clear that in 1956 there were people, and not a few, who would satisfy such conditions. It seems also clear that such association would make it possible to share the identity of the Lasallian project in each place and as a whole. And certainly, the conditions or practices, fixed or recommended, are in line with what has been proposed over the last twenty years.

There is a difference, however, which we discover immediately on interpreting the surprise caused by this text: it does not seek to arrive at a new Community but to articulate the dialogue between two parallel 'Communities', lay people and Brothers. Two groups, close, but two. Twenty years later, in 1976, we will find this same situation again with the configuration of the Signum Fidei Fraternity.

At that time, still before the Council, the sign of the numerical decline of the Brothers was missing.

When it appears, it will show to those who are able to see it that the proposals of the General Chapters of the 21st century are not so new and that those of that Appendix were much more than their drafters imagined.

The Origins and the Lasallian Identity

In the meantime, everything is silently maturing.

In our first pages we spoke of two forces, external and internal, which shaped in a certain sense the possible path of the Lasallian Community. Both converged in a way of understanding the Consecration of the Brother. The problem

was that both were interpreted from criteria unconnected with the Brother or to the origins of the Community. For this reason, as the double motto of returning the Founder to the Institute and returning the Institute to the Brothers⁵⁹ spread, the possibility of redefining these two forces, which we have pointed out for 1904, was opening up.

Thus, two years before the Chapter, in 1954, the study by Br. Maurice-Auguste, *Pour une meilleure lecture de nos Règles Communes*, had been published or at least circulated.⁶⁰ In it we find an understanding of the subject that is much more theological and spiritual than juridical: it is the man's lectures as sub-Director of the Second Novitiate during the preceding years. And we must not forget that the Director of the institution during all those years, Br. Nicet-Joseph, would become the Superior General.

This was the beginning of something that the Chapter recognised and promoted: the study of Lasallian sources. It was a great decision, the fruits of which would already be noticeable ten years later. It brought with it one of the dimensions required by Lasallian fidelity: the bridge to the

59 Br. Michel Sauvage comments on this motto in *The Fragile Hope of a Witness*, Rome, 2014, Lasallian Studies 18 (chap. 5, end). For him, it meant the attitude or a whole programme in the face of the inheritance received. It was, first of all, a diagnosis of reality, as is understandable. If it was a matter of giving something back to someone, it was because he lacked something of his own without which he could not look to the future. As an echo, cf. *Rule 2015*, art. 154.

60 In *Cahiers Lasalliens 5, Frère Maurice Hermans (1911-1987) et les origines de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, Rome, 1991, 468 pp. The text quoted, pages 318-403.

origins, freed from reading and forgetfulness. Without it, one could do no more than stick to clichés, already pure prejudice.

The theological and historical perspectives were still lacking, that is to say, a renewed understanding of consecration and an awareness of the development and exhaustion of the historical cycles within which institutions such as the Lasallian one emerge.⁶¹ The process was nevertheless present, although not yet clearly identified.

Thus, admittedly, when we review Br. Maurice's text, we feel much closer to conventional monastic and religious life than to the future of the Lasallian Community. The commentary is confined to two chapters of the *Rule*: Chapter 2 on the spirit of the Institute and Chapter 16 on regularity. In both cases his analysis is, as we say, spiritual, not canonical, and this was something to draw attention to at the time (between 1950 and 1954), but it leaves us somewhat unsatisfied.⁶²

To use a well-known reference: it is far from the systematic attempt of Brother Jourjon's commentary on the *Rule* written in 1967⁶³. It is true that between the two there is

61 We have already quoted Circular 353 of 17 June 1956, *Our vocation as religious-educators*, signed by the Superior General, the Vicar General and the eleven Brother Assistants.

62 M. Sauvage himself notes this in the presentation of the text. See in *Cahiers Lasalliens* 5, especially p. 320.

63 Cf. Jourjon, P.-A, *Pour un renouveau spirituel, Commentaire des Règles et Constitutions des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes établies au 39th Chapitre Général 1966-1967*, Rome 1969, 404 pp.

the Council, and that changes everything, but it allows us to realise that in the days of this General Chapter (and in the following days until the Council), the point of view is not comprehensive, that is to say, Br. Maurice does not comment on a document from the possibility of a model of religious consecration which on the one hand embraces the apostolic task and on the other moves around a truly lay universe.

There is a reason for this: in 1956 the subject is still considered more from the past than from the present. And it is worth considering its meaning.

According to past or present, 'Brother' and 'Community' mean two different things: today we understand it very clearly; then it was probably not possible even though they were living it or precisely because of that. Considered from the past, it raised the great issue of present viability, pondering it as something that could be faced by selecting the areas of commitment from their viability with respect to the origins. Considered from the present, it also raised the issue of viability, but there was a qualitative change: the reference to the past was more spiritual than literal.

That leap was the fascinating thing about Br. Maurice's presentation. That someone as serious and reliable as he was, dared to propose and to base his ideas on something else. Because he did not reason from sociological or historical novelty, but from the monastic tradition. Keeping a delicate balance between that tradition and what he knew of Lasallian origins, he offered a way of interpreting tradition that was not at all literalist.

The distinction would end up being imposed ten years later, but before that, in the run-up to 1956, it did not seem applicable to the Lasallian Institution. That was the novelty of Brother Maurice's commentaries, and we can understand why he limited himself to the chapters he commented on, without going any further. Judging from other issues and other reactions in the Chapter, we can believe that its members were aware of the dilemma, but did not consider it possible to face it. So, as they did specifically with the study of the Rule or with decentralisation in the animation of the Institute, they preferred to stagger actions over the next ten years.⁶⁴

Something was missing which would become evident a couple of years after the next General Chapter: the awareness of a change of era. This would deliver a new interpretation of everything, oriented towards the new as well as the past. Then the Lasallian Institution would dare to interpret differently the theological and political models that were stifling it.

Something, small but very important, was there: attention to the working world. On 31 May, at mid-morning, Bishop Cardijn addressed the Chapter on the movements of Catholic Action and in particular the Young Christian Workers. It was undoubtedly the harvest of the French Brothers, in the vanguard of the renewal of educational institutions, who were linking service for the poor and training for the world of work.

64 And certainly with the election of a new Superior General of the character of Br. Nicet-Joseph.

There, in this union, they found a mode of presence of the Spirit, basically nothing new, which opened doors towards an important institutional renewal. The matter would be echoed in European (and perhaps North American) Lasallian Institutions, given the special sensitivity of the social moment: social reconstruction in the days of the Cold War.

It was not an easy task: European states in general did not have the institutional experience and legislation to undertake projects in this field. And it was also essential to address the most familiar sectors (elementary and middle-class education).

For this reason, the Chapter could not shed much light either. It was clear that another order of things was at work, but the answer remained in the hands of the authorities. The change would come ten years later. And, in any case, things would not be so simple then either.

Time two: Renewing

In carrying out this revision [of the works], attention should be paid to the increasingly real fact that the influence of the Christian school depends more on its quality than on its number. For this reason, it is not necessary to begin by setting as a goal the preservation of the existing works, but rather the creation of living communities, with abundant and qualified personnel, capable of revitalising the school institution.

1967. *General Chapter*: Decl.49.

This second period is much clearer in its beginning than in its end.

It is easy to situate its beginning in the days of the Council, between 1958 and 1965. In those days there was a clear awareness of the need and the possibility of renewing everything, Church and Society. Once the Cold War was over, the world contemplated the possibility of a major new development. All social institutions took part in the same spirit.

In the Lasallian Community it became evident with the General Chapter of 1966-67 and was maintained in the following two Chapters, in 1976 and 1986.

There was no lack of tensions within that kind of euphoria of renewal. Nor was there a lack of different rhythms according to the Regions, in terms of results and awareness.

It can be understood as culminating in the General Chapter of 1993, with the presence of lay people as members of the Assembly. This marked the beginning of a new era.

We also develop it in three steps:

1. A *Declaration*: this refers to the *Declaration on the Brother* as the emblem of the General Chapter of 1966/7.
2. The Signum Fidei Fraternity: which in our study can be the emblem of the following Chapter, in 1976.
3. 1986: Sharing the Mission (1): Ten years later, a new Chapter, and in the *Rules*, that very graphic expression.

1. A Declaration

In 1966 a Chapter was planned as it had never been done before.⁶⁵

In the Lasallian Institution, Chapters were not convened to discuss the state of the community in general. Their basic purpose was to renew the leadership teams at the highest levels. Once the new leaders were elected, it would be up to them to study the situation and propose guidelines accordingly.⁶⁶ The election of Superiors was both a vote of confidence in their ability to lead the Institute and a recognition that the present was sufficiently comprehensible from past experience.

This time, 1966, the approach was different. In part it had already been conceived as an Assembly for reflection, with the Council as its context. Events, however, led its development far beyond all calculations. There were two circumstances that made it necessary.

65 Except perhaps, in 1834, in what was called the General Committee, devoted to the revision of the *Conduct of the Schools*. On the General Chapter of 1966-67 we have the study of Br. Josean Villalabeitia, *Un falso dilema*, in two volumes: I. *¿Religioso o maestro?*; II. *La respuesta capitular*, Roma, Lasallian Studies, nn. 15-16, 2008, 266 y 264 pp. (Only in Spanish). Essential.

66 This does not detract from the fact that at Chapters, commissions or groups of Capitulants were set up to help respond to questions proposed by the Brothers, in the way of 'notes'. There were, of course, always moments of awareness of current events, but the government or the response to these notes and to the situation in general was the responsibility of the Regime in the following period until the new assembly.

The first, obvious and fundamental, was the Council. It was a call for the whole Church to rethink itself in relation to the times in which it was living. The Council itself was the fruit of a twofold awareness: of historical change and of the need to reread the Gospel. Since, moreover, the Council indicated to all the institutions of the Church that they should propose similar paths, it followed that sooner or later the Congregation of St. John Baptist de La Salle had to do the same. Like other similar institutions, they could have delayed their celebration by two or three years in order to prepare it better, but they preferred to maintain their ten-year rhythm.

We must, however, make an observation about the scope of the Council in the Chapter: it reached it less through its documents than as a new spirit⁶⁷. It is an important observation, which we underline because we will have to repeat it a few paragraphs below.

The Council could not reach him in the serene assimilation of its documents, because in reality it ended in December 1965, four months before the Chapter sessions began. But

67 In *The Fragile Hope...* Brother Michel clearly points out that the Chapter of 66-67 was more in continuity with the preceding one than with the Council. He could not deny the relationship between the Council and the Chapter, but he wanted to underline that it was the Institute which was making its own way. Cf. o.c., 535f. In his *Pour un renouveau...*, Brother Jourjon, speaking of the work of drawing up the *Rules*, qualifies it by saying: «...Thus some of the members of the Commission who worked on the Rule began to understand that it was not so much a question for the religious of practising a Rule as of living according to a spirit» (O.c. 32).

its spirit did reach him, that is, its way of looking at life as something which flows with history and which at the same time is the face of God, the place where he manifests himself. The Council marked the Chapter by the part that certain Brothers had taken in its development (at least Nicet-Joseph, consultant as Superior, and Michel, as expert to his brother, the bishop), Brothers who would later be very much taken into account in Lasallian reflection.

This way of bringing the Council to the Chapter clearly had a very good side: all its work was oriented towards detecting the Signs of God at a particular moment. But at the same time there was a weak, premature side to all this: as a whole, a group of people, Brothers, the Chapter did not know so much about the Theology of Revelation, the Theology of the Church, the Theology of Consecration or the formidable discourse of *Gaudium et spes*, at least in its global or systematic vision. This meant a deficit in the basis for listening to the signs before them. So, naturally, this weakness was to be noted in the discrepancies or lack of harmony in the interpretation of what was to be done in the Lasallian present.⁶⁸

68 *Mutatis mutandis* it seems certain that the same thing was going to happen with the reception of the Chapter in the Institute. In this case, the documents arrived on time, promptly. There was no lack of information. There was, on the other hand, no shortage of substantiation. The spirit of the Assembly was received before the reasons for it. At least, they were received differently according to the different territories of the Institute and according to the different regional Superiors. This gave the post-Chapter a great fragility, which was also the cause of the great suspicion with which the Chapter documents were to be followed for the next ten years.

And there was a second cause, this time an internal one: the alliance between the techniques of conducting assemblies and the renewal of Lasallian awareness. The former was related to taking part in communication, of commitment on the part of all. The second was about renewing the synthesis between consecration and mission.

The North American Brothers were responsible for having arrived in Rome with a plan of democratisation or participation in the assembly, which their members gradually embraced, despite initial reluctance. The French Brothers, for their part, brought to the Chapter a very delicate awareness of the nature of the relationship between consecration and mission, always within the Lasallian tradition. Both views converged in a fundamental attitude for the future of the Institute: their motto remained that the Holy Founder be returned to the Institute; and that the Institute be returned to the Brothers⁶⁹. Participation and renewed fidelity.

As before in the reference to the Council, this circumstance must also be interpreted from two complementary points of view. The first, once again, was extremely positive: all the Capitulants accepted both the democratising spirit of the animation of the Institute and of the Chapter, as well as the new way of reading the Lasallian sources.

69 On the Chapter, we have the chronicles of Brothers Luke Salm (*A religious Institute in transition*, chaps. 2-5) and Michel Sauvage (*The fragile hope...*, chaps.9-12). Their reading is recommendable on these subjects, even though they are both very close in their thinking: because of the personal nature of their reflections, they allow us to imagine the other approaches which guided the Assembly. From a more strictly theological point of view, we should mention the work of Josean Villalabeitia, already cited, *Un falso dilema* (*A false dilemma*).

But not all could do so in the same way. That is to say, the first acceptance of both the procedure and the reading of the origins was also the occasion of disagreements, of practices which were not stem from a deep, shared conviction. Throughout the two sessions, and certainly during the inter-session period, this was very present and slowed down or even blocked many issues. The novelties were so fascinating that they provoked perceptions that were insufficiently grounded.

Both situations - the Council and the institutional renewal - would be decisive in terms of taking up our theme, that of the new community.

Renewing awareness, renewing definitions

The whole was outstanding and exemplary: it would be hard to find examples of assemblies like that one.

There were two Sessions: May-June, 1966 and October-December, 1967. Never had a Chapter lasted as long as each of its two sessions. Certainly, they were possible due to the Council proposal and its development over those four or five years. In turn, what it sought to do was to update and formulate the Identity of the Lasallian Community.

This required distinguishing and harmonising the two tasks of any such assembly: the theoretical discourse and the organisational structures. Immediate experience and subsequent history have shown that even that long year and a half of Chapter work was not enough to achieve both objectives.

In fact, it had all started, definitely, five years earlier with the first versions of the *Common Rules*. So, when the sessions opened in the last days of April, there was already a path already followed (in this case, three successive drafts of the *Rules*). The Chapter was not starting from scratch and the spirit of the task was not only indicated but already begun. It did not matter that much of what had been done had to be redone: continuity was in the spirit of creative commitment already underway.

Unfortunately, from the very first days an ‘unseen character’, unforeseen character appeared: the introduction of the priesthood. The issue was not new, of course. Its presentation was really new, almost by virtue of the vow⁷⁰,

70 It took place on 27 April, at 5 pm. The Cardinal wanted to point out the obligation of the religious to answer the Council, in *Perfectae caritatis*. His speech was brief, 6 pages. His reflection was general, global, on renewal, without proposing any concrete initiative, except on the subject of the priesthood. The idea of the identity of the Brothers, as seen in the text of his lecture, was indebted to the theory of the two ends and the subordination of the second (the apostolic) to the first (personal sanctification), expressly invoked. It does not present a sufficient vision of the integral lay nature of the Brother’s vocation. From there, in a clear juxtaposition of the topic, he invoked docility and obedience before introducing the theme of the priesthood, presenting it as an indication of the Council: the acceptance of priests within the Institute, to meet its own needs. It was later realised that this was more a matter for him and his Sacred Congregation rather than the Council document itself. We do not know whether he expected that evening the rejection he would receive in the following weeks. For the Chapter, which after a few days of retreat had just begun that very morning, it was an unfortunate beginning. (The Cardinal’s text, in AMG ED 251-252, 4. In French and headed ‘*Confidentiel; ce texte ne pourrait être publié qu’avec l’assentiment du Frère Supérieur Général*’).

by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, Antoniutti. If a procedure had been needed to get the Assembly on its feet, no better one could have been found.

The theme of the priesthood had and has a meaning of its own⁷¹; but at the time it served as a catalyst for two ways of interpreting the person of the Brother. Two different horizons opened up for the Chapter, depending on whether its reference was to the priesthood or to the laity.

The way of the future, as was to be seen in subsequent decades and Chapters, lay in the second, but it was the first that absorbed that tremendous month of May. Thus, within a great unanimity on the non-introduction of the priesthood, two hardly compatible approaches or rationales emerged. For some, rejecting the priesthood delivered the rejection of any other secularisation; for others, on the other hand, it meant underlining the specific work of the Brother in its most secular dimension. They arrived at the Brother's identity either by relying on the secularity of his work or by ignoring it.

It was a sad matter, because it consumed a month and a half of the Chapter, time very much needed to advance

71 The synthesis of the issue was the subject of Circular 386 of 2.7.66, the first session of the Chapter having just ended. Its title indicates that it is the First Report of the 39th General Chapter and it is devoted exclusively to a report on the lay character of the Institute. It is 60 pages long, i.e. a sufficiently detailed report.

in the task itself⁷². But it was positive because it helped to see the possible consequences of the reflection on the Lasallian Community in the days of the Council. Thanks to what could not be done in those first two months, the Assembly scheduled itself for another year and a half.

However, judging by the documentation that has survived from the intercession year, perhaps its fifteen months were too long and perhaps, also, the three months of the second session were closed just on the surface, so that a third session would have been necessary.

The documentation shows that during the months of the intersession, each of the groups made progress in their reflection, unquestionably. What is less clear is whether any of them moved towards harmony with the others⁷³.

72 Br. Bernard-Mérian who, as Secretary of the Commission presented the *Declaration* to the Assembly (6 November 1967), recalled it from its opening paragraphs. He was an excellent facilitator in the work of drafting the basic text. Surely this had something to do with his appointment as Assistant for the French-speaking missions, twenty days later. His biography, in Circular 477, is very interesting.

73 It can be seen in the text of Br. Jean Brun, in August-September 1967, *Note relative au Project de Déclaration sur le frère dans le Monde d'aujourd'hui* (AMG, 2.8.2, 6 pp., typewritten). He sharply distinguishes and expresses the two starting points which clashed in those months: reading the identity of the Brother from the Mission and reading it from the Consecration. In both cases, the subject is being approached from a pre-understanding (this is the term he uses, and presumably, consciously, knowing its meaning and scope). Personally, he chooses to start from consecration and community, an option '*à partir de laquelle nous pouvons nous ouvrir à une compréhension différente de notre vocation de frère*'. Excellent, the sketch that follows in his note on the development of this different understanding. One can see his mark in the *Declaration*.

The different tone that we can see in the documents of the time was reflected in the great tensions that occupied the months of September and October.

By the time they had arrived at approaches that were more or less acceptable to all, it was almost November and there were only forty or fifty days left to draft both the *Rule* and the *Declaration*. It was clearly insufficient: the abundant documents left by that Chapter produced as a whole the impression of a lack of unity, as if a synthesis or unifying vision was still lacking in the resulting system.

Perhaps the best proof of these statements is to be found in the process that took place around the outline of the *Declaration*. In the summer of 1967, the French Brothers⁷⁴ published *Intersession*, a small volume of 129 pages already proposing a plan for the Declaration. It presented basically two parts: the first on Mission, broken down into three areas, and the second on the Vocation and Consecration of the Brother. In September, already in Rome in working groups, the positions were very tense between one and the other and they ended up accepting the reversal of the order of the two parts. They understood that in this way the two opposing orientations were taken into account.

But changing the order did not necessarily mean having reached a synthesis.

Fortunately, the source criterion, generator of the whole system, appears very clearly. We see it, for example, in

74 Brothers Patrice, Michel and Félicien were responsible for the drafting.

numbers 25 and 26 of the *Declaration*. They were the final numbers of the first part, which was already opening towards the second part.

Community life is more firmly established and more effectively renewed to the extent that the Brothers work together for the achievement of a common objective, the building up of the kingdom of God. The communion of minds becomes more intimate...when the members are more aware of their apostolic mission... (25.4).

Within the People of God, the Brothers... are called to exercise the function of witness, investing it with a specific character. They are signs of the action and presence of the Spirit of God in our own day; signs of the present reality of the new world... (26.2).

The Brothers are called to bear the witness to their total consecration to God at the very heart of their educational activity... (26.3).

The true community life constitutes a living sign of the central reality that it is the Brother's mission to announce. The love that God has shown to men in Jesus Christ becomes the principle of unity among them... (26.4).

In its second half, the *Declaration* expresses the sense of the areas of the Brother's apostolic work. There, in speaking of the revision and innovation of educational works we find:

The school will be molded into community only through a faculty rich in the diversity and the unity of its members. For this reason the Brothers work closely with lay teachers,

who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life and of civic affairs. The Brothers act in such a way as to guarantee that the lay teachers are involved in the whole life of the school: with the catechesis, apostolic movements, extra-curricular activities, as well as in administration and matters of policy. (46.3).

Consequently (paragraph already quoted):

To undertake this reevaluation, it must be remembered that the influence of the Christian school will come more and more from its quality rather than from how many of them there are. The first objective, then, will not be to preserve existing institutions, but to constitute vibrant communities adequately staffed by personnel of such quality as to be an animating influence in the school institution. (49, 3).⁷⁵

Quite rightly, when the *Rules* have to define the consecration of the Brother, they express it as follows:

Incorporated into Christ by baptism, the Brothers are already consecrated to the glory of God. By their religious profession they confirm their baptismal consecration and express it more fully (IV.b).

The Brothers make their consecration effective within an ecclesial community. This community becomes for Christians a special sign of the covenant between God and

75 We will return to these texts in *Part Two*, because of their exceptional value in naming realities that would remain crucial half a century later.

mankind. It is an affirmation of the duty and the possibility of transforming the world by the spirit of the Gospel. But it is also a reminder to the world that it must pass through death in order to be transformed one day (IV.c).⁷⁶

Community and educational community

Today, half a century after they were written, these texts continue to surprise us by their audacity. The leap they represented with respect to the previous spirit and vocabulary was certainly great, so much so that it was in fact excessive, beyond the capacity of those ultimately responsible for turning the ideal into daily reality. This was seen in the presentation and application of the Chapter documents in the different territories of the Lasallian world.

It is true that the great gesture of awareness of the Chapter could not address all areas of what was possible. Today we can clearly appreciate the great gap which it left pending: the real, concrete Lasallian Community, the one which in fact was already in those days animating the educational institutions. Logically, the Chapter was urged by the renewal of the person of the Brother and the first of its community domains. It focused on this and left the door open for what was to come later. But this new thing

76 To see the scope of these statements, see Jourjon, P.-A, *Pour un renouveau...*, pp. 157ff. Also interesting in this respect is the collective work *La Declaración, 30 años después*, (Valladolid, 1998, 254 pages) with eight studies on various aspects of the document.

did not come. It was the great damage inflicted by the priesthood controversy.

In fact, that controversy was experienced on two levels throughout the Chapter. First of all, the most explicit one: whether a community of lay religious could or should establish the priesthood within itself, without altering its identity. Its process was what it was and was closed by the end of May 1966.

Because there was another level: that of suspicion, that of the interpretation of motives. Thus, beneath the rejection of the priesthood, there were those who interpreted another reality that was not clearly recognised. It was the reduction of the Lasallian Community to the status of a secular Institute, that is to say, the modification of the

status of religious educators. Its presumed key, hidden, was in the way of considering the vows, the profession.⁷⁷

It was a set of misunderstandings and sometimes ill will. It was also ridiculous and a cause of institutional embarrassment. It would lead the practice of the principles of the *Declaration* and the *Rules* to the internal or intimate domain of the Brother's life. It would not allow him to follow his natural development by reaching out to the whole group of people who operated in schools and other educational projects.

The controversy of the priesthood was the ultimate cause of the Lasallian Institute's neglect of what in those very days it was calling with an important expression, of wide fecundity in the following half century: the educational community.

77 In the years preceding the Chapter and even the Council, two formidable studies on the identity of the Brother had been published: the dissertations of Brothers Saturnino Gallego and Michel Sauvage. Both of them were to have a significant influence on the Chapter. But neither of them contained an adequate reflection on Lasallian identity in relation to secularity, that is to say, with the possible new modes of lay commitment. They were based on the relationship between the Identity of the Brother and the Priestly, clerical identity. If the Cardinal had not been present at the Chapter, perhaps the theme of the Priesthood would have appeared just the same, but from an internal perspective. And then it would have been part of the *Declaration*'s own reflection, which would have taken place earlier and with more serenity. The result was probably that the Chapter used a concept of consecrated life that was defective or incomplete because it was improvised. At the very least, it was necessarily a concept seen more in relation to priesthood and order than to laity and baptism.

In fact, by not developing the discourse towards the area of the relationship between Brothers and lay people, the newly named 'educational community' insensibly drifted towards 'educational organisation'. And in this slide, exacerbated by the significant loss of Brothers, it was accompanied by an unequal but undeniable disappearance of the Brothers' communities themselves, which became something closer to educational work groups than to meaningful communities. Thus, paradoxically, as the discourse of the real Lasallian Community - let us say 'mixed', for the moment - did not develop, the crisis established by the renewal of the formulas of the Identity proposed by the Chapter was exacerbated.

This is something we see today, of course, much better than they did then. Nevertheless, the journey of the Lasallian Institute over the next ten years was full of sufficient signs of the process. All were able to experience some or other crises.⁷⁸

It was certainly not the least that within the General Council itself there were two groups, for and against the spirit of the Chapter, as became apparent in sometimes tendentious publications directed from Rome against

78 Two examples: the perplexities about the nature of the 'vow' commitments (vows, promises, none) and the animation of the Community from the Brothers' group, without a Director.

Rome⁷⁹. And the matter did not even end with the necessary change of direction ten years later, with the drastic reduction in the number of Council members, in search of a more constructive harmony. The wound of the loss of some 40% of the Brothers⁸⁰ did not make things any easier.

And yet the clue was right there, within everyone's reach. It was necessary, however, to read the Council without

79 This is the publication *Ou va l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiniennes?*, a booklet of 88 pages. in the *Documents-Paternité* Series, monthly no. 141, June 1969, Editions St.-Michel, Rennes, unsigned and clearly disqualifying Brother Superior and the General Chapter. With the opposite position, the *Communication aux Frères des Ecoles Chrétiniennes, 'communication décidée par le Conseil Général'*, edited by Brothers Michel Sauvage, Patrice Marey, Maurice Hermans and Arthur Bonenfant, of the General Council, Rome, 1969, 111 + 48*pages. Regarding the climate in which these things were happening, let us note that already in 1971, in the Circular on the Intercapitular meeting, already quoted, *Milestones for a new five years*, there remained these terrible phrases: "It was emphasised that the main witness to the living unity of the Institute will be given by the General Council, which is not merely a Council of Administration. It is, rather, a true community. It is not a group of people living together, but a group of religious who aspire to a communion of thought and life. Each member of the General Council must be more and more a witness to this unity and communion, whether he is working at the Centre of the Institute or representing the Brother Superior in a District of the Institute". (o.c., 39)

80 This is what the Superior, Br. Charles Henry, noted in his address to the following General Chapter in 1976. The first half of the address focused on the reference to the life cycles of religious Institutions, the second half on the signs of a new time, specifically in relation to the vitality of the Lasallian Institute. We will refer to this text in the following section.

prejudice. This is what *Lumen gentium* says in chapter VI, ‘*de Religiosis*’:

Thus *the profession of the evangelical counsels, then, appears as a sign which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfilment of the duties of their Christian vocation*. The people of God have no lasting city here below, but look forward to one that is to come. And since this so, the religious state, whose purpose is to free its members from earthly cares, *more fully manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods* are already possessed here bellow. Furthermore, it not only *witnessess to* the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ, but it foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom...”⁸¹

81 LG 44.4. The italics are ours. The corresponding Council text: “*Evangelicorum proinde consiliorum professio tamquam signum apparet, quod omnia Ecclesiae membra ad officia vocationis christianaem impigre adimplenda efficaciter attrahere potest ac debet. Cum enim Populus Dei hic manentem civitatem non habeat, sed futuram inquirat, status religiosus, qui suos asseclas a curis terrenis magis liberat, magis etiam tum bona coelestia iam in hoc saeculo praesentia omnibus credentibus manifestat, tum vitam vitam novam et aeternam redemptione Christi acquisitam testificat, tum resurrectionem futuram et gloriam Regni coelestis praenuntiat. Formam quoque vitae, quam Filius Dei accepit, mundum ingressus ut faceret voluntatem Patris, quamque discipulis Ipsum sequentibus proposuit, idem status pressius imitatur atque in Ecclesia perpetuo repraesentat. Regni Dei denique super omnia terrestria elevationem eiusque summas necessitudines peculiari modo patefacit; supereminentem quoque magnitudinem virtutis Christi regnantis atque infinitam Spiritus Sancti potentiam, in Ecclesia mirabiliter operantem, cunctis hominibus demonstrat*”. The sense of the Religious Life underlying this paragraph was perhaps what was missing in Brun’s quoted reflection, so that the two approaches could meet.

“... to free its members from earthly cares”: the debatability of the expression shows that not even the Council could advance in such an important way in the Theology of Consecration, and even less so when the integration between consecrated life and apostolic life was in question. It would take time, decades.

But it did advance in spirit, taking seriously paragraphs such as the one quoted above.

There is in it, first of all, the affirmation that the Brothers' Community is '*tamquam signum*', something like a fundamental reference, a sign of the definitive path, a prelude. Then: this 'sign' '*potest ac debet*' behaves as such and proposes to the People of God a model of the proximity and actuality of the Afterlife. And this is not something that is indicated as belonging to one group within the Church. It is said of all its members, of all, because this Constitution is for all. The message is clear: every Christian, every member of God's people, can connect and feel on his or her own path towards an encounter with God. Anyone who believes this, within an educational institution, is a potential member of a new community.

More importantly, the task of this potential new community will not be to do anything, but to remember the proximity of the Lord.⁸²

This is something that is all too easily overlooked and produces very serious mistakes: the 'task' is what is usually

82 As will be seen below, this theme will be the soul of our *Part Two*.

called the ‘mission’, that is, what someone is ‘sent’ (*missus/missio*) to do. That something, as *Lumen gentium* expresses it (years later the *Code of Canon Law* will take it up) is not to do anything but to refer to the reality of the Lord. This makes the apostolic commitment a sacrament of God, that is to say, that at the heart of the commitment the Kingdom of God is expressed, not simply referring to social welfare (indisputable and necessary), but taking part in the revelation of God. This is the concrete ‘ministry’ of the Lasallian Community, in 1700 or in 1967.

Dialogue between the various ways of being members of the People of God is both possible and necessary. It is clear.

Had there been a different serenity, this orientation would have given so many communities of consecrated life another vision of their present and their future. It certainly did not mean the disappearance of the consecrated character in the Brothers’ community. It meant the way to establish another model of community, in which all would find a way of living complementary to each other.

Ten years later, the Commission charged with preparing a paper on the Vows would not present something very different. But the Chapter refused to consider it and so the Lasallian Community was condemned to wander along vague paths for the next generation.

From this point of view, it can be said that the great Chapter of 1966/67, and especially its *Declaration on the Brother in the World Today*, did not succeed in bringing the Lasallian Institution into the new times as it intended.

2. The Signum Fidei Fraternity

From our point of view, the 1976 General Chapter began in 1971 with the meeting of Brother Visitors in Rome. As things were going, it was a necessary break between the two Chapters, past and next.⁸³

One of the issues to be examined by the Visitors and the General Council was that of the vows, a topic which it is not difficult to imagine, points directly to the Identity of the Brother. The practice of profession was much discussed, with such manifestations as the substitution of vows for promises, of perpetuity for indefinite temporariness, of attachment to the local community rather than to the Institute.

The diversity of the formulas was a clear sign of dissatisfaction with what had been established. Without our being able to determine the causes, it was clear to everyone that there was an inadequacy between what had been received and the new generation of Brothers whom it was proposed to link definitively to the Lasallian Community. Along with this, logically, the variety indicated the diversification of the density of the bond, or in other words the different ways of belonging to the Lasallian project.

83 Circular 394, November 1971, entitled: *Milestones for a new five years*, has remained for posterity. We have already quoted it several times. It is an impassioned forty or so pages which helps us to take the pulse of the Institute five years after the previous Chapter and the Council. It is well worth reading and re-reading.

The Council and the Chapter had entailed an unknown shock for the Congregation. If, in addition, we add the high proportion of young Brothers, plus the psychosis of social change, protest and hope, we can understand that the effervescence must have been huge⁸⁴. In these circumstances, the 1971 meeting determined to set up an international Commission, chaired by the Brother Assistant for Formation, to study the question of the vows and to prepare a report for the next General Chapter.⁸⁵

There was, however, from the beginning, a strange or logical circumstance, depending on how we look at it, which was to have a powerful influence on the work: along with the international Commission proper, another was set up in Rome, made up of four of the Brother Assistants or

84 It is not surprising that Circular 394 (*Milestones...*) opens with these words of the Superior: "It seems to me very appropriate to point out that none of us felt entirely satisfied with our work or with the results achieved...". And he ended by saying: "Let us not waste time mourning over the errors found in the changes in our civilisation or in the situation of the Church in the last five years..." .

85 To better understand this direction: that same year, 1971-1972, Brother Sauvage gave a course at the *Jesus Magister* Institute on Consecrated Life, which he published in *Lasallianum* in May 1973. In 1969 J.-M. Tillard had already published *Les Religieux au cœur de l'Église*, which was very much in mind in that course. It should be noted in order to better understand the orientation of Brother Michel and the Commission. Since then, much literature has appeared on the subject. Within the whole and because of its harmony with what we have been saying, we point out the thesis of Gabriel Leal *El seguimiento de Jesús, según la tradición del rico, estudio redaccional y diacrónico de Mc 10, 17-31* (Verbo Divino, 1996): well-founded, concise, complete, although unfortunately little known.

General Councillors. And certainly not with the same attitudes towards what they were trying to prepare.⁸⁶

The dynamics of those two Commissions meant a very powerful sign of the Lasallian Institute's awareness in this regard. The two came to the Chapter and then disappeared. The Assembly was not even able to study the Report of the International, because the first part of its Report was judged to be unrealistic and all inclined towards the conversion of the Lasallian Congregation into a secular Institute. Nor was it helped by the lack of time at the end of 7 or 8 weeks of sessions, with only ten days left. The Chapter confined the topic to the series of subsequent publications on the various themes studied by the Commissions.⁸⁷

The International Commission on the Vows and the Signum Fidei Fraternity

It is worth remembering, however. Right or wrong, it was the fruit of a great deal of work and clearly expresses a sig-

86 Cf. Villalabeitia, Josean, *Consecración y audacia, la Comisión Internacional de los Votos (1971-1976)* Rome, 2007, pages. 51-83. Regarding this perception, cf. Salm, L., *A religious institute...*, p. 87.

87 It can be commented on in different ways, according to languages and cultures. Thus we can recall the phrase of Sallust in the Jugurta War: '*Concordia res parvae crescunt; discordia maximae dilabuntur*', that is, when people want to understand each other, however little they have, they get a lot; whereas, if they do not want to, whatever good they may have, however good it may be, disappears. It was a pity for that North African kingdom: it disappeared.

nificant state of consciousness in the Institute. The Report had - has - four sections.⁸⁸

The first is an overall presentation of the subject, starting in particular from the several thousand Brothers concerned by the circumstance of the renewal or emission of vows. It concludes:

The Commission believes that the future of the Institute is to be sought neither in a return to past structures (which does not mean denying the value of Tradition), nor in the maintenance of a state of affairs whose limits have already been clearly perceived by the Brother Visitors. The Commission considers that it has opened up a path which can deliver a positive solution.

The second and third sections first of all study the diversity or even casuistry which is taking place regarding the commitments of the young Brothers, as well as the question of the perpetuity or definitiveness of the commitment. It is a realistic and at the same time imaginative reflection, both in its description of the situation and in the alternatives which it proposes in response.

The fourth is devoted to the content of the Vows, with specific reference to those of Celibacy, Poverty, Obedience and Association.

Strictly speaking, the first three did not raise any issue: their reality was not in dispute. The fourth, however, did,

88 See in AMG ED. 277/2, doc. 10. And *Consagración y audacia...*, pages. 259-297.

for which something new was proposed. Problems could arise here. There are four paragraphs, the first two of which concisely recall the existence of this vote in the early days of the Institute and its progressive insignificance until its disappearance at the time of the Report.

The third paragraph proposes three ways of considering Association:

- (a) Association could be the integrating element for the person of the Brothers, for the Community and for the Mission. It could express in a synthetic way the consecration of the Brother who unites himself with other men who, like him, wish to live fraternal love and to exercise a common mission.
- b) it is possible to consider various forms of belonging to the Institute in terms of the form and content of the commitment. In this hypothesis, association could be a major unifying factor among the different members of the Institute.
- c) Such an upgrading would also go in the direction of a rediscovery of the specificity of our religious life (according to the dynamism of the origins) and of a new understanding of the values hitherto linked to the triad (whose abstract and timeless character is more and more criticised).

Logically, in the following paragraph they put forward these suggestions:

- That association for a fraternal life and the fulfilment of a common mission become the focal point of our consecration.
- That the commitment to live by association be made within the local community, the place of fraternal life and of the exercise of a concrete mission, but within the larger framework of the District.
- That association for fraternal life and the exercise of a common mission be the only vow explicitly formulated by the Brothers. This does not mean that the values expressed by the triad are rejected. But we think that such an option would better translate the dynamism of the Brother's life project and would give a more specific orientation to certain values linked to the triad: witness of a simple life, service to the poor, commitment to a community life, personal and collective search for God's plan.

This is what the Report said and continues to say.

It was, therefore, in line with the speech (rather than 'report') with which Br. Superior opened the Chapter. Br. Charles devoted it to reflecting on the history of religious

congregations, that is to say, on their future⁸⁹. His starting point was very clear, and the man knew it well in his own flesh:

...If there is one thing that the history of religious life reveals, it is that religious institutes are not fixed and static entities, but rather elements of a historical process that unfolds unceasingly over time, and that historical process is a significant social movement in the history of Western Culture.

Religious institutes have emerged in response to dramatic social changes in the Church and in the broader cultural and political developments within Western civilisation, in order to become dynamic forces for shaping and changing both Church and Society... (p. 1).

Not just anything goes. Not even the best goodwill can improvise. The Superior was well aware of the risks of superficial opinions, always on the verge of remaining pamphlets.

89 As the same text noted, it followed the approach or spirit of Hostie's book, *Vie et mort des ordres religieux*, plus the studies of Lawrence Cada and Raymond Fitz, *The recovery of religious life*, and David Fleming's book *Life cycle of religious communities*. The speech was welcomed by a standing ovation from the entire assembly, Luke Salm notes, adding: "The approval was perhaps more about the person everyone loved, rather than the content of the presentation. The delegates were aware that the presentation was, in fact, their swan song" (*A religious institute...*, p.104). The Chapter was obviously aware of the tensions within the General Council.

When we study the relatively small number of institutes which have been able to revitalise themselves after a period of crisis and decline, we find three characteristics in all of them:

- a transforming response to the ‘signs of the times’,
- a rediscovery of the charism of the foundation,
- a profound renewal of faith and prayer centred on Christ (p.5).

Suggesting clues and with the vocabulary of the days of the Council, the Superior lists six ‘signs of the times’ that call especially to an institution like the Lasallian one. They concern youth, justice and the third world. Their common denominator, the perspective of Church:

... a growing ecclesial sense, a deeper and deeper awareness that we are called to serve the body of Christ which is the Church and that the special charism given to each congregation is for the good of the Church, that all decisions taken within the Institute should be taken in view of the Church... what the Church expects of us..., antithesis of self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction (p.10).

In the speech the Superior does not quote Paul VI⁹⁰, but it was six months since the publication of *Evangelii nuntiandi*. And in that text the Pope spoke of the great drama of

90 If it does so with the Synod of Bishops of 1971, it is legitimate to link that Synod with the meeting of Visitors, so strongly remembered by the Institute. The Superior was very aware of this. (In the text the date 1972 appears in error, confused with the Stockholm Assembly, on the same theme as the Synod, justice and peace).

our time, the separation between faith and culture⁹¹. The horizon could not have been more suitable for the renewal of a religious Institute such as the Lasallian one, in its persons and in its structures.

It was not enough. The chronicle, the day-to-day running of the Assembly, provides more pain and suspicion than hope. And yet no Chapter had ever been prepared with such rigour, with so much participation by the Institute. It was the largest in Lasallian history, with 158 members.

Today, remembering the prejudice of the dissolution as a secular Institute, but without the bitterness that this entailed at the time, we hear all these things in a different way. They help us to understand the endearing contradiction between the rejection of the Study of the Commission and the acceptance, with the whole Chapter as witness, of the consecration of 11 persons as *Signum Fidei* on that Pentecost Sunday, which they celebrated on Saturday 5 June.⁹²

91 EN, 20. This is another of the places we will necessarily come across again in our *Part Two*. And with this same reference to Paul VI.

92 In Rome, 7 people; 2 more in Spain; and 2 others, one in Italy and one in Brazil. There were 6 young Brothers in perpetual profession (District of Valencia). In all this we follow the references of the *Bulletin...* No.250 (2005), as expressed by Br. Victor Franco, then General Councillor with special responsibility for relations with the SF Fraternity. It is striking that neither Br. Marcoux, chronicler, nor Br. Carmody, secretary, make any reference to the event in their reviews.

Five years earlier, in the Circular on the Intercapitular meeting, it had been written:

The spirit of courage and inventiveness shown in his time by Saint John Baptist de La Salle could today give us the courage to experiment with different possibilities of incorporating in some way into our apostolate, as special collaborators, young people who, although they have no vocation for the Institute, wish to take part in our educational mission and perhaps also in our community life for a more or less long period of time. Several Visitors have said that they have met people who are interested in this, former students and catechists, lay teachers and priests, former Brothers. Our federations of former students must certainly have many members who would gladly take part in our apostolate as valued collaborators, bringing to our mission valuable elements for real contacts with the needs of the world.⁹³

Without quoting it, these last lines evoke number 46.3 of the *Declaration*:

The school will be molded into community only through a faculty rich in the diversity and the unity of its members. For this reason the Brothers work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life and of civic affairs...

In the Lasallian world, a ‘Signum Fidei’ was and is a type of person who is publicly linked to the Lasallian project and spirit, while maintaining his family life, that is to say,

93 *Milestones for a new five years* (Circ. 394), 29.

without sharing the Brothers' community. The Chapter took up this magnificent gesture by making it official⁹⁴ . At the same time, of course, it showed a certain contradiction in its own in these matters.

In fact, at least on the surface, the consecration of someone as Signum Fidei means bringing into the Brothers' community someone who is not a Brother, but who has publicly promised to live the same spirit as the Brothers. This person also commits himself/herself to draw up a life project similar to that of the Brothers, to renew his/her commitment periodically and to make it definitive after a certain period of time.

It does not have a canonical figure, that is to say, there is no place at that time that can accommodate this figure in the Code, at least in its relationship with the Lasallian Institute. But from the Institute it is proposed for these new 'members' of its project, a spiritual and apostolic discourse very similar to that of the Brothers.

94 In reality, the Consecration of the Signum Fidei was not promoted by the Chapter. It had its own path and the Chapter made it its own in a silent rather than passive way. The fact is that its assumption by the Assembly would remain for the Institute a strong, if somewhat distant, reference point. This would be proven by the evolution of the whole issue in the following decades. It was also evident in the awkwardness of the daily relationship between the Fraternity, the local Lasallian cadres and the various forms of Association. Very useful, in this regard, from the 43rd General Chapter "Associated for the educational service of the poor...", Circular 447, p. 6, Rome, 1 October 2000.

The endearing contradiction lies in having assumed that someone can approach the life of a community, although without getting too close, and at the same time deny the possibility of the Brothers' community taking on these persons by associating with them or by associating all together in the same Lasallian project. It is the implicit recognition of a reality which needs to be resolved but which is not faced as an institutional challenge. Hence the illusory response of having a model based on the statute of the Brother, not on the baptismal reality.

Recently - 2013 - the International Assembly of Signum Fidei Fraternities collected and disseminated the specific statute of the SF community. In it, forty years after its first constitution, one can see above all the spirit of its beginnings, its statute, its formulas of consecration and organisation. It is an exemplary testimony, reflecting the tone of Brothers Paulus Adams and Manuel Olivé⁹⁵ when they took on the task of responding to the first requests from non-Brother members to be associated with the Lasallian project.

And precisely this reflection of 1976 expressed in 2013 says something else at the same time: how is it possible that this formula is still present half a century later, without having merged with the other formulas of association which have emerged over the last half century?

95 Br. Paulus Adams was Assistant to the Superior, General Councillor; Br. Manuel Olivé was in charge, in Rome, of the work of Alumni.

It is worth asking the question calmly. The answer appears immediately and we have presented it above, speaking about the Appendix to Circular 354 of the 1956 Chapter: in the definition of the SF, the focus is naturally placed on personal faith, on the attitude of commitment of the members of the emerging Fraternity. In this way it seeks to respond to a vocation or need of people who cannot be members of the Brothers' community. This is why the statute of the SF Fraternity is an adapted reproduction of that of the Brothers.

But it is not concerned with the latter, simply because it is not established with the inclusion of both groups in a common entity in mind.

As is evident, inclusion in the Lasallian tradition already presupposes a basic belonging to something that transcends the Fraternity itself, although it is an approach that works outside the Brothers' Community. When, on the other hand, twenty or thirty years after the constitution of SF we encounter the question of Association, the approach will not be the same. This time, without underestimating the personal dimension, the faith and the commitment of the associated person, we will think of the community of Associates as well as that of the Brothers.

In 1976 Signum Fidei and the Brothers are two parallel lines. In 2013, Association and Brothers are two confluent lines. In the first case there are two 'communities' that are distinguished; in the second there are people who approach the Brothers' community. In the first case, a new 'community' responds to a need external to that of the Brothers. In the second, the need is at both poles.

In 1976 it had to be that way. The Chapter made a massive exercise of closure and security, distancing itself from any substantial novelty (from the priesthood, which came up again in the debates, to secularity, which was constantly present).⁹⁶ From this point of view, it could be said that in the institution of the first SF Fraternity there is something reactionary, not in its outcome, but in the attitude with which the Brothers assume it. It is, perhaps, a gesture of self-defence of the Brothers' Institute in the face of possible modifications to its inherited identity.

And yet, the Chapter went so far as to determine that

...in addition to postulants, other young men or men of mature age can be associated with the apostolic action and community life of the Brothers, without having made religious profession. (The particular statute and the contract will be specified by the local community, in agreement with the District). A person or a group of people can be associated to the apostolic action of the Brothers and to the spiritual life which animates them without taking part in their community life.⁹⁷

96 But he could not, could not, finish with any topic. The internal climate of the Assembly did not allow it. He left them in the hands of the new General Council. In the following years, the new Council issued circulars on each of the outstanding issues.

97 Circular 403, October 1976, with the chronicle and results of the Chapter. The paragraphs quoted are Propositions 44 and 45.

It is also true that the Chapter states that

it found itself in possession of abundant data denoting a changing situation". In its resolutions, the Assembly expressed the same division and uncertainty as the Institute. The doctrine made available to us by the Council and by the previous Chapter had not been sufficiently assimilated.⁹⁸

Faced with texts like this, although the interpretation we are proposing may seem forced, we believe it is not. Not, of course, if we take into account the whole dynamic of the Chapter. We cannot forget, for example, that even in the last days of a long and tense session, the suspicion of a drift towards the Secular Institute was expressly raised. Nor can we do so with so many unreflective interventions between the table and the assembly, examples of aggressiveness and reproaches, sometimes staging tensions in the General Council itself over the concept of consecration.

Nor can we forget, even if this time it belongs to the social or cultural context of the Chapter, its place within what can be considered as the possibilist reaction that followed the great ruptures in the significance of May 1968.

Let us recall that in the face of such a phenomenon, the whole world was overwhelmed by a paradoxical attitude: on the one hand, the need to redefine social bonds was accepted, but on the other, the apocalypse to which it seemed to lead was rejected. Therefore, we find, first,

98 Circular 403, concluding his reflections on Consecration and Vows, p. 47.

the global economic and authoritarian reaction, the best emblem of which was the constitution of the Trilateral Commission⁹⁹. But those days also marked an important pause on the road to freedom and democratic renewal, not forgetting the so-called Gulf War.

Such a context must have weighed heavily on the Chapter and made it a more tense and large assembly than a constructive and serene one, as reflected in its minutes and chronicles¹⁰⁰. There was, however, an internal circumstance that helps to explain everything more fully: the Capitulants' deficient and disparate understanding of the Theology of Religious Consecration. It is perhaps more accurate to describe it globally as anachronistic, i.e. situated in another time in history.

99 The great sign of that decade, the constitution of the Trilateral Commission, dates from 1973 (in Tokyo, it sought to strengthen political and economic structures in the face of the wave of upheavals that threatened to overturn the order established after the Second World War). It represented a slowdown in the face of the possible risks of a climate of rupture, the major sign of which were the demonstrations that we call May 1968.

100 On 4 June, with two weeks of sessions still to go, the Chapter's chronicler, Br. Benoit Marcoux, wrote in his diary: "...La discusión prend fin vers 11h 40, mais s'agit-il bien de discussion? Vu l'ampleur des questions et le grand nombre de Capitulants, les Assamblées plénierées se ramènent souvent à une suite d'interventions hétérogènes qui additionnent des points de vue sans creuser aucun...". (The discussion ends around 11:40 a.m., but can it really be called a discussion? Given the scope of the issues and the large number of participants, plenary assemblies often boil down to a series of disparate interventions that add up different points of view without exploring any of them in depth). 129, ED 278/4 doss.1.

‘The Challenge of the Founder’

There is no need to quote any of the debates in groups or in plenaries. The interventions of the Capitulants are very clear on this point. But we will recall, because of its significance after the Chapter itself, the conference of Br. John Johnston.

The 29th and 30th April and the 1st May were devoted to evoking the figure and thought of the Founder. Thus, Brothers Maurice and Michel spoke, respectively, on the design of the Institute at the death of Monsieur de La Salle and on his spirituality. Brother John, on the other hand, was asked to help reflect on the present-day Lasallian heritage. His address was to be on ‘the challenge of St. John Baptist de La Salle to the Brothers of today’¹⁰¹.

It was a beautiful speech, which would convince the Capitulants to appoint him to the next General Council as Vicar and eventually as Superior from 1986 onwards. He broke down the challenge into eight ‘sub-challenges’, or perhaps an overall challenge that was specified in seven others. In one way or another they were these:

Understanding our vocation.

Being Religious.

Living zeal.

Being Religious-Educators.

Being Signs of the Lord’s presence for the poor.

101 The text, in French, in the AMG, ED 278/5.

Being educators.
Being Brothers.
Being faithful.

At the time, the conference could have delivered the Capitulants to focus on some ‘minor’ but more understandable, immediate or polemical theme (concerning the Poor, in particular). Brother John, however, clearly states, and this can be seen in his text at the end of this half century, that the fundamental challenge was the one he proposed as the first: ‘Understanding our vocation’.

Starting from the express rejection of the traditional theory of the two ends of religious life (personal sanctification and apostolate), he recalled the contribution of the previous General Chapter, quoting the *Declaration*, and proposing what were then called the three dimensions of the Brother’s Identity¹⁰². For Br. John, all the difficulties that Brothers might experience in integrating these three dimensions could be overcome by considering them as the soul of the Brother’s ‘ministry’, as the holy Founder understood it.¹⁰³

102 Although its purpose and the sense of the themes are clear, it is actually a little chaotic in its expression. It is also possible that this is due to the translation (the lecture was delivered in French) and to the linguistic localisation of the terms.

103 In fact, Br. John was to convene, in view of the 1986 Chapter, an international reflection group on the scope of the term ‘ministry’ in Lasallian identity. The work was done, but it did not constitute a significant contribution, probably for lack of unity or community in the reflection.

And he says it in a certainly beautiful paragraph:

Our Founder calls the Brother a ‘minister’. This term may not appeal much to us, but the meaning of this word is essential. For John Baptist de La Salle, a Brother is a man in whose heart God has lit a lamp, asking him to respond to the needs of others. He is a man fully consecrated, living a life freely chosen in celibacy, poverty, obedience, service of the poor through education, a state of life which he has promised to keep throughout his life, counting on God’s fidelity. He is a man of faith, a man of prayer. He is associated with his Brothers throughout the world, in particular with the Brothers of his local community, Brothers united in a ‘conscious sharing of the same ideal of life, which is embodied in a common way of life’¹⁰⁴ . He is a man sent by God to be a visible sign of the presence of the Saviour God in the world of education, with a special attention to religious education, the service of the poor, as well as integral education. He is a man of faith, a man of community, a man of zeal.

Right away we understand that none of the following ‘challenges’ can be left out of this definition/description. None: that is the great value of this synthesis. So why add the headings, for example, 2 and 4?

No. 2. for example: ‘Being Religious’. It must be assumed that the term ‘religious’ refers to the specific life of the Brothers as consecrated to God in a canonical community.

104 This sentence is quoted from an author: John Carroll Futrell, a Jesuit, specialist in spiritual theology. Br. John quotes the phrase, but not the book or article from which it came.

It does not refer to the life of faith, of acceptance of the mystery of God, to the personal relationship with God, all realities proper to any 'religious' person, Christian or not. We have to assume this way. And yet, the development given to it is precisely that: the one valid for every person who lives the faith.

In the paragraph we have just quoted verbatim, however, there was already the fundamental defining note of 'religious consecration': a special life, in common, which was a special sign of God, in this case in the world of education. No more was needed. And, if it needed to be insisted upon or expanded upon, it should be done using this same perspective, not talking about what is being talked about as if the above had not been said.

There is an explanation for this. And it serves for the examples of the same thing that we can find in the discourse in various other places. The author of the text or the audience of the conference knows the terms involved in the discourse: religious life, consecration, sign, community, ministry, etc.; they also know the content of these concepts, even their application or expression in the concrete life of the Lasallian Community. But each of these two lines - terms and content - does not go within the other but in parallel with it.

The result is that the understanding of Lasallian identity is correct, but not its expression. That is why the relationship that Br. John pointed out of the three dimensions is forgotten in the same conference in its treatment of both community and education. It was a thought that needed

to grow, mature and integrate. And to keep pace with the rhythm of the times.

It will be felt, and very much so, in the weeks ahead, when the Chapter will have to reflect on the years since the Council and the orientations of the Institute in the meantime. And it will be in the hearts of all the Capitulants when, a month later, on 5 June, they celebrated the consecration of the Signum Fidei in the great chapel of the House.

When, 25 years later, Brother John bids farewell in his last Christmas and New Year letter, after 7 years as Vicar General and 14 as Superior, when he greets the Brothers on the eve of the General Chapter of the year 2000, he will have this discourse very much in mind, he will quote it and he will make it much more realistic and ambitious. In this case, he will take up again on his own initiative the title given to him in 1976 and will load it with the quarter of a century of his Roman experience. At that time, the Challenge was already 'living our founding history today'.

It was the 1st January 2000 and the Superior invited the Brothers to live the re-foundation. A General Chapter opened in 1976 and two more were to follow, so we cannot get ahead of ourselves.

A little visible deficit

We can point to a hidden but extremely active circumstance in these decades, from the Council until almost the turn of the century. It is an institutional deficit, something that is missing or failing in this whole process. And it is a very important process, as understood by the term 'refoundation', which we have just used.

It is the paradox of freedom shackling itself. It is worth dwelling on it for a moment, because of the transcendence it will have in the next forty years.

It is seen from a distance, when discovering the continuity from one gesture to another, from one word to another, from one Chapter to another, from one model of *Rules* to another. In each case, the freedom of faith is invoked, fidelity over and above the norms, the encounter with the Lord who calls with new words, the awareness of the community and of each of its members. In each case, we are reminded that we are living in new times and that we must therefore pay attention to the Signs of God, to *aggiornamento*, as Pope John used to say.

This attention to the Signs means two things: institutional responses and contemplation of the Mystery of God, or vice versa.

When we speak of institutional responses, we are referring to what is being established in that great period of time from the Council until, for example, the Chapter of 1986. One of its examples is that of the variations in the configuration of the General Council; another, the

presence of the Lasallian way in the processes of formation; another, the diversification of the educational models; another, that of the configuration of the teaching staff, of the agents of the Lasallian project, of the members of the educational community.

The contemplation of the Mystery of God refers to growth in faith, to the quality of prayer, to shared silence in Community, to spiritual reading or formation, to availability to the situations of those closest to us, to the place of the Eucharist in the life of the community, to the capacity and the habit of continuous prayer.

Both realities must go together, become one, as anyone understands. However, these days, in fact, one of the two factors is cultivated rather more than the other. And the Chapter of 1976, which we have just recalled, shows this clearly to anyone who looks at it carefully: from 1960 to 1990, these were times more for initiative, intelligence and effort, than for acceptance of the mystery and waiting for the signs of the Lord.

In a certain sense, this is how it was meant to be or how it was logical for things to happen. The task was - and is - so huge, that an important space had to be given to the capacity not for silence but for effort. It was - and still is today, more than once - the reaction of someone who was living in a radically new time, and who was also responsible for a large institution that needed to move forward and establish itself in society in a solvent, stable way.

The paradox of this very logical situation is that in fact it was being precisely the opposite of what it was intended to be.

The intelligence of situations can insensibly deliver one's own interpretative judgement as the only criterion for action and life. It can deliver one to believe oneself to be faithful when perhaps one is only changing. Fidelity to the Lord who calls can thus be confused with fidelity to one's own personal, collective or institutional criteria.

It is not a question of camouflaging a turning back. When one experiences the tensions of, for example, the second session of the Chapter of 1966, or those which followed throughout the Institute around the question of the Brothers' vows, or those which filled the life of the new General Council until its redefinition from 1976, or those which dynamited the whole preparation of the Chapter of that year, or those which throughout the Institute received the gestures of enlarging the communities by bringing non-Brothers into them, or what did or did not underlie the discourse of Association, when all this is lived, it is perfectly logical that the bulk of an Institution is more inclined to action than to contemplation.

In our theme, in the reflection of this study, observation contains something decisive.

Our theme is the process that delivers from one type of Community to another. Now, if the model of Community is to be a function not only of Mission (understood as apos-

tolic action), but also of Consecration, it is clear that cultivating only one of the two or one more than the other leads to a certain imbalance in the very model of community.

That is to say, if the Community becomes a function mainly or exclusively of Action and educative Commitment, but not of Consecration, the resulting model will sooner or later be frustrating. The Community is also a function of Contemplation of the Mystery of God, a contemplation that is shared and is reflected in the educative Commitment. Thanks to this triple function, satisfactory, truly faithful models can gradually be achieved.

History shows that the Consecration component is the most fragile of the three components that make up this identity. This deficit may be the cause of many perplexities in the decades that follow this chapter.

This is the paradox. The paradox of those who want to go forward but do not go beyond themselves, either personally or in community, because they do not sufficiently consider the Transcendence component, in what they do and in what they are.

3. 1986: Sharing the Mission (1)

The 1986 General Chapter did not begin in 1986 either.¹⁰⁵

The Chapter was to focus on the *Rule of the Brothers*, after the time of the first reaction or renewal proposed by the Council had passed. There were other issues, of course, especially of a general organisational nature, and it was promised that these would be taken into account. But what was to deliver the lion's share was the basic document on the life of the Brothers. In that sense, paradoxically, the real and complete life of the great Lasallian Community was to be somewhat distant from the great assembly. They did not study any particular theme but the whole. It is not the same thing. In all logic the Assembly would determine that for the next Chapter they would wait not ten but seven years.

As far as the reflection of this study is concerned, the area is even more restricted. It is limited to a few lines, to one expression: 'Shared Mission'. In itself it did not seem so far-reaching as to be considered as an emblem or a privileged moment of institutional awareness, but the facts showed otherwise.

The subject was not alien to the concerns of the Institute, far from it, as can be noticed from the chronicle of the inter-capitular meeting. Already then - we presume that they anticipated that they should devote themselves to the *Rule* -

105 There was also, as was customary, an Intercapitular Meeting in 1981, from 4 May to 6 June. Its chronicle and results are reported in Circular 415.

they pointed to a set of six most significant insistencies on the part of the Institute before the Chapter. The first three, which the Circular strongly emphasises, were:

- to continue to discover the mission;
- the liberation of the poor and the promotion of justice, and;
- the integration of the laity.¹⁰⁶

With regard to this latest theme, it is pointed out a little further on that it is '*a sign of the times* which the Brothers must know how to interpret'. A little further on, the theme of the laity is explicitly linked to that of Lasallian Associations. And the whole of it merits the Circular these words:

Perhaps it is excessive or rhetorical language to speak of a Lasallian springtime. But, in truth, 'something' is happening before our eyes! The exchange of information has enabled the representatives of the sectors where these movements are manifesting themselves to make their apostolic interest known to those of *the sectors where nothing is happening yet*, helping them to realise that this is possible everywhere, taking into account local specificities.¹⁰⁷

In any case, the Chapter was to focus almost exclusively to the *Rule*, so that beforehand a Commission had to be set up to prepare the texts that the Assembly would revise

106 The other three, much more succinctly outlined: to be more 'Brothers'; to feel more like children of the same Father; and better ongoing formation. Cf. Circular 415, pages 10ff.

107 *Id.*, 22-26. The exclamation marks are not ours; the italics are ours.

and eventually fix¹⁰⁸. For this reason, as well as a Commission to prepare all the management of the Chapter, another was set up to draft the text of the *Rule*. Both began their work in September/October 1985, both in Rome.

Both were to take into account the directives of the Inter-capitular Meeting.

There is little to say about the work of the Administrative Commission, except that it did it well and leveraged the experience of the two previous ones. This time the number of delegates was reduced: 118 delegates (forty fewer than ten years earlier), who in eight weeks had to meet the Chapter's objectives.

The other Commission, on the other hand, should be spoken of at length and with great praise. Its diary, full of details, has remained in the archives in Rome. It is a little monument, which with the passage of time gains in value by showing us even the daily rhythms of prayer of its members, their centres of interest, their personal approaches, their health, their doubts. And it helps to perceive accurately the contribution of the Chapter in the resulting document.¹⁰⁹

The Commission spent eight to nine months at the Generalate, in constant dialogue with the General Council, so that the latter received the Commission's input as it

108 The Institute would receive information about the whole process, at the Chapter and at the Sacred Congregation, on 30 April 1987, in Circular 424, monographic.

109 Its chronicle, in AMG, ED 286/1 and 2.

became available. Once the two groups - Council and Commission - were in agreement, it was considered that the text was ready to be presented to the Chapter.¹¹⁰

It is precisely this way of proceeding that offers an important anecdote for this study.

Shared Mission

The Commission articulated the future *Rule* around the three dimensions of the Brother's identity as formulated in 1966/67, in the *Declaration* and the *Rule*. In doing so, they also set the tone for the last revision, that of 2015, which is still in use today. This did what the drafters of the previous text had not been able to do.

The *Rule* was to be organised into five chapters: Mission, Consecration, Community, as well as Prayer and Formation. Each of the members of the Commission would be responsible for the first draft, always in dialogue or shared with the others. Once it had reached enough consensus, it was passed on to the General Council, which returned it with their observations.

This was the case with the chapter on Mission, the first draft of which was written by Brother Bruno Alpago. The

¹¹⁰ On our subject, we can affirm that the contribution of Br. Patrice from the General Council was very important. As was, after the Chapter, the setting up of the French Lasallian Centre, which would be animated by that man and would be a source of inspiration for so many other areas of the Lasallian world.

usual protocol was followed: first draft, Commission, General Council, final draft or final proposal to the Chapter.

Logically, the relationship between the Brothers and the rest of the educators and people involved in the animation of the educational project had to appear in some way, among other topics. In this case, Brother Patrice Marey, of the General Council, reflecting on the daily reality of Lasallian institutions, proposed: “the Brothers strive to make them share the Lasallian spirituality and pedagogy...”. He was referring to “the way in which the Brothers share with them their spirituality or their educational experience...”.

It was 22/23 April 1985, and with their suggestions, they were to meet again a month later, on 24 May. The text remained there, which the Chapter could later rework, but on 2 May the diary reports that “...We need to think about subtitles... which will be requested...”.

‘Subtitles’ refers to certain words written in the margins, as a summary or indicator of the subject of the article in question. They had already been used in 1967, both in the *Rule* and in the *Declaration*. They have to include them, because it has been determined that they should accompany the actual text of the articles of the *Rule*, but on 24 May they had not yet done so. One of the drafters had been ill, he had even been hospitalised for a few days, and this detail is missing from the document they are presenting. The rest, we believe, had already been known to the General Council and had kept them quite busy for the rest of the month.

So, finally, on 3 June¹¹¹ they found that they could not wait any longer but that “Brother Bruno has not fixed the ‘subtitles’, given the difficulty encountered in regrouping the articles. After discussions within the Commission, they settled on the following: ... Shared Mission: articles 19 and 20...”.

This is how the text was left, and that ‘subtitle’ could not pass neither through a more careful analysis nor through the revision of the General Council: there was no more time and in those days everyone had to leave Rome. The article at the top was adjusted, but not the accompanying expression: ‘Shared Mission’. In fact, they didn’t think much of it: the expression sounded good and seemed clear. That was enough. Eight years later that subtitle would be the key of the 1993 General Chapter.

The concerned article would read as follows, after the Chapter:

...The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission. They provide, for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit... The Brothers’ community makes known to the rest of the educational community the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition. The Brothers offer to those who desire it, a more intensifying sharing of Lasallian spirituality, encouraging such persons to make a more specific apostolic commitment. The Brothers join

in the formation of faith communities which are witnessing to the truth of what the Brothers profess....¹¹²

In the margin, by way of a synthesis, it read: 'Shared Mission'.

The novelty of the scheme

If we recall this story, it is to underline the transcendence of the words, in this case, this expression. It signifies a privileged moment in Lasallian awareness in the last century.

Because, let us see: the Commission had modified the structure of the *Rule* twenty years earlier. It had done so by building it around the triad of Mission, Community, Consecration. A happy discovery. This made the text clearer and more coherent and was expressly in keeping with the will of the Lasallian Institute to respond to the Council's invitation.

Twenty years earlier, the *Declaration* had proposed these three axes as the interior architecture of the Brother. And

¹¹² In the *Rule* approved at the time, art. 17 and 17c. It can surely be said that, taken as a whole, this article 17 does not enrich the corresponding article 19 of the draft presented by the Commission. Rather, it has a certain triumphalist ('Since their foundation, the Brothers have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity...') and somewhat paternalistic air, detectable in this article and in the following one, 18, on mission and inculcation. As in other similar cases, it is very suggestive to compare the two versions: the one approved by the Chapter and the one presented by the Commission (the latter published in August 1985, in Rome, under the title of *Draft*).

it had called them ‘constitutive elements’¹¹³. The key is in the verb ‘to integrate’, which also appears in 13.1.

The terms are not innocent, blithely interchangeable. ‘Dimension’ and ‘Element’ do not mean the same thing. Thus, the elements of a reality are separable; they are together, of course, but as juxtaposed, so that each has a life of its own. Dimensions, on the other hand, are not internal realities but external perspectives. Thus a person can be considered from her dimension as a mother or from her dimension as a teacher or from her dimension as a citizen: in each case we see the same reality, not a fragment of reality, an ‘element’ of such a person, but the whole person configured in relation to something. Reality is one, indivisible; the perspectives, i.e. the dimensions, as many as one likes.

This is what the *Declaration* means: the Brother integrates in his person, in a single reality, therefore, the baptismal consecration, the educational task, the community, the faith... He integrates these realities or these realities are integrated in him in such a way that they are inseparable, that is to say, they constitute the dimensions of his person. Integrate, not juxtapose.

It is thus understood that Consecration, Community and Mission mean very different things if they are considered as dimensions or as elements of/in a person.

To put it very clearly: one element of a person can be shared without having to share the others. In the midst

113 *Declaration...*, Nos. 12-14.

of everything, a part of that person is shared (e.g. a blood transfusion, without either person knowing any of the other's hobbies). But you cannot share one dimension of a person without sharing the others, because that dimension is not a part of his or her person, but the whole person oriented around something.

For this reason one cannot speak of a 'Shared Mission' in the sense of shared work: the work is not the mission. Which, in our reflection, leads us to a transcendental question: is it possible to share the Brother's mission without sharing, for example, the Brother's community? And if the work is shared, is the mission shared?

Or, what is much more serious: can a Brother live his mission apart from his consecration; does he need the community to live his mission? can he live the community without living his consecration?

It is understood. The expression 'Shared Mission' seems to be a happy expression at first glance: it brings people closer, it eliminates distances; but it is most unfortunate as soon as one goes down the path it invites: it delivers fragmentation and separation.

The whole of Art. 17 of the draft, which it headed, was enriched by the Chapter, with references that the Commission had not thought necessary. And yet, even so, it is poorer or with less content than that promised by the 'mission' that is shared. There is more in the [sub]title than in the development. The latter, in fact, speaks of the fact that in their educational work - in their mission, if

you will - the Brothers are not alone. Sharing the mission is much more.

Mission and Community

There are two clues, however, that can take us much farther. The first is in art. 17c. It is quoted above, but we consider it separately: "... (The Brothers) join in the formation of faith communities which are witnessing to the truth of what the Brothers profess."

Sharing the Community: this is something else and would have deserved more development or a greater presence in the *Rules* as a whole. In fact, the reflection of the Chapter on the theme of the Rules was centred on the relationship between Consecration and Mission. Perhaps the role of the Community in this relationship was left somewhat out of scope, even though it is precisely what is most characteristic of the Lasallian heritage.

The Community was born from and for the school of the Poor, responding to the call of God and of the Church. But in configuring itself as a Lasallian Community it specifically shapes both the mission and the consecration. It is not the same thing, for example, to see the school 'mission' from the point of view of a group of well-organised teachers, as from that of a community of teachers who have bound themselves before God with a vow of mutual fidelity for their entire lives.

Indeed, it is not possible to speak of a Shared Mission when the concept of consecration is something defined by

the vows or by distance from the lay person. And the transcendence of those texts of the *Conditae* and of Saint Pius X appears once again.

Lasallian identity is defined from the Community, so that, if it can be shared, it has to be shared from the Community. This delivers us to considerations that go beyond the limits set by the 1983 *Code*. We are faced with a new way of conceiving the shared mission.

In the Commission, and later in the Chapter, they were aware of the new *Code of Canon Law*, which had appeared two or three years earlier. They took it into account in the drafting of the *Rules*. One canon, in particular, guided them: "The apostolate of all religious consists first of all in the witness of their consecrated life..." (c. 673).¹¹⁴

They quoted it and made it a regular text in art. 24, in the chapter on Consecration. It has also been retained in the new one, 2015, in art. 15, only now in the chapter on Mission.

It is an excellent formula, which the Code takes from *Lumen gentium* and other texts of Vatican II¹¹⁵. Its presence in

114 "Omnium religiosorum apostolatus primum in eorum vitae consecratae testimonio consistit, quod oratione et paenitentia fovere tenentur". In a different language and vocabulary, but its spirit corresponds to Panikkar's formulas on the archetype of simplicity (Cfr. his *Blessed Simplicity*, Seaburg Press, 1982).

115 Cf. *LG* 43-47; from this point of view *Perfectae caritatis* is only operational, for the reform.

the particular Code of a religious Institution could not be more appropriate.

If we look closely, however, we notice that the text does not use the term ‘mission’, but the much more general term ‘apostolate’. One might think that this respects the nature of the two, making the latter a broader concept than the former. It is perhaps more plausible to understand that the Code cannot be based on a more precise theological discourse than was usual in those days, and so it uses these terms interchangeably, pending future corrections as the doctrine matures.

In reviewing the *Rule* as the Chapter left it, we find clear signs of this second hypothesis, especially in the use of terms without a very precise scope. The second possible clue appears there: the ministry of the Brother.

It appears in arts. 12 and 13: “As ‘ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ’, the Brothers participate in the Church’s mission by consecrating their lives to God in order to bring the Gospel to the educational world.”

And at the conclusion of 13, we find: “The Brothers consider their professional work as a ministry.”

It follows that for the Chapter the Brothers exercise a ministry among those possible to deliver the general or common mission of the church.

Understood in this way, the Brother does not have a specific mission. What he has is a specific ministry, that is, a specific way of taking part in the mission of the Church.

That mode is his ministry. And that ministry is specified by his taking part as a community in the mission of the Church.

In the following years, the Lasallian Institution will come to specify it in this way¹¹⁶. But at the same time it will come up against the obstacle of the generalised and imprecise use of the term ‘mission’. This will make it very difficult to move forward and it will be necessary to abandon both, mission and ministry, in another that groups them together: it will then speak of Association, understanding it as the other face of the Community. That is where the key will be: in the new Community.

In reality, the *Rule* does not define the term ‘ministry’, although its proximity to that of ‘employment’ invites us to refer to the meaning of the two in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, that is to say, in the Lasallian vocabulary of the origins.

This can be seen in the lines which follow the proclamation cited:

... A ministry. They are attentive to each of their students and specially to those most in need. They make themselves available to all in an attitude of brotherly companionship, helping them to discover, appreciate and assimilate both human and gospel values. The Brothers help young people to grow as persons who are called to realize more and more that are children of God.

116 It is a precision of Chapter 1993, or its context.

But the term ‘ministry’ is not defined in relation to ‘mission’. Mission’ is defined as a presence of the evangelising Church, in the world of education and especially among the poor. And it is with regard to this ‘mission’, logically lived in community, that it is said that “(The Brothers) gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission. They provide, for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit” (Art. 17).

This means willingly associating the laity with one’s own work. But the question immediately arises: what is the scope of the term ‘mission’? Because it can refer to the mission of the Church in which the Brothers take part, to the way in which the Brothers do it, that is to say, to the ministry which specifies them, or simply to their educational work. And, of course, what does it mean to ‘associate’?

More: in chapter 3, on Consecrated Life, art. 24, we find the text already quoted from canon 673. The full sentence reads: “As religious vowed to the ministry of Christian education, the first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life” (Art. 24).

Here ministry and apostolate appear together. And, without wandering down dictionary roads, but looking at the lives of persons, the question arises: does ‘ministry’ mean the same thing in both articles? Is the witness of their consecrated life their way of making the evangelising Church present? What can then be the scope of the terms ‘to associate’ and ‘to share’? where is the mission?

Clarifying the terms

We understand that the doctrine should and must move forward because we immediately notice, under these distinctions, the old question of the relationship between Religious Life and Apostolic Work. And there is no argument in describing it as an ‘old question’, since we have been feeling it since the second half of the 16th century, from Trent onwards¹¹⁷, when the Churches seriously proposed the question of their internal reform.

The key is there, so far away. That is why it is not surprising that eighty years later we are still hearing echoes of that letter of St. Pius X.

The problem lies in finding a model or an understanding of Religious Consecration that is compatible or even really the soul of their Apostolic Life. The question is more serious when the apostolic work is secular, that is to say, not directly or exclusively pastoral. It is not the same thing to dedicate oneself to parish ministry as to caring for the sick in hospitals or for adults in vocational schools.

We understand very well the honesty of this statement of the Chapter, before formulating its Message ‘to the various Lasallian groups and movements which are multiplying in the Institute’: ‘... while knowing full well that these groups are waiting some word from the General Chapter,

¹¹⁷ We will return to this historical reference in our *Part Two*, especially in its last section 6. *The Community of the Christian School*.

it has not been not easy for us to decide upon the precise type of word which we should address to them".¹¹⁸

So again we realise that, beneath the discomfort with the oscillation between 'dimensions' and 'elements', there is precisely this: we do not understand how such secular dedication can be integrated with renunciation or distance from that same secularity. It makes little sense to dedicate oneself to the promotion of that which one renounces: it is a *leit-motiv* that sounds and resonates throughout the 20th century in all religious institutions dedicated to the Christian School at any of its levels or specialisations.

At the end of the 20th century, the great question is not the Reformation of the Church, but the New Evangelisation.

The Chapter understands it in this way when it affirms a few lines later: "...we are aware that we are participating in a new historical fact in the Institute and which is going to identify us as 'the Body of the Society', as 'the Lasallian Family'."¹¹⁹

And the new Superior, John Johnston, reflected this in his speech at the conclusion of the Chapter:

Brothers, so much has been said on this fundamental theme over the last few days, that I will confine myself to expressing my firm conviction that the invitation to share our Lasallian heritage is a call of the Spirit in our

¹¹⁸ Circ. 422, p.19.

¹¹⁹ *Id.*

day. This call demands that we review not only the role of those who collaborate with us but also our own role...¹²⁰

There is still a clear deficit in the definition of Consecrated Life. The fact that it is not resolved is serious enough in itself, but it is doubly so when we live in times of change on a historical scale. If, moreover, we bear in mind the not at all suspicious qualification of 'new evangelisation' referring to these same times, then we can better gauge the importance of distinguishing in language two spheres: that of more or less familiar communication and vital take part in a believing project.¹²¹

The Code resolves this with the statement we have recalled about the witness of one's own consecration. And it is very well said. It only follows from this that this 'apostolate' can only be shared by another equally consecrated person, which delivers us to look with different care at all expressions of these themes in any document, whether rigorous in expression or propagandistic in tone.

We can therefore say that in the Code itself the relationship between apostolic life and consecration is not clear,

120 *Id.*, p. 41.

121 Three years after the Chapter the General Council published the *Letter to the Lasallian Family*, as they had committed themselves to do. It is a text that deserves to be reviewed especially from the point of view of its definition, not only Lasallian and spiritual, but also theological. As was to be expected, however, this theological aspect is not linked to its legislative aspect.

so that its broad classification of these forms of life is still imprecise.¹²²

It is an imprecision that can have very bad consequences, when it is so tempting to recreate oneself along the paths of inconsequential aesthetics, of colours and repetitions, without limits or definition, as if the truth and the satisfaction it produces were the same thing. Sometimes gardens of words are built in this way, where reality is only the appearance of itself. So inviting subsidiarity to find local formulas does not go beyond abandoning oneself to disorder.

In the next twenty years we will find its ghost here and there throughout the Lasallian world. Its appearance will depend on the idea of personhood which underpins the vocabulary used in each case. That is why it is good to frame the subject within the arc of the double reference Trent-New Evangelisation.

Underneath, in effect, there are two models of the human: the one that divides or composes the human into successive levels, and the one that considers it by its relation-

122 In the current *Code of Canon Law*, the subject of religious is situated in Book II (the People of God and its members), in Part III, which has two sections. The first is devoted to Institutes of Consecrated Life. The second considers the Societies of Apostolic Life. It is certainly a better treatment than the previous one, but it still leaves something to be desired at least in the integration of the fundamental concepts: consecration, the vows, the apostolate, community, the publicity or privateness of the commitments, etc. The reference is very important and will return at other points in this study.

ships. These are two anthropologies for each of which, in fact, being a person has a different meaning. In one case, being a person is the last and highest of the levels that make up the human being. In the other, one is a person as soon as one is a person, so that it is the same and unique person who performs functions in which this or that vital aspect seems to predominate.

For some, we are persons as soon as we complete the different levels of our reality. For others, according to how we enter into a relationship with ourselves and with everything that surrounds us. In one case, we will speak of elements of an identity; in the other, of dimensions.

Perhaps not even in the second session of the 1966/67 Chapter were they fully aware of what it meant to speak of dimensions. The same can be imagined in the drafting of the *Rule* in 1986.

Third Movement: Refounding

... in a continuity, in a movement of the Institute, which developed little by little from 1950 onwards.

After the impact of the Second World War, which brought about significant political and cultural changes, we have entered an era of destabilisation and collapse of the old rigid and monolithic systems (social, political, geographical, religious...). A mosaic of cultures and differences is appearing, shaking our somewhat naïve schemes and our bronze certainties. As a result, the Church and the Institute were shaken.

However, in spite of these shocks, uncertainties, doubts and losses, the Institute, for 30 years, worked out its doctrine..., clarifying its identity...

1993. *General Chapter*, in its Final Message.

The expression 'Shared Mission' was the culmination of the renewal movement so far. At the same time, it opened the door to a new horizon, so new that it would soon need a new slogan.

In that situation, the General Chapters were shaken, one after the other, by the magnitude of what was happening, as if their decisions had consequences that no one could foresee. What was happening had to be clarified and its meaning interpreted.

It was a task which logically had to affect the *Rules of Life* of the Lasallian Community.

We developed it, once again, in three steps:

1. 1993: Sharing the Mission (2): the significance of the presence of lay people at the Chapter.
2. Association and the Education of the Poor: two and even three more General Chapters, with the task of clarifying the 'community-mission' pairing.
3. 2015: a required revision: thirty years later, the *Rules* again.

1. 1993: Sharing the Mission (2)

Seven years later, that ‘subtitle’ had become the key of the new General Chapter¹²³. This is no exaggeration.

Between 5 April and 15 May, 132 Capitulants met in Rome. In addition, between 14 and 24 April, there were 20 ‘Advisors’, as a group of lay people from all over the world were called, who took part in the Assembly. The Preparatory Commission had foreseen this, because they wanted to give as much space as possible to the examination of the Shared Mission, and this meant something revolutionary: that lay people should be present at the General Chapter.

These were the antipodes of the 1946 texts.

The Chapter opened with two reflections by experts in Consecrated Life, as well as the Reports of the Superiors. The functioning of the Assembly was then organised, so that by the 13th of April the planning phase had been completed. Brothers and lay people then formed six Commissions to reflect on the Shared Mission from different

123 This is recognised in Circular 435, in the first of the two Messages of the Chapter. The Circular also expresses the awareness of the Capitulants that they were living through a historical period of forty years, with a special significance (cf. Prologue of the first of their declarations, on the Brothers’ Community). This historical perspective was already present, explicitly, in Circular 432, Announcement of the Chapter (7 April 1991). It is tantamount to recognising that the lived experience can transcend many of the proposals of the Chapter. See below, *Part Two*, 1. An Institution in History.

points of view: Association, Formation, Associated Communities, Inculturation, Aims and Objectives.

It was almost two weeks of 'mixed' Chapter. Three more weeks followed, the first of which was devoted, now the Brothers alone, to the rest of the matters (Governance, Finances, Vocations, Community, Ageing). It ended with the elections of the Superiors plus the operational proposals of the Chapter and the programme of the new team. The last days focused on the pedagogy of the Chapter.

Even without the objective fact of having been the phase with the largest number of sessions, the very fact of the presence of non-Brothers in the Assembly debates already justifies what we say about the Shared Mission. It was certainly the top subject.

At that time the Lasallian Institute was perfectly aware that any identity discourse which did not include non-Brothers would be unreal, merely ideological. That is why it provided for the presence of non-Brothers in the great assembly and to do so it relied on the recently incorporated term, pleasant sounding and - apparently, at least - easy to understand.

There was thus a kind of schizophrenia: something was talked about under the auspices of a title, but the areas of reflection and purpose did not match. However, the Chapter flowed as if that were not the case. In reality, there were two concepts of 'mission': that which concerned the Brothers' Community and that which concerned the school or the educational project. It must be said that

they did not match. And of this non-match it can be said that it was not always consciously perceived.

Two texts for interpreting the Lasallian Project

It is better understood if we frame the Chapter itself in two texts, both of authority: one, the Letter of greetings for the New Year, signed by the Brother Superior General, 1st January 1993; and, two, the text '*The Lasallian Mission, a Shared Mission*', of the Brother Superior and his General Council, distributed in 1997 to the entire Lasallian Family, according to the 'fervent recommendation' of the General Chapter. The first, as a prelude to the Chapter. The second, at the request of the Chapter, four years later.

First, the New Year's greeting. Just three months before the Chapter opened, Brother John, Superior, sent his New Year's Letter to the whole Institute. It is an important text, truly the gateway to the Chapter. It was entitled '*Transformation*'.¹²⁴

From the first of its eight sections, the Superior declared that he would write according to the Chapter year. He began, therefore, by concentrating in six observations on what he understood to be the 'health' of the Institute, observations on which he would then rely to propose tasks for the Chapter. The first three of these observations speak of the general satisfaction among the Brothers at being

124 Pastoral Letter, 1 January 1993: *Transformation; reflections on our future.*

what they were, in the school of the Founder and in the present time. The fourth and the fifth:

4. We find personal satisfaction in our apostolic activities. Increasingly we accept that our mission today is a “shared mission”. We are collaborating more effectively with our lay colleagues. We are proud of the excellent work done in the institutions we animate, together with our devoted lay men and women.

5. And yet, many of us, while appreciating our individual contributions, are confused about the specific role we should exercise today as religious men and as communities and as Institute. We recognise that lay men and women can effectively manage schools, teach, catechise, and serve as pastorals ministers to the young. Some of us wonder if there still need for our particular form of religious life (p.8).

There is one more observation, the last one, which refers to vocations ministry and is along the same lines as all the previous ones. Overall it is a clear sequence: satisfaction (1, 2, 3, 4), perplexity (5), vocations (6). And it is understandable when we immediately find the proposal for the Chapter, concentrated in the title of the Pastoral Letter: *Transformation*.

The Superior proposes five ways. Transformation will take place

1. By responding clearly to our need and desire for a more precise articulation of the specific role of the Institute, District, Community and individual Brother in the exercise of the ‘shared mission’;

2. By evaluating ... our lived experience of consecration, mission and community.
3. By calling us to... spiritual conversion...
4. By determining ...clearly major priorities and objectives...
5. By determining effective strategies for realising those objectives... (p. 12).

It is abundantly clear: the topic is the animation of Lasallian Institutions today, counting on these concrete persons. Animation, its hows and whys. The rest of the letter does no more than comment on it, underline it, with serenity and with the Chapter in mind.

Just one comment: nothing is said in response to the fifth observation, already mentioned, about the situation of the Brothers, at least that of those who 'wonder...'. It is not said, perhaps, because their problem is resolved in all the others. Clearly, too: this is reserved for the Chapter, which is already very close.

But the Chapter did not resolve it. It could not do so, and understandably so: the subject required another model of study.

Only once, as we have recalled, did the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools decide that its General Chapter should have two sessions. It was in 1966/67. Today we understand that this was the case because of the proximity of the Council: not only in the dates, but also in the way of conceiving the task: what was to be done required time, since it was a question of redefining the Church. For this very reason, because it was a question of redefinition, the Lasallian Assembly also gave itself a second session. They did not dare

to do more, given the internal climate of the Congregation, and referred to the next meeting, nine years later.

But it has never been done again. That is why all the subsequent Chapters, with the exception of that of 1986 because of its extraordinary monographic character, closed leaving an impression of perplexity with regard to the expectations of the Lasallian Family at the time. In all of them there remained basic questions which should have been resolved at the Chapter, but which were left to the initiative of the next General Council.

In this General Council, 1993, this was not done in any other way: the Chapter itself served to raise awareness of the issue. To make it official, one might say. But nothing more. Instead it indicated with some urgency to the General Council to provide the Institute with clear and common thinking.

If there had been a second session, we can assume that the twenty lay advisors would have been at a different level. Six months (for example) later, they would have been in a position to digest the shock that is always a Chapter and to relate it to their habitual life. That would have put realism into all their words in those first two weeks, between 14 and 24 April. For their part, the Brother Capitulants would also have been in a position to reflect on and decide with quality on the theme of their living together and the mission of their communities. For them, too, it was certainly a great shock to share a Chapter Hall with someone who did not invoke the vows as a right to take part.

Instead, four years later, the General Council composed a broad synthesis on the subject. It articulates the reflection

of the Chapter itself, now enriched by that of the General Council which also took up the echoes of the matter throughout the Institute. It was entitled *The Lasallian Mission, a Shared Mission*.¹²⁵ As we can see, everything focused around the great theme: if thirty years earlier it had been the Identity of the Brother today, now, almost at the end of the century, it was the Identity of the Lasallian Community.

The text is divided into three parts: Lasallian Heritage; Community and Education Today; and Shared Mission.

The first one traces the history of the Lasallian Institute, with emphasis on the situation at the end of the 20th century. It is a simple and effective path, but with a very important silence: it says nothing about the place of consecration in that heritage. It does talk about Community, but from the point of view of the animation of the school, not in terms of the Sign of the consecrated Community.

It is the same in the second part: the novelty of what is being lived at the end of the century and the importance of redefining the educational Community are underlined, but again there is no space for the transformation of the Brothers' Community into the new Lasallian Community.

In the third part there is a block of eight or ten pages (depending on the versions), section 3.3, which departs from that tone and advances something we had not read before. It is entitled Associated, together, in the same mission. Its development:

125 Published in 1997, it was soon translated into several languages.

- 3.30 Introduction:
- 3.31 Communion and Lasallian heritage.
- 3.32 The process linking communion and mission.
- 3.33 Communion in the sense of educational work as ministry
- 3.34 The Ministerial Dimension of the Church
- 3.35 A particular 'ministry': administration and auxiliary services
- 3.36 Co-responsibility, solidarity and association
- 3.37 Living the spirit of association as per the 42nd General Chapter
- 3.38 Proposition of the 42nd General Chapter [and guidelines] for personal reflection and dialogue.

It is a short set, and easy to read, which is worthy to be recommended, especially 3.32 and 3.33. In the latter issue we find an excellent paragraph that puts us at the heart of the matter:

This new ministerial community must be for the Lasallian school the sign that the Kingdom of God is making itself present and growing in this area. Each one of those who take part in the community, in so far as they are animated by faith, lives and manifests his ministry in a complementary way to the others, but with different characteristics, according to his own identity:

- the Brother, from his consecration as a celibate in community,
- the layman, from his life more in contact with secular realities and, perhaps, from his marriage or secular celibacy;

- the priest, from the peculiarity of his ordained ministry, placed at the service of the ministry of Christian education (pp. 143ff).

The paragraph opens the horizon, it promises, but it is an island.

Finding this theme and the expression ‘ministerial Community’, it is understandable that the theme did not appear until the end. It seems evident that it was not an important issue either in the Lasallian heritage or in the new educational community. One might even say that it comes from another hand than all the above. It can be seen, in particular, that in these almost final pages the reasoning considers Lasallian Identity from the perspective of the dimensions; all that precedes, on the other hand, from the perspective of the elements.

To speak of ministerial community is to speak of the profound unity of baptismal consecration and of the commitment to a work born of that consecration. The whole discourse refers back to the mystery of the Community understood as a Sign of the reality of the Lord and his Kingdom. A common sign, unique, diversified in its interior, but constituted in a single reality.

This entails considering the theology of Lasallian ministry, the whole history of its heritage, from another point of view different from that used in the first two parts. The institutional identity is not in the renunciation of anything but in the transparency with regard to the God who makes all the members of that community one. And so it establishes its ministry.

Technical challenges and adaptation challenges

A couple of years later and in preparation for the next General Chapter, a very fruitful distinction was made in the Lasallian world: technical challenges are one thing and adaptive challenges are another. We use its content because the Institute which received the Circular of 1997 was already familiar with it at least in some of its sectors or levels: otherwise, it would have been totally unintelligible to bring it to the Chapter in the year 2000.

It helps us to understand what we are finding in the reflection on the Lasallian Community and the take part in it.

That distinction did not come from the religious but from the institutional or even from the business side¹²⁶. The Brothers of the then District of San Francisco applied it and disseminated it in the formation gatherings and in

126 Its reference was in Ronald Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (1998). The author would later publish *Leadership on the Line* (2002) with Martin Linski. And a little later still, the two of them together with Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (2009). Their terms: 'technical challenges', 'adaptive challenges'. The Lasallian proposal analysed from this point of view the path of the origins and the possible scenarios of the present. These references serve to contextualise them with other later ones on the same theme.

preparation for the General Chapter that was about to initiate.¹²⁷

This distinction expressed that there are changes that challenge institutions to modify themselves, to 'transform' (to use the term we found around this Chapter of 1993). Thus, the technical challenges really only ask to reorganise resources, not to modify their model, their substance. They are resolved in quantitative or strictly organisational terms: modifying the budget, the timetable or the premises. It could be said that we live in the realm of the *hows*.

The challenges of adaptation, on the other hand, call for a redefinition of the meaning of the institution. They call for a questioning of the beginning and the present, relating the intended objectives and those required by the population, the pupils, the local Church. They require the profile of the people involved in the running of the institution to be adapted to this situation. It is the reconfiguration of the soul of the company. In this case, perhaps, we live in the realm of the *whys* and *wherefores*.

Well then. Paragraphs 3.32 and 3.33, which we have just underlined, express a challenge of adaptation. Unfortunately, it may happen that someone comes along and applies technical solutions to it, believing that they are adaptive. The result is to increase the budget and decrease hope: an in-

127 They were the first days of the Chapter, 3 and 5 May; the Chapter had begun on 1 May. The interpretations of the institutional configuration of the Lasallian project throughout history were also very interesting. They have not been published, as far as we know, so we have to refer to what is kept in the AMG, in the Chapter Documentation.

verse relationship between effort and results. In our case this happens when we insensibly swing from the dimensions to the elements. That is, when one lives in one model of anthropology, but uses the vocabulary of another.

This is why, projecting the light of this distinction on the 1997 document that we are evoking, it seems to us to be a symptom of a deep discontent, a discomfort more suffered than thematised, like a desire that is almost impossible to satisfy.

The desire concerns the understanding of the institutional novelty par excellence: in the educational projects hitherto considered to be Lasallian, the Brothers are in the minority. At the same time, the number of non-Brothers wishing to take on the Lasallian spiritual creed and to commit themselves to the animation of local institutions is growing. Clearly, together with these two types of people there remains a large group of professionals who direct their lives from other horizons, so that it is not so easy to identify the institution or to configure a minimum or basic profile.

In the face of this, slogans such as Signum Fidei Fraternity, Lasallian Family, Shared Mission and Association for the educational service of the poor have been emerging. But none of them has managed to calm the discomfort.

And at the same time, in the Lasallian collective unconscious, the reduction of the mission to educational work has settled very quickly. It is the reflection of its reduction to an element, when it was a dimension. Since this Chapter, in fact, approaches and bodies for the more serene and effective organisation of the work have been established;

bodies and approaches which function in parallel with those which concern the Brothers.

Since that time, the adjective 'educational' has been used with complete normality alongside the noun 'mission'. It is said 'educational mission' and a network is established to attend to the 'Lasallian Educational Mission'. In this network, organisations have been appearing, firstly regional and then local and global in scope. Thus the network of Brothers' communities and the network of educational projects, the District Councils with regard to the Brothers and the Educational Mission Councils with regard to the educational projects have been concluded simultaneously. And finally the Regional and World Assemblies for the Lasallian Educational Mission in parallel with the District, Regional and General Chapters.

This is how it is done and surely this is how it should be done. But it is important again to note the scope of the words we use. We speak in all these bodies of 'Lasallian Educational Mission'; well then, can the Lasallian Mission be anything other than educational? why, then, add the adjective to it?

And yet it was added and continues to be added.

Without anyone having intended it to be so, the same thing happens again as with that 'Shared Mission'. The introduction of the adjective manages to strengthen the Lasallian mission. The introduction of the adjective manages to reinforce the fragmentation of the Lasallian identity, so that the mission is reduced to school work. Basically, there is no longer any need for community in education

because the organisation is sufficient. The adjective thus opens the door to the disappearance of the figure of the Brother, henceforth dispensable from the point of view of educational ministry.

Perhaps all this, at the turn of the century, is not perceived in its significance but in its usefulness. Gradually, however, as the acronyms become more established and become part of the thinking process, something else will emerge. That is why, a couple of years after the document of the General Council, on the eve of the new Chapter, we are once again faced with the question.

The Brothers of the District of San Francisco rightly made the distinction between the two types of institutional challenges. If it is not well underpinned, a challenge of adaptation can be reduced to a technical challenge and thus leads up nowhere. This was a very clear caution for the Lasallian Institute.

The fifteen years which have elapsed since the revision of the *Rules* commissioned by the Chapter in 2000 until their approval and publication in 2015 are proof of this.¹²⁸

128 Time proved that the statement of the 1993 Chapter could not be accepted in its strict sense: “It was frequently pointed out during the Chapter that *we do not need* a great number of new, long documents; what we need is to live, as genuine Brothers, in our Communities, Districts, Regions and the whole of our Institute, in the manner described in our Rule, using the Personal, Community and District Programmes to help us in our endeavours”. This is the beginning of Circular 435, reporting on the General Chapter. It shows the breadth and depth of the Superiors’ reflections over the next two decades. The italics are ours.

2. Association and the Education of the Poor

With the Chapter in 2000 it was already clearly evident that the big issue for the Lasallian Institute was the modification of the model of community.

We can assume that this was already something felt in 1966. If so, they were unable to deal with it, given the volume of previous questions. It would return ten years later, only to receive an indirectly traumatic refusal in the Chapter's attitude to the International Commission on the Vows. In 1986 it entered into circulation by the least suspicious way: the new *Rules* and with the status of a margin title. By 1993, as we have already recalled, that title had become the theme. This was to give rise to considerable reflection both in Rome and throughout the world and to various actions as a consequence.

As a middle way that could calm or harmonise opinions, recourse to a traditional term in the Lasallian vocabulary, Association, had been gaining ground.

It had appeared again and again over the previous twenty years, but now it was emerging strongly and taking everything else with it. It was joined by the theme of the school for the poor, so that it arrived at the Chapter in 2000 with the motto 'Associated for the educational service of the poor' and with it it would be present at the following two Chapters.

It is the great venue that the Institute is building to understand the new Lasallian Community. The General

Chapters of 2000, 2007 and 2014 were held under its roof, academy or temple.¹²⁹

They represent, in fact, three moments in a period in which the main concern of the Lasallian Institution is, on the positive side, the Association of its members, new or known; and, on the negative side, the exhaustion of the communities prior to the emergence of the term. This, logically enough, should deliver a reconsideration of the text of the *Rule*.

‘Association’ (and ‘Society’) mean, in the Lasallian corpus, the grouping or conjunction of all local activities into a single total body. ‘Union’ (and ‘together’) refer rather to the state of mind, to personal faith, to the welcoming of those who are closest to one another. ‘Association’ refers specifically to the integration of all that is local into a single whole.¹³⁰

In reality, they are two ways or two perspectives of a single reality: community. John Baptist de La Salle by no means wished to use the model of certain monastic institutions

129 It is worthwhile, on this regard, to review calmly the Circulars following each General Chapter (447, 455, 469 and 478), as well as the New Year Letters (which are in three series: two from Br. Alvaro and one from Br. Robert): they form an exceptional set, usable in any process of formation or awareness of the future to come.

130 See, on this subject, the conference of Michel Sauvage in November 1998 *Mieux comprendre l’Association lasallienne ?* published in *Cahiers Lasalliens* 55, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et la Fondation de son Institut* (Rome, 2001, 355pp). The reference text, pp. 308-338.

of the medieval past, which were organised in the form of more or less autonomous communities, maintaining among themselves only a spiritual relationship. He understood that in his work the system or whole was fundamental, given its novelty. He understood - and we can easily understand this - that a group of more or less autonomous installations could not guarantee the stability of the project¹³¹. In this sense, he used to speak of 'Association'.

As time went on, with the consolidation of the Lasallian Institution, the idea of Association fell into disuse, like a meaningless redundancy. One was already associated by the fact of coming into contact with any of the Lasallian establishments. It was logical, then, that the term came to be forgotten, without realising that it was the whole or the network of communities that gave it stability at the beginning and throughout the three centuries of its history.

Instead - and here lies the key to future tensions - the religious vows or triad were taken to be the real stabilisers (if we can use this term) of the Institution¹³². Paradoxically, this led to a situation unknown in the beginnings of the Lasallian Community, when precisely neither the triad existed nor even all its members were bound by any vow.

131 As we know, this was the drama that the Founder was experiencing in the days of Parmenie: the schools had no medium-term problem; Association, on the other hand, was on the point of disappearing.

132 Brother Alvaro, the Superior, noted this in his *Pastoral Letter* of Christmas 2000. It is expressly stated on p.14.

Thus, it is understandable that, when in the decades prior to the Chapter in 2000 the term Association was used, someone always appeared who thought of the Lasallian Institute from the triad (the vows) and not from the network of Communities (Association). This meant that in reality the official discourse of the Congregation could only assume the term because of dissatisfaction with the previous ones.

Perhaps that is too much to say, but sometimes, when reading the documents of the last three decades, the question remains whether the term is used for its own sake or rather because of the insufficiency of the others. This could explain the polysemy of the term as it has been used since 2000.

From this hypothesis, we understand our perplexity about the use of the term.

Therefore, on the one hand, we see a tendency to neutralise all its problematic nature by linking the Association with the Educational Service of the Poor. It is almost a paradoxical situation: it is used in order not to be used. In fact, in this way Association is once again limited to action, but not to identity, which does not go very far in comparison with the previous terms (Lasallian Family, Shared Mission, in particular).

On the other hand, we find that the term is applied only or predominantly to non-Brother members of the Lasallian project. This is another way of neutralising it: its meaning or its scope is limited in this case to its being lived by a

certain type of person within the Lasallian group. In this way, the Brothers are not or do not live associated.

A common feature of the two directions is the lack of a satisfactory reflection on the relationship between Association and Consecration, or between Association and Community. This deficit will weigh down the use of this term over the next twenty years. We can see it in the very striking flourishing of local gestures, trying to put a face to the discourse of association.

At this point, by opening this section in the 2000 Chapter, it appears a decisive perspective on the future of this Institution.

It is very striking, in fact, to see how the very dynamic of Association itself leads the Lasallian Institution first of all to overcome a serious deficit in its self-concept. In this way, for almost twenty years, it has been directing the proposals of Chapters and Superiors towards the heart of the matter. And in this focus it silently succeeded not only in pointing out the keys to the renewed identity discourse but also in outlining the horizon of his responses.

The deficit came from the previous two decades. We pointed it out at the end of the previous section: the consideration of the dimensions of Lasallian identity as elements, breaking the reciprocity of its definitions and distorting contributions of the best good will.

At the beginning of the new century it was still real that in the Lasallian documentation there was no response to the feeling of so many of its members that to live the ‘mission’

there was no need for ‘consecration’. This has been commented on and we do not return to the issue. We point out only, as a sufficiently clear example, the table of contents or the general outline of Circular 447, with the chronicle and the decisions of the Chapter: its concept of Mission is the educational task. The formidable contribution of the *Rule* of 1986, canon 673, remains entirely in the air: “The apostolate of all religious consists first of all in the witness of their consecrated life...”. We have underlined this by talking about the 1986 Chapter and the update of the *Rule*.

Little by little, however, by the same logical inertia of Association, the Fraternity would end up appearing. Faced with it, the Lasallian Institution could perceive how the heart of the Mission was the Community, the new Community. And it would not be so as a means for a task but as a Sign within that task.

In this way Association ended up proposing a new model of consecrated life: could Association propose itself as a new model of Consecrated Community? Everything would depend on whether belonging could be lived and presented as an encounter with the Mystery, that is to say, with God.

But let us not anticipate the issue.

Identity and Association

2000-2015: during this period, in orientation and response to so many local experiences, we find a continuous bibliography on the theme, or rather, starting from the theme. It is

not the same thing. It is not the same to write about something that we are all living and to write about something else that we can guess behind what we are living. It is like writing about the fruit and the sap, on the same tree.

The theme is obvious, indisputable, reiterated: the Brother's identity, the Lasallian Identity, the Community's identity. And it is precisely its reiteration that makes us wonder whether we are talking about what we are apparently talking about or, on the contrary, about what brings us to this, what we cannot yet talk about because of its novelty but which is modifying our habitual discourse about ourselves.

Thus, there are Circulars, Pastoral Letters from the Superior, issues of the Bulletin..., issues of the MEL Bulletin and, as is logical, a strongly renewed emphasis on the *Rule* of Life of the Lasallian Community. The whole leaves the undeniable feeling of an open door to another reality, still to be systematised.

It is worth recalling it as a global context of what has been happening in the Institute during these two decades.

Leaving the new wording of the *Rule* for a section of its own, a good guide for looking at it is the very careful reflection of Brother Superior during this period when he addressed the Brothers' Communities. It also has the value of providing us with a system, or at least a systematic sequence, which encompasses and gives meaning to whatever is expressed in any other Lasallian forum during these years.

At Christmas 2000 the new Br. Superior, Alvaro, wrote the traditional Letter of greeting to the Institute. It was the first in a series¹³³ that would last until 2013, covering both terms of his office. It is clear that from the outset there is a project and a sense of the whole, so that its references criss-cross backwards and forwards, within a single system, developed over a decade. As can be understood, this gives much more value to what each of the Letters proposes.

Let us take a closer look. For example, the first one. It is a short text, 24 pages of small size, which shortly at the beginning states:

Our 43rd General Chapter, studying and promoting the topic of Association as it did, opened the Institute to a process which we do not know exactly where it will take us, but which we do know that we should look at it with a lot of hope since it could mean a real way to restart of our charism...

“We do not know where it will take us”: expressing it like that in this Letter to the Brothers, the Superior is not proposing a topic that he is going to comment on next. He is not going to deal with Association; he wants to speak about Community.

Naturally, he is not going to do so as if he lived in another world. He knows, as all the Brothers know, that Association affects the Community. One could say that it involves it. That’s why he invites the Brothers to take into account the meaning of their life. In fact, he invites them to an exam-

133 All these texts can be found today on <http://www.lasalle.org>.

ination of their fidelity and of their present situation. He wants to propose to them something like an audit around two questions, one express and the other guessable.

The express question is: what are we, as a Community, and the guessable question: what should we say, then, in the face of the coming Association?

For example, in this same Letter, a little further on:

... However, our fourth vow does not only have this spiritual dimension of devotion to God and procuring his glory; it also has strong community repercussions. Association to conduct, together and by association, schools for the service of the poor strengthens the bonds of the Brothers among themselves. The Founder was led, little by little, to discover that his personal vocation was linked to the fact of founding a fraternity in service of abandoned youth. He understood that the will of God for him, the service that he ought to offer to the work of God, consisted in “establishing and guiding” a community made up of persons freely committed by God for the service of poor and abandoned youth, continually energized by reference to the living God and the work of God and by the lived experience of fraternity.

It is very clear that ‘Association... strengthens the bonds of the Brothers among themselves’ and that in this way ‘a fraternity at the service of abandoned youth’ was born. Association is a term referring to the Brothers’ communities and to the grouping of such communities in a network or Society. Now then: could, for example, the same lay consultants who took part in person in the recent General

Chapter be included in this definition (in this Fraternity...)? Can the same be said of them and of so many others who, throughout the world, are committing themselves to the Lasallian project (this is Christmas 2000)?

Three years later, in 2003, the Superior refers again to the Chapter recalling a common principle:

The last General Chapter tells us that “the original vow for the service of the poor, which associated the Founder with 12 Brothers in 1694, is the source of Lasallian associations of lay persons and religious who wish to be part of the Lasallian mission.

Four years later, in 2007, and this splendid formula:

... It is for that reason that our communities of Brothers throughout the Lasallian world should be an icon of Trinitarian life in the world and Church today, as the Founder proposed to us, when he told us that within our communities there should appear the essential union which exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Meditation 39.3)...¹³⁴

Again: can the same be said of the various local formulas which are coming into being in the light of Association?

134 It is 25 December 2007. The General Chapter has already passed, so the Christmas Letter cannot be understood without its impact on the Brothers. The Superior says what he says, knowing that Circular 455 (17.09.07) is in the Communities with the contribution of the Chapter to their daily life. The Christmas Letter is, without saying so, a reading guide for the Chapter.

The topic is of the greatest importance, not because of the beauty of its formulation, but because of the panorama that would be opened up by its extension from the Brothers' Community to the new 'Community'. At first sight, it seems perfectly valid to affirm this about this new configuration of Lasallian groups. Immediately, however, the tremendous question arises: if it is something characteristic of those who live a model of consecration, by virtue of what can this be affirmed of other people, not 'consecrated'? What does Association have to say about this?

They are a single question and the answer urges. So much so that without it, everything can remain a vacuum that is more spiritualistic than faithful.

Every Christian and every Christian community are meaningful if they become Lord's face for the world. So much so that, strictly speaking, they are not in this life for anything else. In the desert or in the city, with the faculty or in the factory, that is their 'mission'. And, if we refer to the Lasallian world, that is their contribution to the ministry of education.

A year later, Christmas 2008, the Superior dares to go further and the significance of what he says underlines the urgency of the matter:

... The essential is not to know if we are going to survive (as a Congregation), the most important thing is to know if we are contributing to the creation of a world that is more human, starting from Gospel values. What is important is to exploit the dynamism of our founding charism, to know how to take risks while looking ahead. The most

important thing is not to know if we have a future, the most important thing is that our present has meaning, that our life is worth the effort, that many, thanks to us, discover the face of the Father and his maternal tenderness, that the Gospel be proclaimed to the poor and that young people find in us the support they need.

The formula is certainly strong. He is saying that worrying about the future can mean losing it. And he points, again and again, to the common structure of meaning: the transparency of God in the school, in this school of right now, the first decades of the 21st century.

Who are we talking about?

Still the following year, 2009:

This is our principal contribution to building up God's Kingdom and we can always live this commitment, regardless of age or the process of association with which we work with lay persons; our fraternity is open to unexpected horizons. Our vocation advances the egalitarian eschatological state of God's Kingdom, in whose service is the Church and our fraternal life in community makes present. I like to think of the Brother as the *sacrament of the horizontal dimension* that keeps us from calling persons father or teacher and invites us to call one another Brother and live like brothers.

Here there is indeed an express mention for non-Brothers, implying all equally in 'our principal contribution to building up God's Kingdom'. And certainly, the expression 'sacrament of the horizontal dimension' (which the text

itself underlines in italics)¹³⁵ shows the difficulty of finding common formulas, within the dialectic Incarnation/Schatology which the Superior knows perfectly well.

The Sign of Fraternity

In this same Letter, of 2009, a little further on, we find a particularly appropriate formula, in which we may think that the Superior means much more than he says:

If the Church as mystery is an icon of the Trinity, then as sacrament it is an invitation to unity. A unity that is revealed as a task, gift, and goal, and which is committed to a passionate search for the good of all humankind for which it senses a solidarity, which demands ongoing conversion and purification, patient and understanding dialogue, evangelical awareness, respect for diversity.

Quite simply: what if we were to replace ‘Church’ with ‘Lasallian Community’? It would be a wonderful formula: Community as mystery, icon of the Trinity; Community as sacrament, invitation to Unity.

135 *Ibid.*, p. 5. On closer inspection, the expression is somewhat ambiguous, somewhere between eschatological, transcendence, verticality, simplicity and fraternity. It is an example of expressions that perhaps offer more than they have. It is an observation that we can repeat in several other places in this reflection and we keep silent; if we do not do so here it is because of the proximity to the themes of the Incarnation and Eschatology and the duality elements/dimensions, very important topics in our reflection.

And since ‘sacrament’ is the Latin term for ‘mystery’, which is its Greek version, we find the correspondence between Trinity and Unity, ‘mystery’ one and ‘sacrament’ the other, both developed in the operative ‘task, gift and goal’. The Lord as the source of the new Community: yes, it would be no nonsense to establish a very serious theological reading of the Lasallian Community which we can arrive at from the vow of Association for the education of the poor.

It is something still to be done, but there is a clue, and a very clear one, in the documentation of these twenty years: the Fraternity. It has been very present in the Christmas Letters...

For example, ten years later, 2019, in his Christmas and New Year Letter, the new Superior, then Br. Robert, states:

We are all the image and likeness of God, members of the one human family and global community. In our FSC communities we first and foremost strive to experience our innate brotherhood. We live the experience of fraternity on a daily basis - its wear and tear, its joys and frustrations. Every day, we recall the presence of God in the midst of the community. We are sustained by a rich life of prayer, the Eucharist, the grace of reconciliation and constant care for one another. We know that our fraternal life is a fragile but prophetic sign...

The portrait, contextualised in the current world situation, serves him for the next logical step:

... Our fraternal life “is part of the answer that God gives to the absence of brotherhood which is wounding the

world today". Today, this sign must be both audible and visible; it must awaken people who are beyond the doors and windows of our communities to the light of Christ.

That is the point: Signs of the Fraternity possible in the face of the world to come. Obviously, not only as a closed or intimate community of Brothers, but in the mediation of an educational project. This entails making the school a sign of the community possible in the face of the society to come.

Twenty years earlier, the previous Superior, Br. Alvaro, had commented on this. His successor, Br. Robert, quoted in 2019 from his Letter of 2001, following the text we have just quoted:

If there is one topic which I hold especially to heart, it is that of our fraternity. We are called to be witnesses of fraternity. I do not think we have been able to exploit our fraternity, our 'being brothers' as one of the prophetic elements of our vocation and one of the most important elements of our mission. We ought to ask ourselves to what extent our fraternity is evident and contagious today [And this is especially important since the world and religious life in particular are rediscovering the value of and the need for community.]¹³⁶

In 2001 the Letter was entitled '*Being Brothers in community: our primary association*'; in 2019, '*Witnesses to fraternity*'. In front of them, as soon as we look around, i.e. a couple of

136 In 2019 Br. Robert stops his quotation at ...'contagious'. The 2001 text continued with the sentence we added.

years before and after, we find as it were a bridge between four General Chapters.

There is no exaggeration or manipulation of the facts in stating this.

The first two Letters of Br. Alvaro (2000 and 2001) bridge with the last one of Br. John (1.1.2000), entitled '*The Challenge: living our founding story today*'. In 2019, Br. Robert, for his part, not only quotes his predecessor, but goes on to describe a global situation in need of this Sign of Fraternity. And he proposed it on the eve of the next General Chapter (which he did not know at the time when it would be held).

'Great Things Are Possible', the Institute's theme for 2019-2020, is rooted in the Gospel-inspired mandate that we Brothers be builders of fraternity (cf. Rm. 12:10).

Faithful to his criterion of historicising or updating the message of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, he looks from his heritage to the world of this first third of the 21st century and goes on to say:

A review of news from around the world clearly demonstrates we are witnessing increasing intolerance, lack of courtesy and senseless violence. We see that some governments, whether liberal, conservative, or populist, do not respond in lifegiving ways to "legitimate grievances, economic injustice and social fragmentation. In their different ways, liberal and populists are both hollowing out democracy and the wider Christian humanist foundations on which it rests: the dignity of the person,

the common good and lived fraternity".¹³⁷ Many elected leaders demonize people who are different. Migrants and refugees are ostracized and often subjected to policies that disregard their inherent rights as children of God...

All of which leads him to conclude:

I am reminded of Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:15): "You live in a world that is twisted out of its true pattern and among such people you must shine out as beacons to the world, upholding the message of life.

The message is very clear: rather than doing nothing, being a certain way. And being quite visible.

And this is not a show for the gallery. In the same year, a text by Brother Léon Lauraire, an expert in Lasallian Identity and Pedagogy, was published in the MEL Bulletings. The Bulletin is entitled '*The Challenge of Fraternity: A Reflection and a Personal Testimony*'. That is to say: in this case 'Sign of Fraternity' is not the slogan of a cloistered monastery, but of a Congregation devoted to education.¹³⁸

137 The Superior quotes essayist Adrian Pabst, in a short article entitled *The Ugly Sisters of Modern Politics*, in The Tablet, 27.7.2019, pp.12-14.

138 It is issue 56 of the MEL Bulletings, which can be found at www.lasalle.org. It is very useful to reflect on all this to see and listen to Br. Léon Lauraire, on 12 May 2015, presenting the latest and the whole of his Cahiers Lasalliens volumes on the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*. The lecture itself is also on lasalle.org, alongside Cahiers Lasalliens 67.

Neither the Superior's text goes into Lauraire's specifics, nor does the latter's monograph alludes to the integral identity implications of the Superior's message. It is clear that the two texts have been dealt with separately. But also, that they are being proposed in the same context. That is why they can be read together, heard as the two voices of a duo.

On the part of the three Superiors we have just mentioned, the same theme, reiterated over and over again; on the part of Br. Lauraire, the same, as we can see in his volumes on the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*¹³⁹, prior to this 2019 Bulletin we are quoting. For all other comments, the final lines of his presentation are worthwhile: "Experiencing fraternity in school so as to become builders of it in society: such is the educational dream of all Lasallians."

School and Fraternity facing the society of the 21st century: this is a formula which could be found both in a text on pedagogical theory and in another on spirituality. And in each of the two it would give rise to the same reading. It is worth going through the documentaries of these twenty-five years to see how the future is opening up.¹⁴⁰

139 They are Cahiers Lasalliens 61, 62, 63 and 67.

140 As a further example of the reflection we are engaged in, we now refer to the publication edited by Brother. Diego Muñoz, *That the school runs well. Approach to Lasallian Educational Model*, in Lasallian Studies No. 17. We note in particular pp. 345ff, on the relationship between the new Community and the new pedagogy. It was 2013.

It is not hard to perceive all this today and thus to respond to the two questions which have guided communication between the Superior and the Brothers during these twenty years: what has been and what can be the Lasallian Community.

In any case, before progressing along this path, there remains a topic related to all the above and which appears at key moments in this journey: the *Rule* and its revision. This is the latest great moment in Lasallian awareness.

3. 2015: A Required Revision

The most transcendental event of the second half of the 20th century for the Lasallian world has been the modification of the teams responsible for the different educational projects. We have pointed this out time and again. It is the central point of this reflection.

We say that it is the most transcendental because it must necessarily have meant a more or less major disruption in the code of identity and life of the Brothers' communities, that is to say, in their *Rules*.

When the Lasallian Institute undertook this task on the eve of the 1966 Chapter, it was not so much because of the transformation of the educational community but for another, prior reason. The transformation of the Community was already taking place in many places, but, as we have recalled, it was pressing to begin by redefining the role of the Brother. This was the real issue. The other issue would come later. It was really less urgent at that juncture.

At stake was the need to substantiate a discourse that could then be articulated in the code of life that is any *Rule*. And this required revising the whole definition of the Lasallian Institution. Quite rightly, throughout that half-century, terms such as renewal, refoundation, transformation and the like had been used.

That is why, when the Rule Commission was set up by mandate of the Chapter in 2000, this problem became evident. It was tackled, but, given its magnitude, the task

was left to post-Chapter structures. Circular 447 took it up in this way:

Proposition 38: That Brother Superior General and his Council appoint an '*ad hoc*' Committee to study what implications changes in the Church and in the Institute might have for the present text of the *Rule*. This committee will present the results of its work to Brother Superior General and his Council at least two years before the 44th General Chapter.

It was done in this way. The Commission presented its report at the conclusion of its work, while at the same time indicating that not much could be expected without broadening the horizon of what was possible¹⁴¹. That is why the next Assembly, 2007, decided that a further step should be taken, as proposed by the Commission and the General Council.

In the 2007 General Chapter documents there is only one paragraph on the revision of the *Rule*. Realistic and operational, it is found at the end of the whole on Government, and in front of the concluding greeting, almost as an appendix. It was a task for the new General Council.

8. IV. That under the authority of Brother Superior General and his Council, a Commission should lead, in dialogue

141 Reflected in Document 2 in the series of five in *Towards the 44th General Chapter*, presented under the title Referring to the work of the *ad hoc* Committee on the *Rule* (October 2005, p.6): "...as discussions about changes in the Church and in the Institute proceeded in the Commission, its members gradually realised that they had underestimated the scope of the task at hand."

with the Institute, a revision of the *Rule*. If the Superior General and his Council see it opportune, they should convene an Extraordinary General Chapter or a special session of the ordinary General Chapter in 2014 in order to submit for consideration the proposed revision of the Rule.¹⁴²

It was, and is, a twofold task: to understand the new Community and to regulate its day-to-day life. Apparently, one begins by understanding it and so ends up codifying; but there is no such thing: at this juncture, codification reveals unknown areas of the conscience, so that at every step it is necessary to recode.

Post-2015 Lasallian literature and its Assembly practice have been showing this beyond doubt.

Understanding Community

The Circular on this Chapter dates from September 2007. A year later, a new Circular (C. 459) communicated the process planned by the Council.

Just as the minutes of the Chapter state only the paragraph just transcribed, the presentation of the task sets out its motivation. It is broken down into five or six items, of varying scope. The first two, which are quite forceful, are fundamental:

- Today there is a widely accepted conviction that we are living at the dawn of a new era...

142 Circular 455, p.55.

- We Brothers live in a social and ecclesiastical situation outside of which our life has no meaning...

Then came the call of the new members of the educational task, that of the Church proposing a model of communion and the different actions already taken by the Districts on the topic.¹⁴³

A new group of experts got down to work and concluded by presenting their revision for September 2012. The Chapter studied it and entrusted it to the General Council for final drafting and presentation to the Sacred Congregation concerned.

Duly approved, Brother Superior General, Robert Schieler, wrote in his presentation to the Lasallian Family in 2015:

... Initiated by the 43rd General Chapter in 2000, the revisions are a result of a collective discernment on the changes and developments in our Church, Institute and world since the publication of the 1987 *Rule*. Two developments in particular are worth noting: the recognition of the centrality of our vow of Association and the educational mission we share with our Partners.

The Superior expresses it very clearly: 'Association' and 'sharing' are major signs for the Institution in the last half century. And he recalls the text/context hermeneutic model by placing these two pieces of information on a wider stage and thus presenting them as signs. Without

143 Circular 459, pp.5ff.

using the latter term, he places all emphasis in discernment, which he describes as collective.

What we can call an event, i.e. what occurs, are figures, volumes, statistics, perhaps even social dynamics. They are realities that can become a sign according to how they are interpreted, according to what their interaction with the whole of their scenario reveals. And we speak of 'revealing' in the double social and theological sense of the term. This is a terrain where the criteria are not only empirical, objectifiable ones. Events become signs when they are interpreted or received as the occasion of God's manifestation.

In the Lasallian world and the like, events are basically those produced by historical, social, economic, cultural, etc. ups and downs. They speak of figures which grow and which decrease, of places which disappear in the geography of the Institute and of places which seek new paths. They speak of formation statistics and of new structures for its general administration and animation.

With all this, there are necessarily multiple itineraries of personal fidelity, local or institutional creativity, dramas even of martyrdom, recognition, trial and error... We are shown the challenges of social and educational novelty to fidelity to tradition, responses and doubts, renewal in formation, growth and disappearance, infidelities... People and institutions emerge which nobody had thought of and which surprise, which are then accepted or disappear.

Everything becomes a sign when it is interpreted as an invitation from God to question the permanence of a tradition and the paths of fidelity. As a whole, it is the

challenge of historical novelty to the inherited community, the great Sign.

Like all signs, it does not consist in the data, but it is in them. It is like the sacraments and the classical concepts of their matter and their form. Without matter there is no form, but form is not matter. This is what is forgotten when figures are treated as if they hold the key in themselves. More or less, this is what is done in the face of technical challenges. It happens that data can contain a challenge of adaptation, derived from the sacramental ‘form’ that animates them.

This dynamic appears repeatedly in the path of the great Lasallian documents of the last eighty years, from the revision of the *Rule* in 1946/47 to that of 2015: in between are the clear awareness of its necessity in 1956, the great response of 1966/67, the adjustments of 1976 and the re-drafting in 1986, up to the hesitations of 2000 and 2007.

We have pointed this out in the previous sections, in this same reflection, using the words of the Superiors General.

The Superior knows this and that is why he speaks of Association and Shared Mission. He also knows that their common root is Community. That is why he advises and gives the key to reading it.

It is easy to see it: the times have imposed a new configuration on animation of the Lasallian institutions. In fact, without anyone having planned it, everything has blown up, in spite of the various attempts to redirect it. There

were two major topics, intertwined, but at different rates of maturity.

The first, logically, was the identity of the Brother. It was necessary to reconnect the profile of the Brother with the times of the Council, without denying three centuries of tradition, but reinterpreting it. This was the great task embraced by the 1966/67 Chapter and expressed especially in its *Declaration on the Brother in the World Today*.

The second goes hand in hand: the Lasallian Community. At first, for example, in 1966/67, this Community was still understood more in relation to the Brother than to the educational project. This is the scope of No. 27 of the *Declaration* ('the mystery of the person transcends activities and institutions'). Gradually, however, the novelty becomes more evident and the whole institution realises that a community is still needed in order to give meaning to the project, but that the familiar design of community does not serve that purpose today.

It goes hand in hand with the first, but carries a different timetable of manifestation, as we say. By the days of 1986 it is already evident and thus appears, almost unnoticed, an expression both fortunate and unfortunate at the same time: mission is something that is shared, so that community, in fact, is also shared.

Sharing community will soon show itself to be the true cross of Lasallian hermeneutics (and non-Lasallian hermeneutics too). Indeed, if we measure community by consecration and consecration by the vows, there is nothing to share. The big question is the possibility of defining

community from a point of view other than the vows. That is why the intermediate question arises: if community and consecration go together, can consecration be defined in any other way?

This is the big issue underlying the latest version of the *Rule*, in 2015. It was already very clear in the team that tried to revise it from 2000 onwards; and it came up again from 2007 onwards. Either a solution was found or no revision of the *Rule* would be possible.

The way forward can be predicted by combining the questions.

First of all: can we define consecration in terms of community; can we define consecration in terms of the constitution of a community animated by the call of God and dedicated to serving the children of the poor in the ministry of the Christian school; can we maintain that consecration consists in the life of that community?

Next: if we define consecration from the community, can we also define mission from the community thus consecrated; that is to say, can we define mission as the witness of that community consecrated for that work, for the ministry of the Christian school; how does that ministry end up being defined, then, when it is lived in this way?

Finally: if everything is understood from the community thus consecrated for and from the mission, who belongs to it? who can be a member of this human group? by virtue of what?

Then, logically, we must look at the indispensable block of the hows: how is an institution organised on the basis of this model of community? how is such an institution animated both globally and locally? how is the fundamental unity of this institution guaranteed in a world where particular identities seem to be blurred according to each geographical area or according to the games of interests?

This is what the collective discernment invoked by the Superior is all about.

Because in these same days, in the diversity of the signs which the different zones articulate in order to respond to the challenge of the new Community, these are the questions which the Lasallian Family is feeling.

The *Rule* is, today as yesterday, the articulation of its answers.

And codifying understanding

The *Rule* expresses it in language that is understandable everywhere. The Rule identifies the names of God in the present moment.

Already on its first page we find a very significant change. It is in the subject of the introductory article. In 1986 it had been written:

1. As he became aware, by God's grace, of the human and spiritual distress of 'the children of the artisans and the poor', John Baptist de La Salle devoted himself to forming

schoolmasters totally dedicated to teaching and to Christian education...

In 2015 it states:

1. Deeply moved by the human and spiritual distress 'of the children of artisans and of the poor,' and in response to the call of God, John Baptist de La Salle and his first Brothers made a lifelong commitment to God to provide these children with a human and Christian education...

This is the first article. It is true that the verbs 'to devote' and 'to commit' do not mean exactly the same thing, nor they have the same object in the two cases, but what they agree on is the reasoning. That is why we say the same of this 1987 statement: "[3.] John Baptist de La Salle gave a new meaning to the school by making it accessible to the poor and offering it to all as a sign of the Kingdom and as a means of salvation."

In 2015 this idea is incorporated in the first article which is completed thus: "[1.]...They reformed the kind of schooling available at the time to make it accessible to the poor, and to offer it to all as a sign of the Reign of God and as a means of salvation."

And it is made explicit a little further on with this new statement, full of suggestions:

5. The members of this Institute live in community and call themselves Brothers. By the fraternal character of their community life and their active and disinterested presence

among those they serve, they bear witness to the possibility of true brotherhood among people and nations.

The agent and recipient of the *Rule* is the Community. And when we see this, we are reminded of the motto of fifty years earlier: to give the Founder back to the Institute, give the Institute back to the Brothers.

That is why this change in the subject does not mean altering Lasallian history: it is another way of looking at the origins, realising precisely the meaning of Association. It is the body of that community which, with the guidance of the Founder, is finding its way and consolidating the institution in that society.

It is quite clear where the revision has gone. In the new art. II, third paragraph, it is even stated:

Association for the mission leads them to welcome and accompany those who wish to share the Lasallian charism and deepen their knowledge of it. The specific contribution of the Brothers to the shared mission lies in their consecration to the Most Blessed Trinity, lived out in community. Their total gift of themselves to young people, especially the poor, is a special sign of God's own fidelity to them.

A little further on, speaking already about the Mission, the particular contribution reappears with new nuances:

15. As 'ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ,' the Brothers consecrate their life to God to bring the Gospel to the world of education.

The primary responsibility of the Brothers, and their distinctive contribution to the shared mission, is the witness of a ministerial community, living its religious life in fraternal charity and in solidarity with the poor through its educational service.

The witness of a consecrated life lived in community is a Sign and an instrument of God's plan. It demonstrates that love is a saving reality and that, by being Brothers among themselves and with others, they make the Reign of God visible.

It is a dense article, full of nuances. To begin with, its first paragraph: in the margin, canon 673, recalled above, is quoted, now not to the letter but in its spirit, so that the following two paragraphs can be understood as its explanation. And in that explanation itself, the two starting expressions are striking. First, 'the witness of a ministerial community'; then, 'the witness of a consecrated life'. They leave a question: are they two or a single witness?

Speaking further on about Consecrated Life, it opens with this first article:

22. John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers committed their lives to the progressive establishment of a community which responded to the needs of poor and neglected children.

Called by God to procure his glory by undertaking his work, and by making a lifelong commitment to remain associated with one another in order to run together and

by association Christian and gratuitous schools, they lived out their consecration to the Most Holy Trinity.

The path they followed continues to inspire and focus the consecration of the Brothers today.

It may be interesting to recall that, in 1987, the article that opened this theme said: “22. In response to the call of the Holy Spirit, each Brother, freely, and without any thought of turning back, bases his whole existence on the gospel in order to follow Jesus Christ...”.

The nuance is in the passage from the person of the Brother today to the Community of the beginning: the subject is not ‘I’ but ‘we’ and the reference is to a life, a shared project, not to an act.

These are nuances, debatable if we look at them one by one, no doubt. But as a whole they deliver important conclusions. For example, in art. 28, which together with art. 29 is dedicated to ‘association for the educational service of the poor’, we find this paragraph:

28.3. The dynamism of unity¹⁴⁴ shown in Brothers’ communities binds the Brothers also to all those committed to the Lasallian mission.

144 In the French version ‘*alliance*’; in the English, ‘unity’. It is not the same thing, and these are details that should have been better taken care of. Perhaps the term ‘alliance’ is not the most appropriate to express what is meant in this article.

Further on, now speaking of Community Life, these references to the Holy Trinity are made somewhat more explicit. Trinity:

46. The Brothers find inspiration in the prayer of Jesus Christ: "Father, that they may be one as you and I are one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." The community is where the Brothers live out their consecration to God.

Therefore

52. The Brothers seek to share with many other people the fraternity they foster in their community. The community, as the home and school of communion, is actively and generously accessible to others, especially to Partners, young people trying to discover their vocation, and to the close relatives of its members...

53.... Through these relations, they witness to evangelical fraternity, a sign of the presence of the Lord.

It is understood the profound meaning of

54.3. In educational institutions, the visibility of the Brothers' community should be a form of Gospel witness.

54.4. The Lasallian charism is a gift for the Church and for the world. Today, it is increasingly a source of spirituality for all those who share the mission. Attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit, the Institute is open to new forms of community life.

In the final chapter, the spirit of 1966/67, which they had already made explicit in 1986, reappears:

154. The life and development of the Institute depend above all on the mystery and the power of grace. But by the gift of freedom, the Lord wanted to put the destiny of the Institute into the hands of the Brothers. At the heart of the Lasallian Family, the Brothers are a source of inspiration for all Lasallians who increasingly share the mission and the charism of the Institute.

It has been said and written before, as we have been showing. Now, 2015, after recalling it, a very intentional note is added:

157...The Brothers ... are happy to see numerous Partners wishing to deepen the knowledge of the Founder revealed in his life, spirituality, and work.

In the growth of association with men and women who walk side-by-side with them and identify themselves today as the sons and daughters of John Baptist de La Salle, they see a sign of the times which fills them with hope.

That is why it can be stated, almost in conclusion, that

159. The Brothers are convinced that their fraternity, demonstrated in community and educational ministry, as lay religious, is a prophetic sign for the Church and for the world.

Therefore, do we need 'great new, large documents' or not?

This is certainly a selective reading of the text of the *Rule* and therefore intentional or even self-serving.

It is guided by a particular pre-understanding¹⁴⁵ which has been developing in the three great stages or phases of our journey through the history of the Lasallian Community in the 20th century. That is why, even if we recognise that it is intentional, if we place this revision of the *Rules* in continuity with the whole previous process - what we are evoking since the events of 1904 - it no longer seems so interested, subjective, a simple opinion.

It happens that there is a lack of foundation, as always when it is a question of that anticipated or expected understanding that we call pre-understanding. Full substantiation is achieved when the subject is mastered. In the meantime, one ventures along the paths of logic on the assumption that certain key moments along the way are known - 'pre-known'.

The relationship between community and religious consecration needs to be grounded: there is a lack of a serene theological discourse that considers the vows as an expression of consecration and not as its cause, so that consecration itself is understood as the possession of someone

145 *Pre-understanding* and *prejudice* are similar in that they both have something prior to contact with novelty. They differ, however, in that one enables the arrival at novelty while the other prevents it. The studies of Ricoeur (e.g. *On Interpretation*) and Habermas (*Knowledge and Interest*, also e.g.), whose orientation we follow, have already become classics in this respect.

by God, the sole consecrator. The symptoms of this consecrating possession, i.e. another system for expressing it that is not necessarily the vows, or at least the triad, need to be enunciated.

It is necessary to situate this theological discourse in our cultural or social moment in which it is not the forms of religious life that are in crisis but the very credibility of the Christian community.¹⁴⁶ The issue is not the viability of the Lasallian heritage but that of the Gospel.

Seeing what is missing, one understands the caution of the Superior in pointing out in the beginning of the *Rule* that there are two important circumstances behind its revision. In that notice there is much more than a reading guide. Certainly, it gives guidance, it says where the novelty lies with respect to the revised text of thirty years ago. But at the same time it points out the transcendence of what it proposes as a guide. It turns out to be both a guide and a warning of fragility.¹⁴⁷

Given what is missing, we understand that the Superior himself is already looking at the places where the reasoning that will sustain it all has to be established. He knows that this argument is not yet explicit and therefore the

146 Brother Vincent Ayel formulated it in this way a long time ago in various Lasallian formation activities in France. Cf. for example, *Chrétiens à la recherche de son identité (avenir de la vie religieuse)*, Eds. Salvator, Mulhouse, 1978, 127pp.

147 Symptomatic and important, the warning of the new Superior General, Br. Armin Luistro, on this theme of fragility. See, for example, his reflection at the *Days on Spirituality*, Rome, Casa Generalizia, July 2023.

publication he is presenting is daring: many pieces are still missing in this jigsaw puzzle.

To tell the truth, these paragraphs leave a certain feeling of discomfort, even unease. The last 'lack...', 'lack...', point to something that could be serious, if the situation were really like this.

That is why, before finishing this list of signs, we would like to recall a statement from the 1993 Chapter. It is the point of reference we have adopted in this study to indicate the presence of the third phase of the Lasallian journey in the last century: Refounding.

At the beginning of Circular 435, which gives an account of what took place at its sessions, it is stated:

It was frequently pointed out during the Chapter that *we do not need* a great number of new, long documents; what we need is to live, as genuine Brothers, in our Communities, Districts, Regions and the whole of our Institute, in the manner described in our *Rule*, using the Personal, Community and District Programs to help us in our endeavours. (Italics added).

Well then. Time showed that this statement could not be accepted in its strict sense. The extent and depth of the reflections of the Superiors in the two decades that were to follow showed this. This is what we mean by the possible feeling of discomfort and uneasiness.

Perhaps it is not real and so this analysis is incomplete as well as self-serving. But, as we come to this end, a certain

caution is called for and we must ask ourselves, for example, if in the Lasallian world these three expressions: 'associated', 'associated for the mission' and 'associated for the educational service of the poor' mean the same thing.

It seems evident that they can in fact mean the same thing. This is often the case, of course, although each in itself has a scope that does not exactly coincide with the other two.

The first two, association/for mission, do not coincide for a very simple reason: in the second there is a redundancy that is much more than an insignificant nuance. Indeed, if we feel that to 'partnership' we must add 'for the mission', it is because we imagine a 'association' that is not for the mission to be possible. This, however, is absurd, because the 'mission' expresses the aim or the meaning of the 'association'. There is, in fact, no 'association' that does not have a mission'. There is no point in adding it.

Now: if we accept, unconsciously at least, that there can be an 'association' that does not include the 'mission', we are accepting the possibility of an absurd institution, without purpose or meaning. It follows that to associate oneself with such an 'association' is to associate oneself with an absurd entity in itself. Such an association does not offer many guarantees for the future, logically, at least for that first 'association' that could live without a 'mission'.

When we consider the third expression, we find something similar: to associate for mission and to associate for the educational service of the poor do not mean the same

thing. It seems logical that there can be a ‘mission’ that does not consist in ‘the educational service of the poor’.

It may be objected to this distinction that, if we are talking about the Lasallian Institution, the two expressions coincide, so that they are interchangeable. And that may be true. It happens that then the previous comment reappears: does it make sense to extend ‘association’ to the ‘educational service of the poor’, since we are talking about the Lasallian Institution?

One would say no, that it is another redundancy. Unless, again, we accept the possibility that such an Institution could be constituted outside that service, as we said earlier about the possibility of an institution without a mission....

These are such exquisite distinctions that they deliver almost to the point of ridicule. And that is why we often abandon them as soon as we begin to raise them. However, in one way or another, we feel that underneath them there is something uncomfortable, as if the ground we are treading on were not smooth enough. This is what we mean when we talk about the relationship between ‘mission’ and ‘association’.

There is between the two a crucial pair of terms: community and consecration. Their scope in these distinctions is decisive. It is enough, for example, to ask what is the ‘mission’ of a ‘consecrated community’. And, following along this path, to ask whether it is the same thing to be associated with a consecrated community or to be associated with its mission.

The documents of the Chapter in 2000 suggested that it was possible to be associated with the mission of such a community without being associated with the community itself. This can be seen by looking at the table of contents of the Circular which presents its results ...¹⁴⁸

148 Cf. Circular 447, Acts of the 43rd General Chapter, 1 October 2000. From the cover it has the subtitle: "Associated for the educational service of the poor as a Lasallian response to the challenges of the 21st century".

Overview

At the end of this *Part One* of our study, it is necessary to ask ourselves whether, in addition to the data, we can discover in it any system or structure, perhaps even some continuity. That is to say, whether the whole makes any sense or whether it remains a collection of unrelated data.

If any process appears, the history of an institution can be interpreted in the way of living beings, i.e. in terms of birth, maturation and disappearance. This perspective is quite significant to us because it would allow us to see, beyond the specific dates of each epiphénoménon, the roots of what is happening and at least something of what might happen tomorrow.

We therefore ask ourselves: do the signs collected in this itinerary (in its three main periods, in its different sections) mean anything as a whole?

From the perspective of this study, the first answer is yes. Even if initially or more hypothetically than we would like, we find that yes, a process seems to have taken place over the last century. It seems that none of the sections can be understood without the sequence that links it to the others.

Taken as a whole, the process seems to deliver a change of perspective in the definition of Lasallian Identity. It seems

to propose the passage from one emphasis to another: from the vows to the Community.

A common and new language

This *Part One* shows that our theme appeared a long time ago. By whatever name, express or contextual, the new community has been giving meaning to what was happening in the Lasallian world. Inherited and new at the same time, the community has gradually shown itself to be the great issue.

At first it did not seem so. Rather than a precise topic, there was a general, unidentified discomfort. We found a framework or delimitation that held an issue. It was like an invisible planet, deducible only from the orbits of others.

In our study we interpret the first fifty years of the 20th century as fulfilling the nature of an invisible planet context.

In those years the dimensions of the area of play are set, circumscribed by the tension between two polarities. The first is that between religious life and apostolic commitment; the second is that between religious life and secular life. Between the two they were already indicating the tone or the content of each of its elements, so that within the limits of the Lasallian project an acceptable, common and new configuration could be assumed.

The Community had always been the result of the confluence of these factors: consecration, commitment, secularity. As in music, harmony requires above all cleanliness in

each of the notes. With the passage of time, there is always a certain looseness in the sound that disfigures any chord and forces the instrument to be recomposed or replaced.

That is why in that first half century those polarities or rules of the game showed their limitations more and more clearly. As the dynamics of universalisation, on the one hand, and the exhaustion of modernity, on the other, became increasingly acute, it became clear that their definitions did not correspond to reality. Very soon they could be perceived as reflecting a society or a world that no longer existed.

It is understandable, therefore, that it was not easy to identify the problem or system of problems, nor was it easy to formulate solutions. It was necessarily a time of confronting problems rather than offering solutions. Consecration, commitment and secularity gave rise to three languages in the same forum. No other outcome was to be expected.

We see this in the period from the *Conditae a Christo* and the Letter of St. Pius X to the *Code of Canon Law* and its *Normae*, i.e. the first quarter of the century (1900-1917/18). The second quarter of the century already shows very clearly the exhaustion we have just pointed out, made more severe due to the new universalisation of social interests (1920-1950). Its best example: the expiry of the lightning solution of Br. Athanase with the approval of the *Rules*.

Symptomatic in this regard is the ten-year arc from the rejection of lay teachers (1946) to the proposal of an Association of Christian Educators, as we have pointed out (1956). This is already the turning point. Bold as it may

seem to say, these are already the beginnings of a common language. Half a bitter half-century had passed for the Institute and for the whole world. Its fruit was the predisposition to generosity, to a new exactitude.

This is the general scope and the countless nuances of what we have called the **Restoration**.

In the following two decades, that is to say, around the time of the Council and after, the explosion of problems caused by the persistence of the previous rules of the game and the shaping of new ones is very clear. With regard specifically to our subject - the Lasallian Community - a symptom of these tensions was, first of all, the perplexities over the question of the priesthood, which lasted for thirty years, from 1946 to 1976. There was also the violent debate about the vows, their existence, duration and nature. And the issue of the Signum Fidei Fraternity.

The memory of these three references shows how, little by little, the exchanges between these polarities are being consolidated, so that the language becomes more nuanced. It was the invisible planet revealing its contours.

In this sense we have spoken of **Renewal**.

The last third of the century showed the new dimensions of the Lasallian Community. It is no longer only the domain of Signum Fidei, but we are beginning to speak of a new Community, even if for the moment it is more pronounced as an educational community than in any other way. But the enrichment of the discourse of the new *Rules* (1986) on this subject is already an indisputable

fact. We have underlined the great Sign which is the formula 'Shared Mission'. The Chapter will tacitly turn this expression into a guide for the Institute in the following decade, culminating the movement with the presence of lay Lasallians at the Chapter of 1993 and the interesting Circulars and documents immediately preceding that of the year 2000.

Since then, our theme has become the Lasallian theme par excellence. It is the one that marks the new limits or the scope of its entire vocabulary in terms of mission and the relationship between one type of person and another, between Christian confessionality and the assumption of other confessions.

It does not yet shed much light on the understanding of the last dimension of Lasallian identity, Consecration. Rather, it is seen as an aporia, the difficulty that the new forms of community have to overcome or resolve. And it is a task that still remains today, even if after having achieved, through practice, contributions that were unknown not so long ago.

We are clearly still in a time of **Refoundation**.

The new language and the new Community

Overall, from 1900 to 2020, the process is clear. Framing the data in a single puzzle in no way manipulates it. If it is true that Monsieur de La Salle had founded not Christian schools but communities to animate Christian schools, it is also true that from the first decades of the last century,

the inherited formula for defining such a Community no longer holds.

Without Community, the project of the Christian Schools is not feasible. In journalistic terms we would say: the Bull no longer defines. That is why the whole history of this Institution throughout the 20th century is the chronicle of its efforts to find a new formula, faithful to its origins and to the present. And it is easy to perceive the two phenomena that definitely show this. In another science we would speak of catalysts.

The first is the less new of the two. Social dynamics had in fact always been ahead of the personal resources of the Lasallian Institution, leading it to better define the profiles of its agents, to situations which could not be satisfied from within the Community. The first catalyst is the professional impossibility of the Brothers' communities to face up to the animation of the educational projects that societies are in need of. For this reason, the Brothers seek the professional presence and commitment of people not linked to their religious community.

Sometimes, it is true, they are reluctant to need them and want to refuse new works. For various reasons, however, they do not succeed. Or rather, they feel that they cannot do so, because social dynamics impose it on them.

Since the middle of the 20th century, at the same time, there has been a phenomenon of numerical or quantitative reduction in the number of Brothers worldwide. This is a reflection of taking part in a larger, universal movement. For this reason, the natural difficulty of providing

for all the diversifications from within is now much greater and is going to impose protocols oriented towards urgency. It is the second catalyst.

Between the two, their communities are both shrinking in visibility and significance in the eyes of society. This necessarily produces a new and greater reduction, which accelerates the process of their insignificance. It is a time when the community model is, insensibly, functioning as an organisation. We have pointed this out at various times.

That is why they proclaim, from the heart of those years of numerical plenitude, that educational animation from living communities is more important to them than the mere multiplication or maintenance of inherited works: *Declaration* 49.2-3. Unfortunately - it must be admitted - it was soon forgotten.

It could not be otherwise. Both diversification and shrinkage had at their root the factor just mentioned: the consideration of the social from the point of view of its organisability and performance. It was something that had been pervading all institutions for a hundred years. In the early days of the post-conciliar period it would even distort the understanding of Christian renewal.

This way of looking at life and society caused the Christian datum itself to lose its mysterious character or the consecrated community to lose its character as a Sign of faith reduced to a generous increase in results. For this reason it was logical that in many cases that paragraph of the *Declaration* disappeared almost without having emerged.

From the point of view of our study, this points first of all to the indispensable updating of the Lasallian vocabulary, that is to say, the precision in the scope of the concepts used to support the educational projects. This is the effort of Lasallian documentation over the last thirty years.

This task, however, has two aspects: that of the vocabulary itself and that of the institution. That is to say, as we have seen more than once, the process of maturation which we are studying shows that sometimes we can fall into the illusion of renewing the vocabulary, but not the institutional design, that is to say, the language of the structures. Language is, in fact, the place and the way a school is at a social point. Language is also the way in which it is run, its criteria for its results, its programmes for the promotion of professional awareness, etc.

Well, the reduction of community to organisation can go as far as that, preventing an adequate awareness of the situation, incomprehensibly stretching the time limits of the institutional response to the 'signs of the times'. It can happen, for example, that the treatment 'community' is in fact reserved for that of the Brothers, while education continues to be reduced to educational organisation.

This is what appears in all the consequences of the two catalysts, diversification and shrinkage. Between the two, in fact, they give rise to a situation in which the Lasallian community needs to redefine itself, on pain of disappearance. And so we come to the crux of this study, which allows us to affirm that yes, there is a logical sequence between the data.

Everything, in fact, is ordered if it is interpreted from the hypothesis of the adequacy between the community and the meaning of the Lasallian project. And when we say that everything is ordered, we include not only what concerns the community - which would be logical or natural - but all the rest. For example, the whole project of government, the formulas for formation, the theological or spiritual discourse, the diversification according to cultural diversity..., everything is understood from the perplexity between the configuration of the community and the meaning of its presence in society and in the Church.

Defining from a system of three

It is like this and it cannot be surprising because in one way or another it is something always present in the Lasallian awareness of around the last half century. It must also be recognised, however, that more than once this indisputable occasional awareness has remained just that, occasional. It does not seem that its content has been transposed to the Lasallian Institution as a whole. In that group, the support of the work has been more important than that of the community.

In any case, what is important in this study is to point out, as the common thread of this history, the relationship between the Community and the educational establishment. This is what gives coherence to our nine sections.

It seems understandable, but there is more to it. The plausibility of this reading is reinforced when we realise that this coherence or continuity does not lead to one conclu-

sion but two, which are, moreover, contrary. It would be a different matter if the conclusive orientation were to deliver the necessary emphasis on such an action or such a structure, guaranteeing its positive outcome. In that case, we would have to view our conclusions with some suspicion. But this is not the case. The process takes to a dilemma or two opposite outcomes, without any apodictic guarantee of the outcome of either.

In fact, as we have already pointed out or at least suggested, the process of this last century produces the reformulation of the Lasallian Community. However, it does not say in any way whether this reformulation is or is not possible. It is not, therefore, an assertion - that of the logical process - of a self-serving nature, but one that is willing to reveal that it delivers us at the same time to institutional extinction.

To put it bluntly: the redefinition of the Lasallian Institution requires solving certain places in its identity discourse. In particular, the discourse of Consecration.

This, in fact, is the last one that has become evident, in the face of the unsatisfactory or incomplete relationship between the new Community and the inherited one, or between the Community and the educational task. Neither of these two arrangements - the inherited and the new, plus community and education - can be satisfactory for the simple reason that the third is not yet satisfactory.

The three dimensions of Lasallian identity, as formulated in 1966/67 and codified since 1986, are inseparable and shape each other. This means, for example, that if one speaks of sharing the mission, one must be able to speak

at the same time of sharing the Consecration or the Community, which is still far from being so clear.

This is the final point to which all the above brings us.

Everything makes sense, i.e. stability and future, if the model of community is configured in relation to the model of consecration. Otherwise, what has been achieved is ephemeral.

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