

69. COMMUNITY, SOCIETY, INSTITUTE

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We shall begin with a few words about vocabulary and then, adopting an historical approach, we propose to examine how a group of teachers gradually gathered around De La Salle and in time came to form the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In doing so, we shall follow in a general way Maurice A. Hermans's book « The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in its pursuit of canonical status » (see bibliography).

Before concluding, we shall ask ourselves who these first Brothers were : a competent team of workers, a community of men inspired by the same faith, a mirror in human history of the life of the Trinity.

1. A WORD ABOUT VOCABULARY

De La Salle uses three basic terms to describe the group of Brothers he founded : community, society and institute.¹ The following definitions will help to pin down the meaning and the weight these terms carried in their day.

"Community is used when speaking of pious houses, founded in order to maintain and support a number of persons in a certain kind of regular or secular life, such as convents, abbeys, conventual prio-

ries, seminaries, hospices and all sorts of religious houses".

"Society is also a special group of persons, formed for profit or in order to live a regular life. [...] Religious form societies, congregations, in order to live a regular life in common".

"Institute. Rule which prescribes a certain kind of life. All religious orders have their special institute. [...] The Daughters of the Visitation usually call their congregation an institute".²

There were a number of precedents during the course of Church history, such as the *Brothers of the Common Life* in the 14th century: "This is a congregation without vows, of priests, clerics and lay women

who came together in search of perfection, living from the work of their hands, especially from copying manuscripts, and teaching or exercising an apostolic ministry".³

2. THE FORMATION OF THE COMMUNITY OF BROTHERS (1679-1694)

2.1. A providential meeting

The Community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools came into existence as a result of a providential meeting between Adrien Nyel and De La Salle. Adrien Nyel had come from Rouen to set up charity schools for poor children in De La Salle's birthplace, Rheims. By 1679, the year in which the meeting took place, Nyel had already established two charity schools, one in the parish of St Maurice and the other in that of St Jacques.

Wanting to consolidate the work he had begun, Nyel consulted John Baptist de La Salle, canon, priest and soon to become Doctor of Theology. At Christmas 1679, the teachers moved into one house. During Holy Week in 1680, De La Salle lodged the seven teachers in his own house and followed a kind of retreat with them. The change that took place in them was remarkable. The teachers accepted the new lifestyle, became more pious and strengthened their commitment to their work in school. For three months, De La Salle reflected and prayed, and then went to Paris to consult Fr Barré. Fr Barré thought De La Salle was being led by Providence. "De La Salle would establish what he [Barré] had not succeeded in founding. There was only one solution: he had to live with the teachers, lead them from within the group, be one of them..." (GALLEGO 1,149).

De La Salle saw clearly that it was the voice of God speaking to him through the mouth of a saint: his faith and reason told him that Barré's advice was sound. He still had to overcome some strong personal feelings: "In fact, I suffered a great deal initially when I invited them into my house" (CL 7,169). On June 24th 1681, the feast of his patron saint and the day house leases expired, De La Salle gave the teachers permanent accommodation in his house in rue Sainte Marguerite.

2.2. "Some teachers from our Community"

It was not long before requests for teachers started coming in, first from Rethel and then from Châtea-

Porcien. In answer to the latter request, De La Salle wrote as follows on June 20th 1682: "It would be wrong of me, Gentlemen, not to send you school teachers from our community, in view of the enthusiasm and zeal you show for the Christian education and instruction of your children. So please be assured that nothing is dearer to my heart than to support your good intentions in this matter" (LA 111).

De La Salle followed Fr Barré's advice to live with the teachers and be like one of them. He left his own home and went to live with his nine teachers in a house in rue Neuve, considered now as the birthplace of the Institute. "It was a real monastery. A timetable was established, long periods were devoted to prayer and there was time for housework. [...] Life was characterised by total detachment, humility, poor habits and shoes, mortification, fasting, all the fervour of a new endeavour" (GALLEGO 1,157).

"Community exercises and work in school need a person full time" (CL 11,350 = MH 0,0,10), De La Salle would write one day. And so, as Blain says, in 1683, he gave up his canonry to devote himself more fully to the training of his teachers, give them an example of the perfection he proposed to them, and adopt himself the lifestyle he was introducing to their community. In 1685, the teachers changed the way they dressed, adopting a short cassock and a mantle without sleeves. "This unusual dress makes seculars look upon those belonging to the community as persons separated and withdrawn from the world, and it is quite proper that they should think this, for it will prevent them from frequenting people of the world too easily and conversing with them" (CL 11,352 = MH 0,0,40).

By 1685, De La Salle was firmly committed to the training of teachers, and he took steps to set up a seminary for country teachers. There were some who wished to give the seminary legal standing by obtaining *lettres patentes*. He was also seen as the head of a community of teachers. Brothers were moved from house to house as the need arose⁴ — new schools, existing schools, for reasons of personal renewal.

The first biographers speak of the need for uniformity felt by the group, and begin to refer to the "small congregation". "Seeing that he was responsible for a number of teachers working in several different towns, J.-B. de La Salle considered it appropriate to form them into a small congregation, and to prescribe for them a uniform style of life" (CL 7,231).

"Seeing, therefore, that he was responsible for a number of teachers working in several different towns, he devised a new way of proceeding. He considered it appropriate to form all these members into a small congregation, and to prescribe for them a uniform style of life" (CL 6,73).

2.3. The first vows of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

On the feast of the Ascension, May 23rd 1686, De La Salle assembled the *principal Brothers* in Rheims. There were perhaps a dozen of them, half of the total number of Brothers. The aim was to give the group greater cohesion. The assembly discussed how the Community should be called, the choice of one confessor for all the Brothers, the habit, the regulations, the formation of new recruits to the Brothers. It decided to run schools in towns rather than in the country and to maintain complete gratuity in them. It discussed timetables also.

Another point that was discussed was the question of vows. A commitment to God expressed by means of vows would fix the Brothers in their vocation, and they would consider themselves as consecrated persons.

The Brothers accepted the idea with enthusiasm, but somewhat recklessly, and asked to make perpetual profession straightaway. De La Salle, however, preferred to proceed with more caution: he weighed up the pros and cons, the advantages and the disadvantages, taking into account both God's grace and human weakness. When Pentecost Sunday came, it was too early for a decision, and the retreat was prolonged for a further week. Finally, on June 9th, the feast of the Holy Trinity, De La Salle and the Brothers present, each in his turn, pronounced the vow of obedience for three years, to be renewed every year.

The following year, it seems as if De La Salle persuaded the Brothers to choose one of their own number as superior. But, as the biographers tell us, the "ecclesiastical authorities" refused to accept the idea of a

lay person giving orders to a priest, as De La Salle was, and Brother Henry L'Heureux was very pleased to hand over the reins of office to the person who would be known as the Founder of the Brothers. The situation seemed dangerous in the long term for the autonomy of the community. De La Salle tried many times, but for a long time in vain, to get the Brothers to choose one of themselves as superior.

Around 1690, Fr Baudrand, parish priest of St Sulpice in Paris, tried to impose the ecclesiastical habit on the Brothers who had been in his parish for two years. De La Salle defended strongly the originality of the Brothers and wrote a document in support, which we know as the *Memoir on the Habit*. Here is some of De La Salle's reasoning:

"Before introducing anything into the community, much thought needs to be given and the good and bad consequences of such an action need to be carefully examined. But once the step has been taken, one must be very careful not to reverse the decision unless it is absolutely necessary (CL 11,351 = MH 0,0,24).

"If the Brothers of this community wore the ecclesiastical habit, they would be tempted easily to study, to be tonsured, to accept successive clerical orders, and look for work in the parishes" (CL 11,354 = MH 0,0,58).

According to M. A. Hermans's calculations, the term "community" is used more than 40 times in the space of eight pages to describe the small group of Brothers. De La Salle demands that his Brothers be independent and free in their community life to follow their vocation. They are neither seculars nor ecclesiastics. As Brothers of the Christian Schools they lead, as laymen, a life close to that of religious.

2.4. A community in crisis

By the time 1690 arrived, the Seminary for country teachers was no longer recruiting and the number of postulants was going down. In three years, there had been one vocation, and many Brothers were leaving or dying prematurely. De La Salle himself fell seriously ill and Br Henry L'Heureux died. In the midst of this painful situation, De La Salle decided that the Community had "to grow from within", as S. Gallego puts it (1,236).

One consequence was that newly arrived Brothers would not begin teaching before they were properly trained. Another was that De La Salle opened in Vaugirard the first real novitiate and made it his resi-

dence. He also organised annual retreats there for the Brothers so that they could renew themselves thoroughly in a peaceful setting. And finally, the Brothers would write to him at regular intervals and he would visit them periodically. By these means, unity and the call to perfection were strengthened among the Brothers.

De La Salle was now 40 years old. Wishing to make a more positive commitment to the work entrusted to him by God, he invited Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin to make — secretly, no doubt — what later became known as the “heroic vow” of association and union to establish the “Society of the Christian Schools”. This they did on November 21st 1691, the

feast of the Presentation of the Most Blessed Virgin. We know the formula they used from Blain (CL 7,313). The three committed the rest of their lives as a group to the service of the Christian Schools. Their decision was dictated by the need to maintain the “work of God” by relying solely on his Providence.

On October 31st 1692, Mgr de Harlay, Archbishop of Paris, gave De La Salle verbal permission for the novitiate to become a community (CL 7,318), a step which helped to consolidate the young Society. Georges Rigault (I,202) believed that “this permission admitted the Society of the Brothers to the ranks of religious communities”. In reality, it applied only to the house at Vaugirard.⁵

3. THE SOCIETY OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (1694-1705)

3.1. The first perpetual vows

On June 6th 1694, De La Salle and 12 Brothers made perpetual vows of association, stability and obedience. The *Collection* describes the obligations entailed by these vows which would be taken subsequently by many other Brothers :

“1. To run schools by association with those who have become associated with the Society and with those who will become associated with it in the future, wherever one is sent, and to do whatever one is assigned to do by the Superiors.

“2. To remain stable in the said Society [...].

“3. [...] To resolve to beg and to live on bread alone rather than abandon the said Society and the schools.

“4. To obey. First, the Superior of the Society who has been chosen [...]. Thirdly, the body of this Society...” (CL 15,2f = R 2).

De La Salle then involved the Brothers who had made these vows directly in the running of the Society : he resigned as Superior. After two secret ballots, De La Salle was re-elected. His re-instatement was accompanied, however, by a new clause : a declaration signed by the 12 Brothers confirmed the lay character of the Society.

From this point on, the term *society* is used more and more and replaces *community* to designate the Brothers in all the houses as a whole.

The copy we have of the *Practice of the daily regulation* is a manuscript dated 1713. As Br M. A. Hermans points out : “There is absolutely no doubt that the date is that of the copy and not of the composition”. The chapter dealing with “the prayers to be said for deceased Brothers” (CL 25,84-87) makes no reference to the ranks of superior, visitor or director. “The only differentiation introduced into the community obligations regarding the deceased is based on whether vows were made and for how long they were made. This represents a very clear statement regarding the importance attached both to the vows, even this early on, and to the fundamental equality of rights of each of the members of the Society” (CL 11,77).

In Autumn 1702, De La Salle sent two Brothers to Rome to run a Papal school and “to ask God for the grace that their Society might always be submissive” to the Church of Rome, as we read in his last will and testament (CL 10,118 = EP 4). It was a means also to bring the Society’s existence to the attention of the Roman court and to prepare the way for papal approbation.⁶

3.2. An ecclesiastical superior imposed from outside

In December 1702, an event took place that shows the great attachment of the Brothers to De La Salle : the new archbishop of Paris announced his decision to put another ecclesiastic in De La Salle’s place as

Superior of the Brothers. The latter protested vigorously and threatened to leave the diocese and go and live their community life with De La Salle elsewhere. After resisting for several days, they accepted the orders of the archbishop, but only after obtaining a written assurance that the authority of the new superior would be purely nominal, and that the Brothers would refer only to De La Salle regarding all matters relating to the internal government of the community.

In 1703, Mgr de Noailles confirmed De La Salle in his position as superior. "His Eminence the Cardinal announced that it was his intention that he [M. de La Salle] should continue to govern his Community as he had up till then" (Maillefer, CL 6,150).

Blain writes that, around 1703, a number of Brothers with perpetual vows left the Society. Two of them went to La Trappe. Before accepting them, the abbot asked for De La Salle's advice. De La Salle wanted the Brothers to return, and he obtained a promise from

the abbot that he would not accept any Brothers in the future without his approval.⁷

The fact that the Society of the Brothers was now a coherent and established body is illustrated by the following event mentioned by M. A. Hermans: "On February 10th of this same year of 1703, De La Salle admitted to the Society a 25 year old man with the tonsure, whose delicate health had prevented him from supporting the rigours of life at La Trappe. His name was Joseph Truffet. On entering, he took the name of Brother Barthélemy and, 14 years later, became superior general of the Society. He had left the austere abbey only on the advice of the Abbot de Rancé. [...] The way he entered the Society was no different from that of the other Brothers. [...] However, it did demonstrate that the life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools already had a sufficiently established religious value for it to be considered on a par with other forms of the regular life".⁸

4. THE INSTITUTE

OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (1705-1719)

4.1. The "Rules" of the Institute

We read in Blain: "Around the year 1700, he [De La Salle] composed a *Rule for the Brother Directors*, which he subsequently sent in manuscript form to all the houses of the Institute, ordering the Brother Director to have it read in the refectory during dinner, on the first Thursday of every month, and to use it himself as spiritual reading on Sundays and Thursdays" (CL 8,146). De La Salle had a very high regard for the position of Director: "The holy priest often said that the Institute was in the hands of the Brother Directors, and that what they did contributed either to its building up or destruction" (CL 8,145).

We do not have this text, but one entitled *Rule of the Brother Director of a house of the Institute*, dated 1718, has the following to say: "His whole concern should be to direct, under the guidance and authority of the Brother Superior of the Institute, all that concerns his house and the schools that depend on it, and to give interior direction to the Brothers under his care, to make them advance in virtue and to lead them to the perfection of their state and of their Institute by directing their conscience..." (CL 25,154 = FD 1,2).

The word *Institute* occurs also in the manuscript of the *Common Rules of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, dated 1705, but drawn up a few years earlier. In it, community life is understood very much in terms of the monastic tradition. As M. A. Hermans says:

"The Brother Director has many of the powers of an abbot. The Rule entrusts him with the care of souls, [...] it submits to him, as to God himself, those for whom he is literally responsible. As in most ancient texts, the vows are not mentioned in it, but three chapters of the Rule treat expressly of poverty, chastity and obedience, while others insist on that spirit of mortification and humility, prayer and faith in which, above all, union with God is to be sought, and docility to the least inspirations of his grace" (CL 11,71).

What is more, the 1705 Rule speaks clearly of the nature and purpose of the Institute, and of the quality and rights of its members: "The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a society in which profession is made of maintaining schools gratuitously. The members of this Institute are called Brothers and they will never allow themselves to be called differ-

ently. They cannot be priests nor aspire to the clerical state. [...] The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children, and it is for this reason that schools are maintained in it" (CL 25,16).

As M. A. Hermans comments, "According to the terms of these *Common Rules*, the 1705 Brother appears as a lay person, invited to practise the counsels, entirely separated from the world, fixed in a state, vowed to his apostolic work which must be pursued in and by the *Society of the Christian Schools*. His personal obligations, his duties to God, to his superiors and his Brothers, are not much different, both by their quality and their scope, from the precepts traditionally imposed on religious who are not exclusively contemplative" (CL 11,72).

4.2. Towards recognition by the Holy See

In 1705, De La Salle informed Br Gabriel Drolin, living in Rome, that the former Archbishop of Avignon, who was now a cardinal, "would protect and help the Institute of our Brothers as much as he could" (LA 17,17). It seems, then, that De La Salle intended and hoped to count on the protection of a cardinal for the young Institute.

In 1712, the creation of the short-lived novitiate in Marseille would have been useful if the Institute were divided up into two provinces (CL 11,75). There were already two Visitors, one based in Rheims and the other in Avignon.

4.3. The risk of fragmentation in the Institute

During the long absence of the Founder from Paris (following the Clément affair in 1712), Br Barthélemy took over as Superior in all but name. He took an important decision which the majority of the Brothers did not ratify: he asked the bishop of each of the dioceses where the Brothers were to appoint an ecclesiastical superior whom they could consult regarding their spiritual and temporal affairs (Cf. CL 6,222). These superiors themselves realised that there was a danger the Institute would break up, and drew Br Barthélemy's attention to this danger. They drew up with the Brothers, especially with Br Joseph, the Visitor of most of the houses of the north of France, a plan of defence for the Institute in three points: 1. To deal with the external superiors only regarding material problems and not give them any title except that of

protector. 2. Visit all the communities. 3. Call a general assembly of the Brothers⁹ (Cf. GALLEGO 1,502).

While the Founder remained absent the worry persisted. The Brothers wondered how to resolve the situation. On Easter Sunday 1714, the principal Brothers of Paris, Versailles and St Denis wrote to De La Salle, ordering him "in the name and on behalf of the body of the society to which you have promised obedience to take up responsibility again immediately for the overall government of our Society" (CL 8,118). This small group of Brothers believed it represented the body of the Institute even though it came from a small part of it. Faithful to the vow he had made, De La Salle returned to Paris on August 10th and took up his responsibility as Superior. However, he accustomed the Brothers to refer more and more to Br Barthélemy.

It was Br Barthélemy who was sent by the Brothers assembled at St Yon to visit all the communities of the Institute in preparation for the General Chapter which would elect a Superior and undertake the revision of the Rules. At the Chapter, 16 capitulants represented 100 or so Brothers. The Founder indicated he would not preside over the assembly and that he would not even take part in it. He would remain, however, at the disposal of the Chapter to help if he was asked (Cf. GALLEGO 1,548). On Tuesday May 18th 1717, Brother Barthélemy was elected Superior General and, on May 23rd, after the closure of the Chapter, he and 15 other capitulants renewed their vows together.

As S. Gallego writes: "The Institute had defined itself clearly: all that was lacking was Rome's approval. It was a community, with its own habit, which affirmed its exclusively lay character. Perpetual vows were made in it and it had a Rule adapted to its needs. It had defined the area of its apostolate: integral education through the Christian school, and it considered complete gratuity to be essential. The Institute had its hierarchy: a Superior, two Assistants, two Visitors, a Director for each house. It had a centralised organisation not restricted to any particular diocese. [...] The Brothers wished to acquire legal status in civil and canonical law, and this would make them religious. Strictly speaking, they would become so only in 1917 when the new code of canon law appeared, but for ordinary people and doubtlessly for the Brothers themselves, the granting of the Bull of Approbation would make them religious" (1,552).

5. THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY ACCORDING TO THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF J. B. DE LA SALLE

How did De La Salle envisage the small group of persons he had brought together? His writings, without offering any kind of systematic theory, reveal his deeply spiritual view of the community.

5.1. Rooted in faith

John Baptist de La Salle was a man of profound faith. In his spirituality, faith is central to the fundamental attitude of the Christian. As he wrote, referring to St Paul: "The just man, that is to say, the true Christian, lives by faith, because he behaves and acts through views¹⁰ and motives of faith. It is for this reason that it is very important for the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who have as the purpose of their Institute to educate the children, who are entrusted to their care in the spirit of Christianity and to ensure they acquire it, to be so penetrated and to be so abundantly filled with the spirit of faith, that they look upon the sentiments and maxims of faith as a rule to govern their actions and their whole conduct, and the spirit of faith as the spirit of their Institute" (CL 15,71 = R 11,1,1).

"The spirit of this Institute is first a spirit of faith, which should induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God" (RC 2,2).

5.2. "Work of God"

Faith made De La Salle see the establishment of his Institute as a gift from God. In what we might call his "personal programme", he writes as follows: "I shall always look upon the work of my salvation and the establishment and direction of our community as the work of God. That is why I shall abandon its care to him, and do everything that concerns me in it only by his order. I shall consult him constantly regarding what I should do concerning one or the other, and I shall often say to him the words of the prophet Habakuk, *Domine, opus tuum*" (CL 10,114 = EP 3,0,8 quoting Ha 3,2).

"It is God who, by his Providence, has established the Christian Schools" (MR 193, title). Quite an as-

tonishing thing to say when we know how much De La Salle did to consolidate this work. For all that, it was still the work of God, and because of that it was a task of fundamental importance to which he dedicated himself body and soul. In a moment of crisis, when the forces of evil threatened to destroy the young society, De La Salle made a pact with Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin, two Brothers in whom he had the utmost confidence, for the sole purpose of procuring the glory of God by the establishment of the Christian Schools for the service of poor youth. The heroic vow of association and union strengthened the community from within, by centring on its permanent establishment enthusiasm for God's plan and commitment to the accomplishment of his work for the liberation and salvation of mankind. Apostolic aims and community cohesion are a source of mutual reinforcement, for the work of God is to reveal God as Father by living as Brothers.

5.3. Founded on Providence

It can be said without any danger of exaggeration that the entire process of De La Salle's conversion to God culminates in the establishment and government of the community.¹¹ He gives up his canonry, shares the life and house of the teachers, distributes his goods to the poor and accepts the risk of having to beg. He does all this because he is convinced that the glory of God demands it of him. Inspired by Nicolas Barré, he believes that the Brothers' community must be founded solely on Providence. In the *Memoir on the Habit*, he speaks of the community as being "presently established and founded solely on Providence. Its members live according to rules, in total dependence, not having any property, and in complete uniformity" (CL 11,349 = MH 0,0,2).

Given these living conditions, the community of Brothers sees that it has been established by God to accomplish his work and to contribute in this way to his plan of salvation for poor youth. Without any human, financial, political or even ecclesiastical support, it finds its strength by putting itself completely into the hands of God, for it is he who founds, calls and

sends. On the other hand, God counts on the cooperation of people. To retire from the world, the Founder tells Gabriel Drolin: "You have to have life's necessities, and you need to know where you can get them. [...] See if God shows his approval of your work and notice if Divine Providence is assisting you" (LA 20,15s). God's Providence sends children to the Brothers whose hearts are filled with love for poverty: "The angels will make you known and will inspire parents to send you their children to teach" (MD 86,3).

5.4. Led by the Spirit

When De La Salle describes how a community is built up, he speaks from experience. He shows also both realism and evangelical inspiration. He knows how hard it is for the human heart to rid itself of selfishness. It is pointless to expect miracles (MD 73,2-3); each one has to bear with his neighbour's defects (MD 74, MD 65). Living together in peace is beyond man's strength! The Brothers must never stop asking God for great union among themselves, just as Jesus asked his Father for it for his apostles before he died: "Since you are privileged to be called by God to live a community life, there is nothing you should pray for with greater insistence than union of heart and mind with your Brothers. Only by means of such harmony will you be able to maintain that peace which constitutes the whole happiness of your life. Ask therefore the Lord of all hearts to make yours one with those of your Brothers, in that of Jesus" (MD 39,3).

Union with Jesus and union with the Brothers go together, therefore. "The Brothers will have a cordial affection for one another, but they will give no sign of particular affection to anyone, through respect for Our Lord whom they should honour equally in all as being animated by him and living by his Spirit" (RC 13,1). To recognise, through faith, Jesus Christ present in one's Brother, as well as the Spirit who animates him, helps to overcome natural repugnance and antipathy. And so, they will say only good of their Brothers,

speaking of them always "with esteem and much respect, showing at all times the esteem and the sincere, true and interior union they have with them" (RC 13,12). In practice this is revealed by mutual help and respect, listening to others, self-forgetfulness and the forgiveness of offences, in imitation of Christ washing the feet of his disciples (EM 13,282).

And so, in communities, Brothers are animated with "the same sentiments as the first Christians, who had but one heart and one soul" (MF 113,2; Cf. MD 39,3). It is especially when the Brothers come together in the name of Christ, that Christ unites the Brothers around himself like the branches of a vine and pours out on them his Spirit (EM 2,34 & 36). *The Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* speaks with emotion of Jesus Christ present in the midst of the Brothers gathered for prayer (EM 2,25-32).

"Give me also the grace through your presence in our midst, assembled in order to pray to you, to have an intimate union of mind and heart with my Brothers [...] in order that having received your divine Spirit according to the fulness which you have destined for me, I may allow myself to be guided by him in order to fulfil the duties of my state, and that he may make me participate in your zeal for the instruction of those whom you will wish to entrust to my care" (EM 2,37,3-4).

In the same way, the teachers brought together by De La Salle accepted one another as Brothers and as elder brothers of the youngsters entrusted to their care (CL 7,241). Fraternal life is not primarily asceticism: it is mysticism and apostolate. De La Salle introduced his Brothers to the ineffable reality of the intimate life of God, so that they could share in it and make their pupils share in it too, because they also are consecrated to the Trinity by their baptism (MD 64,3). It is God's Spirit who unites the Brothers with Christ and, at the same time, among themselves, making them faithful to their vocation to serve young people entrusted to them by the Father.

6. CONCLUSION : A COMMUNITY IN THE IMAGE OF THE TRINITY

Man is “the most perfect of all the creatures on earth [...] a creature with reason formed in the image of God” (DB 1,7,1), according to the extraordinary words of the Bible. He is in the image of God “because of his soul”, says De La Salle, “capable of knowing and loving God” and his brothers (DB 1,7,2). The union which Jesus asks his Father for his apostles must be “so close and so firm as to resemble that which exists between the three Divine Persons, producing the same effect as the essential union between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (MF 39,3; Cf. Jn 17,21f).

With the Apostle Paul, he recommends the Brothers to be united in their convictions and in their love, “with a common purpose and a common mind” (Ph 2,2). One sometimes gets the impression that De La Salle makes uniformity a necessary virtue. However, it is clear we should not see this as a levelling down of individuals as the word *uniformity* implies nowadays : to realise this we have only to read the letters De La Salle wrote to his Brothers or the meditation on the Good Shepherd (MD 33) which reveal his astonishing ability to adapt to individual differences. What is really meant is unity, for what the Founder proposes to his Brothers is nothing less than the imitation of the mystery of the love of the Trinity, which consists of unity, total gift of self, respect for each person, the joyous acceptance of others seen as a gift. Obedience, zeal, regularity, just like fraternal love, have there their fundamental *raison d'être*.

It was in the name and, perhaps one could say, on the model of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and

Holy Spirit that De La Salle formed the Brothers with whom God had united him (Cf. *Testament* = EP 4), into the *Society of the Christian Schools* (EP 1, EP 2). With St Augustine, he thinks that what the ignorant children who come to the Brothers are essentially asking for is “the knowledge of the three Divine Persons” (MD 37,2).

Although the thinking of the Founder is strongly trinitarian,¹² he does not speak of the explicit relationship between the Church and the Trinity, a patristic theme extensively developed by Vatican II. The modern reader should be aware that, when the Founder speaks of God, he does not speak of some abstract entity, but of the God of the Covenant who reveals himself in Jesus Christ, his Son : “The only thing a Christian should apply himself to in this life is to know God in himself and all that he has done, and the Son of God made man and what he did for our salvation” (CL 20,2 = DA 101).

Likewise, De La Salle does not speak of the Church as an image of the Trinity. The period in which he lived was marked by the controversy with the Protestants, and the Church as a visible society was the aspect most insisted upon. However, familiarity with the Scriptures enabled the Founder to find an equivalent in St Paul : “Often pray to St Michael that he may be pleased to protect this small family, or, as St Paul says, this Church of Christ, our community, and preserve in it the spirit of Jesus Christ. May he obtain for each of its members the graces necessary to continue in their vocation, and to inculcate the Christian spirit in those under their care” (MF 169,3).

7. NOTE : THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN THE 1987 RULE

When the *Rule* of the Brothers was re-written in 1987 in response to the request of Vatican II to all religious congregations, the Institute concentrated its attention on a number of topics, especially some relating to community, which reflected progress in the human sciences, and which had been raised during the Council. Among these topics we can mention the following: the dignity of the human person, with his rights and duties (art. 53); the role of the Brother Director to promote the spiritual growth of the Brothers

(art. 61), and the unity of the community (art. 54b), in line with FD 1,2. Newer topics include concern for their affective life (art. 30 & 56), leisure activities (art. 54c), and the stress on being welcoming (art. 57, 57a & 64).

The *Rule* speaks of community poverty (art. 33) and community attention to the causes of poverty (art. 14); of doing apostolic work as a member of a community (art. 16), and of the place of the Brothers' community in the educational community (art. 17a). The

role of the community in the mission shared with lay people is hardly touched upon (art. 17c, 20, 51a & 146). The *Rule* includes also more traditional topics : the influence of fraternal love (art. 9 & 53), community spirit (art. 17c & 23), the importance of prayer in community (art. 71-73), the sharing of faith (art. 48). Referring to the trinitarian inspiration of community (*id.*), it stresses the need to integrate consecration, min-

istry and community life (art. 10). Community witness depends on this (art. 49a), as does the pastoral ministry of vocations (art. 85). The aims and methods of the apostolate need to be revised periodically (art. 51). The topic of pluralism and the need for dialogue is raised (art. 58), leading to the question of how to discern in community (art. 37), since not everything can be decided on a *a priori* basis.

¹ The order in which these three words are given reflects the frequency of their use in successive historical periods, as attested by historically reliable dated documents (Cf. Circ. 410, 47 and CL 11,51).

² *Dictionnaire Universel Français et Latin* (known as the *Trévoux* dictionary), 1721, vol. II, p.38; vol. IV, p. 1769; vol. III, p. 1022.

³ *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. II, p. 1160, article by Marcel Viller on *Communauté (vie de)*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1953.

⁴ What we now call a local community, the Brothers used to call a house.

⁵ See CL 11,55

⁶ CL 11,67

⁷ CL 11,69

⁸ CL 11,70

⁹ CL 8,116

¹⁰ By error, the text printed in 1711 had *revues* (reviews) instead of *vues* (views).

¹¹ His zeal (see this term in the present volume) was not restricted to this limited field : he was involved also in the conversion of big sinners, the accompaniment of priests, spiritual direction...

¹² See AEP, especially the 3rd part.

Complementary themes

Abandonment	Consecration	Love - charity
Association	Director	Ministry
Brothers of the Christian Schools	Formation	Religious
Christian teacher	God's work	Virtues of a teacher
	Imitation of Christ	Zeal

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