

34. BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Summary:

1. A bit of History. – 2. What happened between 1682 and 1686? 2.1. Schoolteachers of our Community. 2.2. Wearing a special dress. 2.3. The change of dress led to change of name. – 3. Brothers of the Christian Schools. 3.1. From a profession often improvised... 3.2. To a ministry one is trained for. 3.3. And which is exercised in a useful and efficient school. 3.4. Where people behave like "disciples of Jesus Christ." – 4. God's work. 4.1. Through the personal commitment of De La Salle. 4.2. As "a poor man among the poor." 4.3. "In order to hold together and by association."

Why and how did De La Salle choose the name BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS? A sequence of events consisting of a succession of commitments will build up the whole itinerary¹ of the Foundation. The name *Brothers of the Christian Schools* describes A COMMUNITY whose traits will appear progressively.

1. A BIT OF HISTORY

De La Salle helped Mr. Nyel and later more and more frequently acted as his substitute with the teachers because "he (Mr. Nyel) had spent all his energies looking for new foundations without trying to consolidate the existing ones".² So much so that at Christmas 1679, La Salle rented a house near his own where the teachers could meet. He then admitted them into his own home for meals; later he received them there the whole day "except during school time"³ and finally on June 24, 1681, he accommodated them there. A year later, on

June 24, 1682,⁴ he went to live with them in a house on the Rue Neuve; there they will observe "a uniform rule covering all the hours of the day".⁵

From June 24, 1682 to June 9, 1686, the actions of La Salle and his companions will constitute the stages of an itinerary which will turn this small group of men into a Community following the pattern of the Religious; thus out of a group of teachers, a Community of Brothers was formed. It was in fact on June 9, 1696, at the end of the first Assembly of the "principal Brothers" that they made their first vows: the vow of obedience.

2. WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN 1682 AND 1686?

- the group of teachers adopts and follows a daily schedule;
- they select the dress they will wear;
- they give themselves a name.

Moreover throughout this structuration process, La Salle takes some important decisions:

- he resigns his canonry, August 1683.
- He distributes his possessions to the poor (Winter 1683/84).
- He shares fully his teachers' life.

These actions are so many commitments; four years during which came into being what De La Salle had written in "Un mémoire écrit de sa main pour apprendre aux Frères par quelles voies la divine Providence avait donné naissance à leur Institut",⁸ namely: "God who directs all things with wisdom and moderation, and who does not force the will of men, wishing to have me take full responsibility for the Schools, did so in a very imperceptible manner and over a long period of time; in such a way that one commitment led to another without my being aware of it".⁹

2.1. "Schoolteachers from our Community"

A first commitment was that of the common life, i.e. "a life controlled by the same set of observances for all".¹⁰ The biographer Blain writes: "At the beginning of 1682, the house of the schoolteachers began to look like a genuine community".¹¹ Bernard, for his part, notes: "It was then that the same exercises as are held today were held for the first time".¹² Whilst Maillefer refers to "new regulations".

So the group gives itself a daily timetable. This will form the first element of a manuscript entitled: "Practice of the daily timetable".¹⁴ Brother Maurice Auguste¹⁵ expresses the hypothesis that "this manuscript dated 1713 probably contains in several of its parts, fragments of a much older text going back to the first years of the Community". In it we find a very detailed timetable of the Daily Exercises of the House, from "the rising at all times at half past four" until the "thirty strokes of the bell" at nine in the evening. Quoting haphazardly, we then come across the Rules for Sundays, for Feast days, for Holy Week, etc...¹⁶ Brother Maurice Auguste shows clearly¹⁷ that these Regulations are now part of the Rule, thus justifying Blain's remarks: "Through practices, he introduced imperceptibly what he wanted to in-

clude permanently in his wise Rules".¹⁸ It is a new "style" of life in common, a manner of life that is going to give rise little by little to a "community spirit". Blain speaks of "a uniform way of living"¹⁹ characterised, on the one hand, by the Rule of Silence (which will always be the object of a Chapter of the Rules) and, on the other, by "togetherness" during exercises of piety, meals, recreation, the rosary when going to and coming back from school, the study of catechism, etc.

One feels like criticising this uniformity; we would find it difficult if not impossible to abide by it; De La Salle desired to ensure cohesion and stability among his teachers. This group finds cohesion and stability in the exercise of its profession as schoolmasters and the practice of a life of prayer. The profession and prayer fill the day. Fidelity to these two activities gives rise to a Community observing the Rule which will become little by little a Community of Communion. "The Brothers will show and will entertain a true community spirit".²⁰ It is this expression "Community Spirit" which must be remembered. When he gets this group of schoolteachers to live side by side, elbow by elbow, La Salle does not aim at creating anonymity; he wants each one to draw, from his contact with others, trust and perseverance. The first text of the 1705 Rule will only mention what was already being practised. "The Brothers will possess nothing they may call their own, everything will be in common even clothes and other items the Brothers will need". Thus, the evangelical option of poverty has been adopted by the group.

Whilst the Community is being set up, La Salle suggests at the appropriate time, the practice of asceticism in matters connected with food. Maillefer tells us: "About this point, he simply accepted what had been done so far. He set up rules for meals and ordered that only ordinary meat of the cheapest type be served".²² He himself sets the example, and at what price!...²³ of the spirit of mortification but, he insisted, "without any compulsion".²⁴ In whatever concerns the Community's food, Blain will refer to "the spirit of poverty and that of penance".

De La Salle wrote, certainly at the end of 1689, beginning 1690,²⁶ what has been called the *Mémoire sur l'Habit* to defend the Brothers

against the meddlings of Mr. Baudrand, parish priest of St. Sulpice.²⁷ In its article 2, this *Mémoire* specifies that in this Community “people live by the Rule, depending on each other in everything, without anything being owned in private, and in perfect uniformity”. Brother Maurice Auguste underlines the importance of this text when he writes: “This text is in more than one place, a judicious reminder of the conditions in which the Community lived”.²⁸

Of course, we are no longer in 1682, but the expression “one lives in it” makes one understand that the events took place years ago... And what is one to think “the Rules”?²⁹ To live “in perfect conformity”, there is the daily timetable. But to live “dependently... and without owning anything” requires more than the daily regulation; the latter cannot lead to a choice of life bound by fraternity and obedience. It seems to us therefore that La Salle was able to form a group whose members live as “persons cut off and retired from the world” (Art. 40). There! the word has been uttered. On the other hand, doesn’t the type of life lived by this group of persons correspond to the definition of Community given in the 17th century dictionary? “Communauté: (congregatio) persons who have secluded themselves from the world to live together in the fear of God and to ensure better their salvation, abide by a set of rules and wear a special dress”.³⁰ That is why Georges Rigault remarks: “If there were yet no “Brothers” in 1682, there is already a Community brought close together in a group through love and obedience, living under the guidance of a priest who holds himself responsible for their souls”.³¹ That is what La Salle states when he writes to the Mayor and Councillors of Chateau-Porcien on June 20, 1682: “I would be quite wrong were I not to send you schoolteachers from our Community”.³²

2.2. “Wearing a special dress”

According to the biographer Bernard, “what made La Salle make up his mind, were the constant requests of the Brothers to give them a dress which would distinguish them completely from the rest of the people”.³³ Maillefer specifies that “the dress was poor and uniform and by its singularity

and simplicity distinguished them from seculars”. And he hastens to add: This new style of dress fitted perfectly the modest nature of their employment and, by inspiring respect for their persons it made them behave with more self-control in their actions. “Le *Mémoire sur l’Habit*” goes back over these ideas and supplies an interesting description: “The Community’s dress is a kind of cassock which covers the body as far as the middle of the leg. It is buttonless and is closed by small black hooks from the neck down to the middle of the body, and from there downwards, from one end to the other. The lower part of the sleeves is not folded over the fist and is closed by means of invisible hooks. This dress is called a robe to avoid giving it the same name as that worn by the clergy from which it differs in shape. By way of mantle, they wear a capote with hanging sleeves, without collar or buttons on the front, its sides being held together by a large hook on the inside”.³⁵

The *Mémoire sur l’Habit* specifies: “This habit has been worn for five years”.³⁶ It is therefore during the winter of 1684-1685 that the habit was adopted. For La Salle and his first disciples to wear this “peculiar dress”³⁷ was on the one hand, to wear a dress which was neither secular nor clerical³⁸ and on the other, “to consider themselves members of a community”³⁹ who are all “lay”.⁴⁰ These persons by the nature of their “state” “secluded and retired from the world”⁴¹ live in poverty. That is why La Salle insists on such details as buttons and hooks. Brother Maurice Auguste explains: “Such a stress is nevertheless significant. Ecclesiastical as well as civil fashion multiplied the use of buttons and hooks in those days on the front of the clothes, on the sleeves and on the facings. And these buttons were of necessity the object of great refinement and often of ostentatious luxury: precious metal, mother of pearl, at the very least. Visible hooks could act just as well as a pretext for the use of all sorts of more or less sophisticated ornaments”.⁴²

The profession of “one who teaches” renders necessary the use of a practical dress against the cold⁴³ and in the exercise of one’s duties; on the other hand, in this connection, Articles 15 and 62 of CL 11, p. 254 are not lacking in a sense of humour!⁴⁴ ... It is important also that this dress distinguishes he who wears it from a schoolteacher

and that it “makes the pupils respect the wearer”.⁴⁵ Thus, “this peculiar dress” becomes a visible sign. It enables its wearer to feel that he belongs to a community grouped around La Salle. It enables those who meet him to identify these new schoolmasters of Rheims. It is well known that they hold a gratuitous school in the district, that they accompany the children to Mass on schooldays where they supervise them but refuse to perform any clerical function. It is also known that they teach catechism every day. On Sundays and Feast days, besides the catechism in the morning, they lead the children to High Mass and, in the afternoon, to Vespers in the parish. This “singular habit” was also the visible sign which La Salle himself wished to wear when “he was compelled through a shortage of teachers, to teach school at Saint-Jacques for a fairly long time”, as is testified by Bernard.⁴⁶ Maillefer and Blain also stress this event and Blain particularly wishes to bring out the humility of their hero. If one is not forbidden from seeing in this a longing for humiliations, one may also see in it the Founder’s participation in school work. From the start, he showed equality with his teachers; on taking the habit, he became one of them. The experiment had lasted long enough⁴⁷ to make him see from the inside what is meant by “to hold schools gratuitously”. It is therefore not surprising that he wrote: “Community exercises and the job of teaching engages one fully”.⁴⁸ Did he not have in mind this experience when he wrote in some of his meditations that this profession is “holy”, it is a “ministry” and even a “holy” ministry in which one plays “the role of guardian angel” whilst accomplishing “God’s work” for the benefit of pupils who have become “disciples” whose “heart is to be touched”.⁴⁹

Referring to what Bro. Maurice Auguste calls “a first taking of the Habit”,⁵⁰ Bro. Yves Poutet writes: “La Salle saw in the wearing of the habit which was neither ecclesiastical nor secular, an excellent means, 1st, to induce young men to join a community which in that way became manifest, and 2nd, to make the Masters conscious of their belonging to an organisation bound by special rules”.⁵¹

2.3. The change of Habit brought about a change of name

Biographer Blain is about to regale us with one of these developments of which he held the secret. In spite of its length, it deserves to be read attentively:

“The adoption of the new garb brought about a modification in the Community’s name. That of *Brothers* was the one that fitted them best, so they chose it, leaving the name of *schoolmasters* to those who practise this profession for gain. Humility and charity suggested giving up that name: it had not been fitting for men who professed to run schools only so that Jesus Christ might reign in them, and so that they might teach Christian doctrine gratuitously. If the name of *schoolmasters* had been acceptable up to this time in a house where uniformity of lifestyle and equality in all things had not yet bound the subjects together, and where some of them were still vacillating in their vocation, it was no longer proper now that they had joined together to form a single body. Consequently, the name *Brothers* truly belonged to them — a name which nature gives to children who share the same blood and the same father on earth, and which in religion describes those who have the same spirit and the same Father in heaven.

In this way the denomination *Brothers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools* became henceforth the official name of the sons of De La Salle and, from now on, we shall call them by no other.

This appellation is the correct one, because it includes the definition of their state and indicates the mission proper to their vocation. This name reminds them that the charity which gave birth to their Institute must be its life and soul; that it should preside over all their deliberations and plan all their projects; it should initiate and help to carry them out, control all their activities, and animate all their words and work.

This name teaches them how excellent is the duty they have assumed, the dignity of their state, and the holiness proper to their profession. It tells

them that as Brothers they owe each other mutual proofs of tender but spiritual friendship; and that considering themselves the elder brothers of the children who come to be taught by them, they should exercise this ministry of charity with truly loving hearts".⁵²

"The name 'schoolmasters' was given up". Their garb "neither ecclesiastical nor secular" placed the people who wore it in a special category. The name "Brothers" will establish clearly the identity of those who will be called by that name. The 17th century vocabulary reserved the word "Brother" for members of Religious Orders who were not priests.⁵³ La Salle is willing to abide by this system typical of an extremely hierarchical society. This group of men will become a community of consecrated non-priests. A schoolmaster fulfils an employment for which he draws a salary. The Brother exercises his profession which is a ministry lived for the poor and in poverty. The two roles cannot be confused: La Salle does not mix them up. He is already convinced and he will make this clear later on in this article of the Rule: "Those who belong to this Institute will call themselves Brothers and they will not allow anyone to call them by any other name";⁵⁴ "they will vow to keep schools gratuitously".⁵⁵ They will be the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Neither ecclesiastical nor secular but "retired from the world"⁵⁶ will be the status wanted for them by La Salle and for this he will fight,⁵⁷ he will explain it to them and make them live it.

Blain stresses very strongly that "this designation is justified". He explains all its relative aspects in detail. "Brothers to each other" and "elder Brothers" for their pupils. The Brother is at the same time a community man and a school teacher: he is a Brother of the Christian Schools. It is worth noting also that the taking of the habit was later to be accompanied by the change of the family name. This is what one reads in the Catalogue of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: "Brother Antoine, family name Jean Partois, entered the Institute in September 1686."⁵⁸ It is a break with the secular state, a sort of death to the world. François Blein, Charles Frappet become Br. Ambroise and Br. Thomas, and it is by these names that they will be called in Community, in school, in the district or the parish.

3. BROTHER OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

3.1. "of a profession often improvised"

Blain points out that "this name: Brother of the Christian Schools indicates the duties of their vocation".⁶⁰ La Salle is involved with and by M. Nyel in the schools for boys of the city of Rheims. Very quickly, he becomes aware that it is not without reason that the image of the schoolmaster is often negative. It is worth recalling that the 17th century historians have often underlined as did Jean de Viguerie, that "the teacher has other obligations to fulfil besides teaching... He must also sing in church and teach handwriting... In turn: teacher of youth, mayor's secretary, sacristan".⁶¹ As for Pierre Giolitto, he calls the schoolteacher, "the assistant or better the factotum of the parish priest and so that the reader understands perfectly what it is all about, this historian lists the activities as varied as they are numerous which are his lot. And as if that were not enough, he specifies that "the master in order to add somewhat to the monthly salary, does a variety of jobs".⁶² La Salle wanted his men to be first and foremost and at all times, full-time teachers. It is therefore not surprising to find under his pen in the *Mémoire sur l'Habit*: "Community exercises and school duties require total dedication".⁶³ And "it seems out of place to give a purely clerical habit to lay people who do not possess and cannot exercise any function, or to wear the surplice in church".⁶⁴ Their "peculiar habit" makes of them members of a "Community of Brothers of the Christian Schools". A Community where "people are employed to hold school gratuitously in the towns only".⁶⁵ The profession of schoolmaster engages full-time.

3.2. To a Ministry for which one is trained

The teacher's image is often negative because of a lack of formation, and sometimes even of any formation. The image is all the more negative if one is to believe La Salle's words,⁶⁶ that they lack not only "knowledge" but skill and "self-knowledge". It is therefore right to help them acquire this knowledge; aware of M. Nyel's draw-

backs, Blain faces La Salle with the dilemma: "He absolutely needs to get closer to them and get them closer to him".⁶⁷ The good name which the Christian Schools secure in a very short time shows eloquently to what extent the word and example of La Salle had been convincing and Community life had borne its fruit.

Formation will be from the start of his Institute, the chief preoccupation of the Founder. The *Mémoire sur l'Habit* refers to the teachers for the countryside whom the Community is trying to train for their employment;⁶⁸ youngsters who join the Community and "who are trained to meditate and to perform the other exercises of piety, who are taught all the parts of the catechism and to read and write perfectly".⁶⁹ The Brother must acquire much "knowledge" but especially that of the Catechism. In particular he must acquire skill in reading, in writing and even more learn "how to behave" so that through his conduct, he may give his pupils good example, and be their model.⁷⁰ In the spirit of La Salle, "to give a Christian education to the children and teach them how to live well"⁷¹ is to exercise a true ministry. That demands preparation.

3.3. And which is exercised in a useful and efficient school

De La Salle realised very soon that the existing schools were not suitable for the needs of the children of the poor. Study sessions were too long and too remote from the daily preoccupations of manual workers. Moreover, they are paying schools, and when they are gratuitous, segregation sets in, the rich on one side, the poor on the other... and sometimes they are left out; this encourages them to miss school in a disastrous manner.⁷² The school La Salle has in mind is open to all, strong or weak, gratuitous for all, poor or rich; a school that is useful and efficient, which forms simultaneously men and Christians. For that purpose, the simultaneous method will be adopted, repeated checks on what has been learnt, the teaching of basic elements: reading, writing and arithmetic, starting with the teaching of reading in French. An innovation which the Founder had often to justify. He even did it in a text written for his friend Mgr. Godet Desmarests, bishop

of Chartres, of which here is an extract: "When French youngsters are being taught to read through French, they know at least how to read when they leave the schools; knowing how to read well, they can go on teaching themselves the Christian doctrine, they can learn it in the printed Catechisms, they can sanctify Sundays and feast days reading good books and through prayers said in French... Finally it is useless to spend a long time teaching to read Latin well to persons who will never use it".⁷³ To form man, through the acquisition of practical skills. To form the Christian: give him the possibility to fulfil "his two duties towards God which are to know him and love him" and, teach him to live "as a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ".⁷⁴

3.4. A school where people behave as disciples of Jesus Christ

Such a school has to be the CHRISTIAN SCHOOL. Is that a new name? More than that. Rather La Salle's will is to distance himself from what already exists. He is aiming at an educational project integrating human and Christian formation. Blain puts that very clearly: "In relation to the children, he has not separated their instruction from their education, nor piety from knowledge. He thought he would find both in teachers who were pious and capable".⁷⁵ In several of his Meditations, La Salle will mention again education and instruction. Here is a very evocative passage in which he reminds the Brothers "to show a particular esteem for the instruction and the Christian education of children because it is a means to make them become true children of God and citizens of heaven".⁷⁶ It becomes evident that the child is at the very centre of the educational system. Why? because he is destined to be saved through Jesus Christ. A salvation which he will achieve only if he behaves as "a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ". And he will learn to behave in this way through instruction and the example given him by his master.

The school is going to become the place where doctrine is learnt. About 4 hours and a half are dedicated to Catechism every week. Every day, a reflection broaches the subject; whilst during the evening examination of conscience the duties of

the Christian are recalled. The school is about to become also the place where religion is expressed through gestures: the sign of the cross, bowing in front of the crucifix, the recitation of the rosary, the reminder of the presence of God, prayers... One has only to leaf through the *Conduite des Ecoles*.⁷⁷ And as if that were not enough, it is to be noted that the master just as much as the pupils is invited to perform these practices. For example, when reference is made to the "prayers to be said at every hour of the day, these will help the teachers to renew their control over themselves and recall the presence of God, and the pupils to get them used to think of God from time to time during the day and be ready to offer him all their actions".⁷⁸

The school will also endeavour to fit its activities into those organised by the local Church. The pupils, led by the masters, will take part each day in the Mass and on Sunday in the Mass and Vespers in the parish.

The school La Salle has in mind is that in which "teaching is gratuitous and given for the glory of God".⁷⁹ And in the same Meditation, he reminds the Brothers that he can say with St. Paul: "The object of my consolation is to teach the Gospel free of charge, without those hearing it having to spend any money". Gratuity becomes a gospel witness. Just as much as the manner in which corrections are meted out; the *Conduite des Ecoles* requires that on those occasions, «Firmness and kindness go hand in hand». ⁸⁰ As for teacher-pupil relationships, the Rule specifies that the Brothers will "love all their pupils tenderly"⁸¹ and in several Meditations, the Brothers are asked to remember that they have to "touch the hearts of their pupils";⁸² an expression which they would find in the *Conduite des Ecoles*.⁸³ In this pedagogical guide, they would also be asked "to dedicate themselves completely to their pupils, to win them all to Jesus Christ".⁸⁴

The pupil will not only be the spectator and the beneficiary of this evangelical apostolate; he will be invited to live such values as: sharing, mutual help, solidarity service to others... It is thus that the *Conduite des Ecoles* referring to the changes between lessons, specifies that "several pupils who are better readers must be left in class to help the others and serve as tutors".⁸⁵ The Master must

act in such a way that "these pupils feel happy to continue listening to the lesson".⁸⁶ If during a lesson, a boy does not know a letter, the teacher will ask another pupil who knows it well to say it".⁸⁷ Moreover, as there are "various jobs that the teacher cannot and must not do himself" officials will be appointed such as:

A pupil who recites the prayers, one who carries the rosary beads, the bell ringer, the holder of the school key!... All the pupils "bring their lunch with them every day". They will be taught to eat their meal in a polite way and to pray God before and after the meal". But it is also so that the children give away "the bread left over to have it distributed to the poor".⁸⁸

The Brother chosen to "behave as a disciple of Jesus Christ"⁸⁹ is also expected to "make of his pupils true disciples of Jesus Christ".⁹⁰ The school La Salle has in mind is a school which aims at evangelisation. Let us read Blain again: "The schools are like churches for children, since they adore God there and address their prayers to him; there, they sing his praises, and there they learn to love and serve him: they are taught to practise virtue, shun vice, to practise Christian maxims. They are taught to pray God, to make good confessions, to receive communion worthily, etc...".⁹¹

4. GOD'S OWN WORK

4.1. through the personal involvement of De La Salle

Bernard and Blain attribute this prayer to John Baptist De La Salle: "My God, I don't know if I should set up or not set up (the Institute). To set up a Community or to know how to go about it is not my responsibility... It is up to you, Lord, to know how, and to do it in the manner most agreeable to you. I do not dare to found, because I do not know what your will is, and I will not do any good if I founded communities. If you set them up, they will be well founded, they will not need any (human) foundation. I beg of you, o my God, to let me know your will in this matter".⁹² As a deeply spiritual man, he searched his soul. Even more, he would do everything to find out the will

of God. Once he has found it, thanks to those whose advice he seeks, he obstinately commits himself to what he knows to be "the marvellous ways of Divine Providence" in his regard.⁹³

That is how he will give up his canonry; the prayers which the canons recite take up much time⁹⁴ and this is therefore incompatible with his community responsibilities. On the other hand, his first disciples told him very bluntly that his inheritance and his canonry make of him "a well-to-do gentleman... sheltered from misery".⁹⁵ He understands that abandonment to Providence is preached better by example than by beautiful words. He undertakes to take the necessary steps; the procedure will be long but will be crowned with success on August 16, 1683.

Wouldn't his inheritance be useful to finance the Schools? Father Barré whom he consulted answered that "having set up the schools on Providence as their foundation",⁹⁶ he did not need to worry about money. The very severe winter of 1683-1684 couldn't have come at a more opportune time, for in the course of an orderly distribution⁹⁷ "he gave away everything without keeping anything for himself,"⁹⁸ and "he became by choice what they (his masters) were through sheer necessity".⁹⁹

4.2. as a "poor man among the poor"

A group of men has, thanks to a daily schedule of work, accepted to lead a community life, under the guidance of a priest. The exercises of piety to which were added the duties of the teacher, the exhortations of their mentor, made these men realise that they were taking part in a very special event. They could also see the evangelical gestures accomplished by La Salle who had become in their midst "a poor man among poor men".¹⁰⁰ Hence they could decide on the choice of a habit which besides giving them an unmistakable identity proved that they were poor. Because all along this process, their life in common has become that of a fraternity, they adopt the name "Brothers of the Christian Schools".¹⁰¹ The mission given to this Community is to impart a Christian education through instruction given in schools. In these schools, the teachers will be called Brothers by

their pupils. From school teachers, they have become Brothers of the Christian Schools.

In the Rules which I have imposed on myself, which Bro. Yves Poutet thinks could date back to the first semester of 1686,¹⁰² La Salle can write: "I will always consider whatever concerns my salvation and the foundation and management of our Community as God's own work".¹⁰³ Bro. Miguel Campos quite rightly points out: "Through faith, La Salle understands that the task connected with the Society of the Christian Schools and that of his salvation are the work of God".¹⁰⁴ If La Salle adds: "That is why I will leave all the care to him",¹⁰⁵ this abandonment is far from passive; it is an act of confidence in God and of availability. His prayer: "My God, I do not know..." finds here its full meaning. Each Brother is also invited to take part in "God's work" that is to work at his own salvation and the salvation of souls through his apostolate in the classroom. "Do not make any difference between what concerns directly your employment, your salvation and your perfection. Rest assured that you will never save your soul better and will never acquire as much perfection as by fulfilling well your duties of state; provided you do so because God ordered it".¹⁰⁶

4.3. "to keep together and by association"

This whole structuring process reached its climax on June 9, 1686, feast of the Holy Trinity, during which La Salle and the "principal Brothers"¹⁰⁸ bound themselves by a temporary vow of obedience: a religious act. The decision was reached at the Assembly which was held in Rheims. Later in 1694, there would be another Assembly, that of "the twelve senior Brothers".¹⁰⁹ These Religious will vow "to hold together and by association" gratuitous schools".¹¹⁰ And on the feast of the Holy Trinity, each of the Brothers will say: "I promise and vow obedience, not only to the body of this Society but to its Superiors, which vows of association as well as stability in the said Society, and of obedience, I promise to keep inviolably all my life time".¹¹¹ This June 6, 1694, marks the culmination of this itinerary which, from 1682 to 1686, had seen the birth of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

- ¹ The word belongs to Fr. Miguel Campos, CL 45.
- ² Maillefer, ms. Reims CL 6, p. 39. The remark deserved to be more subtle.
- ³ Idem, p. 41.
- ⁴ On the date June 24 cf. Maurice Auguste *The date June 24 and the origins of the Institute of the BCS*, Bulletin FEC, Jan. 1959, No. 156, pp. 27-35.
- ⁵ Maillefer, CL 6, p. 45.
- ⁶ Fr. Maurice AUGUSTE, *Lasalliana*, card 08.A.07. In an article: *At Rheims in 1686: a first essay on the General Chapter*. He bears out the date June 9, 1686.
- ⁷ On the meaning of "temporary" cf. CL 2, pp. 35 etc.
- ⁸ Blain, CL 7, p. 167. This Memoir has been called "Le Mémoire des Commencements".
- ⁹ Blain, CL 7, p. 169.
- ¹⁰ Definition given by Fr. Maurice Auguste in his conferences to the CIL 82. "To live in Community in 17th Century France".
- ¹¹ Blain, CL 7, p. 179.
- ¹² Bernard, CL 4, p. 47.
- ¹³ Maillefer, CL 6, p. 53.
- ¹⁴ Set of Rules presented in CL 25, under the initials RC. Read also in CL 11, p. 45 a commentary by Fr. Maurice Auguste.
- ¹⁵ Conference to CIL 82.
- ¹⁶ and ¹⁷ CL 25, pp. 95 etc.
- ¹⁸ CL 7, p. 234.
- ¹⁹ CL 7, p. 234.
- ²⁰ Chapter 3 of the Rule; CL 25, p. 21.
- ²¹ CL 25, p. 70.
- ²² CL 6, p. 73.
- ²³ Cf. CL 4, p. 71; or CL 6, p. 75; or CL 7, p. 226-227.
- ²⁴ CL 6, p. 75.
- ²⁵ CL 7, p. 234.
- ²⁶ CL 11, p. 47.
- ²⁷ The complete text of the *Mémoire sur l'Habit* is to be found in CL 11, p. 339-354. Read also p. 51 notes 4 and 5 on the use of the word "Community". The enumeration is borrowed from CL 11. The manuscript of this Memoir is kept in the Archives of the Mother House in Rome. This document will be quoted several times. The date when it was written is not within the period that concerns us. But it is a transcription in writing of facts that really took place; it may be considered a testimony to these facts.
- ²⁸ Fr. Maurice AUGUSTE CL 11, p. 51.
- ²⁹ The word "Rules" is to be found again in Art. 21, 36, 41; in 29, the word is "regularity".
- ³⁰ *Nouveau Dictionnaire Français*, 1709, Pierre RICHELET.
- ³¹ Georges RIGAULT, *Histoire Générale de l'Institut*, Tome 1, p. 148.
- ³² *Lettres de St. J.B. De La Salle, édition critique*; Fr. Félix Paul, Lettre 111, p. 367.
- ³³ CL 4, ms. Reims p. 69.
- ³⁴ CL 6, p. 53.
- ³⁵ CL 11, p. 350, Art. 11, 12, 13.
- ³⁶ CL 11, p. 351, Art. 28.
- ³⁷ In this sense only: "alone, unique" according to the meaning of the 17th c. This word is repeated.
- ³⁸ CL 11, p. 351, Art. 18.
- ³⁹ CL 11, p. 352, Art. 42.
- ⁴⁰ CL 11, p. 350, Art. 9.
- ⁴¹ CL 11, p. 352 Art. 40. About "poverty" see also Blain CL 7, p. 241.
- ⁴² Fr. Maurice AUGUSTE: *Lasalliana* 04.A.20, *A Reims au cours de l'hiver 1684-85, une première "prise" d'habit*.
- ⁴³ The Casaque, from a mantle worn in the street, becomes a dressing gown to be worn in class and in the community house in winter; cf. Art. 15.
- ⁴⁴ CL 11, p. 354. "They would be unable to move about among the boys wearing that garb, or line them up and keep them in order when they take them to church or when they are there". Art. 15.
- ⁴⁵ "It has been noted that, with that garb on, one could knock down most of the small children from one side to the other when trying to line them up". Art. 62.
- ⁴⁶ CL 11, p. 351, Art. 29.
- ⁴⁷ CL 4, p. 66.
- ⁴⁸ Bernard says: "A rather long period of time" CL 4, p. 66. Blain writes: "during several months" CL 7, p. 244. To which may be added that St. La Salle also taught "in Paris and elsewhere". CL 4, p. 67.
- ⁴⁹ CL 11, p. 350, Art. 10.
- ⁵⁰ The quotations are made in this order: MD 61.1; MR 196.3; MR 197.3; MR 197-198; MD 59.3; MR 196; MR 204.2.
- ⁵¹ Expression drawn from the title written on filing card 04.AA.20 of *Lasalliana*.
- ⁵² Yves POUTET, *The 17th century and lasallian origins*, Vol. 1, p. 733.
- ⁵³ CL 7, pp. 240-241. Read also MD 60.1 what La Salle says on the Dress.
- ⁵⁴ *Nouveau Dictionnaire Français*; Pierre RICHELET; 1709.
- ⁵⁵ CL 25, p. 16 RC Art. 1.
- ⁵⁶ Idem.
- ⁵⁷ This expression recurs in several meditations of St. La Salle. Cf. for example MD 17.2; 40.1; 77.1; MF 144.1.
- ⁵⁸ Remember the *Mémoire sur l'Habit*.
- ⁵⁹ About this Catalogue; cf. CL 3. The remark 6, p. 24 gives the origin of the Catalogue.
- ⁶⁰ Names mentioned in CL 3, pp. 32-33.
- ⁶¹ CL 7, p. 241.
- ⁶² Jean DE VIGUERIE; *L'Institution des Enfants. L'éducation en France, 16e-18e s.* (Calmann Lévy) p. 130.
- ⁶³ Pierre GIOLITTO; *Abécédair et Fêrle. Maîtres et Ecoles de Charlemagne à Jules Ferry*. (Imago 1986), p. 133-135.
- ⁶⁴ and ⁶⁵ CL 11, p. 350, Art. 10; p. 353, Art. 47.
- ⁶⁶ Expressions quoted from *Mémoire sur l'habit* CL 11, p. 349 Art. 2 and 3.
- ⁶⁷ CL 11, p. 350 Art. 9; the *Mémoire sur l'habit* refers to the Masters as "without knowledge" (i.e. not members of the clergy) and intellectually mediocre" and Art. 36 "most of them are rough, ignorant and without education". In CL 7, p. 169, the words of St. La Salle: "Quite naturally, I used to rate below the rank of my valet, those whom I was compelled — especially at the beginning — to employ in the schools; The mere thought that I would have to share their living would have been unbearable to me".
- ⁶⁸ Blain; CL 7, p. 170.
- ⁶⁹ Yves POUTET: Filing Card 03.A.15 *Lasalliana*. "Demia in a printed notice, and in a personal unpublished diary (soon to be published) recalled the example given in Rheims before 1680 by the Founder of the FSC... perhaps even as early as 1686". See: Demia: 1637-1689, Priest of Lyons.
- ⁷⁰ CL 11, p. 349 Art. 4 and 7.
- ⁷¹ "Example and model" are often repeated in the Meditations of St. De La Salle; for example: "Teach them by your example" MF 153.3.
- ⁷² "So that you may be models for those whom you are to teach" MF 132.1.
- ⁷³ Rule of 1705; CL 25, p. 16 RC 3.
- ⁷⁴ In the *Conduite des Ecoles*, Chapter VI is entitled: "On

absenteeism"; Section III tackles the "causes of absences". That helps us to understand the idea the poor had of school in the 17th century. This text is all the more interesting in that it suggests "solutions" to absenteeism. CL 24, pp. 180-196.

⁷³ CL 7, pp. 375-376 or CL 10, pp. 111-112. This Memoir contains ten reasons; the quotation borrowed from the 9th and 10th. The Chartres School was opened on Oct. 1699; that is much later than the period under discussion. But the reasons given by De La Salle to the Bishop of Chartres were not improvised; they were the fruit of experience, of "the tradition established in the Christian Schools" as Blain emphasizes.

⁷⁴ Expressions used in the *Devoirs d'un Chrétien*, CL 21, p. 7.

⁷⁵ CL 8, p. 359.

⁷⁶ MR 199.3.

⁷⁷ The *Conduite des Ecoles*: a pedagogical manual. The Preface gives this introduction: "The Conduite has been collected and put in order by Mr. De La Salle only after a very large number of discussions held between him and the most senior Brothers and those most able to teach and following an experience of several years". CL 24.

⁷⁸ CL 24, Chap. VII, p. 76.

⁷⁹ MR 191.1.

⁸⁰ CL 24, p. 140.

⁸¹ CL 25, p. 36 No. 13.

⁸² For example in MD 57.2; MF 2; MF 81.2; 129.1; 148.3...

⁸³ CL 24, p. 46.

⁸⁴ CL 24, p. 22.

⁸⁵ CL 24, p. 22.

⁸⁶ CL 24, p. 23.

⁸⁷ CL 24, p. 25.

⁸⁸ CL 24, p. 7 and 8.

⁸⁹ MD 44.1.

⁹⁰ MF 116.2.

⁹¹ CL 7, p. 36.

⁹² CL 4, p. 59. Compare with Blain's version. CL 7, p. 128; a very similar version.

⁹³ It is a very fine expression used by Br. Bernard as a title to his biography of St. La Salle. Cf. CL 4.

⁹⁴ "A Canonry which compelled him to attend to choir duties five or six hours a day" thus expresses himself Br. Bernard; CL 4, p. 48.

⁹⁵ These expressions are quoted from Maillefer. CL 6, p. 67.

⁹⁶ Blain (CL 7, p. 220) supplies details of this distribution which was made to three categories of poor: school children; the poor who were too shy to beg and had to be looked for, and the poor gathered in the house.

⁹⁸ An expression used by Maillefer. CL 6, p. 67.

⁹⁹ An expression used by Blain: CL 7, p. 188.

¹⁰⁰ An expression we owe to Blain; CL 7, p. 215.

¹⁰¹ In the *Mémoire sur l'Habit*; CL 11, p. 349 Art. 1.

¹⁰² Yves POUTET, publication already mentioned p. 745 remark 49.

¹⁰³ Blain, CL 8, pp. 318-319; cf. also CL 4, p. 255.

¹⁰⁴ CL 45, p. 256 "Evangelical itinerary".

¹⁰⁵ Continuation of Art. 8 of the "Rules which I imposed on myself" CL 8, p. 318.

¹⁰⁶ CL 15, p. 184 IV. "Collection of various small treatises".

¹⁰⁷ According to the chronology established by Bro. Maurice Auguste; Lasalliana, filing card 08.0.07.

¹⁰⁸ According to Br. Maurice Auguste, "Principal" includes a representative of 5 or 6 houses of the Society plus several Brothers chosen by St. La Salle; very probably fewer than 12 Brothers. Cf. Lasalliana card 08.0.07.

¹⁰⁹ Expression used by Blain; CL 7, p. 343.

¹¹⁰ and ¹¹¹ according to the Formula of Vows CL2, p. 42.

Complementary themes

Association; Catechism; Child-Pupil-Disciple; Correction; Disciples; Education-To bring up; Example-Edification; Exercises; Formation; God's work; Goodness-Tenderness; Guardian Angels; Heart-To Touch Hearts; Instruction; Ministry; Reflection; Rule-Regularity; Salvation; Silence; Spirit of the world; State; Vows.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Yves POUTET, *Le 17^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes*.
2. Bro. Michel SAUVAGE and Bro. Miguel CAMPOS, *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*. Transl. Matthew J. O'Connel, 1981.
3. Bro. Michel SAUVAGE, *Catechesis and the Laity*, transl. Oswald Murdoch, 1991.
4. Georges RIGAUT, *Histoire Générale de l'Institut des FEC* - tome 1.
5. Yves POUTET and Jean PUNGIER, *Un éducateur aux prises avec la Société de son temps*.
6. Jean PUNGIER, *Comment est née la Conduite des Ecoles*.
7. Jean PUNGIER, *J.B. De La Salle et le Message de son Catéchisme*.
8. Jean DE VIGUERIE, *L'Institution des Enfants. L'Education en France 16^e-18^e siècle*.
9. Pierre GIOLITTO, *Abécédaire et Férule - Maîtres et Ecoliers de Charlemagne à J. Ferry*.
10. Bernard GROSPERRIN, *Les Petites Ecoles sous l'Ancien Régime*.
11. FURET et OZOUF, *Lire et Ecrire*.

Bro. Roger PETIT

Translated from French by Bro. James CALLEJA