

MICHEL SAUVAGE, FSC: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

The recently-published memoir *The Fragile Hope of a Witness* traces the vocational journey of Michel Sauvage as a Brother of the Christian Schools in the 20th century while arguing for the various causes for hope in the life of the Institute in the 20th and 21st centuries. This paper explores the spiritual dimension of that itinerary, highlighting three specific aspects. First, Sauvage's experience was truly a journey embedded in and influenced by the larger life of the Institute, beginning with Sauvage's early preference for emphasis on the internal religious and transitioning to a quest for a more integral spirituality. Second, his spiritual path was illuminated by the central insight, drawn from his own experience and his innovative reading of John Baptist de La Salle's spiritual writings, that there is an inseparable unity between religious life and the apostolate, or ministry. Lastly, Sauvage's consistent mission was to extend his personal spirituality in service to his Brothers, especially through providing for formation that fostered an integration of the interior and exterior life and through scholarship that situated the *Rule* within the richer context of De La Salle's spiritual writings for his Brothers, in particular, the *Meditations*.

Key words: Michel Sauvage, hope, faith, vocation, religious life, Institute of the Brothers of Christian Schools, spiritual journey, spiritual insight, spiritual renewal, *Rule*, *Meditations*, Lasallian itinerary.

In *The Fragile Hope of a Witness: The Itinerary of Brother Michel Sauvage (1923-2001)*, Miguel Campos, FSC, and others bring readers into conversation with Michel Sauvage, FSC. Their purpose was, in Sauvage's words, to reflect on the experience of the Lasallian Institute in the 20th century and "to reread this page of history."¹ Rising above the many ups and downs of the Institute's life in these tumultuous years, Sauvage hoped to illuminate the grand thrusts of adaptation, renewal and refoundation that successively characterize the modern Institute. For Sauvage, those movements offered cause for hope for the individual Brother and the Institute as a whole, then and for the future. The scope of the narrative and the depth of the reflection provided by Sauvage make *The Fragile Hope of a Witness* a rare and valuable testament in its own right.

This study, however, seeks to read beneath the text to recognize the spiritual dimension of Sauvage's itinerary. His journey is fundamentally the path of vocation – in his case, the particular vocation of the lay Brothers of the Christian Schools. Three of the most prominent aspects of Sauvage's spirituality are directly connected to his experience of being called to ministry as a Christian Brother. First, his spirituality developed over time as his experience of fraternal life unfolds. Sauvage's spiritual journey is conditioned by his desire to respond whole-heartedly to God's call to live a life of holiness in the specific context of the Institute. Second, the essential

¹ Michel Sauvage, and Miguel Campos, *The Fragile Hope of a Witness: The Itinerary of Brother Michel Sauvage (1923-2001)*, Lasallian Studies 18 (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2014), 27.

insight of Sauvage's spirituality was the recognition of an inseparable unity between the interior and exterior lives, between the so-called "religious life" and the life of ministry. This conviction was the guiding light for his spiritual journey from the late 1940s to the end of his life. Lastly, Sauvage's personal spiritual journey was itself a service to his Brothers. Convinced that Lasallian spirituality must find holiness in both the interior life and the apostolate, he devoted himself for more than fifty years to instilling an integrated spirituality into the life of the Institute. 132

A Spiritual Journey

Sauvage's spirituality must be understood to be the product of progressive development over a lifetime's journey. Referring simply to Sauvage's "spirituality" risks glossing over the developmental impetus that characterized his life. *The Fragile Hope of a Witness* reflects the man's constant striving. Through to the end, Sauvage sought to find ways to live out his relationship with God and with others, especially his Brothers, in dynamic, Gospel-inspired ways. His journey is marked by three phases of development.

The first stage, characterized by a preference for the interior life, began in 1934, when Sauvage entered the Junior Novitiate. Sauvage found the nearly-exclusive attention given to the interior religious life in the Junior Novitiate, Novitiate and Scholasticate appealing.² During these years, Lasallian formation was influenced by the then-common Catholic perception that the primary purpose of the religious state was the spiritual perfection of the individual brother or sister. The work they did in and for the world was a secondary consideration. Thus, the emphasis was continually and exclusively (or nearly so) on the religious life rather than the apostolate. Sauvage described the distinction between the two in this way:

Religious life was prayer, asceticism, communal and interior life, observance of the Rule, and fidelity to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The apostolate, for the Brother, was his scholarly activity related to teaching the catechism, four and a half hours per week.³

In these years, he lived completely within the communal structures of the Institute, with little connection to the world beyond the Institute. Even the effects of World War II were felt only insofar as they prompted a merger of Lasallian houses of formation. In the name of "religious separation from the world," the Brothers intentionally distanced themselves from the national and political life of France.⁴ It is not surprising that in this isolation and as an adolescent, Sauvage would adopt the prevailing spiritual attitudes of his formators.

The second phase of Sauvage's spiritual journey, a rejection of the sufficiency of the interior religious life in light of the demands of the apostolate, began in 1942, when he went to university. Sauvage became disillusioned with the Institute's excessive concern for the religious life at the cost of attention to the Brother's apostolate. His disillusionment arose on a number of fronts. First, he realized that he and his fellow Brothers were not adequately prepared to serve as teachers, whether of secular subjects or as catechists. Despite the Institute's purported commitment to catechesis, Sauvage received little training beyond memorization of the catechism. Theology and biblical studies had been entirely outside the realm of formation in the Novitiate and Scholasticate.⁵ Hours were spent on rigid observation of the *Rule* and the ritualistic practice of interior prayer while little

² FHW, 52, 62-64, and 67. Sauvage later attributed the appeal of the individualistic spirituality to his adolescent mindset, having entered the Junior Novitiate at the age of 11.

³ FHW, 60.

⁴ FHW, 71.

⁵ FHW, 67 and 132.

attention was given to teacher preparation. Second, Sauvage recognized a dramatic disconnect between religious life within the Institute and the life of the surrounding world. His personal experience of the chasm between the two took place at university and while in military service at the end of World War II. Living outside the confines of Institute structures, Sauvage discovered a freedom and unity in interpersonal relationships that challenged the attraction the exclusively religious life held for him.⁶ As the war came to a close, Sauvage's own experience was reinforced by that of other Brothers whose war experiences had compelled them to a new spirituality:

In short, these Brothers were forced to refocus their religious life on the essence of religious commitment: willingness to hear the Word and to discern God's call in the unexpectedness of actual events.⁷

Lastly, in the years immediately following the war, Sauvage and his Brothers found themselves, with the rest of France, in the midst of a Catholic renewal embracing domestic evangelization, various Catholic Action movements, and a return to the theological and liturgical sources of the early church. The Brothers were aware of "the development of a new style of human, spiritual, and ecclesial formation for young people who were considering priesthood that applied the resources of these various renewal movements."⁸ They hoped that such renewal could similarly extend to their own Institute, which was dissatisfying in contrast.

Sauvage's instinct that the integration of religious life and the apostolate were essential in his own spiritual life prompted a vocational crisis that lasted from 1945 to 1948, when he professed his perpetual vows.⁹ Could he, Michel Sauvage, vow to live within the structures of an Institute which he believed had no authentic spiritual life?¹⁰ The 1946 General Chapter and subsequent 1947 revision of the *Rule* did nothing to assuage his concerns. Sauvage and his *confrères* had great hopes that the General Chapter would be "inspirational," "open," and "spiritual."¹¹ By spiritual, he meant encouraging and supporting a "personal religion centered on faith in Christ and the gift of self in apostolic service."¹² Their hopes were not fulfilled: "Our disappointment was as great as were our expectations."¹³ The revised *Rule* further convinced Sauvage of the Institute's spiritual disequilibrium:

By the sheer weight of things, the concept of regularity focused especially on a limited approach to the *religious life*: the observance of the vows, their related virtues, prayer, and asceticism. The apostolate was of no concern.¹⁴

As he approached the time to make his perpetual vows, Sauvage resolved the crisis through interrogation of his "inner call" to be a Christian Brother:

This personal experience [of taking vows in a time of darkness] reinforced my belief for the future that the question of fidelity to the vocation must be situated primarily in the inner domain of the relationship between a human being and God.¹⁵

⁶ FHW, 76-78.

⁷ FHW, 83.

⁸ FHW, 86.

⁹ FHW, 77-78.

¹⁰ FHW, 67 and 128.

¹¹ FHW, 87-88.

¹² FHW, 88.

¹³ FHW, 90.

¹⁴ FHW, 104.

¹⁵ FHW, 127-28.

Regardless of his disillusionment with what he perceived as the spiritual barrenness of the Institute, he resolved to remain committed to the calling given him by God.

Sauvage entered the third phase of his spiritual journey, the synthesis of interior religious life and exterior apostolate, following his perpetual profession in 1948. There is a certain irony in Sauvage's resolution of his vocational crisis. He came to terms with his concern about the excessive interiority of Lasallian practices of spirituality largely through interior testing of his calling. Almost immediately, however, his vocational commitment led Sauvage to determine his external actions. Not only would he take his perpetual vows, he committed to taking positive action to improve the Institute's spiritual life.¹⁶ Thus, what began as a personal and largely internal crisis established the direction of Sauvage's life as Christian Brother for decades to come. From this point forward, he worked to inculcate in the Institute an appreciation for the integral wholeness of religious life and the apostolate/ministry. He made his personal spiritual insight a gift to his Brothers.

A Spiritual Insight

The essential and persistent feature of Sauvage's spirituality in the third – and longest – phase of his spiritual journey is quite simple: holiness encompasses both the interior, or religious, life and the exterior life of the apostolate (that is, ministry). For more than fifty years, Sauvage would explore this principle personally and on behalf of the Institute. Initially, his path was somewhat isolated from the larger life of the Institute. He noted that for a time he “distanced” himself from De La Salle and “the ideal of observance” emphasized in what he had been taught regarding the *Rule* in favor of other Catholic spiritualities he found more productive.¹⁷ In time, he was delighted to discover that his spiritual insight was consistent with De La Salle's own spiritual vision for the Brothers.

Sauvage's conviction that holiness is embedded in, not separate from, one's daily work and life ran counter to two premises that were operative in at least parts of the Catholic church, including within religious communities such as the Institute, prior to Vatican II. First, holiness was seen largely as the specialized domain of religious men and women (those consecrated, whether by ordination or vows, to lives separate from the secular context in which most lay people live). Second, the purpose of religious life was individual perfection. Perhaps due to the distinction regarding holiness made between the lay state and the religious and ordained states, this second premise tended toward an expectation that perfection was achieved through that which was distinct from rather than shared with the lay state. In other words, those practices uniquely characteristic of religious life – including structures of prayer and piety, life according to a communal rule and discipline, and the evangelical counsels – were seen as more essential than the work of the apostolate – for example, teaching, care of the sick, or care of the poor – which were tasks also undertaken by lay people.

Beginning as early as the 1930s and continuing into the 1950s, however, French Catholic movements to evangelize the increasingly secular nation and encourage faith-inspired action by the laity in partnership with the ecclesial hierarchy challenged those two premises. In the decade following the war, Sauvage was sustained more by the theology and spirituality that accompanied these movements than by the practices common to the Christian Brothers and the teachings of De La Salle (as Sauvage knew them at the time). One example comes from French Dominican theologian Yves Congar, who proposed that “[holiness] is not the onerous privilege of priests and religious alone, it is the obligation of all Christians whatever in virtue of the one Christianity that is

¹⁶ FHW, 129.

¹⁷ FHW, 64.

common to them all.”¹⁸ He observed that “each form of life has its own conditions, duties, and resources,” that the “states and conditions of life are diverse.”¹⁹ Thus, the holiness of the faithful, “their ‘being in Christ,’”²⁰ takes place within the tasks and concerns of their daily lives. 135

In the late 1950s, Sauvage’s judgment of De La Salle’s spirituality changed dramatically while writing his doctoral dissertation on the Christian Brother’s vocation as a lay catechist. As he neared the end of his project, he experienced “a true intellectual and spiritual conversion to John Baptist De La Salle.”²¹ The turning point came when he read De La Salle’s *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. “This complete reading for me was like a bedazzlement, a lightning bolt. I discovered a realistic, dynamic, theological, mystical, apostolic, and – in a nutshell – deeply spiritual text.”²² Previously, he had accepted the separation of religious life from the apostolate as an artifact of the 17th century and looked outside the Lasallian tradition for inspiration for the future of the Institute. Reading the *Meditations*, he recognized his error:

Ultimately, what amazed me the most in studying the *Mediations for the Time of Retreat* of Saint John Baptist De La Salle is that this text never envisages the religious life of the Brother as separate from its apostolic dimension.²³

The spiritual shortcomings of the contemporary Institute could not be attributed to De La Salle. The issue, rather, was the limited reading of the Founder’s writings and, in particular, the emphasis given to the *Rule* over his spiritual writings in recent generations. Sauvage saw that the unity of the interior and exterior, of religious life and apostolate, was the foundation of Lasallian life, not an innovation as some claimed and he himself had believed.²⁴ Sauvage’s delight in his discovery is palpable in the account he gave of it in *The Fragile Hope of a Witness*. His own spiritual instinct, which had provoked a crisis that had brought into question his ability to profess his perpetual vows, was in fact consistent with the Institute as founded by De La Salle.

A Spiritual Renewal

The third aspect of Sauvage’s spiritual journey is apparent in his response to this insight regarding the unity of religious life and the apostolate: his commitment to renewing the spiritual life of the Institute. What began as a question of personal spirituality very quickly became for him an issue of communal life. For Sauvage, his own spiritual disposition was embedded in the life of the Institute, even when he experienced a tension between the two. Initially, that had meant his appropriation of the rituals of religious life taught to him at the Junior Novitiate. He prayed as a Brother was taught to pray. When he became aware of the limitations of that approach, it was not enough to resolve the tension through adaptation of his own personal practices.

The account in *The Fragile Hope of a Witness* makes it clear that Sauvage felt compelled to reconcile his spiritual perspective with the Institute’s. However, he found it impossible to simply adopt the Institute’s practices, which would undermine the authenticity of his God-given vocation. Instead, he worked relentlessly to change the Lasallian understanding of religious life and spirituality. These efforts fall into two periods. Initially, Sauvage sought to introduce a new spiritual

¹⁸ Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965), 400. Originally published in 1953.

¹⁹ *LPC*, 400.

²⁰ *LPC*, 401.

²¹ *FHW*, 265-66.

²² *FHW*, 267.

²³ *FHW*, 274.

²⁴ *FHW*, 274-275.

orientation into the life of the Institute. Later, after his personal conversion to De La Salle's spirituality, he worked to re-introduce the *Meditations* De La Salle wrote for his Brothers as an essential element in the life of the Institute and the interpretation of the *Rule*. 136

Beginning in the mid-1940s, Sauvage participated in a movement for what he described as “creative but smothered adaptation.”²⁵ His contributions to the new Lasallian journal, *Catéchistes*, and his efforts to reform the program of religious education for the French Brothers exemplify the adaptive approach. In this period (lasting from before the 1946 General Chapter through the General Chapter of 1956), Sauvage believed the spiritual limitations of the 20th century Institute were a product of a slavish attachment to the 17th century words of the founder, John Baptist De La Salle, particularly as found in the *Rule*. He had been introduced to a Lasallian spirituality grounded in De La Salle's *Rule* and a *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, both of which Sauvage described as “ascetical writings.”²⁶ This spirituality was static (neither mystical nor apostolic, cut off from the contemporary world), negative (emphasizing denial, authority, observance, and uniformity), and narrow (lacking in vision and dynamism).²⁷ Thus, he believed De La Salle's spirituality was insufficient for the challenges of the contemporary world and sought alternatives that would allow appropriate adaptation of the Lasallian tradition to the current context. In proposing adaptation, he and his like-minded colleagues ran into considerable opposition from Christian Brothers who were devoted to perpetuating the cult of De La Salle (albeit, viewed through a narrow lens).

After discovering De La Salle's *Meditations* and the spiritual opening they offered, Sauvage's own conversion to De La Salle immediately took on communal implications, calling for service to his Brothers. From this point forward, supported by his discovery of the Lasallian heritage as well as by the language of “adapted renewal” used by Vatican II in *Perfectae Caritatis* (the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life), Sauvage's efforts shifted from developing a new Lasallian spirituality to recovering in its fullness the spiritual heritage of De La Salle.

In 1957, the Institute – or at least its leadership – was reluctant to hear and accept Sauvage's interpretation of De La Salle's spirituality. The 38th General Chapter in 1956 had continued to accept a dichotomy between religious life and the apostolate and in general made virtually no progress in reconsidering the life of the Institute in any immediately significant way.²⁸ In hindsight, however, Sauvage saw that the Chapter's decision not only to revise the *Rule* but to do so without insisting on literal interpretation of the 17th century text created room for the necessary debate about the nature of the practices of religious life vis-à-vis the specific life of the individual Brother.²⁹ The commonly-held position that the Brother's religious life was separate from and had priority over his apostolate could be confronted by the practical reality whereby:

...many Brothers realized that their gift of self in apostolic activity supported their spiritual life, inspired their prayer, and stimulated their search for God, who calls them into union and sends them to serve humanity. This is the essence of the spiritual teaching of John Baptist De La Salle.³⁰

Sauvage contributed to applying this awareness arising from the personal practice of individual Brothers to the Institute's way of speaking about the relationship between religious life and the apostolate through his work with the Lasallian journal *Orientations*, his service at the *Jesus*

²⁵ FHW, 13.

²⁶ FHW, 269.

²⁷ FHW, 266.

²⁸ FHW, 181-87.

²⁹ FHW, 254-257.

³⁰ FHW, 251.

Magister Institute, and later, in administrative roles such as the Assistant for Formation of the Institute.³¹

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The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) offered Sauvage the opportunity to connect his interpretation of De La Salle's spirituality to the larger Catholic understanding of vocation and holiness. During the Council, he was involved with council deliberations through the participation of his brother, Jean, who was at that time bishop of Annecy. Jean Sauvage and several of his brother bishops stayed at the Christian Brothers Generalate during the Council sessions; there, Michel Sauvage joined them for meals and as a result was aware of the issues unfolding at the Council. He later attended Council sessions and contributed directly to *Perfectae Caritatis* (the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life) and *Gravissimum Educationis* (the Declaration on Religious Education).³²

The dialogue and documents of the Council established Sauvage's convictions about the inseparable connection between holiness and life as the teaching of the Church through repeated reference found in *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and elsewhere. For example, in language reminiscent of the passages quoted from Congar above, the Second Vatican Council taught in *Lumen Gentium* that all the faithful are called to holiness (LG 39) and that it is in and through "the conditions, duties and circumstances of their lives" that people "increase in holiness" (LG 41). This integrative approach to holiness was clearly consistent with the spiritual insight Sauvage had experienced twenty years earlier and had discovered in De La Salle's writings from the 17th century.

The period following the Council presented Sauvage other opportunities to advance his program for a more complete and informed reading of De La Salle's writings. The Institute moved quickly to meet in General Chapter in 1966 (extended to a second session in 1967) to begin the renewal called for by the Council and required by Pope Paul VI. One of the developments at the 39th General Chapter was the drafting of *The Christian Brother in the World Today: A Declaration*, attributed by some to the inspiration and pen of Sauvage.³³ In his words:

...the *Declaration* offers a renewed vision of the Brother's religious life, of his consecration and vocation, by shifting from the religious state to the Gospel life of the Brother; of his mission, by shifting from duality to unity; of his community, by shifting from the gregarious uniformity of individuals to the communion of free persons endowed with the diverse gifts of the Spirit.³⁴

Ultimately accepted by the Chapter and serving as a companion to the revised *Rule*, the *Declaration* formalized for the Institute integral totality of religious life and apostolic ministry.³⁵ In Sauvage's view this totality corresponded to De La Salle's own understanding of consecration, pertaining to the total commitment of the Brother's person, life and activities, not simply to a profession of vows.³⁶ Nonetheless, Sauvage's assessment of the revised *Rule* of 1967 was mixed. On the one hand, it offered a more spiritually grounded understanding of prayer, focusing on communal and relational dimensions more than structures.³⁷ On the other hand, the debates surrounding the

³¹ FHW, 225, 285-87 and 454.

³² FHW, 307-310.

³³ FHW, 411-12.

³⁴ FHW, 414.

³⁵ FHW, 419-422.

³⁶ FHW, 426. Sauvage's understanding of De La Salle's view appears to have been informed, in this case, by his reading of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (cf. Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos, *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor: The Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Teaching of St. John Baptist de La Salle*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Romeoville, IL: Christian Brothers National Office, 1981, 223 p.).

³⁷ FHW, 443-44.

revision demonstrated the difficulties that actual implementation of spiritual renewal would face in practice.³⁸

In the years following the 39th General Chapter, Sauvage served in a number of leadership roles for the Institute, each of which allowed him to share his spiritual vision with individual Brothers and more broadly through institutional structures. His method for constructing a Lasallian spirituality was to place the *Rule* within the context of De La Salle's spiritual writings, particularly the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Sauvage dedicated himself to overcoming the hegemony of *Rule* and the asceticism many Brothers interpreted it as requiring. Instead, the *Rule* should be seen as a tool supporting a vocational life grounded in the Gospel, which is essentially relational and outward-reaching.

Sauvage's appropriation of De La Salle's spirituality was further shaped in the 1970s by the scholarship of Br. Miguel Campos, FSC, in his dissertation on *The Gospel Itinerary of Saint John Baptist De La Salle* (1974). Sauvage and Campos co-authored two books on De La Salle's spirituality: *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor: The Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Teaching of St. John Baptist De La Salle* (originally published in 1976) and *A Commentary on John Baptist De La Salle's Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer: Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart* (originally published in 1989). Both texts merit reading in their own right. Here, they are considered briefly for what they contribute to an understanding of Sauvage's own spirituality and his commitment to the spiritual formation of his Brothers. Sauvage described these books, along with his doctoral dissertation (which had first led him to discover De La Salle's *Meditations*) as "syntheses of John Baptist de La Salle."³⁹

Reading the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* and *Meditations for the Principal Feast Days*, Sauvage and Campos proposed that De La Salle's spirituality was grounded in the conjunction of the lived experience of the Brothers and divine revelation of Scripture:

It is clear, then, that the essential source of Lasallian spirituality is actual experience and sacred Scripture as a unity. More accurately, the source is the faith-inspired awareness that the history of salvation is unfolding here and now: God is at work in the foundation of the Institute.⁴⁰

For De La Salle, holiness and service are inextricably intertwined. Pointing to De La Salle's writings about consecration in the *Meditations*, for example, the two concluded that:

De La Salle's language makes it clear that in his view it is impossible at any point to separate, much less oppose, commitment to God and commitment to human beings, relationship to God and exercise of ministry, attention to God alone and realistic concern for the welfare of the young.⁴¹

The Brother's interior and exterior acts are reciprocal:

While the exercise of the ministry sends a man to prayer, the activity of prayer in turn sends him back to the ministry. More accurately, in his ministerial activity no less than in his prayer the Brother stands before God with the youngsters.⁴²

In this view, taken from De La Salle's *Meditations*, holiness is not a matter of vows or of ritual practices. It is the practice of living in relationship with God and with others – with others because

³⁸ FHW, 445.

³⁹ FWH, 575.

⁴⁰ AGP, xviii.

⁴¹ AGP, 224.

⁴² AGP, 233.

of relationship with God, with God through relationship with others – always inspired and enabled by the presence of the Holy Spirit.⁴³

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* transformed Sauvage's view of De La Salle and the spirituality he proposed for the Brothers. Not so De La Salle's *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, to which Sauvage said he always reacted "coldly."⁴⁴ His effort to understand and appreciate the *Explanation* despite the challenges it posed for him is a testimony to the authenticity of Sauvage's intention to recover on behalf of the Institute a fuller appreciation of De La Salle's spiritual teaching. How easy it would be for Sauvage to dwell only on the writings he personally preferred! His purpose, however, was to renew Lasallian spirituality based on the writings of the Founder.

His second book with Campos, *A Commentary on John Baptist De La Salle's Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, reflects Sauvage's personal struggle with some aspects of De La Salle's writings. Sauvage's own spiritual awareness led him to emphasize the interconnectedness of the internal and external life and to see holiness emerging from the integration of the two. His discovery that De La Salle shared this view was pivotal for his life as a Brother. However, Sauvage could not ignore the fact that he and De La Salle were not entirely like-minded regarding the relationship of the interior to the exterior. As a result, in their *Commentary*, Sauvage and Campos repeatedly acknowledged that De La Salle at times opposed the interior and exterior life, implying a separation of prayer and life.⁴⁵ They admitted to being struck by "a kind of dissonance" when reading the *Explanation*, in which "the Brother's ministry is practically absent."⁴⁶

Sauvage and Campos responded in two ways to this tendency of the Founder. First, they acknowledged it as the product of a dualistic anthropology, common in De La Salle's historical context.⁴⁷ They chose to interpret the *Explanation* in light of a more contemporary incarnational anthropology attuned to the presence of God in and through history. Though this approach did, in a sense, revise rather than recover De La Salle's spirituality, they found sufficient evidence of a more integrative view in De La Salle's other writings (especially his *Meditations*) to justify it.

Second, they proposed that the *Explanation* be studied with reference to Scripture and other Lasallian writings, especially De La Salle's *Meditations*.⁴⁸ The *Meditations* incorporated a use of Scripture oriented toward an apostolic life of service, not simply the pursuit of individual holiness.⁴⁹ The God who is adored in the depths of a Brother's soul is the same God who calls that Brother to ministry. The inward movement of mental prayer comes from and leads to the outward movement of service.⁵⁰ Thus, an integrated reading of De La Salle's writings disallows any prioritization of the interior or separation of religious life and apostolate.

From the moment of his discovery of De La Salle's *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, Sauvage continued to argue that the unity of religious life and the apostolate were essential elements of De La Salle's spirituality for the Brothers from the Institute's foundation. In one of his last papers, given at the 1997 Commission on the Educational Mission of the Latin American Lasallian Region

⁴³ AGP, 235-237.

⁴⁴ FHW, 574.

⁴⁵ Miguel Campos and Michel Sauvage, *A Commentary on John Baptiste de La Salle's Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer: Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart*, trans. Oswald Murdoch (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1995), 27-28, 162, 183, 215, 295 and 332.

⁴⁶ *Commentary*, 372.

⁴⁷ *Commentary*, 378-79.

⁴⁸ *Commentary*, 375-76.

⁴⁹ *Commentary*, 183.

⁵⁰ *Commentary*, 267, 273 and 295.

in Araruama, Brazil, Sauvage described De La Salle's vision of the Lasallian journey in this way: "A spiritual evangelical itinerary involves both the consecration of a life and the consecration by a life."⁵¹ Borrowing a favorite phrase from Fr. Michel Rondet, SJ, he concluded, "[The Brothers] consecrate their life, but life consecrates them."⁵² 140

Sauvage's own spiritual journey began with an early awareness of God's call to be a Christian Brother. From an initial inward focus, his life experience led Sauvage to look outward, finding holiness at the intersection of his devotion to God and his service to the world. Through his studies, he discovered that his spiritual instinct corresponded to the vision John Baptist de La Salle had for his Brothers in founding the Institute. From that moment on, Sauvage worked tirelessly to recover De La Salle's integrative spirituality for his Brothers and to incorporate it into the very structure of the Institute. Such was his spiritual journey, personal and communal to the very end.

⁵¹ FWH, 602.

⁵² FWH, 603.