

THE BUILDING UP OF THE HISTORIC MEMORY OF THE INSTITUTE TODAY

Third part The composition of the Historical Memory of the Institute today

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INTRODUCTION

I have decided to approach this third part of the topic given to me on the basis of what I have written on the history of the Institute in part 2 above. Throughout the five volumes considered there, a certain number of themes were discussed repeatedly.

By selecting those themes that I think are essential, I hope to show how the questions they pose are relevant today. It will be my personal selection, but it can also be a starting point for opening out to other points of view. I shall limit myself to five topics, looking at two complementary aspects in each of them.

3 - 1 ASSOCIATION AND MISSION

These two aspects are considered first, because they seem fundamental to the Institute.

In the section: *Origines*, (especially on pages 87 to 96) an effort was made to show how Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, having united around him the first schoolmasters in Reims, decided to form with them a sort of religious community. Then, as this community began to grow and to give rise to a number of small isolated communities, he realized the dangers of this fragmentation, especially at the time of what is called the crisis of 1690. To overcome this crisis, Jean-Baptiste de la Salle committed himself, with two other Brothers, “to procure the establishment of the Society of Christian Schools” (cf. EL, p. 82). As a follow-up to this, he and twelve Brothers consecrated themselves to God in these words: “I... promise and vow to unite myself and to live in society with Brothers...” (citing the names). This action gave birth to the Society of the Christian Schools (cf. EL 5, p.92), soon to be called the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Henceforth, the Brothers constituted a formal ‘body’, which appointed as its superior Jean-Baptiste de La Salle. When it spread out to other communities, these did not form a simple federation. By associating themselves as they did, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle and the twelve Brothers united with him,

not only gave shape to the society they had formed, but also assured its permanence and continuity insofar as other members would come and associate themselves with them.

However, there is another aspect that deserves our attention. If the Brothers associated themselves as they did, it was with the idea of guaranteeing the future of the work for which they had dedicated themselves to the Holy Trinity. After saying “I... promise and vow to unite myself and to live in society with Brothers...” they added “to keep together and by association gratuitous school in whatever place...”

Because of the way it was set up, the Institute of the Brothers was rather like those Societies of priests, such as the Eudists and Sulpicians, which had lately been organized to promote the reform of the clergy. However, it differed from them because, with the exception of their Superior at the time, none of the members of the Institute was or would be a priest. They did not differ in their mission, which fitted in with and followed the movement of reform already in progress in France, because it was concerned with the Christian education of the children of ‘the poor’.

In the first part of the present text above, we pointed out how the Bull of Approbation granted to the Institute in 1725 led the Brothers to pronounce the traditional religious vows and so changed the Institute into what the Church currently calls a ‘Society of the Consecrated Life’. However, that did not change the fact that it was a centralized Society subdivided into local Communities. We also pointed out how the Bull of Approbation introduced the vow of teaching the poor gratuitously, and that this resulted in the disappearance from the formula of vows of the explicit mention of a ‘vow of association’. It can be noted, however, that the new formula continued to say: “I promise and vow to unite myself and to live in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools... (cf. CL 25, p. 140). This wording was maintained until 1967! Consequently, we can see that the element of association continued to be part of the structure of the Institute, although it was not given much attention for a long time.

During the second session of the General Chapter of 1966-1967 the formula of vows dating from 1726 was modified. The words “to keep, together and by association, gratuitous schools” were replaced by “to keep, together and by association, schools for the service of the poor”, so there was still no explicit mention of a vow of association. By contrast, a few years later Brother John Johnston, the Superior General elected by the General Chapter of 1986, could write as follows in his Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1987. “To attempt to capture, at least partially, the spirit of the original vow of association, the capitulants of the 41st General Chapter renamed our fourth vow (called since 1967 “the vow of service of the poor through education”). It is now called the vow of “association for the service of the poor through education”. In rendering this fundamental notion more explicit, the Chapter wanted to contribute to a strengthening and deepening of our self-understanding and of our commitment as consecrated men associated for mission” (pp. 23f).

In the same circular of January 1987, Brother Superior touched on another aspect of association when he wrote: “Our discussion of association so far is very incomplete. A further insistent call comes to us from the Lasallian Family. The evolution of the ‘Lasallian Family’ is one of the most important developments in the Institute today, one that demands our closest attention.” (p.29). Clearly, a new dimension to association was making its appearance.

From then on within the Institute, people began to focus their attention on ‘association’ but we must acknowledge that it was without knowing clearly whether what was being said referred to the first

dimension mentioned above, with an emphasis on the Brothers, or to the second, meaning the Lasallian Family.

We are still in that same position in the Institute today. There is a lot of talk about ‘association’, but the point of view from which it is being approached is not always clear. Is it association between Brothers? Or between Brothers and lay people involved in a shared mission? Or is it the association of lay people among themselves? Or is it perhaps a mixture of all these different aspects? Clearly, the contents we attach to the word ‘association’ need to be clarified.

For my part, I am particularly attentive to the fact that the Institute has never been just a federation of Communities, but it is an *ensemble* of Communities whose composition varies according to the work undertaken by the Brothers. It is of capital importance that in the Institute great importance should be attached to the lived reality of Communities. But that does not mean that these Communities can be closed in on themselves and forget that they are part of a whole which goes beyond them. I note, for example, that Brother John Johnston was very conscious of this aspect in his circular of January 1988, where he says that in his address to the capitulants of 1986 he spoke to them as follows. “Brothers, we are one. We are an International Religious Institute at the service of the Church. While it is perfectly normal and necessary that we function as regions, districts, sub-districts and delegations, this Chapter has consistently reminded us that we are one, calling us to association and interdependence, calling us to fight against ‘provincialism’. Brothers, we have to appreciate the power for good that we possess, if we really live and work together and by association as an international Religious family.” (p.16)

That is not to say that I wish to focus exclusively on the aspect that is here underlined. However, it seems to me to me necessary to point out its importance for the Institute today. The current concern to extend association to the members of the Lasallian Family in terms of a shared mission should not make us lose sight of the association of the Brothers among themselves and the need to ensure that this kind of association is kept going.

3 - 2 VOWS - CONSECRATION

We can say that the pronouncing of vows has always had an important place in the Institute, especially in its beginnings. Ever since then, it has been part of the cohesion of the Brothers among themselves and a means of establishing a link between them and the Institute.

According to the first biographers of J.-B. De La Salle, very soon after the schoolmasters gathered around him had formed a community of Brothers, the ‘principal’ Brothers, ‘being assembled together’, decided to take the step of making vows, in 1684 or 1686 (EL 5, p.61). It was probably their intention to pronounce the three vows of religion, but J.-B. De La Salle convinced them to limit themselves to the vow of obedience.

Then, in the years 1690 and 1691, when the Community of Brothers was faced with problems that threatened its existence, it was by a vow that J.-B. De La Salle and two Brothers joined together “to ensure the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools” (cf. EL p. 82). And again, in 1694, it was by binding themselves individually by a vow “to unite myself and live in society with the Brothers” (expressly named) that J.-B. De La Salle and twelve Brothers set up the Society.

For thirty years, this formula was used by those who joined the original group, both in making and renewing their commitment to God in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. However,

in *The Collection of Small Treatises*, published by the Founder, we find some paragraphs under the heading *Ce à quoi obligent les Vœux*, (the obligations entailed by the vows), though admittedly they contain a paraphrase of the formula used in pronouncing the vows rather than a real explanation of the significance attached to the action of pronouncing vows. To have some idea of this significance, we must study the formula as used in the vows of 1691 (cf. EL 5, p. 83-84). We can see by the way things are set out that the essential priority lies in the total consecration to the Holy Trinity 'to procure Your glory'. The vows are the means to realizing this goal which is expressed right at the start. They give concrete form to the consecration that each individual makes of himself to God. This could be better expressed, but the important thing is to understand that consecration takes priority over the vows that are pronounced. It is also interesting to note that, since the Brothers pronounced only the vow of obedience and not those of poverty and chastity, their vow was different from the traditional religious vows. The Rule contained a chapter on each of the virtues corresponding to the vows, and the demands they presented were similar to those deriving from the vows. They were, however, wider in their scope.

The Bull of Approbation accorded to the Institute in 1725 departed from the practice as lived by the Brothers for more than thirty years. It made their successors pronounce the three vows of religion plus a vow to teach the poor gratuitously. And there was no further mention of a vow of association. The 1726 edition of the Rule introduced a chapter entitled 'The Vows' and another on 'The obligations of the Vows'. At the same time, the chapters on poverty, chastity and obedience contained in the Rule of 1718 were retained, and this continued to be the case throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. During all that same period, the obligations of the vows were presented mostly in juridical terms.

In 1785, Brother Agathon, Superior General, in his *Lettres Instructives* (Letters of Instruction) said: "having explained the vows of stability and teaching the poor gratuitously, it is fitting that we also explain the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience" (EL 6, p. 152). He then went on to point out the obligations for the Brothers arising from these vows and to show how they differed from those of the solemn vows pronounced by the Religious Orders. In treating of the vow of obedience in this circular, Brother Agathon hits upon a very felicitous expression, when he says that the profession of a vow of obedience 'does not make a person an automaton'. Apart from that he departs very little from the accepted treatment of the vows in vogue at the time.

A few years later in 1789, when the National Assembly of the States General suppressed the Religious Orders in line with its reforms, Brother Agathon and his Assistants drew up a document entitled *Idée Générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes* in which he showed how simple vows differed from solemn vows. He had in mind the particular goal of underlining the fact that vows were taken in the Institute in order to ensure its cohesion and preservation (En EL 6, p. 169-170). Once again, it is clear that in terms of our discussion here, the same rather narrow view of the vows is maintained.

Throughout the 19th century, a similar understanding of the vows dominates in the Institute. What is most surprising is that during that century many Brothers remained in the Institute without committing themselves to vows or without renewing those they had made. (It is said that this was also the case in the 18th century, but I have not been able to find any evidence to support the assertion.) As a result, the numbers of 'employed novices' grew significantly, although in principle they were supposed to be only people in their second year of formation. This increase is evident from the graph reproduced in EL 9 (p. 146). It is impossible to say how this custom became established and was maintained. Perhaps it was simply a method of retaining people who posed no problem in order to make up for the lack of personnel that Brother Philippe constantly complained about. This arrangement, whereby Brothers remained in the Institute without pronouncing vows, was denounced by one Brother Assistant at beginning of the 20th century. (cf. EL 11, p.190), and the custom disappeared about that time.

The Rule of 1901 did not change anything as far as the vows were concerned nor did it change the devotion of individual chapters to the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience. We have to wait until the Rule adopted in 1967 before we find any assertion of the primacy of the Brothers' consecration over the vows by which it was expressed. We find it in the Rule of 1986 in Chapter 3 on The Consecrated Life. First there is a paragraph on consecration, which is followed by a discussion of each of the vows in turn. As far as the three traditional vows are concerned, it is noticeable how the adjective 'evangelical' is added every time the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are mentioned. This is a way of specifying the meaning of these words in relation to the vows that correspond to them. Which was a very useful move!

When we come to the present day, it is clear that we have to stay faithful to the line of development outlined in 1967, which inspired the text of 1986, giving primacy to consecration over the vows. That is what is done in the letter of January 1st 1993 by Brother John Johnston, who became Superior in 1986. He invites the Brothers to 'follow Christ as consecrated men' (p. 24f). And again in the Circular of 2000, he writes that he would prefer the term 'formula of consecration' rather than 'formula of vows' to describe the act of association adopted by the Founder and his disciples in 1694, which he proceeds to discuss (p.16).

That does not stop us admitting that, in today's world, the idea of a commitment by vows is not well understood. Even for educated Christians, the mere expression 'vows of poverty, chastity, obedience' does not mean very much and has to be explained in more simple terms. All the more so for those people who have no religious background. Moreover, the very witness that we aim to give as 'consecrated' people is not always understood. We profess 'evangelical poverty', but what level of detachment do we have to manifest for it to be seen as something real? And if we do not practice a certain level of material poverty, what is the meaning of the vow we make? We commit ourselves to 'consecrated celibacy' and obviously the way we live this out must be unequivocal. Even then, we do not always know how it is perceived. The cultural climate we live in does not facilitate people's understanding of the commitment we make in this area. As for the religious obedience that we promise, if by this expression we want to convey the idea that it is something distinct from the kind of obedience others often have to show, I am afraid the difference is not easily perceived either. In fact, it is when obedience is difficult and opposed to our legitimate personal convictions that we are led to give witness to the fidelity of our commitment, as the 1986 Rule says in article 37.

In addition to all this, nowadays, when any permanent commitment tends to be called into question – be it commitment to marriage, to priestly ordination or religious vows – the idea of making any such commitment 'for all your life' seems even more idealistic. This is undoubtedly the principal obstacle to any irrevocable 'consecration'. The relative value accorded to any commitments reduces the force of those that are made, but this only leads us more surely to place greater emphasis on the act of consecration itself rather than on its expression in the form of vows. This gives rise to the question as to how a step that only makes sense in terms of faith can be made more firmly rooted in faith. It is said that religious life is in crisis. This may not be true everywhere, but the crisis is sufficiently widespread to make us ask questions about it.

3 - 3 RULES: THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

In our study of the Origins of the Institute, one section was devoted to the editing of the *Règles Communes* (Common Rules) of the Institute. The stages in the drawing up of the Rules were traced

through the different editions that have been preserved. They have a variety of titles: *Pratique du Règlement Journalier*, *Règles Communes* (1705) *Règles Communes des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes* (1718) *Règles et Constitutions de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes* (1726). These different texts are set out in CL 25 in a way that allows us to see the modifications that were introduced between one edition and the next. However, a comparison of the first two texts listed above yields no results of great interest, since the first text was so short, as is shown clearly in EL 5, p. 159.

On the other hand, the comparison of the texts of 1705 and 1718 is particularly significant in view of the changes that were made in the second of the two editions. Thus Chapter 2 of the 1718 Rule has an article 1 which has no parallel in the 1705 version. In article 3 of the same chapter concerning the reading of the New Testament which the Brothers are invited to do 'in sentiments of faith, respect and reverence for the divine words contained therein', the 1718 Rule adds: 'viewing it as their first and principle rule (cf. CL 25, p.19). Most noteworthy is the fact that the Rule of 1718 introduces a new Chapter 16 'On Regularity'. Basing himself on St Augustine, the Founder tells the Brothers that they should see regularity as a means of observing the twin commandments of love of God and love of neighbor. There are more additions in following chapters of this edition, but they are not so important as those cited above. In making these changes to the text, J.-B. De La Salle seems to have been anxious to get the Brothers to enter into the spirit of the Rule he was giving them.

In CL 2, the text of 1726 is compared with those of 1705 and 1718. We see a number of changes in details, none of which are important. What *is* different, however, the fact that two new chapters are introduced, Chapter 17 'On the Vows' and chapter 18 'The Obligations of the Vows'. This matter was not dealt with in the preceding versions of the Rule, even though the Brothers were pronouncing vows. The additions were in fact linked to the imposition of the three traditional vows on top of those traditionally made by the Brothers. What we said about the motive for the 1718 additions continues to be valid for those in 1726. However, the Preface of the later edition did not do much to encourage the Brothers to go beyond the letter of the Rule they were being asked to observe (cf. EL 5, p.181).

Nevertheless, this was the text which governed the Brothers throughout the 18th century and continued to do so into the 19th century. Different General Chapters during the latter part of this period thought a revision of the Rule was necessary, but it was not until 1901 that a Chapter was convened with the aim of making progress towards such a revision. We have already indicated that, in trying to stay faithful to the text of 1718, they ended up with a new text that was unsatisfactory. The passage that encouraged a move towards the spirit of the Rule was retained, but the text in general tended rather to favour a literal interpretation, in keeping with the thinking of the time (cf. EL 11, pp. 30 and 57).

In the first half of the 20th century, the Commission on the Rule of the General Chapter of 1934 rejected two proposals. One of these proposed the publication of a history of the Common Rule; the other asked for an 'official interpretation' to be approved by the Chapter. The capitulants supported the decision of the commission. On the other hand, they made provision for the preparation of a new edition with a view to the next General Chapter.

Historical developments meant that the next General Chapter did not meet until 1946. During the war years before that, a group of Superiors living in the south-west of France were able to prepare a new text of the Rule. The final touches to the new text were made not by the Chapter itself but by a Commission that met after it was over. At the wish of Brother Athanase-Émile, Superior General, the Commission was fully approved by the Congregation for Religious and so had the same standing as the Chapter. The publication of the new text in 1947 took place in an age when a book called *The Cult of the Vows* was compulsory reading for the novices. Moreover, in his introduction to the new Rule, the

Superior General made frequent and extensive use of the same work. It was a time when the Brothers were urged to observe the Rule in its minutest details.

Paradoxically, the General Chapter of 1956 also demanded that a new text of the Rule be prepared for the Chapter of 1966. It is appropriate to add here that perhaps even before 1956 Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans, in the Second Novitiate, had been giving a commentary on the Rule of 1718 in which gave particular emphasis to chapters 2 and 16 of that Rule. It is no doubt surprising that he did not – as far as I know- extend this commentary to the other chapters. Whatever the case may be, it is certain that the language he was using was quite new. At the same time, the Superiors, and especially Brother Aubert Joseph, Assistant took on the task of preparing a draft text for the approaching General Chapter. This draft was sent out to the Brothers Visitors and members of District Councils. It was put forward with the recommendation that modifications on essential points should be avoided so as to be sure of the approval of the Congregation for Religious. This greatly reduced the extent of suggestions that were being solicited!

A major change took place with the publication of the Conciliar Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, which asked Religious Orders and Congregations to revise their Rules so as to make them conform more to the Gospel and the spirit of their Founders. Brothers Aubert-Joseph and Michel Sauvage produced a new draft very quickly, but it proved impossible to finalise the editing of a new text in the course of what turned out to be the first session of the Chapter in 1966. Before their departure, however, the capitulants did receive the third draft 9 (called P3) which they were to take to the Brothers in their Districts in the period between the two sessions of the Chapter with a view to consulting their views on the question of a future edition.

During the second session of the Chapter, in 1967, a special commission was given the task of collecting together the propositions made by the various other commissions with a view to producing the new edition of the Rule. After almost three months, the text of the special commission was approved by the members of the Chapter by a large majority. It was a comparatively short text which had some resemblance to the Rule of the Taizé Brothers –a group within the Swiss Reformation Movement who had rediscovered the value of the religious life. Neither the Taizé Rule nor that adopted by the Institute in 1967 were perfect, but they did seem to provide the essence of what was to be expected from a Religious Institute. For our purposes here we can note that the 1967 text was developed more fully after taking into account as far as possible the suggestions made by the Brothers. This is the text that received the approval of the Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes in 1987. Whatever we think about the subsequent use made of the contents of this Rule, it is not to be denied that it allows people to go beyond a formalist approach to its observance, which was not often the case prior to the changes made in 1967.

At the present time, work is progressing on a new edition of the text of the Rule. The status of the work is as yet not known. From what has been made public, this text appears to be even wordier than that of 1986. It is a long way from the sobriety that was welcome in the Rule of 1967. A Rule is not a dissertation in theology. We expect it to call to mind the steps to be taken in order to live according to the Gospel. In our case, this means following the path pioneered by Jean-Baptiste de La Salle but living in today's world. In that connection, it is worth referring to the guidance given by the primitive Rule, particularly the chapter on Regularity, where it says that "those who live in community should above all love God and then their neighbor" (CL 25, p. 63). In the light of this reminder, I think it is particularly interesting to note how our understanding of it is influenced by what is then written in article 7: "They will take care to close all the doors of the house without a noise". For a long time this article was viewed as an example of the respect paid to minutiae, as in other articles. But we can also

see the fulfillment of this recommendation as an example of brotherly love, especially when you think of the annoyance that may be caused by the failure to observe it!

The fact is that today, as in former times, we are faced with the question of the role of the Law. It is necessary, especially in order to protect the weak; it sets limits and gives useful points of orientation. However, if it is only viewed as a series of obligations, or more frequently prohibitions, it remains something imposed from outside and is viewed as a necessary evil. The important thing is to interiorize the Law and to make our own the demands it makes. That was the message of Ezekiel in relation to the Law of Israel when he transmits the words of the Lord “I will put my law in your hearts”. At the beginnings of Christianity, Paul conveyed the same message to the Galatians when he said: “if the Spirit lives in you, you are not subject to the law” (Gal 5, 18). If a Rule does not lead to this result it will be of little use, no matter how long or well-written it may be!

3 - 4 GRATUITY - THE SERVICE OF THE POOR THROUGH EDUCATION

In 1694, when the Brothers vowed ‘to unite themselves and to live in society’, they specified that this was in order to ‘maintain gratuitous schools, together and by association, in any place necessary’ (EL 5, p. 92).

In that period of history, ‘charity schools’ relied on the principle of ‘gratuity’ in the sense that the maintenance of the teachers in these schools was paid for by people other than the parents of the children who attended. As a general rule, such schools only admitted the children from families who were recognized as ‘poor’.

It is an established fact that Jean-Baptiste de la Salle did not think of the ‘principle of gratuity’ in these terms in relation to the schools of the Brothers. The schools did not limit themselves to accepting those publicly registered as poor. The Founder was aware of the difficulty of knowing the precise situation of the families (he knew what was meant by the term ‘shamefully poor’) and he did not expect the Brothers to assess the financial means of the families before admitting the children. So long as the parents accepted that their children would be taught alongside those who were known as ‘poor’, the Brothers admitted them ‘gratuitously’. That was in fact the source of many conflicts with the Writing Masters or the teachers of the *Petites Écoles* (cf. e.g. EL 5, p. 120).

For the Brothers who were ‘associated to maintain gratuitous schools’, the aim was to reach the really poor, i.e. those children whose parents could not afford to pay teachers to give their children a basic education. How far were they successful in this goal? This question is treated in our work *The Origins of the Institute* (CL 5, p. 119f), but to find a specific answer we were only able to go on one passage in Blain (cf. CL 8, p. 36) and on an inquiry by the Writing Masters in Dijon in 1718. In the latter source, the investigators themselves recognized that while some of the parents may have had the means to educate their children by paying the Writing Masters, this was not the case for the great majority of them. For the 18th century, we have the evidence in the *Lasallian Study* entitled *Élèves des Frères au XVIII^e siècle* (EL 6, p. 104f), in which an examination of the registers of the Brothers’ schools in three towns establishes the fact that the children recognized as either ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ outnumbered the others. There was an exception in the case of Amiens in 1769, where we find that children classified as ‘less well-off’ represented 41.45 % (not 14. 45 % as printed). This moved to 51.33 % in 1779. In this case, we must conclude that the Brothers were not entirely free to accept children whose admission was sought by their parents. Another *Lasallian Study* on the same century relates to *La défense de la gratuité* undertaken by the Superiors in relation to the municipality of Boulogne sur Mer which wanted

the Brothers to require payment of fees from those families judged able to afford them. The Brothers eventually won the day (cf. EL 6, p. 137f).

For the first three quarters of the 19th century, the question of gratuity posed problems throughout France, because by then the Brothers were in much greater numbers. As shown in the *Lasallian Study* entitled *La question de la gratuité* (EL 9, p.170f), this concerned the public schools run by the Brothers but controlled by the municipalities, some of whom would try to impose fees on those parents judged capable of paying them. This was not much of a problem for the first half of the century. However, after the arrival in 1852 of what was called the Second Empire, the state began to exercise more control over the primary schools, and the Brothers had to defend their insistence on the strict gratuity of their schools before the Minister of Education. They managed to do this at first, though with some difficulty. But from 1861 on, they were obliged to concede on this principle and obtained the authorization to do so from Pope Pius IX. Up until 1870, however, the Brothers in France did not need to avail themselves of this permission. It was only in other countries where they received no support whatever from the state that the dispensation granted by Pope Pius IX began to be applied.

The whole scene in France changed during the final quarter of the 19th century, as the Brothers gradually found themselves being excluded from public education, and completely so from 1891 onwards. The Brothers were able to continue teaching in private schools, many of which were gratuitous, but for the others they had to invoke the papal dispensation and receive payments from parents, although some of these were still exempted. This situation in France was mirrored in a number of other countries where official aid for the Brothers' schools became increasingly rare (cf. EL 11, p.74-75).

This situation was accepted by the Brothers in varying degrees: some adjusted to it; some even recommended it, while many, especially many Superiors, deplored it. Most notably, the Assistant Brother Réticius denounced it in a 'Memoire' in which he referred to as the increasing use being made of the dispensation and attacked those he called 'the remunerationists' because they were in favour of a generalization of the charging of school fees. You could say that this whole question generated a sort of bad conscience in the Institute. That is one way of understanding the decisions taken on the matter by the Chapter of 1897 (EL 11, p.49). Also, when what is known as the event of 1904 happened in France, some people saw this as a punishment for the Institute's lack of fidelity to gratuity. (cf. e.g. EL 12, p. 95).

After the events of 1904, when the official suppression of the Institute in France changed its position radically, we have to wait until the years after the First World War before we can appreciate how things stood in relation to gratuity. The table given in EL 11 (p. 226) shows that, according to the annual statistics, the numbers of pupils listed as 'gratuitous' were at a relatively high level. For subsequent years up to 1939, (cf. the table in EL 12, p. 96), the same thing applies, apart from some variations due to the situation in Spain and Central Europe. The question continued to bother people and it came up in the General Chapter of 1928 (EL 12, p. 94). Brother Adrien, the Superior General elected at that Chapter, devoted a Circular to the subject in January 1933 (ibid.). At the same time the assessment of pupils as 'non-fee-paying' took on less and less significance. Thus for example, you could find, in one and the same school, parallel sets of classes in the primary section – one for the free pupils and one for the fee-paying pupils, which meant there was a danger that the latter would look down on the former. This practice was widespread rather than just exceptional, and people did not bother to ask what was the relationship between the number of pupils listed as 'free' and the number of really poor pupils being taught.

We had to wait until the General Chapter of 1966-1967 before the Institute could get out of the impasse it found itself in over gratuity. When the Commission on the Vows discussed whether or not to hold onto the specific vows of teaching the poor gratuitously and stability in the Institute, it decided to recommend that the vow on gratuity be replaced by a vow of 'Service of the Poor through Education'. The Chapter accepted this change, and the formula of vows was duly altered, and the Rule of 1967 made its meaning more explicit in chapter 8. Later, the Chapter of 1986 decided to alter the wording to 'the Vow of Association for the Service of the Poor through Education'.

This involved a shift from what was a means of reaching the children of poor families towards a commitment to put oneself at their service, but it did not change the underlying intention to vow oneself fully to the education of poor children. The Declaration on *The Brother in the Modern World* adopted by the Chapter of 1966-67, gave more specific ideas on those who could be considered as poor and the means of putting oneself at their service (N° 28 to 34). From then on, various activities have been developed to put these recommendations into practice. It would not be possible to evaluate the results of these developments within the limits of this article, but at least we can say that they have been more fruitful than an insistence on an artificial adhesion to the criterion of gratuity in the education given to the pupils, which in any case was always limited to those in primary education.

As for today, we can say that it is still important to follow the practice of the early Brothers and to admit into the school all those who ask. That means, now as then, finding ways of making the various types of school accessible to young people, whatever the social status of their families. This means we try to make every pupil/student feel at ease and able to develop his or her potential as much as possible. Schools and other centres can be established for young people who are in special situations because of their social or economic circumstances, or because of physical or emotional handicaps. They, more than other pupils, need to feel that they are recognized personally and that they have the support they need to develop their potential. The scope for action is vast, and even if our contribution is limited it needs to be made.

3 - 5 CATECHISM AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In the time of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, the catechism was taught to children in church schools. Indeed, the main aim of the 'charity schools' was to attract children in order to teach them their catechism (EL 5, p. 35). For that reason, all these schools could be considered 'Christian'. However, when J-B. de La Salle undertook to create schools for the children of the poor, he insisted that they be called 'Christian Schools'. So what was special about them to make them deserve this designation? Certainly Catholic doctrine was taught there in the form of 'catechism', and to enable the Brothers to do this effectively the Founder wrote for them a series of booklets entitled *Devoirs d'un chrétien* (Duties of a Christian). When the educational handbook *La Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes* (The Conduct of Schools) was produced, it gave an important place to the method of teaching 'catechism' (EL 5, p. 105). However, for J.-B. De La Salle, the schools of the Brothers deserved to be called 'Christian' only insofar as the pupils were given a real experience of living according to the Gospel (EL 5, p. 66).

During the time when J.-B. De La Salle was head of the Institute, we know that he was asked to open schools in the south of France, in that part of Languedoc which had become Protestant. As a result, two Brothers were sent to Alès in 1707 and two others took charge of a school in the small village of Vans in 1711. By then, the children they admitted to school had been born after 1685, when Louis XIV suppressed the Edict of Nantes which gave certain privileges to the Protestants. The children were,

therefore, baptized Catholics even though many of their families remained attached to the Protestant faith. The Brothers taught Catholic doctrine in school, but were careful to avoid anything that might be contentious. The religious life of the schools was not incompatible with the private beliefs of the families - apart from attendance at mass.

During the 18th century, the Brothers also went to other places in Languedoc, equally won over to Protestantism. In 1740 they went to Saint-Ambroix in the Diocese of Uzès, to Uzès itself in 1749 and to Montpellier in 1743, where they opened a school called 'Propagation of the Faith' for the children of people newly converted from Protestants. In the Dauphiné, the Bishop of Die was particularly keen on providing a Catholic education for the children of families which had formerly been Protestant. He obtained two Brothers for his cathedral town and others for the villages of Saillans and Mens. In the latter place, opposition arose from the fact that, for the upkeep of the school, the municipality imposed a levy of 150 *livres* on the inhabitants as authorized by the edicts of 1698 and 1724. Apart from that instance, it seems that the way in which the Brothers gave Christian education to their pupils was well received in the other localities (EL 6, p. 50).

During the course of the 18th century, in both the newly founded schools and in those of longer standing, we find evidence of the care the Brothers took to instruct the pupils in their religion by teaching them the catechism and giving them a good Christian upbringing. This same concern was shown in the dozen or so boarding schools opened by the Brothers during this period. Thus, in the book *Conduite des Pensionnats* (Conduct of Boarding Schools) drawn up by Brother Agathon, Superior General since 1777, we read "the goal of those in charge of boarders is to give the pupils a good instruction in the Christian, Catholic religion, to form them in piety, virtue and good conduct and to inspire them through regular teaching to develop and preserve the spirit and habits of religion" (quoted in EL 6, p. 146).

However, the same Superior, wishing no doubt to counteract the tendency of some Brothers to neglect the teaching of catechism and the religious education of the pupils, sent a letter to all the Brothers in 1784. Its stated purpose was to "correct or prevent negligence in teaching", but the text makes clear that the teaching referred to was that of 'the truths of faith' and 'the things needed to lead a good Christian life' (EL 6, p. 152). This shows that the two elements of religious education as practiced by the Brothers were still of concern a few years before the French Revolution put a stop to the work of the Brothers, without however suppressing the concern in at least some of them, which involved imprisonment and death.

After the Revolution, the apostolate of the Brothers was chiefly directed towards the attempt to 're-christianise' France. Among the preferred means of 're-christianisation' were the schools, seen as a way of extending the Christian message to future generations. Resuming the tradition going back to the beginnings of the Institute, the Brothers once again gave the teaching of catechism the important place it had always had, while continuing to promote education to Christian living in their pupils (EL 9, p.200).

During this period, some Brothers were sent to the Île Bourbon (now La Réunion), initially in 1817, but it was only in 1826 that the arrival of more Brothers allowed them to make a permanent foundation. Initially, they could only admit the children of whites and of freed slaves into their classes, but very soon some of them also started to teach catechism and give instruction to slaves. This paved the way for the freedom of slaves in 1848.

The following years were marked by the figure of Brother Philippe (Mathieu Bransiet), who was head of the Institute for almost 36 years. During his time the Institute expanded rapidly, mostly in France. The Brothers were still mainly involved in elementary schools. In 1865, to encourage those who might get discouraged in their work, the Superior provided them with an overview of the results of fifty years of Christian education in the Institute. Then in January 1866, he highlighted the long-lasting effects of a good education. He also gave some guidelines for the Brothers in their work of Christian education (cf. EL 9, p. 157).

It was also at this time that the Brothers started to take up other kinds of apostolates. For example, in order to continue the work done in class time, some Brothers assembled their pupils on Sundays for a period of recreation and further Christian education. In the same way, other Brothers initiated a kind of 'continuing education' for their former pupils who had taken up apprenticeships. Still other Brothers began evening classes for workmen who wanted to improve themselves. In these new kinds of work, no doubt the Brothers gave greater emphasis to opportunities for education to Christian living rather than to teaching catechism as such.

The Institute also now began to spread to new countries. Outside of France, they were already established in the Catholic countries of Italy, Belgium and Canada (1837). They reached the USA in 1845 and England in 1855. These were Protestant countries, but the Brothers were needed to set up schools for the children of Catholic immigrants so that these would not have to go to Protestant schools.

The Brothers also went to non-Christian countries: Turkey (1841), Egypt (1847), Singapore and Malaya (1852), India (1857), Burma (1860), Ceylon (1868) and to the French territories: Algeria (1853), Tunisia (1860) Indochina (1864). In general they were asked to come to these countries by French missionaries wishing to set up schools for the children of Catholic families who were mostly poor. Faced with problem of maintaining the gratuity of these schools, the Brothers set up parallel schools for paying pupils from the local population. For these latter students, the Brothers adopted the following common practice. All the pupils attended catechism classes in which matters of concern to all were discussed, and at prayer times the non-Christians stood in silence while the Christians prayed. All the non-Catholics were exempted from attendance at Church services (EL 11, p. 116). In the last analysis, the influence of the Brothers on these pupils lay in the general orientation of their teaching, inspired by the Gospel, presented to all the pupils.

The closing years of the 19th century, at least as far as the Brothers were concerned, were characterised by the secularization of the curriculum in the public schools of France. They were still employed in some of them but eventually they were totally excluded. This had already happened in Italy and was soon to be the case in other countries. The Brothers were still able to continue their work in what became known as *écoles libres* ('free schools'). But in France even this right was taken away from them in 1904.

One could be excused for believing, however, that the shackles this event placed on the apostolate of the Brothers only served to increase their zeal for catechetical work. In 1885, the Superior General, Brother Joseph, expressed his concern "to maintain the priority of place for religious instruction" in all parts of the Institute (EL 11, p. 57). In September 1901, the Superior General, Brother Gabriel-Marie, produced a Circular announcing the publication of *La Méthode de l'enseignement religieux* (The Method of Religious Teaching), and in 1903, Pius X, in a papal audience, described the Brothers as 'the apostles of the catechism'. The year 1907 saw the appearance of the *Manuel du Catéchiste* (The Catechist's Manual) written by a Brother and honoured by a papal brief. During this same time,

Brother Joseph was encouraging the development of continued education in our schools, and the Assistant, Brother Exupérien, was creating the Saint Labre Guild to train middle-management leaders. This movement continued to bear fruit after 1904, thanks to the work of Brothers who continued to run schools in France without wearing the religious habit. 40

During the Inter-war Years (1919-1939), the catechetical zeal of the Brothers never flagged. It manifested itself in various ways in the different countries (see EL 12, p. 100), and especially in Italy where groups of voluntary catechists were formed. In Torino, Brother Teodoreto, through his support and encouragement, gave one of these groups its own independent existence, so that it was recognised by the Archbishop in 1926 and eventually became a Secular Institute. The Superior General, Junien Victor, also thought it appropriate in 1938 to publish a Circular containing a report on catechetical teaching (see EL 12, p. 97f). He was also well known for his interest in distant missions, especially projects in the Far East. The Canadian Brothers had been in Japan since 1932, and this presence was extended to Manchuria in 1936. However, the outbreak of war in 1939 put an end to all these projects.

After the disturbances of the 1939-1945 war, life in the Institute resumed very much as it was before the war. The same was true for the apostolates of the Brothers. However, changes were quietly taking place in the Church in the realms of liturgy and scriptural studies, and they soon had their influence on catechetics. This was especially true in France more than in countries like Germany where this kind of instruction continued to be given to children in small books which presented Catholic teaching in the form of questions and answers. This formulaic and very abstract approach, was challenged by those who favoured the introduction of what they called 'Catechesis', i.e. a way of educating faith through awakening an understanding of it within the wider experience of Christian living.

The 'Catechism Study', which the young Brothers in the Institute were obliged to do every day, continued to be done through books that summed up Church teaching in the form of questions and answers. Some Brothers who were involved in the 'catechetical movement' managed to make their voices heard in the General Chapter of 1956, which agreed to change the nature of what people began to call 'religious studies' for the Brothers. They also decided to decentralize these studies. In France, an entirely new basic course of religious studies was designed for the young Brothers, and refresher sessions were organized for older Brothers. All these developments went on in the years preceding the Second Vatican Council as well as during it, and they ensured that people were ready to profit from the new perspectives opened up by Council. Similar developments were also taking place in Spain and in other countries at the same time.

In 1966-1967 a General Chapter took place which was to have the same effect in the Institute as Vatican II had in the Church. In effect it initiated lines of renewal that have already been outlined above. Coincidentally in time (though not by pure chance) in 1968, there exploded in the whole western world a wave of protest that had been building up for some time. It brought into question all established institutions, including the Church and our own Institute. Its origins have to be sought in the philosophical movements that diffused the ideas of the thinkers known as 'the Masters of Suspicion'. In the Church even the faith of priests and religious was shaken, and among those who relied on Vatican II there were many who were no longer sure of how to transmit the Christian message. The estrangement of Christianity from a section of society had its repercussions for young people. Christian schools found they were admitting young people who were hardly receptive to the Christian message, and for different reasons the number of non-Christians attending our schools was increasing. The phenomenon was not universal but who could be sure of not being affected by it in turn?

So that is where we are today! Brothers and Lasallians are learning to find the right means of reaching their pupils so as to lead them to adherence to the Christian faith. Group activities of a charitable or celebratory nature are offered to young people, building on their love of being together. The fact remains that in a fairly large number of cases, we are in the situation of those countries where the majority of pupils in Lasallian schools are of faiths other than Christian. In spite of that, such schools can still be considered 'Christian schools' because of the special character of their educational ethos.