

Perspectives of Re-foundation

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A rather well-known French writer, Jean-François Revel, has just published his memoirs. This work³ was intensely interesting for me. Allow me to relate the following anecdote that the author uses in order to show up to what point French intellectuals are convinced of the knowledge that they believe they have of Latin America. He wrote:

I confirmed this again during a meal that was given in June 1994 in honor of Octavio Paz by our minister of external affairs at that time, Alain Juppe.

There were fifteen persons in our group: university professors, writers, journalists, philosophers, academicians, and sociologists. Some fifteen minutes after sitting down at the table, the members of this brilliant troupe – all French with the exception of the ambassador of Mexico and the guest of honor – were vociferously discussing among themselves and interrupting one another while each was trying to force his own vision of the world, especially as it concerned Latin America. All had completely forgotten about the presence of poor Octavio who, left out of the conversation, silently centered himself on his dinner plate. One of the most learned writers, a Nobel Prize winner in literature, poet, essayist, a rich and complex thinker, a master of perfection in the French culture and language, did not deserve to be consulted by anyone concerning Latin American culture and politics.⁴

The parable is clear, it seems to me. For this assembly I have been asked to deliver one presentation on the topic of "the perspectives of the Institute in Latin America for the third millennium," and to do so within a thirty-minute timeframe. In October of 1996, I joyfully and gratefully accepted the invitation to come to Araruama. It is not necessary to explain this good fortune of mine. My life and my Lasallian reflections owe much to the Brothers from this continent, and I have many dear friends on it. But when at the beginning of February I received the fax in which I was asked to make a presentation and on this topic, I was perplexed. How, being European, to speak about Latin America? How at the age of 74 to dare to make predictions concerning the third millennium? How a Brother without responsibility would dare even consider the perspectives of the Institute in Latin America?

But when, some days later, I received and carefully read the quality preparatory documents for the assembly, my perplexity turned into panic! It was now clear to me that I could not deal with the topic as it had been suggested to me. It was also clear that the topic was masterfully developed. Nevertheless, I do not want to avoid the topic. I have been devoting my retirement years to a project of reflection (and perspectives) about the evolution of the Institute for the past fifty years. A few months ago, I drew up

An address that was delivered at an assembly of the Lasallian Region of Latin America held in March 1997 in Araruama, Brazil. It was published in a now extant publication *Lasalliana* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools) #41-3-C-175.

a first draft concerning the issue of the lay character of the Brothers. This work will not be published in its current form. But it seemed to me that the conclusion of this draft would allow me to speak to you so that all of your time is not wasted.

In the conclusion of my study concerning the lay character of the Institute and about the possible introduction of the priesthood, I show that the key issue has been completely displaced. No longer is it the burning issue that it was in 1966: Would priests be admitted to the Institute? Now it is the shared mission. The 1986 *Rule of the Brother of the Christian Schools* devotes no less than five articles to it (#17-17d), while at the same time in only two places does it mention that the Institute is composed exclusively of lay religious. The 1993 General Chapter scarcely dealt with the issue of priesthood in the Institute. On the contrary, it drew up a synthesis of the practice and meaning (even the theology) of shared mission: shared mission is a response to the true needs of today's young people (...), shared mission will be a priority at all Institute levels for the next seven years. A future of the Institute rests upon this shared mission. For the Brothers of the Christian Schools, this deals with an obvious sign of the times.

A future of the Institute... But is it the only future for the Institute? Clearly, at least in some sectors, the form of Institute that we have experienced has died. Is it necessary to conclude that the entire future is closed for a type of Lasallian vocation for lay persons consecrated to God in celibate chastity, who live in community and consecrate their existence to the service of young people “who are far from salvation,” according to an expression that is Lasallian in origin? In an effort to try not to answer this question but to shed some light on it, my chapter conclusion concerning the lay character of the Institute takes another starting point.

Thinking carefully about it, when the Vatican Council II decree *Perfectae Caritatis* asked Religious Institutes to proceed in renewal, it invited them, really, to a new foundation (re-foundation). It was not possible to dream about using this term during the time of the General Chapters of 1966 and 1976. So there was an effort to search for the ways to set out on the right path for the requested renewal. In the texts, the General Chapters indicated paths that were not lacking in their boldness and that really were a new beginning. But it was not possible to speak of a new foundation to members of a society with more than 15,000 Brothers and many novices and young people in formation. On the other hand, in our current demographic situation (barely 7,000 members with an average age of 65 for the entire Institute and a limited number of novices in certain Regions only),⁵ it does not seem mistaken to think that for the Institute if another future is possible, it can only be that which is based on a new foundation.

My conclusion – and, therefore, this presentation – comprises two parts: 1) a re-reading, in the light of its lay character, of the itinerary of foundation of John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers; and 2) a reflection, in light of this re-reading, that is modestly futuristic. It will end up as a dream. What can a new foundation be today, if not of the Institute, at least of some achievements that will inspire the Lasallian charism?

Obviously, these pages have been written from the point of view of my own reading of the history in the Institute. They have also been produced from the point of view of my own situation in the sector of the Institute in which I live, and not where you live.⁶ I will not often refer explicitly to the Regional documents that are before this Assembly. Nevertheless I hope that my reflection will tie into

your own, either in similarity or in contrast. These pages are not altogether new; but neither are they simply repetitive, because I have worked on them time and again.

1. John Baptist de La Salle: beyond the priesthood-laity distinction. Experiencing the Church in a different way.

Four traits of this Lasallian journey allow us to point out that the issue of the lay character, as well as that of the priesthood, appears on the journey as subsidiary in the sense that Petit Robert⁷ gives to this adjective. The issue is in support of a more important reality. It is not in itself a priority. But it does have its own existence and meaning within a larger context. It is a matter of experiencing the Church in a different way.

First of all, from almost the very beginning of his journey as founder, John Baptist de La Salle abandons the clerical milieu in order to involve himself in a world of lay people. He is a priest by vocation, and he clearly wants to dedicate his life to the service of God. He does this in his position as canon of the cathedral of Rheims. He spends a good portion of his time in the recitation of the divine office, in prayers of praise and petition. He has a constant relationship with other members of the cathedral chapter. He is financially secure because of his family patrimony and the substantial prebend given by the Church of Rheims. He belongs to the Church; in a certain sense, he is nothing but Church.

An existential conflict turns his life upside down. At first, he endures it; and he even is tempted to withdraw from it before he finally takes it on. He becomes conscious of the fact that at his doorstep there is an entire category of young people whose family, economic, and social situations are being ignored, who are being deprived of all educational opportunities, of all hope of employment, of all possibilities of being involved in the life of the city. He sets out to remedy this situation. His life project becomes more gospel-like than ever before. But farther along the journey, he has to sidestep the will to provide for these dispossessed young people and deal, first of all, with the small nucleus of schoolteachers who are involved in this difficult educational task. He becomes very involved with them to the point that this makes him “change his vocation.” He gives up his canonry (while at the same time he distributes his patrimony to the poor) in an effort to become closer to the teachers he is accompanying. This image is a very strong one. He leaves the cathedral and gives up the company of the canons; he renounces the clerical world that is his in order to unite himself to a shaky community of laypersons.

In this new state, De La Salle still continues to carry out certain functions proper to his sacerdotal ministry (as chaplain of the Brothers). But many of his activities, and without a doubt the major portion of his time, vie with an area that is not specifically sacerdotal and, if examined carefully, with an area that is profane or secular. In a certain sense and beyond a formal type of label, he becomes a layperson among the laity. He makes his own the commitment that they have for service to the world, their educational concerns, the importance given to the profane that demands of them the correct exercise of their office.

Beginning with his shocking discovery of the world’s anguish, this thirty-year-old priest discovers a new call from God in the service of abandoned youth. On this basis and not on one of ideology nor as a consequence of a reflection on the Church, he essentially goes beyond that which concerns a rigid

separation between the priesthood and the lay state. In his person, he makes a prophetic leap from a clerical Church closed in upon itself to a Church that is for the world.

* From very early on in his journey as founder, he realizes that the difficult educational service of young people who are constantly being threatened with being abandoned requires, as he wrote in 1690, men who are totally dedicated, that is to say, men who consecrate themselves entirely to the work, with no second thought of an ecclesiastical career and with no turning back. He decides on a radical option for his Brothers. The young community will be composed exclusively of lay members.

The fundamental option is that of the mission of the new community: to assure a group of marginalized youth a basic human formation as well as access to the living sources of the Gospel. His experience makes him feel the urgency of this mission, and he is able to write calmly that the Institute that he founded is of great necessity. He does this without putting up publicity posters or coining catchy slogans. He arrives at this conclusion as the result of his own lived experience. The option for the exclusive lay character of the Institute seems to be decided as a subsidiary. For him, it is detached from the necessary condition of the vital importance of the mission of his Brothers for the young people whose faces he knows.

We are not dealing here with an ideological option or a theological vision of the value and the role of the laity. This precedent and resolution are entirely practical but no less prophetic. In the Church of his time, he establishes a society of men who are consecrated and dedicated to the apostolate, and they are all lay by positive choice. Their spiritual formation esteems this situation, from the very application process for the Brothers to the great Pauline texts concerning the diversity of charisms and also the importance of the mission of proclaiming the Gospel by the exercise of the ministry of the Word of God in catechesis. But this proclaiming of the Gospel is also achieved by the commitment to change the human situation of young people who are under their care. Embracing the life of this society of laypersons, he carries out with them the move from a powerful clerical Church to a Church that is at the service of the needs of humanity.

* At the price of struggles against clerical power that last his entire life, John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers establish within the Church of their time a new society of laypersons consecrated to God for a specific mission. In fact, he and his Brothers very quickly come to realize that the educational and apostolic success of their young community requires that their original identity and their own autonomy within the Church be strengthened and affirmed. Regarding the time when the Lasallian program is taking shape, one of his biographers makes reference to the text of the Book of the Apocalypse: "See, I make all things new."

John Baptist de La Salle in no way thinks about establishing or defining the original identity of this company based on an already existing juridical category that they could enter. There is a conscious decision on his part. He knows very well that his foundation some day must be officially recognized both by civil and by Roman authority. But in his eyes, it is not this approbation that will give the Brothers their consciousness of an interior identity and solidity. This consciousness will come from a dual personal and collective experience.

In the first place, there is that consciousness of themselves as the architects of the progressive structuring of their society. In a century of absolute power, the former canon closely associates himself with

the lay Brothers as they establish their rules of life and internal organization. Secondly, in order to strengthen the consciousness of their identity, he draws up for them and with them a pedagogical work that will turn out to be a best-seller: *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*. Likewise, he draws up an original spiritual doctrine based on the resources and the demands of their evangelical vocation as consecrated laypersons in a Church that is in service to the world. I will refer to this again later on.

He establishes the autonomy of his community and makes a bid to recover it when it becomes necessary to defend it strongly. Until the very end of his life, he fights so that this autonomy is realized and finally assured, thanks to the election of a superior who is selected from among the Brothers themselves. And so, within this Church that is strongly one of hierarchy, he becomes the prophetic founder of a congregation of a type previously not known: a community within the Church that is truly fraternal, based on the fundamental equality of its members. Nor is this based on a theoretical reflection on the Church. Simply put, the urgency of the new Institute's mission and the freedom required for its exercise demand this autonomy of a body of laypersons. Experiencing as far as possible the same things as his Brothers, John Baptist along with them carries out the move from a clerical Church to a Church of the people of God, a Church that is a fraternal community based on the union of hearts.

* Finally, John Baptist sees and reads his own journey and that of the foundation of his Institute as a Gospel and a spiritual journey in the strongest sense of these terms.

– A spiritual journey, recognizing the priority of the sometimes delicate, sometimes strong action of God, of the uncontrollable action of the Spirit. According to his own words, John Baptist de La Salle never could have imagined the path that he would have to follow ... “and if I had been able to foresee where the purely charitable concern for the schoolteachers would have led me ... I would have abandoned the work.” His meditation on the origins and the foundation of the Institute opens with this act of recognition (in all the senses of that term): “It is God in his providence who has established the Christian schools.” Here is the priority of a Church of the Spirit over and above a Church of established law.

– A spiritual journey, a journey of faith. God is present in human history; and it is in the very fabric of human relationships, in the very heart of happenings where he carries out his imperceptible action. For John Baptist de La Salle faith, which is designated as the spirit of the Institute, is first of all paying attention to concrete history in order to discern God's calls. It is being docile to history more than trying to live one's life based on established principles. This is the priority of *the event* over *the institution*.

– A spiritual journey that is evangelical, a journey that he says is made with zeal, which is for him inseparable from faith: a free and responsible commitment in carrying out the work of God. A zeal sustained by its inseparability from the interior thrust of being possessed by Christ – and by the consciousness of the unbearable fracture of an entire class of young people who are far from “salvation.” The mission of the Brother looks with hope toward those who are far away. This is the priority of the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the poor.

– A spiritual journey that is evangelical, a journey that involves a consecration of life and by life. To begin with, there is a consciousness of the urgency of the mission and of the strength of the call that both moves the Brother, according to the formula of vows, to offer and to consecrate himself completely to God to procure his glory “as far as I shall be able and as you will require of me.” But the initial thrust must at the same time become involved in, verify, and transform itself because of the gift of each day. Bit by bit, it is the Brothers’ gift of themselves to young people that makes their consecration to the living God effective. They consecrate their lives, but it is life that consecrates them.

2. Dream of re-foundation?

My pilgrimage as a Brother began with a dream.⁸ The often-repeated reflection of the Lasallian foundational journey for me always results in a dream of re-foundation. With the freedom of a child of God, I will try to explain some elements of this dream. Four groups of paired words can serve to sum up these elements: *mystical drive and strategic policies*, *exodus and incarnation*, *pluralism and participation*, and *frailty and hope*. I am aware that what I am about to express here may seem iconoclastic to some or simple or impossible to others. In any case, I am willing to submit my words to criticism in advance. To some, my dream may seem somewhat vague. Evoking the foundation presents a certain consistency; it can provide support for a lived history. My dream will be necessarily very vague... My idea, which is open to all your critiquing, is offered above all for the imagination of the Brothers, especially during this assembly.

It is clear that the lived experience of John Baptist de La Salle in his time offers no solution for the life of the Institute today. In what follows, I do not take it as a *model* that must be replicated but rather as a *witness of the Spirit*. John Baptist de La Salle is not an *oracle* for me but rather a *prophet of the Spirit*. The founder is not an *alibi*, and even less is he a *halter* that prevents us from inventing, but a *companion on the journey along the road of the Spirit* that is necessary to sketch and discern. Various characteristics of the Lasallian foundation that I just recalled may break out in a new way today as prophetic sources of inspiration.

But is what I will try to express really so new? The attempt at re-foundation was the collective dream of the 1966-1967 General Chapter. A document such as the *Declaration* invites the Brothers themselves to become the founders of the Institute of today. And the *Declaration* looks upon the Institute less as an established structure than as a living community that is in continual creation and renewal.

For the past thirty years the movement so launched has been translated in practice into new activities and behavior, principally for the service of the poor. Some Brothers have committed themselves thoroughly and more consciously to their lay character, by leaving religious houses that are isolated and protected, by immersing themselves in the local environment, by being willing to share the conditions of life with the poor, by participating wholeheartedly in movements and associations, by engaging in the battle for justice, by contributing in the fight for youth employment. Pluralism has become a lived reality, and little by little it has become accepted in the Institute.

Quantitatively, of course, the changes have had very modest results; and for a long period of time, these changes have been more tolerated than accepted. The 39th General Chapter began a process.

This process has now taken root effectively. Much of this was not announced by the authorities. On the contrary, all the subsequent General Chapters have invited a continuing trend in this direction. But the intent of re-foundation for a long time was paralyzed by the weight of existing institutions and by the burden of customs, mentalities, the performance of persons. These two factors – weight and burden – reinforced each other.⁹ Paradoxically, the current situation of the Institute can again give force to this dream of re-foundation conceived thirty years ago. The Institute is fragile. Pluralism disperses its living strength; many Brothers no longer can count on the institutional support of a community incorporated into the ministry. Is not this Institute today more prepared than before, so that the movement of re-foundation might be realized?

So that it might be realized... Obviously, one should write instead: so that the Spirit who renews the face of the earth might burst forth, so that in our history the free gift of re-foundation might spring forth. In a humble way, my dream comes close to that of Ezekiel: "He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.'"¹⁰ A re-foundation is unforeseeable and impossible to program, such as the re-foundation of an Institute. At the time of his priestly ordination in 1678, John Baptist de La Salle was incapable of imagining that his commitment as a priest would lead him four years later along the road of his participation in the lay state of poor schoolteachers whom he considered at that time to be inferior to his butler.

I dream about this creative invasion of the Spirit. Knowing that it inscribes itself within the fabric of our human story and that its force is only irresistible with our active support. I also dream that we might hunt for the signs of the Spirit, completely open to that which is new and anxious that we do not stifle the Spirit. My dream is in accord with what Roger Schulz wrote on the eve of Vatican Council II:

Come in and do not flee! Come to the future of mankind ... Go out to those who cannot believe, to the world of the poor; there a treasure is reserved for us. Call on the institutions tired of the long journey, support their reforms, and use all your resources so that their enthusiasm does not weaken (ecumenism).¹¹

Mystical drive and strategic policies

Here when speaking of *mystical drive* and *strategic policies* I am referring, above all, to the text of the *Declaration* itself. The *mystical drive* of which I speak is expressed as the objectives that are insistently pointed out for the renewal. I will list five of these without dwelling on them:

- * Priority of educational service of the poor.
- * The apostolic end of the Institute and the ministerial vocation of the Brothers.
- * The connection that comes from the origins and which is characteristic between catechesis and human education.
- * A strong, renewed vision of the religious life of the Brother from the point of view of its variety: apostolic, lay or secular, and also its juridical nature; regarding its consecration, the move from the religious state to the evangelical life; regarding the mission of the Brother, the move from duality to

unity of purpose; regarding community, the move from the uniformity of persons to union among persons.

* Finally, the *Declaration* also formulates the objective of the renewal of ministries, primarily of the school.

It has been observed, although less frequently, that the *Declaration* also defines the *strategies for renewal*:

* Strategy for the effective service of the poor: the diversity of historical situations demands that local District Chapters clearly define an appropriate policy that really commits persons and works to the service of the poor.¹²

* Strategy for reviewing and questioning existing ministries, which is called for by the return to the poor, catechetical renewal, school renewal and openness to other apostolic endeavors.¹³

* Strategy for creation and mobility: global change and new calls demand a policy concerning new foundations.¹⁴

* Strategy (very important) of respect for and fostering of agents for renewal: the destiny of the Institute is finally in the hands of the Brothers¹⁵ of each Brother, of the community in dialogue and in a state of continual renewal, of the Chapters and levels of government that listen to the Brothers and to various global calls.

Exodus and incarnation

Exodus and incarnation, again beginning from the various calls of the world and then plunging into this work and taking it on. At the beginning of the foundation, leaving the clerical world, the institutional Church, in order to hear new calls and respond to new needs. Today doesn't this mean first of all to recognize that in great measure and in many areas we already have left, we have abandoned our institutions, or if you will, they have abandoned us?¹⁶ And so exodus, leaving, but for the purpose of embarking on new journeys in accord with new needs. An exodus in order to favor the incarnation. To plunge directly into the reality of the world of humanity and of the urgent needs of abandoned youth is already a movement that is going forward in the Institute. My dream is that this movement might grow, that it might receive a more vigorous thrust by those in charge, that it might be seen as something normal and that presenting the vocation of the Brother to new potential candidates might also be done in this light and not only with attention to scholarly activity.

My dream is also that this double movement of exodus and incarnation might be expressed in a bolder way in the formation of young Brothers: that initial formation might boldly follow this road of direct and continued contact with the reality of young people who are in squalid situations. This will in no way impede the emphasis placed on the indispensable interior formation in contemplative prayer: a type of contemplation inseparable from the plan of God's salvation, from the face of this God of love in Jesus Christ and of human poverty.

The proper character of the Christian faith is to reject all that separates God's causes from those of humankind. This is completely centered in Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man in such a way that

being a disciple of Jesus Christ, we do not have to flee the world, because God himself came to this world. And, correlatively, we do not distance ourselves from God by committing ourselves to serve people in the world, for the will of the Father in heaven is that his Kingdom germinate in the bosom of humanity.¹⁷

Pluralism and participation

According to the persons, situations and places, the perception of needs calls for diverse answers that cannot be categorized beforehand. The free creativity of persons should be considered as normal. If they start with concrete needs and given situations, it is important that they be given ample autonomy.

This means that a *pluralism* will be developed which increases time after time in the activities of the Brothers. Educational activities can be very wide-ranging, multiple and varied. My dream includes possibilities that range from educational activities, including study, to activities that are linked with social help, delinquency, and therefore justice. I should note in passing that these activities will depend on professions which in themselves more closely involve the laity. Professions: this means that formation cannot be mediocre. My dream presumes that we be very conscious of the needs of a formation that is very professional and human. The *Declaration* calls attention to this.¹⁸ This same professionalism should characterize the engagement of Brothers who are involved in pastoral activities.

I understand the objection very well. Aren't we going to turn the Institute into a secular Institute? In the context of this intervention, I will only say that my dream takes place in the framework of the Lasallian re-foundation. For the matter that concerns us, this implies two fundamentals. In the first place, the Lasallian inspiration itself is a mission at the service of the education of abandoned youth, which can be illustrated by an article of the current *Rule* of the Brothers, with minor modifications:

John Baptist de La Salic was deeply moved by the abandonment of youth. As a result of prayerful consideration of God's plan of salvation, he discerned a practical response. In order to respond to this divine plan and also to situations of distress similar to those that the Founder knew, the Institute desires to be present to the world today as part of the Church's work in spreading the Gospel. Concerned above all for the educational needs of the poor, ... the Brothers establish, renew and diversify their work.¹⁹

The second fundamental is the community character of the Brother's vocation. The community is no longer necessarily at the service of one single institution. Nevertheless, nothing hinders the fact that in a given area, groups that are sensitive to the general needs of the population work for the same young people by bringing their diverse talents to the task at hand. Here we see the word *participation* associated with *pluralism* in the title of this paragraph. The community more and more

is built up on the basis of participation in the community itself (here words such as change, listening, putting things in common, discernment, prayer ... come into play).

Communities have their own autonomy and existence, but they are likewise open to wider participation. They are open to their surroundings (hosting, especially young people), to their local Church, to other communities that share the same program. The Institute no longer exists as a uniform structure or as an entity dominated by a central core, but it exists in communion. One of the roles of the central administration and those in charge is to facilitate this communion while at the same time stimulating its inspiration by recalling its evangelical and Lasallian references.

Fragility and hope

I am very well aware that the Utopia that my dream may produce is very frail. Frailty in making things happen: they cannot be an activity exclusive to the Brothers. Whatever form they take, they will need to be integrated into existing associations and teams. This also presupposes adequate training in this regard. The vulnerability of persons who, often faced with extreme situations and plagued with problems, hardly ever have the resources to receive support from ready-made answers. The provisional character of what they are bringing about: in our world, situations are evolving rapidly and new needs are brought forth without ceasing. While avoiding an unhealthy instability, they can no longer count on enduring works. Worse still, the re-foundation about which I am dreaming without a doubt will be a foundation in the previous sense of that word: an enterprise that is clung to far after its protagonists have disappeared. It does not necessarily have posterity. It is also in this sense that one can understand that one speaks of a certain death of Religious Institutes.

This is a frailty that is all the more difficult to live as more exterior supports continue to disappear, such as the ones to which Religious Institutes have been accustomed. The internal strength of structures, organization, and centralization ceases to exist. Each person, each local community needs to find for itself the way to live. But one can think that it will be easily found at the moment when the reason for living is so close and urgent and that a minimum of consternation, dialogue and structure will be necessary. It seems difficult to me that the dream I was thinking about still corresponds to a “trademark,” for example, to an approbation awarded by the Roman curia. It will not be possible to invent in response to new needs, without veering far from established canons. On the occasion of the Congress of Superior Generals prior to the Synod on Consecrated Life,²⁰ three terms that were frequently repeated made an impression on me. They were connected together by the logic of the life: that religious life must *be inculturated, creative and live on the edge* and, therefore, *freer* with respect to canonical norms.

This frailty cannot be sustained unless it is supported by hope.

* A *brilliant frailty* of the hope of the poor: if my dream has glints of becoming reality, this will mean the sign of the loving intention of God in what was unforeseen in history. When we no longer have human support, God appears as the Rock. This type of language may be interpreted as an abdication. It can also be considered as a radical human experience, an extreme limit, mysteriously transcended, and those who experience it will be completely poor and dispossessed.

* An *assured frailty* of the hope of the Christian. He knows that life has conquered death and finds each day the strength to re-evangelize, by means of the Good News, his frail existence that is not certain of tomorrow. (“Assurance,” in the sense of the Acts of the Apostles and of the Epistles of Saint Paul: opposed to security-tranquility that is closed in on itself; “assurance” is open trust and never something that is possessed.)

* A *wounded frailty* of the hope of the committed man: vulnerable because he is in solidarity with the suffering that shakes him every day in spite of his trust in the victory of life over death. This suffering challenges him to look for the means to bring to the heart of these death situations the curative power of life.

* A *praying frailty* of the hope of the believer, who, like Christ on the cross, shouts and revolts against the injustices of his time and takes new initiatives in order to begin to combat them again.

* A *responsible frailty* of the hope of the one who is sent, who consecrates himself each morning in order to participate in the manifestation of the Kingdom of justice, healing, peace, and reconciliation, and to collaborate humbly in carrying out the Promises of God made definitively “Yes” in Jesus Christ.

* An *available frailty* of the hope of the servant, who accepts being pushed to and fro by life, launched again by the signs of the action of God, that are written in history and again call upon him to go out, to risk, to invent.

* A *faithful frailty* of the hope of the pilgrim, who continues journeying, often in the night of God’s silence and in the test of the absence of Jesus Christ, refreshing his drive each day in the fountain of the Holy Spirit, in whom faith guarantees the mysterious presence in the heart of the history of mankind and the life of the world. Drinking from our own well. This beautiful image can take on a profound meaning if one makes reference to various passages in Saint John when he speaks of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us as an interior fountain. Jesus, addressing the Samaritan woman, said to her: “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”²¹ Commentators say that Jesus is speaking here about the Holy Spirit. This is explicitly affirmed in what Jesus says in the Temple on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”²² Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive.

Notes

1. Brother Michel Sauvage (1923-2001) was born near Lille, France, and became a Brother at the age of 16. He did his theological studies at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum) in Rome and did his doctoral thesis in Lille (Catéchèse et Laïcité, 1963). He was a professor at the Lateran Pontifical University in Rome (Jesus Magister) and was theologian for his brother, Bishop Jean Sauvage, at Vatican Council II. From 1966 to 1976, he was Assistant Superior General for Formation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He then served as the second director of the office of Lasallian Studies in the Generalate in Rome.

2. Brother John Blease, a member of the Midwest District of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, has served in Rome as a Spanish-to-English translator for the past twenty years.

3. Jean-François Revel, *Mémoires. Le voleur dans las maison vide*. Plon, 1997.

4. Jean-François Revel, *Mémoires*, pages 436-437. In the 1950s, Jean-François Revel had taught in Mexico in the French Academy and in the French Institute of Latin America. Afterwards, he travelled extensively outside of the borders of France.

5. Cf. statistical data from a private letter from Brother Paul Grass, Secretary General of the Institute in Rome (December 1995). "Presently the novices and Brothers with annual vows in Africa, Asia, and Latin America account for 73% of all young Brothers worldwide. Spain has 15%; the rest of Europe, Canada, and the USA have 12%. The Lasallian Family at work in schools now includes 60,000 women and men (of whom 4,000 are Brothers) serving 770,000 students in 930 schools at all levels from pre-school to university level."

To clarify the situation, let me provide some statistical data on the current situation of the District of France (October 1996). There are 1,205 Brothers: 12 under 40 years of age; 41 between 40 and 50 years of age; 233 between 50 and 65 years of age; and 919 who are older than 65 years of age. There is one novitiate in Parmenie, but there are no French Brother Novices this year. The one scholasticate in Lyon has one Brother Scholastic. About ten Brothers are in temporary vows.

Of the missionary Brothers originally from the District of France, there are: 12 in West Africa; 1 in Ethiopia; 11 in Douala; 1 in Haiti; 7 in Madagascar; 1 in Hong Kong; 5 in Latin America; and 1 in Thailand.

Concerning communities (unverified numbers for metropolitan France), there are: 61 communities of Brothers in schools or connected to a school; 26 communities of Brothers who work in various apostolates; 16 communities that are retirement houses; and 30 other communities.

Concerning schools and school personnel (under Lasallian sponsorship), there are: 67 primary schools (6-11 years); 82 schools (11-15 years); 55 schools (15-18 years); 3 higher education institutions; 4,130 classes; 13 specialized centers/social centers; 20 continuing formation centers; 8,000 teaching personnel; 2,800 non-teaching personnel; 108,000 students, of whom 9,300 are boarders; 29 Brother Headmasters; and 165 lay Headmasters.

6. These pages were published from the point of view of my own story and my current situation in the area of the Institute in which I live, and it is not your story. From "the point of view of my own story," this is true, above all, for the first part (Founder) and for the first paragraph of the second part (*Declaration*). From "my current situation," this is especially for the last three paragraphs of the second part (exodus and incarnation): pluralism and participation, frailty and hope.

7. *Le Petit Robert* is a French-language dictionary.

8. The origin was a dream. At the age of five, one night I dreamt that I would be a Brother of the Christian Schools. I did not know them except for references made about them by my

father, who had been a student in Lille at the end of the 1880s and beginning of the 1890s. He used to speak with affection about his former teachers, several of whom had gone to Brazil.

9. In another work published in English that I wrote on the occasion of a colloquium on the *Declaration* held in California in March 1994 entitled “The *Declaration*: Renewal or Re-foundation?” I felt called to present a type of balance of the renewal carried out in the Institute. I did it using as a basis the *Report of Brother John Johnston to the 42nd General Chapter* (pages 3-6) and also the personal commentary of the same superior general to the General Chapter (pages 63-70). Without entering into detail, I saw four images that could guide so many other readings of the situation of the Institute twenty-seven years after the *Declaration*: an Institute heading toward ruin? (resistance, statistics); an Institute without hope? (shared mission); an Institute restored? (polarization, too exclusive toward the *Rule of 1987*); and an Institute on the move in the process of renewal? (or re-foundation).

10. Ezekiel 37:3.

11. Roger Schutz, *Dynamique du provisoire* (Les Presses de Taizé, 1965), pages 176-181.

12. *Declaration* 28.3.

13. *Declaration* 28.2; 31.1-2; 38.3; 48.2-3.

14. *Declaration* 33.1-3; 49.5; 50; 51.

15. *Declaration* 53.2.

16. Basically what follows refers to my own situation. See note 6.

17. Here I quote the Letter from the Bishops to the Catholics in France (Episcopal Assembly of November 1996, page 45). Note the almost literal closeness with the 1967 *Declaration*: “The Brother ought to have no fear of losing God when he goes among the young ‘to serve them’ (Mk 10:45), nor being estranged from Christ ‘when he spends himself for others’” (2 Cor 12:15).

18. Basically, *Declaration* 48.4, which advises that those in responsible positions must guard against any policies that are stingy or narrowly utilitarian when it is a question of the basic education of the Brothers.

19. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (1987), article 11.

20. Rome, November 1993.

21. John 4:14.

22. John 7:37-38.