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ANNOTATION

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

Fragile Hope is Brother Michel Sauvage's final work, one that consumed his full attention during the last four years of his life. It is the fruit of a profound reflection, often made from the epicenter, on the quake that moved through society, Church, and Institute. Published in 2014 to celebrate the 45th General Chapter and the 300th anniversary of the Letter of the Principal Brothers to John Baptist de La Salle, *Fragile Hope* is the 18th volume in the "Lasallian Studies" series.

Brother Miguel Campos assisted Sauvage by stimulating his memory and reflection in 22 interview sessions over four years. Sauvage set out neither to write an autobiography nor a history, but a reflection on the virtue of hope, the central axis and unifying theme of his personal history and the Institute's history of adaptation, renewal, and refoundation in three periods: 1923-1956, 1956-1976, and 1976-2001.

Part I concerns the foundational influences of his early life: the family, parish, and schools of his early years; World War II, which begins during his novitiate; the 37th General Chapter (1946); and the creative ferment in catechetics, formation, and theology. He shows how the 38th General Chapter (1956) sets in motion the renewal that takes form and shape in the Second Vatican Council and 39th General Chapter (1966-67). Part II charts in careful detail the landscape of Vatican II, its nature, vision, and documents. The reader walks alongside Sauvage from the pre-Chapter to post-Chapter stages. In Part III he shares his experience in formation, administration, research, community, and apostolic ministry—lived out in the milieu of new definitions, horizons, and challenges in the Brothers' vocation and Lasallian mission. In the final chapter and epilogue, Campos guides the reader in "re-reading the final itinerary" of Brother Michel.

The reader is rewarded by several bibliographies: Lasallian collections and research volumes, Church and Institute documents, De La Salle's writings, a chronological listing of Sauvage's writings, and influential theological works in Sauvage's life.

The decision of the 37th General Chapter to re-store the *Rule* as it was written in 1718 was a source of "disappointment" and "interior disorientation" (101) for Sauvage. He believed the Institute was "turning its back on history," and in response to the savage war and godless genocide was withdrawing from active engagement with the world.

In 1953 Father Yves Congar, OP published "Lay People in the Church; a Study for a Theology of the Laity. "It was my breviary for months" (159), and he uses Congar's description of the prophetic function of the layperson for the outline of his doctoral dissertation, *Catéchèse et Laïcité*.

Sauvage's disorientation is supplanted by enthusiasm in 1956. The 38th General Chapter's key decisions to "return the Rule to the Institute, return the Institute to the Brothers, and return the Founder to history" (195) are coupled with discovering the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* as though for the first time. "This complete reading for me was like a bedazzlement, a lightning bolt. I discovered a realistic, dynamic, theological, mystical, apostolic, and—in a nutshell—deeply spiritual text" (267).

It proved to be more than a textual find: ". . . this was a completely different Founder whom I met: positive, open to human life and to the Mystery of the Living God and the salvation of humanity" (267). He goes on to say, "that absent any reference to the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, the usual presentation in the Institute on Saint John Baptist de La Salle was fundamentally flawed" (270). Both breakthroughs are portents of systemic change in the intellectual and charismatic history of the Institute.

We are provided an insider's understanding of the 39th General Chapter and the Second Vatican Council through his engagement and writing. He is the principal editor of *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* and a contributing writer to *Perfectae Caritatis*. In both he seeks an integration of ministry and spirituality that is dynamic and responsive to the needs of humanity.

The post-Vatican and -Chapter period of renewal takes shape in governance, formation, and ministry. As Assistant for Formation, he oversees the uneven establishment of the International Lasallian Center (CIL) and endures opposition and hostility to such a degree that he attempts to resign in favor of an assignment in service to the poor. Charles Henry, Brother Superior, refused, saying, "Michel, for you the poor are the Brothers, so you must continue to serve them"(459).

He continues to build on his seminal understanding that "John Baptist de La Salle reread in faith the itinerary of the founding of the Institute as the gift that the Holy Spirit gave to the Church: an apostolic community with an original face, dedicated to . . . the proclamation of the Word, and the Christian initiation of the young" (269). Looking back he sees three syntheses of De La Salle: "in my thesis, *Catéchèse et Laïcité*, in *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*, and *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer (Cahiers lasalliens 50)*" (575).

In the final chapter, Campos points out that Sauvage "develops, in a new language, a synthesis of his ideas about religious life" and that he "seems to move to the idea of refoundation" of the Institute (590). He had entered an Institute that was "a citadel, one that rejected the exterior world" (582) and seen it open itself to an acceptance and embrace of the world. In the process both he and the Institute discovered the "apostolic dimension at the heart of the outpouring of the Brother's life and the return to the poor" (584). Sauvage does not treat Lasallian association as a unifying agent among all elements of the Lasallian family, but his observations, considered critically, will germinate further development. The volume belongs in the conversation and library of those building upon his solid foundation.

Central to Sauvage's theology of hope is the unity of God, history, and humanity. "We cannot separate the cause of God from the cause of humanity" (575). For the God we seek is the one

“who is always ahead and who never stops calling.” He is the one “who is always about to arrive, always about to turn things upside down” (581).

Fragile Hope is a singular contribution to the intellectual and spiritual history of the Institute, fresh sustenance for its living memory and tradition. Sauvage’s disclaimer notwithstanding, the book serves as an extraordinary contribution to the history of General Chapters and belongs alongside Luke Salm’s *A Religious Institute in Transition: The Story of Three General Chapters* (1992) and Paul-Antoine Jourjon’s *Pour un renouveau spirituel* (1969).

In the end, *Fragile Hope*’s value can be found both in its coherent articulation of apostolic spirituality and the centrality of the ministry of the Word in the vocation of the Lasallian educator as in the honesty and integrity of the man who articulates it.