

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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# “TO PROCURE YOUR GLORY”

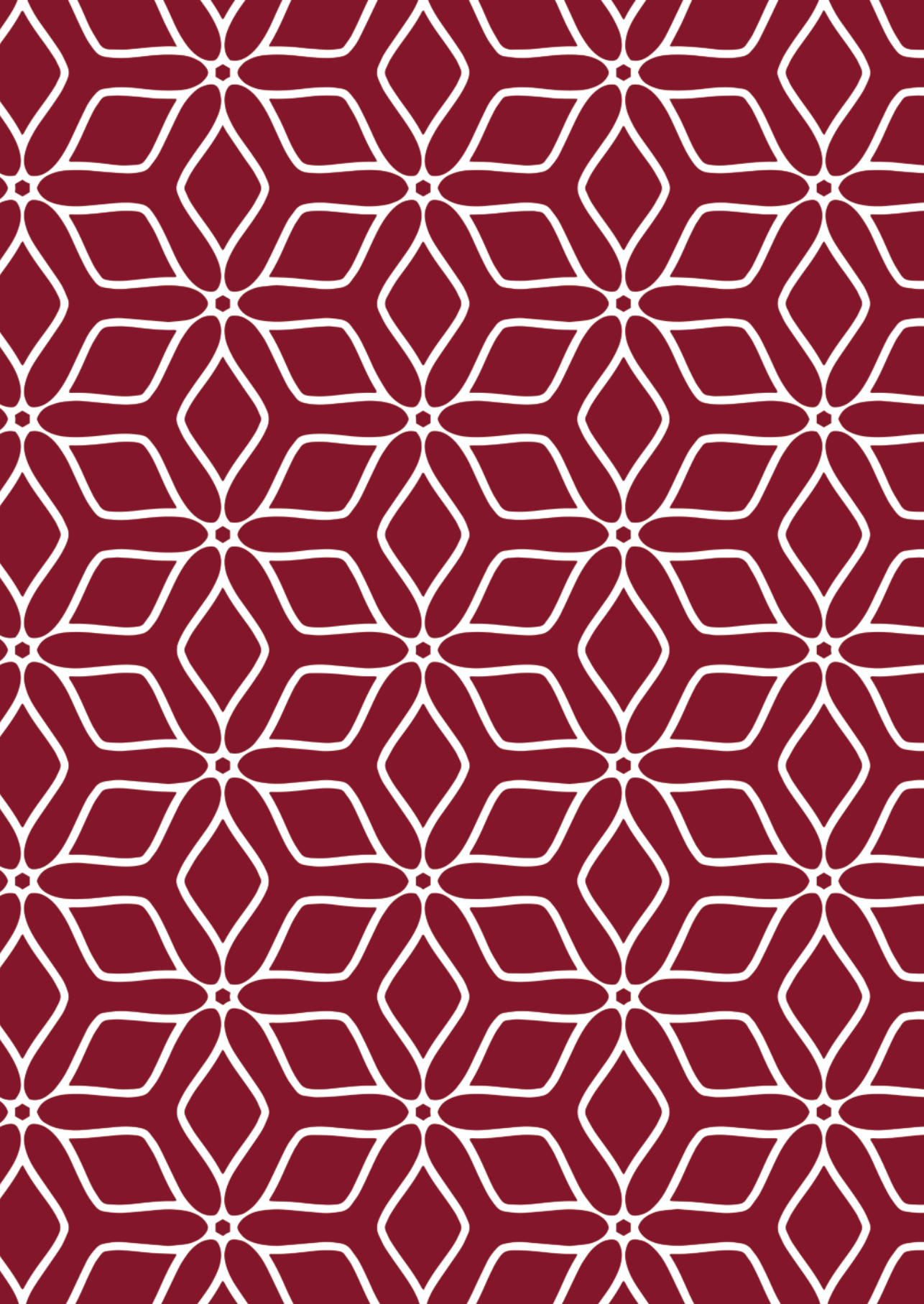
LASALLIAN IDENTITY,  
ACCORDING TO THE BROTHERS’  
FORMULAS OF PROFESSION

BROTHER JOSEAN VILLALABEITIA, FSC



MEL BULLETINS

54



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**LASALLIAN IDENTITY  
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FORMULAS OF PROFESSION**

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# INTRODUCTION

**T**he Brothers of the Christian Schools, founded by Saint John Baptist de La Salle in 1679, have used different formulas throughout their history to affirm their religious profession. Although the basic structure of them all has faithfully respected the outline proposed by the Founder and the first Brothers in the foundation's early years (1691-1694), it is no less true that the content included in this permanent context has varied substantially over the years. The most recent change was made, precisely, by the Institute's penultimate General Chapter in the Spring of 2007.

A profession formula is not just any text, at least among Lasallians. Since the beginning, all the essentials of Lasallian consecration, what De La Salle's followers are and should be, are contained therein: God, other Lasallians (i.e., the community), the school, the poor, the radical nature of its presentation. It is therefore an essential part of our institutional heritage, on which it would be advisable to return more often than we usually do.

If we take into account all of these characteristics, we would have to conclude that the Lasallian profession formula has not changed in this manner because there was an urge to modify its appearance or its presentation to obtain a different one, for example, or to perhaps give it a more contemporary or attractive air. This kind of explanation seems somewhat trivial and not at all convincing. The most logical explanation is to suppose that, if it had been decided to modify a Lasallian formula of consecration, it was for stronger reasons: because at a given time it was not as convincing as it may have been in the past or because other more compelling reasons had been found.

In addition, the fact that they are documents that come directly from the Institute's roots, in the Founder's own handwriting, with a significant presence in our Congregation's secular history, would welcome even more restraint of a reforming impetus to preserve documents so valuable that have been passed down to us. Indeed, one has to be a very audacious Lasallian to try to change the plan of John Baptist de La Salle himself.

However, in spite of the solidity of all these arguments, Lasallian profession formulas have been modified over time, which means that there were very serious reasons for doing so. What were they?

Perhaps the most important of all the numerous reasons was the desire to see the fundamental pillars of the compromise that was being signed being accurately reflected in the text, that is, to describe as best as possible in the very consecration formula the lifestyle to which one was committing oneself when signing it. In this sense, just as the ways of understanding the life that Lasallians led varied, there was no choice but to change some aspects of the profession formula to make it respond better to the new understanding of existence that the De La Salle Brothers had discovered.

The main goal of the current *MEL Bulletin* is to look at the evolution of Lasallian consecration formulas, with the conviction that they hide some of the most important keys to discovering how the Lasallians who wrote them understood their life at the exact moment that they decided to use them. In this regard, comparing the changes introduced between two consecutive texts will give us many valuable clues to realize what each editorial modification hides. This is what we will attempt to present as concisely as possible in the following pages. We will stop to comment upon some particularly significant points, the deeper sense toward which the new enlightened texts would point us.

## **For a deeper understanding and reflection**

- Have you ever attended a Brother's profession of vows? Perhaps that of a religious of some other congregation? Have you had the feeling of being at an important moment in the person's life? What most caught your attention during such a ceremony?
- In your own life, you have surely had to commit yourself to something that was important to you. What do you recall when you remember that experience? Do you remember how you made your commitment: document, signature, spoken proclamation, prayer? How important has that commitment been in your life?



CHAPTER I  
THE “HEROIC VOW” FORMULA

**T**his formula dates back from November 21, 1691. According to the Institute's tradition, the so-called "heroic vow" must have been kept as a personal treasure of incalculable value by one of its signers: Brother Gabriel Drolin. On his return from Rome in 1728, he made Brother Timothy, Superior General at the time, aware of it. Brother Timothy allowed Blain, who at that time had begun to write the Founder's biography at the direction of the Congregation's Superiors, to use it.

Therefore, it has come down to us indirectly from the most important of the Founder's early biographers<sup>1</sup>. We have no other documentary evidence of its existence. He probably conferred the term "heroic", always classic among Lasallians, in one of his paragraphs in order to call attention to the radical nature of this event.

If we look at the general framework in which it was pronounced, we will realize that the heroic vow emerges in circumstances that dangerously threatened the future of the small nascent Lasallian community. In effect, it was the first serious challenge that the Lasallian institution was going to experience throughout its long history.

The fundamental reason for this first crisis must be sought, no doubt, in the expansion of the Lasallian community at its origins. After about nine years of intense school activity beginning in Rheims and surrounding areas nearby, the De La Salle Brothers arrived in Paris in 1688. For the young community this leap meant establishing two important centers of activity separated by 150 kilometers. Everything that this transfer entailed brought to the surface all the difficulties that the fragile community of Brothers had encountered and caused a crisis, as well as with its schools, and for the person who until this time had been their unquestioned leader who was also about to pass away.

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<sup>1</sup> The original biography of J. B. Blain came to be in 1733 and was divided into four parts. Recently there have been two Spanish translations of the first three parts – the fourth was written in Spanish several decades ago – by Brothers BERNARDO MONTES, between 2005 and 2010, destined for Latin American Lasallians, and JOSÉ MARIA VALLADOLID for the Spanish. We will take our references from the latter, *Las cuatro primeras biografías de san Juan Bautista de La Salle, Volume II – Blain*, La Salle Ediciones, Madrid, 2010, where the heroic vow appears on p. 410.

In effect, John Baptist de La Salle, a priest who at the time was approaching his forties, must have had the feeling that everything was falling apart as well. He felt, without a doubt, completely deceived by all those in whom he had placed his trust – Brothers, priests, laypersons, and authorities. The Founder was undoubtedly tempted to think that this unimaginable personal exodus, which concluded with leaving his family home, renouncing his canonry and his goods to the poor, had been completely in vain. “He had found himself in the same situation, quite similarly, ten years earlier, with few Brothers and without having seen his work advance and fearing it would collapse”, Blain would affirm in an expressive description of that moment<sup>2</sup>.

However, against all odds, what could have been an utterly definitive collapse of the Lasallian project would become a turnabout in the future of the growing young community; this is the backbone of saints, because the Founder’s reaction was completely different from what might be expected in such circumstances.

Therefore, De La Salle approached two Brothers, whom he completely trusted, and invited them to accompany him in concretizing this new society that they knew was in crisis at that particular time. For him, they would have to commit themselves in a radical way to the bold enterprise even unto death, even if the conditions of their lives became inhuman: God would provide...

The instrument chosen to give substance to all of these dreams in a concrete commitment was a vow that the three together, with no witnesses other than God, made on the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, November 21, 1691. In a society that was Christian through and through, in which the Church controlled almost all personal and social spaces, including all those dealing directly with education, a field in which the Lasallian ministry was developing, no one could miss the fact that this brave threesome would select a vow as a definitive instrument of commitment.

Such an option was not at all surprising for those who saw God acting very definitively in their lives, calling them and subtly moving them – as John

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 410.

Baptist himself describes very explicitly in the work attributed to him<sup>3</sup>: *Memoir on the Beginnings* – to take their place in the vineyard that He, God, had foreseen for them. Therefore, it was a vow that made God a witness to the demanding commitment that they took on.

However, it was not a vow like those made by other religious orders. It does not seem that De La Salle and his confreres were convinced that the solution to the difficulties they were facing was that their teachers become something like the Benedictines or Franciscans, for example, or like other religious well known in Rheims or Paris at that time. The heroic vow was intended to be something very different, a very particular profession, for several reasons:

1. Since they were private vows<sup>4</sup>, which applied only to their personal relationships with God, in their consciences, to put it another way, within their very small community of three unique persons who professed their vows. Let us notice, in this respect, that the verbs are always in the plural and that the formula commits the three of them in a radically communitarian way: *“even if we were to remain just we three in the said Society”* or *“we promise to unanimously and with a common consent, whatever we believe in conscience...<sup>5</sup>”*
2. Because they were not the three classic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience taken by religious of that time. These would not appear among the Brothers until official recognition given by the papal Bull of Approbation in 1725. This may mean that those Brothers – at least at that time – did not plan on becoming religious like others, although vows would of course have to have been added if they intended to consecrate themselves to God in a radical way. Yet surely, they wanted to do so in a different manner, not like other religious orders well known at that time. To enter into what was called the “religious state”, it was

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<sup>3</sup> “God, who leads all things wisely and gently, and who does not as a rule do violence to mens’ inclinations, wishing to involve me totally in the direction of the schools, did so in an imperceptible way and over a long time”. *Obras completas de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Ediciones San Pio X, Madrid, 2001 – Volume I, MSO [Memoir on the Beginnings] 6, p. 77. Also reference *Cahiers Lasalliens (hereafter indicated as CL)*, no 7, Blain, Volume 1, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> We do not speak here in canonical terms, although from a strictly legal perspective the qualification would be equally valid.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the complete text of the heroic vow.

an essential condition to profess these three classic vows, but the Lasallians, who although strictly complied with them in their daily lives, did not seem to be of a mind to profess them officially and become like other religious. On the contrary, the only vow – the only two vows, if we prefer to be literal – that they pronounce in the formula is that of union and association. Let us not forget that, according to some biographies, some Brothers tried to take a perpetual vow of chastity several years before, but the Founder did not allow it<sup>6</sup>.

3. It was a consecration to God, in the community, marked in a radical way by an apostolic commitment to promote schools that were Christian and free. The only thing that justified this act of consecration to God was the desire to commit themselves strongly to the school project that they had in their hands for more than ten years, and that was now being threatened by ruin. With this vowed commitment they wanted to say: things are going badly and we run the risk of withdrawing from our path in search of security: God will not permit it.

After this multidimensional introduction that helps to understand better the content and scope of the heroic vow, the time has come to read its complete original text. Here, then, is the text of the heroic vow.

*Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty, we consecrate ourselves entirely to you to procure with all our ability and efforts the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools, and in the manner which will seem most agreeable to you and the most advantageous to the said society.*

*And, for this purpose, John Baptist de La Salle, priest, Nicolas Vuyart, and I Gabriel Drolin, from now on and forever until the last surviving one of us, or until the complete establishment of the said Society, make the vow of association and union to bring about and maintain the said establishment, without being able to withdraw from this obligation, even if only we three remained in the said society and even if we were obliged to beg for alms and live on bread alone.*

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Las cuatro primeras biografías de San Juan Bautista de La Salle, Volume II – Blain*, p. 15.

*In view of which we promise to do, all together and by common accord, everything we shall think in conscience, and regardless of any human considerations, to be for the greater good of the said Society.*

*Done on this 21<sup>st</sup> of November, Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, 1691. In testimony of which we have signed.<sup>7</sup>*

At first glance, it can be seen that the formula is structured in four paragraphs, of which the last one is nothing more than the logical closing of this type of document, with the date, the final ratification of the commitment and the signatures. Therefore, we will not examine the last paragraph in this document or in the other formulas. The deep sense of the text will therefore have to be deciphered in the other three paragraphs, which will be the subject of our analysis.

Let us also note that the second paragraph begins with the words “*And, for this purpose,*” that is, what follows is intended to explain what has been presented in the previous sentences, which are those of the first paragraph. In the same way, the third paragraph begins with the expression “*In view of which*” that becomes the practical conclusion of what was explained in the previous paragraph. From these editorial details, we can already point out that the first paragraph strongly characterizes the rest of the formula, which is limited to gradually explaining and gradually extracting more and more consequences of the abovementioned. Something similar should be stressed in relation to the second paragraph and its preponderance over the third. The precise content of each of the paragraphs only confirms these intuitions. Thus, the three paragraphs appear in a precise order of priority and should be read so: starting with the first, whose content becomes explicit in the second, to conclude with the third.

The criteria for putting the paragraphs in order would not exactly be their importance in the general text, because the three paragraphs are important, but rather a kind of precedence between them. To put it in another way, without reading the first paragraph, one could not fully understand what it explains and the implications of the second, or one would run the risk of

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, VH [Heroic Vow] 1, p. 95.

doing so in a wrong way. By the same logic, the third paragraph could not be interpreted correctly without having read and understood, in their specific order, the two previous paragraphs.

Since we are speaking of the formulation of the “vow”, that is, of a promise made to God – although it also directly involves the other Lasallians who shared the commitment, of course, and did so very intensely, as follows from the reading of the various paragraphs of the document, it is logical that the formula begins with a text addressed directly to God, the well-known “*Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, prostrate with most profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty, we consecrate ourselves entirely to you, to... in the manner which will seem most agreeable to you...*”. There is no way could it be otherwise in who we also know, because De La Salle tells us that when things got ugly he liked to address himself to God in the words of the prophet Habakkuk: “Lord, the work is Yours”<sup>8</sup>. The vow is a promise addressed first to God and, logically, God must be the only protagonist of the first lines of the text.

Actually, as we suggest above, this introduction strongly marks the content of the rest of the document. It is, as if we were saying, a way of recognizing that it is God, and He alone, who has directed De La Salle and his companions toward an apostolic vocation for schooling. Despite being in the middle of a crisis, the certainty that this particular vocation came from God had not abandoned them<sup>9</sup>. They wished to continue along the same path, supported by the common interior conviction of responding to the will of God; they knew that what they were carrying forward was the work of God; therefore, they could not abandon it in any way.

It was a way of recognizing, if you will, that the same living God who was manifested in a thousand ways at the beginning of the adventure of the Christian and gratuitous schools – we know the spiritual interpretation that the Saint gives to what happened<sup>10</sup> – continues to be there. He was very

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, RP [Rules I have imposed upon myself] 3,0,5, pp. 119-120. De La Salle repeated a part of the traditional Latin translation of Habakkuk 3, 2: “Domine, opus tuum...”

<sup>9</sup> Saint de La Salle will repeat this, in one way or another, up to 43 times! God has placed the Brothers in the work.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, MSO [Memoir on the Beginnings], pp. 77-79. See note 3 of the current *MEL Bulletin*.

much present, inviting them to apostolic creativity and giving them the strength and the light to respond adequately to the mission's requirements. In this sense, as Brother Michel Sauvage liked to underline, the vow of 1691 is a "transcendent bet", an "act of theological hope"<sup>11</sup>.

However, by beginning the vow formula with a very direct appeal to God and transcendence, these three Brothers of the heroic vow do not wander among the clouds of the abstract, the theoretical or so-called strictly "spiritual"<sup>12</sup>. No. If the formula begins with an explicit appeal to the transcendent, immediately after, at the end of the first paragraph and, most of all in the second, it ends up the reality of life and history. It does so to commit to the promotion of Christian schools for the poor, in radical conditions that impress even more when the difficulties of life in Paris for those years of 1690 and 1691 are known: hunger and misery everywhere. *And, for this purpose, John Baptist de La Salle, priest, Nicolas Vuyart, and I Gabriel Drolin, from now on and forever until the last surviving one of us, or until the complete establishment of the said Society, make the vow of association and union to bring about and maintain the said establishment, without being able to withdraw from this obligation, even if only we three remained in the said society and even if we were obliged to beg for alms and live on bread alone.* In view of such conditions, it would be necessary to agree that that first Lasallian had every good reason to suggest that the adjective "heroic" be added to the vow.

It appears here, as can be seen, very explicitly, the concrete vow – or the two, as can be said – of union and association for the establishment of schools, the first vow of association known in the Institute, although from a canonical point of view it is only a simple private vow, which only affects the conscience of each one. In relation to this matter, it is known that, at least several Brothers had previously pronounced a vow of obedience – but not association – for a single year, at least in 1686 and 1687<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Much of the commentary developed here is inspired by the entire work of Brother Michel Sauvage. To give a brief and exact source of the ideas presented, you can consult the six *Lasalliana* articles, Volume 49. 14-D-115 to 19-D-120, with the English title "For a better understanding of Lasallian association".

<sup>12</sup> "Spiritual" must also be all apostolic works, in the sense of being moved by the Spirit, of being carried out in response to his impulse, trying to be faithful to his movements.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Las cuatro primeras biografías... Volume II—Blain...*, pp. 314-315.



Therefore, if the first paragraph makes explicit reference to transcendence – because God is implicitly present throughout the entire formula - after reading the second we do not hesitate to call it an “incarnate transcendence”, of a “historical mysticism”, of a hope that is based on very tangible, very human, signs of very flesh and blood, so to speak, trying to unite and harmonize in different ways those two seemingly opposite aspects of our life as Brothers: the transcendent and the historical.

In the third paragraph, the commitment to consolidate this structure to encourage free schools is further specified: *“In view of which we promise to do, all together and by common accord, everything we shall think in conscience, and regardless of any human considerations, to be for the greater good of the said Society”*. As you can see, it is fundamentally the commitment to mutually promote a dream, a desire, and a plan, a project that they were convinced came from God Himself. Moreover, in order to bring it about, they proposed to always act together in community, discerning communally, and, of course, based on faith and hope, indispensable conditions or criteria that had been appearing in the previous lines of the formula.

As a summary of everything discussed, we can simply define the heroic vow as the commitment to a hopeful relaunch of the Lasallian mission. The three, who subscribed to it, already had certain roots in the institution, and through the heroic vow, supported by the common conviction that God kept calling them to work in favor of schools for poor children, they wanted to take new strength and give solidity and a future to their small apostolic community. The vow of 1691 revived the original hope, gave it new spirit, also transferred it to Paris, for by the heroic vow that fragile newly- born Lasallian community forcefully stated once again what its fundamental project was and, in this way, opened itself to the future of a new view and accepted mission. It was, we could say, a prophetic way of dealing with the crisis: based on solid interior convictions and limitless generosity in generating and bringing about the work of free schools.

Let us note, in this sense, that the heroic vow does not entail any concrete prohibition, as used to be the case of this style of vows. It is that the fidelity to the path drawn would not consist of compulsively fulfilling certain duties set once and for all, rather in creatively developing a way adaptable to each moment and place, a series of imaginative responses that are effective vis-à-vis the problems of youth in need.

The heroic vow, in short, creates a responsibility before God and before their other Brothers, and develops in each Lasallian who takes part a deep sense of belonging to the institution they are founding. The general background in which the commitment of these three was included was the conviction of responding to a call from God that invited them to extend the Kingdom of God in schools.

## For a deeper understanding and reflection

### *Historical context*

1. Imagine the problems that could arise inside the Lasallian community after the move from Rheims to Paris, two important mission centers separated at that time – very important to consider communications at that time – by about 150 kilometers. Keep in mind that until the heroic vow, John Baptist de La Salle was the only community leader. What does the profession of the heroic vow mean in this context?
2. Investigate, in particular, two very serious problems faced by the first Lasallians in Paris, from 1688, three years before the profession of the heroic vow:
  - The relationship with the pastor of Saint Sulpice, ultimately responsible for the Brothers' schools, which belonged to that parish.
  - The relationship with the teachers of the elementary schools and writing masters, who saw their business jeopardized by the Lasallian efforts to teach their classes gratuitously.
3. Consult the document *Memoir on the Habit*<sup>14</sup> in the *Complete Works of the Founder*, written on the eve of professing the heroic vow. In the opening paragraphs (from *MH 0, 0, 1* to *MH 0, 0, 10*) you can read a description of what the Lasallian community was at that time. Read them carefully. What did you already know and what have you learned from them? What most surprises you? Choose a phrase that serves as a synthesis of what you have read.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, MH [Memoir on the Habit], pp. 85-90.

### *For a deeper understanding of the text*

1. Try to explain, in your own words, what a religious vow and a profession of vows are. Find out what the three vows that religious professed for many centuries in the Church are: what goal do you think they are pursuing? What do you rely on to affirm it? Given this latest data, why does the text say that the heroic vow cannot be considered as the vows of religion that many orders and religious congregations profess?
2. Summarize in a few words the commitment taken on by the three who professed and signed the heroic vow. To understand it better, carefully read the second paragraph of the vow formula. What do you think? Is it a single commitment or are there two instead? Explain
3. If you look closely at the formula of the heroic vow, not only does it talk about specific commitments; it also proposes a very concrete way of putting them into practice. What is the way? You can find it in the third paragraph. Does this way of acting suggest any precise direction for our Lasallian reality?
4. This vow has always been known among Lasallians as the “heroic vow”, surely because of the heroic conditions of the commitment that those Lasallians took on when they professed it. What are those heroic conditions? Where do you find them? What can they mean in relation to the historical context in which the heroic vow was made?

### *Keys to Lasallian identity*

1. From the Institute’s beginnings, the Lasallian mission has always been closely related to Christian and gratuitous schools.
2. Ever since those first moments of our institutional history, Lasallians have wanted to carry out decisions “unanimously and in common agreement”, which is a concrete way of acting together and connected.

CHAPTER II  
THE PROFESSION FORMULA  
OF 1694

**I**n addition to its deep spiritual meaning, the core heart for Lasallians of any age, the heroic vow has some characteristics that make it especially attractive:

- Although we do not possess the original document, it is the first and continues to be a path of spiritual and apostolic fruitfulness that has never ceased to bear fruit.
- For its simplicity, a simple vow, or two if you prefer, association and union, which are in the same vein and are perfectly complementary.
- Evolving as a very direct formula, it gets to the point without ornamentation or flowery language: *“To procure by all our power the establishment of the Society of the schools.”*
- For its radical nature without any hesitation: *“and live on bread alone... obliged to beg for alms...even if we were to remain just we three...”*, indicates that these good people were willing to deal with the ultimate consequences.
- For its intense communal sense manifested with plural verbs and the commitment to always act together and in union, partners/associates.

However, by embellishing the heroic vow with so many pearls, the profession that thirteen Brothers pronounced on June 6, 1694, Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity that year, is – at least from the historiographical point of view – much more important, because we even have the papers signed by each of the protagonists with the impeccable text of their commitment. Thus, although we do not precisely know how the events occurred, because the early biographies of the Founder give mismatched versions of them, we know that the profession took place at Vaugirard, near Paris. We also know the names, with their corresponding signatures, of those who sealed their consecration that day, and the exact text of the document, read aloud, by which they committed themselves. This is precisely the text on which we will comment.

Furthermore, the Act of the Superior’s election, signed on Monday, June 7, 1694, by the twelve<sup>15</sup> Brothers of the previous day, who elected and

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<sup>15</sup> Actually, there are only eleven signatures, because, apparently, a Brother went off and left without signing the document.

recognized the thirteenth of the group as Superior, has also reached the Lasallian Institute's archives. As signed in that act, those Lasallians pledged to always remain lay and not accept in the future as superior anyone who had not taken vows like them. Though elected at that time, John Baptist de La Salle was the exception, an exception that confirmed a general rule always respected from that time until the present day. In fact, it is well known that, perhaps for this reason, John Baptist de La Salle has always been considered – and loved – by Lasallians as Father and Founder. However, De La Salle, as the first Superior General always presented himself to Brother Barthelemy, his successor as the Institute's superior in 1717, despite the fact that he acted as Superior General, whether explicitly appointed or not, for forty years<sup>16</sup>.

The tests, analysis of experts, and comparisons of various types to which all these manuscripts have been submitted, confirm, moreover, their authenticity, for which we can be reasonably sure that both the aforementioned profession formula and the Act of the Superior's election that are in our possession are the same papers that our Lasallian ancestors signed in 1694.

The circumstances in which the consecration of 1694 took place cannot be too different from those so dramatically present at the heroic vow, because – more so in those times, today things change much faster – in two and a half years it would have been difficult for the situation to change so substantially. However, some specialists do suspect that the conditions may no longer have been as distressing as those of 1691, especially due to the fact that the formula no longer speaks of only three remaining in the Society. With the suppression of such a reference, those Lasallians would seem to be revealing their conviction of having better prospects to increase in number. Others think that, basically, nothing changed, but that the formula had simply become more solemn and acquired a certain packaging; and, in this sense, that detail that we underline would be just one more feature of the phenomenon, which should not lead us to draw overly specific conclusions.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. GEORGES RIGAULT, *Histoire Générale de l'Institut des Frères Écoles Chrétiennes. Vol. I: L'œuvre religieuse et pédagogique de saint Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1937, p. 412.

Nevertheless, the 1694 formula, in its general structure and internal skeleton is similar to that of the heroic vow: four paragraphs, with comparable general contents, although with certain quite different specifics, as we will see. To interpret it in a suitable context, we would therefore have to place ourselves again in the already known scheme of “incarnate transcendence” or “historical mysticism” which we spoke of in connection with the heroic vow. It is for the same reasons and applying them to the same apostolic and school circumstances that we pointed out in that commentary.

Once all these details, which better define some aspects of the context in which we have to move when we examine it, have been pointed out, we can now get to know the consecration formula of June 6, 1694 in detail. Here then, is the complete text:

*Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable Majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me.*

*And for this purpose, I, John Baptist de La Salle, Priest, promise and make vow of uniting myself and living in Society with Brothers Nicholas Vuyart, Gabriel Drolin, John Partois, Gabriel Charles Rasigade, John Henri, James Compain, John Jacquot, John Louis de Marcheville, Michael Barthelemy Jacquinot, Edme Leguillon, Giles Pierre and Claude Roussel, to maintain together and by association gratuitous schools, wherever I may be, even if, in order to do this, I were obliged to beg alms and to live on bread alone, or to do so in the said Society at which I might be employed, whether by the body of the Society, or by the Superiors who shall have the direction of it.*

*Wherefore, I promise and vow obedience as well to the body of the Society as to the Superiors; which vows of association as well as stability in the said Society, and of obedience, I promise to keep inviolably all my life.*

*In witness whereof I have signed; done at Vaugirard, this sixth day of June, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, in the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-four<sup>17</sup>.*

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, FV [Formula of Vows] 2, p.101.

From the beginning, it was possible to note that, in fact, the formula was very similar to that of the heroic vow, although there were some changes that should not be overlooked.

The first modifications are already found in the first paragraph. Although the two profession formulas start in the same way: *“Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit...”* there are a couple of significant changes. One of them is that the verbs are in the singular form that will be maintained throughout the entire 1694 text; that is, it no longer reads, *“we consecrate ourselves entirely to You”* but *“I consecrate myself entirely to You”*. It is a relevant difference that, however, we will touch upon when analyzing the second paragraph, since there we will find other specific details that will help us understand better the more or less communal tone of the 1694 formula.

The second difference in this initial paragraph is the change in what we might call the apostolic purpose of the consecration. If the heroic vow stated: *“to procure with all our power and with all our efforts the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools in the manner which will appear to us to be most agreeable to you and the most advantageous for the said Society”*, now it simply states *“to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me”*. We emphasize that in both cases the quotation begins with the expression *“to procure”*, which establishes an undeniable relationship between both expressions; and, therefore, also among the first paragraphs of both formulas...at least.

It is evident that the formulation was significantly simplified: the number of words used was reduced by a third. However, most of all, the fundamental objective of the Lasallian commitment the *“glory of God”* was made explicit, when in the heroic vow it was about engaging in promoting a very specific, very human and precise: *“the society of the Christian Schools”*.

Although, thinking about it, is it really so, as we explained it? On the other hand, wouldn't it be, rather, that both formulations are referring to the same reality, even if they use different specific literary expressions? Was it not for those first Brothers to establish, ensure, promote the Society of the Christian Schools and nothing else, in short, that a way – the one they had chosen – of engaging institutionally to seek God's glory? I think that it is perfectly



legitimate and consistent to interpret things this way<sup>18</sup>. In doing so, we would again be combining, perhaps without realizing it, the “transcendent” and “incarnate” that we talked about above, which, incidentally would help us justify the enormous importance the spirit of faith has for Lasallians, without a doubt the most expressive, most characteristic, and also without a doubt, the most important aspect of Lasallian spirituality.

“The spirit of this Institute is first, a spirit of faith, which should induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God”<sup>19</sup>. John Baptist de La Salle wrote this in the Rule destined for his Brothers, to invite them to use God’s glasses at all times when analyzing reality, to encourage them to always prefer the divine point of view, the Spirit’s criteria. A spirituality immersed in the spirit of faith, along with frequent attention to the presence of God, wherever they may be, should constitute the two key instruments to never forget that their ministry, however lay and secular it might seem, and the approaches with little experience in these questions of the Spirit, was nothing other, in short, a generous response to God’s invitation to extend his Kingdom into the world of schools.

In other words, the spirit of faith must be the essential bridge that allows connecting these two primary shores of any Lasallian approach. On the one hand, there is God’s will, transcendence, mysticism, and on the other there is what Lasallian apostles deal with on a daily basis in schools, with students and their parents, with weary and fulfilled companions, that is, with the historical and incarnate. The spirit of faith is what allows us to be on both shores at the same time. It is what gives a sense of eternity – as it was said before – concerning so many everyday efforts that appear so radically material, and even so insignificant; it incorporates us through our daily work into that great dream of God that is his Kingdom, particularly among children and young people in need. In an educational environment it is the one that gives us such an important role in the work of God; the one that makes us realize that we are instruments of God, of the enormous importance of the tasks we carry out, even if they seem merely material and historical, only human.

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<sup>18</sup> That both expressions begin with the words “To procure” cannot be a simple coincidence.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, RC [Common Rules] 2, 2, p. 14.

In light of the Lasallian spirit of faith, therefore, the end of the Lasallian consecration would not have varied from 1691 to 1694, although some indications, examined in a hurried manner, were intended to convince us otherwise. Its two iterations, apparently different, embodied in the first two paragraphs of the heroic vow and the 1694 formula, would be but two different formulations of the same primary goal: to seek the glory of God by promoting Christian schools at the service of poor children in the best possible way.

The second paragraph of the formula has evolved a lot and has become even clearer. On the one hand, we see therein the verbs change into the singular. There is no doubt that the Brothers who commit themselves do so with their other consecration companions, to the point of writing all their names one by one. Therefore, it is not just a commitment to God and exclusively for God; it is also a commitment to the rest of the Brothers who sign the profession. Therefore, we are faced with an intense communal commitment, a promise made to God and to the rest of the Brothers whose names literally appear, one by one, in the documents signed by each of those who profess. For this reason, the change from the plural to the singular that we noted in the first paragraph can be deceptive, if the rest of the formula is not carefully considered. Because, as seen in the second paragraph, this vow is a community commitment to the max.

If we continue to read this second paragraph attentively, in addition to the names of the professed and its radical nature which is similar to the heroic vow, we will verify that a very similar expression is repeated a couple of times: “*to unite myself and to live in Society*” at the beginning, and “*together and by association*” later. The protagonists of the heroic vow wrote “*union and association*”. What can this expression in particular mean, this – we would say – traditional “Lasallian binomial”?

Brother Michel Sauvage interpreted it<sup>20</sup> as the expression of a fruitful tension between the Society (“*remain in society*”, “*by association*”), which the vow defines and carries out, and the various local communities (“*hold together*”, “*in union*”), responsible for developing in the field, at each site, a common school action, although each in a different, particular way. That is,

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. MICHEL SAUVAGE, “For a better understanding of Lasallian association”, Volume 49, 14-D-115 to 19 D 120.

the Lasallian association that serves a single mission is carried out in different schools, environments and circumstances, through local communities whose members work together, together in the same school activity, even if, in fact, they develop different activities. Together, in local communities, and associated in that network of communities that is the Society of the Christian Schools.

It is clear that the profession of 1694 is not a community commitment, since those who subscribed belonged to different communities, and yet others who lived in different communities with them did not sign their commitment in public.

That of 1694 was, without a doubt, a vow of association, in that Society each one would have the role assigned by those responsible for the same (*“the body of this Society”* – a very original way of presenting things at that time – or their *“Superiors”*). They would move to the place where they were sent to by those responsible, where they would form local communities structured for mission with other partners, some would have professed and others not; that is to say, apostolic communities that, in theory, were of associates and those not associated explicitly<sup>21</sup>. These local communities were organized in a network, in a wider Society, to coordinate their actions and fulfill a common mission. Throughout this missionary framework, those who had publically proclaimed their commitment to an association would constitute something like the fundamental framework of the whole work, the guarantee that everything would work properly, according to the fundamental charism of the Society. However, they would also need the agreement of the non-associates who, despite not having “officially” committed to sustaining the institution for the moment, did belong to the different communities and actively worked in the various educational projects of the Society.

In this way, the Society broadened the horizons of the various local communities and reinforced their ties of union. Those who lived in a specific community to animate a certain school for the poor could feel more supported,

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<sup>21</sup> “Associated explicitly” in the sense of having explicitly signified association by a public gesture; and it is in this way, interiorly, that all Lasallians could feel associated without having to profess or sign any document.

belonging to a more ambitious project, with more colleagues working in the same direction, encouraged by greater educational and missionary ambitions, and with greater possibilities of performing their mission.

In the beginning, when the first Lasallian works were born, after the proposal of Adrien Nyel and the subsequent evolution of the events by Canon De La Salle in Rheims and Nyel himself in other smaller towns of the region, the Project consisted of establishing pedagogical, educational, evangelical communities without, apparently, too much interrelation between them. The definitive abandonment of that region by Nyel, who went on to die in Rouen, forced De La Salle to resolve and fix some questions that at first had not seemed so necessary; fundamentally the vow of obedience for one year of the Directors participating in the Assembly of 1686 to the direction that had been decided by it<sup>22</sup>. Thus, a first simple network of communities began.

The move to Paris, with its remoteness from Rheims and the serious problems that that caused, convinced De La Salle of the work's fragile nature. It was necessary to provide it with more universal horizons. The inevitable dispersion that the transfer to Paris required should have been counteracted by a strong sense of belonging to a more extensive project than the work where one was situated. The project transcended them, including the work in the larger picture of a more general purpose, a characteristic spirit and a particular action plan. Here was the fundamental goal of the transition from Community (or communities) to Society.

In the process, the weight of the Society would no longer fall exclusively on the shoulders of its fundamental advocate (as was the case with the early Lasallian communities), but there would be more people to share the responsibilities. First, it was just De La Salle; then there would be two Lasallians; then later, ten more; up to thirteen in total; and then more and more...

In Lasallian language, therefore, the word "together" would always have a connotation of a specific local community, Lasallians who live together, pray together, work together, decide together how to guide and improve their life and their school, spending much time together, enjoying and recreating, supporting each other in difficulties.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Las cuatro primeras biografías...*, Volume II – Blain..., pp. 314-315.

Yet, “Society” and “association” both apply to the entire Lasallian Institute, without however the connotations of religious congregation that would be adopted over time, up until the final pontifical approbation of 1725. Society meant inspiration, driving force, help for discernment, questioning, openness to a broader human communion, ecclesiastically speaking.

The local communities of well-trained members would be nurtured by the Society in a common way of thinking, feeling and doing; with agreed upon goals and a very strong sense of belonging. However, the Society, in turn, would need the contribution of the small local communities, whose members were those in daily contact with the reality of children and young people, with their needs, with school problems. The local community would need to open their eyes up wide and be very attentive to recognizing new educational and catechetical needs; its creative way of coming up with effective responses to those needs will enrich and stimulate the entire body of the Society.

Therefore, we can conclude our reflections on “union” and “association” by stating that there was a fruitful tension between the local Lasallian community and the entire Institute. If the first failed, everything would be reduced to mere theoretical idealism, without landing in real and daily life, pure idealistic evasion and full of sterile volunteerism. If the second one were not present, the activity could become a simple repetitive routine, which would end up by not responding to any problem. The Lasallian mission must accept them, accordingly, “together and by association”. Even today.

From the formula’s third paragraph, we will highlight only one important aspect of the vows, which – as we have pointed out above – are not the three classical ones necessary to enter the religious state. From the literal point of view, what is articulated in the formula is a promise of obedience, addressed to the Body of the Society and to the Superiors, and a triple vow of association, stability and obedience – the latter in the same terms as the promise and issued twice – that we should consider directed to God, but also as we have stressed, to the other consecrated Brothers.

If the vows of religion fundamentally sought to help one gain holiness, to be better Christians – this was the main purpose of religious life, as the

commentators of that time emphasized - the vows professed by those with this formula were very different: they were only intended to optimize the performance of the schools' work. They were, therefore, vows with a clearly apostolic purpose: to associate to give more solidity to the entire work and be more effective in it, to not leave when things get ugly and to obey those responsible for the Society because otherwise there would be no way to accomplish the mission as stated. The same vow of obedience, having the same name - like that of stability, which has nothing to do with the monastic stability that was professed at that time in many monasteries - is completely different. What the Lasallians intended to achieve with it was that the schools function as well as possible, and not be ascetic and humble.

Obviously, this explanation would be incomplete if we did not remember something that the Founder wrote on at least two occasions, indicating the importance he attached to the approach. We refer to the following well-known text: "Do not distinguish between the duties of your state and what pertains to your salvation and perfection"<sup>23</sup>. That is, do not break up your life; do not divide it into distinct categories between schoolwork and other paths that are apparently more appropriate to ensure your holiness, your salvation. In other words, you can become perfectly holy fulfilling the duties of your state, which have to do, above all, with the school and the community, without having to search for particular "pietistic" additions.

But the Saint goes even further when he finishes the previous advice with the following conclusion: "Rest assured that you will never effect your salvation more certainly and that you will never acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling well the duties of your state, provided you do so with a view to accomplish the will of God"<sup>24</sup>. That is, not only can you become saints by fulfilling the duties of your state well, but it is also the best way. This is the only way, at least for you, since you have felt called by God to participate in the project of the Christian Schools.

Applying it to the issue of the vows we discussed above, it should not be confused: first, Lasallian vows are strictly apostolic vows. They pursue exactly

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, CT [Collection of Various Short Treatises] 16,1,4, p. 175, text which the Saint repeats with very similar words in *ibidem*, RP [Rules I have placed upon myself] 3,0,3, p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> *L. cit.*

the same goal as the other classical vows: to lead the Brothers to holiness, but by other means: inviting them to be as faithful as they can to their school and community commitments<sup>25</sup>.

## For a deeper understanding and reflection

### *Historical context*

1. The vow of 1694 took place, approximately two and a half years after the heroic vow. The text you just read says that the historical circumstances in which both vows took place could not have changed much because they lacked the time to do so. Remember what these circumstances were. They were mentioned in the previous chapter.
2. The vow of 1694 was professed in Vaugirard, a small house that the Brothers had bought on the outskirts of Paris to overcome the crisis alluded to above. Investigate a bit what happened and what services were provided in this house of Vaugirard, because the 1694 profession was not the only measure they took to overcome the crisis.
3. The day after the 1694 profession of vows, the same Brothers elected John Baptist de La Salle as Superior General of the Society of the Christian Schools. They had to vote twice, because De La Salle did not agree with the result of the first vote. Look in some biography of our Holy Founder for the Act of Election that they signed and carefully study its content. What catches your attention?
4. Surely, you have heard of the long episode of Parmenie, where De La Salle retired to escape all the problems that beset him in Paris. The Brothers sent him a letter to make him return, so that he could take charge of the Lasallian Institute. Find that letter in some biography of the Founder and try to find in it the memory/recollection of the

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<sup>25</sup> The already long list of Brothers of the Christian Schools' saints, blessed and venerables would prove to us, with concrete and abundant facts, that the Founder's intuition was not far-fetched.

commitments that De La Salle adopted, together with his Brothers in 1694. You will surely find undeniable echoes of the text professed twenty years earlier before the events of Parmenie.

*For a deeper understanding of the text*

1. Compare the texts of the heroic vow and the profession of 1694. What are the similarities between them? What are the fundamental differences you see between them?
2. In the second paragraph of the profession of 1694, there is the expression “together and by association”, which, since then, has indicated the specific way in which Lasallians must develop their apostolic mission. Shortly before this expression, the formula proposes something similar: “I promise and vow to unite myself (together) and to live in Society (by association) with the Brothers...” Do you want to explain in your own words what this expression means? Do you find any similar phrase in the heroic vow?
3. The preceding explanation affirms that the Lasallian vows of 1694 are vows to improve and develop the mission, apostolic vows. They are three: obedience, association and stability. Do you dare to express the concrete commitment each vow demanded of those Lasallians who promised to fulfill them?
4. De La Salle wrote the following: “Do not distinguish between the duties of your state and what pertains to your salvation and perfection. Rest assured that you will never effect your salvation more certainly and that you will never acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling well the duties of your state, remember you do so with a view to accomplishing the will of God”<sup>26</sup>. Once the vow formula of 1694 has been read carefully, do you think that the commitments first contracted when making this profession agree with the Founder’s wishes to not separate the strictly religious from the professional? Try to explain this from the 1694 vow.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, CT [Collection of Various Short Treatises] 16,1,4; De La Salle actually proposed it to us in two very different places, almost in the same terms. A sign that for him it was an important matter; cf. RP [Rules I have imposed on myself], 3.0.3.



### *Lasallian identity keys*

1. The concrete way in which we procure God's glory is by committing ourselves to the Christian education of children and young people, especially those most in need.
2. Since the beginning, Lasallians have developed the mission "together and by association". There is no sense in speaking of a Lasallian or an isolated Lasallian, who acts as an individual and without relying at all on the Lasallian community.

CHAPTER III  
THE PROFESSION FORMULA  
OF 1726

Taking a leap forward thirty-two years in the history of the Lasallian Institute, we find ourselves in 1726, a very different moment than the one we left in 1694. In fact, it was about seven years after the Founder died. Brother Barthelemy, who had taken over the Institute upon the death of John Baptist de La Salle, had also passed away. The unstable Institute of 1694, composed of about thirty Brothers had now become a fairly stabilized institution, which had multiplied its personnel by six and had spread over large areas of France, opening another novitiate and strengthening its governance structure with new personnel, unknown in 1694.

However, the greatest novelty in that moment was surely that the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools had been officially recognized by several French offices and, above all, in Rome, by the Pope<sup>27</sup>. The papal approval would immediately result in the drafting of a new rule that would include new details that some Lasallians felt had to be introduced into the statutes that governed their daily life.

Among many other things, the Institute would have to touch up the consecration formula, because, in order to achieve ecclesiastic recognition, the disciples of John Baptist de La Salle had to significantly modify the terms of their profession, by introducing the three classic vows of religious orders. This fact fully affected several original aspects of the Lasallian consecration, present in the formula from those quasi-foundational moments of the heroic vow. It was therefore necessary to correct the formula, which was as follows:

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

*Most holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you, to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me.*

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<sup>27</sup> Ecclesiastical approval came on January 23, 1725, by the Bull “*In apostolicae dignitatis solio*”, signed by Pope Benedict XIII. A few months earlier, on September 28, 1724, the Institute had obtained a valid Royal Patent for Normandy that, although of limited validity, was its first civil recognition in French society, an essential condition for obtaining recognition from the Church.

*And for this purpose, I, [Brother's name], promise and vow to unite myself and to live in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are associated to keep together and by association gratuitous schools, wherever I may be sent, whether by the body of this Society or by the Superiors who have or will have the government thereof.*

*Wherefore, I promise and vow poverty, chastity, and obedience, and teaching gratuitously, and stability in said Society, conformably to the Bull of Approbation of the Institute granted by our holy father Benedict XIII, which vows of stability and obedience, as well as to the body of the Society as to the Superior of the Institute, as of poverty, chastity, and teaching gratuitously, I promise to keep inviolably all my life.*

*In testimony whereof I have signed. On ... the day... of the year 17...<sup>28</sup>.*

The first change already appeared in the first line: the Brothers begin their consecration with the sign of the cross. Here the new rule in a way formalizes a custom that was observed in the formulas that had come to us since some years before 1726, the date of the new rule's composition<sup>29</sup>. However, this introduction would not be noted in subsequent formulas and would quickly disappear from circulation.

As can be seen next in the text, the first paragraph and the introduction of the second are exactly the same as in 1694. Only the expression "*Brothers of the Christian Schools*" was introduced instead of the exhaustive listing of Brothers that were shown as associated in the 1694 formula; a completely logical movement since the number of professed Brothers had increased greatly, and it was not a matter of reciting a number of names one by one<sup>30</sup>.

Radical references to maintain consecration had also been deleted such as when it was necessary to ask for alms and feed only on bread. This completed the "purification" process initiated in 1694, when the commitment to remain associated was deleted, even if only the three that consecrated themselves remained, as indicated in the heroic vow. The

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<sup>28</sup> *Cabiers lasalliens*, n° 25, p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> In all those that have come to us since 1716 and in some earlier, such as Brother Barthelemy, dating from 1705, cf. CL no 3, pp.7-23.

<sup>30</sup> Actually, this change can be seen from 1700 in some signed profession formulas – not in all, not even in most of them – that have reached us; cf. *l. cit.*

elimination of all these heroic references may be interpreted in a simple manner: the Institute was now flourishing and it did not make sense to consider the commitments as radical and demanding as those of the time of the Paris foundation.

Continuing along the line of changes, a slight addition of a clearly legalistic nature was made in relation to the vow of obedience, adding the Superiors who would come in the future to the current ones.

The point in which the most serious changes occur is in the third paragraph. On the one hand, in its first line the three classic vows that the religious of that time professed appear in their usual order. This classic triad is followed by the well-known vow of stability in the Society of the Christian Schools, to conclude with a new vow for the Brothers expressed in a way that was not part of their daily reality: the vow “*to teach gratuitously*”. In addition, the paragraph includes an explicit reference to the Bull of Approbation of the Institute and its signer, Pope Benedict XIII, and concludes by repeating the commitment to keep the vows, in a line similar to that of previous formulas, although with the necessary adaptations to the new relationship of the vows.

If we compare this paragraph with the equivalents of the two previous formulas, we see that the vow of association had disappeared or, better said, it was transformed into the vow to teach gratuitously. This confirms a trend that was beginning to appear in the Institute that started several years earlier, according to what we can gather from a 1717 manuscript text, which has reached us intact, in which it is explained, “What do the vows oblige?” of the Brothers<sup>31</sup>. This document contains a somewhat curious fact. Despite explicitly professing the three vows of 1694, in the document Brother Irenaeus explains the obligations that the four vows entail – those already known of obedience, stability and association – plus a new one: to teach children gratuitously. The fifth vow of the profession of 1726, therefore, was handled in the Institute from a few years earlier, in what we could interpret as a splitting of the association vow into two complementary effects: on the one hand, association with the rest of the Brothers to animate Christian

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<sup>31</sup> This is a text written on the back of the perpetual profession formula of Brother Irenaeus. Both sides of the paper have been copied by the same hand, surely that of the Brother himself who signed the profession, cf. *ibidem*, pp. 20-21. On the other hand, that this document dates from 1717 does not necessarily mean that before that date things were not understood in an identical way, even if documents that prove it to us in a reliable manner have not reached us.

schools, and, on the other, the gratuitous school. Over time, of these two practical consequences of the association vow, only the one to teach gratuitously remained explicitly in force, an aspect that, as is known, had always been extremely important to the Brothers, even if they did not formally express it as a vow.

Be that as it may, although association had disappeared as a vow of the third paragraph of the formula, we continue to find it with plenty of clarity in the second, in a formulation almost identical to that used in 1694. Remember in this respect the interpretation that we proposed above, on the hierarchical ordering of the paragraphs of the formula, with which the second paragraph would be, in principle, essential to understanding how the third should be interpreted; along these lines, gratuitous schools should almost be given the same importance as association commitment.

On the other hand, I think it can be argued without difficulty that the union and association to encourage Christian schools strongly underlies the whole formula, although it only appears explicitly in some lines of it. It would be something like the permanent atmosphere, the general environment in which the different elements of the consecration formula are developed.

However, taking into account all of the above, it is evident that in the 1726 formula they had acquired two characteristics that brought the Brothers closer to the organization of religious life institutions of that time. Namely, the mention of the three classic vows of the religious orders, in a preferential place in relation to those that we might consider coming from the Lasallian tradition, and the explicit mention of the Bull of Approbation and the Pope – whose figure will be hereinafter linked exclusively to the annulment of vows. It is unquestionable, therefore, that the Society of Christian Schools whose members professed the 1726 formula was much closer than before to the religious orders of that period<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> From the canonical point of view, that the Society of the Christian Schools became a “religious order” is more than debatable, because at no time of the Institute was it officially erected as a “regular” order, and its vows, although being public, were just simple ones. However, everything seems to indicate that those Brothers were quite convinced of having become a religious congregation “like the others”, which made them satisfied and happy. See, in this regard, the significant preface to the Rule of 1726, in *CL* n° 25, pp. 12-15.

From that moment, in a process that intensified with the passage of time<sup>33</sup>, almost until our days, the classic triad of poverty, chastity and obedience has taken on a leading role that at the beginning was not present among the Lasallians. Certainly, the Brothers lived these virtues from the first moments of the Institute, and even did so with extreme vigor, if we heed the indications of the Rule. However, they never expressed them as vows, if we except obedience, which was at the beginning rather related to association for the mission.

After the Bull of Approbation, in addition to amplifying the importance of the classic triad, the vows of stability and of teaching gratuitously were pushed into the background. The heart of the whole formula, the association for the mission, lost strength as a vow, although it certainly implicitly remained in the text as a reminder of a past in which things were different. With all these actions, association ceased to be at the center of the Brothers consecration, and even the total surrender to God, so radical in the formulas of 1691 and 1694, was diluted in the three vows, or if you want, in the five Lasallian vows of 1726. As a consequence to all this, to put it simply, the means replaced the end. The concrete expression in the form of vows – which were very variable in those times – replaced what the vows intended to say, that is, the total and unconditional surrender to the Lord for what He might send<sup>34</sup>.

It is necessary to once again repeat, a religious is not someone fundamentally poor, chaste and obedient, rather a person who, above all, has given himself completely to God, in response to what he thinks is a call from above to be involved in a specific mission. The religious consecration always supposes calls-answers that begin when and as God wants, as our Founder so clearly

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<sup>33</sup> The *Brief Treatise of the Religious State*, Editorial Bruno, Madrid, 1951, still taught the Brothers that “religious are those who have professed vows in some Religion”; p. 6. The conditions to be religious stated beforehand in this text are, namely, to be bound by vows, that those vows be public and according to the discipline of an Institute approved by the Church; cf. *ibidem*, p. 2. As you can see a strictly canonical point of view.

<sup>34</sup> This poorly defined hodgepodge between consecration and vows has not been exclusive to the Lasallian institution. In fact, even today, in some books on the religious life, vows and consecration are made equivalent, or it is explained that to consecrate oneself means plain and simply professing a few vows. In this regard, it may provide more clarity to consult pp. 240–245 of JOSEAN VILLALABEITIA, *Consagración y audacia*, Lasallian Studies N° 14, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, 2007, with the bibliography provided.

indicates in the “Memoir on the Beginnings”<sup>35</sup>. Because of the consecration, manifested in a more concrete way, the Church decided that legally the religious undertakes to live poor, chaste and obedient, accepting to live in community, to pray, to be gracious, to give oneself to the mission, and to so many other things fundamental to religious life not spelled out in a specific vow.

What kept the first Lasallians closely united to each other and animated them in their mission was not their vows – which not all of them professed, as we have already commented – but their deep vision of things, their communal ministerial spirituality we could say, which committed them in the school and in the community. In addition, their vows, when they existed, were not ascetic vows such as those of the religious orders of that time, but vows for the mission: association for the mission, obedience to improve or develop the school project of the Society of the Christian Schools and stability in the mission.

Consequently, the changes of 1726, in relation to those that had been experienced since the foundation’s first projects, constituted a transcendental novelty that diverted the attention of the Lasallians from what should have been the primary core of their consecration. Thus, being “ministers of God and ambassadors of Jesus Christ”<sup>36</sup> meant being considered Christians who entered the Institute to achieve holiness more easily, in a state of life in which educational apostolic activities then tended to acquire secondary importance<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, MSO [Memoir of the Beginnings] 6, p. 77.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, MR [Meditations for the time of Retreat] 195,2,1, p. 583.

<sup>37</sup> It is what has been called the “Theology of the two ends” of religious life, in force in the Church until mid-twentieth century. This view assigns to the religious life two fundamental objectives: one, the main one, is the personal sanctification of the religious, and the second, less important, consists of an apostolic activity that, in the case of the Brothers, would be Christian education. The 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter had to deal, in this regard, with numerous complaints from the Brothers who, given the concrete circumstances of their life, found it impossible to submit to these criteria without becoming completely unhinged. Since the Second Vatican Council, no one supports these ideas.



## For a deeper understanding and reflection

### *Historical Context*

1. As soon as Saint John Baptist de La Salle died, the Brothers decided to request official recognition from the French state – the so-called “Royal Patent” – and then that of the Catholic Church, which would be granted in 1724 and 1725 respectively. In your opinion, why would the Brothers make these decisions? Why would they do it, just after the death of the Founder? What could they look for with the official recognition of the State and the Church?
2. Official Church recognition was granted by the Bull “*In apostolicae dignitatis solio*”, signed by Pope Benedict XIII. What is a pontifical Bull? What was its content? Investigate and discover what the Bull approved regarding De La Salle’s Institute. How was the approval obtained? What specific points of the Bull of Approbation were already known among the Brothers beforehand, and what new aspects did the Bull provide?

### *For a deeper understanding of the text*

1. Compare the profession formulas of 1726 and 1694. What similarities do you find between them? What are the fundamental differences between both texts? In your opinion, what could be the reasons for these differences?
2. If we look closely, the profession text of 1726 had lost all the marks of the radical and heroic nature that distinguished the commitments of Lasallians from the beginnings: standing in the breach even if only a few Brothers remain, living on alms, surviving only on bread. Try to imagine some reasons that explain why the Brothers would decide to remove such radical directives from their profession formula.
3. Beginning in 1726, the Church in Rome mandated the addition of the three vows professed by all religious to the vows professed from the beginning. With this in mind, answer the following questions: of the five vows of the 1726 profession, which are those traditionally of religious? Which ones come down to us from the commitments of 1691 and 1694? Which ones are exclusively those of the Brothers, of Lasallian

religious? Which ones could be valid for anyone who wished to live their Lasallian life option with integrity and fidelity, even if they did not want to be religious?

4. The vow “to teach gratuitously” appeared for the first time in a Lasallian profession formula in 1726. However, gratuity in education had always been a fundamental characteristic of the Lasallian mission. How can the presence of this vow be explained, just from the 1726 profession formula? What does it mean that gratuity should be understood only in economic terms? By analyzing this chapter, you will find clues to an answer.

### *Keys to Lasallian identity*

1. From the first moments of the mission of De La Salle’s disciples, gratuity was a constant of the Lasallians apostolic activity. A gratuity that was not well accepted by the first Lasallians, but this did not prevent them from continuing to defend it with conviction and coherence. What is important is that it not be limited to purely economic matters: to teach the poor gratuitously is more, much more, than not asking them for money.
2. The mission and its particular spirituality were recognized by the Catholic Church shortly after the death of John Baptist de La Salle, three centuries ago. Afterwards, the wave of Lasallian saints whether officially proclaimed or not - Brothers, Sisters, laity, fathers and mothers of families, alumni, priests, teachers, professionals and others, moved by the same principles that our holy Founder would leave us – continued proclaiming through its works that the Church was not mistaken in its decision. The Lasallian way is an excellent road to live the fullness of the Gospel in the world of education and catechesis, among children and young people.

# CHAPTER IV

## A LEAP OF TWO AND A HALF CENTURIES

Surprisingly, if in thirty-five years the text of the Lasallian profession formula was significantly modified in its content – although it kept the literary structure of four hierarchically organized paragraphs; then years and years would pass with hardly any changes, because there were no modifications until 1967. This fact may indicate that the 1726 formula, with its charge of clarifying this consecration for the religious life, fully satisfied the Brothers of successive eras, although perhaps it may also have been due in part to the deep respect that Lasallians have always had for the documents of the beginnings.

However, in the successive texts of the Lasallian profession formula, two changes can be highlighted – practically the only ones, apart from some minor questions of spelling or grammatical precision – which occurred during that prolonged period of time that we will comment on. In addition, these changes, in their brevity, are of marked interest. Let us examine them.

On the one hand, in the first line of the initial paragraph, following the name of the professed, the following first four [three in English] short words were deleted: “*and I vow*”, so that the phrase as it read in 1726 “*I, (name of the Brother), promise and vow to unite myself and remain in the Society*” was now “*I, (name of the Brother), promise to unite myself and live in community with...*”<sup>38</sup>. The change was driven by impeccable logic. If the effective vows are the five pronounced in the third paragraph, where there is no evidence of uniting and remaining in Society with the Brothers, it makes no sense to profess it in the second paragraph. For this reason, the allusion in the second paragraph to the unity and to the association in some way “diminished” them to the simple degree of promise. However, let us stress this without ambiguity. If from the logical perspective it is a decision overflowing with coherence, from the point of view of the tradition and identity of the Institute, on the contrary, such a deletion could be considered an affront to Lasallian association. As we have been insisting throughout this study, unity and association have always been the fundamental core of Lasallian consecration.

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<sup>38</sup> *Rule and Constitutions of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Generalate/Mother House, Rome 1967, p. 100. All the direct quotes on this page are taken from this reference.

A second change comes to correct a slight problem in the text that gave abundant headaches to those in positions of responsibility, especially throughout the nineteenth century. This was the formulation of the fifth vow, which in 1726 was “*teaching gratuitously*” and would become “*to teach the poor gratuitously*”. Actually, the Bull of Approbation spoke of gratuitous teaching for the poor, so, as in the consecration text of the vows it was professed as “*according to the Bull of Approbation of Pope Benedict XIII*”. The interpretation that had always been accepted was that the vow of gratuity did not prevent charging something for teaching students who were not poor<sup>39</sup>. After many controversies, chapter texts explained how conditions and Vatican rescripts had to be interpreted to contravene the vow’s literalness. It was decided, well into the twentieth century, to rewrite the form of the formula to avoid misunderstandings<sup>40</sup>.

As we have pointed out above, a very relevant change occurred in 1967, with the approval of the new post-conciliar Rule, completely different in its wording from that inherited from the Founder. This new normative text would have an “*ad experimentum*” character, which meant that, after a long trial period, it had to be revised before becoming definitive. Although, if the text of the Rule would be completely renewed in its conception and wording – the renewal ideas of Vatican Council II so advised – the consecration formula would remain quite similar to the usual one, with a couple of substantial changes, a consequence of those times of renewal.

In addition as regulatory criteria of the Brothers commitments to the Bull of Approbation were the Rule and the Constitutions that had just been approved. The third paragraph of the formula thus was as follows: “as

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<sup>39</sup> The vow to teach gratuitously had never prevented Lasallians from charging students for reasons other than strictly teaching, such as school supplies or boarding school residency. In fact, for centuries the Institute financed a large part of its governance structure and its initial formation programs with the benefits obtained from large boarding schools, in which, theoretically, the boarders only paid for lodging.

<sup>40</sup> Interesting documentation and commentary on this subject in the book of Brother BRUNO ALPAGO, *The Institute at the educational service of the poor*, Lasallian Studies No 7, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, 2000. In particular, refer to pp. 299-303 and pp. 317-322. Brother LÉON LAURAIRE, for his part, has explained it much more succinctly in MEL Bulletin N° 12, *The Conduct of Schools – An overall plan of human and Christian education*, Rome, 2004, pp.37-49.

approved by the Church and according to the Rule and the Constitutions of this Institute”<sup>41</sup> instead of “according to the Bull of Approbation of our Holy Father Benedict XIII”, which was indicated in the previous texts.

However, the big change took place in the way referring to the vows and although less so, in the order adopted in the formula. As the gateway to the following comment, we should remember the ever-lengthy discussions that took place in the Chapter Hall and in the commissions of the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter regarding keeping the specific vows of the Institute that the Brothers had always professed. There were those who thought the vows should be five, and those who wanted to reduce the vows of Lasallian profession exclusively to the classic triad of the religious congregations, lowering the two vows pertinent to the Institute’s tradition as meaningless in those heady times that drove the Council.

From a particular perspective, this position came to represent the crystallization of a whole way of thinking based on the “Theology of the two ends” of religious life. The one prioritized the goal of personal sanctity, represented by fulfilling the classic triad of vows, while the other was the charitable apostolic commitment, which for the Brothers was represented, above all, in the two vows of stability and gratuity<sup>42</sup>. Fortunately, in line with the return to the origins that the Council had strongly advocated as an essential way for the renewal of the religious institutes<sup>43</sup>, the General Chapter opted to keep the five vows of the Institute, including the two specifically Lasallian vows, although, that being done, it had changed its name to adapt it to the current times. It also modified the order of the three classical vows, thus adopting the suggestions of the Council in this matter and in a certain way, the logic of the Institute in the formula of profession.

Consequently, the fourth vow, hitherto known as “*of stability in said Society*” would be renamed “*fidelity to the Institute*”, and would be placed at the end. It would only be pronounced at the time of definite consecration, that is, when professing perpetual vows. The Brothers who signed a temporary

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<sup>41</sup> *Rules and Constitutions*, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Salamanca, 1968, p. 77. All text citations referred to in the *Rules and Constitutions* of 1967 are taken from this reference. [In English: *The Rule and the Constitutions, 1967, Thirty-ninth General Chapter, SECOND SESSION*. St. Mary’s College Press, Winona, Minnesota, p. 52.]

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Note 37 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>43</sup> In *Perfectae Caritatis* 2.

profession would not make this vow, so their commitment would be reduced to the other four. The old fifth vow *“of service to the poor through education”* would come to occupy the fourth place on the list, after the classic triad ordered according to the Council’s preferences. For consistency with this change, an expression of the second paragraph had to be changed, and where earlier *“gratuitous schools”* was stated, now it would read *“educational work for the service of the poor”*.

That being the case, the third paragraph of the formula was given a completely new wording, although the content had not changed much; it was adapted to current times and the recent directions of the Council. Specifically, the third paragraph of the 1967 profession formula was as follows: *“Wherefore, I promise and vow chastity, poverty, obedience, (and) service of the poor through education, (and fidelity to the Institute) as approved by the Church and the Rule and the Constitutions of this Institute”*. The parentheses served to distinguish the cases of temporary and perpetual profession. The first two paragraphs, for their part, remained practically unchanged.

In view of the results, I think we can conclude that the capitulants of the 1966-1967 General Chapter were able to give the formula of profession a much more current expression. It would merge without difficulty the approaches of that period, respecting, at the same time the structure and spirit of the formula’s background in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The changes were not finished. In the same way that in the first thirty-five years of the Institute’s history the profession formula underwent many modifications, in recent years as well, all the while still respecting its original secular structure.

## **For a deeper understanding and reflection**

### *Historical Context*

1. After two and a half centuries without hardly modifying the profession formula, at the end of the 1960’s the text was changed quite often, especially with that specifically concerning Lasallian vows. Do you think that these changes were justified? What reasons could be given to explain them?

2. The Second Vatican Council, which met between 1962 and 1965, advised religious institutions to “renew” and “adapt” their approaches to the reality of current times, so different from previous ones and, above all, of those moments when the various institutes were born. A conciliar document, *Perfectae Caritatis* (PC), was dedicated exclusively to guide this renewal and adaptation recommended by the Council to the religious institutes. Read Article 2 of this conciliar document (PC) and highlight the three fundamental criteria of renewal proposed by the Council in it. Read Article 8 of PC and try to understand what the Church proposes in it regarding the apostolic works of religious. What consequences could be drawn from these two articles for the life and apostolic commitment of all Lasallians, whether they are religious or not?
  
3. Dialogue with some elderly Brothers and find out about the changes that occurred between the Council’s meetings: how was life lived in the Institute of De La Salle before the Council and how was it lived after it, after several years. You could talk about the changes within the communities, in the mission, in relations with the laity and with society in general. In these changes try to distinguish between the secondary or anecdotal and the primary core or the fundamental.

*For a deeper understanding of the text*

1. Compare the texts of the profession of 1726 and that of 1967. How similar are they? What are the fundamental differences that you appreciate? In your opinion, to what may these differences be due?
  
2. The two issues raised in the formula that caused the most discussion were the relationship between a vow and a promise, and the problem of how to interpret Lasallian gratuity correctly. Why do you think that difficulties arose in these two specific matters, while others did not generate so many doubts?
  
3. After the Council, the vow of “teaching gratuitously” is transformed into “service of the poor through education”, and “gratuitous schools” are referred to as “educational work for the service of the poor”. Why do you think this change occurred? Does the change seem appropriate to you? Do you think, perhaps, a re-naming of the classic Lasallian vow would be better suited to our time?



### *Keys to Lasallian Identity*

1. We Lasallians are faithful to the foundational charism that the Holy Spirit generated in Saint John Baptist de La Salle, our Father and Founder. We find our essential roots in his life and in his work. The Church – and common sense as well – advises us that Lasallians have to be very attentive to the signs of the times in order to see how to interpret the legacy of our Founder in every moment. It is what the Church calls “creative” or “dynamic fidelity”. For this reason, with the passing of time some changes have been introduced in different aspects of Lasallian life and spirituality, in order to remain faithful in each specific historical moment that the disciples of De La Salle live, without betraying by this, the inheritance received, no less, at the hands of the Founder himself.
2. Although the school remains the privileged instrument of Lasallian apostolic action, we Lasallians are open to other forms of teaching and education adapted to the needs of each time and of each country. More than the school, considered an area of exclusive action, it is education that motivates us, in its many forms and modalities, and very particularly Christian education.

CHAPTER V  
RECENT TIMES

**T**he 1986 General Chapter, following the ecclesiastical directives of the time<sup>44</sup>, initiated a revision of the Rule that, in the end was published with a completely new wording. The previous normative text of the Institute, approved in 1967, had only been in force experimentally for nineteen years.

With regard to the consecration formula, the 1986 Rule introduced only a double variation, however of great importance. It changed the name of the two specific vows of the Brothers, somehow to return to the earliest tradition of the Institute. In this way, the vow of “*service of the poor through education*” was renamed “*association for the service of the poor through education*”, which recovered wording very close to the original, that vow that had always constituted the essential core of the first formulas of consecration. But that was not all, because the still recent fifth vow of “*fidelity to the Institute*” returned to its oldest term, recovering the name “*stability in the Institute*”, which all the Brothers, whether in temporary or perpetual vows, should profess. On the other hand, alongside the Bull of Approbation, the previous expression “*the Rule and the Constitutions*” was replaced by that of “*Rule*”, which was the new title given to the fundamental prescriptive book of the Brothers’ life since 1986<sup>45</sup>.

The General Chapter of 2007 gathered in the spring<sup>46</sup> and introduced significant new developments in the Lasallian formula of consecration, although, as occurred whenever there were changes, it retained the basic structure of four paragraphs inherited from the Institute’s earliest times.

The first of the changes took its form from a proposal of the former Superior General, Brother John Johnston, who stated before the chapter assembly that, in his opinion, our consecration formula is “splendid and theologically profound”<sup>47</sup>. What Brother John suggested, and what was then almost

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<sup>44</sup> In 1983, the new Code of Canon Law, in force today, had been published, and the Church called to correct the Rules adapted *ad experimentum* after the Council, in order to adapt them to the new canonical prescriptions. This ended the prolonged period of experiments in the institutions of religious life that followed Vatican II.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Rome, 1987, article 25, pp. 34-35 [English edition].

<sup>46</sup> The last General Chapter of the Institute took place in Rome during the Spring of 2014; the next one is scheduled for 2021.

<sup>47</sup> *Institute Bulletin*, N° 251, p. 46.

unanimously accepted by the capitulants, was to add to the beginning of the second paragraph those four words [three words in the English version] that had been lost over the course of time. So, what until then had read, “I, [name of the Brother], promise to unite myself and to remain in society” would now be written “For this purpose, I, [name of the Brother], promise and vow to unite myself, and to remain in society”. The only objective for the change was to get closer to the earliest formulation, now that from the canonical point of view there were no particular problems in doing so; thus, the Institute echoed the most recent research on Lasallian spirituality that advised it. Once that change was approved, the second paragraph of the formula was much closer to that of 1694 that meant that the starting point for the Society of the Christian Schools at that time was also the same for the Lasallian Institute.

However, the 2007 capitulants did not stop there. They introduced another very simple but fundamental change. Namely, to modify the order in which the vows appeared in the profession formula, so that the first one to be professed was the fourth vow, of association for the educational service of the poor, followed by the others with stability at the end.

With all of these modifications, the consecration formula that is actually used in the Institute is the following:

*Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I shall be able and as you will require of me.*

*For this purpose, I ... promise and vow to unite myself, and to remain in society, with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who are associated to conduct together and by association, schools for the service of the poor, to go wherever*

*I may be sent and to do whatever I shall be assigned, either by the Body of the Society, or by its Superiors.*

*Wherefore, I promise and vow association for the service of the poor through education, stability in the Institute, obedience, chastity and poverty, in accordance with the Bull of Approbation and the Rule of the Institute.*

*I promise to keep these vows faithfully [for a period of...years] all my life.*

*In testimony thereof, I have signed. Done at....on...in the year of Our Lord...*

*Signature*<sup>48</sup>

The decision of the last General Chapter in relation to the consecration formula is, as has been said, true to our earliest and original tradition, and recovers something that we lost over the highs and lows of history. At the same time, links with concerns of most current theology of religious life attach much more importance to consecration itself than to the vows that are its concrete manifestation<sup>49</sup>.

Not only that, the modifications introduced were also in tune with another important intuition of post-conciliar theology of religious life. This was because the so-called “fourth vow”, that is, for us that of “*association for the service of the poor through education*”, had acquired transcendental importance in the most recent reflection on religious of apostolic life. Current theologians are convinced that this fourth vow is the clearest manifestation of the foundational charism of an apostolic religious consecration. It gathers, on the one hand, the most specific and particular, the essential of what distinguishes that religious institute from others, and on the other hand, the one that orients it on the mission that both God and the Church have entrusted to it. The fourth vow thus became the fundamental core of the entire life of an apostolic institute, the source from which its concrete life,

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<sup>48</sup> This formula was officially approved by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on January 9, 2008, when the fact was officially reported.

<sup>49</sup> “For a long time the three vows have constituted the nucleus and basis of the classical theology of religious life. However, a certain silence has fallen on them in the most recent theology on the religious life. In the best case, the reference to the vows is often accompanied by strongly critical observations and not a few questions [...] the vows are not the essential core of the religious life. The essence of all Christian life is love”. FELICISIMO MARTINEZ, *Situación actual y desafíos de la vida religiosa [Current situation and challenges of religious life]*, Instituto Teológico de Vida Religiosa, Gasteiz-Vitoria, 2004, pp. 65-73. Without being as clear as this well-known Dominican specialist is, other current theologians express themselves in a similar way. It would not be difficult, on the other hand, to trace in our post-conciliar institutional documents – both *Rule* and *Declaration* – the reflection of these ideas, but this is not the place.

its concerns, its projects, the criteria for an evaluation of its fidelity, the evaluation of new goals and projects, the dynamism of its renewal, the adaptation of its charism to new times, etc.<sup>50</sup>

The fourth vow marks and gives a specific orientation to the entire life of an apostolic religious: prayer, community life, mission, governance, spirituality, formation. The fourth vow, very specifically, embellishes in a particular way the rest of the vows, which must be lived conscientiously, according to this fourth vow. Because, for example, the chastity of a Benedictine cannot be the same as that of a De La Salle Brother; or the poverty of a Franciscan that of a Jesuit; or the obedience of the latter that of a Comboni missionary or Sister committed to health care. Thus, for all apostolic institutions the fourth vow is very valuable, and must therefore be analyzed and treated with a lot of responsibility, handled with care.

The fact that, after the last General Chapter, our fourth vow has become the one that the Brother pronounces first when he reads his formula of consecration must be interpreted, from the line of thinking just commented, as having been placed there to point out that it has a direct relationship with our founding charism, which is the one that most characterizes us. It is the one that tells us about our specific mission and the one that sets the tone for the Brother's entire life: prayer, fraternity, conversion, involvement with school and children, other vows, the structure and governance of the Institute, formation, etc.

From what I have said – and surely exaggerating the literal nature of the formula –, someone could say that, for a De La Salle Brother, the vows have now gone from five to six. Why? Because the first one, which appears in the second paragraph, is a vow of association and union with the Brothers, while the five already known are in the third paragraph: a vow of association for the educational service of the poor, as well as the former fourth vow, to which the other four acquaintances were then added, and whose formulation has not changed. To me, a similar reasoning would be too forced, because the first two vows, those that refer to association, are very similar, almost identical. Therefore, would it not be, perhaps, more correct to speak of five

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<sup>50</sup> See in this regard, for example, IGLESIAS I., "Fourth Vow", in APARICIO, A. – CANALS, J.M. (editors), *Diccionario Teológico de la Vida Consagrada [Theological Dictionary of Consecrated Life]*, Claretian Publications, Madrid, 1989, along with all the specialized biography that the author provides.

vows, although the one of association is repeated twice, with two different formulations? It could be, but we would continue without reaching the heart of the change introduced by the General Chapter of 2007.

In my opinion attending to what we have explained so far, and also attending to the literary scheme of the proposed formula, that is, to its division into paragraphs, and their contents, the most appropriate thing would be to speak of the single fundamental vow, expressed in the second paragraph of the formula as an explanation of what is stated in the first. In other words, the only essential and indispensable vow for the De La Salle Brother would be the vow of association and union with other Lasallians ... who have gathered to conduct together and by association schools for the service of the poor ... going anywhere they may be sent and to perform there the work entrusted to them.

So, as an even more concrete expression of this original vow, already in the third paragraph, are the five known vows, beginning to list them from association, to highlight its influence and the light it projects on the other commitments. Association is primary not because it is more important than the other five, but because if we do not consider it, we would run the risk of misinterpreting the other vows and, consequently, of falsifying the entire Lasallian consecration.

In any case, and to prevent the secondary from replacing the primary, I believe that the most beautiful summary of the consecration formula's content and also the most faithful to the history of our foundation period, is the one which introduces the three key figures in the Brother's life: God, other Lasallians and the children. Our consecration is one made TO God who calls us, WITH our Brothers who have heard the same call and try to respond with the same generosity as ourselves, and FOR the children and young people in need, who are the horizon that God puts in front of us. It is the fundamental reason for launching a process as complex as the one that leads a person to associate with other Lasallians to commit themselves to the mission of the Institute of the Christian Schools<sup>51</sup>.

These three prepositions, TO, WITH and FOR are fundamental in our consecration and in our life, and if any one of them fails, everything falls

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<sup>51</sup> Explained in detail by Brother ANTONIO BOTANA in *Institute Bulletin* No 250, p. 7ff.

apart. Our current Rule clearly states “Each Brother takes upon himself the responsibility for integrating within his own person these constitutive dimensions of his vocation: consecration to God as a lay religious [preposition TO], the apostolic ministry of education, especially among the poor [preposition FOR], and community life [preposition WITH]”<sup>52</sup>. A perfectly integrated life, authentically Lasallian, in which God, the other Brothers and children and young people, especially the neediest, participate.

## For a deeper understanding and reflection

### *Historical context*

1. Carefully review what these recent years have supposed in the life of Lasallians in your own experience. New details are being discovered about them in the field of mission, in that of the life and spirituality shared by Brothers and lay Lasallians, in collaboration with our ecclesial institutions.
2. We encourage you to list the characteristics that a person’s life must have to qualify as a fully-fledged good Lasallian.

### *For a deeper understanding of the text*

1. Brother John Johnston, Superior General of the Institute between 1986 and 2000, was of the opinion that the form of consecration that comes to us from the early days of foundation were “splendid and theologically profound”. Do you agree with that opinion? What are the aspects that you like most in it, that you think are most significant, that you find more interesting?
2. The last modification of the formula of consecration of the Brothers intends to highlight the importance of the so-called “fourth vow” of apostolic institutes that, in the case of De La Salle, is that of “association for the service of the poor through education”. Try to find in the previous explanations the reasons why this fourth vow is as important for other institutes such as that of De La Salle. Do you think that the

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<sup>52</sup> *The Rule*, Rome, 2015, p.21, Article 12.



concrete formulation currently presented by the fourth vow responds appropriately to what should be expected from it? On the other hand, in your opinion, would it be better to modify it, cut the formulation, complete it, specify it...? Try to justify your answer.

3. According to the previous explanations, the Lasallian consecration or, if you prefer, the Lasallian commitment, is marked by three indispensable prepositions: TO, FOR, WITH. What do these prepositions mean in your own words? Where do they lead? Do you think it is a good synthesis? Would you add or remove any aspect?

### *Keys to Lasallian identity*

1. “Association for the service of the poor through education” summarizes the fundamental concerns of the Lasallian commitment. This expression, which coincides with that of the fundamental vow, means that, responding to God’s invitation that sends them to his vineyard, Lasallians associate with each other to respond effectively to the educational and catechetical needs of children and young people in need.

# CHAPTER VI

## SOME CLARIFICATIONS

**I**n order to start recapping our reflections, we will remember the fundamental concerns that moved us to initiate them. It was about analyzing the different profession formulas of the De La Salle Brothers throughout their history, but not just in any way, rather based on a well-defined criterion. Because, as a basic hypothesis, we were convinced that “all the essentials of the Lasallian consecration, what they are and should be for the followers of De La Salle, are contained in them: God, others (that is, the community), the school, the poor, the radical nature of the involvement”<sup>53</sup>. From our work we therefore wanted to shine light to understand better our identity as followers of De La Salle, and thus be able to decide more clearly, what we have to be and to do, why we have to do it and how we should do it.

It is evident that the De La Salle Brothers will find in these profession texts very particular connections because the successive formulas of vows have been composed thinking exclusively of the Brothers. However, ever recognizing this particular role of the religious in the form of Lasallian consecration, we did not intend to refer only to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, but to all Lasallians, even if they have not signed any profession, promise or commitment. Because we speak about fundamental Lasallian identity, that is to say, of the characteristic features that make a person a Lasallian and not anyone else, of the fundamental aspects that distinguish Lasallians from those who are not.

When vows are mentioned, it seems we automatically frighten away those who do not profess them. In our opinion, this attitude would be a mistake, and the form itself is responsible for giving more than enough arguments to justify such a claim. Because long before the vows appeared, a splendid vision of evangelizing work in Christian schools is offered, in a deep sense and in the concrete way in which they should be carried out; this information will constitute something like the essential pillars of the fundamental Lasallian identity. We refer, above all, as is logical, to the most apostolic and mission-related aspects, but not only to them. The analysis of the different forms of consecration can also draw valuable implications for the Lasallian community, for example, that it has to be a community for mission, or about the spirit of faith and the relationship of Lasallians with the Trinitarian God who calls them, sends them and saves them.

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<sup>53</sup> P. 2 of the current MEL Bulletin.

In addition, as we have seen, these fundamental foundations have remained relatively intact throughout the centuries. Because what has been most modified in the profession formulas has been, precisely, the particular way in which these indispensable pillars of Lasallian identity were expressed, for example, by the successive religious vows of those Lasallian associates of the first hour who are the Brothers. However, the inalienable milestones of Lasallian identity, which, among other things, serve to justify the greater or lesser success of the different options adopted, have preserved in the formulas of consecration an admirable constancy in the midst of so many convulsions that ensued inside and outside of the Institute.

From this careful study of the evolution of Lasallian formulas of profession, one would have to have learned abundant information and an absolute guarantee about our deepest and most original Lasallian identity. This, without a doubt, is vital for all Lasallians, whether they are religious or not. Since not all Lasallians must necessarily be Brothers, it is imperative that all Lasallians possess clear fundamental characteristics that characterize them as such.

Let us see, then, what some of these pillars of the fundamental Lasallian identity could be and how they appear in the different consecration formulas. Let us look for them in the unchanging parts of the formula.

Taking advantage of the literary framework of three paragraphs - plus a fourth, to which we have not given attention in this text - the Lasallian formula of consecration has presented this format from the earliest times. Synthesizing boldly the many changes over more than three centuries, we could conclude that while the third paragraph of the formula has been subject to constant modifications, the second has been touched less, although it varied in the early stages. The first paragraph has remained practically unchanged since 1694, or even since 1691, if we accept the interpretive hypothesis based on the Lasallian spirit of faith that we explained at the time as accepted<sup>54</sup>.

We also brought to light, at the beginning of our analysis<sup>55</sup>, the existence of a certain important order of priority for the three paragraphs of the

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. pp. 16-18 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. pp. 8-9 of the current MEL Bulletin.

formulas. The second explicates what the first exposes, and the third does what deals with the previous one, that is, with the second paragraph: and, consequently, extending the logic of reasoning with the first one.

By linking both, it is not difficult to accept that Lasallians have always understood their mission in the terms issued by the first paragraph of the consecration form, that is, that they have always wanted to work to procure the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with absolute generosity and trying to be faithful to his divine will.

If we turn to that formidable Lasallian connector between mysticism and history, which is the spirit of faith, described earlier with that beautiful metaphor when we explained the profession formula of 1694<sup>56</sup>, we could even specify what the “glory of God” consists in for Lasallians. Because the heroic vow, instead of being a permanent expression in all of the Lasallian formulas since 1694, proposed, “*To procure the glory of God*” as the permanent expression in all the Lasallian formulas of profession from 1694 onward. “*To procure by all our power and all our efforts the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools*”, was a phrase followed by some indications that could be considered as archaic versions of “*to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me*” of the 1694 and successive formulas<sup>57</sup>.

In any case, there is a fundamental point on which there should be no doubt: Lasallians have a transcendent view of their existence and their mission. Although, surely its practical activity displays a strong dimension of humanitarian and social service, the Lasallian institution can never be considered as just an educational multinational<sup>58</sup>. The fundamental reasons for its existence and the primary objectives of its performance must always be religious, transcendent. Because what Lasallians claim is, in short, nothing other than “*to procure the glory of God*”, to extend his Kingdom, even though, by diverse circumstances, this fundamental Lasallian element must at times remain somewhat veiled.

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. pp. 17-18 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. pp. 7-8 of the current MEL Bulletin, comparing them with pp. 15-16 of the same document.

<sup>58</sup> How many times have I heard my good friend Brother Pedro Arrambide make this comment, “May God have his glory!” Brother knew a lot about humanitarian organizations.

This fundamental conviction should never be held or developed further with inflexibility, of course, to the point of reaching overly hasty conclusions, based on unstable foundations. There must always be, in its simplicity, nothing superficial in its meaning<sup>59</sup>.

It goes without saying that such an essentially religious basis of the Lasallian institution has very important practical consequences, not only in relation to the goals and objectives that Lasallians pursue, but also to the criteria and methods with which they should develop, and the style of behavior that they should manifest. However, this is not the right place to explain all of this.

Let us now focus on the second paragraph. From the first moment there have been in it elements that were gradually disappearing, while others remained unchanged in the midst of the transformations, and some alternated periods of presence with periods of absence. Among those that have disappeared, the clearest are those features of a radical nature – such as not leaving the institution even if only three professed remained in it, or living, if necessary, on bread, or alms, very firm in 1691, somewhat reduced in 1694 and already nonexistent after the 1726 formula<sup>60</sup>. Of the textual elements that come out of and enter the text of the formula, the most obvious is “*I promise and vow*” that began this way, then became just “*I promise*” to return in recent times to be what it was: promise and vow<sup>61</sup>.

But if the doubt between only promising, or promising and vowing, could pose difficulties at some point, the object of that commitment was always as clear as possible for Lasallians. They always vowed or promised “*to unite myself and to live in society*” or “*to keep together and by association the schools*”, as appears in two consecutive moments of the second paragraph from 1694 onwards, until today<sup>62</sup>. Moreover, if we turn to the heroic vow, we will find

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<sup>59</sup> The General Chapter of 2000 promoted the formation – and admitted, therefore, that possibility – of reflection groups to “share the Lasallian charism with educators and young people of other religions”, *Circular 447*, dated October 1, 2000, proposal 2, pp.7-8. This could mean that we would not have to focus exclusively on the Catholic world, nor even on the wider framework of Christianity in general. Experience seems to confirm that, in effect, from non-Christian religious sensitivities the Lasallian mission can be lived with undoubted authenticity.

<sup>60</sup> Compare in this MEL Bulletin, pp. 7-8 with pp. 15-16, and then with pp. 25-26.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. pp. 32 and 38 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. pp. 15-16; 25-26; 38-39 of the current MEL Bulletin.

an equivalent expression in the second paragraph: “*make the vow of association and union to bring about and maintain the said establishment*”<sup>63</sup>. It is, therefore, indisputable that Lasallians should encourage, direct, promote, maintain ... their Christian schools “*together and by association*”, that is, “united and associated with each other.”

In the opinion of Brother Michel Sauvage – as has been explained<sup>64</sup> – this would mean that Lasallians carry out their common mission, “together”, “united”, grouped in small communities composed of people excited about the task of announcing the Gospel to poor children and young people who surround them. Thinking precisely about their target audience, these Lasallian communities try to imagine and implement effective solutions to educational and pastoral problems that they detect without difficulty, because they are especially sensitive to those issues. These solutions emerge within the general spirit that encourages all Lasallians, but which, at the same time, are perfectly adapted to local circumstances, with their specific characteristics and conditions. In addition, in their performances these Lasallians manifest a deep sense of belonging to a much wider and apostolically ambitious institution, namely the Institute.

Because, in addition to joining local communities, Lasallians also work “in association”, that is, forming much wider interconnected networks, which allow the specific Lasallian actions of the different places to be added in a coordinated manner to the general action of the rest of the Lasallians, so that the common Lasallian mission is gradually advancing everywhere. This great final network, which would be Lasallian association, would need the generous and concrete contribution of local Lasallian communities, but, at the same time, would enrich them with goals, ideas, criteria, resources of different types, enthusiasm. In that exchange so well known as “together and by association”, therefore, all Lasallians give and all receive.

It is in this great apostolic network that constitutes the Lasallian association, where the affirmation of the second paragraph, which already appears in the 1694 profession formula, becomes meaningful and will be maintained – giving somewhat different meanings but very similar content – to this day, to go “*wherever I may be sent and to do whatever I shall be assigned, either by*

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. p. 8 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. pp. 19-21 of the current MEL Bulletin.

*the Body of the Society, or by its Superiors*<sup>65</sup>. In addition, if one has been caught up by the Lasallian mission and enthusiasm, one must be willing to move to act where the Lasallian institution is in need. This will be discerned more specifically by those who at each moment are at the head of the network, and even, if necessary, the “Body” of the Institute, which should be seen in that case as giving a voice, even though certain procedures for giving voice are not lacking<sup>66</sup>.

The third paragraph of our consecration texts is the one that has changed the most, and will more than likely continue to do so in the near future. These frequent modifications would be, in some way, a consequence of the characteristics of said third paragraph, intended to express in more detail what the two preceding paragraphs state more generally. Perhaps for the same reason, since 1694 – in the 1691 formula the vow was explained in the second paragraph – this sought after practical concern has always meant pronouncing a series of particular vows, which have been changing in formulation and order throughout time. In this sense, this third paragraph may interest the Brothers much more, as religious who make canonical profession of certain vows, than Lasallians in general, to whom the mere mention of the word “vow” could easily dissuade them from continuing their reflection.

Despite this, even understanding and accepting this possible reaction of Lasallians who are not religious, it is possible to underline a detail of the evolution of the third paragraph that may interest everybody. To give it a name, we refer to a movement of “return” to the origins that has recently been introduced into this paragraph. Since association occupied, without a doubt, the place of honor among the vows and promises pronounced by Lasallians<sup>67</sup>,

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. p. 26 and pp. 38-39 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>66</sup> At this precise moment in the history of De La Salle’s followers, talking about the Institute can still make complete sense; that is why we have introduced it without bias in our reflection. It is evident that, as the different practical possibilities of Lasallian association are clarified and developed – some of which today, probably, we cannot even begin to imagine – we will have to think about the great network of the Lasallian association in a very different way, and consider models, structures and expressions that are fully valid for the new Lasallian reality. Then, within that great Lasallian network, we would have to look for the place that best matches what we know today as the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, or other institutions of religious life, such as the different congregations of Lasallian Sisters.

<sup>67</sup> This statement would be valid for both the heroic vow and the 1694 formula. Refer to p. 8 of the current MEL Bulletin, the second paragraph of the heroic vow, and p. 10 of the same document, the second and third paragraphs of the 1694 text.



for two and a half centuries beginning in 1726, it would suffer a noticeable process of loss of presence, and marginalization, in Lasallian vow formulas<sup>68</sup>. These were the times when the Brothers wanted to highlight, above all, the character of official entry into religious life. This meant their consecration, their “religious profession”. Therefore, they gave priority to the so-called “vows of religion”. However, with the invitation of the Second Vatican Council to return to the Gospel and to the original sources of the religious institutes, it impelled a movement that we could call a “backward march”. The surprising conclusions about the Founder and the first Brothers, to which the great specialists in Lasallian history and spirituality were arriving, were most encouraging in the search for a better understanding of how Lasallian life and mission were conceived in the beginning moments of the foundation.

The first realization of this reaction back to the origins would come in 1967, with the reaffirmation of the validity of the specific vows of the Institute and the change in the name of the fourth vow of the Brothers: instead of the vow “*to teach gratuitously*”, the “*schools for the service of the poor through education*” would be adopted<sup>69</sup>. With this decision, a battle was won against the literal nature of immutable statutes, and even against a somewhat disjointed casuistry that the vow had occasioned, at different times in the history of the Institute, in order to enter the fields of fidelity to the spirit from which it was born. If in the new socio-economic conditions in which Lasallian works moved, it was not always possible to attend to the students without charging them anything, however the basic attitude that should accompany the actions of Lasallians had not changed at all: Lasallians were to serve the poor. This was paramount for them.

It was not a novelty: the first Rule of the Brothers already proclaimed it without ambiguity in its initial lines: “The purpose of this Institute is to provide a Christian education to children; and for this purpose to conduct schools [...] It was to procure this advantage for the children of the artisans and the poor, that the Christian Schools were established”<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> There are those who even talk about the disappearance of association, a statement that, as we have indicated, we absolutely do not share; cf. pp. 27-28 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. pp. 34-35 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, RC [Common Rules] 1,3,5, p. 13. At least since 1705, cf. *CL* 25, pp. 16-17.

A second realization, undoubtedly more important, takes place two decades later in the Rule of 1986, with a new name change for that same fourth vow of the Brothers, which from that date would be called “*association for the service of the poor through education*”<sup>71</sup>. With this modification, something very valuable for the mission and life of Lasallians was recovered, which had been lost in the twists and turns of history since 1726. The new designation of the fourth vow directly connected Lasallians with their secular tradition. It channeled them with precision to better fulfill the mission entrusted to their great apostolic network and to carry it out with the same apostolic dedication of the first Lasallians.

The final point of this great “operation return” to the beginnings was put in place in 2007 by the Brothers’ General Chapter that decided to change the order of the vows, putting in first place the previously considered fourth vow<sup>72</sup>. With this, “*association for the service of the poor through education*” was once again at the forefront of Lasallian concerns as a beacon that illuminated all their life and apostolic action with its special light. In effect, from this prominent lighthouse, the rest of the aspects of Lasallian life had to be interpreted and implemented because everything in it, from the beginning, had been oriented to facilitate association for the educational service of the poor.

## For a deeper understanding and reflection

1. In the text you have just read, the following is stated: “All the essentials of Lasallian consecration, what De La Salle’s followers are and should be, are contained in the consecration formulas”. Now that you know them better, do you agree with that statement? Give a reason for your answer.
2. I have added another statement from the text: “Despite offering a great humanitarian and social service, the Lasallian institution can never simply be considered an educational multinational”. What do you think? Do you agree with the content of the statement? Explain your position.

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. p. 37 of the current MEL Bulletin.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. pp. 38-41 of the current MEL Bulletin.

3. How do you justify this movement of return to the beginnings – “operation return” is the term used in the text above – that is observed in the changes produced in the most recent versions of the profession formulas? In the broad explanation given above, you can find some clues.
4. Discuss some indications about the specific mission of Lasallians that can be discovered in the consecration formulas.
5. Highlight some criteria about the Lasallian community that can be understood from the consecration formula.
6. According to the profession formulas, what is the role that God plays in the life of Lasallians? How should it manifest itself in a palpable way?

### *Keys to Lasallian identity*

1. The Lasallian charismatic family is an association formed by people of all backgrounds and conditions: fathers, mothers, male and female religious, priests, youth, professors, teachers, professionals, Lasallian alumni, etc. The fundamental reason that pushes these people to associate and form this Lasallian family is their interest in the life and work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, in whom, they are convinced, the love of God for the poor and the overwhelming strength of his Spirit to transform history are manifested in a palpable way. The Lasallian family updates the charismatic action of De La Salle and his first followers today.
2. Essential characteristics of every member of the Lasallian family will be: the assiduous cultivation of a serious and deep inner life, which keeps them united to the God who elects and sends them; frequent contact with the life and work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle; active belonging to a community, in which all Lasallians share life, spirituality and mission; and the generous commitment in a mission of love that brings the Kingdom of God to those in need.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION: LIKE EXCITED ANTS AND SPIDERS

**T**he early Brothers' Rule opened with an enormously significant phrase: "The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a Society in which profession is made of keeping gratuitous schools"<sup>73</sup>. After careful reading of the different formulas of consecration that the De La Salle Brothers have used throughout their history it is deservedly right to recognize the success of that phrase as a descriptive synthesis of what Lasallians did in those early times. Although, to be more faithful to the exact content of this profession throughout the centuries, it would be helpful to complete that definition with several important details.

First, it would be interesting to point out that the source from which all these concerns in favor of poor children and young people are derived is none other than the desire "to procure the glory of God". That is to say, that Lasallians consider their mission as a way to make the Kingdom of God grow in the world, especially among the poorest children and young people. Because, in words the Founder himself directed, among others, to all Lasallians, God Himself calls "for you have been destined to cultivate these young plants by announcing to them the truths of the Gospel and to procure for them the means of salvation appropriate to their development"<sup>74</sup>. They, therefore, feel, as the psalmist, possessed by zeal for the house of God<sup>75</sup>, who calls and sends them to be "ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ"<sup>76</sup>. They respond with unconditional surrender, placing themselves at the service of the Kingdom in a generous and enthusiastic way.

Secondly, since school gratuity was mentioned in the primitive Rule, it would be essential to understand this important concept of the first Lasallians, which gave much more relevance to the attitude with which they should develop their mission, rather than to the strictly economic and accounting aspects of it. For them, gratuity meant not charging students anything, of course, but, above all, Lasallian gratuity was a compelling invitation to absolute generosity, to total surrender, to uncontrollable enthusiasm to spreading the Gospel among the poor. For Lasallians the most important thing has always been the person in front of them, the child

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, RC [Common Rules] 1,1, p. 13.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, MR [Meditations for the time of Retreat] 193,3,1, p. 580.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Psalm 69, quoted in the Gospel of John 2: 17.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Obras completas...*, Volume I, MR [Meditations for the time of Retreat] 195,2,1, p. 583.

who receives their instructions, the young person who approaches their schools...and not the wealth or poverty of their families, or the often-overwhelming financial situations of the community or the work. As the Founder would say<sup>77</sup>, “total disinterestedness” by the Lasallian, a moving beyond self in the sense of detachment in relationship to one’s particular world, with its legitimate interests, concerns and attractions. This in order to give oneself completely to the person in need, which is the key to what the Lasallian represents, without a doubt, the only truth that really counts.

Thirdly, characteristic of the Lasallian mission is its concrete way of carrying out “together and by association” with Lasallians acting “united and associated”. The communion between Lasallians is, therefore, an inescapable component of their particular way of acting. In its own way, the General Chapter of 2007 remembered it, echoing the recommendations of several recent documents of the Church’s magisterium: “Communion is missionary and the mission is for communion [...] The Brothers’ communion is source and fruit of the mission they carry out”<sup>78</sup>. A communion that gives rise to local apostolic communities, intertwined from within in a much wider coordinated organization.

Taking advantage of an image of Pablo Richard, Lasallians must adopt “the strategy of the ants and the spiders. The strength of the ants is in their number and in their coordinated action. The spider weaves nets. Large vertical power structures are not built today, but rather networks where all are ‘entangled’, interconnected and interdependent”<sup>79</sup>.

This is how Lasallians would have to work if we claim to be faithful to our most authentic and dynamic tradition: like ants and spiders excited to bring the Kingdom of God to schools for needy people.

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<sup>77</sup> Your profession commits you to teach children the science of salvation, and you are bound to do this with total disinterestedness”; *Obras completas...*, Volume I, MF [Meditations for the Principal Feasts of the Year] 108 2,2, p. 445.

<sup>78</sup> *Circular 455*, September 15, 2007, pp. 23-25, with two quotes from *Christifideles Laici* 32, of which one also appears in *Vita Consecrata* 46.

<sup>79</sup> RICHARD PABLO, “*La fuerza del Espíritu. Religión y Teología en América Latina*” [The Power of the Spirit. Religion and Theology in Latin America], in *Nueva Sociedad*, 136 (March-April 1995), pp. 128-141; quoted by VARIOUS, *Religiosos Hermanos hoy. Don para la Iglesia y la sociedad, [Religious Brothers today. Gift for the Church and society]*, Claretian Publications, Madrid, 2011, pp. 63-64.

## For a deeper understanding and reflection

1. According to the conclusion of the study you just read, how should Lasallians understand the first fundamental intention expressed in the first paragraph of the profession formulas “to procure the glory of God as far as I am able and as you will require of me”?
2. At the conclusion of this study, an explanation of Lasallian gratuity is proposed that goes far beyond simple economic restrictions. Do you agree with this vision of things? Give reasons for your answer.
3. How would you relate “together and by association”, that has characterized the Lasallian mission since the early days of the foundation, with the different strategies of the ants and the spiders that has been proposed to us, as a metaphor, in the last lines of this study?

### *Keys to Lasallian identity*

1. Some fundamental aspects that have always characterized the Lasallian mission are most noticeable in the Lasallian profession formula, regardless of the different specific versions that have been adopted throughout the centuries. Among them, three stand out:
  1. The primary foundation of Lasallian commitments expressed in the intention “to seek the glory of God” that presides over the vow formulas.
  2. The Christian and gratuitous character of the educational projects promoted by Lasallians.
  3. The concrete way to carry out the mission: through ministerial communities engaged in a local work that closely interrelates with other Lasallian communities active elsewhere, forming a large network united by a great sense of belonging to a common work, with identical roots. This distinguishes particular local approaches from other similar projects that have the same objective of bringing the Kingdom of God to the world of education, particularly among children and youth in need. In short, acting “together and by association.”





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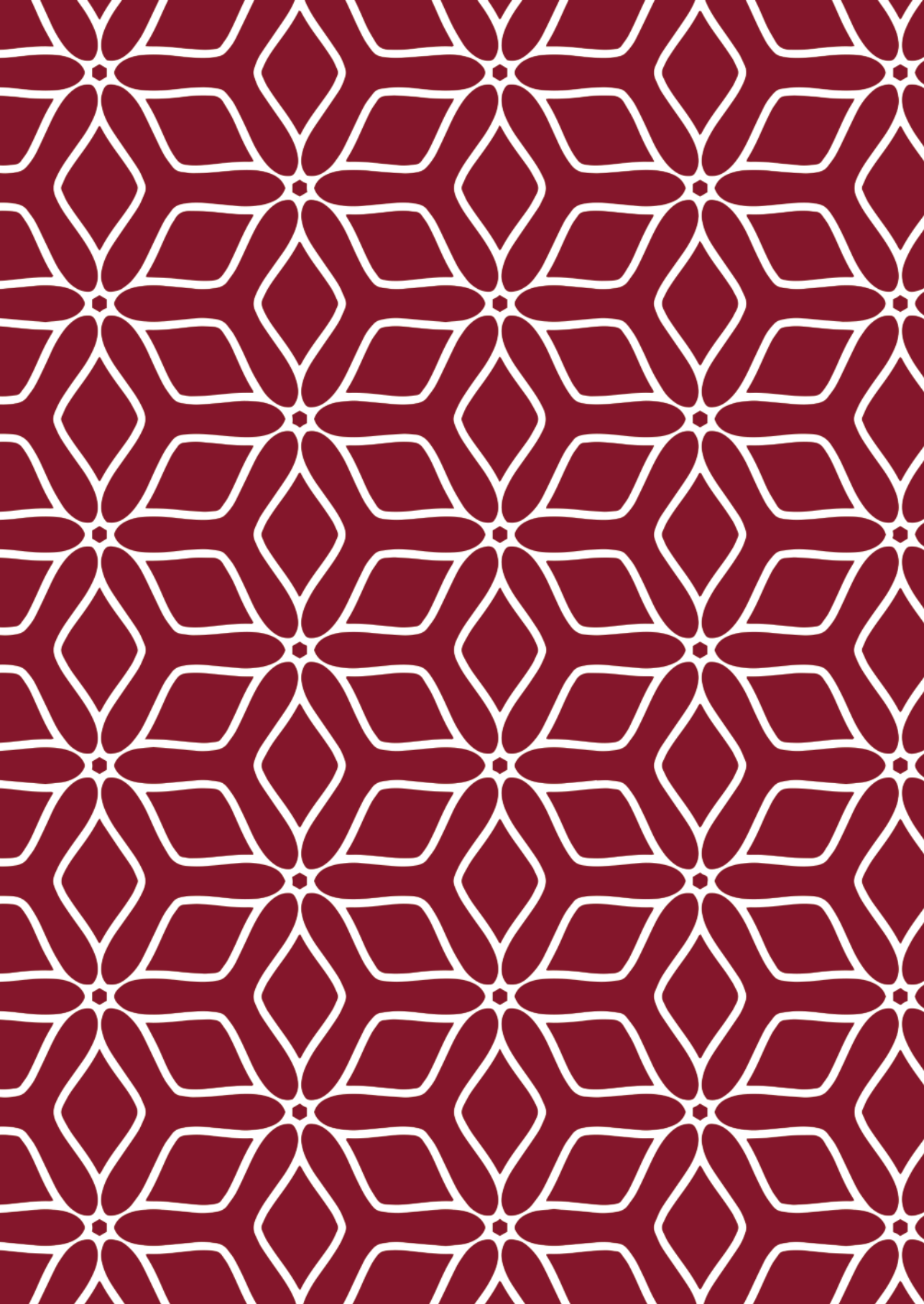
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# Index

Introduction	4
1. The formula of the “heroic vow”	7
2. The profession formula of 1694	18
3. The profession formula of 1726	32
4. A leap of two and a half centuries	41
5. Recent times	48
6. Some clarifications	56
7. Conclusion: like excited ants and spiders	66
For Reference	71
The author	73





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