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LETTER TO THE LASALLIAN FAMILY (8)

5. DIFFERENT BUT ASSOCIATED

«Faced with the urgent needs of his day, Saint John Baptiste de La Salle began by gathering around him a group of men with whom he shared the process of building up a community and of mutual education». (Letter, p. 31)

1. COMMUNION AND PARTICIPATION

The Lasallian Family is more or less worldwide, and so it is hardly astonishing to discover that its members speak a multiplicity of languages, belong to a variety of countries and cultures, and come from vastly differing socio-political, economic and educational backgrounds. And so, as a consequence, the variety of Lasallian groups is both very wide and rich.

In Chapter 5, the Letter tries to divide up the present-day members of this large Lasallian Family according to 8 different groups or categories. Here are the categories:

1. The **Brothers** of the Christian Schools.
2. **Teachers, catechists**, in general, anyone who works in a Lasallian school.
3. **Women religious** who live their consecrated life according to the spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle.
4. Men and women who wish to define their attachment to the Founder by a more **special commitment**. For the moment, those included in this category are:
 - The Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate;
 - Signum Fidei (cf. articles 05-D-07 and 05-D-08);
 - The Lasallian Third Order.
5. **Young Lasallians**.
6. **Parents of pupils**.
7. **Former pupils**.
8. **Benefactors and Affiliated** members of the Institute, **parents** of Brothers, **friends** of our schools and **sympathisers**.

All these groups have one essential mission:

- TO GROW as members of their group.
- TO DRAW CLOSER to other groups.

The Letter reminds the Brothers, however, that since they are the "principal heirs", they must "by *vocation, choice and consecration*" play an important role in the consolidation of the Lasallian Family.

The challenges they are called upon to meet could be stated as follows:

1. To deepen understanding of the Lasallian message, adapt it to the present day, and spread it abroad.
2. To encourage the vigorous growth of the Lasallian family and its sense of unity;
3. To **make** their communities places open to lay people, welcoming, prayerful and apostolically minded.
4. To contribute their availability to the schools they teach in, and to suggest ways of ensuring a human, professional or Lasallian education. (cf. Letter, p. 26)

Whatever the Brothers or Lasallian groups do, all must be done within a context of

COMMUNION and PARTICIPATION

seeing that each group has its own identity, and its members have opted for different states of life, professions and fields in which to exercise an apostolate. This internal pluralism is a source of enrichment, but it remains nonetheless clear there is an urgent need to work towards the achievement of a common purpose. In fact:

«each component of the Lasallian Family has its own specific characteristics and must function in virtue of them. This is essential if everyone involved is to feel comfortable in what he is doing and if his work is to be effective. At the same time, we feel, however, that in all this rich diversity, *there must be a greater capacity and willingness to work together with others.*» (Letter, p. 31)

2. TOGETHER AND BY ASSOCIATION

On June 6th 1694, the Founder and twelve Brothers pronounced the first perpetual vows of obedience, stability, and association in the Society of the Christian Schools. In this way, in the presence of God and their Brothers, they expressed their commitment to achieve their aims and to undertake certain obligations. Together and with no turning back, they wanted to launch an apostolic, religious and educational undertaking. In this way, the Founder made the spirit of association a fundamental characteristic of his work.

Our own formula of vows expresses this same desire for association. In this connection, it seems useful to remind ourselves of the following:

- «1. The importance of **the desire to live in association** as the basis and dynamic force of our community life. We are not employees hired to carry out a certain activity, but rather we are persons who voluntarily associate themselves within a consecrated state in order to seek and determine **together and by association** the best means of being ministers of God among youth.
2. The need of a **specific programme** that will provide meaning and substance to this association. The first Brothers were energised by the desire to develop successfully a type of school that would serve the poor. Their plan for such expressed itself graphically as well in their "state" as in their "work".
3. Within this dynamic programme structure **obedience** takes a positive significance: it is the basis of the solidarity promised by each member to "the body of the society".» (Circ. 410, pp. 51-52)

At the present time, the various groups belonging to the Lasallian Family wish to show their **DESIRE FOR ASSOCIATION** both within their own group and with other groups, so as to be able to undertake the **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME** so admirably and clearly described in the 1987 Rule.

«We believe that the life of the Lasallian Family can be and should be characterised by this spirit of association, even though the forms this takes may differ. Ways to achieve this must be found for each of the groups we have spoken about, care being taken, however, to respect their specific characteristics and the kinds of links that bind their members together.» (Letter, p. 31)

However, in order that this **association** does not remain in the realm of pious wishes and good intentions, **five conditions** mentioned in the Letter have to be taken into account if action is to be **effective**:

1. Active involvement in Lasallian educational schemes or evangelisation;
2. A dovetailing of the efforts of individuals and groups;
3. Coordination in planning so as to be able to draw up common schemes and define practical measures that can be taken;
4. Common agreement, if only in general terms, about what they understand to be the position of man, the world, the Church, the essential values to promote, in God's overall plan;
5. The common pursuit of the task of exploring the works of John Baptist de La Salle, of translating his **thinking** and expressing it in modern language. (cf. Letter, pp. 32-33)

It is certainly not easy to put into practice in any significant way this "together and by association", which is a concrete way of living according to the ideal of **Lasallian brotherhood**, and which is an essential element of the spiritual message of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. The challenge that it offers deserves our response and the dedication to it of all our spiritual energies.

3. QUESTIONNAIRE TO HELP STUDY GROUPS

1. What action should be planned so that the group I belong to can grow to its full potential?
2. What action should be undertaken so as to bring all the local Lasallian groups closer together?
3. What are the obstacles that I encounter, either in my group or in the area in which I work, when real team-work is needed for getting something done?
4. What precise instances could I use to show my group that, among the people I work with, there is a desire to work "together and by association"?

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