

# **PROPOSALS MADE BY FATHER BARRÉ TO LA SALLE AND A NEW DEFINITION OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN MODERN TIMES: A LASALLIAN EXAMPLE TO THINK IT OVER IN THE FRENCH CONTEXT OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE XVII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study deals with a new reading of the Lasallian foundational experience reviewing the French spiritual context in the 17th century. Luther, Barré and Bérulle help us to revisit their contemporary concepts of religious life. Moreover, the introduction of religious vows in the Lasallian community could be read focusing on the necessity to be faithful to the original evangelical project. The dynamics experienced by the Institute near its legal and ecclesial recognition allow us to advance some hypothesis about the difficulties to understand a religious life open to the world in the theology of those days

**Key-words:** Religious vows, community, Barré, Luther, Bérulle, John Baptist de La Salle, religious life, Bull of approbation.

## ***Introduction***

One of the most decisive and at the same time intriguing questions in Lasallian origins is the canonical and civil recognition of the Society of the Christian Schools. We understand it immediately if we compare it with the community of Nicholas Roland. At Roland's death, the young John Baptist needed less than a year to obtain it<sup>1</sup>. Instead, almost forty years later, de La Salle will die without his own institution having attained it.

What happened that this was not accomplished before the public configuration of the Society of the Christian Schools? Was there something else, like the indispensable attention paid to everyday necessities, which caused postponing the recognition of the institution? Or is it that it did not matter to him? How was the Bull of Approbation arrived at? And what was the end

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<sup>1</sup>The process took place between 1682 and 1684. Nicolas Roland had established the Sisters of the Child Jesus, on the foundation contributed by the first Sisters of Father Barré's Community in Rouen. He was the canon lawyer of Rheims and friend of John Baptist's spiritual director. At his early death he entrusted to his friend and directed the responsibility of concerns that he had not been able to take care of. Archbishop Le Tellier accepted the new institution that submitted its vows to his authority.

result of all of this, between January and August of 1725 (date of the General Assembly to receive the document and configure themselves as a result)?

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Furthermore, from what we know, the process had begun with a more modest objective, so that one can say it led the petitioners much further and took much longer than they had expected. In effect, initially, what they were seeking was their ability to obtain the Saint Yon property as an institution or as a Society. From the start they did not ignore the integral recognition of the institution, but above all they did not wish to see themselves deprived of Saint Yon if Brother Thomas should not be around<sup>2</sup>, since from the death of the other signer, Brother Barthelemy, he was the only other name registered as proprietor. Likewise they also wanted to see themselves recognized in their institutional capacity when it might be necessary in some other similar operation elsewhere. For this reason we can say that in the first instance their necessity was more economic than canonical.

They were certainly conscious that sooner or later they would need more than the mere recognition of their legal qualification as property owners, but at the moment they aspired to nothing more, from what it seems<sup>3</sup>. For this reason we understand their happiness to finally find themselves with a much more satisfying outcome. Such happiness, however, does not answer other questions: why did that Society wait such a long time to obtain it and if having obtained it, did it mean something important?

In no way are we treating a purely speculative rhetorical question. With that which happened in those years, from the beginning of negotiations to the General Chapter of 1725, an institutional design was completed that was to have influenced thousands of Brothers over the course of more than three hundred years. Yet this is very important if we consider the theme looking backwards, at lived history. But if we treat of this looking forward, if we look at the present, in 2015, a story to be lived, the question becomes ever more decisive. What does that process mean regarding the Lasallian future that the founder did not attempt to complete and that was completed in a way that perhaps he had not foreseen? To what point does what has been established continue governing the possible future of an institution in a world that is absolutely different from that of its beginnings?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Brothers Barthelemy, Superior, and Thomas, Administrator, had signed for the acquisition of the property. Brother Superior died in 1719.

<sup>3</sup>In this matter, we follow Maurice Hermans [ed.: Brother Maurice-Auguste] in volumes 2 and 11 of the *Cahiers Lasalliens*: Brother Maurice-Auguste, *Les vœux des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes avant la bulle de Benoît XIII* [The Vows of the Brothers of the Christian Schools before the Bull of Benedict XIII], Cahiers Lasalliens, 2, Rome, 1960, 143 pages; and *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)* [The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in search of their canonical status: from the beginnings (1679) to the Bull of Benedict XIII], Cahiers Lasalliens, 11, Rome, 1962, 416 pages.

<sup>4</sup>In the anteroom of these reflections it is indispensable to stop in order to become conscious of the many changes, of the historical distance between that French 17th century of Lasallian beginnings and the present day. Without this attentive care, the alleged research would be less serious because we would compare perspective and necessarily fall into the anachronism of projecting the present on the past or the past on the present without any discernment. The times are so radically new that in our research we need to be attentive to the events as well as to their spirit, in a very scrupulous balance. Without such a balance it is impossible to establish the relationship between the past and the future.

## Knowledge and Interest

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Recalling the familiar theme of the connection between Knowledge and Interest, we meet something very significant in all of this. To begin with, all of the data in this reflection was known, even if nothing was tried of its possible connection and all of it remained autonomous, independent. Even if right now we give an account of it, it is because we hope to find something regarding the present or the future. It all depends on interest in the present, then the past and the future are researched. It is the discourse of knowledge and interest, that is to say, of what we know and of the reasons for knowing it.

And this brings us to another, more recent, matter: that of knowledge being part of the known, or the fact that the researcher in a certain sense belongs to the area he is researching. Always, at heart, it happens that if we ask about the past it is at least with an idea of the present. And we will agree that one does not have ‘ideas of the present’ without ‘ideas about hope,’ i.e., about the future. In sum: that to ask about what happened is at the same time to ask about what can happen. More exactly, on what can happen to us. For this reason in these pages we do not speak only of the past, even though it seems so. Our will is rather to understand the possible future.

Clearly from that point we will find ourselves before something else, not pertaining to our research. It is the possible transformation of knowledge’s call and the invitation to commitment. Because it is this last point and not knowledge of the present which carried our personages to be situated in the history we are about to recall.

### *1. The process of obtaining the Bull of Approbation and the possible novelty of the outcome*

According to the chronological scheme of Maurice Hermans, the process began in the spring of 1722 and finished in January of 1725<sup>5</sup>, although the operation was already finished by November of 1724, for want of the Pope’s signature. Along the way they had to overcome two main obstacles: the definition of the ‘religious’ character of the Lasallian community and the institution’s acceptance by civil authority. The first definition seemed to be the function of the vows; the second was the King’s matter, he being the source of law, and of the Parliament of Normandy, the recorder of documents.

Throughout those three or four years of negotiation in Rome the Brothers accepted the proposal of including the traditional vows in their request. This would modify their practice of the previous thirty years, but it had been suggested to them and they understood that in this way their recognition would be made easier. They believed that with this the first question would be resolved. Unfortunately the King’s business was held up for almost two years until the new King bestowed ‘civil’ recognition that was proposed in September of 1724.

It seemed that without this the ecclesiastical process did not move ahead either, so that they had to interrupt or redirect the process. Before, during the Regency, there was no interest in recognizing any new institution of the Lasallian kind. For the Administration the usual

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Brother Maurice-Auguste, *L’Institut des Frères...* Cahiers 11, 284-289.

relationship with parishes, dioceses or founders was sufficient enough<sup>6</sup>. What was important was to sustain each school; there was no need to sustain a school network. The second question remained blocked and, with it, also the first. Nevertheless, with the death of Philip of Orleans and the entry of young Louis XV, the Brothers obtained what they had aspired to as a civil institution. 4

Almost all was concluded with this. Two months later and with the favorable judgment of the Council's Congregation, the process was completed. So that even the novelty in the design of the vows, which came two years later, was assumed. Blain, clearly abusing the data in his interpretation of the facts, concludes that:

The Founder always had desired three things for the good and perfection of his Institute: the first, that it would be a religious order; the second, that his Rule would be approved such as it was, without additions or cuts; the third, that it would not be joined with any other older already approved order<sup>7</sup>.

These desires were accomplished to the letter, without any management by the Brothers, and without even any thought given to it. One year before dispatching the Bull, Rome had communicated that the Holy See would deny approbation of the Rules if the Brothers were not disposed to take on the three vows of religion. The Rule spoke only of the vow of obedience, but all held in their hearts what they knew their father held in his, that it was the pious desire to add to the vow of obedience the vows of poverty and chastity. Some, even, had taken them privately. For this, happy that divine Providence was offering such a possibility, they ran urgently before the yoke which was offered them, and presented their necks to these agreeable chains being prepared for them. The Brothers carried through this holy disposition as the end of their desires. Their Rules were approved as if Monsieur de La Salle had left them behind, without additions or cuts, and with no other material from other Rules. This last article was important for the holy man had feared that he would be rejected. And he feared that, with much reason, because it was not possible for him to join his Rule to no other, that it was not of a distinct nature, and that as a consequence the form would change, in place of being established, and that in this way it would have caused his ruin<sup>8</sup>.

The last part of the quote probably contains the essential of the event: for the Brothers' Community, as for the biographer, there is no fundamental novelty in what happens. They do not appreciate, according to Blain, any important difference between having those vows and not having them. Yet, without a doubt, there was a great deal involved, as we know and will comment on, so that in this matter there are two points of interest: one is (1) the document and its acceptance, between Rome and the Parliament of Normandy, and the other (2) the attitude of the Brothers in receiving it. One thing is what happens and the other is the perception of what happens. Of the two, in this commentary we emphasize the second (the first has been well studied and we will refer to it again).

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<sup>6</sup>In Rome, this perspective was efficaciously stressed by De Tencin, chief negotiator. See footnote 52 for more on this person and his place in the whole process.

<sup>7</sup>We shall later on, in recalling Vincent de Paul and above all Barré, deal with a possible interpretation of this 'third thing' according to which Blain's last affirmation could be not so misguided.

<sup>8</sup>Blain, J.B., *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, Rouen, 1733, 2 vols. The first edition does not have the name of the author. The quote in CL 8, 191.

Thus, recognizing the role of the Bull (1), we point out that its understanding was much more decisive (2) for its recipients. For them the Bull was the recognition and the continuation of what they had been living for forty years. Nevertheless, like Blain, they were mistaken. Thus, mistaking its interpretation, they were perverting the whole process and the significance of the Bull (even if it were more for later times than for their own).

The civil structure of the Institute was new, as such it began to exist beginning with all of this. But it was also its canonical structure/configuration. From the civil point of view the Brothers could now act as an institutional/corporate body, i.e., for example, they could acquire goods and receive donations. They could inscribe their community's name on the school door and they could be called as a corporation before the courts. By civil law they were a recognized, public institution. This was truly news. But canonically it was even more so: now they were defined by similarity with religious institutions/groups, i.e., by their vows, something which had never occurred. The profound novelty was that, just as the vows defined them from the canonical point of view, they were also coming to define themselves as a civil society, inasmuch as their vows were being recognized by civil law<sup>9</sup>. Something else was being dealt with that surely was beyond their expectations, but above all their institutional structure was being modified.

It resulted that those vows were redefining them as much in the canonical as in the civil spheres. Those vows were representing a road that they not had traveled over until now. On the whole, a great novelty.

It was precisely this modification which helps us to understand the difficulty of Monsieur de La Salle before the institutional recognition of his work. We can imagine, on one hand, that each time he feared its recognition would alter his plan; and on the other hand, that each time perhaps he would see to what model he would have to conform himself<sup>10</sup>. At once one can appreciate that the problem would not be in the recognition of the institution but rather in its configuration. Facing the authorization and perhaps on top of it was the definition of that Society of the Christian Schools.

## 2. *The idea of religious life*

Half a century before these events, like other writers during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a priest from the Seminary of Saint Nicholas de Chardonnet, Matthieu Beuvelet (1662?-1657), had published various volumes of Meditations<sup>11</sup>. He was the successor to Adrien Bourdoise, founder of the establishment, and a person of some reputation and responsibility as well. For this reason his Meditations merited attention in the French church. Initially, they were destined for the members of the priestly community, even though they were quickly extended to all Christians. Monsieur

<sup>9</sup>This will become dramatically evident in the days of the Revolution, 1792, the respective Assembly suppresses... vows. It can seem shocking to us, incomprehensible. Yet, the suppression of vows was what empowered the legislators to suppress the institutions that had them, which thanks to the vows was a social or public organism. Logically, in 1904, the Lasallian community was suppressed in France a second time; the process would be very different.

<sup>10</sup>See footnote 7, and later on, the references to Barré.

<sup>11</sup>Monsieur de La Salle went back to this Seminary in the last period of his life, 1717, and would have remained there if the Brothers had not required him to return to Saint Yon five months later.

de La Salle knew of them, as well as the rest of his work, as Yves Poutet has shown in his outstanding work on the 17<sup>th</sup> century and Lasallian beginnings<sup>12</sup>.

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To be exact, Poutet points out the influence of this author on the Lasallian founder as regards his esteem for the priestly vocation, which was a frequent topic in those times of clerical reform. He adds that de La Salle must have utilized the work or taken it into account in the series of Meditations for Sundays and Feast Days that he composed for the Brothers.

There is no doubt that he knew the work (though not the person)<sup>13</sup>. And therefore that he also knew the following ways of comparing the priestly institutions and the religious life, full of suggestions for us in our questions on the meaning of the Bull:

Consider the difference that exists between these two states. The first is that the state of religious is properly a state of penance and that of ecclesiastics is a state of perfection; perfection which appears in the holiness and in the stability of that state and in the consecration made by the ministers who are destined for it. Likewise, in the early days of the Church, public penance was an impediment for entrance into the clergy, even if a holy life was led after penance: thus it was in our monasteries, which were always sanctuaries for the greatest sinners and where disorderly ecclesiastics also were consigned. The second is that the first and principal end of religious is more properly to think about one's own salvation; and if all seek that of others it is not only by power conferred but also by charitable motives: but ecclesiastics are not so much for themselves but for others: thus they must say with our Lord when they become sanctified: *Pro eis sanctifico meipsum*. [ed.: For their sake I consecrate myself] John 17, 19, and with Saint Paul: *Non quaerens quod mihi utile est, sed quod multis*. [ed.: Nobody should be looking for his own advantage, but everybody for the other person's] I Cor. 10, 24. Because they are obligated to this by justice and by duty.

Judge it accordingly: see which of the two states, considered in themselves, is the better and more excellent. In one, to send an individual to God in the ecclesiastical state, obliges him at the same time to perfection by the consecration that he makes; on the contrary in the other the obligation comes only from the will of him who places himself under the obligation.<sup>14</sup>

Poutet cites the second part of the first paragraph and omits the first: it is understood that he does this because he attempts to show Beuvelet's esteem for the priestly vocation<sup>15</sup> and its possible influence on the ministerial consciousness of Monsieur de La Salle, no other reason. But the first part of the cited text, with its itinerant interpretation of monastic history and of the early days of the Church, fills us with doubts about the validity of his conclusions in comparing the two states.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Poutet, Y., *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et les Origines Lasalliennes*, volume 1: The Rheims Period, Rennes, 1970, 785, pp. 203-209. The complete text of the three volumes of Beuvelet Meditations, at <http://babel.hathitrust.org/>

<sup>13</sup>Matthieu Beuvelet (1622?-1657) was the maternal uncle of Nicholas Roland, canon of Rheims, friend and spiritual director of de La Salle.

<sup>14</sup>Immediately after, the following point of the same Meditation concludes thus: "Consider the consequence or better yet what confusion we must draw out from this. Where are the ecclesiastics now who live as religious? Where are they tested, in order to enter the ecclesiastical state how are they tested to enter a monastery? Where is the contempt of pleasures and honors among ecclesiastics? Who amongst us thinks of that perfection to which we are obliged? Not without reason do we call ourselves seculars, because we live as seculars and do not believe ourselves to be obligated to anything else but them: and of all its forms, mark the words well, there is no other in which life is as distant from its end and from its institute as that of the ecclesiastics." *Op. cit.*, volume 2, meditation 7.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Poutet, Y., *op. cit.*, p. 204, note.

Logically, we do not enter into this comparison for itself<sup>16</sup>. Instead, in the definition of religious life he takes for granted: something centered on personal sanctification (including above all, in penance for one's sins), he omits by definition apostolic commitment or interest in the Christian community. Beuvelet's thesis is very clear, as much in the first as in the second paragraph<sup>17</sup>. In formulating this he must be showing a state of opinion or sensitivity relatively widespread on this theme. Moreover, if we take into account that these meditations would continue to be edited in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and still in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we would come to realize something more serious: the long life of an habitual state of opinion in the Church for which apostolic action does not correspond to that which today we call consecrated life. This, if consecrated life is defined by the religious vows...

With regard to the spirit of these meditations, one understands the difficulty of Monsieur de La Salle before this matter, which concerns us in this reflection<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup>Before Beuvelet, Bérulle, in the first lines of the Rules and Regulations of the Oratory of Jesus, an institute which he founded in 1611, wrote: "The first Order in the Church, Order essential and absolutely necessary for it is the Priesthood, which was instituted immediately not by saints and angels but by the very Son of God, who instituted it over himself, that is to say, on the model and state of priesthood, as an example and organ of priesthood on earth. He did institute it for no less a reason than to spread his spirit and to give his body to His Church at death. He instituted it on the last day of his life, desiring to return to life by it when he died on earth, leaving behind on earth a divine seed that should make it give life when he was going to die for it. He instituted it consecrating priests to his Father by an anointing and consecration more intimate than that of kings, of prophets, or of religious, which is done only by their vows and their own anointing and not by any divine operation of the Son of God on them, as is done with priests." We quote the Migne edition, Paris, 1856. It reproduces, lays out and enlarges the F. Bourgoing edition in *Les Oeuvres de l'Eminentissime et Révérendissime Pierre Cardinal de Bérulle*, Paris, 1644. The entire work at <https://books.google>.

<sup>17</sup>There is a curious time coincidence: the Beuvelet edition on which he is in the habit of citing these Meditations is from 1664, Paris: well then: two years before Rancé had finally withdrawn to La Trappe, his commendatory abbey, decidedly directing his steps toward conversion. With all certainty the ideas of Beuvelet were perfectly established before Rancé's conversion and, knowing them or not, their arguments had served him. But the history of La Trappe's reformer is neither the first nor the only one in this case: there are many who united fidelity to God and penitence, for the simple reason that almost always one endeavors to reform individuals or institutions, and in that which has to be reformed, necessarily, there appears sin and penitence. Monastic reform, at least that of 17<sup>th</sup> century France, is marked by consciousness of infidelity and for that very reason it gives place to be interpreted as a penitential way. It was more, much more, but it was not easy to see it. What Beuvelet certainly saw was, for example, the curious situation of the Visitation Monastery in Paris that St. Francis de Sales and Saint Chantal had founded: the convent of the Visitation nuns had the convent of Saint Magdalene as an annex, given over to women repentant of their previous lives. Twenty years after the installation of the Salesian Nuns we meet four of them as superiors and directors of the monastery annex: recently founded and established in Paris, they contributed a more intense spirit in that climate of monastic reform. Today it is not so easy for us to imagine these situations, but at that time they were not exceptional.

<sup>18</sup>An example, a reference, that Monsieur de La Salle had to know: Benedict of Canfield, in his *Règle de Perfection*... The influence of this English capuchin, settled in France, was very great throughout the century. He had the great virtue of codifying a method of the interior life, easy to understand and in relation to daily life. Monsieur de La Salle had to know about any of his many editions, especially those which were done at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century after having been included on the Index a few years (for their apparent close connection to Molinist and Quietist themes). Well now: about the middle of the century (Canfield died in 1610), in editions of his work, his life chronicle appears, twofold: from the hand of a biographer the properly stated life chronicle and from Canfield's own hand an account of his conversion from Puritanism to Catholicism and entrance into religious life. This last part and its presentation of the religious life gave reason to whomever wished to consider it as something centered in the community's interior life, without any apostolic reference. The founder must have appreciated him as a spiritual

Let's say, Beuvelet. With regard to other things one has to situate the person and the work of Saint Vincent de Paul, whom Monsieur de La Salle probably may not have known (died in 1660, a year after the text that we will now quote). From one of his last Conferences to the Daughters of Charity we extract these two paragraphs:

Well, my dear sisters, you may not be religious by name, but you have to be true and have a great obligation to perfecting yourselves. But if some entangling and idolatrous spirit should present itself among you that said: "You must try to be religious; that would be much better", then, my daughters, the Company would be ready for extreme unction. Be fearful, my daughters, for if you then be with a crippled life: cry, wail, and tell it to the superior. For who says religious says cloistered, and you have to go everywhere. For this, my daughters, though you would not be enclosed, nevertheless, it is necessary that you be so virtuous and more than daughters of Holy Mary. Why? Because they are enclosed. Even when a religious might want to do something bad, she would find the grille closed; she could not do it, because the occasion has been deprived her. But there is no one who moves in the world like a Daughter of Charity and who encounters so many opportunities as you, my daughters. For this reason it is very important that you be more virtuous than religious. And if there is a level of perfection for persons who live in religion, two levels are necessary for the daughters of Charity, inasmuch as you run the great risk of losing yourselves if you are not virtuous, if for example you would unfortunately take for love of money that which is of the poor. Alas, my daughters! Be most watchful of this!..."

"There is here the second article<sup>19</sup>: You will consider that it does not pertain to a religion, yet this state does not go well with the occupations of your vocation. Nevertheless, as you are more exposed to occasions of sin than religious obligated to cloister, not having any monastery other than houses for the sick and the place where the superior resides, without more than a cell than a rented room, without more than a chapel than the parish church, without more than a cloister than city streets, without more to lock you up than obedience, not only having to go than to a house for the sick or necessary places to do your service, without more than grilles than the fear of God, without more than a veil than holy modesty, you have no other profession to assure your vocation than continued confidence in divine Providence for the offering that you have made of yourselves and for the service you give to poor persons, for all those reasons you must have so great and greater virtue than if you had professed yourselves in another religious order. For this reason you will procure in bringing yourselves to all these places at least with much virtue, devoutness and edification, as true religious in their convent. To achieve this is that you strive to want to acquire the virtues that their regulations orders them, especially in profound humility, perfect obedience and a great indifference of creatures, and that you take all precautions to perfectly keep chastity of body and heart."<sup>20</sup>

These texts are rather well known, outstanding for their forceful arguments and realism. They are worth re-reading parallel with prior meditations. Between the two they draw the religious and

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author, but necessarily Canfield must have roused some perplexity as regards the viability of his model of religious life for the Brothers in the schools.

<sup>19</sup>'Second article': because it is the second article of the Rules that Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul drew up with the Daughters of Charity. It is also used in formation talks, from which this entire quote is taken. See the following footnote.

<sup>20</sup>*Conferences to the Daughters of Charity*, 111, 24.08.59. There are different editions of the saint's complete works. The reference we quote is in one of the official pages of the Vincentian communities: <http://somos.vicencianos.org/>

social context of the time and carry us to the door of almost all that which we frame in this commentary.

Well then: Monsieur de La Salle had to know about the Vincentian institutions: the Society for the Missions, for its proximity to Bérulle's Oratory and to Olier and Tronson's Saint Sulpice, and the Daughters of Charity, for their presence among the poor. In both cases he had to know the Monsieur de Paul's perplexity before the type of bond that will identify his works and his doubts between a secular and religious formula, between separation from the world and service to the Gospel and the Poor. And he had to know the imagined formulas in the Vincentian communities to resolve them, both concretely and relatively for the vows and community.

Nevertheless, the more and better we think about it, we encounter something extremely ironic and significant: in this effort and in this search of a new statute, it can happen that all were in agreement with Beuvelet's affirmations insofar as the inherited definition of religious life is concerned. Everyone could agree that religious life before was inwardly a state or institution of intimacy. Thus, even if they did not accept Beuvelet's strange discourse on penance, they could agree that it dealt with a type of life destined above all for each one's sanctification and that to this effect vows had been established: to make impossible or difficult any other model of life. This did not serve them.

The two saints, however, had to think that the religious life could well be something else. Without going too far, we see it in the outstanding block of Saint Vincent de Paul's Conferences to the Daughters of Charity and in the reflections that de La Salle left behind in the Collection of short treatises and in various places of his Meditations. From this we can affirm that for them religious life had to be different, although it was dealing with something that did not seem to exist at the time or that at least was very difficult for it to exist in that society and in that Church. Logically, in this context, there was not much sense for de La Salle to preoccupy himself for any recognition, neither canonical nor civil: in neither of the two settings was there a place or an antecedent in which they could be. Perhaps recognition meant altering the project.

The problem was not in recognizing anything but rather in setting up something that could be recognized. Again, the definition over and above authorization: what was necessary was to give a right formula, not to recognize in the Lasallian community any other known formula (and Blain refers to this again in the 'third thing' that the Founder wanted to avoid, according to what is expressed in his commentary before the Bull which we have quoted above).

### 3. *The radical nature of Father Barré's formulas*

From this context it is necessary to accept that the Bull appears in the Lasallian community where nothing had existed before. We can better lay the foundations of it with evoking what de La Salle said to someone he knew and from whom, moreover, he received definitive enlightenment in his journey: Father Barré<sup>21</sup>. His spiritual kinship, if we can speak thus, was much closer.

<sup>21</sup>Nicholas Barré (Amiens 1621 – Paris 1686) was a French religious, of the Franciscan community, called the 'Minims', established by Saint Francis de Paola. Theology professor, a deep believer and in touch with the society of his time, he stood out as a spiritual director and animator of communities for the formation of people. He was

Nicholas Barré died in 1686 when the Lasallian project was six years old at the most. Nevertheless in this period institutional foundations were laid down that would be sustained until the days of the Bull. In those six years de La Salle and Barré were able to meet three or four times, between Paris and Rouen, so be it from looking over some correspondence. Several journeys could have been made directly, between the two, or by means of Nicholas Roland's or Adrien Nyel's mediation. The fact is that the contacts and the influence are evident, as we can deduce by the interest of Barré in seeing that the de La Salle Brothers meet with his in Paris and by the emotion expressed by de La Salle at the Minim's death.

For this reason in Lasallian circles the remembrance of Barré's orientation has been a known and familiar factor since the beginning, as much in the proposal that John Baptist would live with his teachers as in the matter of not applying his inheritance to the founding of his schools<sup>22</sup>. The scope and play on words left by Barré clearly set the limit: 'Si vous fondez, vous fondrez' ('If you spend money [ed.:i.e. fund], you will melt [ed.:i.e. sink])<sup>23</sup>. But there is in his orientation another dimension, not so well known yet nevertheless definitive in the configuration of the first Lasallian community: the theology of consecration and knowledge of the history of the religious life, from Barré.

It is known that the emphasis on Providence as the only foundation points to the theme of faith in God. For Barré it was faith in God above all else that calls for what is necessary to sustain individuals as much as for the institution of the charity schools. For him any other base could be an obstacle to faith. His words are very clear:

The spirit of the Institute draws its strength from unselfishness, from love of poverty, from pure desire to serve for the salvation of your fellow human-beings, with an abandonment of oneself to divine Providence, this is what makes the vocations of the young strong and maintains them in a permanent and continuous fervor. On the contrary, from the moment that there would be any kind of setting up and material guarantees for the future, you would see, as elsewhere, young people come who have nothing to rely on, in order to escape necessity. They would not cease to show much zeal, and would conceal their intention so very well that sooner or later one would not be able to distinguish true vocations from false or selfish ones. The intentions of the teachers no longer being pure, fervor for work and for the mission would quickly perish, and one would see that it is this abundance of heavenly graces that has made the charity schools of the Holy Infant Jesus flourish until now.<sup>24</sup>

These are clear, direct words, full of power. There is no need to comment, unless perhaps to point out the how closely this orientation is with that of the Lasallian means called the heroic vow, 1691, when Monsieur de La Salle and two Brothers unite themselves, secretly, to stand

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beatified in 1999. His *Oeuvres Complètes* were published in Paris, Cerf, in 1994. Excellent is the biography that was dedicated to him by Brigitte Fleurez, at the time Superior General of her community, with the title *Marcheur dans la nuit*, Paris, 1992; there are Spanish, Italian and English translations of this book (Engl.: *Better than light*, 1994).

<sup>22</sup>The first three biographers stated this and so left behind a limited understanding of the matter. Cf., for the three, Blain, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p.190.

<sup>23</sup> "He said this endless number of times to various people: 'I do not wish any foundation.' He also threatened the sisters of the Institute in these terms: 'if you fund, you will sink.'" *Oeuvres Complètes*, Reasons for not founding, 6, p. 155.

<sup>24</sup>*Op. cit.*, 4, p. 155.

firm in the work until the end, even if there should be no more than the three of them and to live on alms...

In light of these facts, nevertheless, we begin to read something new in this paragraph from the Statutes of Barré:

They will live in community, neither taking vows nor keeping cloister, under the guidance of the superior or mother superior, whom they will be obliged to obey out of pure and holy love, and with the determination to remain united in spirit, in heart and in mission, with all the members of these charitable Schools, where no one will admitted, nor received, without holding to these holy dispositions.<sup>25</sup>

It is very clear: neither vows nor cloister. We have seen this in Monsieur de Paul, but Barré brings a perspective that we have not encountered in the Vincentian texts (although its author must know, not as texts, but as institutional orientation). Indeed, if these two paragraphs – abandonment to Providence and the rejection of vows – come from the same spirit, one must keep in mind the relationship between them. But, what? Because we can understand that a foundation based on money can cause faith in Providence to be forgotten, but, the vows? What relationship is there between the vows, trust in Providence and dedication to Poor schools?

Even though the teaching sisters do not take vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, and never should they do so, in order that what is willed for the public good does not degenerate into private good, enclosing oneself in a cloister or monastery, as has happened all too often in the Church, nevertheless, one will have to apply much accuracy, rigor, correction and effective shutting out of the community, as if, in effect, the sisters had solemnly pronounced these three vows and had broken their commitments.<sup>26</sup>

At this point, yes, here there is something new. For Barré, a religious himself, the religious life is a hindrance to apostolic commitment. At least, it can be<sup>27</sup>.

In a clear and very strong formula he points out that a public good may reduce itself to a private good by virtue of the vows. In his judgment the religious life is conceived for the personal benefit/good of the religious, not for the good of the Church or society. And it is not he who fabricates this: he finds rather that ‘it has happened quite often in the Church’. For this reason, if the vows define this religious state, it follows that the vows are obstacles to commitment. The vows act in reducing the public to the personal, the communal/social to the personal/private.

Barré does not explain these conclusions, but he does not need to do it. See, for example:

<sup>25</sup>*Op. cit.*, Statutes and regulations, 5, p. 172 following.

<sup>26</sup>*Op. cit.*, Secret articles, 4<sup>o</sup>., p. 242.

<sup>27</sup>It is clear that Barré goes much farther afield than other similar communities that he certainly knew, as for example the Daughters of the Cross, of Mme. Villeneuve (in the neighborhood of Saint Nicholas de Chardonnet and the Visitation of Paris), and the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Nicholas Roland (begun by two followers of Barré in Rheims): these two communities, like others, believed to have freed themselves from the cloister and solemn vows by accepting simple vows and adding the vow of stability, but this did not solve the problem of their identity. Barré knew this well and took into account that the difference between solemn and simple did not suppress the significance of the vows. He believed that in them was the problem of these institutions. Clearly for many of his contemporaries it was a matter of dealing with a radical as well as untenable stance...

When a teacher of the charitable Schools is tempted to withdraw from her work, in order to enter a religious house, let her be careful in regard to what she must do. She is abandoning a more evangelical state, of more dependence, more painful, poorer, more scorned in the world, for another more comfortable, more honorable one, but which is only more useful for her.

She becomes like Rachel, a sterile bride in religion, in place of what she was, a Leah marvelously fertile. In the work of the charitable Schools she suffers birth pangs, but she has the advantage of giving her spouse a great number of children.

In seeking to confine herself in a monastery, she seems like a cowardly soldier, who always wishes to be in the barracks and who never ventures forth into the country. She abandons the spiritual war that she had committed herself to for God and Jesus, to relax and live as she pleases in a safe place, without making vigorous efforts for the interests and glory of her king. It is a temptation that will cause several of the Teachers to waver, to seek to withdraw from their work and exercise charity for their fellow human-beings, under the pretext of working for their own perfection. It will even strike them that they must love God, and love him perfectly, rather than making him loved. Big mistake. Big error...<sup>28</sup>

A new, radical formulations. And the matter is sufficiently central in his project, as to have shared it with Monsieur de La Salle, with the same radical root.

From the point of view of ministerial theology, we are at the opposite dispositions of Beuvelet. Barré's expressions can hardly be stronger: convenience, sterility, cowardice, excuse. It is clear we are starting from naught, that is, that we are not before a general discourse on the Christian vocation. In this case the reference is about one who has already received a vocation and leaves it for another. Because Barré does not speak thinking of someone who is free, who is capable of doing one thing or another. He indicates someone who in any moment believes he has been called to the vocation of the Christian school community. He speaks about a change between a community of one type and that of another. For this we can expect unbalances and comparisons... All of this is certain, but even so it is difficult to understand the strong nature of his expressions.

There is in them, apparently at least, a serious lack of consideration for what we call the contemplative life or even, all of a sudden, the religious life. Although already this is speaking from our present time, with a serious risk of misdating, one could say about Barré that the value of silence or the passive character that is the religious life does not exist. Certainly the very expression 'sign of the kingdom' or sign of any other order of things is a creature of our times. But its meaning is not. Barré had to know and to live this original function of religious consecration and to feel himself as having lived in an invisible afterlife which renders itself visible here in the company of a community of peers. He had to know this and nevertheless his means of expressing it does not allow him to understand it.

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<sup>28</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 122 f. These paragraphs allow us to spot a complete agreement with Beuvelet's interpretation, referenced in footnote 10: a common learning, in this moment, that the religious life holds no object external to itself.

Barré's discourse gives us an excellent example of incompatibility between the religious life and apostolic commitment. At least as an expression of the theology of his time, this is what he is saying to us. In his eyes the religious life has one meaning and the apostolic life another. He has nothing in opposition to the spirit of the vows, as can be seen in the quoted paragraphs. But he has much against the state of life that is defined by those vows, not from its spirit. Thus he leaves us, from the heart of the French 17<sup>th</sup> century, an unquestionable testimony of what during various centuries is going to be the pending subject (academic discipline) of the consecrated life.

For us, at this time, it matters that we take note of this difficulty. In this way we can impose on his words a background of implications much greater than those of merely personal points of view. This obliges us to understand in a much more nuanced way what Barré was able to propose to de La Salle. From him the young founder received at least these three indications: not to "set up" the institutions, no to vows, no to the recognition of the institution. We remember this because it gives a picture of the situation of the Society of Christian Schools before beginning the process that would conclude with the Bull: they depended on contracts with local founders, did not have vows and no legal existence either.

Furthermore: in opening the process for the Bull they did not endeavor to change any of these three bases. The shadow of Father Barré is certainly extended. And, beginning with those texts, we know well the roots of this situation.

#### 4. Barré, Bérulle, and Luther

With this, as you can see, we have gone much farther from the simple anecdote of the differences of criteria and the implications of *possibilism* in the birth of new institutions. It is that there is more, of great importance, and we dare to propose it defended by an expression of Bérulle: "... in the ancient Church, when there was no religion and all the Christians were religious; not like now, when there are a number of religions and less religious people."<sup>29</sup>

Bérulle is speaking with intense emotion at this moment, concluding the first part of his talks on the Grandeur of Jesus, with an addition on the meaning of the vow of Service or bondage that had been proposed with respect to Jesus or the Virgin Mary. It is beside the point to bring it back with detail<sup>30</sup> and it is sufficient to remember that the matter had caused great problems with the

<sup>29</sup>See the *Discours de l'Estat et Grandeurs de Jésus* [ed.: *Discourse on the State and Grandeurs of Jesus*], in the appendix in the block of the first twelve discourses; ed. de Migne, Paris, 1856, on that of F. Bourgoing in *Les Oeuvres de...*, 1644. The quote, on page 399 is from this edition.

<sup>30</sup>Bérulle had intervened decisively in introducing the women reformed Carmelites to France. He was named adviser or director of their convents together with two other directors, Gaillement and Duval, but quickly he took on a chief role in this ministry. He would not leave the position even when the men Carmelites in their turn arrived in France, as a result of which they gained his animosity, which would be added to by the determined doctors of law of the Sorbonne, who also were against his overwhelming role in these responsibilities. In his work of spiritual direction of the Carmelites, following an idea that perhaps he had come to know during his trip to Spain to bring the nuns back, he tried to introduce the Vow of Bondage or of absolute submission, referring all to Jesus as well as Mary. There were those who accepted it and those who did not. The tensions were very strong and one of Bérulle's relationships which was broken on account of it was the one he maintained with Mme. Acarie, now known as Sister Mary of the Incarnation, a convert in the Carmel. Surely this had some connection for his estrangement from Vincent de Paul. He proposed it in his own community, the Institution of the French Oratory. All of this was in the context of the quote of the previous footnote.

Carmelites and the ecclesiastical world, so that one becomes passionate in explaining it and then in this passion this statement is allowed to be used, happy but needing nuances: in its sources there were no ‘religions’ and the Church was much more religious. We are in 1625, for example, and the Cardinal enjoys a privileged vision of France and Europe. He knows what he is talking about. 14

Leaving aside the precise circumstance and the social situation of Bérulle, in our case it is enough to receive his clear message: today we have many institutions of consecrated life and neither all nor even less are of truly religious people. In his judgment, they lose much time and much faith debating the meaning of the vow of service to Jesus which he proposes and they force themselves to place it joined to the usual three vows, when it is dealing with something else. It is a sign that they do not understand neither one nor the other. Poverty, chastity and obedience are in one sphere, while the Vow of bondage or of absolute selflessness to Jesus is in another. Some refer to the world of the serviceable, of the organizing perhaps; the other is at the root or at the base of all the others, encompassing everything.

With his reference to the early times of the Church, the Cardinal wanted to say that, on the base of the usual vows, institutions had lost their religious sense, because they were not capable of understanding the relationship between their vows and their consecration. For them the vows are in fact an obstacle to their identity. They are only a chain which encloses a shelter and allows one to become absorbed in a false relationship with society and with the Church. He does not dare to speak and express it with this power, but the passion of his doctrinal commentaries and his personal references in the Discourse on the States of Jesus... allows us to deduce it without any difficulty. His own experience with the Carmelites in France and with the Sorbonne is telling him this in regard to the Vote of bondage or of absolute selflessness to Jesus.

And we understand him if we remember the expression that we recorded from Father Barré:

...in order that what is willed for the public good does not degenerate into the private good, enclosing itself in a cloister or monastery, as has happened all too often in the Church...

Where does this ‘as has happened all too often in the Church’ come from? Why can we connect these two references, Bérulle and Barré, being that sixty years separates them (1623 and 1685<sup>31</sup>)?

Here is where we would like to add a new element that normally does not appear in these talks: the echo of Luther’s monastic reform. In its light all that relating to the religious life in 17<sup>th</sup> century France, all relative to its tract writers and its founders, everything, covers a much deeper and clearer sense. It deals with the relationship between the vows and faith: as a matter of fact Barré’s talk is surely the one that takes it subject from Bérulle.

Let us see: when Bérulle is writing his great work in the decade of 1620, the entire context, the debate and the quoted expression reminds us that a century before Luther had published his *Judgment on the Monastic Vows*. That text, to show its emptiness of meaning, had contributed especially to the disappearance of monastic life in Protestant countries or areas. It was in

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<sup>31</sup>Date of Barré’s text in *Nicolas Barré, Oeuvres Complètes*, 1994, p. 231.

February of 1522. If half of Europe during those one hundred years had lost its monasteries, it was not because of the reformer's writing: in reality that tract was drawing up a formal statement about the emptiness of a large part of monastic institutions. The facts or the situation were proving his reasons, clamorously in northern Europe and more quietly in the south.<sup>32</sup> 15

France is in the south. There the reformer's reasons had been left suspended for at least two reasons. The first, clearly, was because of the social and economic implications for the established monastic order. The monastic order, as we have recalled, was much more than a religious institution: it was a system of administering territory, so that to modify it would have gone far beyond the physical limits of the cloisters. In these conditions, better to wait.

The second reason is specifically French and is called the Wars of Religion. They happened between 1560 and 1590 and bloodied all of France. The wars impoverished and degraded all political and religious discourse. All groups were confronted, one against the other, and undeservingly mixed the political and the religious, so that in reality the religious was the pretext in struggles of power as the future of the Valois dynasty (Catholics, the League) became exhausted and the passage was opened for the Bourbons (Huguenot party). They were not times to take any Christian message seriously. For this reason not even the Council of Trent entered into the country's Christianity. Again: as regards monastic reform, better to wait.

Thus, for example, we are in 1610. And we meet up with Mme. Acarie's circle. And with Canfield, Beau cousin, Marillac, Duval and Bérulle, all of them committed to Church reform, forty years after Trent. We have to imagine that the Cardinal knows the reformer's text, even if it be in its original Latin text, or even in some of the French translations that were widespread about the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Logically, there was an idea of his belligerency in these matters<sup>33</sup>, we do not have to expect that he quotes it or that he shows he knows about it. He, like all the others of his circle, comes from the 'leaguers' group<sup>34</sup>, that is to say, militant Catholics. You cannot say that he accepts any point of view that does not come out of the strict political orthodoxy of the League. But we can think that it is from this knowledge and climate that from him is derived the expression enabling him to say that the only Christian Order is that of the priesthood. The only or at least the main.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup>For Michel Dupuy, in his introduction to the volume of the *Oeuvres Complètes* of Barré, is very clear that Luther constituted a common reference in understanding Bérulle and Barré as regards these matters. On page 11 he also records the expression of Bérulle that we have quoted and places it in over-all reference to the reformer. Recording various other names of the period, Dupuy attempts, with reason, to help situate all of Barré's work.

<sup>33</sup>The reason for these very serious tensions was the other famous Cardinal, Richelieu, that without ignoring the theological oriented himself more toward the political.

<sup>34</sup>The League grouped the different political faction of Catholic confession. Its identity, so, was especially relating to the moment: on the one hand it was constituted in opposition to the Protestant faction ("Huguenot") and for the other one it was trying to come to the throne of France, if the reigning dynasty was becoming extinct. So called "In the night of saint Barthelme" (August 23-24, 1572), slaughter of its adversaries, and example of relationship between them, it was promoted by the League by the assent of Queen Mother.

<sup>35</sup>Thus begins the Rule and Regulation that he established for the Congregation of the Oratory: "The first Order in the Church, the essential and absolutely necessary Order for her, is the Priesthood, that was instituted neither by saints nor by angels but by the same Son of God, who instituted it upon himself, to wit, on the model and the state of priesthood, as an example and organism of priesthood on earth. He did not institute it for anything less than to spread his spirit and to give his body to his Church upon his death. He instituted it the last day of his life, as if seeking to be renewed in it when going to die for it. He instituted it consecrating priests to his Father by an anointing

In the Oratory and in similar institutions this theme was customary doctrine during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (let us simply recall the Beuvelet quote), so that we cannot distance it from the attitude of authors like Vincent de Paul and Nicholas Barré in regard to the vows in their new communities. Also they had to know it, simply by their participation in the movements of opinion and sensibilities of their society: Vincent de Paul, from his close connection to the Administration of the Kingdom, and Barré from his apostolic militancy, his relationship with persons of the social avant-garde and his theological teaching ministry. It is logical that they also, without having to say it, express their acceptance of Luther's criticism on the supplanting of the faith and consecration inside the monastery's regular practices of the time<sup>36</sup>. Not even did they need nor could they perhaps even quote it, because they had made it theirs by taking it on in their own spiritual attitude, in their way of living the faith. They cannot, for this reason, permit themselves any risks similar to the denounced in their new communities for more than a century.

They had to be in agreement with the fundamental reasoning of Luther:

...our source, the word of Paul in Romans: 'all which does not come from faith is sin.' From which we infer that the monastic vows are sin if they do not come from faith. And from the outset they do not come from faith if they are perpetual, obligatory and not free (without possibility as much as to be followed as to be left behind)...

...the monastic vows taken and observed outside of faith are sinful and as a result are invalid, worthy of condemnation, revocable, and have to be suppressed or else to be renewed and observed in another way...

Let us now ask all our followers in vows under what criteria they made the vows and you will meet them possessed of an irreligious opinion according to which the grace of Baptism was annulled and that it deals with saving oneself as in a second list, that of penitence, so that in its way of life marked by the vows they have to find not only how to make themselves good and destroy sins but also to do more abundant penance so that they can become better than their fellow Christians...

...why do they teach that we justify ourselves and save ourselves by works and they separate themselves from the faith when they understand their obedience, poverty and chastity are not only like certain journeys for salvation but furthermore better and more perfect than those of their fellow faithful, which is an evident and clear falsehood and error and sin against the faith.<sup>37</sup>

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and consecration more intimate than that of kings, prophets or of religious, which is done only by their vows and by their own anointing and not by any divine action of the Son of God upon them, as it is for that of the priests." See the complete text in the de Migne edition of 1856, cols 1623-1628. This and other texts of the internal character of the Oratory were not published in the editions prepared by Bourgoing in 1644, 1656, 1657 and 1665.

<sup>36</sup> This is a situation typical of the entanglement of the theological and the political of those days from Charles V to Henry IV that in France would be prolonged until the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1686. In these conditions, while it may have been possible, it was better to keep quiet than to enter into the debate. It is worth recalling Claude Séguenot, orator, author of books on spirituality, who dared to express his opinion until 1636 on the uselessness of vows in a translation, with commentaries, of Saint Augustine's *De Virginitate*: he very quickly shared the fate of Saint-Cyran those same days, in jail (Séguenot in the Bastille and Saint-Cyran at Vincennes), from which they would not come out until the death of the Cardinal, six or seven years later.

<sup>37</sup> Luther, Martin, *De Votis monasticis Martini Lutheri iudicium*, text composed between October and November of 1521 in Wartburg and published for the first time in Wittenberg, February of 1522. The quotes are from the

The four small paragraphs belong to the block of the second of five arguments of Luther: the vows are opposed to the faith<sup>38</sup>.

### 5. *Discipline and sense in the religious life*

The affirmations themselves of Luther need shades and context; we do not have space for here. Nevertheless, beginning with these same brief lines we can interpret the term ‘vow’ contextualizing it in the way of living them in the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Then we will bring back the terrible reality of the commissions, that is, the total abandonment of the monastic life on the Church’s part, which confided only in the vitality of the Orders themselves in order to overcome the so-called chaos by the non-existence of residential abbots and abbesses.

It is something that we know and which proves to be unimaginable to us, from the theological point of view: inasmuch as the monasteries, like dioceses, were administrators of land, they were also the destination of other things such as the incomes from these lands. Thus the monasteries, like the dioceses, accomplished two functions: administer a sector of society and allow the king to judge the corresponding incomes as a prize or recognition of persons from whom he received some service. This second point was the commission (patronage). Evidently, none of these two functions had anything to do with the Christian faith, but they are the two formulas inherited from a previous time period. In 17<sup>th</sup> century France this took for granted that anyone could be an abbot or abbess or titular of a diocese and not pass any time in the diocese or monastery.

It is easy to imagine what the significance of this could be for the Reformation or Counter-Reformation or religious vows in these circumstances.

Everything was coming, since we know, of the European medieval age.

From the distant 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries at least, the monasteries had assumed an assignment in which nobody had thought about the birth of this type of life. Its aim or its sense were in the testimony of beyond God and in its service to the evangelization. First it was the first one and the evangelization came immediately later: there was no difficulty in joining both things. So it can be said that the monks were the big Gospel workers of the nascent Europe.

But, very soon, engaged of this Gospel assignment and precisely orientated by the sense of the God's Incarnation, the monks and their society learned that the social order was going with the evangelization. Thus they were the inventors or diffusers of a way of working the land and maybe even the guarantee of a way to organize the social conviviality. They contributed the bases or the background for the different cultural and artistic moments; they were also for the settling of Europe's territories.

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translation of the work published in Bilbao, Univ. Deusto, 2008. In this edition they correspond to pages 81, 85, 91 and 99.

<sup>38</sup> The other four arguments are: the vows are opposed to the Word of God; to evangelical Liberty; to God’s Commandments; to Monastic Reasoning.

We figure out that, together with the evangelization, the monks were assuming a labor of social classification that was much more than opportunism. Really it was from their contemplation of God's mystery from where they were living through a different world comprehension. It was, since the historians make notice, the great paradox of the social creativity of those peoples who seemed to resign the society. From those distant times they were living a fruitful alliance between resignation and commitment, advertisement of beyond and faith in reality. 18

Nevertheless, in a long time, the first unit wherefrom everything was born was disintegrating. Only two or three centuries after the monastic reforms of the high Middle Ages, monasteries were of fact fulfilling a social assignment that already was not of themselves : it had eliminated their value of God's sign to dissolve in center of order in the resources of the society. Those communities had gone on from the testimony of the faith to the administrative efficiency. Logically in this situation of institutional emptiness the discipline had to relax. The deep sense was absent, so that the daily order had to stop existing. Then the vows appeared.

The vows, as they knew them in the 17<sup>th</sup> France, were an inheritance of an emptiness ecclesiastic and social situation. They were a kind of impossible safeguard of the sense: If it was not, the votes were an absurdity. Their unique possibility was in replacing the sense with the discipline, the faith in God with the works. We were going on from the evangelizing minister to the cloister.

We know, it was not an exclusive situation of the monasteries. The entire Europe's Church was impregnated with the vice of these substitutions. Thus certain devotions or ascetic practices had occupied the place of the Gospel or the liturgy. Everything was defined by it supposed efficiency before the God's court. It was understood like a place where there were the merits of the sacrifices and the celestial rewards were weighed. The more it was done, the more necessarily it would come near to the definitive salvation. Because of it in many Christian areas the faith or the grace are replaced with the works or the rites.

In this circumstance the vows are a disciplinary matter, not even canonical and of course not theological. Thus it was from Boniface VIII until Trent. The monastic life had been left devoid of any mission and was moreover shackled in a purely organizational social function of territory and its economy. Just like the structure of the dioceses, in good part, even the monasteries had passed to serve the social order and thus only guaranteed a way of insuring profits from the resources of the territory.

Thus, the reform of the monasteries consisted only in restoring the prior order, that is, in distinguishing the Commission aspect from the Contemplative aspect. With the first aspect there is no argument except that it is accepted and it distances itself from the community's life. The matter is of social Administration. With the second, on the other hand, there is always a fight to restore the origins. Thus the French monastic reform of the 17<sup>th</sup> century does not look to the future nor to the present, but only to the past. It does not touch upon its definitions. It only deals with carrying them out or keeping them. For this the two or three past centuries from the imposition of monastic vows do not have an invitation to consider themselves for the future, from that which they could be in a new church. Thus we understand that neither Bérulle, nor De Paul, nor Barré hoped for any new thing regarding monastic reform. The vows are or return to be what they had been.

In these conditions, apart from their civil value, the only thing that remained for the vows was the function of regulating austerity or penitence, always that those same communities desired to accept them, this is clear. In 17<sup>th</sup> century France normally they did not desire it. For this reason, putting it all together, Bérulle, Saint Vincent<sup>39</sup> and Barré did not wish to know anything of the vows nor of the life that defined itself by them<sup>40</sup>.

They were looking for a new means of commitment with evangelization and felt that the structure of the religious life that they had inherited did not serve them. Unfortunately the urgency of the task will conclude having accepted a false formula of reconciliation that we will encounter from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in distinct institutions: boil the vows down to utility.

Really, without understanding it completely, they were not only looking for the re-evangelization of their society, but also to re-defining the theology of the consecration. The process that had worked with the evangelization and Europe's settling was not working now before the challenges of the Modernization. The consecrated life was showing her disability to assume the apostolic commitment.

For it, a new model of Church was needed or was coming. It is what existed under the speech of the evangelization, the vows and the poor, in the French 17<sup>th</sup> century.

## 6. *The evangelical foundation/base*

In this context the message that de La Salle receives when he meets with Barré does not have fissures: all has to base itself in faith in Providence. For this, neither in one's own funds, nor in legal recognition, nor in the vows. It is not an easy task. And much less if one has committed his own life to it.

Bernard, the biographer of the beginnings, puts the following prayer on the Founder's lips, in which we can see a new pursuit in the light of all the previous:

<sup>39</sup> In the case of Saint Vincent de Paul the attitude is not always so clear. He always insisted, at times against the advice of the majority of his community of the Mission, on the introduction of vows. Nevertheless, he did not wish it, and thus the definitive Roman approval stated, that such vows supposed the religious state. Among many others, refer, for example, to his *Biography* by José María Román, at:

[http://www.basilicalamilagrosa.es/materiales/san\\_vicente\\_de\\_paul\\_roman](http://www.basilicalamilagrosa.es/materiales/san_vicente_de_paul_roman), pp. 179-189. (This work offers abundant bibliography on the person and the work of Monsieur Vincent). The matter of the vows is much clearer in regard to the Daughters of Charity, as we know, even though even in this case some nuance is missing.

<sup>40</sup> As an example of this type of mentality, we know that in the final days of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Bossuet directed a text defining religious life to the women religious of Saint-Cyr. It has two parts: the first on consecration itself and the second on the vows. The first focuses in declaring the misery of this world and the goodness of their renunciation and of the monastic life. The second goes over the three vows one by one and finds in each one of them considerations that are very pertinent in themselves. All of this does not take anything away because it leaves us with the impression, first, that all is negative or very difficult and that all the same you have to sacrifice yourself to be on top of everything; afterwards there appears the sensation that the apostolic life has nothing to do with what we are reading: the society or even the Church are realities without relationship to the religious life. See the text in *Oeuvres de messire Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet*, tome 8, Paris, 1778, *Sermon sur l'État religieux, prêché devant les religieuses de Saint-Cyr*, pp. 325-349. As in so many other texts, one can use the original edition in google-books.

My God, I do not know if one must found/set up or not. It does not fall to me to establish communities nor to know the way of establishing them. To you, my God, to know it and to do it, in such a way that it is pleasing to you. I do not dare to set up because I do not know your will nor must I contribute to set up our houses. If you will set them up, they will be well founded, if you do not set them up, they will be without foundation. I beg you, my God, that you let me know your will in this project.<sup>41</sup>

It could be no other way. De La Salle was conceiving a new structure in society and in the Church: a network of communities, celibates, seculars, at the service of the basic schools for the urban Poor. He was looking for the same autonomy for them that Bérulle and Saint Vincent had for their works regarding diocesan and parochial structures, but this time without priests in its core. Communities, lay and associated: he could rely only on faith before such a similar vital life-giving horizon.

Possibly, as often happens in history, three or four centuries later, we are more capable than even the same Monsieur de La Salle of interpreting what was happening. Certainly we see better than him the structural or institutional range of the creature that was being born. It is logical that we are in better conditions than himself and them to understand what was happening after the crossing of a century, between his first foundation and the debacle of the Revolution, when we see reborn and this time at the hand of the Administration. They were the vanguard of a fundamental change in the animation of the society. They were advancing or proposing the models of new societies.

They could not see it in a similar way. Their audience above all, that is to say, those who saw them from outside of the institution, could not understand the extent of a similar structure. Dedicated to the education of the poor, it was advancing the state of things in that charity was now proceeding to be right. In it a group of lay persons was proceeding to become ‘religion’. And it was presenting itself at the same time dependent and independent as regards local ecclesiastical structures. It was not easy to understand nor to accept and this made of them something very fragile. But if, furthermore, one was dealing with an institution not recognized by either ecclesiastical or civil authority, it was resulting from a huge/terrific fragility: as such an institution could not receive any guarantee, neither legal nor economic.

Everything was so shaky from the social point of view that only faith in the will of God could sustain it. The founder, when in the middle of the ten very harsh years of litigation at Saint Sulpice, would evoke before the community the commentary of Gamaliel (‘if it is the work of God...’), he knew what he was talking about<sup>42</sup>. He took upon himself an almost insupportable

<sup>41</sup> Bernard, *Conduite admirable*....manuscript, p. 59. The quote is a literal translation. For a complete edition, monumental work of J. M. Valladolid, *Las cuatro primeras biografías de san Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Madrid, 2010, 4 volumes. The text quoted, in tome 1, p.171.

<sup>42</sup> The phrase, as it was imagined by Blain: ‘if this work is of God, who will be able to destroy it? And if God is not its source, I consent to its going to ruin. I myself would work with our enemies in its destruction if I believed that God is not its author, or that He did not desire its progress...’ *La vie...* [ed.:*The life...*]:the complete discourse, in tome 2, p. 33. See J. M. Valladolid, *op. cit.*, tome 2, p. 620, from which comes the Spanish version. In regard to the situation that motivated these expressions, the reading of Y. Poutet, *op. cit.*, in his 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, pp. 83-121 is altogether recommendable, a detailed and critical narration, besides being overawing.

weakness and did not desire or perhaps was not able to modify the order of things. It was something between God and himself.

Between God and himself: if we take care to read all of this not only from the institutional point of view but altogether as the personal journey of Monsieur de La Salle, we understand it much better. It does not deal, in effect, with a theoretical discourse, relative to the nature of an organization, external, but with a social task. It is, of course. But it is, moreover, the journey that the founder discovers for himself: he believes that God has called him not to start anything, nor to guide anyone in anything, as if the journey of others and his own were two distinct things. No. He believes that God calls him to live in a determined way his relationship with Him. And this determined way is characterized by faith. He believes that God has placed him in this world so that he lives looking for Him and meeting Him beyond all the conventional ways or in that which he was hoping from a person like himself. For this we say that when he encounters the word of Barré it is not only the founder who receives it, but the person, John Baptist<sup>43</sup>.

It was also necessary that others understand him and that they take on the endeavor as their own because otherwise the project would not have a future. Some said about him that he was doing this at the same time to distinguish his personal life journey from that of his work, but that these two were joined together at the same time. He felt that his own journey went beyond the limits of his own life, as if God were proposing a surprisingly fruitful experience.

It was necessary that his personal faith would convert itself into an institutional structure. It was that which his entire life sought to attain. He had to help others to understand another vertebral system, of a guarantee similar to that of the vows. It had to be something exceptional, capable of fostering it with guarantees similar to faith.

In his formula, logically, solidity began by professional experience. The initial gateway of faith was in the reward of the teaching experience that they were sharing. Thus very quickly they learned to relate the reality of God with their experience of being together in the educational project that was identifying them. It was their experience of God, of that incarnate God whom Bérulle, and above all his followers Condren and Olier, had taught about in lofty terms. That God was also the one that Monsieur de Paul had taught France to see in the Poor. And He was the one that Barré and the Sulpician community, furthermore, had as the spirit of their organization.

Very quickly that experience that was identifying the community was showing itself as the face of God's saving plan. For them it was a sign in time of the eternal plan that was giving meaning

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<sup>43</sup> This is the great contribution from the studies of Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos, with their emphasizing the key moments in the founder's itinerary, the powerful words or the crossroads that he goes about overcoming throughout his incident filled life. One does not deal with the big moments of the configuration of a nascent institution, but above all with the big moments of a life, with the great challenges of a person in search of the meaning of his life. See both authors jointly, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux Pauvres* [ed.: *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*], Beauchesne, Paris, 1977 (there are editions in English and Spanish); but very particularly, of Miguel Campos, in his great work *L'itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* [ed.: *The Gospel Journey of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*] ...in numbers 45 and 46 of the Cahiers Lasalliens. In the first of these two volumes expressly presented is the understanding of the founder's itinerary from the prism of "powerful words": pp. 77-89.

to the life of those masters of those schools for the people. De La Salle insisted on grounding his work, his association of local communities, in the world of a God beyond and very deeply in this human world. He taught them to see the reality of poverty that normally enveloped his schools as the call of God's mystery. They realized this by discovering it in dedicating themselves to organize their teaching, thrift and living together strictly and energetically.

It was like a constant process of feedback, like a virtuous circle. It was based on the possibility of accepting a God being better understood than from a kind of abstract or impersonal mysticism. Gradually that transcendental God was overcoming all human diversity through the face of Jesus seen in children and in the very heart of the teacher. The abstract mystic (to use the language of one hundred years before) was becoming Christian from identifying with Jesus, who was calling and offering Himself daily.

Gradually, always gradually, by sharing this faith in Jesus who was making the teacher his Minister, the interior coherence of the group was being built. Thus it was moving from group to community and was defining itself in a common vocation. It was the first big jump. The other came afterwards: the necessity to serve and to grow taught them that those small local cores had to make themselves reasonably autonomous and to function together / in association, that is to say, as a network<sup>44</sup>. The jump, now, was from community to "association." Thus they were seeing the definitive face of the community that, this time, transcended the local and was becoming universal, at least potentially.

So then, yes, already they were beginning to see that they were in God's Plan, precisely as a community of the plan, as the Society of Christian Schools, for that also was what they were called. Then His design ended in closing themselves in a perfect circle in offering the true Sign of the Kingdom to his people: that of an institution made up of a network of communities that, they said, had been thus desired by God since time immemorial and forever<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Many years before Bérulle had made it very clear and it is good to recall it in order to help in understanding what was obstinate and what was present of fidelity and realism in the insistence of the first Lasallians regarding their vow of Association. The Association was what Bérulle proposed in order to guarantee the quality of service of his Congregation of the Oratory regarding the French dioceses. He did not use the term, but he built on the concept: "As we do not wish to do anything in the dioceses unless by obedience to the prelates as regards ecclesiastical functions, it is equally necessary that the Congregation not be subject to the prelates in their institutions because it would be the same in different places where different prelates would desire to form each one according to their plans, nor in the same diocese under different prelates." Cited in *Histoire du Christianisme*, Desclée, 1995, vol. 9, *L'Âge de la Raison*, p.263.

<sup>45</sup> This is the contribution of Miguel Campos' thesis with his interpretation of the itinerary of Monsieur de La Salle and the Meditations for the Time of Retreat (ed.: MR): looking for an evangelical foundation for the religious life, he encounters a path of fidelity that begins to be shared around a mission. In this process the MR assumes a speculative or theological foundation of lived experience. Neither the itinerary nor the MR brings an explicit word relating to the Gospels and new forms of religious Consecration. But what is very clearly given is that the foundation root goes through shared fidelity and mission as part of the Father's mission (using in this last case the word 'mission' in the strictly Berullian sense of the word, to which more than likely Monsieur de La Salle was sensitively attentive). Perhaps the work of the author, monumental, just did not appreciate what he brings and thus expresses himself classifying his contributions as modest: in no way are they, inasmuch as they indicate a new way, a reality that neither the vows nor any other regulation point to, if not the faith in relationship with God and with a specific task. This, lived in a specified way, is the foundation that M. Campos was searching for and ended up proposing. See in **Op. cit.**, the Conclusions as well as his first part (CL 45, pp. 329-358) as well as the overview of the work (CL 46, pp. 357-389).

## 7. *From the vows to community*

Already they were Sign, already they were religious. And in this way they were definitely stable: all were becoming settled to live in community for the mission, responding to the same call of God that completely concerned their life.

That which helps us to understand all of this course is that by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in a dynamic of exchanges that had broken out in the days of the Reformation and had given place to the appearance of new forms of religious life not defined by the vows but by the mission, communities such as the Lasallian one, were anticipating a model for the future<sup>46</sup>. Now they would define themselves by the community that shared the faith in service of the mission.

Vows were not necessary for this. At least not as regards a public, recognizable, obligatory or prescribed action.

His Institute exists, its interior hierarchy is strong and coherent, its governance efficient and flexible. Conquered subjects come to them for what seems to be the same self-sacrifice of his humble and generous predecessors: once in the house, the recently arrived occupy a place which hardly distinguishes them from the older ones; between them the Rules establish a fraternity that does not take into account anything more than their belonging to the same body; and this defines itself by a simple formality of admittance, without any other agreement. “Brothers” not only by virtue of the name that they give all the disciples of Monsieur de La Salle who receive the same formation, who assure the same service, are obliged to common exercises. Some of them will bind themselves in a special way: for a fixed time or in perpetuity, they will take a vow of association, of stability, of obedience. Thus adding to their personal obligations, those ‘professed’ will be, for the entire body, as so many points of support, as so many strong factors of cohesion.<sup>47</sup>

Yes, there are vows. And they can be so interpreted that, even if not for everyone, they are there defining all. Well: when this incipient community speaks of vows it is not referring to the triad that afterwards had become classical: poverty, chastity and obedience. It is something else. Their ‘vows’ are not penitential nor of abandonment. They are the expression of their belonging to God in the school of the Poor.

You had and have those who reading ‘obedience’ read at the same time the other two vows of the triad, but they will be as mistaken today as then, because the range / meaning of the word is

<sup>46</sup> Way before, one hundred years before, Ana of Xaintonge (1567-1621), establishing the Ursulines of Dole, said expressing herself contrary to the cloister and solemn vows for her community: “The Company that I wish to establish has nothing in common with existing societies, because none of them has the objective that I am proposing...I desire an educational company and not a contemplative society”; and also, “that wish to desire to have is not an assembly of school teachers but a company of Christian virgins dedicated (‘vouées’) to the religious life for the instruction of youth.” As Y. Poutet observes, from whom these two quotes are taken, how to unite the two intentions? This was in the first twenty years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One hundred years later the Lasallian community was debating the same question, even if in its own case it dealt with young men, a difference that facilitated many things in regard to the cloister and the solemnity of vows. But the challenge was the same. See the texts in Y. Poutet, *Originalité et influence de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, Cahiers Lasalliens, 43, pp. 27 & 28.

<sup>47</sup> Brother Maurice-Auguste, *Les vœux...* CL 2, p. 104.

other. Here, ‘Obedience’ means ‘community’, as one sees by its closeness to the rest of the Lasallian commitments from the very beginning. It is not necessary to linger too long on this matter in order to realize that association, stability and obedience are the three aspects or dimensions of a same reality: they express the commitment that is lived in respect to a body of local and territorial character<sup>48</sup>. The Brothers of the schools live their commitment with a group close by, community and work team. But on the contrary they are not limited by the fact that these work groups animate themselves in a network, interchanging persons among themselves, multiplying and organizing themselves, they constitute themselves as an association of local groups.

Their ‘vowed’ commitments are centered on association: their network of local groups needs persons who are conscious that they belong and they maintain themselves permanently in it, until the definitive commitment of their life. These are their vows<sup>49</sup>. For this reason they do not hesitate to add more to themselves, so astonishingly different from the conventional triad’s point of view: that of educating the Poor gratuitously.

They are certainly vows and they will confer a distinction on the group as regards their spirit. They are vows of mission, not of sacrifice, penitence, coercion. They are neither all nor the majority who have professed them. But all are definitely there in the mission, source and destiny of the vows.

Their vows, their spirit, express the faith that constitutes their community. For this reason, it is thus that the Institute presents itself from its beginnings:

...in no form does the canonical state of perfection foreshadow today what is known as the secular institute: insistence upon the separation of the century and the distinctive habit, in our case the transposition of all the traditional obligations in matters of common life, leave no doubt in this matter. On the other hand if he proposes the ideal of full perfection to his children, if he appropriates the lessons of the monastic masters for them, if he reproduces the forms employed among centralized Religious orders in many of their institutions, Monsieur de La Salle does not undertake anything, of what we know, that should enforce for him or his Brothers any pretense to

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to remember how E. Maillefer recalled the assembly, retreat and profession of 1686. In that paragraph you can see his concept of the vows – that even now interests us – and his vision of the purpose, objective, or meaning of that proposal: ‘to live in community.’ “...He added that until then there had been fluctuating and some lack of determination in his state; that he begged them that they should consider if it would not be more convenient in his illness, and to leave to the less perfect all excuse of returning to the world, to commit themselves with a vow to live in community in accord with the Rules that were in effect among them...” *La vie de...*, manuscript of 1723, p. 41. The version is from J. M. Valladolid, in the cited first volume of *Las cuatro primeras*....p. 316.

<sup>49</sup> The Rule of Saint Benedict, in speaking of the compromise that the novices had to express when they went to be admitted to the monastic community, is thus expressed: “He who is to be admitted promises in the oratory before (‘coram’) all stability, conversion of habits and obedience before (‘coram’) God and his saints, so that, if he comports himself at some time in another way, he knows that he will be condemned by him whom he mocks. From this promise he will draw up a document in the name of the saints whose relics are there on him with the abbot present. He will write it in his own hand. If he does not know how to write, another whom he has asked will write it and the novice will give a sign and with his own hands he will place it upon the altar.” *Regula Benedicti* 58, 17-20. No explanation is really necessary to establish the correct relationship between commitment and community, or between vow and commitment. In both meanings one is dealing with the faith that is shared and expresses itself in an act before the community and God. Nothing else.

the legal status of religious. And finally, if one keeps in mind the evolution of law over the last three centuries, rather we encounter in the Institute of the Brothers what has existed at least since 1694, just as it still maintained itself at the death of its founder, the juridical figure of the society of common life without public vows. However it follows being impossible to decide if the saint was considering whether or not to be formally recognized by the Church, as regards public vows, the commitments introduced among his followers.<sup>50</sup>

From what we reflect on in this commentary we do not see as impossible to imagine the answer as when Maurice Hermans wrote these lines, sixty years ago. We see, moreover, that there was a gap between the objective and the result in that process of two or three years that concluded with the Bull and that he studied in an exemplary manner.

As he helped us to understand, without the intervention of very inexperienced Roman functionaries<sup>51</sup> - Joseph Digne who probably was the one who recommended the introduction of the three vows to facilitate recognition - without him and without his mark in our history, probably recognition would have been obtained anyway. But without those vows. Those are the ironies of life.

The Brothers, indeed, hurried to modify their application including the vows as Digne indicated. But that modification did not give the result in and of itself: by the work of de Tencin<sup>52</sup> (52), the one in charge of negotiations, all was kept back in the hope of a civil recognition that was not arriving and that moreover the civil authority did not deem necessary. When the government changed with the arrival of the new king, recognition also arrived. And with that, two months later that of Rome, from September to November. But between the modifications of Digne and the acceptance by the young king almost two years had passed, that is to say, from the one the other did not follow.

The Brothers claimed civil recognition before all because they needed it to be able to acquire goods (concretely the Saint Yon house). But this recognition – the ‘Letters Patent’ of the King or of the Parliament – would not arrive if they had not presented beforehand to the civil authority some canonical recognition. For this reason they rushed to Rome and they hastened to modify their application including the matter of the vows. Nevertheless, the negotiation on the part of the civil authority having blocked them, the modifications that they were willing to accept did not serve any purpose. When the royal acceptance was finally given it was not because they had the canonical (that they do not have) but because the reports that reached the Court were positive about them. At that point the Letters Patent appear, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1724. And with them in hand they return to Rome, where their request had remained, modified almost two years before.

<sup>50</sup> Brother Maurice-Auguste, *L'Institut des Frères*..., p. 298.

<sup>51</sup> The judgment is Brother Maurice-Auguste's: CL., 2, p. 110 and CL., 11, p. 152.

<sup>52</sup> Pierre Guérin de Tencin, diplomat to the Holy See, in this moment a priest (later a bishop and cardinal), seems to have acted during his whole career more as a political person than as an ecclesiastic. His attitude was critical in the delay of the whole process. For him, from what we can see, the question was not of some vows or others, but rather of establishing it in the French administration of the moment, i.e., the Regency. Cf. Brother Maurice-Auguste, *Op. cit.*, CL, 11, pp. 239-244. Twenty years before Brother Maurice (1938, Paris), in the second volume of his *Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, G. Rigault had been more biting in his appraisal of de Tencin's role. cf. *Op. cit.*, pp. 80-82.

Thus it happened that what Blain presents as two parallel and independent processes ended forming itself into only one, in which each one of the two sustains the other. For this we say, without giving it a decisive or proven character, that perhaps without the modification of the vows the final result would have been the same. Perhaps. One way or another, the Society of the Christian Schools would have arrived at the register of societies (if we can use that term)<sup>53</sup> (53). They, at any rate, called a General Chapter full of joy and ready to confront a new time.

It was August of 1725 and the itinerary of the Beginnings concluded.

### 8. *Epilogue: brakes to retain the persons*

Anyhow, it was not the same to begin that new time in one way or another.

Cultural, social including historical changes that were brewing for already more than a century would end up manifesting themselves in fifty years. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a new order would already be evident and little by little that had already been emerging came to pass. In that which concerns the Brothers the novelty would consist in the change of profound nature regarding its service to the Poor by the school: over the course of a century, what had been born as a service of Charity and Evangelization had been changed into Law and the social order.

This implied that the basis of the institutions dedicated to this service was going to move from the canonical to the civil service, from the Church to society's organizations. Then one would see the inadequacy of a pertinent institution being measured by its canonical expression, i.e., the vows. Not to understand this – and the canonical understanding of the vows did not make it any easier – would render the situation difficult if not almost impossible.

Sooner or later the incompatibility between that understanding of the vows and apostolic commitment would become evident, as Barré had anticipated and Anne de Xainctonge, Vincent de Paul, Francis de Sales, Jeanne de Lestonnac and Mary Ward, among others, had foreseen. One could see that no one could present oneself before one's society with the pretense of forming one's new members and at the same time 'profess' one's distance and renunciation of it. Vows based on disregard of the world were not compatible with commitment for the Poor of this world.

Likewise a new definition of consecration was needed, so that the center of gravity moved from abandonment to witness, from the ascetical to the community. But this, which was precisely the endeavor of Barré and de La Salle, had become almost definitely forgotten<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> In reality, according to Blain's narration (*op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 185-188), they were already registered from the issuance of the Letters Patent and so noted, apart from the Roman negotiations. The problem of the Saint Yon property, the reason for all of the process, was resolved without the vows.

<sup>54</sup> As a consequence of the Bull, the Lasallian community had to touch up its Rule. It was logical then that the vows would appear in it as they had not appeared before. But the most decisive change was the new Preface which someone composed based on more or less juridical texts, more or less canonical ones stressing a reading of the vows precisely contrary to what had been aimed for before. And that had to last for two and a half centuries. To have an idea of this, cf. the first volume of M. Campos' work on *L'itineraire évangélique*...in the final moment of his conclusions, pp. 352-358.

Thus, sixty five years later, we come across these paragraphs in the Lasallian archives that we quote as a epilog:

These perpetual vows, though simple, are a necessary means for the Brothers to sustain and spread their Institute, whose preservation is desired by all of its members. Without vows they would not be able either to rely on its members or consequently to oblige themselves to adapt them for any place; they could not even have them, because no one would want a state that will not present any perspective nor assured resource, in case of old age and infirmity; without vows, therefore, they would not be able to preserve themselves.

Some communities, priests as well as religious, seem in truth, to sustain themselves with annual vows; but the difference in this case between men and women, between priests and simple brothers, is perceptible. A woman, of a certain age, cannot hold any claim on the world; a man with talents always has them. A priest does not need vows to join a house that, with work, at least offers him certain satisfactions; a brother needs this check to be held back in a state in which he does not encounter anything that not be painful and overbearing.<sup>55</sup>

It is a document, with its 32 pages, entitled General Idea of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The Brothers write it in order to present it before the Assembly of the Revolution that attempts to suppress religious vows. It is from 1790 and was conceived to be presented from the different places where Lasallian communities were located.

Two years later the Revolution suppressed vows and the Institute officially disappeared.

We cannot know what would have occurred if its configuration had been otherwise<sup>56</sup>. It is at least possible that in this case the Institute would have given more attention to proposals like that of Pierre-Joseph de Clorivière, the Jesuit (ex-Jesuit in those days) that on the eve of the Revolution was organizing some form of secular consecrated life, as later he would establish others no longer secular or would collaborate in restoring the Company<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> *Idée générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, Angers, 1790, p. 3. See in AMG (Archives de la Maison Générale).

<sup>56</sup> Dated January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1785, Brother Agathon tried to forward a set of two *Circular Letters* to all of the communities on the nature of the Brothers' vows and on that of Community. Some Brothers, depending on the Superior's words, concerned about what was happening, had gone to the Sorbonne, seeking the advice of some theologian on the nature of their vows, their dispensation and their religious character. The Superior, then, sent a lengthy document (320 pages, in 8°) to the Communities, with a set on the nature of the Lasallian vows; the first circular, the first document, is given over to those of Stability and Teaching the Poor gratuitously; the second, to the other three vows. The Conclusion, the same for both documents, is that one does not deal with solemn vows, but of religious ones, with the consequences that this has for the dispensation of such vows. This set of documents is much more balanced or nuanced than what one could think of the text from the *Idée générale* [ed.: *General Idea*]... Anyhow, it still remains true that all lies with the triad, 'the three substantial vows of evangelical perfection.' The basic concern, at any rate, of the Brothers as well as of the Superior, is that of the possibility and the effects of a dispensation: thus, the second letter (on the triad) does not deal with anything on the sense of the Institution which professes them; the first (on the two 'specific' vows), in contrast, is a discourse on the meaning of the Lasallian project. Unfortunately it is muffled by the entire document.

<sup>57</sup> Breton Jesuit (1735-1820), exiles himself in 1762 when the Parliament of Paris expels the Jesuits from France. When Pope Clement XIV suppresses the Company, he returns to France as a secular priest. From 1790 he attempts to found and ends up establishing two secular religious institutes, the Fathers of the Heart of Jesus and the Daughters

In what remained of the Lasallian community, the Superiors knew their project, as we know from the correspondence of Brother Solomon, secretary general<sup>58</sup>. But that is yet another history. 28

For us, in this reflection, in this context, we are interested to affirm that Barre-La Salle meeting is one who has marked the transformation of the institutions of consecrated life. Because it was not a question of appealing only to faith and loyalty to re-constitute what one was finding without too much sense. This episode proposes us with total clarity that the problem was in the institutional design more than in the quality of the persons.

Thus, in this reflection have appeared, silently, all the institutions founded by Bérulle, San Vicente of Paul and Olier: all of them claim 'congregations' by themselves, but already they do not accept the institutional form derived from the religious vows. What they found is something based not in the vows but in the mission. And, in proof of the difficult compatibility with one thing and another, all of them feel deeply perplex before the vows that have to be done inside them.

Another example, more known and much more bleeding of the same situation, is the happened one in the feminine institutions of Saint Francis of Sales, Saint Juana de Lestonnac, Anne de Xaintonge and Mary Ward among others: in all of them the ecclesiastic authority ended up by imposing the closing on the secularity in the mission, in a gesture that it would suppose several centuries of delay for the above mentioned institutions and for all others would look in forward for the false exit of the simple vows or stability.

Several centuries should happen until we were understanding that the constitution of the consecrated life it are not the vows but the *sign of a specific community*. Meanwhile the history would still remain sowed with symptoms of perplexity with a constant simultaneously sad and encouraging: the life of the new institutions was far beyond of their own vocabulary, up to managing always to contradict it almost.

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of the Heart of Jesus. He overcomes the risks of the Revolution but later is jailed under Napoleon. When the Jesuit order is re-established in 1814 he is put in charge of its reorganization in France.

<sup>58</sup> In the collection of his *Letters*, as we know them today, it appears for the first time dated August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1791, in letter number (n.) 100. We see it again November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1791 (n. 102), January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1792 (n. 106), March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1792 (n. 107), March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1792 (n. 108), and finally May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1792 (ns. 104 and 98). It is unfortunately an unpublished set. The document can be found in the Lasallian Archives of Rome (AMG) and of Lyon.