



# Lasallian Reflections

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Brothers of the Christian Schools

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## ASSOCIATION

### A First Reading of the "Signs of the Times"

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(25 September 2006)*

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## 1. Its Importance

### In Documents

In various forms and with its own specific vocabulary, association has been one of the major areas under consideration by the Institute for the last 30 years. The resulting documents produced by General Chapters show how thinking has developed in this area, and how the way it is formulated and implemented has also changed.

This change in vocabulary is noticeable also in Brother Superior's Pastoral Letters which, by their regular appearance and despite their literary genre, express the thinking of the Institute between 1976 and 1996<sup>1</sup>. We should note in particular that, in those which appeared in the period 2000 to 2005, the word "association" or its derivations constantly recur in the titles:

*The Image of the Brother Today, the Centrality of our  
Fourth Vow [of Association] (2000)*

*Being Brothers in Community: our Primary Association (2001)*

*Associated with the God of Life, Our Life of Prayer (2002)*

<sup>1</sup> See *Twenty Years of the "shared mission" in the Pastoral Letters of Superior Generals*; in *Lasalliana* 44: articles 18 D 99, 19 D 100, 20 D 101 by Brother Edwin Arteaga.

## 2. Its Nature

*Associated with the God of the Poor, Our Consecrated Life in the Light of the 4<sup>th</sup> Vow* (2003)

*Associated with the God of the Kingdom and the Kingdom of God, Ministers and Servants of the Word* (2004)

*Associated Together to Seek God, Follow Jesus Christ, and Work for his Kingdom, Our Religious Life* (2005)

Among other documents produced by the Center of the Institute, we can mention the *Institute Bulletin* No. 250 (2005): *Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission*; and the first source document for the preparation of the 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, the DVD entitled *Together and by Association for the Educational Service of the Poor*.

### In Practice

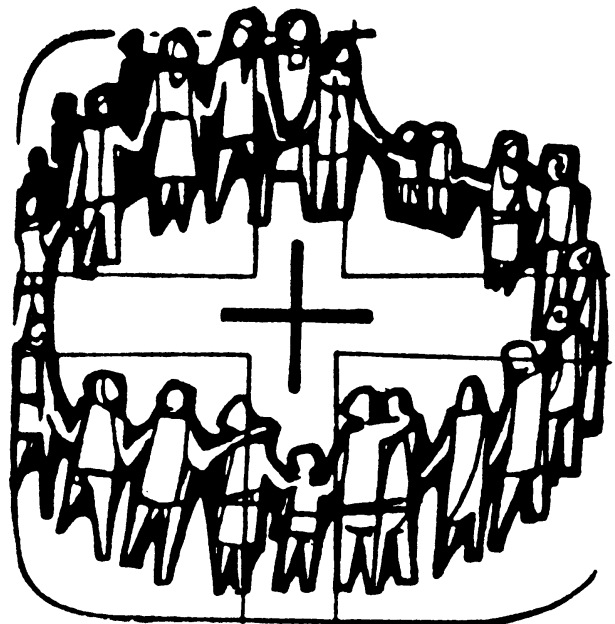
**Personal journeys** to association differ greatly. One even could say that there are as many journeys as there are Brothers and lay persons in the Institute. As successive official documents developed the idea of association, and its practice evolved, so each one had to adopt a position - and continues to have to - which reflects this development. Some have not yet started out on this journey; others are already well on their way; some have even gone too far or have lost their way! The *Institute Bulletin*<sup>2</sup> offers us 14 possible routes to follow - a source of inspiration for the hesitant...

**Community Journeys.** Given that the Mission calls for Communion, it is not surprising that many personal journeys have ended up by merging, and have led to the formation of Lasallian-inspired faith and action communities. The *Institute Bulletin*, already referred to, describes nine of these.<sup>3</sup> But there are also Lasallian-inspired faith communities which have formed within the framework of canonical consecrated life: the Institute of the De La Salle Guadalupan Sisters, and the Union of Catechists. This proliferation of communities provides input for reflection by Brothers and lay persons at all levels, and stimulates it. And the search for vocabulary continues.

### a. Historical Context

*On the diachronic plane*, in recent times, the nature of association has reflected an evolution in vocabulary. The 1947 *Rule*<sup>4</sup> refers to “secular teachers” as employees who are admitted almost grudgingly. Many years later, a *Pastoral Letter* dated 31 December 1979 notes “the apprehension caused by the negative impact on the teaching of catechism due to the large number of lay persons”! *Circular 422*, reporting the decisions of the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter held in 1986, corrects this view, speaking of “the integration of the Brothers and lay people in a common ministry” (p.13); and *Circular 435* following the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter speaks of the “shared mission.”<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, there is talk of the “Lasallian Family,”<sup>6</sup> which eventually gives way to the more generally used term “association.”

*On the synchronic plane*, we restrict ourselves to the period 1691-1694, with its outstanding and courageous act of association, born of the faith and zeal of De La Salle and of his two companions Gabriel Drolin and Nicolas Vuyart, an historical event which saved the fledgling community of the



<sup>2</sup> *Bulletin of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, No. 250, pp. 53-81.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, pp. 16-24.

<sup>4</sup> *Rule of Government* 26, 12; 19,95; *Common Rules* 9,18.

<sup>5</sup> 1987 *Rule*, 17; Document dated 30 April 1997: *The Lasallian Mission: Human and Christian Education - A Shared Mission*.

<sup>6</sup> *Circular 403*, p. 78, No 6; *Letter to the Lasallian Family*, dated 02 February 1989.

Brothers. In concrete terms, this event took the form of a religious vow in two phases: the heroic vow of 1691 and the vow of 1694. The theological force of this act, transmitted from Brother to Brother, continues to keep the community alive to this day. Association is the core message of the history of our beginnings. Historically speaking, the vow of association has had an eventful past, as a reading of the various versions of the *Rule* from 1726 to this day would show. In this connection, we should also recall that, for a variety of reasons, up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not all Brothers made vows, and those without vows constituted about a third of all the Brothers in the Institute! However, no one would dare to suggest that these members of the Institute were not associated 100% in its mission, even though that had not made a *vow of association* or any other vow.

## b. Theological Dimension

Association is born both of faith in God, who considers that there is a great need for this Institute, and of zeal; and God invites Brothers and lay people to work in the vineyard of Christian education. Association finds its nourishment in a healthy ecclesiology of communion, and in the conciliar and post-conciliar vision of the laity. Mission, which is its ultimate goal, calls for communion (*Christifideles laici*, 32). Association finds its nourishment also in consecration, which is the root and guarantee of the apostolic project. The Brother is consecrated by his baptism and his vows; the lay person also is consecrated by his baptism (at least, by his faith in God, if he belongs to another religion). Without a real desire to put this faith at the service of the mission, there is no association in the Lasallian sense of the word. It will be only a corporative, or even a philanthropic association, with a minimum of intentionality and sympathy.

In this theological dimension - this *locus teologicus* - we consecrate ourselves **to** God, **with** our Brothers, **for** a mission. What makes the constitution of this dimension possible is association. As the **heart, memory, and guarantor of the charism**<sup>7</sup> of the Lasallian project, the Brothers make this theological dimension the core component of

their identity, and they live out this identity through their consecration. Consecration associates us and association consecrates us. God says to us, "I shall be with you," and we say to God, to our Brothers, and to our collaborators, "I shall be with you." It is a Trinitarian type of movement between God, the Brothers, and committed lay people. Association affirms the community by linking it to God and to the mission.

## c. Social Phenomenon

Association is undeniably a social phenomenon. To associate oneself is to participate in a group identity which is built up by an affective and narrative process, and through formative experiences. It cannot be understood as a collateral effect of the decrease in the number of Brothers. This would be the worst possible way of looking at association. It is not as if there were two (opposing, some would say) forces. The world sees us as the community of the De La Salle Christian Schools. It is a single force composed of 5,800 Brothers and 70,000 lay persons committed together to the same educational mission serving almost a million people. As was said earlier, it is much more than a social phenomenon. In the midst of the Brothers and the lay people the Spirit is at work "*to direct them...in all of their actions and in all of their conduct*" (cf. EM 2,26). "*It is this Spirit who animates their actions, who is a spirit of life in them, and who acts in such a way that their actions are not dead actions, and not only Christian actions, but even actions proper to their state... which demands a particular perfection in them*" (Id. 2, 36). Association is a commitment, a life option which implies surpassing oneself, and above all a gift of oneself to the very poor. It is much more than a philanthropic social phenomenon.

## d. A Rainbow

Association is like a resplendent rainbow which links the history of our beginnings to our present age. Thanks to its light, we understand what happened then and what is happening now. We see the charism in all its diversity, composed of different forms of association and different degrees of commitment to it. We have called these different forms and different degrees of commitment *personal* and *community journeys*.

<sup>7</sup> *Circular 435* (Report of the 42nd General Chapter) points out this expression twice: p. 16; p. 43, No. 3,6,1.

Although we have already referred to them (p. 2), we list the most important ones below:

**Lasallian Consecrated Life**

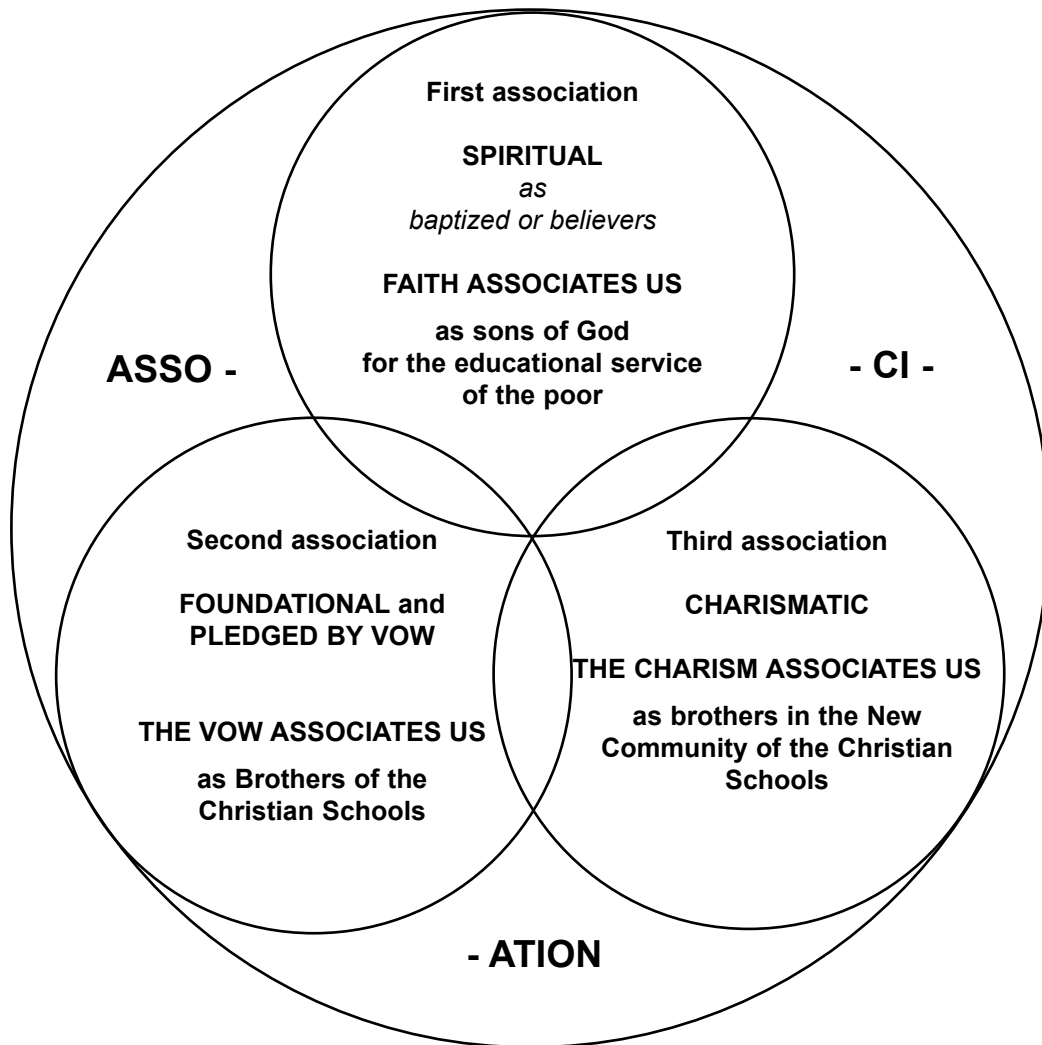
- Brothers of the Christian Schools
- All the teaching Institutes of Sisters and Brothers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, associated, as it were, in anticipation!
- The De La Salle Guadalupan Sisters
- The Lasallian Sisters (La Salle Sisters) of Vietnam, Thailand, and USA
- The Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified of Turin (Italy)

**Faith Communities**

- *Signum Fidei* groups in several countries who were the pioneers of association

- The Lasallian Fraternity in the District of France (Lasallian Third Order up until January 2001)
- LAMB (Lasallian Association for Mission in Bristol) in Great Britain
- The Galilee Community in the District of Valladolid
- A Lasallian Community in South Chicago
- A Community of Brothers and Volunteers in the Town of El Salto in North Mexico
- Lasallian Volunteers in the Cameroons and in the Philippines
- The Network of San Miguel Schools in the United States

**e. The Three Circles**



**THE CIRCLES OF ASSOCIATION**  
**A Graphic Approach to Help Us Understand Association Better**

Association can be represented as a circle, a vital element which ensures the existence and cohesion of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and of their associates, whatever their degree of commitment, for the mission God has entrusted to them.

This vital element is the **LARGE CIRCLE** which carries the word “asso - ci - ation” which includes three fundamental aspects, symbolized by three circles which overlap and have common points of contact. The areas where they overlap indicate their essential intrinsic interdependence, their point of anchorage, and areas of reciprocal nourishment.

The **FIRST CIRCLE**, chronologically speaking, called here “first association,” expresses the fundamental spiritual aspect of our association. Together, as sons of the same God / Father, members of other religions and baptized persons, we work in the educational service of the poorest children, urged on by the Spirit of God, that “ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”<sup>8</sup> It is in this sense that what is involved is first of all a *spiritual association*. It is not by chance that one chooses to offer oneself for the educational service of young people, whether one has vows or not. Faith in God and respect for others associate us as teachers who are believers (cf. *Rule 20*, § 2).

It is this same common faith which conditions the nature, the degree, the quality, the spirituality of the two other aspects or circles of our association. Without this fundamental association through faith and spirituality, there is no association by vow between Brothers, and no association between us all, Brothers and lay persons, in a shared charism in the service of the mission. This first aspect of association, that is, spiritual association, comes first chronologically there-



fore. It is an association which calls upon a person to develop his faith by serving others through education. The more passionately we live out this faith and spirituality in the service of underprivileged young people, the more we shall be “sons” of the same Father so that we can be more “*brothers*” for them and for our partners in the mission.

The **SECOND CIRCLE** represents the “second association,” the association of the Brothers with one another by vow and a foundation experience. After 1691 and 1694, this association consisted in the pooling of their baptismal gifts with those of other baptized persons as they confronted together the pitiful state of teachers and children of their time. It is an association for the salvation of others which creates fraternity; an Institute of “brothers,” bound together by a solemn promise, a vow of association. The more the Brothers live out their first association as believers and true sons of God, the more they are able to be brothers among themselves and brothers of men in the service of underprivileged children. The second association, therefore, is nourished by the first and depends on it. The “vow of fraternity” association is the commitment demanded by the faith of De La Salle and of the Brothers, and by their ardent zeal for the salvation of young people. This is still true of the Brothers today.

The **THIRD CIRCLE** represents the “third association,” the charismatic association which includes both Brothers and lay collaborators, inspired by the Lasallian charism. Chronologically speaking, the knowledge and diffusion of this charism comes first of all from the Brothers, the “heart, memory and guarantee of the charism.”<sup>9</sup> It is the Lasallian charism which defines the consecration and ministry of the Brothers (*Rule 2*), it

<sup>8</sup> Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 2, § 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Circular 435*, No. 3,6,1.

inspires foundations (*Rule* 18a), and Brother Superior and his Council work to ensure fidelity to it (*Rule* 116, 117 § 3). Finally, “the spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute he founded” (*Rule* 146).

The spiritual gifts of De La Salle and his charism will “spill over” only to the extent that Brothers live by them intensely. One of the greatest gifts of De La Salle to his Brothers was that of association, through which he saved the Institute and thousands of children. Consequently, it is also to the extent that Brothers live out this association of fraternity among themselves, that it will spill over and our lay collaborators will feel attracted to live it out with us also. This “third association” is, therefore, charismatic, centered totally on the Mission. It helps us to build together the new Community of the Christian Schools.

It is clear that this third association, that of our lay collaborators with the Institute, depends on the “second association,” which is the charismatic fraternity which spills over from the life of the Brothers. If the faith, charism, and passion of their association, vowed by the Brothers, are not visible, lay collaborators will not feel attracted to associating with them in any significant way. This third association depends also on the “first,” that of the faith and spirituality of believers, acting because of their faith for the good of children and young people. Without this faith, lay persons will not associate themselves with the Brothers except on a contractual or professional basis. The degree of a lay person’s associative commitment with the Brothers will depend on the depth of his spiritual experience, whatever his religion.

These “three associations,” which in reality are one, but whose three aspects we have treated separately for the sake of clarity, form a coherent whole. These three aspects reflect a chronological development: first, faith associates us; then fraternity, through a vow of association, brings us together as Brothers; and finally, the charism of De La Salle associates Brothers and lay people, for a mission, as consecrated believers or simply as lay people. It is association for a mission which is clearly religious and spiritual, and which

is accessible to all believers whether they are Christians or profess some other religion.

If association is not seen in this way, it can be visible, effective and generous, but is restricted to functioning on rather a sociological and contractual level, with albeit great sympathy for the institution and for those who run it. It ensures the institution functions properly but not at a deeper level the Founder would have wanted and which comes from a committed faith. This kind of association should not be condemned: it is simply another form of association which meets criteria different from those we have described above. In a situation such as this, the lay collaborator, at the lowest level of association, is placed in the large circle, in the space not occupied by the three circles or aspects of association. He is still a real associate, just like the Brothers who, before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, did not make vows!

#### **f. A Process**

Building up the ministerial fraternity of the new Community is an on-going task for everyone, Brothers and lay people. Our situation could be described in terms of the planetary system. There are two possible views:

The first: the Institute is the sun around which the various satellites of associates revolve, individually or in more or less homogeneous groups.

The second: several planets make up the system: FSC, Sisters, and Catechists of Jesus Crucified. There are also others which could become autonomous planets at some time, but which in the meantime revolve as satellites around the FSC planet, such as, De La Salle Christian Communities, Signum Fidei, etc. That is, new associates find their own orbit around the Sun (the Mission), each according to its identity.

There could be objections to the use of this model because of the lack of contact between the satellites or the planets. Each one follows its own orbit; and, if we stick strictly to this model, it cannot touch any other. So there is no contact or interactivity. We are very far here from the models of the great Franciscan, Dominican, or Benedictine families, in which there is real contact

and interdependence - sometimes General Chapters are held which include all branches of the family. It would seem that in their case the shortcoming has been overcome.

What is more, taking into account the three circles of association we have already explained, it is clear that the persons concerned are prepared to make a concrete and formal commitment to Lasallian institutions, according to the degree of their adherence to each of the three aspects or associations, and especially to the first one, that of faith, which unites us in a mission of salvation for ourselves and for underprivileged young people. All this can lead to an explicit and public commitment, sometimes gradually and following a process that is not always discernible. This is what explains the existence of associates who make public "promises" of association, of *Signum Fidei* commitments. There are others also who are very committed but who have no desire to formalize publicly their commitment, because they have a different lifestyle, a different way of expressing their faith, because of family reasons, or because they refuse any kind of association which implies constraint, etc. We have already mentioned the significant number of Brothers who never made religious vows, and yet, God knows that they were committed body and soul to the mission!

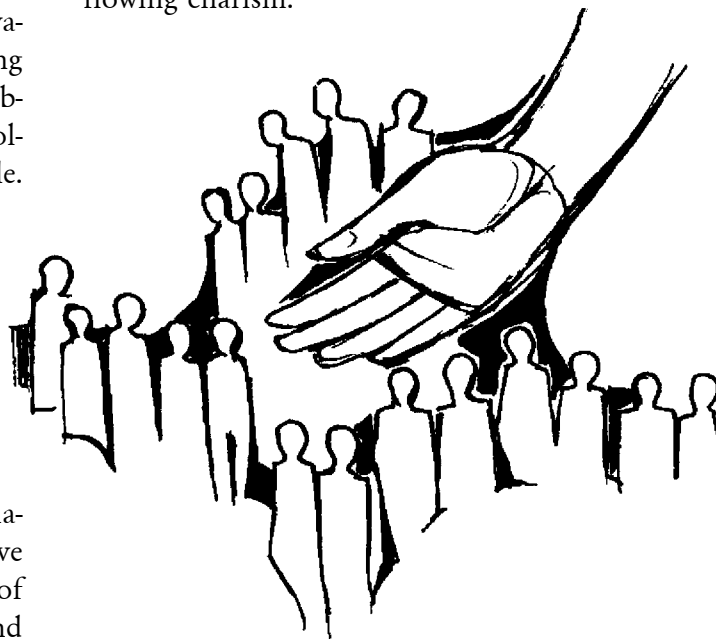
It is clear then that association does not manifest itself solely by public commitments. It is a process which little by little welds believers together - Brothers in their community, Brothers and lay people, united in their commitment to the work of education, for their own salvation and for that of the children and young people entrusted to them. Association has its supports, as we shall see later.

### 3. What It Is Not

#### a. A Simple Contractual Relationship

Although one can say that the word *association* describes the canonical and **simple contractual relationship** of the Brothers among themselves, as well as the work-contract between lay persons and the Brothers, this is not what is meant when

we speak of association in the Institute today. It is sufficient to read again what we have already said to understand this. It is because we have forgotten to some extent to envisage association in its **three** aspects (represented here as circles of association) that we have restricted ourselves to the **last circle**, the one which concerns the relationship between lay people and the Brothers, forgetting the faith and the association of fraternity of De La Salle and his Brothers which gave birth to the Christian schools and their overflowing charism.



#### b. Dispossession

Quite the contrary! It is an "admirable exchange" resulting from the overflowing of the Lasallian charism. The Lasallian charism is not a game preserve. Incomprehension of the "shared mission" has provoked deep-seated reactions from some. "It's not a shared mission, but a take-over (by lay people); it's a mission that has been given up, abandoned (by the Brothers)." There are others who feel *dispossessed* at the sight of the increasing "invasion" by lay people. Their identity is threatened by the increasing presence of our collaborators... What is still missing here is a global and healthy vision of the three circles or associations.

Association is a threat only when there is not an overflowing of charism from the Brothers. Charism that spills over is open, welcoming without being paternalistic, because it belongs to the

Church. It is a gift God has made to the Church through the intermediary of the action of the Spirit on the Brothers in particular and as a community. Association is not just a sociological phenomenon produced by a decrease in the number of Brothers: it is a grace, one of the signs of the *kairos* of God. God promised the immortality of their descendants only to Abraham and to a very few patriarchs. The love of De La Salle for the teachers and children of his Christian schools will remain for all eternity, because only love remains for ever (1 Co 13:8). It is that love Brothers are called upon to increase in themselves, without fearing to feel, sometimes, dispossessed by those they wish to love.

### **c. Leveling**

If there is leveling, it is in the sense of the de-clericalization of the Brothers, a healthy “secularization” which brings us closer in a certain sense to our lay teachers. As for them, they are called to enter into a process of spiritual commitment which will increase their faith in their educational service of the very poor. We go toward them; they come towards us, as we live together in the presence of God, adoring together the presence of God in those entrusted to us.

## **4. Its Supports**

### **a. Intentionality**

This is the starting point for any association, wherever it occurs. Brother John Johnston spoke to us about “intentional communities”<sup>10</sup> in his Pastoral Letter dated 1 January 2000. The simple fact of being together is not enough to create this intentionality, nor association in the Lasallian sense as described here. As a minimum, it involves looking together in the same direction, with the same spirit. It is a “mission” which should not be confused with employment, whose maturity is ensured by formation and the sharing of responsibilities.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Challenge: Living Out Today Our Founding History*, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Bro. Gilles Beudet, “Lasallian Spirituality: the Christian Journey” in *Lasalliana* 53-6A-238 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Lasallian Studies* No. 8: *Lay Religious Life and the Brother's Vocation*; LS No. 10: *Religious Life - Spirit and Structures*; Cahier Lasallien No. 55: *John Baptist de La Salle and the Foundation of His Institute - "Consecrated Brothers" in the Church for the World; Catechesis and the Laity* (Paris: Ligel, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> *MEL Bulletins*, Nos. 2, 8, and 9.

### **b. Faith**

Association does not find its nourishment only in faith in God the Father, who wants all mankind to be saved, but also in the faith and trust we have in those around us, and in the faith we have in the mission entrusted to us. It is in the Scriptures that believers committed to the mission find the strength to persevere in their dedication to it.<sup>11</sup> It also means faith and confidence in those working with us in the same mission.

### **c. A Healthy Theology of Religious Life and of the Lay State**

The dynamism of the charism, and consequently of association reflects the theology of the Vatican II Council. It is a theology of communion, further developed in *Evangelica testificatio, Christifideles laici, Fraternal Life in Community*, and *Vita consecrata*, as also in the *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity*, a document produced by the Religious Life Congress of November 2004. Among our Institute documents, we have the theological research of Bro. Michel Sauvage<sup>12</sup>, and the series of studies produced by Bro. Antonio Botana on association as such<sup>13</sup>, and the *Pastoral Letters* of our Superior General, Bro. Alvaro Rodríguez, referred to on page two. To these documents, we can add his *MEL Bulletin*, No. 18: *Ministers and Servants of the Word*.

## **5. Its Challenges**

### **a. The Lack of Faith on the Part of the Brothers and of the Lay People**

A lack of religious faith (no vision as set out in the 1<sup>st</sup> circle of association); a lack of faith in a passionate commitment with their fellow Brothers to an inclusive mission of fraternity (when Brothers do not understand the 2<sup>nd</sup> circle of association - their 4<sup>th</sup> vow); and a lack of faith in association itself, because the charism “does not

overflow,” and so the 3<sup>rd</sup> circle of association is no longer there, because its second source, after that of faith, is missing. A lack of attraction to committing oneself to a “passionate” mission among those who are entrusted to us.

## **b. Language and Structures**

We saw at the beginning of this article how association has been looking for a language in which to express itself and visible structures of commitment for the last 40 years. The search for structures goes on, as can be seen from the rainbow of associations. And so does the search for an

appropriate language. Structures and the language of association may come into conflict, and in fact do so with canonical norms and the *Rules* of the Institute. Their boldness has already shocked more than one person, but a charisma which overflows cannot be stopped, nor can the signs of the times sent by the God who challenges us be effaced. Association is a reality. The Lasallian charisma, joined to the creativity of the Brothers and lay persons, will make association, considered as a grace of God, a powerful means of salvation for all.

### **A Reflection on “Association”**

*After having read the attached essay by Brother Edwin Arteaga, Assistant Director of Lasallian Studies at the Casa Generalizia, you might want to use the following questions to assist in your personal reflection or community sharing:*

What do you think about what you have read? Why do you think or feel this way?

Is there something to be learned from this brief essay?

What thoughts are emerging for you about the question of association?

Is there anything in this essay that you would like to discuss or clarify with its author?