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ANNOTATION

Wentworth, FSC, Timothy. "The Renewal of Religious Life in the De La Salle Christian Brothers of the New York Province: A Survey of Current Attitudes and Criteria for Future Direction." DMin dissertation, Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1995.

The stated purpose of this study, completed in 1995, was to "look at the *Rule* of the De La Salle Christian Brothers and ask through a questionnaire whether this *Rule* reflects an ideal, actual behavior, or both" (12). Wentworth states "the thesis of this study is that the *Rule* can be looked at as an instrument of renewal" (66, 86). In doing his study, the author hoped what he would "write and say might make some impact on the collective life of religious and especially on the De La Salle Christian Brothers" (ii). Wentworth was motivated to pursue this topic because of the "moment of darkness [and] time of profound change" (127) that many religious institutes have been living since the Second Vatican Council called for the renewal of religious life.

Chapter two "traces the history of the renewal process [concerning religious life that] started in Vatican II" (13). Wentworth looks at a significant number of magisterial documents connected to the renewal of religious life, beginning with *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965) and concluding with preparatory documents for the 1994 meeting on consecrated life of the Synod of Bishops. The author gives parallel attention to documents specifically about the renewal of the De La Salle Christian Brothers that were produced during roughly the same time period (Vatican II until 1993). Wentworth writes about religious life thirty years after Vatican II from the perspective of the "historian who sees [religious life] in a period of breakdown/transition and the sociologist who sees it in the midst of a major paradigm shift" (39).

Chapter three focuses specifically on community, which Wentworth believes is the "pivotal place where renewal takes place" (64). In connecting religious community and the work of renewal, the author uses models of community given by sociologist Patricia Wittberg: intentional, bureaucratic, and associational (46-52). According to Wentworth, the Brothers fashioned post-Vatican II communities that incorporated elements "chosen uncritically" (65) from the three different models and which contributed to a "lack of clarity about what is [collectively meant] by community" (65).

Because a "Rule can be looked at as an instrument of renewal" (66), chapter four examines "the importance that a Rule plays in the life of a religious congregation" (66). Wentworth speaks about the Rule in the history of consecrated life, with specific attention to the "importance of the Rule throughout the history and tradition of the [De La Salle Christian] Brothers" (84). He draws a connection between his thesis – "The Rule is both an ideal and is descriptive of behavior." (84) – and the fact that the post-conciliar *Rule* of 1987 was not "imposed on the Brothers, but [was] grown from the input and experience of the Brothers themselves" (84).

In trying to ascertain if the *Rule* “is...an instrument of renewal for the Brothers” (86), Wentworth created a questionnaire based on exact statements taken from the post-conciliar *Rule* [of 1987] “that would elicit emotional/attitudinal responses from the Brothers” and which have been “the topic of community and District conversations” (91). Chapter five pertains to the methodology used in connection to the questionnaire, which was sent to thirty Brothers representing a cross-section of ages.

Wentworth analyzes responses to the questionnaire in chapter six, which reveals that the Brothers “see a gap between the ideals presented [in the *Rule*] and the behaviors exhibited” (99, 107). The greatest number of Brothers said the chapter of the *Rule* on prayer life “was both the most important and the hardest to implement” (103). Wentworth argues his questionnaire reveals that in the post-Vatican II era, the “Brothers have been more involved in adaptation, which concerns externals, than with renewal, which involves the interior disposition for conversion” (107). Wentworth argues his questionnaire would be valuable to use with Brothers in a larger context beyond this study, such as with an entire District of Brothers or even the entire Region of USA/Toronto (107).

In chapter seven, the author highlights areas where the questionnaire revealed significant divergence of opinion and which, in his opinion, are of “immense importance to the Brothers and for the future of the Brotherhood” (112). These areas include *poverty*: “Divergence in thought and practices can give rise to divisiveness in community.” (113); *educational service of the poor*: “I believe it is important for Brothers to talk about this and create ways that can help us better implement [service of the poor].” (116); *daily Eucharist*: “The various theologies of Eucharist that emanated from the post-Vatican II Church have solidified the thinking of the Brothers into various groups.” (117-8); and *daily spiritual practice*: “[While article 73 in the *Rule*] says that ordinarily a Brother gives to God at least two hours [of his day], the overwhelming response of the Brothers [to the questionnaire] was that this is not his ordinary experience” (119). Concerning the renewal of community living, Wentworth expresses strong opinions: “I do not think the individual is free to determine for himself what he will or will not do in terms of the community.” (123) and “If we continue to choose or permit individual needs to prevail over community needs, then I think we may very well be among those who are in the last stages of their life-cycle as a congregation.” (125)

Wentworth concludes his 1995 study with four ideas that are “connected with the central thought of renewal” (126). First: “We are very early into the work of renewal.” Second: The De La Salle Christian Brothers are “living in between a known past and an unknown future.” Third: The renewal of the religious life called for by the Second Vatican Council needs to “take us back to the roots of religious life.” Lastly: Now (1995) is the time to “seize the moment for renewal.” (127).

Wentworth’s study, now twenty years old, has continuing relevance for those interested in the continuing struggle to renew religious life during these fifty years since the close of the Second Vatican Council.