

John Baptist de La Salle and the Foundation of His Institute: Re-reading the Foundation

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Brother Ludolfo² asked me to participate in these meeting days of reflection in preparation for our 2000 General Chapter. I am happy to respond to this invitation because of my deep attachment to the Latin American continent, to its peoples, to the Brothers who live and work there. Another reason is because of the prophetic contribution to the universal Church of the theological reflection tied to the praxis of liberation, especially after Medellín. The presence among us of Gustavo Gutierrez makes my heart feel grateful and rekindles a strong new lease on life. I am happy to respond to Brother Ludolfo's invitation because, after Vatican Council II, the search for God and His Kingdom in my life as a Brother was enlightened, energized, and at times deeply moved by my contacts with Latin America. I find many friends there. I will simply mention, with respect and gratitude, Brother Noe Zevallos by name. Finally, I am happy to find myself among you at this preparatory stage of a General Chapter that we sense will be of historic importance because it will be celebrated at the beginning of the third millennium and in a year of Jubilee. It is also important in view of the stakes involved for the evangelizing mission of the Institute and because the word and the action of Latin America should be there, strong and inspiring.

In inviting me to this symposium, Brother Ludolfo asked me to present *a talk about the future of the Institute in a globalized world, including the challenge of poverty in the twenty-first century*. He asked me to continue, as well, the initial reflection on reform begun at Araruama.³ The reactions and questions of Brothers Ludolfo and Guillermo Danino following a first draft led me to focus my argument and to broaden it as I will soon point out. I hope that these directions will bear hope – a hope open to God's unexpected action in our history, a hope committed to contributing to achieving this future along the lines of the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr.: a visionary dream, which concretizes the future into a plan. The future is not what will arrive in general, but that which we will do to make the promise become *real*. That which is to come is not the future. The future is a task never fully completed: "*I dream, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, that our nation will rise to live truly its belief: We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.*"⁴

A conference prepared for the meeting of Brothers of the Region of Lasallian Latin America (RELAL) in Peru (February 2, 1999). As per the author's own words: "It was written with a view toward a talk I planned to give to a group of Latin American Brothers for a meeting in Lima (February 1999) on globalization in preparation for the 43rd General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Some health concerns prevented me from going to Lima, but this text arrived in time for the participants to study it closely at the session. In reading it, you will understand that in calling to mind the *Declaration* of 1967, it recalls how that document of the 39th General Chapter responded to the invitation of Vatican Council II, calling all religious institutes to undertake their adaptive renewal, thanks notably to an entirely new approach to fidelity to their Founder. The Lima Conference seemed to offer me a "re-reading" of the "foundation" of the Institute, in making explicit the idea of "re-foundation," outlined at Araruama." The conference was prepared in Annappes, France, between September 1 and November 30, 1998.

In a particular way I add here the expression of Brother Ludolfo speaking about globalization and poverty: for hope can only be global, as the Protestant theologian Henry Mottu emphasizes citing Ernst Bloch⁵:

Hope in the name of all implies the notion of world, of a different world. It deals with imagining a world that *Job* would no longer be able to accuse of being unjust and which would finally end up being worthy of its Creator. Hope therefore very much implies a totality, a wholeness. Hope desires wholeness ... as long as there is only one human being in this world who is in peril or humbled, I will not rest at ease. If reality is unjust for only one, then it is unjust for all. For God is so good that having created us, he wills that all of us come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2:4) ... That is why the hope of prophets is always global, inclusive, a total summary. The new creation does not concern itself only with a part of what we now see or with a small part of the elect ... Biblical transcendence does not play God against the world, but God in view of a new world. This world is not seen as “another world” but rather as a different world.⁶

I am positive that you have perceived the Lasallian echo of these contemporary words on hope. You have recognized in the quote from the *Epistle to Timothy* the first sentence of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, and the high-powered “founding” key word at the beginning of John Baptist de La Salle’s work. You have also noted the insistence on the fact that hope can not only be the virtue of a certain expectation of a new world, unless it is also the virtue of a daily commitment to contributing to what that new world should become. Day after day, the hope we have causes change. The paradox of religious institutes is that, born as a result of a creative breakout moment, they are constantly tempted to place themselves completely in previously existing structures. To break with this temptation of perpetuating the past by making it sacred, Vatican Council II asked all religious congregations to involve themselves in the process of their renewal. In the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* of June 1966, Paul VI had indicated that henceforth *the renewal of religious institutes was to be ongoing*. I think we have not paid sufficient attention to how revolutionary such words were.

The renewal of the Institute did not finish with the approval of the *Rule* by the Holy See in 1986. The General Chapter of 2000 offers the Institute precisely the graced opportunity of reviving the undertaking of its renewal. As a result of the request made by the General Chapter of 1993, five Colloquia were held in the Institute since then: 1) family, 2) globalization, 3) megalopolis, 4) new technologies of information and communication, and 5) communicating the faith today.⁷ Without a doubt, we will have echoes of these Colloquia during the course of this session. As far as I am concerned, I have not participated in any Colloquium. I am in no way a specialist on the first four subjects treated. I think I was asked to participate [although, as I said above, I never did] as a result of my modest competence as a witness often involved in the life of the Institute for 60 years, and because of the way I understood its mission and tried to live out its renewal. I will confine myself to what I can do.

Also, in order to contribute in clarifying our research in preparation for the next General Chapter, I will attempt to place it in the renewal or re-foundation movement undertaken by the General Chapter of 1966-1967 and especially in the *Declaration*, because this was the prime document of

that Chapter and because it remains the symbol of this ongoing renewal. I will do so in three parts. In the first part, I will recall that the *Declaration* was the result of an unexpected event and not of the institution. I personally lived it as the tangible sign of the Holy Spirit's unforeseeable passing through the contemporary history of the Institute. At the same time, it was the result of a movement which had enlivened the Institute since 1946. In the second part, I will recall what the contribution of the *Declaration* was; and I will attempt to evaluate what its impact on the Institute has been until the present day. These two parts will no doubt pose more questions than they will provide answers. A third part will propose some questions for our exchanges on the actual relevance of the *Declaration* and on the position that the next General Chapter could take in this regard, within the context of today's world, that is to say, no longer the world of 1967, but that of the beginning of the third millennium.

I. The *Declaration*: An Unexpected Text, A Charismatic Sign of the Passage of the Holy Spirit in the Institute and the Fruit of the Renewal Movement since 1946

The capitulants who gathered in Rome in April 1966 never thought that they would produce a document like the *Declaration*. After ten years, three successive drafts of the *Rule* had been worked out by the General Council and submitted to the Visitors and their councilors for review. Logically, the General Chapter would have as its main task to review the last draft, to discuss it, to amend it, and to vote on it before having it approved by the Congregation for Religious. I still remember a Brother Assistant saying to me, at the beginning of the afternoon on March 19th: *We have to speed up the final review of the Rule text. The capitulants will make some observations; they will approve it rapidly, and the Chapter will not last more than three weeks....* This Brother Assistant with whom I worked on the draft of the *Rule*, while I was being inspired with Conciliar texts of Vatican Council II, found that I was too slow. I answered him respectfully that I did not at all think that things would happen as he predicted; and that if it were to be so, it would seem to me catastrophic for the Institute. At that moment, I was only thinking of the *Rule* and not of any other document.

But, without being a prophet, I was aware that a deep desire was shaking up the depths of the Institute and that the Capitulants would not be able to ignore this movement. I perceived this movement at the depths in 1966 as the compelling confluence of three currents: the thawing of an ancient glacier; the breaking of an age-old dam; and, in the temple, the unpredictable outpouring of a spring that became a torrent. I will explain myself by quickly going over *six stages* beginning with the General Chapter of 1946. This part of my talk would help us to reflect on the actual context of the Institute's life and could still be done now so that the next General Chapter would be able to respond to explicit or unformulated goals, indeed on the lack of consciousness of the Brothers and of all those who are concerned about the Institute's mission on this dawn of the third millennium.

Six stages leading up to the renewal

Stage one: The General Chapter of 1946 remains for me, and for many Brothers of my generation, the symbol of an Institute turning its back on the future. The ancient glacier is the *Rule* of the Institute's beginnings, which text had been kept intact since 1726. The General Chapter of 1946 brought very few modifications, preferring whenever possible the text of 1718

to that of 1726. Furthermore, the Superior General at the time clung stubbornly to obtaining the approbation of the Holy See for the entire text of the *Rule* in 1947, whereas until then Roman approval was only concerned with the 18 articles of the *Bull of Approbation* of 1725. The approbation by Rome of the *Rule's* text would definitively guarantee, it was thought, inviolability... The literal manner of understanding the *Rule*, of making it absolute, of making it sacred, implied a closed-minded conception of religious life separated from ministry. It was marked by a flight from the world, turned toward a past to be upheld, and valuing, that since the Institute had proven itself, there was nothing to learn from the life of the world and of the Church. Finally, such a revision of the *Rule*, and the pontifical approbation of its text, reinforced an ossified and biased idea of fidelity to the Founder.

Furthermore, during the General Chapter of 1946, the *Rule* had been considered as an almost sacred text. It was out of the question to submit it for discussion by the capitulants. They had to be happy to listen to a public reading of it (in French) in the Dining Hall. They had been granted permission to hand over their written comments to a post-Chapter Commission which would complete the work of revision in less than a week. This same distrust of the capitulants' free speech was also seen in regard to other subjects the Brothers were concerned about, such as priesthood, apostolic activities outside of the school, and the appropriateness of lay personnel in school establishments.

Stage two: Life and the Holy Spirit emerged forcefully in the Institute in the days after this disastrous Chapter. Despite this blockage, Brothers, between 1946 and 1956, knew how to open themselves to the various renewal movements enlivening the Church and society. I will recall these renewal movements by mentioning the names of several Brothers. If they are mainly Europeans, it is because my limited experience at the time had no other horizons, and also because these Brothers sustained my hope. I will limit myself here to five Brothers as examples.

Brother Vincent Aysel, deported to a work camp in Germany during the war, had been struck by the unbelief and religious ignorance of the young. He worked to rekindle the conscience of the Brothers' catechetical mission in France by creating the journal *Catechistes* beginning in 1950, by establishing a renewed course of doctrinal studies, by a more extensive formation of young Brothers, and by the continuing formation of Brothers in ministry.

Brother Guillermo Felix, wounded by the arrogance of clericalism, was able to go beyond any sense of inferiority and to realize his dream of university-level formation for the Brothers in their catechetical ministry in the Christian school. He realized that the increased numbers in the Institute had to be supported by a preparation relevant to the Brothers in the areas of theology, philosophy, pedagogy, professionalism and spirituality. From 1949, he set aside several young Brothers for lengthy preparations, having already in mind the creation of the Saint Pius X Institute which would become a reality in 1956.

Brother Honoré de Silvestri, his involvement in technical education and in Catholic Action contributed to making the option for the poor a renewed priority in the Institute. He knew how to share with some Brothers his passion to pull working class youth out of hopelessness, thanks to improving the status of teaching technical arts and implementing the participatory pedagogy that characterized the Catholic Youth Workers Movement.⁸

Brother Didier Piveteau raised attention in the Institute in France to the need of renewing the Lasallian School and to update teacher preparation with the best current methods of modern education and the contribution of the social sciences.

Finally, *Brother Maurice-Auguste*, sub-director of the Second Novitiate since 1947 and an expert on the *Rule*, understood the need to begin by studying it as a human text, examining its sources, researching its broader context, distinguishing its various editorial layers – moving from profoundly inspirational texts such as chapter two or the prologue of chapter sixteen to texts reproducing the regulations used in an Institute community (all chapters dealing with daily schedules), and by reviewing chapters marked by a particular era, such as the chapters on silence or modesty. How could one give equal value to all the articles of such a mixed *Rule*, as the official fundamentalist conception maintained it to be?

The General Chapter of 1946 wanted to lock all of the Institute's doors against human life and the world. Thanks to the initiative of these Brothers who were attentive to their times, the life of the world, and the Church, the Spirit came back into the Institute through the windows.

Stage three: In various ways, these pioneer Brothers had to struggle to obtain recognition for their innovations. But little by little, thanks to them and to many other Brothers, who were more attentive to the needs of young people than to seek desperately for their own perfection, the Institute's mindset changed. The General Chapter of 1956 and Brother Nicet-Joseph, elected Superior General at that Chapter, knew how to recognize that it was necessary for the Institute to open itself to life and to the Church. The General Chapter made three major decisions, little noticed at the time, that were watersheds for what would follow. The *first decision*: return a *Rule* full of life to the Institute. In 1947, the General Chapter had caused the *Rule* of the beginnings to be approved by the Pope, in the hope of no longer looking at it. In 1956, it became evident that it was necessary to undertake a fundamental revision of the *Rule*, drawing one up free from the text left behind by the Founder. The *second major decision* of 1956 was to give the Institute back to the Brothers. Until then, notes sent to a General Chapter had to be strictly individual; it was forbidden to have several Brothers write one up. The General Chapter of 1956 decided that, for the next General Chapter, community or group notes would not only be allowed but encouraged. Furthermore, two years before the General Chapter the Superior General would send a questionnaire to all the communities so that all the Brothers could take part in reflecting and exchanging views in preparation for the Assembly. The *third decision* dealt with re-starting Lasallian studies, broadening the remarkable effort of the Italian Brothers to the entire Institute, and entrusting Brother Maurice-Auguste with the implementation of an ambitious program that he himself had presented as a note to the General Chapter.

Stage four: Brother Nicet applied these three measures. As I have mentioned, three drafts of the *Rule* were successively drawn up and discussed in the Institute. Brother Maurice began the publication of the *Cahiers lasalliens* in 1959. For the 1966 General Chapter, he made available to all the Brothers the first edition of all the Founder's writings. Thanks to this widespread circulation, important work on Saint John Baptist de La Salle was completed over the course of the decade. They clearly showed that the Founder was not limited only to the *Rule*. His major manuscript was, without doubt, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. They were, as such, rediscovered in the Institute. Their message showed the dynamic unity of the Brother's vocation:

called by the Father and by the poor for a ministry; consecrated to follow Jesus Christ for an evangelizing mission, and consecrating themselves day after day for the exercise of this mission as Good Shepherd of the young; beneficiaries of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the Church, in such a way that its spiritual growth was inseparable from its apostolic service. Finally, for the New Year of 1964, Brother Nicet forwarded to the entire Institute the questionnaire announced in 1956. In a number of Districts, communities discussed these questionnaires at length; and the notes sent to the General Chapter after this consultation were quite something....

Stage five: Thus the thawing of the ancient glacier of the Rule had more than begun. The age-old dam which virtually prevented allowing the Brothers to express themselves, because the Founder had brought all the answers beforehand, was broken by the encouragement of group notes and the renewed approach to the Founder. The third current of which I spoke, the bursting forth of a spring in the temple, is demonstrably Vatican Council II, which took place from October 1962 to December 1965. I will not take time here to recall how the many renewal movements that had taken hold especially after 1950 – biblical, theological, patristic, ecumenical, liturgical, catechetical, and missionary – were in difficulty. Many of their leaders were the object of suspicion, often of condemnation. Soon after his election to the papacy, John XXIII released the Spirit by announcing a Council that was to be pastoral. The Pope's gamble held, and fulfilled to a great extent, his hope in the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.

From Vatican Council II's teaching on religious life, I highlight only two decisive aspects. First, Vatican Council II introduced fundamental changes in the meaning of religious life: a) its place within the total Church – religious are included in the People of God, not beside them or above them; and b) consecration becomes primary, not the vows – a new theological approach, elaborated according to the charism proper to each Institute, now has priority over a deductive theological approach based on an abstract concept of the religious life in general that exists nowhere.

Other fundamental changes in meaning include the: c) unity of consecration and apostolate; d) transition from separation from the world to presence in the world and offering this up by means of service, challenge, change; e) full significance of the lay religious life; f) abolition of class distinctions in the religious life; and g) fusion of obedience and dialogue in a common search for the will of God discerned in the present situation.

Vatican Council II had special influence on the religious life because it directed all Institutes to initiate a process of renewal on the basis of five criteria: a return to the 1) source of all Gospel life, 2) following of Christ, 3) inspiration of each Institute, 4) spirit and specific intention of the Institute's beginnings – by listening to the needs and calls of today's world, as well to the Church's movements at the time, all of this would lead to a revision of all regulations and an evaluation of all apostolic works. Finally, 5) the renewal would have to be spiritual, that is to say that it would have to rely on the assurance of the Holy Spirit's enlivening presence today, in the Gospel, in the Founder, in the world (to which it had to be present) and in the Church.

Secondly, I cannot prevent myself from indicating here what, for me, was the fundamental message of Vatican Council II. It is contained in the closing speech of the Council given by Paul VI in St. Peter's Square on a beautiful December 7, 1965. In substance the Pope said that when

one looks at this Council, one notices that much of its content dealt with man. Too much so, thought some morose spirits who believed that a Council should deal with God, with religious concerns. A Council must be theo-centric and Vatican Council II was largely anthro-centric. Paul VI dedicated a lengthy part of his discourse to justifying this character of Vatican Council II. To know man, admittedly, one must know God; but the converse is also very true, for man is the unique way for man to seek God.⁹ I think that this argument marked our General Chapter of 1966 and, in a remarkable way, the *Declaration*. And I think it is still relevant for today and for the next General Chapter.

Stage six: But just as it took the effective commitment of the Brothers to make the General Chapter exist, the idea of a framework would never have become the text of the *Declaration* unless people came forward welcoming the “kairos” of this confluence of invigorating currents and deciding to seize the moment to bring forth the Word that many were expecting. This did not happen without great élan, effort (inspiration and perspiration), intense fraternal dialogue –with a lot of tension, suspicion and even conflict – and great joy, at the price of much suffering at times. But before producing the *Declaration* and being able to do so, the capitulants of 1966 had to become aware of its necessity. They did so, little by little, during the course of the first session. The General Chapter realized it beginning with three experiences during the first session.

A first experience: The Assembly knew it had to make the decision to take on its own identity. This was shown by the initial refusal to follow a pre-set schedule and the decision to determine it as a task of the General Chapter itself. The Assembly knew how to assume its own character by resisting the pressures of the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Religious who wanted to impose his interpretation of the text of *Perfectae Caritatis* (#10.2) concerning the introduction of the priesthood into the Institute. By reason of the autonomy it had taken, the Chapter voted the adoption of the principle of subsidiarity for the Institute, an essential option. It decided upon a kind of *New Rule* very different from the three drafts drawn up and discussed between 1956 and 1965.

A second experience: A second experience strengthened the awareness of needing a comprehensive document on the identity of the Brother. The lengthy and painful discussion on the lay nature of the Institute showed that it was necessary to broaden the issue and re-phrase the significance of the Brothers’ vocation in the contemporary world in a more positive and dynamic way.

A third experience: A third experience, negatively, confirmed the above. Like all General Chapters, this one worked in commissions: consecration, mission, community, governance, finances, the *Rule*. The initial drafts of reports, drawn up by several of these commissions, were rejected by the Assembly. The need was felt for an initial framework which would give an overview of the Brothers’ vocation.

It seemed from then on that a second session would be necessary. It was also necessary to take into account the notes that had come from the Brothers in response to the questionnaire of Brother Nicet. These notes obligated the General Chapter to question itself not only on the way of being a Brother, but also on “the how” of the Institute, on the *raison d’être* of being a Brother today, on “the why” of the Institute. This realization brought back into focus Vatican Council

II's call: the challenge of *Perfectae Caritatis* was not simply the *adaptation* of religious life but the adapted *renewal* of religious life. Between the two words, there were fundamental differences: adaptation focused on "the how," this done beginning with the Institute's conventions, the rule, apostolic works. *Renewal* focused on "the why," the finality. This could only be achieved from a vital rediscovering of the *raison d'être* of the Institute, which is neither in the Institute itself nor, a fortiori, in its *Rule* – but in the life of humanity and in the needs of today's world.

Thus, the very idea of a *Declaration* was birthed from the rich and complex movement of the Brothers' life – from themselves within a Church and in the world:

1. The Church of the late 1950's was stirred by deep renewing movements all at once: biblical, theological, catechetical, liturgical, social, embodied (worker priests), however the Church suffered from blockages and condemnations...these latter sometimes directed toward its most keen and lively children (not to mention the brilliant work of Teilhard de Chardin).
2. The post-war world with its technical, geo-political and cultural upheavals. I randomly cite in no order: the atomic era, the cold war, de-colonization, separation into geopolitical blocks, the emergence of the Third World.

The *Declaration* would call the Brothers to be attentive to these signs of the times (#11-13). Vatican Council II had already said to the Brothers: your vocation does not place you outside of this world, nor does it dispense you from being interested in it, nor from knowing its reality and its problems, nor from committing yourself to serve, transform, challenge and make it holy. The *Declaration* would translate this new language into proposals of profound fidelity to John Baptist de La Salle.

This historical recollection will permit us to better perceive the contribution of this document and to appreciate its impact.

II. The Contribution of the *Declaration* and Its Impact on the Institute's Life after Thirty Years

In contrast to the *Rule*, therefore, the *Declaration* did not come about from the institution, but rather from the event. It was the result of a basic movement which touched the Brothers, but which came first of all from outside the Institute. It was thus that it was welcomed by the Institute. For many Brothers, thirty years ago, there was a "before" and an "after" the *Declaration*. The first impact was most often positive: a breath of freedom, a more expansive document, one full of life. A life oriented to a future to be created, and calling for creativity, initiative, responsibility. The breath of the Holy Spirit, unified and unifying, transcending harmful dichotomies between religious life and apostolate, between occupation and ministry, between catechesis and non-religious teaching, between prayer and action, presence to the world, separation from the world, service of the world, challenging the world. The concrete implementing of the *Declaration* in the Institute would turn out to be more difficult. That is why

in this second part I will speak first about the contribution of the *Declaration* and then of its real impact after thirty years.

My goal, in this retrospective, is not to turn immediately to the message of the 2000 General Chapter. Nevertheless I hope that this recalling will contribute to your discernment of certain elements of its message.

The contribution of the Declaration: a fresh / new approach of vision under two aspects

It seems to me that the *Declaration* came, above all, from the fresh/new approach to the text. I am speaking of the new approaches existing at the beginning of the 1970s. It is up to us to see what remains of this new approach today. I will distinguish between the “freshness” of the vision that the *Declaration* presents and the “fresh/new” approach of the renewing action that it calls the Brothers to undertake.

In speaking of *adaptive renewal*, the authors of the *Declaration* – the General Chapter – realized full well that they were calling the Brothers to a radical change. They were firmly inviting the Institute to take up new directions. (Brother Charles Henry focused his famous conferences of 1968-1969 on this radical change.) The *Declaration's* objective was to find again all its vigor *in the creative principle that had given birth to the Institute*. That creative principle was none other than the *Holy Spirit*. Thus the *Declaration* begins with a text on spiritual renewal which remains inspirational provided that one takes it in its totality (#3.1-5). Look at the number of explicit references to the Holy Spirit in the *Declaration*: there are twenty-five. “According to Saint John Baptist de La Salle, it is this fidelity to the Holy Spirit that is the unifying element in the Brother’s life” (#14.5). From that perspective it seems to me that the fresh/new vision of the *Declaration* is twofold. It presents *a fresh/new understanding* of the relationship of the Institute to its Founder; it offers *an altogether fresh/new conception of the Brother’s religious life*.

a) *The Declaration radically renews our view of the Founder*. It invites us to move from the idea of the Founder as an oracle to be imitated to a Founder who is a witness of the Spirit. From a Founder as an excuse that exempts us from being creative to a Founder as traveling companion on the paths of the Spirit at work today.

From model to witness. The Founder’s vocation begins by a striking “break” from his first priestly vocation in the canonry. It continues as a journey, a painstaking search, sometimes hesitant, by trial and error, with mistakes, crises, and dark times. The Founder calls us to live our vocation as a story, a continual becoming stimulated by a future project rather than by past methods. Answers found yesterday are no longer suitable for today. Fidelity to the Founder can only be *a fidelity to seeking* (#6.1).

The *Declaration* caused us to move from the idea of *a Founder as definitive oracle to a Founder as prophet of the Spirit*. Beyond numerous outdated conventions, John Baptist de La Salle left behind in his writings something of the vision that enlightened him, of the creative inspiration that animated him, of *the hope which never ceased pushing him beyond his fears*. A **visionary prophet no doubt with eyes uplifted**, but also above all with eyes on poor children seeing in them children of God and, unseen to many eyes, helping them reach the dignity and the freedom of

their calling. A **committed prophet** who in his reforming action of the people's school and as founder of an original society concretely agrees to destroy in order to build and to uproot in order to plant. A **courageous prophet** who fights for justice, and bears with harassment from the defenders of a traditional world, in order to contribute to the coming of a new world. Fidelity to a prophet-Founder who speaks can only be a *fidelity in dialogue* (#5.2).

The *Declaration* invites us finally to go from a *Founder as oracle* to a *Founder as fellow traveler*.

The charism of the Founder involves institutions only through the mediation of men. Saint John Baptist de La Salle founded a living community of Brothers. Fidelity to the specific intentions of the Founder and to the tradition of the Institute is confided to us as living men. This dynamic fidelity to the Founder is marked first of all by the community character of the search (#7.1-2).

John Baptist de La Salle only moved forward accompanied by his Brothers, moved by them to the Gospel of service to God's Kingdom here below – to minister to youth who were far from salvation. – He had lived **the open-ended fraternity** of a priest freed from his ties to a clerical society, established, centered on itself, hardened by a hierarchical organization which was separated, cut off from the “world” yet “worldly.” – He had lived **the creative fraternity** of a Gospel minister planning with his followers the way of a journeying Church, of a mission in the world, of a service to humanity with respect for their freedom, of selflessness, of gratuity. Our own incarnational search, of presence to the world, of another form of Church, will be sustained by the Founder if we remain alert to understanding John Baptist de La Salle beginning with his “breaks.” He becomes our fellow traveler only to the point we agree to “break” from pre-determined ways and progress, when it is necessary, on routes that he marks out for us day after day.

b) *Secondly, after Vatican Council II, the Declaration presents a strongly renewed vision of the Brother's religious life.* For many today these views would appear evident. For Brothers educated according to very different and sometimes conflicting concepts, this proposed change of vision was significant. It could imply the shaking up of “foundations,” even of their “religious life.” Yet to the degree that this new vision corresponded to often unformulated, indeed unconscious longings, or where it was caught up with unavoidable and unsure developments of practical living, the *Declaration* was able to contribute to “re-founding,” to reviving the Brothers' religious life. I will attempt to recall this fresh/new approach beginning with three dynamics revealed by the *Declaration* – **consecration (vocation)** – **mission (ministry)** – **communion (community-association)**. This useful analysis must not put us off track: each of the three terms implies two others: **consecrated/sent/reunited: by** (the God of Jesus Christ) ... **for** (to announce the Gospel to the poor) ... **with** Brothers.

Before treating each of these three movements, it appears necessary for me to make three observations. They underline that one of the fresh/new approaches of the *Declaration* is “to present the religious life of the Brother” beginning with its specificity and not at all beginning with religious life in general. In this regard the *Declaration* re-discovered the Founder's inspiration. **Apostolic specificity**. The chapter on the Brother's religious life begins with

consecration. But it is clear that by its baptismal roots, this consecration is apostolic, fresh and new (#17.4; 18, 6, 8); the same is true for the communal dimension (#20.1, 5, 7, 10). Of course, the paragraph on apostolic purpose insists on this aspect (#22.1 and #22-24). The *lay or secular specificity* of the Brother's life: I will come back to this. Finally, the *Declaration* even recognizes *the legal or canonical specificity* of the Brother's religious life.

Fresh / new vision of the Brother's religious life. Consecration (vocation): from the religious state to the evangelical life of the Brother

Three reflective sketches:

From the profession of the vows of religion to the consecration of the person to God. The Conciliar rediscovery of consecration's priority here brings back the same words of the vow formula from the beginnings (#17.3; 18.4, 7). In 1976, one could see that this viewpoint was far from being acknowledged. (Is it today?)

From perpetual profession (or lifelong consecration) to consecration by life. It is not a matter of calling into question the decisive importance of the act of perpetual profession and its implied fervor. The *Declaration* also involves a deeper and more realistic reflection: personal consecration supports itself, accomplishes itself, progresses and leaves itself open to one's own sense of reality, by means of one's life. *I consecrate myself for life, but it is life that consecrates me* (see #14.2; 25.1-2; 34.2; 38.4).

From separation from the world to presence in the world with a view to offering the world to Christ by consecration alone. Here again, it was the same journey of John Baptist de La Salle, priest, at the beginning – transforming himself in a certain way to the lay state – not only by living with the Brothers but by investing his energies in secular tasks.

Fresh / new vision of the Brother's religious life: the Brother's Mission, from duality to unity

Three simple notations to this discussion:

Unity between consecration and apostolate. We have spoken about this.

Unity by means of the recipients of the Brother's mission: the poor. The Brother consecrates himself to God to announce the Gospel to the poor. At times one had the tendency to tone down that which appeared too harsh in the *Declaration* and to say that the Brother was sent to all the young, with a priority for the poor. It seems to me that the *Declaration* is more radical and clearer. In this it returns to the Lasallian experience. I will come back to this.

Unity of announcing the Gospel by all the Brother's activities. Of course, the Brother is a catechist by vocation; and the explicit announcement of the evangelical Good News is important in his life. The pages of the *Declaration* remain classic and forthright on this point and not outdated (#38-39). What seemed fresh/new to me in 1967, and still is today, is the recognition of the apostolic character of the Brother's tasks. For before being a message, announcing the

Gospel is action, transformation, healing of the present world's reality: *the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk: the poor are evangelized...* (cf. #10.4; 38.4; 41.1-3; 42.3; and all of 45, 46, 47).

Fresh / new vision of the Brother's religious life: community according to the Spirit, from uniformity of individuals to union between persons

Due to a lack of time, and because I have already spoken of this above, I will limit myself to mentioning three contrasts: *From a community of observance to a community of relationships* (#19.2; 20.8; 7.2; 14.5...). *From a community of established traditions to a community of projects* (#25.4; 48.6; 46.3; 33.2; 39.4; 52.2...). *From the priority of structures-things to the primacy of structures-persons*, based on sharing, dialogue, meeting (#3.1; 4; 28.4; 34.4).

Fresh / new approach of renewing action which the Declaration engages the Brothers to undertake

It deals with the renewal such as *Perfectae Caritatis* had ordered all religious Institutes to undertake. These are the first words of the *Declaration*:

Faithful to the spirit of Vatican II which invites religious families to undertake the work of renewal and adaptation, the thirty-ninth General Chapter gives expression to the willing response of the Institute and to the understanding it has at present of its own nature and mission, and therefore considers it opportune to publish this declaration on the Brother of the Christian Schools in the world today (#1.1).

I must briefly come back here to the word re-foundation that I used at Araruama. No doubt at the beginning of the *Declaration*, it is formally indicated that *there can be no question of "re-founding" the Institute, because the community which seeks to renew itself must do so in fidelity to a given objective* (#7.3). Yet, with the passage of time, it seems to me that in its profound intention, the *Declaration* considered the renewal wanted by Vatican Council II as a dynamic of re-foundation,¹⁰ of re-creation. The Institute which it projects looking forward is a different Institute, if not another Institute.

Whether it be the word renew or re-found, the *Declaration* demands the definition and the putting into effect of a real policy of renewal. It presents the ongoing objectives of this policy; it invites the use of strategies to attain these objectives; finally, above all, it designates the responsible agents of this renewing action.

a) *The Declaration indicates the ongoing objectives for the renewal of the Institute.* The *Declaration* opens the ways of an effective renewal by the new *light* it projects on fidelity to the Founder and the religious life of the Brother. The momentum of the General Chapter had succeeded in producing this document, unexpected at the beginning. Those who lived through the difficult and sometimes painful growth period, until the final climactic outburst of an almost unanimous vote, truly experienced a Pentecost, a *bursting of the Spirit who renews the face of the earth* (cf. #53.3; *Meditation* #42.3). In turn, the text could become "*inspirational breath*" for the Brothers (cf. *Letter of Brother Charles Henry*¹¹). But the *Declaration* went way beyond that. It

clearly indicated the objectives of renewal to the Institute; it suggested *strategies for a policy of renewing action*. I limit myself to citing some texts corresponding to these two levels, often difficult to dissociate in the Chapter document.

The strongest objective of renewal is, without a doubt, that of the *conversion of the Institute to the service of the poor*. It is to them that we are sent by preference (#28.1).

“Every level of authority, then, every dialogue and decision in the Institute, must be in harmony with this orientation, so that all our plans and work will show in deed and in truth our “return to the poor” (#34.4).

Also very strongly worded is the objective of *renewal of works – especially of the school*. For the finality of the Institute is not to maintain schools in and of themselves, but, by the privileged means of the school, to work in the educational apostolate (#49.2). Otherwise – and it is an objective – the educational finality of the Institute must broaden itself without fear to non-school activities:

Nevertheless, it is the mind of the General Chapter ... that the Institute not limit the interpretation of its educational apostolate so as to refuse all apostolic activity unrelated to the school. Such a narrow point of view would not conform to the traditions of the Institute (#51.3).

This orientation took up again the ever-present tradition of the Institute, kept secret in certain Regions after the French laws of 1904. It was the subject of a special vote in the Assembly during the course of discussion on the *Declaration*, so much so that it seemed important to know the thinking of the General Chapter on this particular point, which seemed new to many. The fundamental idea was to bring new responses to new needs that were presenting themselves on the local level.

The fresh / new vision of *religious life* presented above in b) evidently also implies *action objectives*: spiritual renewal (#3); renewing the spirit of zeal (#22.3); personal freedom so that the Brother lives out his activity (#27.1); community renewal for – and by – the advancement of persons, the coming together to listen to the Spirit in Scripture and in the world’s calls.

The community effort to recognize and understand the call of the young of our time and to respond to them by means of generous apostolic commitments must therefore be placed “among the first of the objectives of the Institute” (#23.3).

b) *The Declaration indicates strategies to involve and to pursue a policy of renewal in the Institute*. The word policy is used in regard to the *service of the poor*. The diversity of historical and sociological situations demands that local Chapters clearly define an appropriate *policy* truly involving persons and works for the service of the poor (#28.3).

One must also implement a strategy of revising and questioning existing works. It is required by the return to the poor, the catechetical renewal, the reform of schools, the opening to other apostolic conditions (#28.2; 31.1-2; 38.3; 49.2-3). At the same time, the *Declaration* asks that a

strategy of creation and mobility be carried out: world changes, new calls demanding a policy of new foundations: in accordance with situations and environments, an effort of imagination and personal and communal research is essential in order to find new and adaptive forms of educational presence close to the poorest (#33.1, 2, 3; cf. #49.5; 50-52).

This cannot happen without some mobility. New creations and foundations will only be possible if “the local needs of each District will not prevent a response to other areas where the needs are urgent” (#33.4; 24.2).

Finally, the *Declaration* attaches particular importance to that which must be laid out and which one can call a *strategy of formation*. The insistence with which the *Declaration* returns to the importance of the Brothers’ formation in all chapters is not surprising. It speaks in strong language about: its characteristics, its dimensions, its stages, its type. It suffices to refer to the word “formation” in the index!

The Declaration indicates the agents responsible for this renewing activity. These renewal agents: they are essentially persons. In the end, the fate of the Institute is in the hands of the Brothers (#53.2)

Regarding each Brother, one must recall, first of all, that one of the major emphases, one of the imposing characteristics of the *Declaration*, is the attention, respectful consideration, openness with which the person of each Brother is considered. One cannot separate #13, concerning the constitutive elements of the Brother’s vocation, from #14, concerning the lively personalized synthesis.

A laudable desire for unity does not require that there be a changeless and universal type of Brother to which all should conform. God calls each Brother to make a personal response to the constitutive elements of this vocation as received from the Founder, and to adapt his response to the signs of the times which are manifest in the needs of the world today (#14.3).

And the *Declaration* adds that we must be attentive to the diversity of each Brother’s gifts (#14.4), to the unique originality of his personal story (#14.2), to the space of “*implementing the principle of subsidiarity in his own life by taking the initiative to respond personally and to persevere in fidelity to the Holy Spirit. According to Saint John Baptist de La Salle, it is this fidelity to the Holy Spirit that is the unifying element in the Brother’s life*” (#14.5). More fundamentally, each person is holy, a mystery in his unique relationship with the God of love:

Yet the religious consecration which the Brother lives at the very heart of his apostolic activities is not confined to any one of them. Consecration reaches its full expression in the mystery of the personal relation each one has with God. It is, after all, a characteristic of the person to transcend his activity (#27.1).

The current *Rule* again takes up these orientations (*Rule* #81, 86) just as it recalls that the Institute adopted the principle of subsidiarity (*Rule* #102). One could have hoped that such a clarification would have been made more frequently, more boldly, more vehemently. One will

never be able to give enough trust to personal liberty. One will never be wrong to call upon its creativity.

The *Declaration* invites the Brothers to become founders. Founders called to be more attentive to new opportunities, to not be afraid of coming up with new responses, asked to renew, to create. Therefore founders, sometimes driven to breaking off, to challenging work / institutional plans, but also founders by their way of living out Church, religious life. Founders seeking to live out searching for God's will in personal initiative and obedience in dialogue. Isn't this what is meant by the word conversion used herein?

They must not expect those in authority to give ready-made solutions to the new problems that come from a world in evolution. It is up to each Brother in the presence of God to start out along the path of spiritual conversion and determine to have a personal share in the great community work of renewal and adaptation (#53.2).

It would still be necessary here to follow up on the texts where the tension between liberty and responsibility is accentuated; a concern for developing personal talents and the opening of oneself to be of service to others; a person's interior life standing before God with steadfast and alert attention to life's calls; the uniqueness of specific gifts and respect for others and for the community; personal initiative and attentiveness to the common good...

Secondly, the *Declaration* recalls that *the community of Brothers in dialogue* is the locus of all renewing action, community dialogue is its condition and instrument:

It is evident that community dialogue in all its forms is a privileged instrument of individual conversion and fraternal union. Each one should contribute to its issue in practical conclusions. The superior finds here one of his important roles... (#20.8; cf. #20.4-5).

Agents of renewal, Chapters, governmental authority, listening to the Brothers and to the world's calls, are in a state of permanent renewal (#28.3; 49.2). Mention is made of Chapters and of Councils in regard to each of the objectives and each of the strategies I have just spoken about. It is up to them to define and to put concretely into practice the policy of returning to the poor, of re-evaluating works, of creation and of mobility, of the Brothers' formation...

Societies, like individuals, grow old and die once the habits inherited from the past outweigh the will to renewal. It is not easy to balance fidelity to the intuitions that sparked our origins and the requirements of life today (#53.2).

The impact of the Declaration: its results

I have just recalled the major points of the Institute's renewal program laid out by the Declaration. No doubt the question on your minds, tinged with melancholy, could express itself thus: Dear Institute, what have you done with your *Declaration*? Without a doubt it would be necessary for the next General Chapter to draw up a balance sheet of renewal always being

planned. I here have neither the competence, the authority, nor the means of drawing up such a balance sheet. On the other hand, a more recent, authorized work can be up to such a task (although it does not deal only nor even explicitly with the Declaration). I wish to speak of the 1993 *Report of Brother Superior General to the 42nd General Chapter*,¹² as well as the *Personal Commentary on the Report of Brother Superior to the 42nd General Chapter*.¹³ Without going into detail, I see in these documents several sketches that can also deal with many projections of the Institute's situation thirty years after the *Declaration*. I will indicate four, and I will finish with a more personal reflection. Remember that I propose questions rather than statements.

a) *An Institute on the road to ruin?*

If actual trends do not change, the Institute will be hit by extinction or by minimal survival in a certain number of countries during the next twenty-five to forty years.¹⁴ It seems to me that in his analyses, Brother John in no way suggests any cause and effect between the General Chapter of 1966-1967 and the extent and duration of a crisis which has caused us to pass from more than 15,000 members in 1965 to 6,500 at the end of 1998 – an average loss of 173 Brothers per year for the last ten years, and an average age in the Institute which surpasses 60 years.

It is nevertheless evident that such statistics preclude all gloating in evaluating the *Declaration's* results and the General Chapter of renewal. More so, these numbers pose serious questions concerning not only the Institute's future but its very *raison d'être*. Admittedly, growth statistics are not necessarily signs of evangelical authenticity. Nor do statistics marked by similar declines condemn the generations who must live with their consequences. It is nevertheless a fact that they can deeply undermine the Brothers' virtue of hope, or at least their optimism as regards the Institute's future, as well as their self-confidence in regard to the historical usefulness of their existence, or even of its authenticity. Consequently, doesn't even the relevance of a document like the *Declaration* come into question? Does not the contrast between the enthusiasm of renewal that marked this text and the situation of the Institute's lesser numbers in 1998 raise just such a question?

b) *An unforeseen Institute?*

... and that the *Declaration* had not foreseen... The example of "shared mission" seems to me the strongest element of this fresh / new approach, the fullness of which could hardly have been foreseen in 1967. The article of the *Declaration* on collaboration with laypersons (#46.3) has the merit of being very positive ("For this reason the Brothers work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life and of civic affairs"). It would be necessary to look more deeply at the text to see therein an indication of what has actually happened and to look more deeply as well as at the Brother Superior's report¹⁵ – not without some nuances and questioning, so it seemed to me.¹⁶

This unforeseen movement is unquestionably positive, and I share the thinking of those who see it as a sign of the Institute's renewal under the guidance of the Spirit. I have had only a few but very intense occasions of personally living this partnership. I can therefore only be very modest in daring to ask a simple question: could there not be an alternative option in the future to the specific vocation of being a Brother, which would not be a matter of "shared mission" (such as it

is lived and defined at the present time), without the Brothers withdrawing into a ghetto-like situation? In other words, could not the question that the *Declaration* borrowed from *Ad Gentes* be asked more frequently, more systematically, more profoundly...? “sincerely to ask ourselves in the presence of God whether we cannot broaden our activity in favor of expanding God’s kingdom among the nations” at the expense of “leaving to others certain ministries.”¹⁷

Personally, I would hope to reflect – and share – more on the idea of this alternative. It seems to me not only essential to the future of the Institute, but also quite obviously to the authenticity of its life today.¹⁸ I think that, under another form, this question will come up again in the third part of this presentation.

c) *A restored Institute?*

At the end of a transition period, we ended up with a text of the *Rule* that was unanimously accepted, noteworthy, and acknowledged as the real expression of the Lasallian charism. One can consider that this *Rule* is one of the positive results of the *Declaration* (not solely of it, of course). The *Rule* quotes the *Declaration* quite often, making numerous references to it. It is certain that, after 1987, the official authorities of the Institute quoted the *Rule* extensively. One of the 1986 General Chapter’s objectives was to make it “accepted” in the Institute. In my opinion, the repetition of texts was a little too insistent. I am just telling it as I felt it.

I do not ask to ignore the *Rule*, and I do not wish that the quotes from the *Declaration* be multiplied. The renewal of the Institute should not be confused with a document, whether it be the *Rule* of 1987 or the *Declaration* of 1967. What is important is the renewal movement of which the text was the outcome and of which it can be an instrument. The document on its own can neither replace nor produce the renewal movement. The *Rule* was not in the beginning...: I had recently proposed a reflection on this phrase during a CIL session.¹⁹ At the beginning of the foundation – and for the re-founding of the Institute – it was essential to begin with the Brothers as persons, listening to the world’s calls and needs, in openness to the Spirit, interiorly nourished, and shared in community. It seemed to me that the dynamic of Brother Superior’s report as well as the type of propositions voted on by the 1993 General Chapter go in this direction. I will add that I would also like that the first *Rule* of the Brother, that is the Gospel, be more emphatically and more frequently recalled. The title of a recent letter by Brother John Johnston strikes me as inspiring in itself, as well as by the commentary that he writes: better “to live authentically in Christ Jesus” than “in following Christ.” One could return to the Lasallian contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus Christ: in his story, in our lives today.²⁰

d) *An Institute on the move, in the process of renewal (or of re-foundation)?*

This finally is the main image that I hold onto from the *Report of the Brother Superior*. In regard to all aspects of the Brother’s life and of the Institute he finds both positive and negative points. And in many respects, it seems here that the movement of the *Declaration* was interpreted in a positive way, as long as it continues to be lived that way.

One cannot say that the *Declaration* transformed the Institute. But there is no doubt that the renewal movement it launched translated itself into reality. I cite only *the example of returning to*

the service of the poor. One has the feeling, in reading Brother Superior, that today we are becoming more open interiorly to enter more deeply into the lived reality of this renewal / re-foundation.²¹ Without becoming too self-satisfied, without losing sight of the first image touched on above, one can at least recognize that the Institute remains alive, that it becomes more creative and that the *Declaration's* thrust remains current. It is a noticeable result of this document. But it is above all the manifestation of the Spirit's action in the body of the Institute, which, in other respects, seems weakened, made fragile. *It is in my weakness that I am strong* (2 Cor 12:10).

If today I look at the living reality of the Institute, I am led to consider that the Declaration achieved its aim, as well as it could.

Naturally, if one expected a radical, rapid and almost military-like transformation of the Institute, one could only be disappointed. But such a change would have been fundamentally contrary to the new image that the *Declaration* presents of the Institute: a living reality, composed of persons, set up in a pluralistic world which one cannot govern from an authoritarian center, nor deduct from strongly asserted principles. The adoption of subsidiarity was essential; and whatever the clarifying points necessary to produce it (*interdependence* for example), its exercise remains a fundamental responsibility. I know a number of Brothers who suffer because, according to them, the Institute did not change its direction completely for the poor. They sometimes bitterly lament what they consider as a divorce between the "talk" (word) and the "practice" (in the sense of an observation made in the USA. dealing with the gap between the "talk" (words) of religious and their "practice."²² But by recognizing that *the destiny of the Institute is in the hands of the Brothers*, the *Declaration* let it be understood that such a gap was inevitable and that it would always be necessary to work to *fill in the gap*. What would be very dangerous would be to henceforth literally take the "talk" as the only reality. Because one would then consider that the "practice" was not sufficiently faithful to the "talk."

On the other hand, if one understands the *Declaration's* perspective, one must recognize that it contributed much to freeing persons not only "from" (certain constraints; and it was necessary to do so), but also "for" a more resolute service of the poor. Otherwise did not the *Declaration* at least allow and facilitate the emergence of a certain number of Brother "founders," more often connected to the living Institute than was sometimes stated? Was that not its principal and invaluable result? *Freeing persons, so that the Spirit could be free.* I will add two positive observations dealing with service of the poor, an essential stake of renewal according to the *Declaration*.

The first is that all the General Chapters (1976, 1986, 1993), like the Inter-Capitular Assemblies of 1971 and 1981, the *Circulars*, and *Letters of the Superior Generals*, have repeated, emphasized, and broadened the call of the *Declaration* for the return to the poor without ever going back on this point. I will simply cite the intense *Circular 412 of September 15, 1980 on the service of the poor and the promotion of justice. The Circular takes into account the last General Chapter, the Pastoral Letters of Brother John Johnston, especially the one titled "Being Brother Today."* Without forgetting the next CIL²³ on the service of the poor, programmed with the General Chapter of 2000 in mind, one can say that if one never tires of repeating the same invitation, it's so that the message will not be lost. Personally, I am sensitive, above all, to the

persistency of this fundamental orientation. And I am grateful for it ... above all, for the many Brothers who live out the return to the poor.

The second observation is precisely that “the cause of the poor” has made good progress in the Institute over the course of these last thirty years. What the Institute realized and realizes in the field of educational service of the poor is truly significant, as was obvious in the documentation prepared for UNESCO²⁴ on the occasion of the Institute’s being awarded the Noma Prize.²⁵ Along the same line, it seems to me that concern for the return to the poor has become the Institute’s thrust despite the difficulties that this concern involves.

III. Questions Regarding the Future for the Institute in the Context of the Third Millennium?

It seems to me that recalling what I have tried to do already opens different reflections on the Institute’s future, on the eve of the 2000 General Chapter. It doubtlessly also leads to more than one question. Because it is within the presentation that I was asked to give, I must now try to make explicit some elements of the future. I do so in all modesty, conscious of the limits of my current situation. I do not have any action plan to present, no solution to propose. I simply raise some questions which concern me in thinking that the exchange of views will broaden and deepen them. I have grouped these questions into three tracks.

Beginning with the relative setbacks of the renewal movement taken on in the Institute since the 39th General Chapter and especially by the Declaration

Whatever the advances achieved after thirty years, it is difficult to affirm that the renewal asked for by Vatican Council II and committed to by the *Declaration* has really been accomplished in the Institute. For example, can one say that the desire expressed by Brother John Johnston has really been accomplished, i.e., that the Institute has really been recognized as a social entity visibly vowed to the educational service of the poor? The first future-oriented questions that I propose begin with a modest attempt at analyzing some causes of this relative setback. How can we avoid them from here on in?

It must be acknowledged that during Brother Charles Henry’s term as Superior General – a time period that should have been decisive for this renewal – the *Declaration* (and to some extent the General Chapter) was not really accepted in the Institute. It even met with opposition: one only has to recall the unbelievable storm stirred up (especially in one sector of the Institute) by the two conferences of Brother Charles Henry to the CIL²⁶ in November 1968 and February 1969. I suggest four possible causes of this harmful delay, which leads me to ask several questions in view of the next General Chapter.

a) One has to note well the great gap between the vision and the aim of the Institute’s renewal that the General Chapter knew how to prophetically present, and the government structure that it established. Already in 1966, many Brothers wished that this structure would have been changed in the sense of what came about in 1976, with what one can think of as a ten year delay. I could develop that, but it is not worth it. In the position I find myself today, it seems to me that in conditions that are more and more difficult, the central government of the Institute fulfills its

specific function better in a decentralized structure. I will limit myself to an example: the five Colloquia organized since 1993 (on the family, globalization, megalopolis, new technologies of information and communication, evangelization). Cannot one think and hope that in light of the experiences carried out by three successive General Councils (1976-1985; 1985-1993; 1993-2000) a potential evaluation of the General Council's role and of the conditions necessary for it to fulfill its function could be made and that desirable modifications be introduced before the next General Chapter?

b) A second cause of delay, tied to the first, contributed to stalling the renewal desired by the General Chapter. The General Chapter had established the necessary decentralization of the Institute. But the entire Congregation was not able to undertake the full measure of what this decentralization concretely intended immediately. For example, District Chapters were held rapidly everywhere. But it was rather rare that these new authorities became immediately aware of what the *Declaration* had put in their hands, for example in material dealing with the return to the poor or the re-evaluation of works. In regard to the USA, Brother Luke Salm observes that after the General Chapter of 1967 many capitulants did not have sufficient leisure time – nor clear-headedness – to look for the means to present the essence of the changes in which they were called to participate.²⁷ Was it not the same for Vatican Council II? This shortcoming was no doubt not limited only to the United States.

I will extend this observation by a question on the present situation. One of my anxieties deals with the effective participation of the Brothers in the functioning of the Institute. I have spoken about the intensity – at least in several Regions – of the grass-roots preparation at the 39th General Chapter. I do not have the impression that it was the same for the General Chapters that followed. I have recalled the importance of the five Colloquia organized by the General Council. What repercussions have they had on the Institute? *How can the 2000 General Chapter be the opportunity of restarting everywhere this active participation by all the Brothers in the Institute's life? We are a worldwide organization. Are we living this reality sufficiently, and how can we come to do so even more?*

c) A third cause is more complex. For different reasons, the General Chapter of 1966-1967 and the renewal it recommended were not positively welcomed by all the Brothers. Without going into detail, I will recall that some perhaps were tempted by a kind of iconoclasm, by rejection of what existed, by a frantic individualism.²⁸ With regard to the numerous departures which occurred between 1967 and 1976, I only note that I knew of several who left the Institute because of a sense of feeling helpless. The more they subscribed to the *Declaration's* plan, the more they were tempted to consider it as an impossible task to be achieved in the actual Institute. *Could one put such a new wine into wineskins that they considered too old?*

That was not the most frequent reason. More often, resistance to the *Declaration* was the consequence of indifference, indeed of ignorance. In some rare situations, Brothers who had studied – and no doubt understood – the *Declaration* opposed it with violence (and some were in important positions of responsibility in the Institute!). That some presentations of the *Declaration* – and of the General Chapter – were mishandled cannot sufficiently explain these rejections. Often they were the result of a fundamental resistance to change as such, and no pedagogy as such would have been able to undo such blockages. Frequently it was not even

active resistance, but a sort of inertia, of weariness. The text was accepted; even the inspiring spirit was recognized. But doubt existed that the spirit could pass into concrete reality, at least into one's own lived reality ... Maybe elsewhere? The different forms of resistance I have spoken about have no doubt subsided; they have even disappeared in most of the Institute's Regions. The question I ask in this regard, and which could be asked at the General Chapter, deals with the discernment of vocations and the formation of the Brothers. To the point, how to support an intellectual and spiritual formation that develops the capacity of openness, the ability to change, the welcoming of a Living God, whose Will is not fixed once and for all, but reveals itself and which one discovers by welcoming life little by little in history.

d) As a matter of fact, and this is the fourth and last cause which I will touch on in this regard, more than the inertia of persons, it was the weight of institutional realities which caused skepticism and paralysis. Analysis of the *Declaration* itself was applied exactly. For the young, the weight of works and resultant overwork frequently led to a summary and abbreviated formation. For the Brothers already in active ministry, the impossibility of a deepening and renewing intellectual life. For communities, the difficulty of dialogue and reflection. For certain Regions, the lack of sufficient attention to changing conditions and new opportunities (#49.2).

As long as this situation existed, how could one truly have heard the follow-up of this paragraph which "*urges the Regional and District Chapters to review the present state of their commitments*" (#49.2)? Consequently, in a number of cases, the practically allergic reaction crystallized around the question of service of the poor. Many of the Brothers sensitivities were deeply affected by this subject, that is to say – not without reason sometimes – either that the poor were not lacking in the schools where they were working or to wish that one would stop making such appeals, which to them seemed fanciful or pharisaical in the specific situation where they lived.

Beginning with the hypothesis that I have heard some formulate lately, shouldn't we proceed to updating the Declaration? What has become outdated in the text of this document?

This hypothesis rests on a double statement. On the one hand, in many aspects (that I will touch on following the third track of this section), the *Declaration* remains quite valid. However, on the other hand, one cannot deny that it has become dated on certain points, i.e., its language has become outmoded, and consequently, if it remains an indisputable witness of the Institute's will of realizing its renewal, it can no longer be considered as a fully accurate charter of this renewal.

a) *I believe I have shown that the Declaration of 1966-1967 was an unpredictable event.* Of course, once the text was published, one can find sources for it. But even as the Assembly started to take off, and until the end of the first session, no one imagined such a document. At this time, how can one tell today what will happen in a little more than a year, until the capitulants will have met. To the best of my knowledge, I believe I cannot be suspected of bias by noting here, always under the form of a question, three aspects of the *Declaration* which seem out of date and call into question its relevance for today.

First of all, it deals with the description of the signs of the times (#8-11). The Declaration was written in a socio-economic world context very different from the one we are living in today; it was produced above all (although not only) by the Brothers of the First World, certainly attentive to hearing the voice of what was then called the Third World. Some members of the Commission and of the General Chapter came from there, already sensitive to certain questionings which soon would make themselves heard, for example at Medellín. The world which it described was not idyllic (#11.3), no less true for the world of the young (#36.1-2; 39). But the Declaration scarcely knew of strikes, drugs, AIDS, new bio-ethical problems, Internet.

Above all, the General Chapter will not be able to leave aside the globalization movement referenced in these days. More radically, even the topic of our session, globalization, is unknown in the *Declaration*.

To see the frantic nature of monetary chaos, the systemic chaos of an economic model in the grip of a syndrome of collapse, social inequalities and fragilities that are always more keenly apparent, the revealing break between a mega-bourgeoisie and the runaway impoverishment of two-thirds of the planet, the varied ecological crises, the weakening of civic values and the barbaric signs flaring from Kosovo to the suburbs of our cities, one certainly has the right to question oneself about fear of the year 2000.

This evocative description by a *Le Monde* journalist dates from Tuesday, November 13, 1998. On some of these new characteristics of our world, there is agreement with the presentation of the Colloquium's theme on globalization which took place in Sri Lanka, and that I limit myself to quote here by underlining the novelty of our situation in regard to that of the *Declaration*:

The members of the Colloquium were invited to consider just a simple realignment of existing descriptions of international commerce and exchange which would not adequately respond to the necessity of a model of present realities. The outlines of international organization now surpass by far the definitions of ten years ago. It is evident that systematic globalization affects entire populations in their individual lives, their opportunities and their community structures. We have to be cautious in our framework of familiar references: they can be an obstacle to the perception of major changes in the nature and quality of structural relationships between communities in the entire world. It is possible that as an Institute, we might have to reevaluate our ways of imagining education in different places around the world.²⁹

Thirty years ago, we could speak of transforming the world. Today, we deal with a world already changing. And our Church barely reaches this world, as shown, for example, in the work of the *Le Monde* journalist responsible for religious news: "Challenges for the Pope of the Third Millennium."³⁰ Is not the author's conclusion for the Church applicable as well to the Institute of the next General Chapter?

The choice tomorrow will not be between continuity and change, but between what the Church must keep, according to a Christian tradition which, let us

remember, is always evolving and living, and which she must change in order to tackle ... the challenges of the third millennium.

b) *Secondly*, if one picks up again the listing of constitutive elements of the Brother's identity (#13), *can one keep it such as it is in #13.6?* "The Brother chooses the school as the preferred but not the only means 'to form the family of God's children during the present history of the human race.'"³¹

I know that, asking this question, I step into a minefield. I did not have any doubt on the subject of this phrase thirty years ago. If I ask myself questions today, it is not because I no longer believe in the importance of the school. I would still sign today #44 on *the value of the school*. It is not even because I would reckon that the Brothers must abandon teaching. My question does not begin from ideology, but from a simple supposition. In 1967, the *Declaration* could still speak about *the Brothers' school*. For example, read again the lengthy developments (#45 to 49) where it is a question of *the need for renewal of the school*; and there you will often find this expression *the Brothers' school*. I ask you: where does this Brothers' school still exist in our Institute which has recognized the importance of *shared mission* and its positive significance in the *Rule*? It is not here a matter of questioning the richness and the potential of this shared mission, nor the role which the Brothers can and must still play so that the sharing of this mission keeps its Lasallian characteristics. But simply: in 2000, if one can no longer define the Lasallian school beginning with the Brothers only, can one keep such a phrase as that of #13.6?

All the more reason since the actual reality of the Institute is already that of a widespread pluralism in the exercise of the evangelical, educational and even teaching mission. Pluralism which considers the aging of the Institute, even more evident in certain geographic sectors. Of numerous retired Brothers who continue to pursue an activity in education and in the proclamation of the Gospel, but often doing this in other settings rather than that of the traditional Brothers' schools. This is true even of younger Brothers, led to respond to new opportunities, and doing this more often after a discernment made according to the criteria enumerated in #52 of the *Declaration*. And this leads me to another question on this same subject. One of the important changes which came about in the Institute is that today, unlike 1967, the life of a number of Brothers is no longer defined by scholastic institutions. Consequently, shouldn't we, therefore, state *that the next General Chapter* formally note this major change, that it *views the "ministries" of the Brother as the exercising of an evangelizing mission* in the context of humanization and of cultural formation, beginning with concrete situations, the gifts of persons and of their history – as well as from the needs they encounter there – and, therefore, *under pluralistic forms* among which the *shared mission* in the Christian school would be found? By adding that, undoubtedly today, there cannot be any exercise of the Brothers' mission which is not a *shared mission* with lay men and women, and also no doubt shared with Catholics and others [Christians of other denominations, members of other religions, non-believers...].

From this perspective, should not another concern of the next General Chapter be to *underline the importance and the necessity of a renewal of community sharing?* The pluralism which characterizes the Institute often goes so far as to deal with ministries conducted individually by some Brothers. It is often a matter of implementing diversified works with the same Lasallian

charism. How then to find the means of living out this community charism? How then to share the complementary richness of this pluralism even more, on the community, District, Regional, and worldwide Institute scale? One of the essential characteristics of globalization is that of information, of communication circulated more and more rapidly and universally. *How can the Institute be more of a broadcast and sharing center for its members? And how can it awaken even more the interest of the Brothers for the open acceptance of different forms of what is, definitively, the action of the same Holy Spirit to be discerned, of course, and not extinguished?*

I subject you to another difficulty that I experience in regard to the constitutive elements of the Brother's identity. It deals with #13.2, which is thus expressed: "The Brother gives full and explicit expression to his baptismal consecration³² by making a public profession of vows which are received by the Church. He assumes this engagement in an exclusively lay Institute."

First of all it seems to me that in strict canonical terms, this constitutive element (i.e., the profession of three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience) cannot be connected with a real objectivity with respect to the specific intention of the Founder as we know it.³³ That is not to say he would be adverse to it. Some Brothers who lived with John Baptist de La Salle were the first to interpret the Institute's *Bull of Approbation* in such a way and mention it had been introduced by order "of Rome." The Institute never ceased to consider itself as a religious Congregation. One can think that another canonical statute would have been better suited – or even truer – to the Founder's intention. That's my point.³⁴

It seems even more regrettable to me that all too often one still hesitates between two ways of presenting the Brother's consecration. Sometimes one insists on making explicit the three classical vows (cf. for example #24 and #27 to 38a of the *Rule*). At other times, someone suggests using the more inspiring explanation of the Lasallian dynamisms (cf. #22, 23, and even #39 to 42b of the same chapter of the *Rule*). The *Declaration* itself does not escape this dichotomy. For example, compare the following two texts:

There is a new way of exercising the universal priesthood of all the faithful. In the public profession of vows, especially the vow of obedience, the Brother unites himself to the dispositions of Christ in his paschal sacrifice. This offering is an act of worship, a special gift to God of all that one is and all that one does (#18.4).

It is not true to say that the exercise of the apostolate is in opposition or harmful to the religious consecration. On the contrary, the apostolate is for the brother a necessary expression of his consecration to the Lord and a means to live it well. Apostolic tasks are religious because God wants them. In devoting himself courageously to the apostolate the brother accomplishes the will of the Lord who calls him. These tasks are religious because the brother finds Christ in the students to whom he is sent, particularly in the poor. They are religious because they realize the divine plan by contributing to the development of persons and by preparing them to welcome the Good News of salvation. They are religious because their final end is to prepare for God a people who will be adorers in spirit and in truth" (#25.1).

I understand that this duality is imposed on us *de facto* because of our definition as a Religious Institute of Pontifical Right (*Rule*, #2). But I fear that this dichotomy weakens the unique evangelical simplicity of the consecratory dynamic affirmed in the vow formulas of 1691, 1694, and professed until 1725. This is what one finds, most of the time, in the Founder's spiritual teaching. It hardly makes explicit the Brother's consecration beginning with the three vows, but rather by beginning with the Brother's existence.³⁵ In that way, it invites us to walk as pilgrims in search of the face of God, from the building of a fraternal community open to universal communion, of an educational service for the poor. *Can we not hope that the next General Chapter will go all the way in reinstating the vow of association, worked on by the General Chapter of 1986? "Most Holy Trinity, I consecrate myself entirely to you in order to ... and for this purpose I promise and vow association for the educational service of the poor..."*

And would that not clarify the orientations of our existential identity as consecrated persons? Is it really necessary to state a canonical religious identity at all costs?

Beginning with consideration of the Declaration's permanent orientations, facing up to the context of today's world, especially globalization

I am speaking here less of the text of the *Declaration* than of the movement which birthed it; and I will begin with this reflection of Brother John Johnston's in the *Pastoral Letter of 1994*:

It dawned on me several times, during this General Chapter [of 1993], that the Institute seems more willing than in the past to involve itself in decisive and effective action which will be required if we wish to reduce the gap in a significant way before the year 2000.³⁶

If this statement is true, I will simply bring up again three areas of this decisive and effective action strongly emphasized by the *Declaration* and recalled in recent documents: *the reality of serving the poor* – which implies a creation dynamic, and a reflection on the local and global economic order; *"catechetical" renewal* – understood in a very secular and pluralistic world (I refer here to such an intervention heard at the Conference of Superior Generals in 1993 in Rome, which accented that the undertaking of a true dialogue with the religions of Asia would set up a major challenge for the Church of the next millennium); at the source, in depth *"spiritual" renewal* – faithful to all the dimensions listed in section 3 of the *Declaration*, of consecrated laity in the single life and associated in community life and the mission.

I will limit myself to expressing some questions for discussion. To develop them would assume a competence that I do not have, and particularly a knowledge of the Colloquia's content. I stated the limits of my interventions at the beginning. Therefore, the very sketchy nature of this last point.

a) *The decisive and effective orientation toward the service of the poor in the context of globalization.* Two points in contrast. One, a strong and relatively recent text of a French Dominican seems to focus the problem very well for me. Then a question on the subject of service of the poor which returns in a striking way, without conclusion, in the report of the Colloquium on globalization.³⁷

I quote here several lines of a French Dominican, commenting on the statement of Jesus that the Gospel is announced to the poor (Mt 11:5 and Lk 4:18).

“Announcing the Gospel to the poor” is an expression which comes after an enumeration of concrete actions accomplished in their regard.³⁸ But it does not indicate an activity which would simply be added to the others. It recapitulates and summarizes in it all these saving acts. Announcing the Gospel does not add itself, therefore, to the list as a simple supplementary activity, this time in word order. It is the conclusion which takes up and summarizes all which precedes it ... Announcing the Gospel is inextricably connected to doing all which has been said. The sign given by Christ is not that the Gospel is announced to all humanity. It is that the Gospel is announced to the poor. If, as we believe, the Gospel is destined for all – for God does not make any distinction of persons – it is not the universal announcement of the Gospel which is the sign of God’s presence, it is the fact that it is fulfilled for the poor. The situation that we are in – perhaps let us begin to get out of it – has accustomed us to starting with the universality of the Christian message and, from there, to take into account the question of announcing it to the poor. The movement indicated in the Gospel is the opposite: it begins with the announcement to the poor and continues, beginning from there, into a universal announcement. The truth of the announced Gospel is decided at the point of departure: either first – all humanity or first – all the poor. In truth, if the Gospel is not first announced to the poor, then we do not announce the Good News to all humanity.³⁹

[Consequently, wouldn’t it be better to avoid formulations, which risk being distorted, of things that one wants to be universal. *The Institute vows itself to the educational service of youth, mainly the poor.* Such was not the language of the *Declaration*. The announcement of the Gospel to the poor is truly *the* apostolic priority of the Institute (#28 to 34). To serve the poor is not reduced to charitable support; that implies the struggle for social justice (#29.5; 30.2-3). The priority of service of the poor must be lived also by those who are not actually involved in service of the poor (#32.1-2).]

Secondly, I limit myself to refer to a question formulated in different ways regarding service of the poor in the report of the Colloquium on globalization. In the context of globalization, we work in areas, in limited concrete situations, next to people who may not have any awareness of globalization. How do we reconcile an essential enculturation without losing sight of the world perspective? If one comes from a different sociological context, how do we work for the human advancement of disadvantaged peoples, in a spirit of true service and not of domination? Must one truly choose for the poor and the poorest, or finally, can one hope for a more efficient action on behalf of the poor by working with and influencing those who are better off? Must one give up all political involvement?⁴⁰

b) “Catechetical” renewal, but understood in a deeply secularized and pluralistic world. I would be tempted here to raise three questions (without having been able to see the report of the Colloquium on evangelization).

First of all, in the world of religious pluralism where we work more and more, while the announcement of the transformative and healing action of the Gospel is, above all, an active source of salvation it is accomplished through different forms of serving the poor. Must not the different forms of service of the poor take on their full value *before* being the announcement of a message?⁴¹ Along the same line, must not catechetical renewal focus its energy on the very observations of the *Declaration* regarding God's work as being accomplished in "advancing human civilization and culture," "even when it is not possible explicitly to announce the Gospel" – "and sometimes for long periods of time" – to think of an explicit announcement of the Gospel (cf. #41.1-3)?

Second question. The fact remains that the Brother's vision must be, in all situations, this explicit announcement (see #42: Primacy of the Word of God). In order that it be the authentic announcement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, muddled by the least possible contamination of Western languages in which the Catholic faith has usually expressed itself most of the time, and continues to do so, wouldn't it be good to again recover and possess the essence of the Christian message, and for that to be done, to agree to some necessary cleansing and simplifying of the Christian message as we ourselves have learned and deepened it? I refer here particularly to an article of Emile Poulat titled: *The Church must rework its internal coherence. Christianity appeared in a universe where all were religious. We live in a world "running from God."*⁴²

Third question, which extends the second, and is particularly valid for inter-religious dialogue toward which we are more and more being led. Would it not be necessary to insist on a theology of Christ's universal salvation outside of the Church's borders, leaving room for His Holy Spirit's action? This is a strong intuition of Vatican Council II, recalling the teaching of numerous Greek Fathers.⁴³

c) *At the source, a very deep "spiritual" renewal*, faithful to all the dimensions listed in the *Declaration's* introduction (#3) of lay persons consecrated in celibacy and associated in community life and the mission. In the first place it seems to me that it is necessary to work all the more to emphasize the importance of the positive value of our consecration as men, as Christians, as lay religious. The first adjective must not consume the second. The *Declaration* outlines several qualities of this lay vocation. I personally believe that we should deepen this original and prophetic dimension of the Brother's religious life.

The Brother is a man (#3.3) who lives in the world and "experiences the same desires and anxieties as the rest of men" (#8.1). The Institute was born from listening to the needs of humanity, of the world. Its renewal must also be made by beginning with the cries of today's humanity (#23.1⁴⁴; 33.2-3; 36.1-3 ...). Moreover, the consecration of the Brother involves him in the world. It expresses itself and lives in "... the exercise of the teaching profession ... (#48.2); it aims at serving humanity to whom "... all things on earth should be related..." (#10.4). One can still re-read with this human starting point: #3.5 – presence to the world, necessity of spiritual renewal; #8.1– insistence on attention to the signs of the times; #11.4 – witness of the consecrated life's witness to the world's heart; #41.2-3 and 48.2, 7 – "It adds a new dimension to their religious life, since for them the exercise of the teaching profession is an integral part of their religious consecration."

This presence is not submersion. “*This implies also a special type of presence to men, which is defined on the one hand by the depth of the charity of its commitment, and on the other hand by a certain separation from the world*” (#18.3). It is a completely positive spiritual attitude: it deals neither with refusing nor fighting against this world. Caught hold of by Christ, a member of Christ, the Brother lives the human condition of this world as a citizen of the new world begun by Jesus Christ. As the dough’s leaven, he desires to contribute little by little to the transformation of this world (#26.2-3). Regarding this meaning, look at the beautiful text on the Eucharist’s significance (#20.10). We are already into the theme of spiritual renewal, which should be taken up, in the initial and continuing formation of the Brothers, in line with the introductory overview of #3 of the *Declaration*.

To live, to renew oneself spiritually, is to begin each morning to hope, that is to say:

- *welcome the gift of the Spirit* (#3.2; cf. #17.2; 42.2; 51.4), and *the attitude of prayer* which corresponds to this welcoming of the gift, does it not consist of *taking the time to give thanks*, each day (#20.9)?
- *acknowledge the calls of the Spirit in life* (#3.3; cf. #10.2-3; 14.3; 18.8; 25.4), and *the attitude of prayer* which corresponds to this acknowledging life’s calls, does it not consist of *taking time to making life holy*, each day (#25.2-3)?
- *commit yourself to the ways of the Spirit* (#3.4; cf. #48.7; 37.2; 27.2; 14.5) and *the attitude of prayer* which corresponds to this acknowledgement of life’s calls. Does it not consist of *taking time to intercede*, each day (#25.2; 53.3)?
- *be united to the active presence of the Spirit* (#3.5; cf. #18.3; 18.5; 26.4; 38.4), and *the attitude of prayer* which corresponds to this communion to the Spirit’s presence. Does it not consist of *taking the time to offering oneself, to opening oneself, to abandoning oneself, to making life holy*, each day (#18.4; 27.1)?

In concluding, I propose two final reflections for your consideration which seem valid to me in view of the next General Chapter.

Shouldn’t we all avoid using the past as our reference point when thinking about the Institute and the Declaration? The *Declaration* was the product of a relatively strong Institute, definitely worldwide, but centralized, dynamic and young, still having many strong communities as animators of scholastic institutions. That is no longer our reality. The Institute is fragile; its energies are scattered; many Brothers no longer have the institutional support of a community attached to a work. Is it not this Institute which is called to live the movement of renewal / re-foundation? And, from this moment on, should not the function of structures (notably of Councils, Chapters, Superiors) favor the effective vitality of the Institute: to encourage to the utmost the creativity of persons; to enliven their membership by supporting the evangelical and Lasallian *inspiration* of what is created, as well as of that which is renewed – by favoring *the living out of communion / unity*, the sharing of experiences and of situations that are more and more diversified – in questioning needs *by discerning, and not risk extinguishing, the Spirit?*

Are we not on the threshold of daring to hope? For me, it is not a word, but a daily challenge to welcome it as a gift; to do it by commitment; to wait for it without constraint. God continues to conduct all things by His Spirit. We do not know from where He comes, nor where He goes. But we are assured that He is present to us. It is He who is our Hope. Each new morning.

Notes

1. Brother Michel Sauvage (1923-2001) was born near Lille, France, and became a Brother at the age of 16. He did his theological studies at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum) in Rome and did his doctoral thesis in Lille (Catéchèse et Laïcat, 1963). He was a professor at the Lateran Pontifical University in Rome (Jesus Magister) and was theologian for his brother, Bishop Jean Sauvage, at Vatican Council II. From 1966 to 1976, he was Assistant Superior General for Formation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and later served as the second director of the office of Lasallian Studies in the Generalate in Rome.

2. Brother Ludolfo Ojeda, coordinator of the RELAL meeting.

3. The reference here is to “Perspectives of Re-Foundation,” which was delivered by Brother Michel Sauvage in Brazil in March 1997 and which can be found in this current issue of *AXIS*.

4. I quote here from the Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech, on the occasion of the Civil Rights march on Washington, DC, August 28, 1963. The title of the speech: “*I Have a Dream*.”

5. Ernst Bloch, *Le principe Espérance*, Volume 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), chapter 14, pp. 99-142: *the fundamental distinction between day dreams and nocturnal dreams*. Bloch considers that he who dreams with his eyes open, even if often distracted, is pushed to do what he dreams about. Contrary to the “daydreamer” who is simply on the moon, the day dreamer interests himself in others. He is pushed toward the outside world. “The ideas which he comes up with do not ask to be interpreted, but put into practice; and when he is imagining his castle in Spain, he is also drawing up plans” (quoted by Henry Mottu, *op. cit.* p. 334).

6. Henry Mottu, *Espérance et lucidité*, in *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie* Volume 4, Ethics (Paris: Cerf, 1983), pp. 333-334.

7. These five Colloquia, which were organized by the Institute’s education secretariat, occurred between 1993 and 2000: family (Rome, Italy), globalization (Colombo, Sri Lanka), megalopolis (Mexico City, Mexico), new technologies of information and communication (Barcelona, Spain), and communicating the faith today (Rome, Italy).

8. *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique*.

9. *Paul VI, Talk at the General Audience of December 7, 1965*, in *Talks at the Council (of John XXIII and Paul VI)* (Centurion Editions, 1966), pp. 239-253. The entire talk would have to be cited.

10. Varied vocabulary does not know the word “re-foundation”; nevertheless it was developed at the 1986 General Chapter. It frightened some because for them it seemed to imply

that one wanted to separate oneself from the Founder. As far as I am concerned, I think it is quite the contrary...

11. *Institute Bulletin* #234.

12. *Report of Brother Superior to the 42nd General Chapter*, pp. 1-61.

13. *Personal Commentary of the Brother Superior on the Report to the 42nd General Chapter*, pp. 65-79.

14. *Personal Commentary of the Brother Superior on the Report to the 42nd General Chapter*, p. 66.

15. *Report of Brother Superior to the 42nd General Chapter*, pp. 39-45; but also *Personal Commentary of the Brother Superior on the Report to the 42nd General Chapter*, pp. 68-70.

16. In this regard see also the *Pastoral Letter* of January 1, 1994, pp. 46-53: our specific role; refer also to *Circular 435*: the 42nd General Chapter, pp. 30 -51; and certainly the recent document (1997) of the General Council entitled *The Lasallian Mission of Human & Christian Education: A Shared Mission*.

17. *Ad Gentes* 40; *Declaration* 24, 2.

18. "Alternative," to my mind, means: practice this, without omitting that (Lk 11:42).

19. Centro Internazionale Lasalliano (International Lasallian Center).

20. Cf. *Cahiers lasalliens* 50, pages 385-390: "It is no longer I who live, it is Jesus Christ who lives in me" (*Meditation* #22.2, citing *Gal* 2.20).

21. Cf. *Report of Brother Superior to the 42nd General Chapter*, pp. 30-31, #5.4; *Personal Commentary of Brother Superior General to the 42nd General Chapter*, pp.72-73.

22. Cf. *Report of Brother Superior to the 42nd General Chapter*.

23. Centro Internazionale Lasalliano (International Lasallian Center).

24. *Bulletin of the Institute*, #234.

25. *Personal Commentary of the Brother Superior General to the 42nd General Chapter*, pp. 30-33.

26. Centro Internazionale Lasalliano (International Lasallian Center).

27. Cf. *The Impact of the 39th General Chapter*, pp. 147-150. [It is not clear to what Brother Michel is referring here.]

28. Cf. *Personal Commentary of the Brother Superior General to the 42nd General Chapter* on the enlightening distinction between *free from* and *free for* (p.72).

29. The Colloquia so far. A compendium of progress reports of the four Colloquia up to “Communicating the Faith Today.” Colloquium 2, Schema 1, p. 1.

30. *The Pontificate of John Paul II. The Successor’s files* by Henri Tincq. Here are the descriptive titles of the eight chapters (and of one or another paragraph) of this work, which is no stranger to globalization! And which is written in a positive spirit! 1) “Rome”: *Return to a more modest use of papal power* (the primacy of the Pope, big debate of tomorrow’s world?); 2) “A People of Believers”: *Decentralize the government of the Church?*; 3) “Toward a Church without Priests”: *Ordain married men?*; 4) “The Other Half of Humanity”: *Open wide the door to women?*; 5) “The Road of Unity”: *Hasten the reunification of Christians?*; 6) “Religious Dialogue”: *Resist fundamentalism?*; 7) “A Disillusioned Modern Society”: *Answer the search for meaning?*; 8) “To the Extremities of the Earth”: *Answer the sects back by enculturation?*

31. *Gaudium et Spes* #40.

32. *Perfectae Caritatis* #5.

33. In #14.3, the *Declaration* speaks of *the constitutive elements received from the Founder*, leading one to believe that these constitutive elements are those that #13 enumerates. This ambiguity is regrettable.

34. What is here presented as an endnote [an Appendix in the Spanish and French versions of the conference] is an additional commentary on #13.2 of the *Declaration*. Brother Michel felt that it would have unduly lengthened the presentation, but he believed that it was not without interest:

I present here an historical interpretation of the assumed intention of John Baptist de La Salle regarding the juridical/legal representation that he wished to give to the Institute (see the work of Brother Maurice Auguste, *Cahiers lasalliens* #2-3 and #11). Did not the Founder say that *he was led there, where he would never have wanted to go on his own?* Re-founding the Institute – the expression would be less shocking if a less idealized, more realistic image of the foundation, if one recalled that it was really more of a *process*. We are too used to looking at the foundation by beginning to look at its accomplished reality (*but beginning when? 1682? 1691? 1694? 1717? 1725?*) ... unless the foundation came about as an extraordinary break which opened up the Founder’s life, and then continued by many trials and errors, frequently in *extreme fragility* as often written by Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain at different moments in his account: 1682, 1690, 1701, and 1714.

In 1725, some Brothers believed that by the *Bull of Approbation*, the Institute was finally well founded, solidly affirmed, publically recognized. Henceforth, it could present its official identity card to all: *we became a religious Congregation of pontifical right!* Our situation was very clear and secure. Look: the Bull even accorded us the three vows of religion! The little Society of Brothers set up with so much effort by M. de La Salle was now lawfully established, and it took its place among the religious orders (because for some Brothers their vows were the

same as solemn vows, and Blain himself does not draw back from this erroneous interpretation).

For me, the Preface given to the *Rule of 1726* sets up a monumental misinterpretation in regard to the process of the Institute's founding. It was not an interpretation of the intention, the spirit or the letter of M. de La Salle's activity and writings, but a radical contradiction of his work. The capitulants of the General Chapter of 1900 understood this because they eliminated this text from the revised *Rule*. However, they did not deal with the dishonest dichotomy which had been introduced and was always accentuated in the literature, the practice, and the current mentality of the Institute (as was the case in numerous religious congregations).

On the one hand, the Brother doubtlessly defined himself according to the direction of the original *Rule*, and chapters 1 and 2 remained strong as regards the *apostolic finality, the evangelical spirit of faith-zeal, the priority of Scripture, the attention paid to the event* (cf. to the three effects of the spirit of faith). The *Meditations* of the Founder constantly called the Brother to better perceive and live his real life as the locus of spiritual and religious growth. He demonstrated and discovered his identity as consecrated in the living experience of his concrete story: seeker of God; disciple of Jesus Christ; accomplishing his mission as educator, catechist, server of poor children under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; worker for the world's development as well as evangelizer of peoples; active member of a fraternity.

But on the other hand, from then on the Brother also defined himself beginning from a *canonical category, that of a Religious whose consecration was expressed particularly in the three vows of religion*. It was necessary for him to think of his identity and attempt to live it on the basis of values and obligations removed from the realities which motivated him interiorly and caused him to make progress day after day. For example, how many times did I see initial formation programs superimpose some sort of study of the nature and obligations of the religious life in general (a type of *Small Treatise on the Religious State*, even updated) on a study of the Brother's life beginning with the *Rule*, indeed of the *Declaration!* At best, this dualism is a waste of time. In many cases, it contributes to blurring the image of identity. At worst, it turns out to be an illusion for some.

This dominating fact of a canonical concept of the Brother's religious life and understanding of his identity has remained in the official language and in a number of Institute structures beginning, not from his specific life, but from the external nature of a so called *religious life in and of itself*. *One can recognize that the most fundamental intention of the Declaration was to introduce a dynamic – and to open a process – of re-foundation, because it was developed by breaking away from this harmful dichotomy*. It invites the Brothers to define and to understand themselves beginning with the charismatic origin of the Institute, of its

apostolic finality, of its Gospel spirit, of its embodiment in the life of the world, for the service of liberating humanity and of communing with all.

With the passage of time, it seems to me that it is this intention of an historical and specific approach to the Brother's life which was most vigorously fought against, in the name of another vision of the essence of the religious life – namely of consecration in and of itself, of the decisive importance of the three vows, of the relationship to the world. As for what concerns me, I believe I can say that between 1954 and 1966, I gradually had become more clearly conscious of the officially admitted dichotomy and that *I had been led, without having foreseen it at the beginning*, to reflect on the Brother's religious life ... beginning with its specific nature and no longer with the religious state in general. With the passage of time, I think that the fundamental focus of the *Declaration* was developed along these lines. And that, despite the difficulties and a certain number of regrettable but minor compromises the text of the *Declaration* such as it is still realizes this fundamental intention.

At its root, this is a *theology of Revelation* which is at stake, the same one that even *Dei Verbum* so profoundly renewed, and that Gabriel Moran came to present to the capitulants at the beginning of the second session of the 39th General Chapter. Are we or aren't we called to live in the Institute to help us make progress by the Spirit's movement? Or is it an external canonical law, an official approbation that has the strength to keep us together? Is our fidelity to the Founder's spirit and his specific intentions *in the texts (of the Rule)* guaranteed as *the faithful expression of the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* because of the Decree of the Congregation of Religious of January 26, 1987? Or does the value of our *Rule* come because it is the fruit of the living Institute's long discernment seeking to express its specific identity ... even if we had to agree to make concessions to a common law that one finds particularly in the *chapter on Consecration*, and which prominently stands out in contrast between the two paragraphs of article #2 of the *Rule*?

35. See "The Vows of the Brothers in the History of the Institute" by Brother Michel Sauvage in *The Vows and the Brother*, translated by John Barry Ryan (Lockport, IL: Christian Brothers Conference, 1975).

36. *Pastoral Letter of 1994*, p. 16.

37. The Colloquia so far. Reference cited above as endnote #30.

38. "The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, the good news is announced to the poor" (Mt 11:5).

39. Alain Durand, OP, *La cause des pauvres. Société éthique et foi* (Cerf, 1992), p. 55.

40. The Colloquia so far. Refer to p. 10, group 3, and p. 11, group 4 the next to the last paragraph; p. 15, 3.1, last paragraph.

41. I refer here to the text of Father Durand, cited above, endnote #40.

42. *La Croix*, November 26, 1998.

43. A theologian like Father Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, in his outstanding work, *L'histoire des hommes, récit de Dieu* (Cerf, 1992), 381 pages, goes deeper into this question. Jacques Dupuis, SJ, goes the same way in an even more explicit way, in a work that has rapidly become a "classic" – *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, Cogitatio Fidei (Cerf, 1999), 657 pages. Father Geffre, OP, longtime director of the Cogitatio Fidei collection at the Editions du Cerf was anxious to publish this work, which caused some stir. In his recent work in the form of an interview by Gwendoline Jarczyk, *Profession Théologien. Quelle pensée chrétienne pour le XXIe siècle?* (Albin Michel, 1999), 316 pages, he develops this work, not without indicating certain points on which he would distance himself (pp. 202-212).

44. Unfortunately, at the time of the discussion in the Assembly, an amendment was voted which weakened the scope of the text quite a bit. The Commission had written: *it is in the attention ... that the Institute will find **the** indispensable **source** of renewal*. Now one reads: ... *will find **an indispensable source***. *Change of article, change of meaning.*