

## Considering the Vocabulary of Association

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*Understanding certain words and expressions  
in John Baptist de La Salle's cultural and linguistic context:  
Associate, To Associate Myself,  
Society, Together (together and by association),  
To Unite Myself, To Remain (in Society), Company*

We must consider the meaning of these words as people use them in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, that is, by reading the definitions in the dictionaries published at the time. I consulted the Dictionary by Furetière (1680); two editions of the Dictionary of *l'Académie Française*, indicated below as AF 1694 and AF 1762; the Dictionary by Trévoux (1743-1752); and *Le Robert, Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française* (1992), indicated below as DHLF.

In my experience, Trévoux, for two reasons, most frequently offers the definition closest in meaning to the words of John Baptist de La Salle. First, dictionaries generally record changes in language use only some decades after the word appears in the commonly spoken and written language. This is especially the case in an era when publication of a dictionary was a rare occurrence. Moreover, Trévoux, the result of work by a group of Jesuits, conveys a far more evident collection of spiritual and religious themes than what other contemporary dictionaries contain; and the overall scope and development of the French language as presented by Trévoux are quite close to the language that De La Salle customarily employs.

### Association

Furetière and Trévoux start with the same definition of "association":

accord, pact, or treaty in society by which two or more people join together, whether to assist one another, to act in common, or to live more conveniently or comfortably.

Marriage is the closest example of association. Examples also include associations related to business (for example, an association of merchants). Trévoux adds that "association amounts to perfect agreement."

For "association" and its derivatives, AF 1694 refers to the word "society."

AF 1762 defines "association" as "the union of a number of people who join together for a common interest or purpose."

The DHLF historical overview indicates that the word “association” first appears in the French language in 1408, and it connects the word with *compagnie* (company). Today, “association, in French law, is the pooling of activity without a profit motive, in contrast to a society or to a commercial enterprise.” This precise distinction is relevant for us because, for John Baptist de La Salle, “association” and “to associate oneself” are not juridically opposed to “society” or “to form a society.”

### **Associate (noun)**

Trévoux develops at length the meaning of this term “associate” as it pertains to religious congregations, especially those of women: associates of the Visitation, associates of the Sisters of Saint Genevieve (or Miramiones<sup>3</sup>), and people who participate in the life of the religious community but are ineligible to hold positions of responsibility.

The other dictionaries define “associate” as a member of an association.

In Furetière, “An associate can connect with, or make a commitment to, another associate, but all associates must consent when undertaking something in common.”

John Baptist de La Salle rarely uses the term “associate” as we do today when speaking of associates. The word appears only twice in his *Meditations* (both of them in the Meditation on Saint Bruno<sup>4</sup>), once in *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*,<sup>5</sup> and once in *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools*.<sup>6</sup>

### **To Associate**

In Furetière and Trévoux, “to associate” is “to form a society or to admit someone into a company.” They offer as an example, among others, “the confraternity of believers who associate themselves in prayer for one another.”

AF 1762 defines “to associate” as “to receive someone in a company in order to participate in the benefits of that company”; and it is the only dictionary in that early group to use the reflexive form, “to associate oneself with someone else is to form a society with someone for a specific common interest.”

DHLF indicates that this reflexive form appears in French in 1413 and that the double construction, to associate someone to someone or with something, dates from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The word “association” is related to “society” and to “company.”

Association refers to persons and is formed freely by the consent of those who constitute it for the purpose of pursuing a common goal or of sharing interests.

To be an “associate” supposes agreement with a certain number of rules of conduct, a degree of participation in the association’s activities, a pooling among the members, and common accord about specific operations.

Associating oneself presupposes a common purpose among the associates.

### **To Unite Myself**

The dictionaries refer only indirectly to this reflexive form “to unite myself.”

Furetière and Trévoux give the same general definition of “to unite”: “to gather together, to join two things together to make one.”

Trévoux mentions that “to unite together” is not a tautology (citing Vaugelas<sup>7</sup>). In the sphere of ethics, “united” is used when speaking of peace, friendship, and harmony among people.

AF 1694 and AF 1762 also offer a symbolic sense of the verb “to unite”: “it is said of people who share a bond.”

According to DHLF, the term initially means “to establish emotional bonds among people” and is used at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1594) in a particular context: to join together for an economic, religious, or political cause. Such association, however, does not imply unity (1636). “To unite myself” is also used in the sense of “binding two people in marriage” (1644 and 1669), a meaning nearly contemporaneous with De La Salle.

The term “to unite” is related to “association.” This terminology occurs in the definition of marriage, already noted with respect to “association” and “to associate myself.” In our vow formula, we say, “to unite and to remain,” which are major aspects of marriage.

The verb “to unite” is related to “together,” doing things together, bonding together.

The moral meaning of “to unite” is significant in relation to the themes of peace, friendship, and harmony.

### *To Remain*

In Furetière, “to remain” is to sojourn in a particular place, to live somewhere, to do something for a period of time, to pause in place, to rest.

In AF 1762, the meaning is “to be permanent.”

In Trévoux, one definition is “to lodge, to inhabit, to sojourn in a place”; and another is “to persist, to persevere, to be in a continuous state.”

“To remain” implies permanence in space (a place) and in time and thus includes the notion of stability: to pause, to remain, to persist, to persevere.

“To remain in society....” is not to remain in one place; it is an inner process.

“To unite myself and to remain in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are associated to conduct, together and by association, schools....” Two important elements appear in the formula: “to unite myself” and “to remain in society.” Specific people, Brothers of the Christian Schools, constitute this “Society” which puts in place a project that thereafter characterizes it: conducting “schools for the service of the poor” (formerly, “gratuitous schools”).

To unite ourselves with this particular Society is to make common cause with others who are working on this project.

“To remain” is to will the project’s continuation. Not separating from this Society and its project means persevering in the Society and in its realization of the specific project.

## **Society**

Furetière and Trévoux begin with the same point of view: “Society is an assembly of people in one place who focus on helping people in need.”

The term also refers to a particular bond of friendship and mutual interest among people.

Trévoux, in particular, develops the religious dimension: “Religious form societies as Congregations to live in common according to a *Rule*.” Examples include the Society of Jesus and the Societies of the Sorbonne, of Saint Joseph, and of Brittany (a Benedictine branch<sup>8</sup>).

DHLF historically connects the word “society” with “association, meeting, community, alliance, company, and groupings both professional and religious.” The main point is that a group forms itself for a specific purpose.

“Society,” in the sense of “a group constituted for a purpose,” implies:

- accord among the members.
- definition of a common project, commercial, religious....
- definitive structure: rules, positions with responsibilities, and functional procedures.

This certainly is the case with the “Society of Brothers,” with its vows, its *Rule*, and its mode of functioning (as in the election of the Superior at its origin).

The meaning of “Society,” then, always remains related to that of “association.”

Two aspects stand out particularly with the term, “Society”: its purpose (something “for which” people create and construct a Society) and its organization (which always is related to the Society’s purpose). A religious society is neither a literary nor a commercial society; its operating methods are different.

To be in society, to create society, also includes the particular relationships among its members.

## **Together**

In all four sets of dictionaries, “together” means “one with the other,” and to go together means “to go in company with.”

DHLF indicates that the French word “*ensemble*” stems from the Latin word<sup>9</sup> meaning “together” and “simultaneous.” Other meanings develop later, including “one with the other” and “at the same time, simultaneously.”

The Lasallian expression “together and by association” might seem redundant. A relevant text is in the 1699 formula of vows of Brother Paul Narra: “to unite myself and to live in Society with the Brothers who are associated together to keep together and by association gratuitous schools....”

“Together” approaches in meaning the expression “uniting myself” in the sense of physical proximity in this effort; the proximity might be that of a local community.

“Together” would also describe the approach taken by a local community in its own particular educational work.

“By association” would envisage a global perspective by the District or by the Institute in proclaiming a project “to conduct schools to serve poor people.”

“Together” does not involve the same organization, will, and global nature as a project “by association for....” and “in Society for....”

## **Company**

In Furetière and Trévoux, “company” is “a collective name that refers to a number of people who assemble in the same place with the same plan.”

The AF 1762 definition is “an assembly of a number of people who participate in conversation or in some kind of society and bond.”

In Trévoux, “company” also means a certain assembled “body.” *Compagnies Souveraines* (legal courts); *l’Académie Française* is a Company. The word also refers to Societies, religious houses, colleges,<sup>10</sup> the “Company of Jesus.” Company is also used for an association or a society of merchants.

In DHLF a “company” is a voluntary, often organized, grouping of people, an association of people gathered together by objectives and common statutes in commercial, ideological, and religious domains.

“Company” is close to “society” and to “association.”

In their Letter of April 1, 1714, the principal Brothers write to the Founder: “Everyone is convinced that God gave you and still gives you the graces and talents needed to govern properly *this new Company....*”<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

In the language of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, “association” never refers to a local community; it always designates something larger.

It seems to me that we cannot point to John Baptist de La Salle and the vow of association and make of it a “vow of community.” When De La Salle wants to refer to “the local community,” he usually says “a house of the Institute.” The principal Brothers summoned to the General Chapter of 1717 are the Directors of the principal houses. In the *Memorandum on the Habit*, the word “community” refers to all the Brothers, not to a local community.<sup>12</sup>

“Association,” “Society,” and “to create Society” are similar terms that refer to people who freely choose and who agree together to carry out a specific project (or an objective of the association or of the society) in a specific organizational structure that enables the “society” or the “association” to continue.

The dictionaries consulted illustrate the terms “association,” “society,” and “to unite myself” by referring to marriage. In other words, our understanding of “I promise and vow to unite myself and to remain in society ...” can, without any doubt, be clarified by considering the meaning and the anthropology of marriage.

“To remain” points out the permanence and the constancy of participation in the Society and in its objectives.

“To unite myself” perhaps contains a personal aspect; people unite (in marriage). In the vows, we Brothers say that we unite ourselves with others who share the same project.

In our vow “to unite myself and to remain in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are associated to conduct, together and by association, schools for the service of the poor...,” we welcome our Brothers and are welcomed by them. We join a project, the one for which a “society” is created. We enter the project with determination to make it a success; we make it “our own.” We sustain this project by making it effective locally (“together”) and by undertaking its perpetuation through history and events (“by association”). The project “to conduct ... schools for the service of the poor” is not reduced to its local dimension. We must bear the responsibility for its global efficiency and effectiveness today.

*The vow of association for...* takes us out of ourselves and directs us to the mission. We are not left alone as we face this mission, for we consecrate ourselves “in Society.” In vowing association, we acknowledge ourselves, and our Brothers acknowledge us, as active members of the Society who have a role in implementing its project. We also state that providing this service

to young and poor people is simultaneously the place of our consecration and the path to our holiness.

## Endnotes

1. Brother Jean-Louis Schneider, who finalized this brief document about the vocabulary of association on September 27, 2004, is a member of the District of France. He has been a frequent presenter at the Centro Internazionale Lasalliano (CIL) in Rome and a regular presenter in Lasallian formation and education programs in his own District; and he was the Institute's Director of Lasallian Studies in Rome from 2004 to 2009.

2. Brother Paul Grass, FSC, who received a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Michigan State University (1970), served as Vice President of Saint Mary's College, Winona, MN (1976-1987), Regional Coordinator (1988-1991) and Executive Editor of Lasallian Publications (1998-2007) of the USA-Toronto Region, and Secretary General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (1991-1997).

3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genevieve>. The Institute named after the saint was the Daughters of Saint Geneviève, founded at Paris in 1636 by Francesca de Blosset, with the object of nursing the sick and teaching young girls. A somewhat similar Institute, popularly known as the Miramiones, had been founded ... in 1611 by Marie Bonneau de Rubella Beauharnais de Miramion. These two Institutes were united in 1665, and the associates were called the Canonesses of Saint Geneviève ... Suppressed during the French Revolution, the Institute was revived in 1806 by Jeanne-Claude Jacoulet under the name of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07407c.htm>. Sisters of the Holy Family, formerly known as Daughters of the Holy Family, and later as Miramiones. In 1636 Françoise de Blosset (d. 1642), a zealous collaborator of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded in Paris a religious community known as Daughters of Saint Genevieve ... Mme de Miramion (b. 1629; d. 1696) ... in 1661, gathered about her a number of young women to lead a community life, under the patronage of the Holy Family, their aims coinciding almost exactly with those of the Daughters of Saint Genevieve. In 1665 a union of the two congregations was effected ... Mme de Miramion was elected superior. In time, several other communities also requested and obtained union with the Daughters of the Holy Family, known after Mme de Miramion's death as Miramiones.

4. Cf. Meditation #174.2: "... he engaged six other people with whom he associated" and "Such was the practice of Saint Bruno and his associates...." *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, reprinted 2007), page 324.

5. Cf. John Baptist de La Salle, *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, reprinted 2007), page 91. Part Two, "Decorum in Common Activities and in Ordinary Situations," Chapter 5, "Amusements," Article 3, "Gaming." This edition translates the word "*associé*" as "partner" (in a team of two persons).

6. Cf. John Baptist de La Salle, *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 140: "... the number of

your elect will be increased, as well as the number of those associated with them in glory.” Part 3, “Instructions and Prayers for Confession and Communion,” “Prayers after Confession,” “Act of rejoicing with the angels and saints because we have recovered the grace of God.”

7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude\\_Favre\\_de\\_Vaugelas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Favre_de_Vaugelas). Claude Favre de Vaugelas (6 January 1585–26 February 1650) was a Savoyard grammarian and man of letters. Although a lifelong courtier, Claude Favre was widely known by the name of one of the landed estates he owned as seigneur of Vaugelas and baron of Peroges. His thorough knowledge of the French language and the correctness of his speech won him a place among the original members of the *Académie française* in 1634.

8. Société de Bretagne.

9. The Latin word is *simul*.

10. *Un college* in France was a secondary school.

11. Cf. Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Book Three, Chapter XII (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000), page 657, *emphasis added*.

12. Cf. “Memorandum on the Habit,” point one, in *Rule and Foundational Documents* by John Baptist de La Salle (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 181: “Whether it is appropriate to change or to keep the habit that the Brothers of the Community of the Christian Schools are currently wearing. What this Community is and who compose it.”