



LETTER TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

March 2020

The General Superior

DRINKING FROM THE SOURCE

Dear Lay Mennaisians, Dear Brothers,

The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians (**1 Cor 12: 1-13**), defines charisma as a free gift of the Holy Spirit for the construction of the body of Christ. In fact, our Founders received a special spiritual gift in order to participate in the building of the Church. *"Everything has to be rebuilt and I want to be part of it,"* said Jean-Marie de la Mennais. For him, this re-creation comes above all through education because *"everything comes from education, the man with his virtues and his vices, the family with his character and his habits, the society with his beliefs and manners"*¹.

Each charism offers a specific style which expresses the specific sensitivity of those to whom this gift is entrusted by the Lord for the service of his Church. In other words, it is a concrete response from the Founders to their spiritual experience and their understanding of the needs of their environment. Style therefore constitutes the real source of belonging to which all members of the Mennaisian Family must drink if they want to be fruitful.

1- Welcoming the Mennaisian style

The style bequeathed by our Founders includes:

- a **spiritual sensitivity**, this ability to let oneself be touched by the weaknesses of others, which helps both to perceive the needs, the poverty and the weaknesses of children and young people and to discover global and integral educational responses. Such sensitivity demands that we know how to read reality as a call from God. Thus, the children and young people without a shepherd of Saint-Brieuc were for Jean-Marie de la Mennais the



invitation of the Lord to found the Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction. Armed with this founding experience, we consider the fragility and poverty of children and young people, the Church and society as places where God still signals to us today and gives us an appointment.

- a **call to go to the borders**, and to use an expression dear to Pope Francis, to **the peripheries**. In fact, it is about going where others do not go, without fear of difficulties, with the conviction that God helps those who seek to work for his glory. We were founded for the Breton countryside, the peripheries then. How can we, today, Lay people and Brothers together, respond to new borders or peripheries? How can we get closer to our brothers and sisters who are victims of human trafficking? How can we be present to street children and young people who ask us for bread? How do we take care



of creation so that we leave the younger generations with a healthier planet? It is this same call that our last General Chapter calls us when he asks us to be *"Brothers of the young and the poor, Brothers of creation"*².

- an **alternative character**. In his time, Jean-Marie de la Mennais had proposed something else: schools which instruct, educate and evangelize in a single act. Today, how can we help each other, Lay and Brothers, to be this presence which humanizes, trains and evangelizes following the example of our Founders?

¹ Jean-Marie de la Mennais, « *De l'éducation religieuse* », 1833.

² General Chapter 2018, n° 13b.



LETTER TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

▪ an **openness to the initiatives of others**. Jean-Marie de la Mennais welcomed the collaboration proposal from Gabriel Deshayes, who had already started a work similar to Auray. Does not our celebration of the jubilee magnify our God who often fertilizes our responses through other people? What types of initiatives should we promote together so that the Mennaisian style inherited from our Founders and enriched by our predecessors continues to bear much fruit?

2- Knowing how to transmit the beauty of the Mennaisian colour

To achieve this, Lay people and Brothers, following the example of the Founders, are invited to promote some key values by word, but above all by their testimony of life:

▪ the **compassion** which allows us to take care of the most fragile and to find global and creative responses to the fragility of children and young people who knock on our doors. It is the best methodology for healing and healing. *"A school is a hospital; all young people are more or less infirm ... Be merciful to them as God is to you"*³.

▪ the **preferential option** for the poorest. Jean-Marie never stopped reminding his Brothers of this reality: *"Even if we had lost our lawsuit, we would not have sent the poor away: they are sacred to us"*⁴. But the reality of the poor must be understood and it is plural. The young person in school failure misses the good of success and enhancement. The child whose parents are divorced also experiences a form of poverty. The young man who has never heard of Jesus Christ lacks the richness of the Gospel.

▪ the **integral education** which is clearly defined by Jean-Marie de la Mennais: *"When we say education, we mean that we are far from the thought of those who believe they have done everything for the child, when they have it initiated into calculation, the arts, languages, natural sciences and when they gave*



*him the means to satisfy the needs of the body, as if it were enough to enlighten the mind, to provide for the physical needs of man, and that one should not train one's heart in habits of virtue and teach him where he comes from, where he must tend and how he can get there"*⁵. If our presence with children and young people were only concerned with education, it could train heartless adults. If it were limited to satisfying the needs of the body, from our apostolate would emerge fundamentally selfish and capricious women and men. Only a presence which humanizes, trains and evangelizes helps to train men and women able to speak simultaneously and harmoniously the language of the spirit which gives breath and vision to life, the language of the heart which offers humanity and flavour and the language of the hands which provides motivation and appreciation.

▪ the **ability to walk together**. In a world marked by individualism, self-sufficiency and identity withdrawal, the Mennaisian Family has this magnificent heritage to transmit. The ability to walk together helps open your heart and hands to learn from others' experiences and from your own mistakes. Everyone learns to count on the other to move forward, grow and build together. On this path, we need this insightful wisdom which will help us to live according to the logic of brotherhood and which is clearly defined by an African proverb: *"If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk with others"*.

To live more and more *"in Mennaisian Family mode"*, as the last General Chapter asked us, is to learn together to welcome the style proper to our charism so that we can in turn transmit the beauty that emanates from it.

May this time of Lent help the whole Mennaisian Family, like the Samaritan (Jn 4: 1-42), to go and drink from the Spring in order to recover the original freshness of our charism. While asking the Lord to give you the living water, I renew my cordial and fraternal proximity to you.

Brother Hervé Zamor, sg.

³ Au Frère Henri-Marie, le 2 novembre 1851.

⁴ Lettre au Frère Lucien, le 15 mai 1849.

⁵ Jean-Marie de la Mennais, De l'éducation religieuse, 1833.