



LETTER TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

Dear Lay Mennaisians, Dear Brothers,

Developing a culture of fraternity

"In order to be a sign of the Kingdom", the 2018 General Chapter called us "to develop a culture of fraternity in our educational centres and other mission locations" (GC 2018, no. 1). Looking at what is happening in our world today (war, globalisation of indifference and individualism, abuse of power, trivialisation of violence) and listening to Pope Francis who indicates synodality as "the path that God expects of the Church of the third millennium" (17 October 2015), developing a culture of fraternity seems to be a real emergency. Are we ready to respond to it with audacity and creativity?

Indeed, the term "fraternity", (in French: fraternité), carries with it a whole series of values that could help the Mennaisian Family to promote this culture of living together as brothers and sisters.

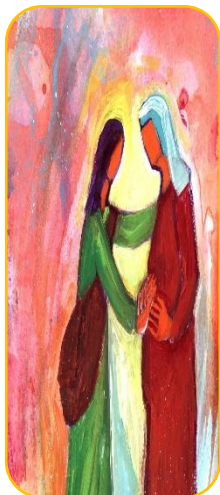
Faith: To trust someone is to have confidence in him. This is the basis of all fraternal relationships. On the other hand, it is mistrust, denounced by Pope Francis in his Encyclical on fraternity and social friendship (FT¹, no. 26), that leads someone to withdraw into himself and to build walls and barriers around him. In order to foster trust, the seed of every culture of fraternity, Jean-Marie de la Mennais encourages mutual knowledge, that patient taming which allows one to go to the other without fear, "and even with a kind of joy" which reassures, values and soothes (CG² III, 486). Thus, when I get to know better my neighbour in the neighbourhood or flat, my pupils, my brother, the migrant in search of a country, I contribute to making my surroundings more fraternal.

Respect: In his encyclical letter "Fratelli Tutti", Pope Francis makes the sad observation that respect for others has been shattered (FT, no. 42). He reminds us that this value must be transmitted from the earliest age (FT, no. 114). Without it, the future of society is compromised (FT, no. 207). What does our founder propose to do to educate in the respect that promotes fraternity? As he did for Brother Lucien Deniaud in his letter of 5 February 1835, he repeats to us today that gentleness is the best way to educate children and young people well, otherwise their character "will sour" if they are punished too severely or if they are the object of sharp reproaches. So, when I try to be gentle with those close to me, I am doing my bit to build a more respectful and fraternal world.

Attention: St. Thomas Aquinas defines the experience of love as a movement that leads to the concentration of attention on the other "by identifying him with oneself" and that leads to seeking his good freely (FT, no. 93). It helps to find words that comfort, strengthen, console, stimulate and accompany (FT, no. 223). For Jean-Marie de la Mennais, this benevolent attention is achieved through permanent presence. Thus, the Brothers were invited to be always present to the children and young people in their care (Rule of 1876, no. 44), to make themselves loved and not feared (Letter to Brother Liguori-Marie, 8 December 1845). Thus, when I practice this benevolent attention which freely seeks the good of the other, I promote a culture of fraternity in my environment of life or mission.

Testimony: Pope Francis presents Francis of Assisi as a witness to universal brotherhood. Indeed, he recounts an episode in the life of this saint with a "boundless heart, capable of overcoming distances linked to origin, nationality, colour or religion" (FT, no. 3). Through his visit to Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Egypt, he wanted to open up to all people. What a beautiful parable in the act of fraternity! For our Founder, the most effective teaching is testimony (S I, 47). Credibility allows an education in fraternity by osmosis, by attraction, by admiration and by contagion. Thus, when I train myself to be credible in my relationships with others and to open my arms to all, I build a more fraternal world around me.

Expectation: In the encyclical "Fratelli Tutti", expectation or hope is described as that daring which broadens the horizon and makes life more beautiful and more fraternal (FT, no. 55). In this perspective, the brother is never "locked into what he may have said or done but is considered according to the promise he carries within himself" (FT, no. 228) of the seeds of a living together that is ever more in keeping with his vocation to fraternity. When all seems lost, when failure looms on the horizon and misunderstandings and



¹ FT: Fratelli Tutti, Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship.

² Jean-Marie de la Mennais, CG : Correspondance Générale (*General Correspondence*), S : Sermons.



disappointments multiply, Jean-Marie de la Mennais exhorts us to hope, which helps us to walk at the pace of God who never despairs of anyone (CG III, 312). For him, hope is the lamp that illuminates the promise of growth that is hidden in each brother or sister. Thus, when I apply myself to giving the other a second chance, I am doing my part to bring about a culture of fraternity in my environment of life or mission.

Rendezvous: In order to move forward together on the path of fraternity, Pope Francis advocates the culture of encounter, that capacity of establishing meaningful rendezvous, which is above all that style of life where no one is useless and where one can always learn something from the other (FT, no. 215). Such openness makes it possible to build bridges and develop bonds of communion (FT, no. 216). This is the best pedagogy for educating people to dialogue and to the good fight of the encounter (FT, no. 217). In order to promote this culture of encounter, Jean-Marie invites us to develop "*a truly Catholic heart*". This enables us to see those with whom we work as "*brothers*" and not "*competitors*" (S II, 645). Thus, when I strive to be open to others, I make my living environment more fraternal.

No to indifference: In his encyclical "*Fratelli Tutti*", Pope Francis repeatedly denounces the "*convenient, cold and globalised indifference*" that reigns in our world (FT, no. 30). In the manner of Cain, it leads one to question the vocation of being the guardian of the other (FT, no. 57) and to continue on one's way without concern for the wounded brother at the side of the road (Lk 10, 29-37). To cure ourselves of this, Jean-Marie de la Mennais proposes the remedy of compassion, which encourages us to reach out to those who need our help. Indeed, it was when he saw idle children running around the streets of Saint Briec that he felt pity for them and decided to found our Congregation (S II, 538). Thus, when I allow myself to be touched by the sufferings of others and come to their aid, I work to develop a culture of fraternity in my environment.

Inclusion: The inclusive attitude to which we are called is that of the merciful Father who makes his sun rise on the good and the bad (FT, no. 60), who kills the fatted calf for the prodigal son and who opens his arms to welcome the firstborn (FT, no. 77). No one is excluded from the goodness and generosity of the Father. In order to educate ourselves to this inclusive fraternity, Jean-Marie de la Mennais invites us to take care of all those for whom we are responsible. It is this pedagogy that he reminds Brother Adolphe in his letter of 22 December 1821 - we are in the very early days of the Congregation! - when he says: "*We are not only sent for the virtuous and easily led children, but even more for those who need correction... The poorest and most unfortunate must have our preference*". So, when I open my arms to welcome all the people who cross my path, I am making my contribution to a more inclusive and fraternal society.

Temporality: Developing a culture of fraternity requires a lasting commitment. Time implies patience. It is this virtue that has enabled so many generous people to weave solid and stable bonds of fraternity (FT, no. 198). Like a house that is built stone by stone, it helps to create this magnificent space where everyone finds their place (FT, no. 190). For Jean-Marie de la Mennais, it is delicacy that best expresses our patience with others. In so doing, it teaches us to avoid "crushing an already bruised reed", "putting out the wick that is still smoking" and "doing the least pain to those who do us the most harm". Thus, when I practice leaving time for others to grow at their own pace, I contribute to a life that is more fraternal.

Empathy: This is a love that is compassionate and dignified (FT, no. 62). It is this central motivation that made the Good Samaritan the neighbour without borders (FT, no. 80). And this is what Jean-Marie de la Mennais wants to inculcate in us when he exhorts the Brothers: "*At the sight of this multitude of children who call us to their aid, no human interest will hold us back; we will rush to them, we will take them in our arms, and we will say to them: ... come to us, stay with us; we will be the guardian angels of your innocence*" (S II, 538). Thus, when I respond to those who ask for my help, I am making my contribution to the construction of a more universal brotherhood.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to live as brothers and sisters and to support each other so that together we may walk the path of trust, respect, care, witness, hope, encounter, compassion, inclusion, patience and empathy. In this way, we will be artisans of fraternity in our different living environments.

God alone in time! God alone in eternity!

Br Hervé Zamor, s.g.