

Hope through education for fraternity

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Résumé

Dans cet article, l'auteur explore la fraternité comme un horizon et une « vocation » : un don reçu et l'appel à en vivre.

Partant du constat que la fraternité suppose consentement et apprentissage, l'auteur en montre l'ambivalence : promesse de réconfort mais aussi source de tensions ou de rivalités.

Tant dans notre histoire que dans les récits bibliques - de Caïn et Abel à Joseph et ses frères- la fraternité se révèle comme toujours dissymétrique : il y a des frères aînés et des frères cadets, dévoilant Il n'y a pas qu'une seule manière d'être frère.

Au final, Jésus, le « vrai frère », la révèle comme inconditionnelle, orientée vers le service et le salut de tous.

L'école catholique est ainsi appelée à être le lieu de construction d'une fraternité en actes, non seulement entre jeunes, mais aussi entre jeunes et adultes.

L'article propose ainsi des pistes à la fois modestes concrètes, invitant à une conversion du regard, à la valorisation des talents de chacun, et à l'expérience du partage. Éduquer à la fraternité devient alors un acte d'espérance : il est possible de vivre en frères.

Resumen

En este artículo, el autor explora la fraternidad como un horizonte y una «vocación»: un don recibido y la llamada a vivirlo.

Partiendo de la constatación de que la fraternidad supone consentimiento y aprendizaje, el autor muestra su ambivalencia: promesa de consuelo, pero también fuente de tensiones o rivalidades.

Tanto en nuestra historia como en los relatos bíblicos —desde Caín y Abel hasta José y sus hermanos— la fraternidad se revela siempre asimétrica: hay hermanos mayores y hermanos menores, lo que pone de manifiesto que no hay una única forma de ser hermano.

Al final, Jesús, el «verdadero hermano», la revela como incondicional, orientada al servicio y la salvación de todos.

La escuela católica está llamada a ser el lugar donde se construya una fraternidad en los hechos, no solo entre los jóvenes, sino también entre los jóvenes y los adultos.

El artículo propone así pistas modestas y concretas, que invitan a una conversión de la mirada, a la valorización de los talentos de cada uno y a la experiencia del compartir. Educar en la fraternidad se convierte entonces en un acto de esperanza: es posible vivir como hermanos.

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Abstract*Hope through education for fraternity*

In this contribution, the author explores fraternity as a horizon and a 'vocation': a gift received and a call to live by it. Starting from the observation that fraternity presupposes consent and learning, the author shows its ambivalence: a promise of comfort but also a source of tension or rivalry.

Both in our history and in biblical stories – from Cain and Abel to Joseph and his brothers – brotherhood always proves to be asymmetrical: there are older brothers and younger brothers, revealing that there is no single way to be a brother. Ultimately, Jesus, the 'true brother,' reveals it as unconditional, oriented toward service and the salvation of all.

Catholic schools are thus called upon to be places where fraternity is built through action, not only among young people, but also between young people and adults. The article offers modest but concrete suggestions, inviting readers to change their perspective, to value each person's talents, and to experience sharing. Educating for fraternity then becomes an act of hope: it is possible to live as brothers and sisters.

Introduction

*Spes non confundit*². "*Hope does not disappoint*". Hope does not disappoint", recalls the indicative bull³ of the Jubilee 2025.

Could the same be said of fraternity? Not quite so simple. Fraternity is not a virtue but a state of affairs - we have brothers and sisters not only in blood but also in humanity - which must be followed by action. When this is not the case, it is the absence of fraternity that disappoints. Fraternal" behaviour, when it really is fraternal, never disappoints.

It is not enough to "be" a brother. You have to agree to live fraternally. Following in the footsteps of Pindar, St Augustine, Nietzsche and so many others, we can eminently say of this fraternity: "*become what you are, when you have learned it*".

Discovering that we are brothers and sisters, accepting this, and learning to live as such, is essential if fraternity is to produce the fruit we expect it to. Believing that it is possible to educate for fraternity and working towards it is an act of hope that does not disappoint.

Because fraternity is at the heart of the Gospel: "you have only one father and you are all brothers⁴", education in fraternity is an indispensable component of the educational community's efforts to create the "evangelical climate of freedom and charity" that *Gravissimum Educationis*⁵ speaks of in relation to Catholic schools.

² Rm 5, 5.

³ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html

⁴ Mt 23, 8-10

⁵ Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education "Gravissimum educationis", 1965, § 8.

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_fr.html

In so doing, Catholic schools can also become more and more "what they are", for the benefit of society as a whole. It thus contributes to giving a concrete meaning to fraternity in a world increasingly marked by individualism and every man for himself.

This is the meaning of the following statement, formulated some years ago but never published, and revisited for the occasion. It argues for the development of a genuine education in fraternity in Catholic schools, and suggests a few ways forward.

"You are not alone", or the ambivalence of fraternity

We are not alone. This simple statement, which is self-evident, in itself conveys the ambiguity - or at least the ambivalence - of the presence of others at our side.

When a parent says to a frightened child: "*You're not alone*", it means: "*I'm with you, look, we're here, together, don't be afraid*". The other is that reassuring presence that restores confidence. The other is the reason to keep going, to get up, to live.

The very young child knows this well and expresses it perfectly when he is asked what he wants and answers: "*I want Mummy*". With her, he doesn't care where he is or where he's going. The important thing is that she's there and that he's with her.

But this "*you're not alone*" is also a sentence addressed to the person who disturbs us, the one who plays his music too loudly, the one who didn't leave anything in the fridge that he hadn't filled, or who improperly invades the common space, be it that of the family, the class, the train or the bus. "*Hell is other people*" wrote Sartre. From this point of view, it is always a 'me' who speaks, without ever bothering to know whether this 'me' is not, moreover, the hell of someone else.

The issue before us - fraternity - lies at the heart of this ambiguity. Whether or not it's a blood relationship, it's good to be (or to feel) someone's brother or sister. And at the same time, it's expensive, it's difficult, it can't be taken for granted. *There's the person I absolutely don't want, or whose brother I absolutely no longer want to be.*

To claim to live with others according to a "horizon of fraternity" would be illusory if we forgot to take this *ambivalence* into account. We would be risking a pious hope, a tisane of good feelings that would ultimately be quite insipid and unproductive. Because once the call for "fraternity" has passed, the other person is bound to come back and bother us. Disturb me.

In short, nothing is more difficult than building fraternity, and at the same time, nothing is more vital. That's why - as Brother André-Pierre Gauthier says at⁶ - we must avoid turning it into a banality, a generic term, a vague indefinite "value", or proclaiming in haste: "*We're all brothers, that's great!*"

Fraternity is certainly a fact, but a fact that cannot remain just a fact and nothing more, a fact that is not followed by action. It must become a choice, or more precisely, a response, and discover itself as a vocation, a challenge to decentre oneself in order to receive others, and in so doing, to receive others.

The response to the fraternal vocation is the exercise of a permanent *hospitality* to be extended to one another, but not in just any way: in the recognition of a resemblance and a difference. For at the heart of the question of fraternity lies that of otherness. So let's be wary of a "*all brothers*" that would mean "*all identical*", in short, of a fraternity that unfolds only in a form of smooth, univocal horizontality based on a "commonality" that we need only "posit", without bothering to formulate it. Yes, there is a commonality, and this commonality is essential. But it can only really operate in the mode of appropriation. For the purpose of the common is not to absorb differences, but to give them meaning.

An asymmetrical and differentiated fraternity

As I hope to show in what follows, it is because it is *asymmetrical* and *differentiated* that fraternity is fruitful. There are younger brothers and older brothers, stronger brothers and weaker brothers. There is no single fraternal attitude, but *several*, which cannot be confused either with friendship, which is selective, or even with solidarity.

I will proceed in three stages. First of all, I'll take a brief diversion into the existential experience of siblings, which is rich in lessons, as a "matrix" of fraternity, even if, in many respects, it needs to be transcended.

We will then explore some aspects of the multi-dimensionality of the experiences of brotherhood in the Bible, without claiming to see everything, but by targeting some characteristic figures, and by noting some points of attention concerning the "brotherly" posture of Christ himself.

Finally, it will be time to draw out some consequences or educational avenues, based on the two previous approaches.

⁶ Fr. André-Pierre Gauthier, "A l'école de la fraternité", Cerf, Paris, 2015.

1 The experience of fraternity

"From the very beginning, the life we receive is a life given to share with others, whose presence is imposed on us".

This sentence is taken from an article by Fr Rémi de Maindreville, published in 2013⁷. For him, this experience of siblings shapes us in the sense that it is our very first inclusion in the human community, which in a way helps to shape our relationship with others, more or less consciously. And this is true even if we have the experience of being an only child. In a "hollow" way, and in the mode of absence, it will be a case of looking for substitute "brothers" or "sisters".

This very first entry into social life assigns us to a place that we have not chosen, and that we have as much to make our own as to tame. And whatever that may be, it's not easy. The older brother or sister, the one who is told he or she is "the big one" when a new baby arrives, may experience this position as a privilege, but sometimes also as an injustice: *"be nice to your brother, you know, he's little... you can lend him your toy"*.

Maindreville speaks of a "test" of fraternity. This is also true for the youngest child, who is always one or more steps behind the others, and who will only be able to do what his sister or "brother" does "when he's that age", but for the moment is too young. The same could be said of those in-between places in large families, where it can be very difficult to situate oneself as second, third or fourth, caught in a sort of pincer movement between "too old to do this" and "too young to do that", and where one can experience the tension of sharing neither the privileges of the eldest nor those of the youngest.

Except perhaps in the case of twins (and even then, we'd have to check), blood ties impose brothers and sisters on us, and in a way a 'rank' within the sibling group.

In a way, this is a paradoxical reality, that of sibling dysmetria. Why paradoxical? Because each of the children has an identical relationship with their parents. They are brothers and sisters because they share the same filial bond. None is "more" a son or daughter than the others. And yet, none is in exactly the same place as the others. Brotherhood allows us to experience the "sameness" of origin, and at the same time the otherness: *"I am not him, I am not her, I am not like him or like her"*.

⁷ "De la fratrie à la fraternité", Rémi de Maindreville, sj, Revue Christus no. 240, October 2013, p. 392-399.

Maindreville also notes another form of ambivalence, in the alternation of affectionate feelings and violent rivalry, which sometimes coexist and overlap: I hate the person I think I love because he or she doesn't turn to me. This 'test' of brotherhood is one of learning and integration (which may remain incomplete) of this tension between love and hate, between attraction and rejection. *"This brother who took my place on Mum's lap - with her complicity! Or not spontaneously. Or not always. But he's also cute, and I like it when he smiles at me, when I play with him and make him laugh, when we have a good time..."*.

So we are all more or less marked by this type of relationship or experience. And this cannot fail to have some repercussions, for better or for worse, on our way of envisaging a wider fraternity outside the bonds of blood, and that perhaps these - however inescapable they may be - will have to be overcome.

In a sense, Jesus said something very similar when he announced *"Who are my mother and my brothers? They are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice"*⁸. If the brotherhood is a fact, this fact must be followed by action, or the brotherhood will fail. And for the fact to be followed up, the dissymmetry of rank juxtaposed with equality of bond, and the ambivalences of love/hate must be taken into account.

2 Brotherhood as vocation, apprenticeship and conversion in the book of Genesis

Moreover, the Bible does not ignore this difficulty, since the first "fraternal" story it tells us is the story of a fratricide. I'm referring here to the episode of Cain and Abel⁹, even if on closer examination it is not quite the instant zero of brotherhood.

2.1 There are several forms of otherness in Genesis.

First, the context: we have chapters 1 and 2, which are the creation stories. From chaos, God creates by separating. His creative act brings the world out of indistinctness and indeterminacy, assigning each thing and each being - including human beings - a specific place.

For human beings, this has a singular meaning, which is revealed in v 18: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"*. Man and woman, similar and different, are the only ones for

⁸ Lk 8:21

⁹ Gn 4, 1-18

whom a differentiation in similarity is expressly mentioned: sexual difference. The mission entrusted to them together is that of "mastery" or rather "care"¹⁰ of creation, in the sense of participating in bringing the world and its differences into communion with God. And this "mission" involves their own differences.

Neither man nor woman - taken in isolation - can claim to be the whole of humanity, even if each of them is fully 'human' and the bearer of full human dignity. But what we might call 'total humanity' they can only represent together, and in a non-interchangeable way, that is to say specifically, without this 'specific' - that is to say, the fact of being 'male' or 'female' - being in any way defined or essentialized. This is a crucial point, at a time when some in our society are inclined to confuse 'equality' with 'indifferentiation'.

Whereas in Ch 1 it is God who "says" and "names", in Ch 2 the perspectives are similar but expressed in a different way. It is Adam who "names". To name is to come out of the unspoken. It also means recognising that there is a difference (with the animals) and that there is otherness, or rather that Adam does not find this otherness or this opposite in the animals. Here we find an initial indication of the place given to 'speech' in any construction of relationships.

In the animals he names, Adam will not find any "help that corresponds to him". It was not until this was given to him in a moment that escaped him, by God himself, that he cried out: "*These are the bones of my bones and the flesh of my flesh. A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two of them will become one*"¹¹ ". Here we find communion, which paradoxically requires leaving something behind. Note also that all this is said by God not in the present tense, but in the future, in a vocational sense and from the perspective of the promise. Communion is both what God calls to, and what he alone can give. But if fraternity is a gift from God, this gift remains to be accepted by man.

Most of the time we see Adam and Eve as conjugal figures. Without calling this into question, it is also worth noting that they are also the first "fraternal" figures, in the sense, of course, that they are "brothers and sisters in humanity", and also in the sense that they are in a position before God to recognise him as their common origin, even if the text does not use the term "father" here.

¹⁰ "We are not God. The earth precedes us and was given to us. This is a response to an accusation levelled against Judeo-Christian thought: it has been said that the Genesis account, which invites us to "dominate" the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), would encourage the savage exploitation of nature by presenting an image of human beings as dominators and destroyers. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible, as understood by the Church. While it is true that we Christians have sometimes misinterpreted the Scriptures, today we must forcefully reject the notion that, because we were created in God's image and given the mission to dominate the earth, we have absolute dominion over other creatures. (...)"

Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* on safeguarding the common home, § 67.

¹¹ Gn, 21, 24.

The first chapters of the Book of Genesis therefore present us with several forms of otherness: otherness before God (man is not the source, he is not the origin, he has not given himself what he is) and two forms of human otherness: "sexual" otherness, and "fraternal" otherness, which in a certain sense also concerns sexual otherness.

However, in sexual otherness, we clearly perceive that each person has something that the other does not have, and the vocation to union and communion is more easily perceived than in fraternal otherness, in which we must constantly "decipher" and "reveal" what each person can bring to the other for a greater common work.

We should also note (we'll come back to this later) that Eve and Adam stand before God and each other in perfect "transparency": they are naked, in other words, with no shadows and nothing to hide.

But let us note above all what we have already perceived to some extent, and formulated to some extent: namely, that in this primary and untainted vision of human brotherhood, there is a "consanguinity of destiny": *something to be done together that can only be done together*, already understood in terms of vocation (that is, as we have just seen, in terms of call and promise) which originates in something other than oneself alone (God), and which is also oriented towards something other than oneself (the other).

2.1.1. A shift

It is at this point in the biblical narrative that something is toppled by the irruption of evil and misfortune, achieving all the "transparency" and "evidence" of the existential meaning of otherness.

The story of the Fall is certainly the one that allows us to imagine the "origin of evil", since the preceding stories attest that "evil is not the origin". The serpent will attempt, and in part succeed, in destroying the possibility of communion. But how? By attacking the link, the thing that binds, with a lie. The form of this lie is more pernicious than pure untruth: the "partial truth"¹². The rupture of the bond proceeds in two stages, one of which is the consequence of the other. First the bond with God, then the "fraternal" bond between man and woman (in the story of the Fall, it is not sexual otherness that appears, but the "solidarity" of Adam and Eve that carries them off together in the same act).

These two tenses are "*He lied to you*" with regard to God, and "*It's not me, it's him*" with regard to the other, the latter excuse being the most universal. As Brother André-Pierre

¹² This idea of "partial truth" consists in stating a truncated truth, which then becomes a lie. The serpent distorts the prohibition against eating the fruit of two of the trees in the garden into a prohibition against eating the fruit of any tree in the garden, deliberately reducing the field of possibilities to a single restriction. He obscures the fact that, according to the divine commandment, Adam and Eve can in fact eat the multitude of fruits from all the trees in the garden, with the sole exception of two of them. More broadly, but in the same vein, a 'partial truth' can be a sentence that was actually spoken but taken out of the context that gave it its true meaning. It then becomes a lie by omission.

Gauthier says, this is the work of the "false brother", the one who sows doubt, and doesn't stay until the end once his work is done. As we will see a little later, the work of the fraternity will also always operate on this double link.

2.1.2. *The drama of fratricide*

Next comes the account of the first fratricide in Ch 4:1-18. The reasons for this are obscure, but they seem to involve jealousy, because God accepts Abel's offering, but not Cain's. One has something that the other does not. One has something that the other does not, and the one who does not experiences this as an injustice.

But it seems to me that another aspect of this fratricide is more interesting, and that is another question: that of "election". Cain chooses the wrong culprit because, fundamentally, his brother Abel did absolutely nothing to him. It would be more logical for him to turn his resentment towards the God who has not accepted his offering, or to question himself, as God suggests.

But there is a more radical solution. The question of jealousy is: "What does he have that I don't have? Here, it's no longer "it's not me, it's him!" as with Adam and Eve, but "why is it him and not me!" And Cain's response consists of suppressing the problem rather than reflecting on the real question, which was nonetheless crucial: why did God choose to accept Abel's sacrifice alone? It is this "*preference*" or "choice" that the Bible most often calls "*election*". For yes, there is indeed unequal treatment between Abel and Cain. And yes, one has something that the other does not.

The tragedy, beyond the death of the brother - which is already doubly a tragedy in that it destroys a bond (am I my brother's keeper?) and kills a fellow human being - *is that the meaning of the election will not be known*. For this, something simple and essential would have been needed, but jealousy (sin) prevented it: *the true word between one and the other*. Something had to be named to get out of the chaos called "doubt". Cain could have spoken to his brother.

Not only would it have been an alternative to his death, but it might have shed light on the meaning of God's *actual preference* for Abel, and who knows, it might have made us aware of what Cain had that Abel might not have had.

The first two brothers in the story are not on an equal footing, and we'll leave it at that. Their similarity is destroyed by their difference, a difference that makes no sense. And everyone loses out.

But the symbolic place of this first story in the book of Genesis conveys something essential and positive: in human history, brotherhood is a horizon, not a given. It will have to be built, lived out, patiently and over time, through trial and error, with advances and setbacks, until it finally delivers its ultimate meaning.

Of course, Cain will be "marked" forever by this fratricide. But he will have a progeny that the rest of the text likes to detail. He himself will have sons who will have the opportunity to behave like brothers. So the good news is that brotherhood is still possible.

2.2. Learning about brotherhood: from the particular to the universal.

The continuation of the biblical accounts in Genesis is interesting from the point of view of election, because it is repeated over and over again. It is Noah and no one else who will be chosen at the time of the flood. It is Abraham who will be called and no one else to be the "father of a multitude". We could discover in these stories a diversity of more or less fruitful fraternal postures, often conflicting, but sometimes also supportive: Isaac and Ishmael, Esau and Jacob, etc. I don't have time to go into the details of these stories here, but we could look at them in the light of what we described earlier: *the link to a common origin, the discovery of what we can share or what we prefer to take from each other, the distance that must sometimes be established so that each can be himself, but also the closeness that is sometimes established, or that continues to make sense despite the distance.*

Jacob - whom God calls "Israel"¹³, a new name which also signifies this election or "preference" - will have twelve sons¹⁴, who will be the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. It is a "family", an entire people who will be "chosen" - as they were already in the promise to Abraham - and who will have to undergo the always difficult but never impossible experience of the brotherhood of blood ties.

One long story will be particularly illuminating in resolving this difficulty linked to election, inequality and preference. It is the story of Joseph, the penultimate son of Jacob-Israel¹⁵, which occupies the whole of the last 13 chapters of the book of Genesis.

2.2.1. *The figure of Joseph, or the transition from privilege to responsibility*

Joseph was Jacob's favourite son. He was a "darling". A real darling, the kind who irritates people to no end. But there is an explanation for this preference. Joseph is the son Jacob obtained very late, with Rachel, his first love. Jacob had been cheated by his uncle Laban, who had forced him to marry his daughter Leah, even though he had worked for him for seven years precisely in order to marry Rachel. He had to wait seven more years before he could finally do so. And while Leah and her maidservant bore him children, Rachel was sterile. She also got her maid involved, before finally obtaining the miraculous birth of Joseph herself.

¹³ Gen 35:49.

¹⁴ Gen 37:23.

¹⁵ Gen 29 ; Gen 37 to 50

Joseph had therefore been awaited for a long time; he was cherished and given the most beautiful clothes.

Not only is he clearly favoured, even though his brothers lack nothing, but God has given him the gift of vision and interpretation of dreams, which leads Joseph to tell his brothers dreams in which he sees them bending over backwards for him, accentuating their jealousy even further.

But Joseph's story is really one of unveiling several facets of the brotherly vocation. Joseph himself, the "chosen one", would discover the true meaning of his election through a symbolic death and resurrection. It was not his own good, and it did not make him superior to his brothers, as he believed. Joseph had to die to this misinterpretation of the gift he had received, and discover the final meaning of his visions.

Through him, God planned to offer salvation to all his brothers and sisters. Election does not mean injustice, but collaboration in God's plan in the sense of a call to share. What seemed to be a personal privilege was in fact destined for everyone.

Three of Joseph's brothers unwittingly contributed to this unveiling. The first was Reuben, the eldest, who convinced the others to commute Joseph's "death sentence" to a more lenient one that left him alive. No doubt there was little more he could do. So he did what he could. There is pragmatism in brotherhood too. For all that, His choice, however imperfect, benefited everyone, because if Joseph had been killed, his brothers would have had no ally in Egypt at the time of the famine.

The second was Benjamin, who was too young to have been associated with his brothers' crime, and who prevented Joseph from lumping all his brothers together. The third is Judah, who, along with Reuben, took up the cause of Benjamin when he had not done so in his time, for Joseph.

When he was finally reunited with his brothers because of the famine that drove them to Egypt, Joseph addressed them as follows: "*Do not be troubled that you have sold me, for it was to keep you alive that God sent me here to meet you*¹⁶". He finally understood the meaning of his election.

Beyond the figure of Joseph, the salvation of all would not have been possible if at least some of them had not behaved like brothers, even in an imperfect way. As we have just seen, it is also the reversal of an injustice, a *felix culpa*.

There is something Christ-like about this story. The real brother, and even the real elder brother, will be Christ. The one through whom salvation will be offered to all.

Before coming to Jesus, it would be useful to look at other brotherhoods or brotherly figures. Let us at least consider that of Miriam, Moses' sister, who is also unable to prevent

¹⁶ Gen 45, 5

her brother from being thrown into the river to escape death, but who remains with him until he is rescued.

2.2.2 Provisional summary

In what we have just seen, we have been able to rediscover the fraternal ambivalence we mentioned earlier. But we also discovered that beyond the rivalries, cowardice and jealousies, the different "fraternal" attitudes show that this is nevertheless always possible, even in an imperfect way, and that this makes a difference.

It's not all black and white. The brothers who want to kill Joseph are also the ones who will have defended their sister Dina, who was raped¹⁷. Disunity can be overcome, even if it comes at a price. Even if it means leaving a position and finding new centres of gravity, starting again from a real situation that is not what you would like, or taking one (or even several) steps towards the other. Reconciliations unravel situations, and avenues for the future appear where there seemed to be no way forward. The choice of building fraternal ties is a horizon that remains open. It presupposes another hermeneutic, or another reading of what I have that others don't, which critical situations often reveal if we pay attention.

It is within a preferred group (siblings or not) that what we might call learning about brotherhood is played out in concrete terms. It is in this particular group that a universal will be played out, which we can never access directly, because I cannot experience universal brotherhood with all people other than in my fraternal relationship with a few.

It is therefore an inescapable step, but one that involves a collective risk, the same risk that each of us runs on an individual level: that of experiencing as a personal privilege the particular gift that I have received for the benefit of all. A family, a group, a nation... needs to build fraternity from its own "common ground". But this may never open up to wider forms of fraternity, and may remain within the confines of the individual.

Following on from the election of Abraham¹⁸, the election of Israel in fact signifies the election of all humanity. Just as Joseph's election *ultimately* meant the election of his entire family. By identifying those who are first and foremost my brothers, I also run the risk of demarcating a border, or even a wall: there are those who are my brothers, and those who

¹⁷ Gen 34, 1-7.

¹⁸ "In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed", Gen 22, 18.

are not. Hence the question from the doctor of the law to Jesus: "*Who is my neighbour?*" which is answered by the *parable of the Good Samaritan*.¹⁹

We can translate this question in another way, and in two ways: personally, "*who is my brother?*" and collectively, "*who are our brothers?*"

Lastly, this vocation, this apprenticeship, always takes the form of conversion.

2.3 Jesus, the true brother.

Jesus is a son of Israel. It is within the chosen people that he will live out his mission. He says that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it²⁰. And this fulfilment has something to do with the healing and restoration of brotherhood.

A healing of this fraternity that can turn into selfishness, and a restoration of a bond between all in a renewed relationship with his Father who is "Our Father" and the Father of all, according to the prayer that he leaves to his disciples.

While the Chosen People, like many societies, lived with watertight "frontiers" between the pure and the impure, between the Jew and the non-Jew, Christ broke down walls: by talking to unattractive people like the Samaritan woman²¹, or the adulterous woman²², by allowing himself to be physically touched by sick people, lepers, haemorrhoids, in defiance of the rules of ritual purity, by calling collaborators of the Roman occupiers like Matthew, dishonest tax collectors like Zacchaeus, to follow him, and by showing himself to be fraternal with them, thus revealing to them that they can contribute something to everyone. "*Nowhere in Israel have I encountered such faith*²³!" he said to a pagan centurion. As for Zacchaeus, he repaid more than his debts.²⁴

In what sense does Jesus show himself to be truly fraternal? Precisely in the sense that he does not make his gift conditional: "*I have come that the sheep may have life and have it to the full*²⁵. "*I have not come for the healthy or the righteous, but for the sick and sinners*²⁶". In

¹⁹ Lk 10, 29-37. It is worth reading Pope Francis' commentary on this in chapter 2, entitled "*A stranger on the road*", of his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* on fraternity and social friendship, published in 2020.

My neighbour is simply someone who needs the hand I can offer. The same applies to my "brother", who is the one who needs a fraternal gesture or behaviour.

²⁰ Mt 5:17.

²¹ Jn 4, 4-39.

²² Jn 8, 3-11.

²³ Lk 7, 1-10.

²⁴ Lk 19, 8.

²⁵ Jn 10, 10.

²⁶ Lk 5, 31, 32.

so doing, he invites us to resist the temptation of the "give and take": *I am your brother if you behave like my brother*, and to dare to enter into unconditional brotherhood: *even if you do not behave like a brother to me, I will not give up behaving like a brother to you*. This is the profound meaning of the commandment to love one's enemies.²⁷

Jesus makes a preferential choice for the little ones and those left behind. Like his Father, he calls people whom no human being would have chosen. Barren women, the elderly, children...

His actions reveal that all of humanity is chosen, and this is particularly evident in his choice of the poor. That the rich and powerful should be favoured is part of the order of the world. But when it comes to choosing those who nobody wants, that's something new. That's universal. There is no universality that only concerns a few!

He has taken the measure of our ambiguity, as in the *parable of the two sons*²⁸. And he also knows how difficult it is for us to get out of ourselves, as in the *parable of the merciless debtor*²⁹: none of our debts to one another stand up to the Gift that God gives to everyone, and to whom he asks us to say "Father". It is also our relationship with God that he not only restores, but brings to fulfilment.

How far does he push brotherhood? As far as it is possible:

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy'.

I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may truly be sons of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you deserve? Do not even tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet only your brothers, what extraordinary thing are you doing? Do not even the pagans do the same? (Mt 5:43-47)

Utopia? No. The episode of the guard whose ear Peter cuts off is an illustration of this.³⁰

This radical choice of fraternity expresses a horizon that seems unattainable, but which is offered: the unconditional love of God, the creative force and source of the communion that is the purpose of fraternity, but also the reason for its possibility.

²⁷ Mt 5, 38-47.

²⁸ Mt 21, 28-31.

²⁹ Mt 18, 23-35.

³⁰ Lk 22, 49, 51.

Jesus does not just give what he would have received in "surplus", but gives his whole person. *Jesus is the true brother because he stays with us to the end, even to the cross and death*, a death to self that opens up a new life for all.

Jesus offers everyone the chance to leave behind their own measure and live by his own. It is no longer a question of loving your neighbour "as yourself", but "*to love as I have loved you*"³¹. In this love, there is all the power of forgiveness and mercy, and of the future they open up. Where, paradoxically, we are content for others with a future that is blocked, as in the parable of the prodigal son, where the brother did not go to look for the one who was lost, and does not rejoice at his return.

Jesus is this "true brother" who comes to look for people, whatever the cost, and wherever they are, in order to rejoice with his Father: "*there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who is converted than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of conversion*"³²

The new bond he establishes between men is mutual service: "*that you also may do as I have done for you*"³³. How better to express this quality of humanity, which gives meaning to the fraternal dysmetria mentioned above, than in the form of "service"?

3 Educational options

It's time to move on to educational approaches. Not as "infallible recipes" - fraternity is always the result of conversion - but as points for attention.

The very **first** is the originality of this fraternal bond as refounded by Christ. Because he became our brother, access to God can be made authentically through the brother, even in ignorance. This is the meaning of the parable of the judgement in Matthew.³⁴

It is a form of transcendence, particularly relevant in our school, which is open to all, and therefore a "sign" of fraternity. "*Anyone who says he loves God whom he cannot see and does not love his brother whom he can see is a liar*"³⁵. Let us not be afraid to cultivate the generosity of young people.

³¹ Jn 15, 9-13.

³² Lk 15, 7.

³³ Jn 13, 13-15.

³⁴ Mt 25, 31-46.

³⁵ 1 Jn 4, 20.

The **second** stems directly from what we have seen of a certain fraternal dysmetria. There is a fraternity to be built between adults and young people, which is of this order. This is the intuition of religious congregations: to be "elder" brothers and sisters for young people, whose vocation is to enable their "younger" brothers and sisters to find and take their place in the world and in society. This means revealing their talents, not extinguishing them, choosing them when no one else would: *"What do you want me to do for you?"*³⁶

In fact, young people are often keen when they too are allowed to be older brothers to the younger ones. As a general rule, let's not be afraid to explore all the "inter" aspects: *interpersonal, intergenerational, intercultural, interreligious, etc.*, not just through words but through joint action, by doing everything we can together while respecting consciences and differences, and giving value to the "common".

Third point: This cannot be done without also going through or questioning the fraternal journey of adults. Here too, not everything is black and white. Here too, a certain pragmatism is called for, that of the small step that leads to another, towards relationships that welcome differences and pool each other's talents to a greater extent.

It involves little things: talking... among my colleagues: *who do I talk to? Who do I never talk to? Who do I feel I have nothing to expect or receive? How do I see my pupils? Am I like an older brother or sister to them?*

Fourth area: words again. Are others confined to what I think of them, their culture and their tastes? *What kind of 'dialogue' between identities, cultures and generations in the school?*

In what way is everyone really called upon to contribute to the common good on the basis of what they are, and not by asking them to leave it aside, or on the basis of what we would like them to be? What postures must we "leave behind", what bad reflexes must we give up in order to live more fraternally? Dialogue of any kind is impossible without listening to each other. So how can we envisage times and places where this can happen?

Fifth point: service and sharing. Not only within the school, but also outside, within the town, with its associations, structures, etc. As a school, what is our "election"? What are the talents of our educational community that could benefit others? What do we have that others don't and that we could realistically share?

³⁶ Mk 10, 51.

Conclusion

"From the outset, the life we receive is a life given in sharing with others, whose presence is imposed on us".

Fraternity consists in consenting to this life given, by learning to receive others, even those we have not chosen.

It also means contributing to this gift of life, by bringing what only we can give to those who live with us.

Fraternity consists in believing that our differences, far from leading us to withdraw, can become an opportunity for enrichment and even salvation for all. What we can do together, despite the difficulties we encounter, far exceeds the sum of what each of us can do on our own.

Fraternity is undoubtedly the path of a lifetime, which begins in the family and continues in many places.

One of these places is the Catholic school. Let's not be afraid to contribute our specific vision of fraternity to the common pot of the public education service by daring to live it ourselves, more and more.

□

The Catholic school's participation in building a more fraternal world, in the very name of its vocation, is not optional. But the task is vast!

Let us not be discouraged by the scale of the task. Here, as so often, Christ goes before us...

JH.

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