

Looking at the Future from a Memory That Challenges

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Introduction

Good morning. It's an honor for me to share with you some ideas on Lasallian research. I will try, despite the limitations of my English, to develop a perspective that traces its roots in the past and projects itself towards the future. It is a future where Lasallians are walking together and by association in educational service that increasingly poses more and more challenges.

A Challenging Memory

I would like to start by affirming that we Lasallians are inheritors of a challenging memory. This is what Br. Miguel Campos reminded us in his presentation during the first International Assembly: Association for Lasallian Educational Mission, in 2006.²

Surely John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers of the Christian Schools never imagined that the short steps they took, from commitment to commitment,³ to create the first Christian Schools, would be for us, an ongoing memory of an event that propels us forward together into the future. As Jacques Le Goff points out, memory, or perhaps history that nourishes it as it unfolds, does not seek to recover the past except to serve the present and the future.⁴

I am convinced that a process of reflection within the Lasallian perspective, which involves research, necessarily ends up touching on essential elements which give meaning to what we are presently doing in our daily lives as Lasallians. Hence, it involves our identity, the way in which we live and work together. It must also involve our educational mission.

A Brief Reference to Our Journey

After the death of the Holy Founder in 1719, the Brothers felt the need to retrieve the memory of his journey, shared with the first ones who entered the community; further, they needed to gather all his writings and keep his relics for veneration. For the first time in the Institute, there was a generation of Brothers who had not personally known De La Salle.⁵

This was the framework of the first biographies – Bernard, Maillefer and Blain – in the first half of the eighteenth century. Of the three, the third one, that of Blain, was chosen as the official biography. Its hagiographic character, however, did not help the Brothers get in touch with the person and the context of De La Salle. Instead, they got in touch with what they wanted to say about him in a climate of theological conflict within the French Church of that period.

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In the second half of the eighteenth century, and onward to the French Revolution, the Brothers maintained the desire to remain faithful to their origins, until they eventually took the initiative in continuing their works [on pedagogy, etc.] Thus, for example, we see the efforts of Br. Agathon, working on *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*,⁶ which follows the outline presented by De La Salle in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*.⁷

After the storm of the French Revolution had passed, the Institute was faced with new circumstances within and outside of France in the nineteenth century. At that time, the Brothers did not creatively read the signs of the times. The Brothers were concerned with remaining faithful to the Founder's tradition rather than responding to the new needs of the time. Thus, problems like the *Latin Question*, which pitted the French Superiors against the Brothers of the USA, could not come to a good conclusion.⁸ There was a lack of an opening for accepting that the world was changing at a rapid pace.

And that is how it works, as the twentieth century tells us – after two Great Wars and the Great Depression, coupled with the collapse of Modern thought and the search for new transcendent horizons – that we are entering into a new stage of global thought. The Brothers, in close touch with our era, experienced what it was like to return to the sources, with a critical eye, to re-encounter the Holy Founder, and to renew our way of being Brothers, through the revision of the *Rule*.

Thus, we arrive at a very important date for Lasallian research – the year 1956, under the baton of Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans and the work of *Lasallian Studies*, which initiated a process of renewal, understanding, and the projection of Lasallian thought into the future.

From 1956 onwards, the *Lasallian Studies* project has grown into a collection of reference works to help us understand our origins. One limitation has been the language of reference: French. This has encouraged the translation of many Lasallian works; and specifically in the United States, this has been led by the Christian Brothers Conference.⁹

Where We Are Right Now

Research Set-up

In the Generalate in Rome today, we have the Lasallian Research and Resources Service. Its goal is to know, and let others know, Lasallian thought, and to develop research processes in a network involving Lasallians all over the world.¹⁰

One of our major concerns is to generate group projects with research teams or potential researchers at Lasallian Universities in all the regions of the Institute. We know that there are Brothers and researchers who wish to construct new perspectives on thought that unites us. We still have a long way to go in generating research projects among Lasallian Universities, projects with a more universal, more international meaning.

We have also continued the process of the formation of Lasallian researchers in the Institute through the SIEL Program (the *International Session of Lasallian Studies*.) At the moment, we

have finished the 2012-2013 course in which 26 Brothers and lay partners participated. We hope to publish their research outputs soon.

Research Agenda

What we need to do now is to clarify the research agenda being set by the center of the Institute for the next period of animation of the Institute (2014-2021). Maybe it is too early to give the final word on this, because we need to wait for the decisions of the forthcoming 45th General Chapter, which will be held in Rome from April to June 2014. Nevertheless, we can already mention some of its general directions:

First, as a result of the *Second International Mission Assembly: One Family, One Mission: Lasallians Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor*, we are invited to re-create our Lasallian pedagogical thought.¹¹ Who we are as educators, what we do, where we are going . . . I invite you to read the latest publication of *Lasallian Studies*, No. 17 of the collection, which deals with an approach to a Lasallian pedagogical model.¹² It is the product of a multidisciplinary study among fourteen Brothers from all the Regions of the Institute.

This Assembly invited us to think of a *Declaration on Lasallian Education in the World Today*. Is it possible to start thinking of Lasallian pedagogical discourse for higher education, which would serve as a reference point for this more general reflection?

Second, this is not work that would remain within the Lasallian community. We are called to offer educational responses to the challenges faced by children, youth, and adults of today, with their problems and limitations. Therefore, from the field of research, we also ask ourselves for our way of understanding the new poverties of the twenty-first century; the emergence of new youth cultures and the impact these can have on carrying out a new evangelization; and the challenges of the dialogue between faith and culture in a world where religious fanaticism is leading to violence and war.

We believe that these issues can help recreate contemporary Lasallian thought for today. Aware of our educational and pedagogical heritage, we need to return to our sources, from where we can consider who we are and what we do. Hence, thirdly, we cannot forget that we have a tradition that has given us a foundation, an epistemological vision, our own perspective that we also need to work on. We are heirs to over three hundred years of collective efforts on educational action and reflection. And that wealth is not insignificant because, as we said at the beginning, there is a memory that is being constructed.

Fourth and last, all these themes have an impact on the way we understand ourselves as educators. It is becoming more of a challenge today for Lasallian educators to recreate our former Lasallian community. Today, we are challenged to create the impact that we have for the dignity of teaching as a vocation. Also, these issues have an impact on our educational projects and the way we live everyday experience in the classroom. The twenty-first century is also asking for a new way of teaching, a new kind of relationship between teacher and student. And we are certain that in the Lasallian heritage, we have many interesting pedagogical insights that can illuminate our current educational reality.

Research Resources

What resources do we have for carrying out Lasallian research? I would like to point out our strengths and limitations in terms of resources for specifically Lasallian research.

We have great wealth in having Lasallian archives throughout the world. In Rome, we have the Institute General Archives with 1250 meters of documentation. We're actually starting the process of digitalization. We already have the right equipment and the website. But we are facing two major challenges: one, ensuring the continuity of the process and the public accessibility of the collections, while it is being built up, and also being able to attend to requests for information; and two, that other Lasallian archives, especially those of Districts all over the world, join and become part of a shared network of information, digitized from the General Archives in Rome.

We also have a specialized Lasallian Library in Rome. We are still in the process of a physical transfer to start cataloging all the books. We are also seeking initial contacts to get ourselves included in more global work projects in a network with Libraries of Italy.

These two realities could perhaps represent certain limitations at this time, but in the medium term, they will be a wealth of resources for Lasallian research.

Fortunately, we already have the *Digital Journal of Lasallian Research*, published semi-annually. We have issues now for three years, totaling six volumes, indexed in several international systems and with a production that opens pathways to more contemporary Lasallian thought. Right up until No. 6, the articles were offered in their entirety in Spanish, English and French. From Volume 7 onwards, only the Abstracts will appear in the three languages.

A resource that we are considering is the publication of e-books with Lasallian themes worked on by multidisciplinary teams of Lasallian Universities worldwide. If we are able to work with Lasallian publishers, we could edit them in Spanish, English, French and Portuguese.

We are thinking of the following topics: memory and Lasallian educational pathways; intercultural and inter-religious dialogue from the Lasallian perspective; teaching in a Lasallian way for the twenty-first century; and ethics in Lasallian education and its impact in the post-school period. With this project, we would like to develop new strategies to raise awareness of our thinking, in an accessible manner, respecting the dynamics of the production of materials of high academic quality.

Challenges for the Future

I think that there are three fundamental challenges at the very base of this discourse.

First, we need to break down barriers. We are a worldwide Institute; internally however, difficulties in communication remain because of the diversity of our languages, our cultures, our views. We need to overcome the difficulties involved in the globalizing of knowledge through Lasallian research capable of energizing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary projects of an academic nature.

Second, we can produce useful Lasallian knowledge. Our pedagogical and charismatic tradition needs to dialogue with current educational realities. Thus, we can envision viable educational projects that can face the problem of educational poverty, with the support of Lasallian communities with a strong identity and the spirit of association.

Third, we will grow if we can interact with the global academic world. In the dynamics of a knowledge society, we need to know, and be known, by those who are near and far from us, and do this in order to enrich our views, to be challenged, to understand the differences and sharpen our critical sense, so that we increasingly demand more of ourselves.

Conclusion

I remember the name of a song composed by a Central American Brother entitled, “A Story to be Told.” I think that it partially summarizes what I have wanted to share with you. It is a journey that we have received from the hands of many Brothers and Lasallians who, from the beginnings of the Institute, have tried to reflect on our being and acting.

Today, as members of the knowledge society, being Lasallians in higher education who belong to an international network, we are invited to join a movement of scientific research with social relevance, with a capacity to respond to the demands of a humanity in search of ways to have justice and peace for all.

John Baptist de La Salle, in the city of Reims, was moved by the situation of the abandoned children of artisans and the poor, who had no access to quality education. Today, as researchers, we can live the same experience: our twenty-first century requires of us, as Lasallians, to let ourselves be challenged by the present, in order to seek answers for the future. I hope that together and by association, we will be a better team and be satisfied with the work accomplished.

Notes

1. Diego Muñoz, FSC, Ph.D., is from Caracas, Venezuela. He did his formation in Lagos de Moreno and in Caracas. He graduated in Education, Biological Science, and has a Master's in Educational Research and a Doctorate in Education. He specialized in political pedagogy. Currently, he is the Coordinator of the Lasallian Research and Resources Service in Rome. His research includes the cultural history of the Institute in the twentieth century, Lasallian Pedagogy and digitalization of the La Salle Museum and Archives in Rome.

2. To see the full text: Miguel Campos, *Fidelity to the Movement of the Spirit: Criteria of Discernment. International Assembly: Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission*, Rome 2006. Official Report.

3. La Salle said in one reflection: “God did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning” (Blain, 2000: 80).

4. Jacques Le Goff, *Histoire et mémoire* (Paris : Gallimard, 1988), 176.

5. For example, in 1725, Brother Timothée “. . . had a new edition printed of the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, and then, between 1726 and 1731, he published St. La Salle’s *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* and his *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* . . . In 1733, there appeared *The Life of Monsieur Jean Baptiste de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* by Canon Blain . . . All these works served to keep alive the memory of the Founder among the Brothers, and to increase their veneration for him” (Bédel, 1998: 14).

6. Br. Agathon Gonlieu, *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*, translated by Gerard Rummery (Washington, DC: Christian Brothers Conference, 2008).

7. John Baptist de La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, translated by William Battersby and edited by Daniel Burke (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993).

8. cf. For details: W. J. Battersby, *The History of the Brothers in the United States, 1900-1925* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s College Press, 1967).

9. You can see the latest Lasallian publications in English at <http://lasallian.info/resources/publications-documents/>.

10. cf. *Circular 456*.

11. “The MEL Secretariat of the Institute will develop an updated declaration of Lasallian Pedagogy from a reality that challenges us, from a tradition that inspires us and in dialogue with contemporary pedagogies, in order to strengthen our identity and respond with creativity to current challenges” (IA-MEL 2013:36).

12. Cf. Pedro Gil and Diego Muñoz, eds., *That Your School Runs Well: Approach to Lasallian Educational Model* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Lasallian Studies*, No. 17, 2013).

Key Reference Material

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