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Lasallian Pedagogy: Who We Are Is What We Teach

John M. Crawford, FSC, Ph.D., *La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA, USA*

When John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers of the Christian Schools embarked upon their ministry to provide a human and Christian education to the young people of France over three centuries ago, they did so without the benefit of empirical studies of pedagogical methodologies or so-called "scientific" elements of effective teaching. Rather, they lived these pedagogical experiences in classrooms, honed them by continual reflection about what worked best, and, over time collaborated to preserve their insights in such valuable tools as *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* and *The Duties of a Christian Before God.* The fundamental insight that De La Salle and his Brothers gleaned from their experiences understood that the person of the teacher was the most important element of pedagogy. Who they were as persons in Christian service to the young people entrusted to them became their principal methodology. Lasallian pedagogy cannot be understood apart from Lasallian charism. Who the first Lasallians were became the embodiment of what they taught. To understand a contemporary Lasallian pedagogy, it is necessary to align the person of the teacher to the task of teaching. A genuine Lasallian educator engages in the educational ministry to the young as a genuine and conscientious attempt to exemplify and embody the charismatic core values of De La Salle and the first Brothers. This commitment to become what we teach remains the key component of Lasallian pedagogy.

Most contemporary understandings of the concept of pedagogy emphasize the performance side of teaching. Pedagogies tell people how to teach. Lasallian pedagogy for a contemporary audience has relatively little to say about required or appropriate techniques that must be employed to be successful in the classroom. Yet, several current pedagogical thinkers do insist that the personal convictions of the teacher represent the most critical ingredients in meaningful education. Thus, this paper will propose to use some of the contemporary insights of such diverse modern theorists and educators as Paulo Freire, Thomas Groome, and Parker Palmer, as well as others, as lenses on Lasallian pedagogy. The purpose of this paper is to examine and identify key components of Lasallian pedagogy in light of the insights of contemporary theorists, in order to inform and encourage others to take up the great and necessary work of Lasallian education in the twenty-first century.

What Is Characteristic of the Lasallian Educator?

What characteristics have and do the Brothers of the Christian Schools bring to their educational ministry and how might those quintessential qualities might be shared by others who would embrace and adapt them to ground their own teaching ministries? Lasallian texts have inspired the spirituality of the Brothers and may be used as foundational principals for the spirituality of teachers who are inclined toward this special charism and inspired by it. While the initial intention and early writings of John Baptist de La Salle were directed to the original Brothers' community, and, as such, were intended for an audience of male teachers only, the critical insights of contemporary philosophers and theologians like Paul Ricouer, David Tracy and Hans-

Georg Gadamer[2] clearly support the conclusion that classical texts contain surpluses of meaning. For Lasallians, the historical documents of John Baptist de La Salle and the early community of Brothers of the Christian Schools represent the equivalent of classical texts. Such texts, which stand the test of time, continue to inspire their readers because they have an enduring truth to tell that their authors' may never have imagined.

As contemporary feminist scholarship informs the reading of texts, it also is important to be aware of the limitations which male-dominated texts have. Although De La Salle's texts were male-directed in their original audience, they have the potential to move beyond that audience because the vocation of the teacher at the heart of De La Salle's writings is one that is readily embraced by many people without reference to only one gender. While the Brothers are male, and the Lasallian texts were initially intended for educators working with male students, these writings contain richness in their meanings that transcend a male-only audience and invite all persons to engage in Lasallian pedagogy.

There are three principal themes to be considered from the Lasallian charism: the spirit of faith, the spirit of zeal, and devotion to the service of the poor through education, which have a universality in them that appeals to many teachers. How might we imagine the next step in the process of extending this Lasallian charism to a wider audience? Just as the spirits of faith and zeal are inseparable and a unified pairing in the mind of John Baptist de La Salle, so, too, are they anchors of elder-sibling service to the young and a communal connection between teachers.

Our Shared Baptismal Reality as Siblings: Scriptural and Lasallian Roots

The Lasallian charism is, first and foremost, a particular way of living the Christian life of service. This becomes the primary element of Lasallian pedagogy, too. Through Baptism, all Christians embrace a universal call to service of their neighbor. In fact, the call may be inherent to humanity, as someone like the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant suggests as his categorical imperative. Long before either Kant or De La Salle, the teachings of Jesus, reflecting his own understanding of his Jewish tradition, expressed clearly that service is both our common call and our common bond. This point is stated most clearly in Matthew's Gospel and is directed from Jesus to his disciples and "the crowds:"

> As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and all of you are brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23: 8 -12)

In context, this passage conveys Jesus' intention that his followers will minister differently than the scribes and Pharisees of his day. While Jesus clearly taught that Pharisaical authority was to be respected and that their decisions mattered, He also counseled against following "their example. For they preach but they do not practice (Matthew 23: 3)." Titles of honor, executive perks, and "golden parachutes" for a wealthy retirement pension are not the stuff of Christian service. Rather, followers of Jesus understand that their effectiveness is measured in attributing

the gift to its Ultimate Source in God and in recognizing our shared sibling-status as the true indicator of our identities. For those called to teach, we are to be brothers and sisters to our younger siblings, if we are to imitate Jesus' praxis.

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools from 2000 - 2014, suggests that the shared sibling relationship between Brother (and, by extension, all those engaged in embracing Lasallian pedagogy) and others is an essential element of the Lasallian mission. He writes:

> I am convinced that as Brothers we can offer to the Church the witness of Christ as brother and the call to continue his mission for building of a world where all can feel that they are brothers and sisters, starting from the spirituality of communion which today we all live out in the Church.[3]

Brother Álvaro further suggests that: "Our vocation advances the egalitarian eschatological state of God's Kingdom, in whose service is the Church and our fraternal life in community makes present."[4] This "egalitarian eschatological state" foreshadows the ideal of God's Kingdom where all are equals before the loving and Divine majesty of God. In essence, this is connected to Lasallian pedagogy, where differences between male or female, teacher or pupil, elder or younger persons, dissolve into a loving community of respected siblings.

This connection was not lost on John Baptist de La Salle and his earliest followers, either. The fledgling group chose as its name "Brothers of the Christian Schools," and their own appellation "Brother" in view of Jesus' injunction. In De La Salle's writings, this text from Matthew's Gospel was used as a basis for a series of end-of-the-year meditations. One particular exercise is prescribed for December 30, under the title: "How we have acted toward our neighbor during this year, and in what we have been lacking." Originally, these meditations served as opportunities for each Brother to examine his conscience about his actions during the previous year and also to invite him to make a fervent resolution to improve his behavior in the year to come. De La Salle writes:

> Perhaps you have not reflected sufficiently during this year on the obligation you have to be completely united with your Brothers. Yet this is one of the principal obligations of your state, because you are all brothers, as Jesus Christ says in the holy Gospel. The first reason why there is sometimes so little union in a community is that some wish to place themselves above others on the basis of some human reasoning. This is why Our Lord says to his apostles that none of them should either call himself or let himself be called teacher, because they had but one teacher, who was Jesus Christ. Our Lord says that the one who believes himself to be the greatest among you, or who really is, must even consider himself and look upon himself as the least of all. Examine whether you have acted this way during the past year toward your Brothers.[5]

De La Salle expands upon this directive by suggesting that its fullest meaning is found in our obligation to "support" one another. Again returning to his preference for Pauline material, De

La Salle refers to the Letter to the Galatians 6:2, and observes that support means to carry the burdens of others. De La Salle insists that this support is constitutional of Christian life:

> Each one has his [sic] burdens, and ordinarily it is not exactly the one who has them who carries them, for he does not feel their weight; it is the others' burdens he has to carry, and so each one must carry willingly and charitably the burdens of the others, if he wishes to keep peace with them . . . Is this how you have acted during this year? Union in a community is a precious gem, which is why Our Lord so often recommended it to his disciples before he died. If we lose this, we lose everything. Preserve it with care, therefore, if you want your community to survive.[6]

De La Salle's writings indicate that the shared "brotherhood" of the members of the group grounds their ministry. Carrying the burdens of others constitutes the obligation to place the needs of others ahead of one's own.

Clearly, this notion resonates with the insights of the twentieth-century French-Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), who observed that each one of us is bound by the compelling need of the Other.[7] In the Lasallian texts, this ministry of service to the Other identifies the quality called "zeal." A zealous teacher undertakes a pedagogy of kenosis, that quality of Jesus noted in the Gospels and in the writing of Saint Paul[8], which consists of an availability and concern for the other entrusted to our care that calls the teacher to a total dedication and self-emptying. Teachers, as more experienced pilgrims along life's paths, act as elder brothers and sisters to their students by carrying their burdens. In relation to one another, sibling-minded teachers extend themselves to their colleagues as mentors, offering sympathetic ears, working as collaborators in ministry, and demonstrating genuine concern for one another. We are called to relieve the weight of worries and problems for one another, especially those of the young people entrusted to our care. In this way, we elder brothers and sisters model for these younger siblings a Christian path for them to take up. The abiding concern for the welfare of the students, even to the point of "ardent zeal" for them, may require teachers to encourage, admonish, correct, supervise and direct them. All of this oversight is done with the selfless outpouring of the teacher's time, intellect, enthusiasm, and life-force. In a sense, engagement for the other may occur at the cost of the teacher's life. This is Lasallian pedagogy.

The Lasallian charism/pedagogy invites teachers to encounter young people as their elder brothers and sisters, lightening their burdens through the sharing of the hopeful message of the Gospel of Jesus, inspiring them to work to make the reality of God's Reign alive in their world, and by sharing practical elements of learning that will inspire them to serve others in their own futures. The purpose of this ministry is not to aggrandize the teacher, but to invite the learners to understand themselves as the next generation of brothers and sisters to those who will follow after them in the cycle of life. Thus, to be brother or sister to the young is to invite them to Christian unity and community. This Lasallian ethos works toward claiming our common inheritance as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Lasallian teachers are not about their own importance in some hierarchically "more significant" place than their students. Rather, Lasallian siblinghood is about assuring that the young will take their places side-by-side with us in our shared human dignity as brothers and sisters in the eyes of our loving God. This echoes the

exhortation of Pope John Paul II, who insisted that the members of the Church today must make a "commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being."[9]

De La Salle recognized the radical nature of brotherhood. In one of the earliest of his texts, the "Memoire" or "Memorandum on the Habit," he identified the meaning of brotherhood quite clearly:

> The Community is commonly called the Community of the Christian Schools and at present rests upon – indeed, is rooted in – Providence alone. Those who live in it follow a Rule and are dependent for everything, having no personal possessions, and treat one another as equals.[10]

The "Memorandum" is generally dated as 1690. At that time, the fledgling Brothers' community's experience was at a low point. De La Salle had suffered a severe illness that nearly cost him his life. His most promising Brother, Henri l'Heureux, had died suddenly and unexpectedly just prior to being ordained. In Paris, the pastor of Saint-Sulpice parish was attempting to wrest control of the community from De La Salle by insisting that the Brothers serving in his parish should adopt clerical garb and serve at the altar in the Church. At that critical moment, John Baptist de La Salle defends the special identity of the Brothers by presenting the "Memoire/Memorandum." De La Salle discerns and articulates that the Brothers are not destined to become a congregation of priests. He identifies the Brothers' lay character as a radical sign of their shared siblinghood for ministry.[11] From this painful time and, more importantly, from De La Salle's careful reflection upon these trying experiences, comes strength. De La Salle, who learned from his own experience of caring for his siblings after the death of their parents, recognized the power of brotherhood/sisterhood as a sign of our common heritage before God.

Serving others as their "elder siblings" becomes one of the most fundamental characteristics of Lasallians. As a follower of Jesus Christ, a Lasallian does not want to be revered as "Teacher" or "Master." Rather, the self-identifying reality for all Lasallians is to be brother or sister to everyone else, most especially to those entrusted to their care in the classroom. The goal of Lasallian education, therefore, is to encourage young people to recognize their goodness before God as fellow siblings of Jesus Christ. This extraordinary human dignity, forged especially in Baptism and in Eucharist, becomes another way of saying that we are all brothers and sisters in God's eyes. Lasallians, who have been encouraged to embody the Spirit of Faith always, attempt to see everything with the eyes of faith, with God in view, and attributing everything to God[12], and believe that our radical equality as God's children is the noblest title to which we humans may lay claim. A zealous attempt to do the best one possibly can for the young becomes an obligation for a Lasallian educator. As brothers and sisters to the young and to one another, we must give particular attention to those who stand in need of the greatest assistance. Thus, the obligation to serve the neediest of our younger brothers and sisters carries significant meaning for Lasallians. If we are to embody the radical equality that we all share before God for others, then we must understand our ministry as one in which our common siblinghood is foundational.

The common siblinghood shared within the Christian context through the sacraments of initiation do pose some challenges to those who engage in Lasallian ministries who are not baptized

Christians. In many parts of the world today, Lasallian schools and colleagues serve non-Christian students effectively, often through the agency of teachers who are non-Christian as well. These people have been moved by the Lasallian charism while maintaining their own non-Christian beliefs. Clearly, this suggests that this ministerial sense of common siblinghood may be further rooted in what may be termed a Natural Law argument. Our shared humanity may naturally call forth from us a mission to service of others in need. This direction is captured in Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* where he observes:

> If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving. Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive, but rather because they are God's handiwork, his [sic] creation. God created that person in his image, and he or she reflects something of God's glory. Every human being is the object of God's infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives.[13]

While it is beyond the purview of this short paper to explore this potential argument further, it may be a fruitful topic to engage others to study it.

Trust and Care: Echoing Lasallian Virtues in Contemporary Education

John Baptist de La Salle understood the ministry of education as a sacred trust to provide care. Obviously, parents entrust teachers with their children so that under their watchful and nurturing care, these young people will blossom toward their fullest potential. Church leaders share in this Gospel-based trust when they allow zealous teachers to care for the young by inviting them to embrace and spread the good news of Jesus Christ from generation to generation. Teachers trust that their colleagues are motivated by genuine concern for others and honor their profession as embodying the very best that faith, knowledge, and tradition can pass along to our younger siblings. Society trusts teachers to function as agents of transmission: permitting the light of culture, tradition, faith, and knowledge to continue shining brightly. Thus, society supports schools as privileged instruments that provide the time and space where the encounter between caring persons continues the legacy of support into the future.

De La Salle's writings make frequent use of the words "trust" (or its close derivative, "entrusted") and "care." Consider this familiar passage from the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*: "All your care for the children entrusted to you would be useless if Jesus Christ did not give you the quality, the power, and the efficacy that is needed to make your care useful."[14] For De La Salle, the teacher's only claim to authority derived from Jesus Christ. Without closeness to Christ, sustained within each teacher through prayer and religious practice, the ministry would be bereft of any foundation. In that, De La Salle was surely reflecting his own formation in the tenets of the French School of Spirituality, whose mentors understood "adherence to Jesus Christ" as modeling oneself to the best of one's abilities to the actions of Jesus Christ. If, as Augustine, Aquinas, and De La Salle understood it, Christ was the only real Teacher, then those who understood the dignity of their own calling to imitate Jesus in the ministry of education always had reason to know Jesus as the model of trust and care.

Contemporary educators seem to find the words "trust" and "care" expressive of the best goals they are attempting to accomplish. While this paper has an explicitly Christian/Catholic educational perspective in view, that is not to say that teachers in other circumstances, including those working in publicly-supported schools, might find the Lasallian charism helpful to their own sense of vocation and possibly valuable in sustaining their own commitment to such a ministry. The fact that American Quaker educator Parker Palmer's "spiritual" insights about educators find such an appreciative audience among diverse members of the educational community indicates that there is a desire educators to find the right language and encouragement to sustain themselves in their chosen profession. Perhaps even the Christocentric context of Lasallian language might speak beyond its time to help educators find meaning in their endeavors today.

Current educational theorists are using vocabulary to describe the personal convictions of teachers that John Baptist de La Salle would understand. Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider offer insights about the importance of relational trust.[15] Since Bryk and Schneider understand education to be fundamentally a social interaction, they mirror the earlier work of James Coleman concerning the "social capital" in schools. Relational trust describes the social interaction which takes place when each person in the group understands his or her own expectations, responsibilities, and ideas, is able to engage in effectively sharing those personal convictions with the others with whom they interrelate in the social setting, and appreciates what the other brings to the conversation. Ultimately, these effective encounters form the shared social capital for the multiple interactions among all levels of the group as an institutional entity. Schools are as good as the trust that exists among all of their constituencies. To achieve this level of trusting interaction, Bryk and Schneider suggest that there are four "criteria for discernment": (1) respect; (2) competence; (3) personal regard for others; and (4) integrity.[16]

Bryk and Schneider's vision of relational trust requires some structure on which to build. Their theory gives contemporary voice for the importance of an intentional community in order to provide the space, the time, and the opportunity for interactive dialogue to take place. In that view, Bryk and Schneider seem to be echoing the sentiments expressed elsewhere by Parker Palmer. Palmer has written extensively about "circles of trust," and these circles are always related to a reworked notion about community which reflects the lived realities that people face today.

Parker Palmer believes that community is the vehicle through which each person comes to understand truth. Palmer writes: ". . . personal truth leads not toward individualism but toward a community of relationship, dialogue and mutual transformation . . ."[17] A community of relationship functions as a clearing house for truth because:

> We forget that a person can be a person only in community. Whether we are aware of it or not, each of us is a community in microcosm. The personhood of each of us is shaped by a moving inward intersection of numerous selves – family and friends and colleagues and strangers. If we are to grow as persons and expand our knowledge of the world, we must consciously participate in the emerging community of our lives, in the claims made upon us by others as well as

> our claims upon them. Only in community does the person appear in the first place, and only in community can the person continue to become.[18]

An interactive community of persons engaged in dialogue becomes the means by which we learn and grow.

Palmer admits that busy people today do not often have the luxury of time or proximity that close-knit communities had in the past. Instead, he proposes the advantage of supporting the "circle of trust" as an effective contemporary means of creating an engaging community. These circles of trust are created by two or more people who create "safe space" for mutual interaction and growth. Palmer suggests:

> Such circles…do not depend on a critical mass of people the way a traditional community does; two people who know how to "protect and border and salute" each other's solitude can form a circle of trust. Of course, our opportunities for mutual illumination increase as the size of the circle grows, with about twenty-five people as the outside limit. But a couple, or a small group, who create safe space for the soul, can support each other on the journey toward an undivided life.[19]

Bryk, Schneider, and Palmer all advocate the importance of building trust as a key element for creating effective schools, and more significantly, in enriching the lives of the people who make up the communities of schools. John Baptist de La Salle anticipated the need for teachers to form circles of trust by gathering into supportive communities. While De La Salle's vowed community has had a continuing reality as the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Bryk, Schneider, and Palmer are indicating another dimension of what Lasallian community could mean. The "circle of trust" also suggests an intriguing possibility of future agency for both the Brothers and Lasallian ministers.

The pedagogical charism of John Baptist de La Salle is truly an enduring gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church. Effective means to celebrate, educate about, and embrace it must endure, beyond the first community of vowed Brothers. A new dimension of the ministry of the Brothers, especially in the formation of future Lasallian teachers, may include hosting "circles of trust" among interested teachers. It is both logical and hopeful that by convening regular opportunities for dialogue and interaction, the Brothers could encourage and support their colleagues in the educational ministry to young people. It is just as likely that such convocations would be equally valuable to the Brothers, too. For if we are truly brothers and sisters before God, we have much to learn from one another. Just as the richness of the Lasallian tradition might inform and persuade teachers to persevere in their commitment to their vocations, so, too, might the Lasallian charism be reanimated by engaging all Lasallian educators with their unique perspectives. An expanded community of trust is meant to benefit the young people who have been "entrusted" to the care of teachers, especially teachers inspired by the Lasallian charism.

Teachers minister for the benefit of their students. Their purpose is to assist parents in providing for the educational care of their children. The "ethics of care" has been foundational to education since the dawn of time. Among contemporary practitioners of education, Nel

Noddings is among the most eloquent advocates for an ethics of care for children.[20] For Noddings, this work of "attentive love" springing out of parental interests is always couched in the language of the family unit. I believe that Noddings makes a strong case for an "alternative" model of schooling. In her vision, schools would concentrate on the real future lives of students. Teachers would be free to organize the learning experiences to further these life goals. Noddings sees this practical, life-centered curriculum as far more important to the real learning needs of most students than is the mastery of specialized content. For Noddings, teachers become "parents" to the students under their care.

Many students today are not being reared in traditional, two-parent households. Noddings seems to want teachers to adopt some of the characteristics of parents in order to supply the attentive love that children may not have at home. Certainly, adults in schools are expected to be attentive, loving mentors to students. Teachers cannot abrogate their *in loco parentis* legal responsibilities. However, a "parent" model is not the only legitimate example of how the teacher-student relationship may be embodied, or how these reasonable requirements can be fulfilled. In fact, the most significant element of the Lasallian charism is its reliance on a sibling model of education in place of a parental model.

De La Salle founded a community of Brothers in order to meet the needs of the young people of his era. The charm of the Brothers has derived mainly from the fact that they did not and do not approach the students in class as substitute fathers. Rather, the ideal of Lasallian educators is as one who tries to be the elder sibling of the young people entrusted to his or her care. A fraternal or sororial approach to students does not represent less care for students; rather, it embodies a very different perspective on care. To encounter my students as an elder sibling, the teacher enters into a relationship with them is that one of equality. The teacher's authority does not derive from any real or substituted engendering of the young people. The student becomes brother or sister. We are equal in God's eyes. If we continue to see with God's eyes, we acknowledge that all of us are God's children, first and foremost. Teachers invite their younger siblings to delight in the dignity each of us has as God's children, created in God's likeness, equal in God's perspective and destined to treat every other person as my brother of sister in view of this reality. Most young people do not need another adult as a parent-figure. Rather, they may respond well to an adult who regards them as someone who is soon to be a peer.

John Baptist de La Salle's deliberate decision to found a community of Brothers, without choosing to take on the additional obligations of priesthood, focuses the attention of the Brothers on the ministry of equality among all persons. Although this decision to reject Holy Orders clearly had its historical reasons, De La Salle, as a priest, understood that the ministry of ordination is essentially a sacramental service to the Church to which other responsibilities may be added. However, De La Salle realized that priesthood cannot be limited. The ministerial focus of ordination is fundamentally sacramental. The Lasallian charism is fundamentally educational. The two vocations, in the Lasallian perspective, are incompatible, at least for the vowed members of the Lasallian community. Ironically, De La Salle, the only priest ever to consider himself a member of the community, instilled in his followers a commitment to serve as siblings. As Lasallian scholar Brother Luke Salm puts it so succinctly:

> The Founder…discerned that perhaps the Institute should not have priests among its members. He came to see with increasing clarity that the priesthood would be incompatible with the vocation and mission of a teaching Brother, that the introduction of the priesthood might well weaken the very foundation of the Institute. The presence of priests in the Society might also open the door to the ever-present possibility of external ecclesiastical control. In time, the exclusive lay character of the Institute would become one of its most distinguishing characteristics.[21]

Being brother (or sister) meant that one's fullest purpose was discovered in the relationship of trust and care with the students in school. The Brothers of the Christian Schools also related to one another, and other teachers, and parents, and benefactors, and alumni, but their primary aim was always focused on the ministry within the school and toward the younger siblings who were sent to those schools. De La Salle's own personal experience of having to mentor his younger siblings after the death of his parents may well have been the source of his profound awareness of the significance that an elder sibling may exercise on the lives of his sisters and brothers. From this wellspring of experience, De La Salle was able to craft the emergence of a community of Brothers in the Church. In conjunction with the men who joined him in the ministry of education, De La Salle and his Brothers were able to forge a way of schooling that respects students as co-heirs of the divine dignity intended for all people. To that end, the Brothers embody and invite others to imitate the Lasallian charism that derives from the scriptural injunction that there is but one Teacher, the Christ, and we are all brothers and sisters together in continuing his mission.

As the future of the Lasallian charism unfolds, it will be essential for schools to be places where elder siblings mentor younger siblings. Suffice it to say that a genuine ethics of trust and care need not be limited to a parental model to be effective and affective for young people. Alternative models, like the brother/sister model, have long and efficacious histories. The vowed Brothers must embrace their obligation to insure that the charism is passed to a wider community of Lasallians by engaging teachers in new "circles of trust." Students need to be engaged by caring persons in order to come to the fullness of their God-given humanity. Maintaining and extending a commitment to this sibling vision of ministry is critical to the preservation of the Lasallian charism and pedagogy.

Engaging with Learners: Freire's Pedagogy Echoes Lasallian Pedagogy

Lasallian pedagogy calls for the community of teachers and students to work together for the flourishing of the human race to live in our rightful place in God's good creation. In the foundational story of De La Salle and the Brothers, it is clear that John Baptist de La Salle, a good and holy young priest, was moved beyond his own zone of wealth and comfort by the plight of young persons who were poor. De La Salle's eyes were opened by his encounters with people like Canon Nicholas Roland and Adrien Nyel, each of whom invited De La Salle to take on greater responsibilities for a mission of the Church that had no initial attraction for the Founder. Once he became completely committed to the project of the Christian Schools, John Baptist de La Salle lived out a forty-year journey of concrete action that fundamentally affected how young people could be educated.

Although their personal and biographical circumstances are clearly distinct, there are obvious parallels between the pedagogy that De La Salle developed three hundred or more years ago, and the more contemporary efforts of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) to provide for an effective pedagogy for our times, particularly for the poor. While De La Salle was a priest born into privileged circumstances in seventeenth-century France, and Freire was a married layman who emerged from poverty in early twentieth-century Brazil, both men shared a passion for creating pedagogies which engage and serve people in need. A quick survey of some of Freire's ideas will show an extraordinary resonance with the principles of Lasallian education, and may serve as helpful ground to appreciate the vitality of Lasallian pedagogy today.

Freire's own educational tasks were initially directed toward poor, illiterate adult farmers in his native Brazil. Freire discovered that people learned to read faster and with greater confidence when they were able to bring their own life experiences to texts and to be engaged in critical reflection about their daily problems. When educators met these adult students by engaging them in discussion of their ordinary life issues, and successfully challenged them to speak their minds and to reflect critically on their own circumstances, these adult pupils had an incentive to learn to read quickly and often did so. Freire's pedagogy developed out of practical and ordinary life, but it also permitted the learners to take ownership of their world and to use their education to make positive changes in their lives.

Freire begins his pedagogy by asserting that "humanization" is "humankind's central problem," and that "…while humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation."[22] While that sentiment may seem completely secular, it certainly reverberates with the traditional Lasallian expression that says that John Baptist de La Salle founded the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and, by extension, gave impetus to the Lasallian pedagogical world, in order to provide a human and Christian education to the young, especially to the poor. Freire was himself a man of faith, as a commentary on Freire suggests: "It is worth reminding ourselves that Freire's philosophy was rooted deeply in his Christian faith and his 'love for Christ and hope that He is the light.'"[23]

Freire denounced the type of pedagogy that he termed a "banking" or "deposit-making" endeavor. Banking education simply passes along ideas as if they were coins to be placed in a bank. Such an education fails to engage students because it emphasizes learning as a kind of passive holding onto the stuff of the past. Instead, Freire argues for a pedagogy of involvement which he describes as: "'Problem-posing' education, responding to the essence of consciousness – *intentionality* – rejects communiqués and embodies communication."[24] This process of raising the intentional level of consciousness in students through dialogue, expressed best in the Portuguese word Freire uses *"conscientizacao,"* describes the key component of his pedagogy. Students learn when they are actively encouraged to work with teachers who invite them to reflect seriously upon the most significant issues. This dialogical method moves education beyond simply passing along material (banking education) and brings it to the place where people learn because they recognize and articulate what really matters to them.

Freire insists that teachers in his pedagogy are no longer seen in a "vertical" relationship to the students, standing above them to pass along information to be banked. Rather, Freire suggests:

> The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of* freedom, and not *against* it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are "owned" by the teacher.[25]

This mutuality of teacher and student seems to echo strongly the Lasallian pedagogical notion of elder-siblinghood. The teacher is to be elder Brother or Sister to the learner, and is able to be taught by their younger siblings. A sound educational community thrives when the participants are secure enough in the dignity of their own personhood to be open to the insights of the other.

Freire understands the value of problem-posing education in the way it opens the learner-teacher to new possibilities. It empowers people to realize that the world may be changed with their engagement in it. He writes:

> In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation . . . Hence, the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing the reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action.[26]

Thus, for Freire, the great advantage of problem-posing education is that it leads the participants toward reflective action. These reflective actions become praxis to bring about positive change in the world. This becomes good news for the poor, from Freire's perspective, because, as praxis, education has the capacity to assist "the people subjected to domination…[to] fight for their emancipation."[27] Just as the fundamental purpose of Lasallian pedagogy has been to free the young, especially the poor, from the constraints of their limits through education, Freire opines that the pedagogy of the oppressed liberates the poor from their oppressors.

Freire uses the "theological virtues" of St. Paul to ground his methodology, although he uses them in an order different from the Letters. His pedagogy of the oppressed begins in love. For Freire, love is the heart of the dialogical process that allows teachers and students to engage in meaningful reflection and liberating action. He makes two statements about "love" that are vital. First, he argues: "Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself." Second, he suggests: "Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others."[28] Love creates the atmosphere in the classroom that promotes the mutual exchange of ideas and bonds teachers and students to their mutual benefit. For John Baptist de La Salle, this kind of love might be expressed as zeal for the salvation of those entrusted to us, and as care for the ultimate and immediate needs of those students who are our younger siblings.

Freire uses the virtue of faith in human terms in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* He connects faith to the task of dialoguing:

> Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the "dialogical man" believes in even before he meets him face to face. His faith, however, is not naïve. The "dialogical man" is critical and knows that although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power. Far from destroying his faith in the people, however, this possibility strikes him as a challenge to which he must respond. He is convinced that the power to create and transform, even when thwarted in concrete situations, tends to be reborn.[29]

Freire's sense of faith, particularly faith in the efficacy of education, sees it as a transformational power to change the circumstances of both student and teacher in dialogue. For Freire, this dialogue "becomes a horizontal relationship in which mutual trust between dialoguers is the logical consequence."[30] Certainly, this aspect of Freire's pedagogy parallels well with others, including Palmer, Bryk, and Schneider, who have emphasized the critical importance of communities of trust and care as essential to effective educating. It also supports the communitarian insight of De La Salle, in which the community of educators is understood as a place that emphasizes the horizontal dimension of relationship in schools, rather than the top-down authority structure implied in a parental-hierarchical model. Lasallian pedagogy does not dismiss the need for order or structure, but encourages those who exercise the teacher's role to do so with the mindset of an elder sibling.

Freire argues that dialogue cannot exist without hope. "Hope is rooted in men's [sic} incompletion, from which they move out in constant search – a search that can be carried out only in communion with others."[31] For Freire, hope is the quality which fosters both determination and patience. "As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait."[32] Thus, Freire offers some novel insights into the theological virtues to ground his pedagogical methodology. He revisited the topic of hope late in his writings.[33] Hope, in his schema, becomes the virtue that encourages tenacity on the part of teachers and students to keep persisting after their goals. Hope also inspires mutual learners to work for the eradication of injustices.

The argument could be made that Lasallian educational pedagogy was originally intended to meet the educational needs of young students in their primary education, whereas Freire intended his methods to reach adult learners. Therefore, there may be little from one system that truly informs the other. However, De La Salle often encouraged the early Brothers to see the larger picture. The students who benefitted from their ministry would grow to adulthood. Their early schooling would provide them with the means to have a better life. One example of the horizontal dimension of Lasallian pedagogy may be found in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, where the Brothers are encouraged to persuade parents who intended to withdraw their son from school to place him at work. De La Salle advises:

> To have their children earn a little, they will make them lose a very much greater advantage. It should be explained to them how important it is for an artisan to

> know how to read and write well. It should be emphasized that, however limited the child's intelligence, the child that knows how to read and write will be capable of anything.[34]

Here the Brothers become siblings in dialogue with parents to convince them that patience will ultimately serve the greater good. Their child will benefit more by his education than by entering the workplace too soon. The Brothers become the agents of hope, too, by helping the parents to envision a better future for their children through regular attendance and participation in school. Clearly, this horizontal dimension of hope would not be realized quickly or easily, but the perspective that the Brothers are asked to bring to the wider community of student-parent-teacher rests in dialogue and mutual trust.

Ultimately, Lasallian pedagogy exists as a community of faith, love, trust, and hope that intends to be means through which teacher-student-parent-community will meet in the Presence of God. In one of De La Salle's most inspiring meditations, he encourages the Brothers not to lose sight of this ultimate purpose in their ministry. He writes:

> Oh, what joy a Brother of the Christian Schools will have when he sees a great number of his students in possession of the eternal happiness for which they are indebted to him by the grace of Jesus Christ! What sharing of joy there will be between teacher and disciples! What special union there will be with one another in the presence of God! They will have great satisfaction in sharing together the blessing for which the call of God had given them hope: the wealth of the glorious heritage of God in the dwelling of the saints (Eph. 1:18).[35]

This extraordinary vision of Brothers and "disciples" gathered forever in God's Holy Presence represents the "grace" of Lasallian pedagogy. The call to teach ultimately becomes the mortar that cements master and disciple. Yet, another reading of the same passage supports the idea that Jesus is the teacher, and Brothers and students together represent the disciples who have been called together to share in this marvelous communion of saints by God's good grace. Both Freire and De La Salle would agree that this vision is the liberation for which all persons truly hope.

Widening the Circle: Extending Lasallian Charism by Shared Praxis

The recurring theme of this paper has focused on accounting for that quintessential essence that animated and inspired the Lasallian vision of schooling and finding ways to extend that charism to agents who will not share a vowed commitment to it. Borrowing from David Tracy, the analogous imagination seeks to find an effective way of sharing the Lasallian charism and pedagogy that is akin to watching the encircling waves across the top of a still pond when someone plunks a stone into it. Some teachers and administrators may be close to the point of impact. They will literally feel the power of the wave close up, and will seek to invest their time and enthusiasm into knowing, accepting and extending the Lasallian charism. Others may be further out in the water. The encircling wave will have less direct force in their lives, but they still will find elements of the charism helpful or useful to their ministry. Still others, who may find themselves on the periphery of the wave, may still be effective agents of the Catholic

educational ministry without embracing the particular charism.[36] But their own sense of themselves or their ability of commit significant time or energy to inculcating the Lasallian charism, or their own differing opinions about what constitutes sustenance or spirituality of ministry may be less influenced by the wave of the Lasallian charism. It is still important to provide them with the tools to know about it, its texts and lived contexts, but like the barely rippling waters at the edge of the circle, these teachers will not be profoundly moved in the wake of the Lasallian wave. And yet, the future of the charism depends upon sharing the wisdom of the Lasallian tradition with new generations of educators. What dynamic is involved in such an effort?

The worldwide Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools has been making a concerted effort for over thirty years to share the Lasallian charism with our colleagues. The engagement of colleagues at the Institute, District, or school-based levels happens through programs and opportunities for ongoing formation such as SIEL, or in the United States, the Lasallian Leadership Institute, the Buttimer Institute for Lasallian Studies and the newly inaugurated Brother John Johnston Institute for Contemporary Lasallian Practice. So, the desire to share the Lasallian charism and its related pedagogy has already had a significant history. Hundreds of colleagues have actively participated in programs that are designed to open to them the wisdom and tradition of the Lasallian charism. The anecdotal accounts of those who have participated in these programs tend to be positive. Some colleagues report that their spiritual lives have been transformed by encountering the Lasallian story in its depths. Yet, when confronted with the looming question of accounting for that special "je ne sais quoi" of the Lasallian charism and pedagogy, something more is needed.

Perhaps, the very "culture" of the Brothers of the Christian Schools accounts for part of the difficulty. The Brothers, as a religious family, tend not to seek the spotlight. In our own lore, the Brother who gives his lifetime faithfully and quietly in schools without seeking recognition or attention models an ideal Brother. We Brothers are quietly proud of who we are, but we would never force our agenda onto our lay colleagues. However, we have happily discovered in the last thirty years that many of our coworkers and colleagues do have an interest in the Lasallian legacy, which may range from mild curiosity to a deep thirst to imbibe our spirit and our traditions.

Programs to share these traditions have met with some welcome degree of success. We have arrived at a new crossroads in the twenty-first century. Given the numbers of colleagues who have participated in Lasallian formation programs, plus the numbers who are willing to undertake such programs, the next step will require the discovery of some effective methodology to give voice both to the collective wisdom of Brothers and the emerging insights of colleagues together as the contemporary interpreters of the Lasallian charism/pedagogy.

Any extension of the Lasallian pedagogy will require a methodology that will lend itself to mutual respect, deep learning, genuine conversation, and will yield a new articulation of key elements of the legacy of De La Salle. To that end, the Shared Praxis approach proposed by Thomas H. Groome, internationally recognized professor of Religious Education at the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College in the United States, provides a reasonable framework to build the mutual articulation of the Lasallian pedagogy today.[37] Groome himself has

acknowledged how his own pedagogy was inspired by the insights of Freire, whose ideas encouraged him to formulate a religious education pedagogy that made room for the agency of students. By allowing pupils to become actively involved in speaking about their own understanding of their knowledge, and by using the fullness of the Christian story to further their education, Groome suggests that the cycle of learning reaches its summit when pupils are further welcomed to articulate how the tradition challenges them to change and to grow in new ways.

Lasallian formation programs have done well in engaging participants in a focusing activity centered on learning related to Lasallian spirituality of the teacher. These programs also have been effective in gathering teachers and Brothers in dialogue about Movement 1: Present Praxis, Movement 2: Critical Reflection on Present Action; and in opening people to the rich Lasallian literary heritage that is analogous to Movement 3: Access to the Story and Vision. What may be needed next in this process is to address a methodology to meet Movement 4: Dialectical Hermeneutics and Movement 5: A Decision for Lasallian Charism.

Groome has subsequently used the expression "life to faith to life" to describe the dynamics of this shared praxis approach.[38] This newer identifying phrase both acknowledges that the former shorthand expression, "shared praxis," had some negative connotations for some hearers while also refocuses the flow of Groome's insights to the centrality of faith drawing from life and enriching and transforming lives. The focusing activity and Movements 1 and 2 engage the participants in the process in bringing their lives to the discussion. Movements 1 and 2 help people to articulate what they understand now and what they have reflected upon critically with regard to their lived experiences. They engage the "faith" dimensions of the pedagogy at Movement 3 by "re-presenting the Christian Story and Vision with meaning and persuasion."[39] Groome's pedagogy sees the right of all persons to access the fullness of the Christian Story and Vision as being crucial to genuine education. As he indicates it: "I reiterate that every Christian is entitled to have access to the whole Story and Vision of Christian faith. This requires a comprehensive and thorough re-presenting of its scriptures and traditions."[40]

Groome encourages all educators to take as their model Jesus Christ. Groome offers the image of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus as a critical insight into the pedagogy of Jesus Christ. He notes that the Risen Jesus joined "with" these two disciples on their journey and entered into dialogue with them about the events of their lives, currently centered on all that happened over the past few days in Jerusalem. Groome observes:

> An amazing aspect of this Teacher's approach is that he never *tells* these two disciples what to see. Rather, he crafts the teaching/learning dynamics so that eventually they *come to see for themselves.* Jesus begins the pedagogy by turning the two to life, to look at and reflect upon what is going on for them and within their own souls.[41]

Eventually, in the breaking of the bread, the disciples' eyes are opened and they recognize the now-disappeared Jesus as their companion on the road. Groome suggests that this dynamic happened when their lives, brought to faith by the encounter with Jesus, now returns them to their lives when they rush back to Jerusalem to share their experiences with their fellow

followers of Jesus. This dynamic becomes the paradigm for the shared praxis approach to education. Groome suggests:

> The Emmaus encounter is a paradigm story that can inspire every educator . . . "to teach as Jesus did." The Emmaus road story leaves no doubt that Jesus's approach was to enable learners to bring their lives and their pressing issues to the spiritual wisdom of the Faith tradition, and then to bring that Faith back to new and renewed commitment to lived, living, and life-giving faith. Surely this is the best hope for our own pedagogy as well.[42]

In Groome's pedagogy, Movements 4 and 5 encourage teachers and learners to dialogue about how to bring their lives to faith and back to changed lives. Movement 4: Appropriating the Truths and Wisdom of Christian Faith into Life becomes the opportunity to "encourage and draw out people's own appropriation of the teachings and spiritual wisdom of Christian faith around a theme."[43] Groome observes that Movement 4 is often best accomplished by having a teacher ask simple but thought-provoking questions which encourage learners to articulate what they are beginning to understand for themselves. He notes that the lines between Movement 4 and Movement 5: Making Decisions in Light of Christian Faith often become blurred. Because it is not easy to keep these two dimensions separate, they need not be kept artificially apart.

"Movement 5 gives people an opportunity to choose and decide how they might live in response to the teachings and spiritual wisdom they have encountered in the Christian Story and Vision."[44] The purpose of this final step in Groome's pedagogy is to invite people to identify the ways that their lives will be changed as they move forward. It is certainly consistent with the observations of other contemporary educators who claim that the purpose of good education is to engender lively communities of trust and care. Groome's praxis acknowledges the uniqueness of each person before God to be given the right to come to one's own convictions with clear information and deep appreciation for careful thought. Shared praxis leads people to be able to think and act for themselves as they appropriate the call of the Gospel into their own particular lives.

In Lasallian pedagogy, there is a similar insistence upon offering the students the "maxims" of the Gospel. At its simplest level, Gospel maxims are the teachings of Jesus that encourage us to live our lives as good Christians. This is the dimension of faith and education that is demonstrated through knowledge from the heart more than from the head. It flows from personal faith that has become so much a part of the person that he or she lives the faith as well as knows it. In a sense, Movement 5 identifies faith that one lives because it has become part of one's identity. Perhaps this type of learning is best exemplified in the example of shared bread from *The Conduct of the Christian Schools.*

In De La Salle's day, the vast majority of the students came from poor or working class families. Many students were often hungry. They depended upon the simplest and most meager foods to sustain them, and these basic foods were often in short supply. Yet, in the original Lasallian pedagogy, each day the students were able to give practical witness to their Christian convictions by discretely placing a bit of their bread, if they were able to do so, in a basket watched over by the teacher. This morsel would then be offered to those students who had no bread to eat. This simple act of charity, encouraged daily in the school, represents the true meaning of "shared praxis." Students who have an understanding of the way lives are challenged by poverty, also

hear the Gospel that urges us to "do unto others," and thus they willingly give up a bit of their own bread to feed a classmate who is needier than themselves.[45] Those receiving the bread are encouraged by the teacher to pray for those who helped them. Thus, within the small Christian community of the classroom, early Lasallians brought their lives to faith to serve the lives of others. They followed the Gospel maxim of care for others, particularly those most in need. They learned the Christian Story and Vision under the loving and attentive eye of good teachers who made sure that the dignity of all persons was respected. And this practical religion became a habit of the heart for a lifetime, as the young people came to the conviction that care for others in need was an essential part of their education as good Christians.

This methodology may not work in all places today, but its movements remain essential. Lasallian pedagogy must and does continue to open the eyes of the community of the school to the greater needs of others. It encourages students to find practical ways to meet needs, while also opening their eyes to the greater dimensions of injustice. Students-teachers-parents-and the wider community of the school come to see what they are called to do to be Gospel-people in today's world. Action for justice, grounded in the Lasallian tradition, is an integral part of its pedagogy. There are many ways in which that can be demonstrated. For example, the commitment of Lasallian educators today to the *Declaration on the Rights of the Child* promulgated by the United Nations, represents a collective, worldwide Lasallian goal. The Lasallian community gives voice to the God-given dignity of all persons, but especially for the millions of young people in the world whose poverty, lack of basic opportunities or oppressive circumstances deny them their basic rights. The Lasallian network, joined as a worldwide community of dedicated persons in service of education, announces this message and invites each generation of young people entrusted to its care to take up the cause. Sharing bread has become sharing our collective voices on behalf of others who are less fortunate. Ideally, the lessons learned in school will blossom into a Movement 5-like commitment of Lasallians to advocate for the needs of the poor, especially the young, throughout our lifetimes.

Some Conclusions about Lasallian Pedagogy

"Unity in community" identifies a goal that John Baptist de La Salle prized. As a community of dialogue and trust, Lasallians are heirs to an enduring legacy that seeks to serve others through education. While much of how we educate today differs greatly from the style De La Salle would have used, core values remain and identify what truly matters in Lasallian pedagogy. This essay has attempted to bring into conversation many contemporary voices. Its essential conclusion is that much of what is life-giving in the contemporary world of pedagogy is completely resonant with the traditional insights that John Baptist de La Salle and his earliest Brothers lived out long ago.

There are many particular nuances in Lasallian pedagogy that may not necessarily have the same look depending upon the level of schooling involved. For example, how one teaches students in elementary school may be quite distinctive from the approach to be taken when dealing with adult students in higher education. Nonetheless, Lasallian pedagogy shares the common thread across all types of schooling that the teacher must provide the example. As John Baptist de La Salle says so clearly, "…zeal will only become perfect if you practice what you are teaching them."[46]

By way of summary, these are some key visions:

- Lasallian pedagogy relies on a vision of equality: teachers are not "above" students, but are their elder siblings who hope that the ultimate purpose of their mutual work will be realized in the shared experience of God's Holy Presence.
- Lasallian notions of "brotherhood" can be embraced by men and women dedicated to the educational ministry; it is siblinghood that unites us into one community of faith.
- Lasallian pedagogy engages people to create communities of care and trust.
- Lasallian pedagogy invites all who are part of this community to learn how to dialogue about our core beliefs for the mutual benefit of all.
- Lasallian pedagogy asks that all members of the community act responsibly toward other persons, and to care in special ways for the needs of the poor.
- Lasallian pedagogy is modelled by those who teach. Students at all academic levels look to their teachers as examples of credibility, integrity and sincerity.
- Lasallian pedagogy is grounded in the hope that God's grace provides us with the strength to persevere, even in difficult circumstances, and to be alert always to the needs of those less fortunate than ourselves.
- Lasallian pedagogy leads us to practice. The Gospel is meant to be lived, as well as to be known. It touches the heart and the head.
- Lasallians honor in particular ways the extraordinary courage of John Baptist de La Salle, who was led to deeper faith by moving beyond his level of comfort and privilege to devote himself to the glory of God in the wonderful, challenging work of educating the young.

Lasallians today may be tempted to inaction in view of the scope of what has been accomplished by the Lasallian community of Brothers, colleagues, students, parents, alumni and benefactors since 1680. After all, how can we realistically sustain this marvelous vision given our own challenges and limitations in the twenty-first century? In a world that is still so often divided over religious matters, where religious convictions are sometimes suspected as being the cause of unrest, and where many people are indifferent to matters of faith, how do we continue to take up the challenges of educating in a Lasallian vision today? Clearly, the attempts to address these questions will have lasting consequences for Lasallian education in the twenty-first century, and will bring particular challenges to Lasallian higher education. In particular, this author anticipates these issues as having particular import for higher education among Lasallians:

- Given the elder-sibling model presented here and the worldwide growth of Lasallian higher education, is the higher education setting actually ***more*** conducive to these principles because adult-teaching-adult better mirrors a peer-relationship of siblings?
- How must Lasallian educators acknowledge, honor and respect the diversity of backgrounds within the communities of higher education, most especially of religious diversities, while remaining true to the undeniably Christian principles upon which the Lasallian texts and legacy are grounded?
- In the current educational climate in which educational practices are expected to be quantifiable in order to be justified (or recognized as valid), how can the effectiveness of Lasallian pedagogy be reasonably measured?

The late American Jewish religious historian Edith Wyschogrod (1930 - 2009) explored the intersection in today's post-modern world between those people motivated by altruistic beliefs and the challenges of a hostile or indifferent world. She named the efforts on behalf of the self-giving, religiously-based praxis, "saintly labor". Wyschogrod observes:

> [S]aintly action is orchestrated as labor, the total corporeal and psychological involvement in the needs and interests of others. Saintly work, the achievement of ends in conformity with a plan, should be seen against this backdrop. Saintly labor is not a ghost in the machine that inhabits everyday works of generosity but is simply the psychological, social, and corporeal investment of the self's total resources when they are committed to altruistic existence.[47]

Lasallian pedagogy is "saintly action" to the degree that Lasallians understand that the unselfish gift of oneself to our sisters and brothers is a ministry that imitates the kenotic generosity of Jesus Christ. John Baptist de La Salle came to understand this in his own total commitment to the schools and the early Brothers. The Brothers, through three centuries of service, have experienced this in consecrated lives that have required much sacrifice on behalf of our younger siblings. Today's lay Lasallians understand this call as one that requires an "investment" in flesh and blood that offers the whole self on behalf of "the needs and interests of others." Saintly action helps describe Lasallian pedagogy.

Education is seldom glamorous. It is a ministry that places persons of varying ages and abilities in close contact. Lasallians see education of people of all ages as the privileged means by which we continue to do what De La Salle and the early Brothers did.

There are challenges and difficulties, but if one learns to see with the eyes of faith, as any sound Lasallian pedagogue would, then it is possible to fully appreciate our agency in God's plan of salvation. As good workers in the vineyard, we labor in an educational community that seeks to pass along to future generations the vision of God's good grace that is our true home. That is the heart of the shared siblinghood that represents the style of Lasallian pedagogy. Why do Lasallians do this ministry? Saint John Baptist de La Salle must have the last word:

> You, too, must consider it a great reward for yourselves, the consolation you feel at the bottom of your hearts, that the children whom you instruct are well-behaved, know their religion well, and live a life of piety. Thank God with all your heart for all these kinds of rewards that he gives you in advance in this life.[48]

Notes

1. Brother John is Assistant Professor of Religion at La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA.

2. Gadamer offers a helpful insight by suggesting that a "fusion of horizons" exists in the "in-between" of a classical text and its contemporary reader. See: Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method. Second Revised Edition.* New York, NY: Continuum, 1999, 302. Similarly, Tracy alludes to the "analogical imagination" to explain how a classical text may contain more than its

author imagined, and thus may speak to a contemporary audience in ways that the original author did not anticipate. See: David Tracy. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, and Hope.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 15-20. Finally, Ricouer has made an argument that texts contain a wealth of meaning which enlarge its message beyond the original intentions of the author. See: Paul Ricouer. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning.* Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

3. Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria. *Consecrated by God the Trinity as a Community of Brothers: Messengers and Apostles Sent by the Church to Make Present the Kingdom of God.* Pastoral Letter to the Brothers. Rome: Italy, Brothers of the Christian Schools Generalate, December 25, 2009: 5.

4. Ibid.

5. John Baptist de La Salle. Richard Arnandez, F.S.C. and Augustine Loes, F.S.C., translators. *Meditations.* Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994: 386, 91.2.

6. Ibid.

7. See: Emmanuel Levinas. "God in Philosophy." Sean Hand, editor. *The Levinas Reader.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

8. See Philippians 2:7 and John 15:13 as Biblical references for the process of self-emptying kenosis in imitation of the example of Jesus Christ.

9. Pope John Paul II. *Novo Milenio Ineunte.* Vatican City: Papal Apostolic Letter, 6 January 2001, (49).

10. John Baptist de La Salle. *Rule and Foundational Documents.* Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002: 181.

11. Luke Salm, F.S.C. *The Work Is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.* Second Edition. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Publications, 1996: 68.

12. John Baptist de La Salle. *Rule and Foundational Documents.* Augustine Loes, F.S.C. and Ronald Isetti, editors and translators. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002, 16.

13. Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium. 274.* Holy See. Web. April 4, 2014.

14. John Baptist de La Salle. "Meditations for the Time of Retreat: 195.3." *Meditations.* Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994, 438.

15. See: Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider. *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement.* New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002. Their study posits that relational trust, ". . . is . . . an organizational property that its constitutive elements are socially defined in the reciprocal exchanges among participants in a school community, and its presence (or absence) has important consequences for the function of the school and its capacity to engage fundamental change (20). They further argue that: "Relational trust constitutes the connective

tissue that binds these individuals [in a school community] together around advancing the education and welfare of children. Improving schools requires us to think harder about how best to organize the work of adults and students so that this connective tissue remains healthy and strong (144)."

16. Ibid., 23-26.

17. Parker Palmer. *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey.* New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993: 57.

18. Ibid.

19. Parker Palmer. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004: 73.

20. See: Nel Noddings. *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1992. Noddings uses philosopher Martin Heidegger to establish the notion of "caring relation" as the locus of "connection or encounter between tow human beings – a career and a recipient of care, or cared-for (15)." Noddings believes that schools should be reorganized to make the students' ". . . prepared to do the work of attentive love (51)." "The basic guiding idea is to make the school into a family-like center of care (67)." By extending the "family-like" model, Noddings proposal is that teachers view their roles in schools as "parental (62)." In that, she differs quite significantly with the Lasallian model of teacher as elder sibling.

21. Salm, 68.

22. Paulo Freire. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York, NY: Continuum, 1993, 25.

23. Darren Webb. "Paulo Freire and 'the need for a kind of education in hope.'" *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 40:4, December 2010, 331.

24. Freire, 60. (Italics original)

25. Freire, 61. (Italics original)

26. Freire, 64. (Italics original)

27. Freire, 67.

28. Freire, 70.

29. Freire, 71-72.

30. Freire, 72.

31. Ibid.

32. Freire, 73.

33. See Paulo and A.M.A. Freire. *A Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York, NY: Continuum, 1994.

34. John Baptist de La Salle. *The Conduct of the Christian Schools.* Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996, 161.

35. John Baptist de La Salle. *Meditiations.* Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994, 208.2, 471.

36. This statement finds support in Antonio Botano F.S.C. *The Educator's Life Journey.* Martin Spellman, F.S.C. translator. Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools. MEL Bulletin 8/9. March, 2004. A broader view may be found in Chris Kyriacou and Melissa Coulthard. "Undergraduates View of Teaching as a Career Choice." *Journal of Education for Teaching.* 26 (July 2000).

37. See: Thomas Groome. *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998. The Shared Praxis approach to religious education formulated by Thomas Groome articulates a process with one introductory phase and five movements. A synopsis of this method includes the following movements:

Focusing Activity to engage participants around a generative theme;
Movement 1: Naming and Expressing Present Practice (Expression)
Movement 2: Critical Reflection on Present Action (Reflection)
Movement 3: Making Accessible the Christian Story/Vision (Access)
Movement 4: Dialectical Hermeneutics (Appropriation)
Movement 5: Decision/Response for Lived Christian Faith (Decision)

Groome states that: "Educators can combine movements or vary sequence in a great variety of ways" (280), so the method does not require a lock-step adherence to every movement to be effective.

38. Thomas Groome. *Will There Be Faith?* New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011.

39. Ibid., 303.

40. Ibid., 319.

41. Ibid., 40.

42. Ibid., 44.

43. Ibid., 325.

44. Ibid., 329.

45. La Salle. *The Conduct of the Christian Schools. 52.*

46. John Baptist de La Salle. *Meditations 202.3: 456.*

47. Edith Wyschogrod. *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990: 85.

48. La Salle. *Meditations.* 207.2, 468.

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