

The Lasallian Tradition and Its Broad Possibilities

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Introduction

In 1990, the promulgation of apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* by Pope John Paul II intensified discussion over the mission and identity of Catholic institutions of higher learning. Particularly in the United States, where a disproportionately large percentage of such institutions are located, the document and its subsequent implementation by the American bishops were watched with a combination of hopefulness and suspicion. On the one hand, *Ex Corde*'s assertions that "by its Catholic character, a University is made more capable of conducting an impartial search for truth...that is neither subordinated to nor conditioned by particular interests of any kind" seemed to dovetail nicely with the cherished American academic values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.² On the other hand, the document's mention of the Canon Law requirement that "those who teach theological disciplines in any institute of higher studies have a mandate from the competent ecclesiastical authority"³ seemed a blatant grab for control of classroom content by the hierarchy.

The legitimate concerns raised by *Ex Corde* were mitigated by the productive relationship-building that took place between bishops and university⁴ administrators in the wake of *Ex Corde*'s promulgation. Though one can still find Catholic scholars who either chafe at any sign of episcopal interest in Catholic higher education or regret that *Ex Corde* has not been implemented as a checklist of Catholicity, efforts to promote Catholic institutional identity have been, on the whole, very fruitful. In 2012, the American bishops released their "Final Report for the Ten Year Review of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* for the United States," in which they affirmed that "our institutions of Catholic higher education have made definite progress in advancing Catholic identity."⁵ Nevertheless, the bishops also listed four areas that required further attention, including continuing dialogue and cooperation between presidents and bishops, hiring for mission, Catholic identity-based formation for trustees, faculty, and staff, and the need for "improved, accurate, and deeper" theological knowledge through both curricular and pastoral means.⁶

Many Catholic universities no doubt devote some attention to these very subject areas, though admittedly some more than others. Those schools sponsored by religious congregations seek to employ their particular charism as a means of advancing identity and mission along the lines prescribed by *Ex Corde* and the bishops. Though Catholic higher education in America has traditionally been a very diverse undertaking, common ground as well as stronger Catholic identity could be found by a sustained retrieval of the 300 years-old insights of the patron saint of teachers. The Lasallian tradition is uniquely placed, given John Baptist de La Salle's spirituality of teaching as well as its subsequent application to higher education, to promote not only Lasallian but also Catholic institutional identity. Efforts to enhance this Catholic identity have often been hampered by a lack of buy-in (resulting from ignorance, apathy, or willful disdain) on the part of faculty and staff. De La Salle's greatest legacy remains his ability to form

a community of teachers, united around a common cause. Additionally, it could well be that increasing societal pressure on students to pursue courses of study with practical benefits could move Catholic higher education closer to the wheelhouse of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The Lasallian tradition, with its proud history of educating educators, its emphasis on the practical, and its unique status as a lay congregation in good standing with the hierarchy, possesses a voice that could very well move discussions of Catholic identity forward.

De La Salle and the Christian Schools⁷

The France of John Baptist de La Salle's time seems to have been a period of excellent education, but only if one could afford it. In the highly stratified French society, class distinctions were both highlighted and perpetuated by the education system. For the wealthy, as was indeed the case for De La Salle himself, the typical course for educating children was the hiring of a private tutor. These tutors would provide the basic education necessary to succeed in one of the "colleges" which served as a prerequisite of sorts for university education. Of course, private tutors were not accessible for all, nor were all children of well-off French families eager to enter the university. Thus, the "Little Schools," under the auspices of the local bishop but often conducted by a single teacher, sought to provide a more general education relying heavily on memorization and one-on-one examinations by the instructor. Additionally, the guild of writing masters provided a very specific kind of training under the authority of the king, designed to preserve the integrity of official documents. The writing masters, like the teachers of the Little Schools, required tuition.

With no other options, then, poor children were sent to charity schools. These schools were a precursor to the public education of today insofar as they cost nothing to attend. Unlike American public schools, however, these charity schools were run by the local parishes, which were each required to maintain a list of all those children whose families were too poor to attend the Little Schools. With no standards for the training of teachers in these schools, the charity schools were often unruly places where little learning could be expected to happen. With access only to such schools, the children were all but guaranteed to hand on the poverty of their ancestors. As unfair as this may seem, this system of education would have done much to reinforce the traditional notion of one's birth as the primary, if not sole, indicator of one's worth. Therefore propping up the self-worth of those with any real power to undertake serious education reform, the French system of education was unlikely to change.

Happily, not everyone who benefitted from this system felt complacent regarding its shortcomings. While De La Salle was perhaps the most influential of these visionaries, he was certainly not the first. Indeed, many of the innovations associated with De La Salle and his Brothers were pioneered by earlier reformers. An emphasis on the training of teachers, the need to establish personal relationships with students, and the preference for teaching in the vernacular rather than Latin were all major tenets of LaSalle's program, but each had had earlier proponents. Particularly prescient of De La Salle's reforms were those of Charles D emia, who "argued that all the evils plaguing the city—moral, social, and economic—could be attributed directly to the fact that the poorer classes lacked an education."⁸

Indeed, De La Salle was not so much an original thinker regarding educational strategies as he was a superb administrator. As Luke Salm notes, De La Salle's "contribution was to create...a stable community of religiously motivated laymen to construct a network of schools...that would make practicable and permanent" the worthwhile innovations of earlier educators.⁹ Rather than downplaying De La Salle's importance, this simply means the influence of earlier education reformers was secured by the steps De La Salle took. He seemed to have recognized early on in his career in the Christian Schools, despite his own wealthy background and good education, that the social classes long taken for granted in France were perhaps more malleable than those in power would have cared to admit. De La Salle firmly believed that the primary educators of a child were rightfully the parents. Aware of the harsh conditions that come with poverty, De La Salle understood that poor parents, "little instructed and occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their children," simply could not provide the kind of education that might elevate social status.¹⁰ The need for innovations in education was therefore of extreme importance.

To effect real change in the education system, however, a reformer needed to be capable of navigating the complex bureaucracy of education, which involved both the monarchy and the Church hierarchy, to say nothing of the multitude of lesser officials, both civil and clerical. It was this very capability that made De La Salle successful in the formation of the Brothers and the Christian Schools. De La Salle's trust in God's Providence was complemented by his energetic pragmatism as well as something of a politician's ability to coax and persuade. Just as administrators in modern Catholic schools (at any level) have to maintain relationships with a variety of stakeholders to survive, De La Salle too found ways to please enough of the right people in order to keep the Brothers in classrooms.

Fundamental Tensions between the Lasallian Tradition and Higher Education

That the thought of a person involved in the education of poor boys in France 300 years ago might have some value for American higher education, Catholic or otherwise, today is certainly not obvious. Indeed, De La Salle himself might well be astonished to learn that Lasallian universities exist. Insofar as higher education in this country is a refuge of the elite or a place of learning for the sake of learning (which is certainly not the case across the board), one might argue that the Christian Schools De La Salle's Brothers founded were intended as a distinct alternative to the kind of education one receives in American universities. In 1998, well-respected scholar Brother Luke Salm, reflecting on the early history of the Brothers, was moved to ask if the very idea of a Lasallian university were an oxymoron.¹¹ Along similar lines, former Superior General John Johnston relates that "[s]ome Brothers are opposed to FSC commitments in higher education because they say—probably correctly—that John Baptist de La Salle never envisaged higher education as an apostolate of the Institute he founded."¹²

Clearly, there is even now ambivalence amongst the Brothers regarding Lasallian higher education, but there have nevertheless been Lasallian universities for the past 150 years. That Salm, a longtime professor, saw reason to question the assumption "that the survival of our Lasallian institutions of higher learning is a desirable goal"¹³ is due in part to the actions and writings of De La Salle himself. If a Catholic university is supposed to be a place where dialogue between the Church and world might take place, then that dialogue will be hampered

significantly from the beginning if the assumption is that the world is a very negative thing. Brother Martin Lasa recounts how De La Salle would sometimes use the term *world* simply to mean “anything which is opposed to our salvation.”¹⁴ Brother Gilles Beaudet posits that, in De La Salle’s thought, “The spirit of the world is the wisdom, or the philosophy of those people of the world who are the enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ The stark pessimism that is often apparent in De La Salle’s writings leads Lasa to lament “the impression that, within De La Salle a basic dualism operated with respect to reality along with a profound pessimism with regard to the world and to man.”¹⁶

Justifications for Lasallian Higher Education

Clearly, then, it would be forgivable for a reader of De La Salle to arrive at the conclusion that there ought to be no such thing as Lasallian higher education. However, there is ample leeway within De La Salle’s thought for a transition to higher education, despite the apparent pessimism regarding the world. Michel Sauvage contends that the negative language De La Salle employs to describe the world “can result in missing the fact of De La Salle’s existential consciousness of the absolute transcendence of God...”¹⁷ Though elements within God’s creation can certainly distract someone from God, they do not possess any ability to block grace entirely. Similarly Lasa concludes that De La Salle is not angry at God’s creation so much as he takes issue with “the evil which has tarnished the created.”¹⁸ Though De La Salle’s language can indeed be harsh, as when he claims that “God and the world...are not reconcilable...,”¹⁹ Lasa is no doubt correct when he points out that “De La Salle does not nuance his affirmations too much with the result that they sound rather too generalized.”²⁰

The zeal with which De La Salle sometimes denounces the world might be explained by his keen desire for the Brothers to each be “the new man” of Pauline thinking. It is crucial to examine the reality of the Brothers’ vocation as De La Salle sought to define it. Unlike, for example, the Carthusians, the Brothers’ withdrawal from the world can hardly be considered an absolute rejection of what the world has to offer, but rather a simple withdrawal into community. The ministry of the Brothers, even at its earliest restriction to the education of poor boys, demands a level of engagement with the world. The real key for the Brothers was to invite their pupils to embrace God’s plan “by being in the world without being of the world.”²¹ If the word *Lasallian* therefore implies a need to engage with the world in order to transform it, higher education would certainly seem to be a worthwhile undertaking for the Lasallian tradition.

Historical circumstances played a role in the establishment of Lasallian universities as well. The American bishops had been the driving force behind the Brothers’ move to higher education. The primary motivation for the bishops was probably the significant need for Catholic institutions to rival older Protestant and secular schools. The harsh anti-Catholic nativism of the nineteenth century made a smooth Catholic assimilation into American culture unlikely, and the development of a distinctly Catholic subculture would rely heavily on Catholic higher learning as a means of giving that culture some intellectual foundation. Another factor in the bishops’ support may well have been the higher likelihood of the Brothers cultivating vocations to diocesan clergy than those religious orders more firmly entrenched in higher education, such as the Jesuits. In any event, there is little question that the reason for establishing the first Lasallian universities (there were five founded within 20 years of the Brothers’ arrival in the United States

in 1845) was “traditionally Lasallian and pragmatic: the educational needs of the immigrant generations of Catholics.”²²

Unquestionably, pragmatism has long been an essential part of Lasallian identity. De La Salle’s insistence on teaching in the vernacular almost guaranteed (or perhaps *recognized*--low birth had made that guarantee already) that the Brothers’ pupils would not pursue university studies. Instead, the poor boys in the Christian Schools would be educated with more realistic goals, focusing on practical applications for the boys to make their way out of the dregs of French society. Once the Brothers brought their Lasallian heritage into higher education, they would feel a need to emphasize the practical in order to remain true to who they were. Whereas the Jesuits were long noted for their insistence on learning for its own sake, the Brothers moved only reluctantly into the liberal arts in order to facilitate their new universities in America. In 1897, however, the French superiors cracked down on this apparent departure from Lasallian identity and forced the Lasallian universities to adapt or close. To survive, the Brothers retrieved the Lasallian pragmatism of their tradition and “(shifted) emphasis from the classics and the liberal arts to science and engineering, business and teacher training.”²³ Even today there is debate whether the liberal arts have been authentically incorporated into the Lasallian tradition, with a 2009 study describing it as “much more a ‘peaceful coexistence’ than true integration.”²⁴ Thus, while it seems clear that there should be such a thing as a Lasallian university, it is unclear even to those involved in Lasallian higher education what such an institution should entail. If the Lasallian tradition is going to have any positive impact on the broader search for Catholic institutional identity, Lasallian institutional identity needs to be defined first. In order to arrive at such a definition, there is no other place to start but De La Salle’s spirituality of teaching.

John Baptist de La Salle and the Spirituality of Teaching

No justice can be done to the totality of De La Salle’s contribution to the spirituality of teaching in this paper. However, it will be useful moving forward to outline some of the major themes of De La Salle’s understanding of teaching not merely as a means of acquiring a paycheck, but as a vocation. Dr. Kurt Schackmuth, Vice President for Mission and Academic Services at Lewis University, is quite right when he suggests a major pillar of the Lasallian program of education is the need to be “student-centered.”²⁵ While the focus on the students may not necessarily distinguish Lasallian from non-Lasallian education at first glimpse, it is quite clear that De La Salle had a unique understanding of both the high stakes and the hardships involved with teaching. In order for the Christian Schools to live up to De La Salle’s vision, in order for them to be truly student-centered, De La Salle had to devote a tremendous amount of attention to his teachers, the Brothers. This need is clear throughout *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*. In a section on punishment, De La Salle requires that “Those who have been disorderly in church will be severely punished,” but also reminds his Brothers that “teachers must not punish all kinds of students...in the same manner.”²⁶ At all times and in all aspects of the teaching job, the Brothers are required to maintain alertness to the individuality of each student, made in God’s image. Relationship-building was a crucial part of Lasallian education.

The genius of De La Salle was to take the insights from the great contemplative saints of the century or so before his birth and repackage them with a single vocation in mind: teaching. With a constant awareness of God’s presence, it was much easier for the Brothers to comprehensively

educate the children in ways the poor parents could not. Everything that went on in the Christian Schools was undertaken with the ultimate goal being the salvation of souls. Therefore De La Salle's thought, a Christocentric product of the Christocentric French School of Spirituality, considered teaching an imitation of God's action in the Incarnation, "for he so loved the souls he created that when he saw them involved in sin and unable to be freed by themselves, his zeal and affection for their salvation led him to send his own Son..."²⁷ Lasallian education brooks little half-heartedness. Recognizing an alarming pastoral emergency not in the spread of Protestantism but in the nominally Catholic poor of France, De La Salle helped to make teaching them a profession as well as a vocation.

Applying Lasallian Thought to Higher Education

It is certainly worth pointing out that Lasallian universities certainly can, and have, had a positive and direct impact on the traditional ministry of the Brothers; primary education. As Brother Francis Tri Nguyen points out, "universities have greater opportunities for research, for experimentation, and for the creation of alternative models to help" primary schools.²⁸ However, the single goal of improving elementary schools, important as it unquestionably is, is not enough to warrant calling an entire university *Lasallian*. There would be little profit to the Lasallian tradition or to the Church for Lasallian universities to exist if they were good at being restrictively Lasallian but bad at being universities. While this may seem obvious, there has been significant attention paid in the past two decades to what distinguishes Lasallian higher education. Then-Superior General John Johnston's 1992 talk, "The Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Apostolate of Higher Education: Some Reflections," can be seen as a call for scholarship on the nature of Lasallian institutional identity coming only two years after the promulgation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.²⁹

Though Lasallian higher education had existed for 140 years by the time of Johnston's speech, there was a real fear that its Lasallian distinctiveness had been lost. Lasallian universities are subject to the same forces as other institutions, secular or religious. In order to stay afloat, all schools need to attract students, maintain accreditation, apply for government grants, persuade donors, retain faculty, and improve facilities, all the while staying in the good graces of parents, alumni, faculty, students, and, in the cases of religious schools, the Church. The various forces acting on universities can certainly have a homogenizing effect. Johnston boldly asserted that "if our institutions do not manifest characteristics that distinguish them, they are not worth the trouble."³⁰ After more reflection, however, Johnston decided that "What is important is not that we are different, but that we are authentic."³¹

The manner in which the word *Lasallian* modifies a university is therefore of utmost importance. To confine the Lasallian identity to just a department or two (such as theology and education), or even to a special office (such as campus ministry) is to end up with a non-Lasallian university. The Lasallian character needs to permeate the entire institution. A recent study claims that "Separating Lasallian goals and objectives from academic ones most often has the result of minimizing the former as non-academic and non-essential."³² While this is no doubt true, it seems fair to go another step, and declare that each department must demonstrate some Lasallian values if every student will receive a true Lasallian grounding to go with her Lasallian diploma.

As Salm declares, “Values are most appropriately examined in the classroom setting in a wide range of academic disciplines.”³³

What are the values that might distinguish a Lasallian university? Salm lists four headings under which Lasallian values fall: “good teaching, association and brotherhood, service of the poor, and religious education.”³⁴ From a different angle, Brother John Crawford lists “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.”³⁵ For both Salm and Crawford, the nature and quality of teaching are crucial to an institution’s identity as authentically Lasallian. Salm specifically states that a Lasallian university cannot be in the same category as the great American research institutions, secular or Catholic.³⁶ Given Crawford’s claim that 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,” a Lasallian institution can only be true to its heritage if significant attention is given to educating its educators.

Educating Educators

Contemporary Catholic higher education suffers from a number of perceived ailments. Considering the best means of implementing *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Neil Ormerod asserts that “A Catholic university seeking to maintain its identity has a responsibility to its staff.”³⁷ Discussing the professionalization of theology, Joseph Ratzinger laments the divorce of academic theology from the pastoral life of the Church.³⁸ Salm sadly notes that “in today’s world it becomes increasingly difficult to think of the university as a community.”³⁹ The example of De La Salle himself should be something of a clarion call for all Lasallian institutions, at any educational level, to tend to the formation and development of their staff, both professionally and spiritually. The experience of the Brothers has always been inherently pastoral, so no divorce between pastoral work and any academic discipline—much less theology specifically—should be possible in an authentically Lasallian environment. Universities have grown more compartmentalized, but might not a fostering of Lasallian educational ideals across departmental lines help kill the reality of multiversities where universities once stood? Indeed, Nguyen notes that, at one university that began pushing a Lasallian education project, “from an aggregation of employees they turned into a community of educators committed to the Lasallian educational mission.”⁴⁰

Schackmuth’s aforementioned description of Lasallian education as “student-centered,” has to mean more than it does in non-Lasallian schools. Indeed, Schackmuth strongly believes that Lasallian formation provides something “deeper.”⁴¹ Perhaps this depth is a result of the Lasallian “siblinghood” that assures “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.”⁴² Students at any level will follow the cues of a good teacher, particularly so if they feel the teacher cares about them. Teaching, however, can be an extremely difficult undertaking, particularly over the course of an entire career. With little or sometimes no chance of witnessing the fruit of one’s labors, Crawford believes modern educators feel a desire “to find the right language and encouragement to sustain themselves in their chosen profession.”⁴³ The stakes in higher education, perhaps particularly in Catholic higher education, are high. Johnston, drawing from the language of *Ex Corde*, claims that there is a need to “help our young people to cultivate an ardent longing for the

truth and to grow in their capacity to think rigorously, so as to act rightly and serve humanity better.”⁴⁴ If people devoted to Catholic higher education are going to make this happen over the course of decades-long careers, there is certainly a need for some of De La Salle’s insights on the spirituality and formation of teachers.

Even a cursory study of De La Salle’s writings reveals a deep concern with not merely acquiring good teachers, but developing them. Alfred Pang describes a “pedagogy of persuasion” in De La Salle’s letters, which Pang believes he employed to form his Brothers, even long after they had begun their teaching careers. Given the difficulties associated with mail in seventeenth-century France, Pang rightly notes that De La Salle’s correspondence with the Brothers could not have been easily maintained, and therefore should not be dismissed as a display of sentimentality. On the contrary, Pang claims it is better to “appreciate this exchange of letters as an intentional and creative initiative of De La Salle to systematically form and stabilize the community of Brothers spiritually and pedagogically.”⁴⁵ Indeed, the letters of De La Salle cannot be described as a supervisor’s means of enforcing a uniformity of procedure amongst underlings. Pang points out contradictory advice given separately by De La Salle to two of his Brothers, concluding that, rather than being indicative of a lack of systematic thought on De La Salle’s part, it seems much more reasonable to attribute this to his “pastoral sensitivity to the specific situation that each Brother was in.”⁴⁶ Pang concludes that De La Salle’s letters provide valuable lessons for those working on the formation of teachers today. The community that De La Salle had founded allowed him to tend to each Brother in a personal way, giving each Brother ample opportunity to express his ideas and experiences in his letters to De La Salle. For Pang, De La Salle was able to impart a very Christocentric understanding of the service that teachers provide their students, making De La Salle’s development just as relevant today as ever.⁴⁷

If Pang is correct, the potential audience for Lasallian formation could be enormous. Susan Hines notes that, as of 1990, “Over 90 percent of institutions of higher learning have some sort of formal faculty development on campus,” but there was also “minimal valid evidence indicating teaching and learning has improved as a result.”⁴⁸ While Hines is critical of many attempts at faculty development, she applauds De La Salle’s “systemized, goal-oriented, evidence-based approach where teacher development and evaluation were inter-dependent and provided continual evidence of improvement and efficacy.”⁴⁹ Hines is particularly impressed by De La Salle’s program for the mentoring of new teachers by those more experienced, with “observations and corrections...provided in a noninvasive, minimalistic, and facilitative manner.”⁵⁰ With the impressive expansion of the early Christian Schools as an obvious testament to the prowess of the Brothers as teachers, it is difficult to dispute the success of De La Salle’s faculty development. Though newly-minted professors in today’s universities may well be more refined than the initial pool of teachers that became the Brothers, it is nevertheless true that “Today’s newly recruited professors enter university classrooms with various pedagogical preparations and equipped with substantial, yet varied, educational backgrounds and content expertise.”⁵¹

The lack of adequate pedagogical preparation on the part of many new professors may lead many students to have very disjointed, if not contradictory, undergraduate experiences. Much effort has been expended in Catholic intellectual circles for the past half century to find an intellectual replacement for the old Neo-scholastic synthesis of faith and reason. While a new synthesis may

be desirable, one wonders if, rather than pressing theology or philosophy to serve as the adhesive for this new synthesis, a more practical (Lasallian?) approach of community building may be a worthwhile catalyst for unity in its own right. Exposing all members of a university community to Lasallian values through Lasallian formation might “help ensure a shared vision and university-wide buy-in.”⁵²

The Situation on the Ground

Catholic higher education aims for a very complex goal, which involves not only the intellectual growth of its students, but spiritual, moral, and vocational growth as well. Having a visible Catholic culture, permeated by the values of the Catholic Tradition, is a tremendous aid toward meeting this goal. The decline in the number of priests, Sisters, and Brothers in classrooms has made the maintenance of Catholic culture on campus all the more difficult. As John Wilcox observes, “Religious congregations in the Catholic Church have been the drivers of Catholic culture and the guardians of their own religious heritage...”⁵³ The empowerment of laypersons by the Second Vatican Council, coupled with the somewhat dire reality of declining religious vocations, leaves the responsibility for nurturing Catholic culture, as well as the specific charisms of sponsoring religious congregations, on the shoulders of lay administrators, faculty, staff, and trustees.

In some ways, those responsible for maintaining and cultivating the Lasallian charism are fortunate. Unlike many of the other religious congregations involved in education, the Lasallian tradition is entirely concentrated on teaching. Additionally, as Schackmuth points out, the Lasallian charism is “newer than many, and there are ample handbooks and materials about practicality” that other charisms do not possess. As a result, it comes as no surprise that, within the six Lasallian universities in this country, there exist “great formation programs that other charisms don’t have.” In Schackmuth’s experience, the impact of such programs is clear: “people become more animated, become cheerleaders.”⁵⁴

On the national level, a number of structures provide exposure to the depth of the Lasallian tradition. At Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, the Institute for Lasallian Studies offers master’s degrees in both Lasallian Leadership and Lasallian Studies, and the doctor of education in leadership curriculum includes a number of electives focused on Lasallian heritage. The homepage for the Institute declares that it was “founded to provide Lasallian formation and accompaniment to members of the regional and international Lasallian family.”⁵⁵ Similarly, St. Mary’s College of California is home to the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies. Participants have the chance to experience three summers’ worth of two-week sessions in a program that aims to provide “a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Lasallian charism.”⁵⁶

Such programs have an enormous potential to disseminate Lasallian ideals, but there are shortcomings. Schackmuth acknowledges that Lewis University does send personnel to national formation programs, but believes Lewis “can’t rely on national programs”⁵⁷ because of the time it takes for the few people sent to such programs to transplant what they have learned and build a Lasallian culture. As a result, Lewis began in 2007 the Exploring Lasallian Mission initiative (ELM). Though every new hire at Lewis (“from the grounds crew to the president”)⁵⁸ is required to attend a half-day orientation that offers a basic introduction to Lasallian thought, ELM offers

an additional, voluntary opportunity for employees to “[u]nderstand De La Salle’s methodology of teacher formation and pedagogy,” “...understand what it means to have a vocation or calling,” and “Explore ways in which participants can bring various aspects of our Catholic and Lasallian mission and tradition into their own work or teaching.”⁵⁹ Nearby Lasallian primary and secondary schools also send teachers to attend ELM. It is significant that the program has served “almost 300 people since 2007.”⁶⁰

Of course, building a thriving Lasallian Catholic culture on a campus should ideally involve (at least) a two-pronged approach. Formation of faculty and staff is an important piece, but attention needs to be given to articulating Lasallian values to students as well. It is perhaps, on the whole, more important students witness Lasallian ideals through the examples of the professionals working on their campuses, but these examples can be best followed by the students themselves if they are given the tools to articulate it themselves. Schackmuth is proud of ELM, but admits Lewis “could do a much better job” on the student end. Though potential initiatives on this end somewhat exceed the scope of this paper, it is worth asking whether the formation of teachers at Catholic universities would not be much easier if the teachers of the future are better exposed to the Lasallian tradition as undergraduates.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The American Bishops’ review of *Ex Corde’s* implementation after ten years suggested four subject areas to be taken up by a working group consisting of bishops and university presidents.⁶¹ It will be worthwhile to reflect briefly on each of the four.

1) Continuing dialogue between bishops and presidents toward greater cooperation in advancing the mission of the Church.

John Baptist de La Salle was, throughout his career, a loyal son of the Church. Though his career presumably would have greatly benefitted from aligning himself to the Gallican view so prevalent in the France of his time, De La Salle maintained a tremendous respect for the papacy, as well as the local bishops. This potent respect never implied willingness for the Brothers to be taken over by parish priests or even bishops. De La Salle’s loyalty was potent, but it never meant blind submission.

2) Hiring for mission.

The desire to have a critical mass of Catholic faculty is widespread amongst those concerned about Catholic institutional identity, but it is not always easy (or legal) to assess an applicant’s religious beliefs or other possible indicators of dedication to a university’s mission. However, questions regarding an applicant’s approach to pedagogy could well indicate whether she is willing to consider teaching a part of her vocation, or simply as a job. Even in a large research university, a willingness to consider teaching as a vocation, with significant spiritual demands and ramifications, might tell interviewers a great deal about an applicant’s fitness for teaching in a Catholic university. As De La Salle taught, teaching done well is much more than a job.

3) Forming trustees, faculty, and staff regarding Catholic identity.

The Lasallian tradition is probably a most obvious fit for this one of the four. For almost fifty years laypersons have played increasingly prominent roles on the boards of Catholic universities.

While eminently accomplished and probably well-intentioned regarding mission and identity, trustees wield considerable influence over the governance of schools. A lack of comprehensive understanding of mission and identity on their part could drastically undermine whatever fruitful work is completed by individual faculty members, departments, or offices.

4) *Addressing the need for improved, accurate, and deeper theological and catechetical knowledge through curricular and pastoral means.*

Salm asserts that “no school, not even an institution of higher learning, could claim to inherit the Lasallian tradition if it were to neglect the religious development of its maturing students.”⁶² This should be a goal of non-Lasallian, Catholic schools as well. The Lasallian program of education, despite its practical orientation, refuses on a fundamental level to make future earnings potential the sole goal. If religious education, catechetical and academic, has suffered in the decades since the Second Vatican Council, perhaps a broader familiarity with the Lasallian tradition—which has stimulated so much educational innovation in its history—might reveal a remedy.

Discussions on Catholic institutional identity in higher education could benefit a great deal from an infusion of Lasallian thought. Many of the various societal forces impacting Catholic higher education suggest Lasallian solutions. If higher education is highly competitive, the track record of the early Christian Schools indicates Lasallian teachers have a strong appeal to many students. If even Catholic universities seem to be something less than a community, Lasallian formation of faculty and staff (or all university employees) could forge campus-wide excitement regarding mission as well as real, concrete relationships between professionals that might easily bridge rifts between academic disciplines. If Catholic universities seem altogether separated from the pastoral work of the local Church, the highly pastoral approach of De La Salle’s spirituality of teaching could easily blur the line between the university and the parish, without sacrificing the essential nature of either. If Catholic educators are uncomfortable with trends pressuring students to undertake practical courses of study, the Lasallian experience demonstrates Catholic education does not necessarily have to mean liberal arts. Vocations truly come in all shapes and sizes. If the increasing dearth of religious in classrooms frightens people both lay and clerical, the unique vocation of the Brothers carries a proud heritage of empowering lay people. Salm has observed that “[a]s canonical lay persons themselves, the Brothers can understand and support movements to give lay men and lay women more leadership roles in the Church.”⁶³

No single person, religious order, or school of spirituality represents a solution to all problems facing Catholic higher education. Indeed, it is apparent that the idea of a singularly clear-cut formula for what Catholic universities should be is entirely opposed to the spirit of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, where Pope John Paul II urges them to “a continuous renewal, both as ‘Universities’ and as ‘Catholic.’”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the realities of this era in higher education could benefit greatly from a widespread retrieval of the example and thought of the patron of all teachers.

Notes

1. Mr. Scheweigl is a first-year student in the doctor of theology program at La Salle University and teaches theology at Roncalli High School in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

2. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, August 15, 1990, 7. Accessed at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html.

3. Ibid, footnote 50.

4. The word *university* will be used in a general sense, encompassing all institutions of higher learning regardless of their official status as college, university, etc.

5. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Final Report for the Ten Year Review of *The Application of Ex Corde Ecclesiae for the United States*,” (June 2012), www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/higher-education/index.cfm.

6. Ibid.

7. This section is indebted to Luke Salm, FSC, *The Work is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* (Romeville, Illinois: Christian Brothers Publications, 1989), 47-57.

8. Ibid, 53.

9. Ibid, 54.

10. John Baptist de La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents*, trans. and ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 2002), 14.

11. Luke Salm, FSC, “Is the Lasallian University an Oxymoron?” *AXIS Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 2, no. 2 (2011).

12. John Johnston, FSC, “The Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Apostolate of Higher Education,” Presentation at Encuentro III, Saint Mary’s College of California, Moraga, CA, July 13, 1992, *AXIS Journal of Higher Education* 3, no. 3 (2012):3.

13. Salm, “Oxymoron,” 9.

14. Martin Lasa, FSC, “The World and Relations with the World,” trans. Brother Aidan Kilty, FSC, in *Lasallian Themes* 2, (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1992), 270.

15. Gilles Beaudet, FSC, “Spirit of the World,” trans. Brother Augustine Loes, FSC, in *Lasallian Themes* 1, (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1992), 282.

16. Lasa, 70.

17. Quoted in Beaudet, 283.

18. Lasa, 281.

19. Quoted in Lasa, 271.

20. Ibid, 272.
21. Ibid, 276.
22. Luke Salm, FSC, "Lasallian Values in Higher Education," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 6, no. 2 (2015):4.
23. Ibid, 5.
24. Richard Tristano, Mary Catherine Fox, Melissa Luedtke and Judith Schaefer, "Lasallian Assessment: Charism and the University," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2009):3.
25. Dr. Kurt Schackmuth, telephone interview with author, July 23, 2015.
26. John Baptist de La Salle, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, trans. F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arnandez, FSC (Landover: Lasallian Publications, 1996), 146.
27. John Baptist de La Salle, "Meditations for the Time of Retreat," in *John Baptist de la Salle: The Spirituality of Education*, ed. Carl Koch, Jeffrey Calligan, FSC, and Jeffrey Gros, FSC (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 61.
28. Francis Tri Nguyen, FSC, "Lasallian Universities' Identities in the Twenty-First Century: An Analytical Research Paper," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2009), 5.
29. Johnston.
30. Johnston, 4.
31. Ibid, 11.
32. Tristano, 6.
33. Salm "Oxymoron," 7.
34. Salm, "Lasallian Values," 5.
35. John M. Crawford, FSC, "Lasallian Pedagogy: Who We Are Is What We Teach," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 6, no. 2 (2015), 2.
36. Salm, "Oxymoron," 3.
37. Neil Ormerod, "Mission Driven and Identity Shaped: *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* Revisited," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2013), 332.
38. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 116.

39. Salm, "Oxymoron," 8.
40. Nguyen, 27.
41. Schackmuth.
42. Crawford, 3.
43. Ibid, 6.
44. Johnston, 7.
45. Alfred K. M. Pang, "Uncovering a Pedagogy of Persuasion in the Letters of John Baptist de La Salle," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 6, no. 2 (2015), 5.
46. Ibid, 7.
47. Ibid, 14.
48. Susan R. Hines, "Evaluating Faculty Development: Looking to the Past to Improve the Future," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 3, no. 3 (2012), 1.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid, 4.
51. Ibid, 9.
52. Ibid, 11.
53. John R. Wilcox, "Together and by Association: The Legacy of James Luther Adams and the Future of Religious Colleges and Universities," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 2, no. 2 (2011), 2.
54. Schackmuth.
55. Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, "Institute for Lasallian Studies Homepage," <http://www.smumn.edu/welcome-to-brst-marys/institutes-affiliates/institute-for-lasallian-studies>.
56. St. Mary's College of California, "Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies Homepage," <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/living-lasallian/campus-programs-resources/faculty-staff-opportunities/the-buttimer-institute-of>
57. Schackmuth.
58. Ibid.
59. Lewis University, "Exploring Lasallian Mission Homepage," <http://www.lewisu.edu/elm/>.

60. Schackmuth.
61. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
62. Salm, "Lasallian Values," 8.
63. Ibid, 7.
64. John Paul II, 7.

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