

A Pedagogy of Fraternity

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Introduction

In the sixteenth century, the Renaissance humanists, the Catholic Church, and the Protestant Reformers multiplied calls for initiatives to develop the provision of schools in Europe. This created an unprecedented growth in schools in every country.

Prior to that, the universities existed; and some of them were highly esteemed and attended by students from every country. The Jesuits, the Oratorians, the Fathers of Christian Doctrine of César of Bus, and the disciples of Saint Joseph Calasanz did wonders in promoting colleges. But both these two sorts of establishment accepted only the sons of rich families.

Fortunately, the promoters of education thought that it should also be of benefit for boys of the lower classes and also for girls, who up until then had been excluded from education. This was a great innovation. Nevertheless, "rudimentary schools," created by the Catholic Church after the decline of the Roman Empire, had existed in France since the end of the fifth century. But many of these schools had declined or disappeared. They needed to be revitalized.

We shall not attempt to retrace here in detail the forms that this school movement took. Instead we shall summarize briefly the school situation familiar to John Baptist de La Salle in France at the end of the seventeenth century, a situation which continued up until the French Revolution in 1789.

The School Situation in France at the End of the Seventeenth Century

A Society of Orders [Classes]

Around the year 1700, the population of France had reached 20 million inhabitants. Since the Middle Ages, society was divided into three "Orders," including firstly the clergy who numbered around 400,000, secondly the nobility numbering some 370,000, and finally the "*Tiers État*" [Third Estate]. If we include the newly enriched *bourgeoisie* who aspired to identification with the nobility, then the clergy and nobility came to a total of one million or 5% of the whole.

Clergy and nobility were distinguished from the other 95%, the "Third Estate," by virtue of:

- their social status,
- their privileges,
- their professional activities,
- their power and wealth,
- and also by their system of education.

The colleges and universities were reserved for them; but this situation of inequality eventually came to an end on the night of August 4, 1789, when the *Assemblée Nationale Constituante* [National Constituent Assembly] voted to suppress these privileges and by the same token suppressed the two-tier system of education.

Schools for the People

The schools attached to parishes, dioceses, and monasteries had first seen the light of day after 476 AD but had experienced mixed fortunes since then. In some towns, they had gradually developed into colleges or universities, while in others they had simply vegetated for twelve centuries.

These *Petites Écoles* [Little Schools], as they were called, were somewhat looked down upon; but they received a fresh impetus in the sixteenth century. The Council of Trent had seen the need to give instruction to the people, especially in the religious domain. The Protestants were of the same mind with a view to spreading their ideas. Consequently, there was a lively competition between the two Churches. The Council of Trent wanted to see a school in every parish for the purpose of teaching catechism. At the same time, many religious congregations of women were founded to open schools for girls.

Diversity in the Little Schools

The development of schools was poorly controlled and even sometimes anarchic; and in France it eventually led to the creation of five types of schools for the people.

- There were the fee-paying Little Schools for boys or for girls which were run by lay Masters or Mistresses. They were set up mostly in towns and less frequently in villages. They were the most numerous type, and they were normally controlled by the *Chantre* [choirmaster] in the name of the Bishop. The Masters and Mistresses were selected and appointed by the Church. The education they provided was their way of making a living. The work of Jacques de Batencour entitled *L'Escole Paroissiale* [*The Parish School*], published in 1654, gives us a good description of these schools.
- There were the so-called Charity Schools, set up as part of the Church's work for the poor. Each parish was required to open a gratuitous school for the children of the poor who were listed in the "Register of the Poor."
- General Hospitals were set up in certain towns from the seventeenth century on to control the itinerant beggars, who were considered to be violent and dangerous; and in these hospitals, education was given to the children who were interned with their parents. Such schools were naturally gratuitous.
- Many convents of women religious engaged in teaching ran two schools simultaneously: a free day school for poor girls and a fee-paying boarding school for the girls of rich families. The two schools functioned separately.
- We must also mention the schools run by the Corporation of Writing Masters in some large towns. Their *clientèle* was well off; and they charged fees, even high fees.

This collection of establishments covered the educational needs of all the different levels of the Third Estate. However, we should not deceive ourselves. In 1690, only 20% of children were attending schools; and there were wide variations according to regions and social *milieux*. Then there were the real poor, known as *mendiants* [beggars], whether itinerant or settled. They were those whose means were insufficient to meet their needs and who had to rely on public assistance. For their education, the parish *Bureau des Pauvres* [Poor Committee] provided a Charity School for those who were residents, while the General Hospitals looked after the itinerants. Some studies made at the time show that the poor generally comprised 10% of the population or 1,800,000 to 2,000,000 individuals.

The Clientèle of the Brothers' Schools

The above “outline reminder” raises the question of the *clientèle* of the schools run by the Brothers. By clarifying this point, we shall be able to understand better certain initiatives of De La Salle and also the subsequent development of the Institute’s establishments. It is clear from his biography, his actions, and his writings that De La Salle at no time limited himself to the 10% made up by the poor children. He responded to the pleas of bishops, parish priests, and even civil authorities and agreed to send a community of Brothers to the schools attended by the children of the “artisans and the poor,” in other words the whole range of popular urban society. But he was absolutely determined that those schools should remain accessible for the poor, and consequently that they should be gratuitous. As he wrote in the *Rule*, “The Brothers everywhere will run schools gratuitously and this is essential for their Institute.”³ He repeats this, using almost identical words, in the Formula of Vows of 1694,⁴ in the “Memorandum on the Habit,”⁵ and in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*.⁶ Finally, in *Meditation* #92 for December 31, he insists, “You must run your school gratuitously, that is essential to your Institute.”⁷ He could not be more explicit. History shows that the Brothers remained fiercely attached to this principle right up to the end of the nineteenth century.

Over recent decades, it has been repeatedly said that De La Salle founded schools “for the poor,” for “street children,” for “orphans,” or for “abandoned children.” That is historically incorrect. However, he was being original by deciding that his schools should be open to all, and should be *gratuitous for all*. It was this which in fact provoked the anger of the Masters of the Little Schools and brought on law suits, the wrecking of the schools, and condemnations. Paradoxically, he fought and suffered to keep “the rich” in his schools and not the poor. Nobody disputed the presence of the poor, but they did contest the free admission of those who could have paid. Some of his projects showed that he was open to other ways of operating, for example the Sunday Academies for young workers, the classes for the Irish boys, and especially the Saint Yon foundation which had a lengthy existence.

His gratuitous schools, which mixed together all the socio-economic strata, lasted until the French Revolution; and the Brothers added boarding schools in various towns of France. The suppression of all privileges on the night of August 4, 1789, abolished the three “Orders” of society and the duality of educational systems. When the Brothers’ schools reopened in France at the start of the nineteenth century, they were naturally directed to the whole of society, including the *bourgeoisie* and the nobility. However, the Brothers remained attached to the principle of gratuity.

John Baptist de La Salle's Break with the Past

Up to the age of 28, De La Salle had no intention of devoting himself to schools. He says this explicitly in his *Memorandum on the Beginnings*.⁸ He was led to take that step by certain events which his first biographers recount in detail. He personally saw in this spiritual journey the action of God in his life. Thoughtful and methodical as he was, he analyzed the situation in the schools of his time. The results of his discernment were hardly encouraging. For example,

- his initial contact with the Masters recruited by Adrien Nyel showed him their lack of education and professional training;
- the separation into schools for the poor and schools for the rich seemed to him to be contrary to the teaching of the Gospel;
- the repressive discipline to which pupils were subjected clashed with his human values and Christians beliefs;
- the teaching contents and teaching methods in use were inadequate; and
- the premises in which teachers and pupils operated were often unsuitable and in poor condition.

All that was the complete opposite of what he himself had experienced in college and at university. From 1679 on, he found himself confronted directly by this state of affairs. He set about correcting matters, starting with what he considered to be the priority need, namely the training of his Masters. This was the key to all the rest.

There were several other aspects of the situation in schools which drew his attention and motivated his efforts. It is useful to recall them so as to see the extent of his break with the past:

- the adoption of French as the language of instruction instead of Latin;
- the replacement of individual teaching with teaching in classes “simultaneously”;
- the organizing of pupils into homogenous groups of 60 to 70 children working together;
- schools with two, three or more classes, to meet the growing demand for schooling;
- premises that were adequate in size, properly arranged and furnished to promote effectiveness;
- standardization of school equipment such as books, paper, pens, blackboards, etc. to facilitate work in common;
- strict lines of progression in every subject matter;
- fixed timetables with checks on application and punctuality;
- maintaining good order out of respect for the work of everybody; and
- relations between school and parents.

This list is long but not exhaustive. We should add to it the essential, leading element for education in a school, namely the system of pupil support.

A Pedagogy Based on Fraternity

The Idea of Fraternity

The Founder's biographer, Jean-Baptiste Blain, states that "the change of habit led to the change of name." Beginning in 1683-1684, the Masters asked De La Salle if they could call themselves "Brothers." Blain continues, "The title of Brothers was the appropriate one, and that is what they decided, leaving the title of schoolmasters to those for whom teaching was their way of making a living." A little further on, Blain adds that the title "meant that as Brothers to one another they should show mutual signs of warm, spiritual friendship, and that they should regard themselves as older Brothers of those who attended their classes, exercising their ministry with hearts full of charity."⁹

When we consider his writings as a whole, it becomes clear that De La Salle sought to set in motion "*a pedagogy of fraternity.*" The idea gradually became more precise, and the means to implement it took shape. In the course of developments from 1679 to 1691, there appeared the concept of *association*; and the principal stages of this process are known to us.

- The adoption of the title "Brothers" was a decisive event. In order to understand its importance, we must underline the fact that the word was being applied to a group of Lay Masters who had not as yet assumed the status of religious. Its inspiration came from the atmosphere prevailing in the group. It was not a simple appellation or a label but a question of their style of life.
- The lived experience of fraternity came to the fore in 1686 during the Assembly called by De La Salle. Having exhorted them to work well, he left them alone so as not to influence them. They proceeded to draw up proposals for their community life, and they asked if they could pronounce vows. This experience of freedom and autonomy reinforced the feeling of fraternity.
- A few years later, at a time of crisis, this strong bond asserted itself in the name of association in the "Heroic Vow" of November 21, 1691.¹⁰ This was fraternity being recognized and strongly affirmed.
- Three years later, on June 6, 1694, it was extended to twelve Brothers united with John Baptist de La Salle. We can say that by that date the concept of association was clear for the Brothers. That enabled them to take an important decision regarding the non-clerical character of the Institute.
- Confirmation of this came on the occasion of the "Letter of the Principal Brothers," of April 1, 1714,¹¹ which solved a serious crisis by invoking association.
- This was further confirmed by the calm process of the General Chapter of 1717.

It was on this latter occasion that De La Salle showed his approval by agreeing to draw up new versions of two fundamental texts, namely the *Rule* and the *Conduct of Schools*.¹²

Characteristics of the Pedagogy of Fraternity

As the etymology of the word indicates, pedagogy is the art of guiding pupils during their time at school. I would like to point out here six features of the pedagogy of fraternity, which was

promoted by John Baptist de La Salle and continued throughout the history of the Institute, as can be traced in successive editions of the *Conduct of Schools* from 1706 to 1916.

Fraternity Is Warm-Hearted

A reading of the *Conduct of Schools* allows us to see that human relations are at the heart of the Lasallian school. All participants in the life of the school are involved: pupils, teachers, parents, and indirectly even parishes and town councils. For De La Salle, there is one more essential partner in educational relationships, namely *God*. It appears that De La Salle understood very well that the driving force of personal growth (and hence of education) was essentially bound up with human relationships. He frequently stresses this in his writings. For example, twenty times in all (and especially in his *Meditations*), he asks the teachers to win the hearts of the children. In the *Rule* of the Brothers, he does not hesitate to use words such as love and tenderness, especially in relation to those who need them most.

This insistence shows clearly that he wanted to break with the social and educational tradition of severity, repression, and corporal punishment. In Chapter 15 of the *Conduct of Schools*, he writes on the subject of “Corrections” and says that a school is well run when it can do without corrections. Such an orientation is evidently essential for a pedagogy of fraternity. It would later lead the Brothers to make several important decisions.

- In 1720, an introductory paragraph was inserted into the chapter on “Corrections” in order to bring greater precision to Lasallian thinking on this matter, in effect placing so many prior conditions on any punishments that they became practically impossible.
- In the General Chapter of 1777, corporal punishment was suppressed.
- In 1811, the shift from a pedagogy based on repression to one based on motivation was confirmed.
- In subsequent editions of the *Conduct*, new methods of emulation and motivation were introduced.
- The editions of 1903 and 1916 included an invitation to study psychology so as to give better support to the pupils.

It is made clear in writings dating from the start of the nineteenth century that the title “Brother” is incompatible with the use of corporal punishment. De La Salle was convinced that the educational relationship should enable the child to develop as a person, to become free from feelings of alienation and develop a Gospel mind by discovering the love of God through the love shown by teachers. By analogy, that is also what should happen in the relations between adults working in association as an educational community.

Fraternity Is Courteous and Polite

De La Salle and his first Masters lived in an age when correct behavior and civility were of special importance in French society. Courtliness had existed in the Middle Ages, but it was restricted to the upper classes. It took on new vitality in the sixteenth century, in the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam (*La Civilité puérile*¹³) and in Italian writings on civility which had a great

influence in France during the first half of the seventeenth century. This gave rise to the model figure of the *honnête homme*¹⁴ which was seen as something to be imitated and which spread through the various strata of society via the schools.

De La Salle himself, during his childhood at home and in his education in the *Collège des Bons Enfants*, was immersed in an atmosphere of correct behavior and civility. He felt its benefits and advantages, personal and social; and he recognized its usefulness in his own life. His biographers tell us of the shock he received in his encounter with the first Masters. It is reasonable to conclude that this was the origin of his decision to give an important place to good behavior and civility in his schools.

This change was first signaled by, among other things, the adoption of a new habit for the Masters. Twenty years later, even before drawing up the *Rule* of the Brothers or the *Conduct of Schools*, he published the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*.¹⁵ This showed the importance he attached to the matter. It was one of the foundations of his view of human nature, as is evident in its preface. Since civility is a necessary condition for living with others in society, it is the human basis of fraternity. There is a clear link between education in civility and the desire to provide a pedagogy that is fraternal. De La Salle's book was a big success in France up until the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the *Conduct of Schools* during the nineteenth century, the expression "decorum and civility" was replaced by the word "politeness." On the other hand, a new chapter was added with the title "The Politeness Lesson." This continued up to the twentieth century in the schools and in the initial training of the Brothers themselves. It indicates a constant concern, even though the word politeness seems to be less rich in content than the words decorum and civility.

The subject is very relevant today. When civility disappears, the social fabric is destroyed. That is the tragedy current in many societies today. For De La Salle and the Brothers of the seventeenth century, educating the children "of artisans and the poor" in civility was a way of giving them an extra chance to become integrated into society and to gain professional promotion. That is still true today.

Fraternity Is Ambitious

In the organization of society in the seventeenth century, the members of the Third Estate had little chance for economic advancement. The world of the Corporations had reached the high point of its development and could go no further. On the other hand, new kinds of employment were being created by national administrative reorganization and industrial development. The expression *métiers de plume* [occupations of the pen] is sometimes used, and schools could prepare people for them. That is what the Lasallian school sought to do, and with excellent success.

This aim was based on a sincere belief in the pupils' capacity to make progress and to succeed, provided they were properly directed and trained. That is what led De La Salle and the Brothers to offer programs of learning that were more demanding, more rigorous and of a higher level than those in the Little Schools. To achieve this, several things were needed.

- It was not enough to learn to read and to study the catechism. It was necessary to read with understanding what was printed in the ordinary fonts of the time and in the fonts of “civic life” (peculiar to the period), as well as all kinds of handwriting frequently found in offices. Not forgetting Latin, since pupils might well come across it in their subsequent employment.
- It was not enough to develop a natural, personal handwriting. It was necessary to master calligraphy in round hand and in italics.
- It was necessary to learn the French rules of orthography, which were very complicated and still not completely standardized at the time.
- Besides the four basic operations in arithmetic, it was necessary to be able to work out problems based on concrete situations of life, since one might be employed in accountancy.

To sum things up, Lasallian schools sought quality and excellence in everything, in order to increase the pupils’ chances of employment and promotion. The search for excellence concerned the Masters themselves in the first place. However, perseverance in it inevitably brought on the attacks of the Writing Masters, with lawsuits and condemnations. But the Brothers took no notice of these things, because they considered that what they were doing was necessary for the future of their students.

This ambitious fraternity was a constant factor in the history of the Institute. We can cite the following elements.

- The initiatives stemming from the Founder himself: Sunday school and the Saint Yon establishment which went beyond the idea of a school in the strict sense.
- The advanced programs of the boarding schools which were opened in several towns during the second half of the eighteenth century.
- The immediate adoption of a new curriculum in the schools in line with the Guizot Laws of 1833, specifically history, geography, scientific observation, technical drawing, and singing.
- The reopening of boarding schools during the same period, which were so successfully organized that they became models for the whole country.
- The gradual development of secondary education with a modern curriculum (i.e., without Latin) during the second half of the nineteenth century. Teaching methods observed by the Ministry of Public Education and incorporated into the creation of a Modern Baccalaureate.
- The introduction into the *Conduct of Schools* of 1903 and 1916 of new subjects including typing, shorthand, gymnastics, and artistic drawing, etc.
- Examples could be multiplied in the light of developments that occurred throughout the Lasallian network during the twentieth century.

Underlying these changes was the desire to give the pupils all that was new and useful for their professional careers and for their insertion into the society in which they lived. That explains the general development in higher qualifications in the Institute globally speaking. This led to the appearance of establishments of secondary education, followed by institutes of higher education.

These developments would not have seemed strange to John Baptist de La Salle, who did not wish to exclude anyone from his schools.

Fraternity Means Solidarity

Guided by the Gospel and by his understanding of fraternity, De La Salle was uncomfortable with the division between schools for the poor and schools for the rich which existed in his time. Referring to Saint Paul as he often did, he wanted to “proclaim the Gospel to all” as the saint had done. He rejected, therefore, the way gratuitous Charity Schools were segregated from the fee-paying Little Schools, because it produced a division in society. His decision to open his schools freely to all astonished and annoyed the Masters of the fee-paying schools who saw some of their clientele – and hence their income – deserting them to go to the Brothers. These Masters protested and complained to the *Chantre* and brought De La Salle before the courts. They succeeded in getting him condemned.

On that occasion, De La Salle showed the force of his conviction by stubbornly refusing to go to the Bureau of the Poor to check on the financial situation of the parents of the pupils. While the Founder’s attitude was unacceptable for the Masters, we can presume that it was, on the other hand, socially defensible and quite in line with the Gospel. He did not want the poor to feel stigmatized and rejected, but rather to be accepted and to become integrated, having the same chances and the same openings for socio-economic advancement. In the Brothers’ *Rule*, it was stated that the poor should even be loved more than the rest.

In defense of gratuitousness, the Brothers followed the example of the Founder for a long time. The decision to mix pupils of all economic levels in the same class was perfectly defensible as a manifestation of the universal fraternity found in the Gospel. De La Salle wrote in the *Rule* of the Brothers, “They will show equal affection for all the pupils and even more for the poor than for the rich, because by their Institute they are given much greater responsibility with the former than with the latter.”¹⁶ And again, “They will love all their pupils tenderly, without however being familiar with any of them or giving them anything through particular friendship.”¹⁷

These two paragraphs of the *Rule* of 1718 enable us to understand how De La Salle envisaged the fraternal relationship between teacher and pupils:

- prudence to ensure that it stays on the educational level;
- invitation to go beyond the emotional or affective level;
- active compassion for the poor, and not just the economically poor but also children in difficulties of a social, moral or spiritual nature; and
- his use of the words “poor” and “rich” in the same sentence shows clearly that De La Salle wanted to have social inclusiveness in his schools.

This “solidarity in fraternity” is something that developed gradually as the Institute itself developed. It was not limited to the children attending the schools but included all the other young people in need of education or pastoral care.

- Children who were not attending school were admitted to catechism classes on Sundays and Feast Days.
- The enforced “boarders” of Saint Yon who needed this solidarity in their training.

In the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, this variety in the types of foundation was considerably enlarged. On April 16, 1859, Brother Philippe, Superior General, was received in private audience by Pope Pius IX; and he used the occasion to detail the series of new foundations for the benefit of apprentices, workers, prisoners, soldiers, orphans, deaf-mutes. Other types of foundations were added later, including the Saint Francis Xavier and the Saint Benedict Joseph Labre foundations.¹⁸

The twentieth century was even more prolific in diversifying establishments world-wide. As examples, we can cite orphanages, centers for drug addicts, Boy’s Towns, work with travelers,¹⁹ centers for literacy, for agriculture and for student support.

This all shows that Lasallian Fraternity is universal. By means of education, it seeks to help young people in difficulty to become integrated into school, into the Church, and into society. Every effort toward integration contributes to the fraternity of human kind.

Fraternity Is Universal

John Baptist de La Salle had some difficulty in laying aside his canonry. The cathedral chapter and the archbishop of Rheims did not want to lose someone of his caliber. A few years later, in 1688, he had to fight to get authorization to leave Rheims and go to Paris. His archbishop saw the value of the good results from the first Lasallian schools in Rheims and did not want to hand over such a valuable card to another diocese. However, limitations of that kind did not fit in with the views of the Founder.

His vision included all the dioceses of France; and he was no doubt already thinking of Rome, which was for him the center of the Church. Clearly, these things must be studied against the background of the upheavals in the Church of France during that period. Ultramontanes like De La Salle were not well liked. We know that his views led to the sending of two Brothers to Rome, in 1702. When one of them returned to France, De La Salle decided to make an exception to his universal rule by allowing Gabriel Drolin to remain on his own in Rome for a number of years. In effect, he was making an exception to the practice of working in association which was at the heart of the Formula of Vows. It demonstrated the essential catholicity of his image of the Institute.

John Baptist de La Salle had seen the way the Masters of the Little Schools worked, and he realized that it did not fit in with what he had in mind. He considered that teachers had an irreplaceable role to play and that they needed to be prepared for it. He wanted *Masters who were educated in human terms and professionally competent.*

They needed to be well prepared and constantly in search of improvement, quality, and excellence. We know from his letters that he demanded from the Brothers “that your school be well run.” To this end, he soon organized training sessions for the Masters. Later that was done

in the novitiate.²⁰ The “Memorandum on the Habit” and the *Conduct of Schools* regarding the “Training of New Teachers”²¹ give us an idea of the direction of this training. As far as possible, the beginners were entrusted for several months to experienced teachers before being left to work on their own. They initiated “Community Exercises” so that each one could perfect his knowledge and skills. Most of his writings were directed to his Masters. During the September holidays, he brought them together to evaluate the past year and to reflect on the practice of their ministry.

We find this concern for training and for competence in teachers present throughout the history of the Institute. In the second half of the eighteenth century, scholasticates²² were set up. They were systematized a century later, and there was even a higher level scholasticate. Vacation courses were organized. Initial teacher training began in the juniorate,²³ continued in the novitiate and finished in the scholasticate.

The concern for training spread to all the Regions of the Institute in the twentieth century, because the search for knowledge and skills was seen as a matter of justice to the pupils rather than just a personal search for reputation.

Masters working in association: We see this concretely right from the first years in Rheims. This was unusual for the period, since the Masters of the Little Schools worked singly. The reasons that motivated De La Salle to make a change were certainly varied, but it proved to be the most fruitful aspect of his educational insights. As we know, association became the fundamental characteristic of the Institute and then of the Lasallian world of today. Several years of experimentation had to pass, with difficulties, reflection and prayer, in order to arrive at a clear understanding of the spirit of association and how it operates.

The amazing story of the powerful development of association: The positive impact of association was not restricted to the time of the Founder. Its development can be seen right up to 2015, and we still feel the benefits of it. This was evident at certain dramatic and unsettled points of our history. Examples include:

- the time of the French Revolution of 1789 with the decree of the suppression of the Institute of 1791, forcing the Brothers to regroup in Italy;
- the polemic in France over *Enseignement Mutuel* [Teaching through Monitors] 1815-1830, a method of teaching that would have put an end to the central feature of Lasallian pedagogy regarding the teacher’s close contact with the pupils;
- the Laws of 1881 against Teaching Congregations in France brought about a second suppression of the Institute on July 7, 1904; and
- to this we can add the coming to power of regimes hostile to religion in Mexico, Eastern Europe, Muslim countries, China, Vietnam, etc.

It is surprising to note how the power of association made it possible for the Brothers to overcome these obstacles and to find alternative solutions, both short term and long term. During recent decades, we have become more aware of the central role of association for the dynamic functioning of the Lasallian network and for its future. That is no doubt due to the fact that from the beginnings it was association that ensured:

- the cohesion of educational teams,
- the quality of collective discernment,
- the power of stability in a shared project,
- the willingness and solidarity of the members,
- the warmth of conviviality, and
- the possibilities for openness to all.

This was everything that De La Salle expected of the Brothers and their communities, and it has continued to grow and develop. It is our common heritage and the guarantee of our future. We can legitimately be proud of it. The dynamic functioning by association was evident in all of the forty-five General Chapters that have been held since the origins of the Institute.

Fraternity Is Gospel Inspired

In the seventeenth century, the French Church expressly required the Little Schools under its authority to teach children to read so that they could study the catechism. This was in line with the decisions of the Council of Trent.

John Baptist de La Salle was in agreement with this goal, but he found it insufficient. In the third point of *Meditation* #160, for the Feast Saint Louis King of France, he says quite clearly that a Lasallian school must aim both at “the good of the Church and also that of the State”; and he adds,

You will procure the good of the Church by making them true Christians docile to the truths of the faith and the maxims of the holy Gospel. You will procure the good of the State by teaching them to read and to write and everything else which relates to your ministry regarding external behavior. But you must combine piety to external behavior, otherwise your work will be of little use.²⁴

In his writings and his action related to the Brothers, John Baptist de La Salle took very seriously the double goal of education to be human and Christian, as we say nowadays. What we have said here relates mostly to human education. To conclude, we must refer to what the Founder means in the third point of *Meditation* #92, for December 31, when he says, “Have you been attentive to ensure that your disciples are instructed in their Religion? That is your principal obligation, although the others should not be neglected.”²⁵ That explains why:

- out of the forty class hours per week, twenty were devoted to religious activities such as prayers, reflections, examination of conscience, catechism, Mass, etc.; and
- to help the work of his Masters, the Founder published five texts for teaching catechism and other texts for daily prayers, attendance at Mass, and hymns to be sung at the end of the school day.

The importance attached to these things remained present in successive editions of the *Conduct of Schools*. The globalization of the Institute in the twentieth century altered things, since it saw an increase in the numbers of establishments with a large element of religious pluralism, which

has led to a revision of the approaches to religious education. When tolerance and mutual understanding between pupils of different religions prevails in a school, that is already a tremendous example of human fraternity and ecumenism. This is what De La Salle had in mind when he wrote in the third point of *Meditation* #198, “They [the pupils] should be kind to one another, forgiving one another just as God has forgiven them through Jesus Christ. And they should love one another, just as Jesus Christ loves them.”²⁶ What a fine program of social fraternity! Utopian perhaps, but so attractive!

Conclusion: The Ministry of Fraternity

As De La Salle explains in the first two *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*,²⁷ the Christian teacher has been chosen, raised up, and sent by God to contribute to the realization of his plan of salvation, which is a plan of love for all the men and women on earth. The Founder says that this participation in God’s salvific action is our “ministry” in its primary sense of “service.” In the Institute, we readily speak of the Ministry of Christian Education. Personally, I prefer to talk of the “Ministry of God’s Love” or the “Ministry of Fraternity.” On this basis, we can say we are “elder Brothers” of those whom we serve.

That is what gives the teaching profession its eminent dignity and justifies the demands De La Salle made on his teachers:

- the practice of the twelve virtues of a good teacher as expounded by Brother Agathon and which grew to fifteen in the final edition of the *Conduct of Schools*;
- availability and stability;
- generous commitment; and
- exemplariness in all things.

To attain this, he thought that teachers needed to be part of a team, supported in their progress, sustained in times of difficulty, and congratulated when they succeeded. All these elements are precisely what constitutes the role of association.

For more than two centuries, the Brothers were supported in the exercise of their ministry by the twenty-two successive editions of the *Conduct of Schools*. It was a true blessing; but the last edition dates from 1916, a century ago!

After that, it went through a period of stagnation up to 1951, when the celebration of the Tercentenary of the Birth of Founder marked a renewed interest in it, encouraged by the first printed publication of the 1706 manuscript version of the *Conduct of Schools*.

A similar line of development, although in a different form, was followed in the *Declaration* of the General Chapter of 1966-1967, in *The Characteristics of a Lasallian School* document in 1987, and in the *Rule* of the Brothers in the same year. When we read these texts, we are aware that the values for the education of the young that we seek to promote in the world of today are the following: *peace, fraternity, human dignity, justice, solidarity, interiority, freedom, a critical mind, and responsible autonomy*. These values form a coherent whole and relate to *fraternity between individuals*, which they prepare for, make possible, and reinforce. In today’s terms, this

translates as the *ministry of universal fraternity* intended by John Baptist de La Salle in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.

We are reminded of this very clearly in article #53 of the 1987 *Rule* of the Brothers.

The Brothers [we can add Lasallians] seek to be at one and the same time, Brothers among themselves, Brothers with the adults they meet and elder Brothers to the young people entrusted to them. In all their relationships, they are careful to promote the development of individuals and to respond to their deepest aspirations.²⁸

Is there any finer ministry than this in the world today?

Endnotes

1. This essay was prepared to be delivered at a conference in the Aula Magna at the FSC Casa Generalizia on May 12, 2015.

2. Brother Léon Lauraire is a noted Lasallian scholar on the topic of *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*. Once the Director of Lasallian Studies at the FSC Casa Generalizia in Rome (1991-1993), his publications include: *MEL Bulletin #12: Conduct of Schools, An Overall Plan of Human and Christian Education*, translated by Allen Geppert (Rome, 2004); *Cahiers Lasalliens #61: The Conduct of Schools, A Contextual Approach*, translated by Leonard Marsh (Rome, 2001); *Cahiers Lasalliens #62: The Conduct of Schools, A Pedagogical Approach*, translated by Allen Geppert (Rome, 2006); *Cahiers Lasalliens #63: The Conduct of Schools, A Comparative Approach*, translated by Allen Geppert (Rome, 2011); and *Cahiers Lasalliens #67: The Conduct of Schools, A Diachronic Approach*, translated by Allen Geppert (Rome, 2014).

3. “Rule” in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, translated and edited by Augustine Loes and Ronald Isetti (Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 36.

4. “Formula of Vows of 1694” in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, page 204.

5. “Memorandum on the Habit” in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, pages 181-191.

6. *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, translated by William Battersby and edited by Daniel Burke (Lasallian Publications, 1993).

7. In *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, translated by Richard Arandez and Augustine Loes and edited by Augustine Loes and Francis Huether (Lasallian Publications, 1994).

8. Although this document has been lost, attempts have been made to reconstruct its content by using references from the three earliest biographies of De La Salle: Bernard, Maillefer, and principally Blain.

9. *Cahiers Lasalliens* 7, page 241. CHECK THE REFERENCE

10. “Heroic Vow” in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, page 203.

11. *The Conduct of Schools*, translated by F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arnandez and edited with notes by William Mann (Lasallian Publications, 1996).

12. *The Conduct of Schools*, translated by F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arnandez and edited with notes by William Mann (Lasallian Publications, 1996).

13. In English, *A Handbook on Manners for Children* (1530).

14. In English, “a decent, cultured man of the world” (Oxford Dictionaries).

15. *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, translated by Richard Arnandez and edited by Gregory Wright (Lasallian Publications, 1990).

16. “Rule” in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, page 39.

17. “Rule” in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, page 38.

18. Les Œuvres de perseverance, les Patronages, l’oeuvre de saint François Xavier, l’oeuvre de saint Benoît Joseph Labre....

19. The term “travelers” (preferred over the somewhat pejorative terms “tinkers” and “gypsies”) is used to refer to “a traditionally itinerant ethnic group who maintains a set of traditions.” Their origin is a matter of some dispute.

20. A novitiate is a house of study and discernment for novice members of a Roman Catholic religious congregation.

21. *The Conduct of Schools* (Lasallian Publications, 1996), pages 256-271.

22. A scholasticate is a college-level house of general study for those preparing for membership in a Roman Catholic religious congregation.

23. A juniorate is a house of high school study for candidates for membership in a Roman Catholic religious congregation.

24. *Meditation* #160.3 in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Lasallian Publications, 1994).

25. *Meditation #92.3 in Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Lasallian Publications, 1994).

26. *Meditation #198.3 in Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Lasallian Publications, 1994).

27. In *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Lasallian Publications, 1994), the retreat meditations are #193 to #208.

28. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (1987), #53.