

The Lasallian Catechetical Heritage in the United States Today

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Part One: The Achievement

The Inculturation of the Lasallian Charism

The particular situation of Lasallian schools in the United States today is different in so many ways from that faced by John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers over 300 years ago, and indeed from that confronted by the pioneer Brothers in the melting-pot days of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, most Lasallians work mainly in high schools and in tertiary education, although some in the Saint Miguel schools now find themselves working in grade schools with immigrant children, just as the pioneers did. The legacy of what De La Salle initiated with delinquent young people at Saint-Yon continues in works such as the Saint Gabriel System, at Ocean Tides, Martin de Porres School and Group Homes. Direct service of the poor is a concern of each District in its links with the Catholic Worker movement and in the many works with immigrant people.

Our first observation, therefore, is to note that the Brothers who came to work in an English-speaking immigrant country had first to adjust their training and cultural background to a very different situation in which their Institute's well-established and successful French practices and pedagogy had to undergo major changes. It is interesting for us to realize that a major influence in books and practices came from what was being done in Ireland even though the Institute as such began working in Ireland only after 1880. This was due to the fact that the second Superior General of the Christian Brothers of Ireland, Brother Paul Riordan, was responsible for having many of De La Salle's works translated into English and liked to regard his Congregation, founded in 1803 in Waterford by Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice, as the Irish branch of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

- Among the various original books used by the Brothers in the nineteenth century soon after their arrival in the United States in 1843, there were translations or adaptations made by the Christian Brothers of Ireland of works written by De La Salle, or associated with him.²
- Only eight years after their arrival in Baltimore and New York, the first De La Salle Christian Brothers arranged for the publication of the Venerable De La Salle's *Duties of a Christian* under the title *Jean Baptiste de La Salle. A New Treatise on the Duty of a Christian Towards God: Being an Enlarged and Improved Version of the Original Treatise*.³

- The content of a significant number of “First Book of Reading Lessons,” and “Second Book of Reading Lessons,” printed in New York after 1851, seems to be substantially excerpts from original works written by the Christian Brothers of Ireland and exchanged through personal friendships with individual De La Salle Brothers.⁴
- The needs of the immigrant Church quickly led bishops after only 20 years to direct the pioneer Brothers to add to the initial grade schools the development of high schools and universities and colleges.
- Finally, under the name of the *Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, a uniform series of six Catechisms was concluded in 1911 in New York, the first four entitled *Catechism of Christian Doctrine* covering from third grade through to “High Schools, Academies, and Advanced Classes in Sunday Schools,” the fifth called *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (for Advanced Classes in Academies, and for Colleges and Seminaries), and the sixth an *Exposition of Christian Doctrine* (3 volumes, with summaries and analysis), described as “a Reference set for teachers and the Clergy, being a complete set of Religious Instruction in English.” All of the above are declared to be “in conformity with the Decree of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore,”⁵ and there are personal endorsements from the Cardinals Gibbons of Baltimore and Farley of New York, and from the archbishops and bishops of Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Denver, Saint Augustine, Duluth, Seattle, Little Rock, Buffalo, Sioux City, and Newark.
- Exact translation and use of Institute books originally written in French had to be adapted to the very different audiences encountered in the United States,⁶ where the catechism lesson was always conducted as the first lesson of the day.⁷

Probably the best example of the modification of translations of catechetical books is the text known as *le Manuel du Catéchiste*,⁸ written by Brother Bernard Louis, the most complete compendium of theoretical and practical catechetical principles which earned the approval of Pope St. Pius X. The French original of 589 pages was selectively translated under the title of *The Catechists’s Manual, Brief Course*, to a book of some 243 pages. The main chapter headings and large parts of the original text are retained in the translation, most notably in a series of examples and ‘model’ lessons where the same lesson is taught for *young children, older children* and *young people*.

There is no difficulty in recognizing the traditional catechetical method of the Institute in this book, the principal chapter headings of which have been retained in English as the Contents pages clearly show:

Part I : The General Principles of Method

Catechism; the Catechist; the Qualities of a Good Catechist; the Pupils; Organization; Method; Intuition; Forms of Teaching; Questioning; Memory.

Part II: Special Methods

Catechism for Little Children; Catechism after First Communion; Explanation of Text; Development of a Definition; Demonstration; The Moral Application; Introduction to the

Christian Life; Special Catechisms (Young People, Backward Pupils, Converts, Sick People); Reviews; Preparation.

Model Catechisms

Catechism for Young Children; Catechism for Older Children; Catechism for Young People

Overall Appreciation of the Catechetical Method

The traditional catechetical method is a time-honored way of memorization through regular drilling and repetition: it certainly could guarantee the acquisition of ‘knowledge’ without guaranteeing that this ‘knowledge’ would necessarily become an operative principle in a person’s life. It is worth recalling that the word ‘catechism’ was used in English early in the twentieth century without any religious connotation to describe a small compendium that aided learning by heart, as for example, a *catechism of geology*, or a *catechism of imperial or metric measure*, etc. Underlying the implementation of the traditional catechetical method of helping the young to learn by heart in teaching religion in the migrant United States, there was also a concern to preserve a **Catholic identity** in what was sometimes a hostile society. There were, therefore, a number of unexpressed assumptions which accounted for its success according to the society in which it was employed. These included the following:

1. The majority of the children in grade schools came from families that were usually linked to a parish in which they attended Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation;
2. Families contributed as they could afford to the support of the Catholic schools and the parish;
3. Children were regularly prepared for reception of the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and Eucharist and Confirmation;
4. Parishes had youth groups, social and sporting clubs and organizations that kept Catholic young people together at weekends and in vacations;
5. The parish priest and his assistants were known to families and in regular contact with them;
6. It was assumed that the majority of young people would contract Catholic marriages and remain linked to the Church.

In the twentieth century, as the majority of Brothers in the United States gradually came to teach in high schools that often drew their clientele from many different parishes, a number of these presuppositions no longer had the same force. The high school students in the Brothers’ schools came from a wide range of parishes, they usually had a number of different teachers in the course of a day so that there was no longer the same regular contact with one teacher that had been so important in the traditional Lasallian method. Moreover, the very catechetical method itself with a pre-determined correct answer to every question was in both content and style contrary to the way in which the young person was being exposed to new forms of knowledge. Brothers in close contact with their students came to realize that modern methods of inquiry and ever-increasing sources of knowledge and entertainment available to young people contrasted strongly with the question/answer technique associated with the traditional catechetical approach, especially when the same questions and answers from the *Baltimore Catechism* had been employed throughout the grade school. This concern eventually led a group of Brothers in the 1930’s to decide to publish an in-house magazine to improve the teaching of religion.

Brother John Joseph McMahon and the Growth of Saint Mary's Press

One of these teachers determined to improve religious teaching in high schools was Brother John Joseph McMahon of the Saint Louis District. Associated with others in 1934 with the development of *La Salle Catechist* "to serve as a medium of exchange for ideas, thoughts, lessons, and programs"⁹ as the first editorial stated, he would have agreed with the colleague who suggested that religion lessons should "vitalize the bone-dry definitions of boiled-down theology and make them a part of the boy's life."¹⁰ In *La Salle Catechist* in 1941, Brother John wrote an essay entitled *Christ the Leader* saying, "Now we must show Christ to the young as the great LEADER that they may follow him."¹¹

The story of how Brother John Joseph's vision was realized through his own work and through that of many cooperators in the publication over more than ten years of the four books that made up the *Living with Christ* series tells one of the most significant contributions made by the Institute to the improvement of high school religious education in the United States which led to the development of what became Saint Mary's Press. The original *Living with Christ* series and the subsequent improved versions were written by teachers, tested in a number of different situations, evaluated and revised before publication. We are indebted to Brother H. Raphael Erlen for his study *Beginnings: The Founding of Saint Mary's Press up to 1957*, the sequel to which *Winds of Change*, extracted from Brother Raphael's unpublished manuscript was published by Brother Damian Steger in 2010. Jerry Windley-Daoust surveys the overall history of Saint Mary's Press 1943-2001 in his *Touching the Hearts of Teens: Saint Mary's Press, 1943-2001* published in 2009.¹²

Brother John Joseph would have been proud of the way that his vision was eventually realized in the *Living with Christ* series. He never saw the foundation and growth of Saint Mary's Press but would have rejoiced that two Brothers, Alphonsus Pluth and Damian Steger, along with devoted helpers and writers, initiated and developed such an effective instrument for the provision of religious education material for use in Catholic high schools throughout the United States. The history of Saint Mary's Press has been also in its own way a reflection of the enormous changes brought about through the Second Vatican Council and through the subsequent cultural changes we call post-modernism. This is no story of uniform growth and progress because the turbulent years following the Council opened up a new way of looking at the modern world, especially through the Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, the way of dialogue.¹³ Brothers and Lasallian teachers of a certain age, whether as teachers or as pupils, will remember the importance of CCD materials such as PACE, the conflict surrounding texts such as *Making Moral Decisions*, the updated *Living with Christ* series in packaged booklets [West Side Story, etc.] and the gradual, general disenchantment with publications.

An important result of the *kerygmatic* movement in catechetics through the 1960's and early 1970's was the much greater attention given to the Bible. As there was no specific Catholic Bible intended primarily for young people, many Catholic schools at first made use of the *Good News* version. Worthy of special mention, therefore, is the very first *Catholic Youth Bible* produced through Saint Mary's Press from 1994 to 2000 through the patient sustained work of Father Bob Stamschor and the formation of a special team with a wide experience of school and young people.

Faithful to the original founding Lasallian vision of “responding to needs,” Saint Mary’s Press over some 20 years invested millions of dollars in developing material for Hispanic Youth:

This commitment resulted in the founding of the *Instituto Fe y Vida* (Institute for Faith and Life), the first institution in the United States dedicated solely to ministry to Hispanic youth and young adults. By 2006 . . . *Fe y Vida* was offering Hispanic ministry training to thirty-five hundred young people and leaders annually, in addition to conducting important research and publishing such groundbreaking material as *La Biblia Catolica para Jóvenes* (Catholic Bible for Youth) and Witnesses of Hope, a pastoral ministry program for Hispanic youth.¹⁴

Catholic University and Saint Mary’s Winona

The post-World War II Brothers’ scholasticates in Catholic University, Washington, in Saint Mary’s College, Winona, Minnesota, in La Salle University in Philadelphia and in other Districts in the United States, ensured better academic studies in theology as an essential part of formation. It was from this grounding that Manhattan College, for example, developed its own forward-looking theological and catechetical programs associated not only with the name of the person honored by this conference, Luke Salm, but also with such names as Stephen Sullivan, Aloysius Fitzgerald, Albert Clark, and, of course, the lifelong contribution to religious education made by Gabriel Moran.

The challenge of openness and dialogue with the modern world, however, was not easily satisfied by any one series of Catholic catechetical publications. This has been particularly true since the extraordinary revolution in communications that has marked the western world generally since the mid-1980’s. Today, the accessibility of information through computers, iPads and mobile phones presents its own challenge to traditional print sources of information. The traditional role of teachers as the main source of information and knowledge for students no longer exists, so it is not only the content of religious education that has changed but also the role of the teacher or the catechist/pastoral/homeroom person in relation to students.

An Unintended Consequence of Specialization

The very success of the Brothers in developing elementary education in France had resulted in extending the time pupils spent in schools so that the primary schools in the nineteenth century led to the super-primary schools, the boarding schools and eventually to the secondary modern schools and even tertiary institutions. These secondary (and eventually tertiary) institutions needed teachers whose own education qualified them to teach at a higher level. Brother Agathon, the fifth Superior General, had foreseen this need prior to the French Revolution and addressed it in 1783 through the so-called scholasticate at Maréville, which brought together a number of experienced Brothers who were withdrawn from schools for some years of specialized studies so as to teach in the boarding schools.

During the twentieth century, Brothers who became qualified as specialist teachers in high schools in the United States became increasingly occupied for all or most of the day in teaching their special subject in a number of different classes. While it was usual for each Brother to have a homeroom in a particular class, they continued to have an overall pastoral role through their brotherly relationship with students, but sometimes had no responsibility for religious education.

Indeed, as religious education itself increasingly became a specialist activity just like mathematics, chemistry and physics, the religious education teacher taught a number of different classes without necessarily having personal responsibility for any particular group.

This one development in many different countries in the post World War II world challenged an integral part of the Brother's vocation – what De La Salle had insisted on as his “principal duty” of sharing faith with students, of meeting them daily in faith through the reflection, of being responsible for helping them to come to know and live their faith.

In 1971, the inter-capitular meeting of the Brothers in Rome following the radical changes stemming from the 1966-1967 General Chapter noted this change as “a crisis in the catechetical work of the Institute,” and over the next decade a number of surveys showed that barely a third of active Brothers world-wide were engaged in formal ‘catechetical’ activities. Attempts to enumerate the causes of this situation did indeed refer to the demands of specialization, but also showed that many Brothers, following the Second Vatican Council, found it increasingly difficult to feel confident to teach in the traditional way they had been trained because of their difficulty in some cases to adjust to the rapid changes in society or because of their own uncertainty about the new theological directions taken by the Council.

Part Two: Challenges to be Faced

The most obvious change to the Lasallian educational heritage in the United States has come gradually as the number of Brothers has diminished and their Lasallian partners in their ‘Shared Mission’ have not had the same spiritual and theological formation. This is in no way to suggest that Lasallian lay people are any less committed, but rather to emphasize the importance of their ‘initial’ and ‘continuing’ formation in the Lasallian heritage. Regional programs such as the Buttimer, Lasallian Leadership and Social Justice Institutes need to be continued and strengthened but research on teacher-morale has always shown the importance of regular on-the-spot updating. This echoes the clear statement from *The Catholic School*:

The achievement of the specific aim of the Catholic school depends not so much on subject matter or methodology as on the people who work there. The extent to which the Christian message is transmitted through education depends to a very great extent on the teachers. The integration of faith and culture is mediated by the other integration of faith and life in the person of the teacher.¹⁵

To be true to its mission, all Lasallian works continue to respect, promote and support the ‘ministry’ of each faculty member and the diverse gifts they bring in helping their students to understand and evaluate the culture that surrounds them.

The Gospel and Culture

In his letter *Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI wrote that:

The split between the Gospel and culture is, without doubt, the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly, of cultures. They have to be

regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.¹⁶

The already cited document, *The Catholic School*, of March 1977 from the Congregation for Catholic Education, attempted to address this 'split' between 'faith' and 'culture' and the October Synod of the same year hosted an important debate between the expressions 'inculturation' and 'acculturation' – that is, between the faith taking different cultural forms according to the society in which it was being developed (*inculturation*), and the forms thought necessary to be introduced into a culture (*ad* – or *acculturation*) because the culture was thought to be deficient.

Certainly significant changes have occurred in Lasallian high schools and colleges with regard to the traditional criteria for Church membership described earlier. Many young people in Catholic schools – and a significant number of their parents – no longer have a close relationship to the parish nor do they regularly attend Sunday parish Mass. But for reasons that are not always specified, they financially support a Catholic high school or college and choose to send their children to them. The student body in a Catholic high school is frequently majority Christian but only to a certain extent Catholic to the extent it was some generations ago. This is also true in varying ways of members of the faculty.

This situation obviously has important implications for what would have once been the celebration of 'faith' activities of various kinds, as for example in the Lasallian recalling of the 'presence of God,' the saying of prayers, attendance at class or school celebrations of Eucharist and service activities offered and evaluated in terms of Gospel teachings. Other sections of the curriculum – Scripture study from the Bible, attendance at and study of sacraments, Catholic moral teaching, the social teaching of the Church – may well be offered or indeed be compulsory and examinable for all students, but there is always respect for faith as a 'gift' and absolute respect for religious freedom as the Church's official teaching.¹⁷

One of the practical implications of respecting religious freedom and distinguishing at least in Lasallian Catholic high schools between *catechesis* ('the education of faith' or 'faith speaking to faith') and the broader concept of religious education as a distinct form of thought and experience has seen, in some schools, the separation of the group responsible for what has been called 'faith development' from the more general 'religious education' in the school. An unforeseen consequence of this distinction often appears to be the perception of the first group concerned with 'faith' as a kind of "God squad" responsible for certain 'faith' activities – retreats, sacraments, celebration of Eucharist – as their particular and exclusive preserve. This can have unfortunate consequences for the Lasallian school if this distinctiveness means that the majority of the faculty are no more involved in these activities than they would be with regard to other particular aspects of the curriculum, such as physical education, music etc. The already cited Church documents on the Catholic Schools states that "the integration of culture and faith is mediated by the other integration of faith and life in the person of the teacher."¹⁸

The important role played by the community of the Lasallian faculty [*brothers and sisters to one another*] is easily reduced to rhetoric if there is no perceived unity of the staff in supporting the religious activities of the school. For some, this is a challenge to be active participants,

witnessing to sharing the same faith; for others it has to be at least unconditional respect for the ethos of the school in which they have chosen to teach.

Thomas Groome's *Educating for Life*

Thomas Groome, in his preface to his book *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, reflects on his personal experience of visiting 'Christian' schools run by Catholic Sisters in Pakistan, and is enthusiastic about the possibility of offering a genuine Catholic vision in the pluralist United States society of today:

Herein lies the bedrock intent of *Educating for Life* – to propose a spiritual vision for every teacher and parent. Convinced that when spirituality is grounded in a particular tradition it is also most likely to have universal appeal, I draw upon the depth structures of Catholic Christianity for inspiration. In consequence, the spiritual vision proposed may most readily inspire Catholic educators – teachers and parents who are Catholic Christians by faith confession and educate in schools (public or parochial) parishes, or families.

I am convinced, however, that the vision of *Educating for Life* can have an even broader appeal. It reflects spiritual values that find echoes across a broad spectrum of religious traditions and could inspire the world of any educator, regardless of religious identity. And though few may call theirs a catholic pedagogy – even with a small c – they will experience what is proposed here as a humanizing one, a way of educating *for life and for all*.¹⁹

The argument of Groome's book is consistent with his other writings on the importance of "praxis" about which he says:

However, the dual moments in praxis – action and reflection – make it more suggestive for educators than the term *experience*. Praxis highlights two things: that people's experiences include both what comes their way and what they initiate – "present action" – and that they must look at, express, and reflect on their lives in the world in order to learn from them.

Thus, turning learners to the "action" aspect of their praxis means encouraging them to notice and look at "the world" around them, which includes the following: noticing what is "there" in the created order and in the order created by humankind – culture, society, and human history; noticing what they themselves are doing . . .²⁰

Lasallian schools, no less than other schools in United States society, have undergone radical changes since they were first founded in the mid-nineteenth century, and these changes pose questions about why they exist and about their particular contribution to the overall mission of the Church. Are the foundational principles still the same or is there a new emphasis needed?

Mission or ministry?

Another way of addressing the implications for religious education of these sociological changes in the students and teachers in Catholic schools is to wonder whether it would not be more realistic if the traditional ‘ministry’ of nurturing the faith of what is becoming a decreasing number of ‘practicing’ Catholic students should not be replaced by an emphasis of ‘mission’ to those who have not yet heard the Gospel. Australian theologian Neil Ormerod notes that the cultural changes from a stable, inward-looking Catholic community to a Church more open to a pluralist society can be attributed to the challenge offered by the opening words of the Vatican Council’s document *Gaudium et Spes*:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.²¹

While acknowledging that these substantial changes in the previous Catholic community of the school can be read as a call from the previous *ad intra* activities associated with *ministry* to a stable community to confront these changes by *ad extra* outward-looking movement of *mission*, the author concludes that the two documents on the Church, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*, are both concerned with the mission of the Church, about which he concludes: “This reaffirmation of the mission of the Church is, to my mind, the key breakthrough of overcoming the sectarian trap into which it had fallen in the aftermath of the Reformation.”²²

The challenge for the author then becomes:

Are we seeking to re-establish the strong identity markers characteristic of a sectarian community, a community which defines itself in its opposition to the world? Or do we want to establish markers on issues such as social justice or ecological engagement, which signify active participation in the mission of the Church?²³

The author then suggests that “at the level of primary education one may have much higher expectations concerning the formation of children in the faith [*ministry*] than at secondary [high] school level where a more mission focus can and should emerge.”²⁴

This is not to come down in favor of either *ministry* or *mission* but rather to appreciate that, according to circumstances, both ministry and mission have their importance. In the one high school class, there may well be young people who hear the Gospel perhaps for the first time. It would be a dangerous assumption, however, to ignore others in the class with some knowledge and understanding of their faith, if unintentionally, the teacher’s attitude gave them the impression that they were not considered believers.

The use of the term *New Evangelization* by Pope John Paul II is its own reminder that new situations need new approaches:

Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization."²⁵

This is where curriculum and established practices, e.g. examinations in religious knowledge, have an important place in the school. We know that 'knowledge' in itself does not necessarily lead to practice, but the attention to clear teaching of the message of Jesus and its relevance to human living are indispensable gifts that the Lasallian school should be offering to all. Good schools address this by insisting that all who attend the school follow the religious education program of the school and pass examinations as they are required to do in other subjects. The perennial religious questions – the existence of God, the problem of suffering, the understanding of Jesus and his mission as Redeemer, the historical fragmentation of Christianity, inter-religious dialogue – do not have to be introduced to final year students as extraneous, because they are already there in their own lives and in those of their classmates, friends or acquaintances, and the young people themselves are of an age and ability to discuss them.

The “Great Mysteries”

The United States bishops have set out in detail their Core Curriculum in *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*.²⁶ This is a modern comprehensive statement of the content that has always been the basis of the Lasallian catechetical heritage. We have already seen how important the “Great Mysteries” were for De La Salle. The challenge for us today then becomes to consider what kind of pedagogy is needed to do justice to the richness of the doctrinal concepts at each level of the high school. The traditional medieval tag *secundum modum recipientis* – things are received according to the ability of the person to receive them – means that rich material needs to be suitably adapted to help our young people in Lasallian high schools to know, understand, and, with the help of God's grace, believe and live what they have learned. It is particularly important for them to have to learn to grapple with the profound ideas that have taxed Christians throughout the history of the Church.

The richness and detail of the Core Curriculum poses a challenge for teachers and for those responsible for producing suitable material at high school level. It is not that the content in itself is beyond the intellectual ability of high school students, because even a superficial glance at what they are required to study and master in mathematics, physics, chemistry, computer science, languages etc. is quite daunting. The challenge more frequently is to help young people to come to see the relevance of the Core Curriculum to their lives. For example, the very enrollment in most Catholic high schools today means regularly encountering classmates, some of whom may belong to Christian groups that are not Catholic, or others who adhere to non-Christian religions. Just as the catechetical revolution that preceded and followed the Second Vatican Council in its emphasis of dialogue with the modern world was successful to the extent that it helped young people to see the relationship between the great truths of the faith and their own experience of life, today's reality of a pluralist, multi-religious society in which we and our students live, means that religious, moral and social issues are already present and will surface in

classrooms through daily life and the ever-present media. Although the Core Curriculum correctly does not offer a pre-determined sequence, it seems strange that both the ecumenical and interreligious topics come at the very end of the document as Option E (pp. 49-53), the last of the five options. Both these topics, provided they are carefully distinguished, offer a natural starting place for ‘mixed’ classes. Unfortunately this linking of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue – two vastly different topics - can foster an ‘inside the Church looking out’ perception that is not seen as objective. Ecumenism would appear to be more appropriately discussed in the section on Church history, whereas interreligious dialogue in the present context of world events, especially the growth of a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, is something that is part of the daily news.

The ‘Apologetic’ Challenges - Who Asks the questions?

Each section has its own particular *Challenges* because it is important for young people to be able to justify their beliefs, but I wonder whether this approach in itself does not reverse the direction of the Council’s “joys and hopes” approach of dialogue with the world by encouraging a defensive and more sectarian attitude. How much scope is given for young people to ask their own questions? Are we wise in introducing the counter-argument *Challenges* of each section of the Core Curriculum as a kind of pre-emptive strike? I was struck by the practical wisdom of the following paragraph from the famous *Catechist’s Manual*²⁷ of 1908, written at a time of open warfare between the Church and Liberalism:

It is not the mission of a young men just leaving school to be an apologist. We cannot pretend to make a professional theologian out of someone of that age so with even more reason we cannot hope to provide him with the science and talent required of an apologist . . . We need to show that apologetic proofs are profoundly rooted in sacred doctrine much more than in human and natural arguments. It is also necessary to present these arguments with so much solidity and clarity that we avoid the danger of leaving certain minds much more impressed by the errors than by the truths used to oppose them, more convinced by the objections than by the answers.²⁸

Towards a Conclusion

Our Lasallian heritage of ‘teaching and touching hearts’ is about sharing the Christian Catholic vision with all who come to our institutions. We do not limit ourselves to the formation of any kind of intellectual élite. We try to help all our young people, irrespective of their religious beliefs, to discover the meaning of life by creating the elements that afford others an experience of ‘community.’ We ensure that all our baptized students have the opportunity that the Lasallian school can open up for them to know the richness and possibilities offered by a sacramental life. We wish our young people to feel that they are listened to and that they discover something to hope for because of what they sense and see as already present in the lives of their teachers. A Lasallian work is a place where seeds are sown, the fruit of which may not always be immediately seen but where there is already the presence of God’s grace to meet the challenges of a different future.

Notes

1. Brother Gerard Rummery holds a doctorate from Lancaster University, where he studied world religions. Fluent in French, Spanish, Italian and German, he served two periods on the staff of the International Lasallian Center in Rome and was twice elected to the General Council of the De La Salle Christian Brothers (1986-1993 and 1993-2000). In the United States, he is a foundation presenter of the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies and of the Lasallian Leadership Institute. Since 2000, he works mainly with educators as a presenter for Lasallian Education Services in Australia and as an Adjunct-Professor at the Australian Catholic University.

2. *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* by Brother Agatho [sic]; *Christian Politeness* chiefly from the *Civilité Chrétienne* of the Ven. De La Salle.

3. trans. Mrs. J. Sadlier (New York: D & J Sadlier, 1851).

4. Brother Paulian, Provincial of the Saint Louis District and later President of Manhattan College, had originally been a novice with the Irish Christian Brothers in Ireland, and his younger brother, who became an Irish Christian Brother, regularly informed him of new books and sent him copies. Brother Patrick Murphy, first English-speaking Assistant in the Institute, maintained a lifelong friendship with Brother John Austin Grace, a translator and author of the Irish Christian Brothers, who also sent copies of books printed by his Congregation. More research is needed about this.

5. It has not been possible to discover the authors of these texts but it is likely that they were seminary professors.

6. The Sadlier edition in 1851 of De La Salle's *Duties of a Christian* was not so much a translation as an adaptation.

7. The *Manuel du Catéchiste* (pp. 56-58) deplores this change pointing out that this is a change from what Saint John Baptist de La Salle himself began and that pupils at the start of the school day have personal anxieties which make them less receptive than they would be at the end of the day.

8. In an audience of October 10, 1903, Pope St. Pius X had conferred on the Institute the title of "Apostles of the Catechism." Acknowledging the gift of the recently-published *Manuel du Catéchiste* on July 11, 1907, the Pope remarked that "(the title) receives a new and eloquent justification in the *Manuel du Catéchiste*."

9. Jerry Windley-Daoust, *Touching the Hearts of Teens: Saint Mary's Press, 1943-2001* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2009), p. 7.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 9.

12. Both published by Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN, 55987-1320.

13. Pope Paul VI's first encyclical, *Ecclesian Suam*, has almost half of its 120 paragraphs on the concept of dialogue.

14. Windley-Daoust, op.cit., p. 100.

15. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, 1977, par. 43.

16. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*, par. 20.3. Vatican.va/archive/hist.councils.

17. *Declaration on Religious Liberty* from the Second Vatican Council 1965, especially “the practice of religion . . . consists of those voluntary and free internal acts by which human beings direct themselves to God. Acts of this kind cannot be commanded or forbidden by any merely human authority” [3.3], and . . . “The act of faith of its very nature is a free act . . . It is therefore fully in accordance with the nature of faith, that in religious matters every form of coercion should be excluded.” [10.1]

18. *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, No. 43.

19. Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (Allan, Texas: Thomas More Press, 1988), p.14.

20. Ibid., p. 161.

21. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*, 1965, par. 1.

22. Neil Ormerod, *Catholic Schools: Ministry or Mission*, 5th National Symposium on Religious Education and Ministry, 2007.

23. Passim.

24. Passim.

25. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer*, 1990, par. 33.

26. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), November 2007.

27. See note 6.

28. Translated from *Manuel du Catéchiste*, pp. 262-263.