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Formation: A Lifelong Itinerary

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1. Introduction

In May of 2017, the Secretariat for Formation of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools convened in Rome a research seminar on Lasallian formation for the future in the context of the reflection that would eventually lead to the publication of the *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission* in the twenty-first century² and of the document *Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim's Handbook*.³ The theme that was assigned to us for our intervention was precisely that of the meaning of the "formative itinerary," its elements, and its sources.

At CIL 2022 for formators of Brothers,⁴ the Secretariat asked us to revisit this conference and share it with those participating at the CIL program. In connection with this new communication, we have been asked to write this text. We are grateful for the opportunity given to us by Brother George Van Grieken.⁵ The difficulties of the reception of *The Pilgrim's Handbook* in the pandemic seem to justify the need to revisit this text, which is nothing more than the narrative of the experience of one District (Argentina-Paraguay) in order to bring its formation processes in tune with the new generation. The core of our proposal focuses on the notion of "itinerary" since the 1980s and, from there, we have been unraveling its potentialities.

Our Contemporary Cultural Context

Our distance from the original and originating horizon of the Lasallian experience is immense, and we need to put the magnifying glass on our own horizons. This warns us of possible superficial interpretations or misunderstandings. And above all, it cautions us against a false understanding that would accept that what we do is a simple change of names for the same practices.

The following remarks merely underline the cultural logic of the current horizon that can be named in different ways (such as modernity, hypermodernity, over modernity, or postmodernity) but whose structural characteristics have to do with the following developments: the third phase of capitalism (financial, globalized), which produces enormous inequalities and coexists with the movements of an economy of products considered "illegal" for very large sums; the consequent

reconfiguration of the notion and function of nation states; an increasingly specialized conception of science linked to industrial interests; human displacements of great magnitude; and a technological communicational sphere in which we are involved and of which we are, at the same time, protagonists.

As characteristics of this horizon, it is essential to highlight the following:

1. The trend to favor the present and the loss of historical relations with the past and the future. As for the past, it seems that belonging to a tradition is not valued as the foundation of identity. Belongings are weak and the resulting references may relate to different traditions simultaneously, traditions that are detached from history and are understood from “wrecks” that are surviving in fashionable authors or cultural fetishes or consumer products, evoked in different “revivals” and “fashions.” We usually refer to these as *à la carte* beliefs or as syncretism, as revivals or as kitsch. The direction toward the future is rarely seen as an intentional construction (life project) in relation to a calling and is often relegated to mere chance or short-term decisions based on convenience or on possibilities that have not been well studied.
2. “In-transcendence”; that is, the individual consciousness does not seem to choose to go beyond itself. Alongside, society seems enclosed in a horizon of pure feasibility, in instantaneous emotions and in various ways of solipsism. We usually allude to these things with terms such as relativism, pragmatism, positivism, but also relate them to solitude, addictions, superficiality, and other forms of irrelevance.
3. Individualism and the consequent incapacity to experience, understand, value, and decide from another/an Other. The reality thus lived closes on the available and hegemonic information (media, common sense) and the religious relationship becomes difficult, complicated, and biased. The rise of liberalism (neo or classical) and of right-wing thought can be a version of this trend. This is often referred to as hyper-individualization, understood as a sociological, not a moral, category.
4. A particular attention to difference, a consequence of hyper-individualization. Everything that is standardized, universal, or necessary is suspected of restricting individual freedoms and undermining vitality by restricting the spontaneity that has replaced the meaning of authenticity.
5. The forgetting of the metaphysics of the soul as abstract, ahistorical, non-cultural, and static, a metaphysics proper to classical thought in order to understand humankind in terms of self-appropriation. The notion of “human nature” is undermined and a slow elaboration of “human rights” of man and citizen, of women, civil liberties, of children and adolescents, of peoples, and of nature becomes almost the foundation of their dignity understood as conquests and agreements. This notion is a sort of political correlate of the self-constitution of man and woman (as intelligent, free, and responsible) in the contemporary world mediated by meaning and value understood as constructions, with all their possible manipulations. Consequently, pedagogies opt for a “new maieutics” as a way of opening up interiority through self-appropriation, looking at our own inner world

to become aware of our experiencing, our understanding, our valuing, our feeling, and our deciding. In this way, we make ourselves the object of our knowledge and evaluation. Hence the strong connection with the narrative conception of identity proper to Ricoeurian philosophy.

6. De-institutionalization (concomitant with hyper-individualization) and contempt for objective references, which is in turn related to the loss of relevance of traditions and self-transcendence. This new *homo mensura*—man as the measure of all things, the relativism to which Benedict XVI drew attention—is a difficult obstacle to remove in any contemporary life process. It blocks the possibility of understanding life as an itinerary and as a vocation.

2. Itinerary

General Concept of the Itinerary

We call “formative itinerary” the practice of self-appropriation of the personal, community, and District biography (life story) as interpreted and reconstructed from certain thresholds and levels of consciousness. In this sense, the formative itinerary is a pathway, a journey of intentional, personal quest that the Lasallian community proposes to each of its members and which they appropriate in a long process of discernment. A formative itinerary is not reduced to a sum of courses and activities; it is opposed to homogenization and inclusion in a closed and pre-conceived whole; it is not a process that is only intellectual or exclusively affective.

A formative itinerary proposed by an institution will have to take into account conditions, intentions, target audience, stages, processes, methodologies, and contents around some polar tensions. These tensions include (a) social identity given by employment versus spirituality as an identity rooted in a religious experience; (b) belonging to an institution from some options versus community as an affective and effective experience; and (c) professional performance in employment versus mission as a religious experience of foundational commissioning.

The formative itinerary coincides with the life of the person seen as a search in dialogue with institutions that offer a series of existential initiations and technical and professional training. There are total institutions, such as the Church and the Institute. There are other partial institutions, such as the universities or other formative institutions. All of them offer programs that people articulate in a journey endowed with greater or lesser coherence, in non-linear or progressive ways, worked from the building up of a more or less conscious fidelity to some values that we consider central in our life. In many cases, the programs are simply summative, without true discernment, without a value pole that gives them coherence and projection, and thus not conducive to the forming of identities.

Therefore, to speak of “formation programs” is to refer to the originality of the formative journeys of Lasallians (Brothers or Partners) in search of that “personal synthesis”⁶ of the “constitutive dimensions”⁷ of our identity.⁸ We could say that, in fact, the concept of itinerary refers to the entire life seen from its end or considered in the abstract; and the notion of journey refers to the process in movement, to the journey in progress.

It should not be forgotten that the formative itinerary, from the perspective of the Institute, has as its major objective the loving and active union with God in the love of humankind and the world. There is a first conversion that gives rise to this spiritual journey. But there is a second conversion in life, the beginning of spiritual maturity, in which the dynamic state of being in love is established as the principle from which we make our decisions, shape our thinking and our affections, and man and woman “sins no more” (1 Jn 3:6,9), follows the ways of the Spirit (Gal 5:25), and lives the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

Elements of the Formative Itinerary

The formative itineraries are, fundamentally, things that are lived: they are our life experience as formation. As such, looking back on the experience of each person, the itinerary is a narrative construction that we make, again and again, as we find a specific meaning, directionality, and significance in the journey of our life. This implies a task of discernment and putting into words that which each one of us is doing and that which, from other perspectives, other people can do about us.

To be able to establish an itinerary for the future, both an institutionalized proposal for formation and a plan that persons establish for themselves, implies that same constructive task of meaning as an offer of hope by selecting programs not only according to a utilitarian value.

In the narrative reconstruction of the formative itineraries of the members of our Lasallian community, four elements appear as background: the people, the community, the institution, and the grace of God. They are distinguishable but not separable because, in practice, they are configured as part of a unique, complex, and mysterious whole. They should be taken into account when thinking about the development of formation programs in the Districts.

The People

We should distinguish between individual and person.⁹ “Individual” is a concept that draws a boundary between oneself and others. It is a subject of rights and duties with all the weight of liberal modernity. The concept of individual points to a subject who has in and by himself or herself the source of their life and dignity. “Individual” means that someone is defined by their sufficiency and takes it as an ideal of life. The integration of the individual into society is a minimal resignation of margins of freedom for the exchange of some other benefit that individuals could not achieve by themselves. In the individual’s ideal of self-realization, everything is better when nothing is given up.

We prefer to speak of the person as a being from and for encounter, as part of a group and of a history. The person is born to a people and in a community. Between the person and others there are no limits but ties. Responsibility, conscience, work, and language, are no longer individual but communitarian, proper to a people that unites communities. Belonging is what identifies the person. The sense of belonging to a group or class, community, or people, gives identity to a person who, otherwise, runs the risk of feeling lost in loneliness, without known and recognized references. It is not that the person resigns part of their freedom to their community. From the

personalist conception, it is rather a quality of the person's belonging to the historical situation of freedom in the midst of a concrete people with its traditions and social forms that are concretized in the community.

We understand the person as a relational being who builds the self by opening the self to others in the social-historical context of a particular people. The person does not lose dignity by opening the self to others. On the contrary, the person would lose it if he or she were not capable of opening the self to others or, better still, of discovering the self already linked to others. The human being is a radical openness to the world and to other people. There is no self-realization but an inter-realization. Mutual belonging makes us interdependent.

The person is not a reality closed in on itself but is essentially open to possibilities in the encounter with others in their social conditions. Thus, self-realization, which is always inter-realization, is only possible in self-transcendence, since persons have to go out of themselves in order to find meaning about themselves and about the world. Personal openness shapes one's own identity.

The decadence of the person comes when the possibility of essential openness to the other is destroyed, either by the narcissistic fascination that encloses it in a love of self or by the impoverishing selfishness that opens up in violence against the other, in envy toward the other or in possessive desires.

The Community

The second element is community. Community is experienced from the interweaving of shared biographies (life stories) in the history of a people and from an expectation of frequent and intense interaction. Community is the name for the radical belonging of the person to others when that belonging is assumed as a vocation.

The experience of living in community encompasses all the forms of reciprocity that people's personal relationships take on and which are represented by kindness, generosity, friendship, communication, dialogue, complementarity, and availability. Community is the other face of the person understood as a being from and for the encounter. Community is people seen from their co-belonging, a co-belonging that is assumed as an ideal of life. Community is the name of our belonging to a people-made identity. If the decadence of the person is the illusion of narcissism and the horror of selfishness, the decadence of the community is, similar: enclosure and disintegration.

Enclosure can have several meanings. The decadent community lives for itself and forgets its ties with the people it embodies. It seeks its satisfaction in a sterile way. It lacks common self-transcendence. A community without a mission and without belonging to a people, for Lasallians, has no meaning. Enclosure can also be constituted as competition, as greed, and as domination over others.

The disintegration of the community is the experience of the impossibility of the mutual belonging for those who give way to selfishness or pursue self-sufficiency. The decay of the

community perpetuates itself in an inertial way; once it starts there is less and less incentive to contain the disintegration of human bonds and to seek new ways of realizing what has broken down. That is why the place of authority in a community is so sensitive. The decadence of the person in charge of the authority is a booster of the decadence of the community. The community authority is the guarantee of the formative community. From this perspective one can better understand why we cannot be an alternative for social transformation without communities.

Without a formative, welcoming, and accompanying community, the deep insertion and community initiation of every person who enters into the life of the work is impossible. It is the community that forms and evangelizes the person. The structure, the social institution, is not formative and evangelizing without community.

The Institution

The third element is the institution. Persons do not fulfill themselves totally with the community but also need a space where person and community become public works. The institution is the public emergence of the community, its stable visibility. That is why the institution lives in the tension between its instituted arrival and its perpetual instituting beginning. In institutionalism, the mission of the community becomes a public project facing a people in time.

The institution is the stabilized structure of being together in a community in which people find themselves in a state of mutual belonging with a mission. The aspiration to be together is not limited to the instantaneous aspect of wanting to act together but must be deployed in the duration of time. The institution stabilizes ideas, values, and feelings in actions and makes them become lasting. Project and planning are the names of the community made institutionalized mission.

For this unfolding of the possibility of being together in time for the mission to be real and not a mere illusion, it is necessary that a certain type of power be ethically prolonged. Community activity, mission, is a matter of power. To be able to act incorporates both the idea of plurality among people and the need to reach agreements that organize common action. Power is the capacity to realize the community's own possibilities, its mission. Power is not identified with authority. Power is always disseminated in the communities and the people of the institution. Authority has a power that it cannot exercise without the power of the people.

The institution is born as a guarantee of durability of the satisfactions that communities have found for the human needs of a people. It is born to preserve achievements in time. It must be an enabling structure. It is the domain of belonging.

The decadence of the institution manifests itself, similarly, as institutional narcissism and selfishness. The institution that lives for itself makes its structures weigh on communities and people, corroding its own instituting force. The narcissistic institution makes of its ideas, values, and feelings an ideology that prevents the true construction of knowledge that dialogues with reality. An egoistic institution does not develop the possibilities of its action by seeking self-

transcendence, but rather mere fulfillment or dominion over others. Such an institution understands its mission as a competition for narcissistic success.

The Grace of God

From a Christian faith perspective, the horizon of possibilities of formation as an itinerary is given by the merciful action of God, a gratuitous, gracious action brought about in history by the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, the New Man. He has opened the possibility of making the experience of becoming new persons and new communities in a new people. It is the experience of the Spirit of Jesus Christ that moves us from within as a “dynamic state of being in love,” as Bernard Lonergan liked to say.

The community and the institution, from this perspective, have a quasi-sacramental character that serves as a criterion for their identity. They are places of the experience of grace, “graced” spaces, as Romano Guardini would say, spaces in which grace exists and makes the Kingdom of God accessible.

Pope Francis often refers to two attitudes that oppose faith in divine grace as the enabler of existence: the New Gnosticism that leads us to live a Christianity without God, a Jesus without a cross, and a Church without flesh; and the New Pelagianism that leads us to suppose that we save ourselves, that we build our life in solitude without needing God.¹⁰

Formative Itinerary: Its Meaning

Grace, the person, the community, and the institution are interacting elements in every formative itinerary. The formative itinerary is what has already been lived and what is yet to be lived. Seen from the perspective of the person and the community, the itinerary is reconstructed as a memory and is proposed for the future as an option that is permanently discerned as a journey. Seen from the point of view of the institution, the formative itinerary is a proposal structured according to the mission that makes the identity. The institutional proposal is the result of the discernment of the real journeys lived by the communities and the persons in tension with the ideas, values, and institutional feelings.

The formative itineraries of Lasallian people and communities are the practice of self-appropriation of one’s own formation, lived as a process of affective, intellectual, moral, and religious conversion based on ideal formative itineraries. We are all called to carry out this discernment personally and as a community as a path to self-transcendence within the District. This ongoing discernment makes possible institutionalized formation proposals as programs proposed from threshold to threshold.

The constitution of a formative itinerary must be reconstructed in the light of the thresholds and levels of consciousness delineated, in our instance, in the District of Argentina-Paraguay by the “District Formation Horizon.”¹¹ This interpretative reconstruction is a narrative because temporality and narrativity are closely linked. All autobiographical narration configures the time of the narrator as well as that of the narrative. The narration of a formative itinerary is a narration of one’s own identity. In the narration of the formative itinerary, time is understood from the

perspective of the thresholds. This configuration of identity makes the lived events become experiences with and in time. In this way, the narrative identity of individuals and communities is configured as a proposal that is likely to be institutionalized.

Sources of the Concept of Itinerary

In our District of Argentina-Paraguay, the understanding of formation as a formative itinerary lived in formation programs has had a long participative development, what might otherwise be called a “process-based construction.” A first stage, between 1986 and 1996, led us to question our formation models and plans for Brothers. Coming out of an acute crisis experienced at that time regarding the processes of association with lay Partners and the option for the poor, the work of harmonization between the former District of Argentina and the former Sub-District of Paraguay, led us to construct the concept of “formative itinerary,” later enriched by the practice of joint formation of Brothers and lay Partners. This process took place from 1994 to 2000.

We decided then, from our new shared organization between Brothers and lay Partners as a civil association in charge of the mission in the District, to create a single formation commission and to create our “District Formation Horizon.”¹² It was worked on in a participatory manner by some five hundred people between 2000 and 2003 in successive drafts. It was then approved by the District Chapter.

A second process of deepening led us to work participatively on the development of the concept of “formation program” and to encourage the establishment of different programs. This was done between 2003 and 2004. And then, between 2004 and 2009, all the formation plans for the Brothers between the postulancy and the residence for the elderly were recreated, conceived as elements for the creation of formation programs by the animating teams of each stage. From other structures of formation for the mission, formation programs for educators and directors (Brothers or lay Partners) were designed along the lines of educational pastoral care and popular education.¹³

Philosophical Sources

The notion of the evangelical itinerary has its roots in many concepts of contemporary philosophy, especially in the existential ontological phenomenological line. Among them, it is fundamental to point out the *Heideggerian* concept of temporalization, time as a horizon of understanding being, as the first name of being, as the domain of the open. The question of life as a journey refers primarily to the question of the meaning of our going beyond ourselves.

Our life is a journey into the unknown of death and beyond death. In the future that we are becoming, the other comes to us as surprise, as miracle, as indomitable, as wonder. We need to cultivate attentiveness to life as an act of intentional freedom that is not a voluntarism but a detachment, a response to being called by the other/Other, a love that is obedience. This other is unavailable to us and leads us to wait for it/him/her. And it is this waiting that opens a time beyond ourselves. It is a waiting for what is possible beyond our possibilities. In waiting, we recognize our finitude. But we recognize it as “deflated” by the waiting for the other, for the time that the other/Other offers us.¹⁴

This waiting, this attention to time, transforms us. We encounter a future of which we were not capable, a possibility beyond our possibilities that is offered to us as a grace of our freedom. As Bernhard Casper so beautifully taught, the event of temporalization is the key to understanding prayer.

Biblical Sources

The concept of itinerary obviously has biblical roots. The entire history of salvation can be understood as a long exodus from a lost paradise to the promised Kingdom of God. The first “friend of God,” Abraham, marks the meaning of life as an itinerary toward an unseen promise made in faith. It is a pathway that is always a departure, a pathway that must be made by oneself, a pathway that is at the same time horizontal displacement and interiorization, vertical change of horizons and interpersonal encounter.

The life of Jesus is presented by the Gospels as a missionary itinerary that leads to the voluntary offering of himself in the crucifixion, the political consequence of his ministry. Death is transcended in the resurrection, opening a new journey that must reach the end of time and all the nations of the earth.

Theological Sources

Another important element in considering “itinerary” as a key notion for understanding human life seems to us to be that of self-transcendence, that is, the pathway of authenticity. As Bernard Lonergan taught so extensively, self-transcendence can be affective, cognitive, moral, and religious. From Bernard Lonergan,¹⁵ and following the intuitions of Juan Carlos Scannone, it is necessary to insist (especially in the contemporary context) on an aesthetic and affective self-transcendence as a basis for the other pathways.

Consequently, the possibility of self-transcendence must lead to the education of the operators of self-transcendence, which are, from our perspective, above all, the ability to formulate questions and the symbolic capacity, to symbolize and to think symbolically. Formation (Christian initiation and religious initiation) should consist particularly in this double training.

There is one more element of crucial importance, also of Lonerganian root: the dialectical conflict that leads us to make decisions based on authentic positions, that is, learning to discern. Our belief is that it is key to highlight that “being led” by the God of the Gospel itinerary is not a matter of passivity. The Lasallian spirituality of abandonment is not a letting go but an authentic struggle for making increasingly evangelical self-transcendent decisions in conflictive contexts.

In addition, the ecclesial aspect of the Gospel itinerary must be emphasized. This happens on two lines:

1. The first one refers to the communion dimension. This communion is divided into three temporalities: (a) the tradition to which we belong and in which temporalization and self-transcendence are possible; (b) the fraternity of the present that sustains us and

critically guides us in the conflict; and (c) the hope that motivates, challenges, and assesses the mission.

2. The second is the sacramental dimension of the evangelical itinerary. Time is sacramental, a sign and instrument of the saving action. The sacraments of the Church and of life mark our evangelical itinerary in a long process of configuration with Jesus Christ.

Lasallian Sources

The *Rule* of the Brothers of the Christian Schools of 1967 and the *Declaration* of the same year have a strong imprint of *personalism*, the fruit of the writings of Brother Paul Jourjon,¹⁶ although not exclusively. From this conception of the human as incarnation, vocation and communion have been translated, from our concrete life, the constitutive dimensions of Lasallian identity as mission, consecration, and community.¹⁷ These three areas of openness or dimensions of the human, of our life, should be thought of without dualisms or monisms, in a profound, dialogical, tensional inter-relationship, of unity in difference. This triad structured the post-conciliar *Rule* of 1967 in many details; and this dynamism has continued to be present, with greater or lesser success, in the new drafts of the *Rule* of 1987 and of the *Rule* of 2015.

Although it does not appear expressly in the post-conciliar *Rule* of 1967, the idea of the formative itinerary is not entirely foreign to it and several expressions can be understood in this sense, particularly from the understanding of the vital journey that gave the vow of fidelity to the Institute.¹⁸ By 1975, the concept of itinerary must have become so evident that, in his doctoral thesis, Brother Miguel Campos did not feel the need to justify the expression of the title *L'itinéraire évangélique* (evangelical itinerary).¹⁹ In fact, it is a classic expression in spiritual literature after the Middle Ages.

A relevant moment in the constitution of our notion is *Circular 418* of the General Council of the Brothers of the Christian Schools on formation in 1983.²⁰ There the expression “itinerary” is taken in many paragraphs to make explicit the meaning of formation.²¹ We simply enumerate the ideas:

- Formation is an initiation of an existential nature which, however, does not neglect doctrine (paragraph 106).
- This initiation is a change of mentality (paragraph 109).
- Integration between life experiences and doctrine is essential. We must not forget the priority of life experience, without which doctrine risks becoming meaningless (paragraph 110).
- Formation depends on the quality of the relationships established in the personal integration process (paragraph 114).
- Formation consists in following a spiritual itinerary inspired by that of Saint John Baptist de La Salle (paragraph 96). By reliving the spiritual itinerary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, we live Jesus Christ and the Gospel (paragraph 125). It is up to the Institute to offer the Brothers a valid possibility of living this itinerary (paragraph 127).

- Initial formation is only a precise and fundamental moment in an itinerary that is followed throughout life. Identity is not something static fixed in the novitiate; it is a history, a covenant with God lived throughout one's whole life (paragraph 115).
- The existential nature of initiation, which is formation, means that the experiences, programs, or stages are not added to one another but are unified and integrated in the person of the Brother. This takes place under the action of the Spirit, following the Founder's itinerary (paragraph 233).
- The Brother knows his identity in God's history with him (paragraph 116).
- We call *thresholds* those moments of life in which the religious enters into a change of conversion; these thresholds are not a chronological succession of stages. The Brother is exposed to turnabouts (paragraph 117): (a) the threshold of initial discernment (paragraph 118); (b) the threshold of theocentricity (paragraph 119); (c) the threshold of losing our "self-centeredness" (paragraph 121); and (d) the threshold of taking personal control of oneself (paragraph 122).
- The essential pedagogy of formation is the implementation of the spirit of faith in the following of the Founder by integrating two realities: experience and faith (paragraph 234).
- Following after the Founder's itinerary, the Brother lives with the Lord an existence that is transformed according to the spirit of the Gospel; the true teacher is Christ (paragraph 236).
- The Founder's itinerary recalls that he found Christ in his Brothers and in the poor (paragraph 237).
- The true success of the novitiate is to introduce the Brother into an existential dynamism of encounter with Christ, of following the Founder's itinerary (paragraph 240).

Thus, in the *Rule* of 1987, the Brother capitulants at the 41st General Chapter in 1986 felt the need to take up the expression to refer to formation:

In response to God's plan for him, Saint John Baptist de La Salle made of his own life an itinerary of constant growth in faith. . . . Following his example, the Brothers are invited to enter into a process of human, spiritual, and apostolic growth that will last throughout their lives.²²

It would not be idle to point out that by the 45th General Chapter in 2014 the notion of itinerary seems to have become incorporated into the Lasallian institutional vocabulary in such a way that the current *Rule* of 2015 uses it on several occasions.²³

There are other important elements of our Lasallian tradition that, although they are not in force today, serve as a "dangerous memory"²⁴ about the potential of the notion of formative itinerary. We refer to (a) the non-obligatory nature of taking vows at the end of the novitiate, a practice that lasted until 1920 and stopped due to the imposition of the *Code of Canon Law* of 1917; (b) the possibility of indefinitely renewing annual vows or triennial vows, in the same situation as above; (c) the alternative of promises instead of vows offered by the *ad experimentum Rule* of 1967, which could no longer be sustained due to the revised *Code of Canon Law* of 1983; and (d) the personalization of formation and commitments, which consisted in the possibility for each

person to write his own formula of promises or vows, to make the formative paths more flexible, and to make alternative proposals, a practice that ended with the definitive *Rule* of 1987.²⁵

Pedagogical Sources

From the pedagogical point of view, we should think that the notion of “formative itinerary” is strongly supported by Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism, Carl Rogers’ non-directivity, and Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the question.

In recent years, in pedagogy in South America, there has been talk of “educational paths.” There are some theoretical educational paths that establish the routes that the subjects of the system follow linearly: levels of education with their grades (gradualness of the school system) and levels. But this very reflection shows that many subjects do not follow these theoretical paths; they leave the “channeled paths” to follow “infrequent itineraries.” Many children go through schooling in non-linear ways. There are also many young people who do not choose to go through their university education in a linear mode and establish educational paths that are enriched by long periods of travel, volunteering, community, work, and other experiences.

Finally, we must think about the paradigm shift in the understanding of adolescence and youth: from psychosocial moratorium to youth subjectivities. This change, taken seriously, forces us to rethink the institutional formative offer to young people. Candidates arrive at the Institute with educational, religious, and affective paths that are very diverse and distant from what was the majority before the 1990s and interpret themselves as subjects of their own lives. To continue thinking that the subjects in formation are the recipients of an established and successful plan does not seem appropriate.

3. Formation Programs

For Lasallian institutions, outlining formative itineraries implies a strong discernment. To outline itineraries is a continuous restarting, for which the institutions are constituting paths. If an itinerary is the institutionalized proposal of the way to advance from threshold to threshold, the paths are the practical details that make this itinerary possible. The itinerary, as an institutionalized proposal, cannot be completely advanced. Precisely because of the self-appropriation character of the journey that each Lasallian makes, there is always a necessary “play” (*juego*²⁶) of discernment that prevents the standardized path (the ideal itinerary) from being perfectly adjusted to all cases. The paths, for the same reason, are offered to the discernment of each person in such a way that it will be his or her option to do them at one time or another or, also, not to do them. It is even possible that the same person or a group of people could present to the institution the need for a particular route that they ask to be planned or that they decide to plan for themselves.

Structuring of Formation Programs

First of all, in order to build a formation program, it is necessary to discover spaces in which to become aware of experimenting or to make an experience. To experience is to consciously

perceive our concrete practices. The first moment of a formation program should not be a time of study, as if what should be done were already defined beforehand by some timeless authority.

This is a first stage of discernment in which we can look at what we do, we can understand one another and our actions. This first step is not only a personal moment, but a community or team moment, where we can help each other in this experiment. And it is not only an intellectual activity; it starts from the corporeal, the physical, the material, the sensitive, and the emotional.

The starting point of all formative action is the social-historical practice of community mission and formation for mission and community. For example, if we consider in an educational work the composition of a formation program for in-service teacher training, what we should do first of all is to become aware of experiencing the daily classroom practice, the weekly organization of the teacher's and the school's life, the time dedicated to planning. If we consider a formation program for directors, the first step will be to develop a space where directors or potential directors can consciously experience their daily tasks, what they do, what they fail to do, their concrete objectives in practice, their real priorities. If we consider a formation program for catechists, the first step will be the perception of their faith, their religiosity, their way of living the Church, the following of Jesus, the way in which they mediate the faith experience of the students.

Only by asking questions about our practices, our lives, our professional performances, and our options will we be able to find new answers. It is important to hold the questions in common for a sufficient time without falling into the temptation of the first answers, which are usually poorly thought-out justifications of our usual practices. We want to understand the institutionalized building up of formative itineraries as the proposal of an initiation process, as a pathway with multiple routes, not as a closed course of previously established enlightening ideas.

The fact that an institution proposes a formative itinerary means that it knows about the processes of conversion of persons and communities and that it has a hopeful patience in its possibility. We have not become Lasallian directors, teachers, catechists, and Brothers because some people or texts have told us what this identity means, what we have to do. We are appropriating these identities and knowledge, these lifestyles with their commitments, slowly, entering into dialogue with our practices, questioning ourselves, converting ourselves. We are entering into a dialogue with others who are also in the same process.

But the institutionalized formative itinerary is an intentional process. This means that it is provoked, thought out, and planned. The maturing processes that we go through in our places, both personally and as a group, are not necessarily institutionalized as formative paths.²⁷ And this is because these formation teams understand that formative itineraries can be pathways offered for the configuration of Lasallian identity. But the offer does not always coincide with the vital moment of the itinerary itself.

Discernment, which begins with the awareness of the experience of practices, implies an intelligent understanding of them. This understanding must be able to account for the dialectical tensions that allow vertical leaps toward new thresholds in the formative itinerary. Discernment

has a point of arrival in the institutional decision of the proposal of the itinerary, but it is continually open to the revision of the proposal from its existential realizations.

The multiple institutional mediations of accompaniment of an itinerary are articulated for the self-transcendence of individuals, groups, communities, and the institution itself. A formation program should take into account conditions, intentions, target audiences, stages, processes, and contents. It is an intentional process with significant times and a clear and specific target audience. The conditions should include a group environment, analysis and systematization of the practice itself, study time and conceptualization around these practices, application spaces, and instances of accompaniment and evaluation of the process.

Moving from Standardized Formation to Formation as Itinerary Paths

There are institutional challenges in moving from the standardized path of standardized formation to a kind of formation offered as itinerary paths. As we have already said, these are not complete “itineraries.” What we can offer are, more humbly, “formation programs.”

The first thing, then, is to renounce the “knowledge” of the institution or the “formator” in order to move on to the search. This knowledge consolidated by history makes us assume that, beforehand, we have the certainty that the standard path or ideal itinerary works for all cases and that, when the subject does not feel good in it, the problem lies with the subject. The centrality of the function of authority is to collaborate with discernment based on self-transcendent values for each one of those who want to be part of the Lasallian community.

In this way, then, it is necessary to qualify the figure of the “formator” from a relationship of mutual and community search. Community—of the District, of formation—is understood in the broad sense in which all are included as subjects of formation. Strictly speaking, the formator and formandee do not constitute a closed pair. Both participate in their own itinerary in a community that is also in movement. It is not only that the formator is also trained in the relationship with the formandee; it is, above all, that the world that comes to the young candidate and the world of the future will certainly be very different from the world in which we “formators” have lived. We lack the keys, the pieces, to fully understand. And we are obliged to search together.

This also calls into question the overly detailed entry and exit profiles, forgetting any possibility of initial or final homogenization both for Brothers and for educators in general.

As already recommended by the *Rule* of the Brothers (2015), it is necessary to soften the differences in the canonical stages of formation; to decrease the centrality of the novitiate; and to enrich, above all, the experiences of the post-novitiate. Especially, it is necessary to intensify and give relevance to the period around perpetual profession, at least the year before and the year after. There was a very important—and now lost—richness in the practice proposed by the *Rule* of 1967 of making promises instead of temporary vows and taking the vow of fidelity to the Institute at final profession. The dynamic that this imposed was not fully understood by most of the Brothers who, apparently, continued to look at consecration from an ahistorical ontological perspective.

Our institutions, moreover, must give up the expectation of “normal reproduction” as a result of formation. The next generation will necessarily be more pluralistic in many ways. This requires the creation of much more explicit mechanisms of dialogue in order to reach convergences not only in the final objectives but also in the construction of theoretical and practical syntheses that allow for self-correcting creative processes.

The offer of significant formation programs would also imply a “Lasallian theology” that would be much more diverse and at the same time discreet: to renounce a world made up exclusively of Brothers and to renounce a world of Lasallians made up exclusively of Western adult heterosexual male Catholic believers.

There are formative “stages” required by the *Code of Canon Law* (1983). They should be thought of as paths offered in a longer process, or even as a single complex path. What matters is the process, not the individual steps taken.²⁸

There are compulsory formation “paths” for the exercise of the professional task. They should be thought of as such and not as independent careers and spaces for updating or training. This entails a particular behavior on the part of the institution and the community even for those courses that are not offered by them to Lasallians.

Hence, what regulates the design of the programs offered are the experiences through which the institution defines its own identity. It is these experiences that matter more than the design of the paths. That is why the effort must be made to create rich “domains” in which interaction is creative.

The total itinerary of life is made up of multiple paths. But the paths are included in routes that are sometimes parallel or intersecting. Each of us follows many paths at the same time, and they determine our routes. These paths are formative processes that lead us to conversions and transformations at different levels of depth. The paths proposed institutionally and those that each one, or each group and community, carries out on its own initiative, are integrated in the configuration of the unique formative itinerary.

The institutional proposal of formation paths and programs is the task of all the actors of the Lasallian institution, essentially of those who are living on the threshold of animation. It is up to the authority, at all levels, to regulate the “play” (*juego*²⁹) of proposals. It is up to each institutional actor to choose and move himself or herself and his or her reference groups to participate.

Paths, Itineraries, and Thresholds

As already pointed out in *Circular 418* (1983), the General Council understood that the formative itinerary, although it does not entail a unidirectional and ascending linearity, can consider the existence of a series of “thresholds” through which it is necessary to pass. The figure of the threshold refers to a liminal space characterized by a narrowing and opening onto a new and unknown space. Sometimes the threshold is accompanied by a barrier (or door or gate)

that prevents the vision of what lies beyond and makes the passage difficult. For these reasons, the figure of the threshold refers to a passage of novelty, to a change, which involves anguish (from the narrowing of the doors), and then an opening to the new.

In the same *Circular*, we spoke a little laterally of “levels of belonging” to the Institute. In our District reflection in Argentina-Paraguay, we have preferred to relate the thresholds to “levels of consciousness.” The passage from one threshold to another would mean a new awareness of our identity and our participation in the world.

Circular 418 referred to the following thresholds that did not imply the need for chronological correlation: (a) the threshold of initial discernment (paragraph 118); (b) the threshold of theocentricity (paragraph 119); (c) the threshold of losing our “self-centeredness” (paragraph 121); and (d) the threshold of taking personal control of oneself (paragraph 122).

In our reflection resulting in the “District Formation Horizon”³⁰ of the District of Argentina-Paraguay, we have preferred to name them as follows:

- The threshold of initial contact, level of awareness of the task: the young person or the adult who approaches the Lasallian world for a job, a pastoral service, et cetera.
- The threshold of belonging, level of awareness of participation: the person, postulant, or educator, of whom life begins to demand more than what he or she thought of giving in that previous commitment, discovers that there is something greater that demands commitment.
- The threshold of the mission, level of awareness of commitment: belonging to a community with a mission project makes one discover the need to be united with the deep intention of the project, the mission that God entrusts to the community.
- The threshold of community, level of awareness of animation: belonging to an intentional Lasallian community, whether religious, lay, or mixed, awakens the need to animate one’s own community and to raise up new communities.
- The threshold of distance, level of awareness of witness: we will all reach an age when we will not be able to participate in the mission or its animation; crossing this threshold in a formative way will lead to being able to witness to the value of the Lasallian community that continues to live beyond the participation of those who have distanced themselves.
- The threshold of disengagement, level of awareness of disagreement; at one time or another in life, we may not be in communion in a way that is definitive for us. It is part of formation to take distance in a way that is productive.

In the document *Lasallian Formation for Mission. The Pilgrim’s Handbook*, the Institute proposed the following as thresholds of the Lasallian formative pilgrimage for the entire Institute: (a) induction, from the outside to inside; (b) belonging, from me to us; (c) commitment, from career to calling; (d) co-responsibility, from followers to leaders; and (e) wisdom, from positional power to charismatic witness.³¹

Experiences as a Formation Content

In practice, the idea of experiences as a formation content has had two different forms of reception. The first understands that the experiences are the great contents proper to the life of a Lasallian, the dimensions of the “original synthesis” of which the *Rule* speaks,³² but analytically developed. But these are lived in the so-called domains, drawing upon the conception of Adolfo López Quintás. These are the concrete spaces of the design of the path in which the experiences are learned in a complex, synthetic, vital, and reflexive way. This has been dominant in the understanding of the Brothers’ formation plans in our District.

The formation programs for Brothers and lay Partners in mission animation have comprehended this in a more global way, referring to “experiences” in the sense that the other plans speak of “domains.” Thus, for example, in the youth ministry of our District, one can speak of a “volunteer experience” referring to a complex situation that does not consist simply in “going to do a service.”

The differentiation between one and the other is analytical, and its advantage lies in the conscious and responsible planning of the formation programs.

The following is an example taken from the novitiate plan of the District of Argentina-Paraguay that was in effect between 2005 and 2013.

<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Domains</i>
1. Self-Care 2. Together and by Association 3. Building Religious Habits 4. Self-Knowledge 5. Religious Fraternity 6. Religious Consecration and Vows 7. Sense of Faith 8. Personal Prayer Life 9. Studies 10. Initiation to Accompaniment 11. Discernment of Motivations 12. Educational and Pastoral Ministry 13. Mission in the World of the Poor 14. District Community and Shared Mission	Theological Studies and Its Cultural Mediations Personal and Community Leisure Community Prayer and Liturgy Personal Prayer and Spiritual Reading Apostolic Service Time for Personal Reflection Work at Home Common Life District Life Church Life Social Life

Concept of Experience as a Process of Self-Appropriation

It is almost commonplace to refer to our era as a time in which experience has been hampered. This is expressed, for example, by Giorgio Agamben:

At present, any discourse on experience must start from the realization that it is no longer something achievable. For just as he was deprived of his biography, contemporary man has been expropriated of his experience: rather, the inability to have and transmit experiences is perhaps one of the few pieces of information he has about himself.³³

For this reason, it is good to start by trying to understand what we can expect from our idea in this cultural situation.

Walter Benjamin was perhaps the first to warn about this situation in two of his writings that have become classics on the subject: “Experience and Poverty” in 1933³⁴ and “The Storyteller” in 1936.³⁵ He refers to the inability of the generation returning from the European War of 1914-1918 to communicate what had been experienced on the battlefield and to understand how the world changed in the following decade. Instead of words that could give an account of what had been lived and learned, an avalanche of closed meanings was put in its place. And along with the discourses, the complement of the comfortable life that never ceases to grow (as appropriate or as dreamed), reducing more and more the possible margins of experience and supplanting it with fragmentary and unfathomable information, coarse and isolated sensations, reproductions of reality, and the consequent effort to achieve them.

Life has long since become opaque. There is little to say about it, little to learn from the everyday. We find it hard to be aware of what we live and to consider it valuable. Rather, we talk about remarkable things that always happen to others and elsewhere. We talk about news. Or we talk about sporting or cultural events that never have us as protagonists. We end the day tired,³⁶ full of things we have done and of words said, written, and heard, but that can hardly be transformed into experiences. Life does not enrich us but impoverishes us. There are no elements in daily life whose density is such as to generate sufficient authority to base ourselves on them.

Many times we Brothers, and educators in general, are tempted to think that this is something that only happens to young people. We experience it daily in our classrooms and in the neighborhoods in which we live. But it is not something that simply happens to the new generation. The image of many of us in front of a television or computer, zapping, watching reels on Tik Tok, or surfing the Web, in the evening, at the end of the day; or the silent meals, or the avoidance of community meetings and personal interviews,³⁷ speaks volumes about this void of experience. Silence has become threatening; we need to fill it with music, podcasts, and news, novels and novelties. But also the presence of our Brothers and companions has become dangerous, the existential void that wants to open up, or the fullness of life of others that becomes threatening to our own emptiness, or the restless life of a young person who searches and is full of hope.

Truth and courage are not something that we can distill, on a daily basis, from the serene meditation of what has happened to us, of what we have been involved in. We live animated by slogans and images.

Perhaps we could connect this impossibility of experience in our time with the spread of the non-places worked by Marc Augé. They are the anonymous spaces in which we pass without being modified in our identity, in which everything seems new, always up-to-date, in which there are

no traces of a history or a tradition in which to participate, those where a “we” cannot emerge. Supermarkets, airports and shopping malls are the first analogues of this not so new kind of space. But they are not the only ones. Even a classroom or a community, a “formation house” or a “residence” runs the risk of becoming such a non-place.

When we say “experience,” we mean the specifically human way of living what is happening to us. Experience has to do with finding ourselves open to reality, perceiving it as such and articulating it in meaningful units. The word experience comes from the Latin word *experior*, which means “to test,” and shares the root with *peritia* (expertise), *peritus* (expert) and *periculum* (danger). So it is combining risk and the knowledge that comes from having tried, a knowledge that implies courage, constancy in the face of adversity. The prefix *ex* speaks of the source of this knowledge. It is a knowledge that has its letter of origin in that dangerous test that leads to *peritia* (expertise). The authority on some matter, then, comes from this having suffered when tested and having passed the test, so that someone has been constituted as *peritus*, “expert” or “experienced.”

So experience is always both something that happens to someone and something that someone does with what happens to them. An experience is not “owned” as any object. It is not planned as a voluntary activity; it can be done by someone when something happens to them. It always has elements of passivity and elements of activity. It is a gift that we actively receive. It is a task rooted in grace. This doing from what we have received can be schematized as follows:

1. Something happens and has enough power to capture our sensibility and our emotionality. There is in that sensibility, already, a series of cultural elements that mediate our perception, preparing us to select what will catch our attention and what we will consider intuitively beautiful or painful or whatever. However, there is, at times, a possibility of emotion without words, of something that strikes us beyond our cultural conditions, and takes us without our being able to articulate its sense or significance.
2. In any case, the first impact is not enough. For something that happens to be translated into experience, we need to remember it sufficiently so that a space for interpretative reflection can be opened in us. Again, there are cultural mediations that will lead us to complete the memories, to do so with certain technical and linguistic bases. But this is the only way we will be able to think about it. Thinking is what will expand the lived experience toward some significance that can be included with meaning in our storyline. And thinking about it and being able to understand it is also marked by elements of our culture.
3. Finally, the interpretation we make of what we have experienced, in order to be transformed into experience so that we can learn from it must be able to judge ethically what we have understood. Evidently, here too, the value frameworks are culturally received and negotiated.

Thus, freedom has at its disposal an accumulation of understood and valued experiences that are constituted as its own wisdom, as criteria from which it can adhere to truth and goodness and realize it.

4. Mediations

Mediations, The Condition of the Possibility of Experience

As we have already explained, experience does not occur spontaneously but requires mediations in all its moments, mediations that can be understood in different ways. There are structural mediations, which are not proper to the moment of experience but are part of the equipment that the person has to have to be able to live the experience. There are other mediations that do not come from the formative or self-educational processes, but come from God, which are offered to us freely when we choose to live our Christianity in a more active way. Finally, we will refer to a special type of mediation that we organize with the purpose of facilitating the foundational experience, the so-called configuring mediations.

Structural Mediations

By “mediations” we mean everything that strengthens the operations that integrate the process of experience: perceiving, remembering, understanding, valuing, deciding. We also mean everything that strengthens self-awareness, intersubjectivity, work, active insertion in socio-cultural contexts and the symbolic world. All these mediations contribute to building a person capable of experience.

We note a series of basic structural mediations:

1. Ordinary life as the complex place (the domains among which we actually live) where everything intersects and integrates and where, especially, experiences are managed and produced.
2. Self-awareness as a transcendental and spiritual mediation that enables all experience and mediates self-esteem, the real self, inner harmony, existential reflection, fidelity, and so forth.
3. Solitude, silence, which allows the experience to be translated into experience.
4. Writing and reading as basic companions for the understanding and appreciation of what we live and remember. Mainly, the reading of the Word of God.
5. Community as interpersonal and theological mediation, when we can live self-giving and helpful love, unifying our identity, in the encounter with others and the love of God.
6. Educational work as theological mediation. What we call moving from employment to ministry, which does not happen without serious work in employment.
7. Personal asceticism as mediation. Without self-denial, there are no experiences; but not all self-denial prepares for Christian experiences. All asceticism must lead to love. What is desirable is an “asceticism of normality,” that is, the effort to be where we are, to live

fully the present moment, without escapism, finding the way of the Kingdom here and now, as things are.

8. The sacraments as mediations when they do not reify grace but are an expression of the interior life of the community to which we belong, life in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

There are also two structural mediations that deserve more detail: personal accompaniment and culture of companionship. We would like to distinguish between one element and the other. We believe that, to a certain extent, accompaniment is being overvalued in relation to the culture of companionship, and that the latter is just as necessary, if not more so, on a day-to-day basis.

We understand the culture of companionship as the fact of living our lives together on a daily basis, the simple experience of being present to one another in a meaningful way, serving as companions to face daily joys and sorrows, to help us recognize each other as persons from the experience of love in simple things.

Accompaniment, on the other hand, refers to a more technical activity, usually exercised by a qualified (and socially, hierarchically or charismatically empowered) person over a group or a person. Among the possible schemes, we prefer to think of this accompaniment from a non-directive, “demand-driven” or “coaching” perspective. It should be noted that the current *Rule* (2015), in referring to this type of accompaniment by the Brother Director of the community, no longer speaks of an “interview” but of a “meeting”³⁸ and describes it as “a sharing of experience which helps their human and spiritual growth. It promotes also the building up of a fraternal community in which each feels responsible and knows that he is listened to, understood, appreciated, and loved.”³⁹

Personal Accompaniment

Accompaniment can be a structural mediation of the personalization of experience. We define accompaniment as the mediation that personalizes the formative processes. Personalization means an experience of subjectivity in which subjectivity becomes the subject of its own transformation. It is a process that takes place on a non-thematic background, with an intuitive search for what one is not yet. This search does not start from idealistic definitions but proceeds in the progressive and provisional integration of the elements on which it is becoming aware and creating subjectivity. It is an ethical task by which we realize that the responsibility for what we are and can be is uniquely ours.

For the mature person, accompaniment is a necessary complement to spiritual discernment, by which the person lives from within his or her subjectivity in obedience to the manifestation of the Spirit in his or her ordinary life. But we know that it is increasingly difficult to find those who can exercise this accompaniment in a satisfactory way.

Culture of Companionship

A culture of companionship can be a specific structural mediation of Lasallian life. Besides and beyond personal accompaniment, our life is lived in clear reference to a more or less stable

group, or groups, that accompany what we are living and developing. But many times, the conditions of intimacy do not succeed in the group, so they are not effectively mediations for the self-appropriation of the experience. It is up to all the group members, but especially to those who exercise the role of animation, to promote this culture of companionship which, in many cases, can compensate for the lack of personal accompaniment.

Eschatological Mediations

The task of formation for a Christian is not a one-sided human endeavor. In fact, it is not so in the case of any person. There are a series of mediations that are offered by God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit in the ministry of the Church. It is the regime of grace in which we live and which we must always take for granted as operative. Structural mediations are directed to the opening of freedom, to responsible subjectivation, in order to receive this gift and make it fruitful. Among these mediations we can mention: the community, the Institute, our Founder and the witness of our holy Brothers, the sense of faith of the People of God, the Church, the Magisterium, the ministries, the Word of God in the Bible and Tradition, the liturgy, and the sacraments.

Configuring Mediations

One type of complex mediation deserves to be highlighted. Many times they could be thought of as what we call domains in our formation plans. They are those mediations within which we can produce those configuring experiences. Since these experiences have to do with the foundational experience, they are not experiences that could be taught in the sense that they can be programmed to produce them, but they can predispose us to the experience of faith. We must take care in constructing them, but we must do so in a way in which we understand that everything depends on God.

Ultimately, the main configuring experience will always be prayer. Prayer is not a configuring mediation in itself, but it is the creator of a permanent relationship that will facilitate the theological experience when it can happen. Certain retreats or extended formation sessions offered at certain key moments of life—such as thirty-day retreats or sessions lasting several months—should be configuring experiences. However, many times they fail because there is no person with a relationship that can produce a theological experience. Other times they fail because this intentionality is not sufficiently taken into account in the prepared activities, which are designed exclusively from academic or technical criteria.

5. Conclusion

Experience of God

All these experiences are possible paths to the experience of God, since this is always convergent with another, as religious transcendence of an immanent experience that has been transcended cognitively, ethically, or aesthetically.

The experience of God requires eyes of one's own that are obtained in the silence of prayer. They are the eyes of faith, since the experience of God is always an act of faith. The particular mediation of the experience of faith is particularly symbolic. This mediation is inserted in a system of beliefs proper to a religious tradition. Between the symbol and the traditions there is a dialectical interplay. The same happens between the particular experience of God and the religious system in whose framework it is made.

As Javier Garrido insists,⁴⁰ we are convinced that the privileged place for the experience of God is the secularized cultural environment. That is, where we live. There we feel permanently challenged, as the 44th General Chapter of the Institute in 2007 pointed out in the first chapter of its conclusions.⁴¹ Garrido speaks of the experience of God as a theological experience, wanting to point out with this expression that, in this experience, God is perceived "in a real and immediate way, but not objectifiable."⁴²

In this experience, God shows himself without images, as someone who passes through our lives and leaves a trace of absence. He is someone who gives himself to us without our being able to possess him. And his passing generates more the experience of the absolute (the unconditional to whom we must obey and adore) than a verifiable perception or easy consolation. It is more an experience that requires faith than a knowledge that controls and disposes. It is precisely our secular culture, with all its denunciations or suspicion of religion, that puts us in a better position for an authentically theological experience.

Lasallian Experiences

Traditionally, we are accustomed to think in terms of the constitutive dimensions of the Brother's identity. As we have said, the understanding of the personalist roots of these dimensions gives us reason to think of them as an anthropological fact, and the Christological and ecclesiological anthropology of the Second Vatican Council allows us to see in these dimensions a Christian line of identity.

However, are there also some constitutive dimensions of the Lasallian identity of the lay Partner? This research is of great necessity. And it involves a word spoken exclusively by lay Lasallians.

The urgency of a word spoken by women has led to the multiplication of meetings of Lasallian women on different continents. Do Lasallian men and women not share common elements in their secularity as educators?

But one more question should concern us at the moment of thinking about the formation programs. What are the formative experiences of Lasallians from non-Christian religious contexts? And also, what are the experiences that can be the content of the formation programs where the majority of Lasallians come from non-European peoples? Shouldn't the personalist and Western categories detailed in this paper be reworked from other cultural frameworks?

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¹ Brother Santiago Rodríguez Mancini was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1960. He joined the De La Salle Brothers in 1978. He has completed studies as a teacher, catechist, and professor of religious sciences, and holds a bachelor’s degree in humanities focused in arts and philosophy. He has completed a master’s degree in philosophy, religion, and contemporary culture (UNC) with a work on the aesthetic experience as a place of formation of the believing conscience. He has published several books and articles on the spirituality of educators, educational pastoral care, and school catechesis. He has worked as a teacher at primary, secondary, and higher education levels. He was rector of the *Instituto Superior De La Salle* of Buenos Aires and director of the Pastoral Institute of Adolescence. In his Congregation, he also coordinated the District Formation Commission. He has been a formator of Brothers in all stages and in several countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. He has been Provincial Visitor of the District of Argentina-Paraguay and he was recently appointed the director of the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome and the director of the Office of Data Management and Research of the Institute.

² Cf. *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions and Hopes* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2020).

³ Cf. *Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim’s Handbook* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2019).

⁴ *Centro Internazionale Lasalliano* (CIL) refers to residential programs, usually of several weeks or months, that focus on some aspect of Lasallian identity and heritage and that have for the most part been conducted since 1968 at the La Salle Generalate in Rome, Italy,

⁵ Brother George Van Grieken has until recently overseen the Lasallian Research and Resources Service at the Generalate of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome. He is a member of the editorial board of *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* and the director of the Lasallian Resource Center in Napa, CA.

⁶ Cf. *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1967), 14.

⁷ Cf. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Rome, 2015), 12.

⁸ We consider that the three dimensions of Lasallian identity (consecration, mission, community) are valid for both Brothers and lay Partners because they are the three dimensions of Christian life rooted in baptism. In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, it is possible to find this basic equality that takes root in a Christology of the three *munera* of the Lord and an analogous ecclesiology: the ministry of the word (mission), the ministry of sanctification (consecration), and the pastoral ministry (community).

⁹ For some time now, a third concept has entered our vocabulary: “subjectivities.” It refers to the fact that cultural changes, when they become more complex, produce new historical contexts and these, in turn, produce new forms of social bonding that work on people from their interiority as

subjects who create social ties. Those born in the context of the late modernity of global financial capitalism are called “new subjectivities.” The characteristics we pointed out in the first section refer to these subjectivities together with some others such as the relationship with time as if it were a perpetual present with no relation to past or future, rhizomatic logic, speed and simultaneity, nomadism and ubiquity, collaborative presumption, and corporeality expanded with technology or art. For the purposes of the formative itineraries, we prefer to continue using the notion of person.

¹⁰ Cf. Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate of the Holy Father Francis on the Call to Holiness in Today’s World* (Vatican City: Libreria Vaticana, 2018), 35-62.

¹¹ Cf. Distrito Argentina-Paraguay, *Horizonte Distrital de la Formación* [Versión 2.2], 22 de junio de 2003.

¹² Cf. endnote 11.

¹³ “Popular education is a concept grounded in notions of class, political struggle, and social transformation. . . . Rather than the usage in the English language as when describing a ‘popular sports team,’ ‘popular’ here means ‘of the people.’ More specifically ‘popular’ refers to the ‘popular classes,’ which include peasants, the unemployed, the working class and sometimes the lower middle class.”

¹⁴ It is clear that the *Heideggerian* bases have been enriched from the anthropologies of otherness of Emmanuel Lévinas and Martin Buber, as well as from hermeneutic philosophy (Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur).

¹⁵ Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Método en teología* and later writings.

¹⁶ This Brother happens to be the main author of the text of the *Rule* of 1967, a text of very high cohesion and coherence, with a beautiful internal structure that he explains at length in his book. Cf. Paul-Antoine Jourjon, *Pour un renouveau spirituel: Commentaire des Règles et Constitutions des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes établies au 39e Chapitre general 1966-1967* (Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, 1969).

¹⁷ Let us note in passing a certain tension created by the texts of the *Declaration* and the *Rule* themselves between certain “elements” or “dimensions” of our identity. They are not equivalent expressions. Sometimes, when the “elements” are discussed, five are mentioned: baptismal and lay religious consecration, the apostolic and consecrated character of the community, the mission with its specific character as the service of the poor, the unity between education and evangelization in the mission, and the non-exclusive excellence of the school as a means of education. As can be seen, these elements imply a complexity that can still be analyzed. The reduction to three dimensions should not make us lose their richness.

¹⁸ This vow, a rereading of the classical vow of stability, was made only at perpetual profession. Thus, the stage of initial formation had a sense of progressive growth in fidelity until the definitive commitment. Cf. *Rule* of 1967, 67 2b.c.d; 4a.g; 8,d.e.f; 10,a.c.d.j; 11,a.f.

¹⁹ Cf. Cahiers Lasalliens 45-46. *L’Itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l’Écriture dans ses “Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite”*: Contribution à l’étude sur les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse. Volume I (1974) and Volume II (1974). For a synthesis of Volume I, see Edwin Bannon, FSC, *De La Salle: A Founder as Pilgrim* (London: De La Salle Provincialate, 1988).

²⁰ Cf. *Circular 418: Orientations for the Ministry of Vocations and for Initial Formation* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1983).

²¹ Like other Institute *Circulars* of the time, for example, that of the Service of the Poor, it does not seem to have had a great impact or a sufficiently transforming reception. With the distance of these more than thirty years, its value grows and its orientations become very fruitful. Cf. *Circular 412: Educational Service of the Poor and the Promotion of Justice* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1980).

²² *Rule* of 1987, 81.

²³ Cf. *Rule* of 2015, 9; 22; 29.2; 40; 56.2; 71-77; 78-86; 89; 90; 101; 157.

²⁴ Johann Baptist Metz writes, “There are memories that are dangerous, memories that challenge. Memories by which previous experiences break into the very center of our lives, giving birth to new and dangerous insights about the present. For a brief time, they shed a blinding and hardy light over our problematic assumptions about reality, showing us the banality of our pretended ‘realism.’ They burst through the norms of our habits and accepted structures of possibility with certain submissive characteristics. Those memories are like dangerous and incalculable visits of the past. They are memories that demand our attention. Memories which, in a certain way, contain the future.”

²⁵ The word “definitive” here is used in reference to the post-Vatican Council II *ad experimentum Rule* of 1967.

²⁶ The word “play” (*juego*) is being used here metaphorically in a rich symbolic appreciation of “game” and “artwork” in philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical aesthetics. In Cynthia Nielson, “Gadamer’s Aesthetics,” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007; revised 2023), we find, “‘The game and the artwork are both forms of self-movement which require that the spectator play along with what they bring into being’ (Gadamer). . . . The overall argument is not that a game or an artwork cannot be reduced to intention, material, or convention but rather that each of these elements comes into their own when taken up within the *playing* of the game or in the *practice* which is art.”

²⁷ Institutionalization entails authorized teams that discern to draw up planned proposals and teams that accompany their implementation.

²⁸ During the second part of the 1980s, in the formation house of the Marist Brothers in Cordoba (Argentina), this formative concept took on the following dynamics: the stages of postulancy/novitiate/scholasticate were carried out within the house itself. The times for the beginning and end of each stage were not fixed in advance or linked to any specific group but were determined by the discernment carried out between the animation team of the house and each one of the subjects.

²⁹ Expanding on endnote 26 concerning the use of the word “play” (*juego*), which is one of Gadamer’s fundamental themes or metaphors, Cynthia Nielson notes, “Hermeneutical aesthetics is dialogical in character. It recognizes that the practitioner and theoretician share in bringing a subject matter to light and plays down any theory/practice division in the arts. Interpretation is a means to a work’s realization.”

³⁰ Cf. endnote 11.

³¹ *Lasallian Formation for Mission. The Pilgrim’s Handbook*, pages 37-38.

³² Cf. *Rule* of 2015, 10.

³³ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancia e historia. Destrucción de la experiencia y origen de la historia*, 3rd expanded edition (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo editora, 2004), page 7.

³⁴ “Experience and Poverty” was published in *Discursos interrumpidos I* (Madrid: Taurus, 1982).

³⁵ “The Storyteller” was published in *Illuminations IV: For a Critique of Violence and Other Essays* (Madrid: Taurus, 1998).

³⁶ This may also be close to the defining characteristic of the “tired society” in Byung Chul Han’s terms.

³⁷ Cf. *Rule* of 1987, 61a.

³⁸ Cf. *Rule* of 2015, 60.1.

³⁹ *Rule* of 2015, 60.2.

⁴⁰ Javier Garrido, *Proceso humano y gracia de Dios: apuntes para una espiritualidad cristiana* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1996), page 39.

⁴¹ Cf. “Interior Life: Being Brothers Today and Tomorrow, Interior Men in the Simplicity of the Gospel,” in *Circular 455: The Documents of the 44th General Chapter* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2007), pages 9-17.

⁴² Garrido, page 39.