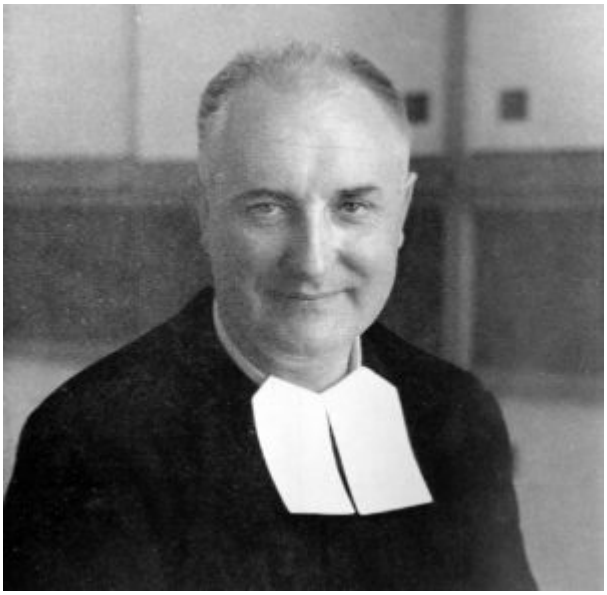
# Brother Michel Sauvage: a great reformer of the Lasallian Charism

***On the 25th anniversary of his death (2001-2026)***



To mark the 25th anniversary of the passing of Brother Michel Sauvage, which took place on 28 March 2001, the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is honouring his memory with a temporary exhibition that traces the most important stages of his life, not only as a tribute to his memory, but as an invitation to rediscover a living legacy. That of a man who knew how to 'read God' not only in the classroom, but wherever there was an educational need, training generations of mission leaders in Rome.

He was the theologian capable of reinterpreting the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle to respond to the challenges of modernity, stepping beyond the confines of the traditional school and performing a revolutionary act: just as De La Salle had left his social status to be with the poor teachers, so the modern Brother had to 'step out' of established educational institutions to reach out to the new forms of poverty.

## A life for the mission



Brother Michel Sauvage was born in 1923 in Marcq-en-Baroeul (near Lille), in northern France. The son of a marble craftsman, he grew up in a large (six children) and deeply religious family in which the sense of vocation was very strong. He died on 28 March 2001 in Annappes (a town in northern France), at a community of elderly Brothers.

Having entered the minor seminary (*Petit Noviciat*) of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at a very young age, he followed the traditional path of formation of the time (Novitiate and Scholasticate).

He immediately distinguished himself for his intellectual abilities. He earned a Doctorate in Theology with a pioneering thesis on the "Participation of the laity in the ministry of the Word", a topic that at the time (before the Council) was almost revolutionary.

He taught for many years in Rome at the *Iesus Magister* Institute, but his thinking always went beyond the academic sphere. Sauvage dedicated his life to a specific mission: rediscovering the spiritual roots of "educational service to the poor".

During the years of the Second Vatican Council and the General Chapter of 1966, his thinking was instrumental in defining the identity of the Brother. Sauvage was, in fact, among the promoters of an educational presence within prisons, seeing in the prisoner the "poor" par excellence to whom dignity must be restored through education. He also realised that the new forms of slavery (drug addiction, social marginalisation) required a new kind of "school": that of life and the recovery of one's identity, just as any place where a young person found themselves in difficulty became a "classroom" and a "theological space".

The Brother's life, therefore, is not divided between prayer and work. Action itself – whether in a classroom, a rehabilitation centre or a prison – becomes the place of encounter with God.

## The theological legacy

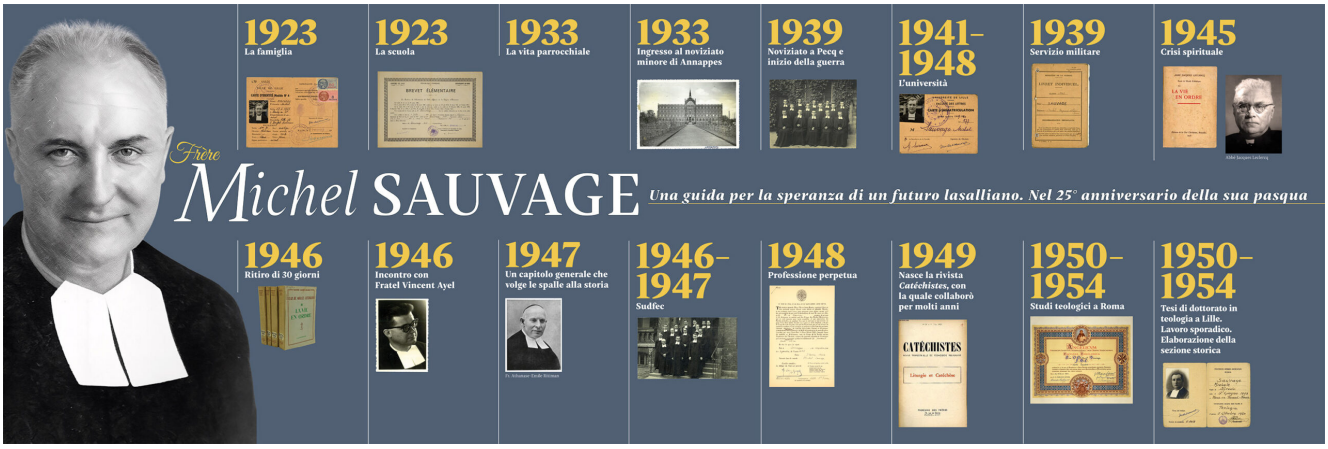
The work that best summarises his thinking, written in collaboration with Brother Miguel Campos, is **Announcing the Gospel to the Poor**. In this text, Sauvage paved the way for a mission shared with the laity, recognising that the Lasallian charism is a gift for the whole Church and that the heart of Christian education is the "community" that takes on human frailty.



"We must not leave God to go to the poor, nor leave the poor to go and find God. If we live in a spirit of faith, the encounter with the young person in difficulty becomes an encounter with Christ. Our prayer is embodied in action, and our action becomes contemplation of God's work in the other".

Today, 25 years after his death, remembering Michel Sauvage means committing ourselves to living with the same boldness. His life reminds us that being Lasallians means being constantly "embodied" in history, with our eyes open to the most urgent needs of the contemporary world.

**The digital version of the exhibition *"Fr. Michel Sauvage: on the 25th anniversary of his Easter"* is available below.**









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1) One of his elder brothers, Jean-Baptiste Sauvage, was Bishop of Annecy and a leading figure at the Second Vatican Council. Michel worked alongside him as an expert (*peritus*), indirectly influencing the Council's documents on religious life and education. One of his sisters was a Daughter of Charity, reflecting a family deeply committed to service.

2) M. Sauvage and M. Campos, *"Proclaiming the Gospel to the* Poor" (*Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*, 1977).