Brothers of the Christian Schools, no more and no less

For the Brothers of the Christian Schools 2025 is being a year of commemorations. In 1725, just 300 years ago, the Papal Bull approving their Institute was published, while in 1900, 125 years ago, the Church canonised their founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, who in 1950, ***75 years ago, was declared Universal Patron Saint of Christian Educators****. These round dates mark the milestones of an institutional history that began in 1680.*

A lengthy exposition could be composed to explain who the De La Salle's disciples are, but, in fact, their simple name describes precisely what they have always wanted to be: Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Brothers

The story goes that the first Lasallian teachers did not take the matter of their name lightly. Although they worked in schools, the term "teacher" did not suit them, or rather, it was not enough for them; they wanted to be more than mere educational professionals. So they chose to call themselves "Brothers"; brothers to each other and older brothers to their students.

Perhaps they did not express it so forcefully, but from their experience today it is very clear that fraternity is the great treasure of the De La Salle Brothers. A fraternity that they try to live every day and try to spread around them.

The word "Brother" also indicates that De La Salle's teachers do not pursue the priesthood, something that was clear to them very early on. As the saint himself wrote, the school and the community were already hard enough tasks without adding more responsibilities. And there they remain, committed to the value of the laity in the Church, despite more than a little misunderstanding.

Schools

The original apostolic environment of De La Salle's disciples was the school. In fact, the first Lasallian projects were communities of teachers dedicated body and soul to their schools for the poor, which formed a wide network, with their identity, their leaders, their formative processes…. This network organisation

helped them to see clearly how to act, to share objectives, to set themselves challenges and to overcome difficulties. Over time, the network evolved into an institute of apostolic religious life and then into a large charismatic family, open in a thousand different ways to all believers wishing to commit themselves to the mission and spirit of De La Salle.

Lasallians do not forget their origins or their mission; for this reason, they feel especially at home among educators who live their profession as a vocation which fills them with responsibility and, at the same time, with deep satisfaction. They know that they are engaged in an essential task, much more transcendental than society sometimes lets on. In Christian terms, De La Salle would explain that these educators carry out an authentic ministry, which God himself entrusts to them; they are "ministers of God and dispensers of his mysteries".

We were talking about schools "for the poor", and this is not an unimportant nuance. Because, not without having to overcome many obstacles, the first Lasallians promoted a free school for all, irrespective of their social origin and their economic possibilities. Sometimes they even did so with a certain intolerance, because for them it was something essential. They should therefore rightly be included among the first defenders of the fundamental rights of children.

With the passing of time, the initial Lasallian school has been opening up to other forms of education, while the commitment to those in need has taken on different tones, depending on the needs and the real possibilities of delivering it. Today it manifests itself in a thousand ways of caring for students with difficulties, promoting non-formal education projects at the service of young people at risk of social exclusion, as an active presence in impoverished countries or by encouraging voluntary work and development aid…. The most recent challenge is to implement effective educational responses to the needs of the peripheries.

But education in the service of those most in need did not mean taking just anything for granted. The good running of their schools was a constant desire of the first Lasallians, who, to achieve this, promoted a real didactic revolution, proposing ways of doing things which were practically unknown at the time. For example, education in French, when the general school language was Latin; or the simultaneous teaching of groups of pupils of a similar level, when the usual practice was for the *sniper* teacher to receive his pupils one by one; or the strict

organisation of school activities: subjects, timetables, calendars…. Much of what we now consider “normal” in an educational establishment could be said to have its origin in the primitive intuitions of the disciples of St John Baptist de La Salle.

But the pedagogical concern to innovate continues and those who have attended a Lasallian school in recent decades know this; they surely remember some particular project which was only developed in their school, although it later became generalised: *Ulises, Arpa, Crea, Lectura Eficaz, Hara*…. Today the effort is concentrated on the so-called “*Nuevo Contexto de Aprendizaje” (NCA).* “New Learning Context” which is already very advanced in its development. Renewing the school so that it responds ever better to the needs of its students continues to be an essential component of the Lasallian DNA.

Christians

As we have just seen, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, together with their Associates, are very far from being ancient museums, mute witnesses of what happened in another era. On the contrary, they are living organisms, intimately connected with that initial charism which, from heaven, impelled Saint John Baptist de La Salle, their founder. That same Spirit inspires them every day in ways of updating the fundamental intuitions which moved the first Lasallians and those who succeeded them in time. They are comforted by the hope of one day finding themselves all together, at the side of God the Father who gave them birth so that “all may be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).

Como acabamos de comprobar, los Hermanos de las Escuelas Cristianas, junto con sus Asociados, están muy lejos de ser vetustos museos, testigos mudos de lo que sucedía en otra época. Al contrario, son organismos vivos, íntimamente conectados con aquel carisma inicial que, desde el cielo, impulsaba a San Juan Bautista de La Salle, su fundador. Aquel mismo Espíritu les inspira cada día maneras de actualizar las intuiciones fundamentales que movieron a los primeros lasalianos y a quienes les fueron sucediendo en el tiempo. Los conforta la esperanza de encontrarse un día todos juntos, a la vera del Dios Padre que los vio nacer para que “todos se salven y lleguen al conocimiento pleno de la verdad” (1Tim 2,4).

* *Article written by Brother Josean Villalabeitia, published in the magazine Vida Religiosa (June 2025, No. 6, Vol. 139), in Spanish.*