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# Lasallian Education grappling with the European Union

Contribution of the Lasallian European  
Commission for Education to the MEL  
International Assembly 2006

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## Introduction

Up-to-the-minute, striking, decisive-these are some of the adjectives that spring to mind from the first lines of this brief introduction when we consider the content and relevance of this study. We are grateful to Brother Herman Lombaerts for having gifted us, yet again, with a work that gives us so much to discuss, so much to ponder and then to serve as reference material in our libraries.

The “prime material” of the contents already existed and a dry, historical presentation might well have been chosen just to “get the job over with”, that is, to get out a quick copy to fulfill the objectives of the publication. Doing so, however, would run the risk of losing most readers in the course of a cursory perusal. Nevertheless, the style adopted has broken the monotony of a mere chronicle; it asks for the collaboration of an active, critical, inquiring mind, one capable of establishing relations, contrasting, synthesizing, questioning and proposing new hypotheses.

One praiseworthy aspect that can be mentioned has to do with the limitations imposed on the author before he even began the work: content, scenario, personages and venues were all givens. Only the script was in the hands of the author to see what he could “make of it” for the reader’s sake to help him to grasp the essence.

A favorable reception of the study is guaranteed for several reasons: the good name of the author, without doubt; the title as well, especially for persons who live in Europe and know the scene; but above all, as already stated, because it is opportune, for the present moment; it is of the “here and now” in living flesh, a time that calls for answers that are precise and enormously responsible. It is a wholehearted effort that is needed if Lasallian education is to respond to the challenges of today: emigration, conflicts, violence, secularism, pluralism, etc. But the fundamental reason that it has been so well received, as happens with the great works of literature and religion, is its universality. Of course, the examples, testimonies, statistical data and general context all come from Europe; but these are only geographical particulars of a magma that flows incandescently under the five continents.

The study is beautifully structured and the reader can easily go through the chapters—even if, on occasion, the reading must slow down to a lesser speed, especially when the descriptive telling is set aside. The four themes treated, (chapters 2 to 5) have similar structure: a) introduction (context, objectives), b) analysis of the present day situation, c) answers found in the Lasallian history of the origins, d) consequences for the Lasallian mission and e) testimonials and concrete examples of how it is being done “the Lasallian way”.

To so wisely combine the present, the past and the future has been one of the sensible moves of the four encounters held in various places of Europe since the year 2002 and which are the object of this collaboration. The CLEE (Lasallian Commission of Europe for Education), faithful to its historical commitment, fostered this reflection by taking into account the themes proposed to it by the Permanent Council of the MEL and by certain aspects dealt with during the Five Colloquia held in the decade of the nineties. A reflection on Europe (and on the broader mission of the Institute in today’s world) must necessarily take into account the wealth of perspectives and findings that were accomplished in those four encounters.

To summarize, we point out that the present publication has as its primary purpose that of making a decisive contribution to the International Assembly of the MEL in October of 2006. Another contribution, which is no less significant, will be that of helping all of us to adjust our mental processes to assume the state of change, now felt by all to be the most permanent state.

Br. Alfonso Novillo

## Foreword

It is with pleasure that I introduce this issue of the MEL booklets, which has been put together by Herman Lombaerts. It sums up all the work done over four years in the Lasallian European Commission for Education (CLEE).

A reflection on the new present-day reality of an emerging Europe was needed, because it is in this situation that we encounter the "signs of our times" and the book of our History - a history in which we see so many gaps and shortages that we are badly in need of the hope proper to union, justice and peace. And if it is a question of 'signs' it is very important that educators do not lose sight of them so as to be able to read them in a Christian perspective. Without this reading and this deepening, whatever is undertaken for education in the faith will remain something disembodied and devoid of meaning.

Faced with this new reality, which is also being updated with the creation of the European Lasallian Region (REL), there is much discernment giving rise at the same time to both optimism and pessimism. Pessimism would be justified if certain European orientations such as neo-liberalism, globalization and the introduction of new frontiers lead us to reinforce our egoism and our differences. Optimism on the other hand is stronger and makes itself felt in the form of new challenges regarding equality, respect for human rights, a great flexibility and broadmindedness with regard to ideas and representations and also concerning the practice of religion.

Taking into consideration what is actually happening in our schools nowadays, CLEE studied a certain number of themes such as immigration, neo-liberalism, violence and secularization. This program constitutes one among many possibilities for focusing attention on present-day reality and giving rise to creativity. There are ruptures in the domain of ideas and also in that of customs. Geographic configurations have been modified within this universe without borders. All these things are further reasons for opening our minds and our hearts to the new things that turn up from day to day. And by the way is not God a novelty?

After the disenchantment of the world and the obscuring of religion, it ought to be possible to create spaces of hope, dialogue, mysticism. Of course, we keep hoping that this secularization will lead to a new practice of religion. But for that to emerge we have first of all to look for it, deepen it and let ourselves be impregnated by all that is good in lay society. In this confluence of ideas, religions and cultures, we need to show a face that is smiling and full of hope: De La Salle led us through a story of adaptations and of creativity. Now the time has come to express them.

Our education centres are living under the stimuli of new times. And this is but the beginning.

These stimuli deserve our attention, whatever their origin, because they always bring with them the winds of renewal and an invitation to multi-culture and multi-religion.

May this booklet be a help for MEL, the General Council and the General Chapter in their wish to reflect on the big themes which at present affect our society and our Lasallian education. It was while thinking of their preoccupations that we programmed our themes for these last four years and we dedicate to them this synthesis of our work, carried out with much enthusiasm.

Br. José María Martínez  
Secretary of CLEE

## I. The Lasallian educational plan in the context of the European Union

The 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter held in the year 2000 launched the ambitious project of entrusting the Lasallian Educational Mission, not solely to the hands of the Brothers, but of associating in it, in a structural way, Partners and Associates with a common concern for a double fidelity: to the founding charism and to present realities. On that occasion a decision was taken to organise an international assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission for 2006. Brother Nicolas Capelle set out its context, aim, objectives and preparatory instruments in the first number of the MEL Bulletins<sup>1</sup>.

This project was a logical response to developments which were obvious across the whole world and for the whole Institute over these latter decades.

On the one hand, the Brothers are a minority among the lay collaborators, to the point, that in certain countries they have disappeared from the works. One of the “signs of the times” is truly the emergence of numerous partners who want to be associated in the Educational Mission and to live Lasallian spirituality through a firm commitment. This evolution constitutes the soul of the renewal of the Institute for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On the other hand, the evolution of the world and contemporary society calls us to a different point of view. The collapse of the communist system is changing the balance of military, political and economic power across the world. It now looks as if the capitalist system and democracy are establishing themselves as the sole models for the entire globe. We are warned by the results of such an evolution: it is profitable for certain regions, the western world in particular, and costly for other regions like Africa and some regions of Latin America and Asia<sup>2</sup>. And then, various populations are involved in it, not by their local governments but by

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<sup>1</sup> MEL Bulletin 1, Rome 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Towards making rich countries places of refuge, *Atlas du Monde Diplomatique*, Paris, 2005, pp. 50-51.

the process of a globalisation of systems of production and by spreading consumerism throughout the world.

## The Institute reading the “signs of the times”.

At the time of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter, the Institute was deeply disquieted by these kinds of questions. To be better able to discern the matters of urgency and to design strategic stances in accord with the Educational Mission, the Council gave permission for international colloquia to be organised<sup>3</sup>. From 1994 to 1998 some 250 Brothers and Lay People were gathered around Brother Superior and his Council to take part in thematic studies on the general idea “Education Today”. First of all, these gatherings took the context of contemporary society into consideration. According to educational tradition, schools complete and amplify socialisation and education begun in the bosom of the family. By common agreement parents and educators in our institutions place their hopes on coordinated continuity in the educational process on the level of values, culture, religious tradition and integration into society and its institutions. This continuity is called into question, on the one hand by a change in the very idea of the family and its tangible real-life experience, and on the other hand because of changes in the social context.

Five fundamental aspects of the changes that are appearing at the present time made up the themes of the Colloquia: the family, globalisation, the development of gigantic cities, new learning technologies and passing on the faith today. During the deliberations, those taking part could glimpse topics cutting across the themes and emerging each time, as, for example, inculturation, inter-religious dialogue, new religious movements and the anthropology of the young. But as well there were partnership and solidarity amongst Lasallians, the aims of involvement in the works, pathways for involvement for the Institute and those associated with it, etc. The five themes affect the whole Institute; they reflect a worldwide reality. Our involvements, wherever they may be, are intimately intertwined with numerous networks beyond and independent of belonging to an international Institute.

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<sup>3</sup> The F.S.C. Institute and Education Today. Five Colloquia for a better understanding, *Bulletin de l’Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétaines*, No. 245 (1999).

International interdependence in the service of the mission is influenced by these same processes of transition in society. Any reflection on Education, in Europe, is bound to take as its basic framework the work achieved at the time of the five colloquia. It has a duty to deepen them and articulate them in accordance with the development of the continent and the specific questioning becoming apparent there.

## Europe.

The Lasallian European Commission for Education (CLEE) decided to adopt the MEL perspective and to programme its annual meetings with the 2006 International Assembly in view. Today, the Mission has the duty of facing up to the matters of urgency in education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The MEL Permanent Council has recalled its objectives that have priority. These are social justice and the educational service of the poor<sup>4</sup>, respect for the Rights of the Child<sup>5</sup>, promoting educational innovations<sup>6</sup> and the explicit declaration of the faith or the problem of developing school-based pastoral care<sup>7</sup>.

In 2000, on the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the impact of developments being announced for the European continent could hardly be imagined. Within a few years a whole new situation was in place. CLEE believed it was called upon to make Lasallians on the continent more aware of these changes by encouraging them to remodel the educational strategies of their works in keeping with this new reality. A hermeneutic reading of the signs of the times requires a simultaneous re-interpretation of the tradition and an anthropological, theological and spiritual study of the presence of Christians in society.

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<sup>4</sup> Intercapitular Meeting May 2004, Educational Service of the poor, MEL Bulletin 20, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the UNO Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, The Rights of the child, *Bulletin of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, No. 247 (2002)

<sup>6</sup> N. Capelle & J. A. Warletta, Educational Innovations, *Bulletin of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, No. 248 (2003); N. Capelle, Lasallian educational innovation, *MEL Bulletin* 4, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> F. Pajer, Education in school and religious culture, *MEL Bulletin* 6, Rome, 2003.

Of what are we really saying when we talk about Europe? More than 800 million people look upon themselves as Europeans. 435 million of them live in the 25 States of the European Union<sup>8</sup>. However the borders to the East of the continent are not rigid. Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine are often considered as being part of Europe. But from a geographical point of view, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and possibly Greenland have as much right to this claim. Greenland is a dependency of Denmark, whilst Iceland has closer ties with USA. Turkey and Azerbaijan, who do not share the Christian roots, are often considered "too far East", although the populations of Albania and Bosnia are also predominantly Muslim.

Several other countries have lodged their applications to become part of the European Union. There is question of a vast plan of reconstruction of the old continent. No one, today, dares imagine where that will lead. Each enlargement is conscientiously planned to make the integration succeed so that the population of a new member may achieve a better standard of living without leading to any destabilisation in the other countries. The EU has arrived at the point of breaking the historic equilibrium progressively established between the States and especially the Christian Churches, with the Jews still suffering some lethal consequences of the Holocaust. With the probable integration of other countries of Eastern Europe and of Turkey, the Orthodox Churches and Islam will be integrated into the Union. It can be expected that the borders will be pushed further back some decades from now. What will the new European identity be, when it does not stem from ethnic or cultural membership? Up till now multiple borders keep separate some realities which from a certain point of view are considered to be irreconcilable. In order to integrate the other-who-is-different an exacting evolution will be needed to go beyond historic prejudices, to allow oneself to be won over by the other seeing further than the differences and recognising one another as equals starting from a programme for co-responsibility, solidarity and living together in the same geo-political reality.

From the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the "old continent" has ceased to be looked upon as the centre of the world, as the point

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<sup>8</sup> L. Halman, R. Luijckx & M. van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values*, Tilburg, 2005, p. 14 ff.

of reference for science, culture, politics or ideology for the other continents. The centre of economic, military and political gravity has moved towards the United States and Asia. And former strong relationships in Europe are becoming meaningless under the impact of globalisation and interest in, and concern for, space around planet Earth and even beyond. From the economic, political and socio-cultural point of view, will the slow moving reconstruction of a solid entity succeed in piecing together again a specific and qualitatively decisive influence at the world level?

But let us be careful not to isolate the position of Europe from the other continents or to under-estimate its resources and potentialities. It is the whole of the contemporary world that is being restructured and moving towards a different model for living together on this earth - where the exploration of other planets and the universe has already assumed an important place. On the world level, strong relationships are changing in the wake of the severance of economic reality from political structures. Access to development by large populations (in Asia for example) up till now, under the control of dictatorships or because of their geographical isolation, will have considerable consequences for the Western world and for the continents in the Southern hemisphere. Thorny problems like hunger and poverty in the world, the abuse of women and children, the exploitation of raw materials, in Africa and Latin America for example, for the exclusive profit of the rich countries, the weakening of the status of the ecology, among others, threaten the quality of life for the majority of the world's population. If these situations are extrapolated into the future, one can only feel alarmed and concerned<sup>9</sup>.

## **Europe and a different world.**

Is a different world possible? A famous author like Susan George<sup>10</sup> is very optimistic about this challenge<sup>11</sup>. She believes that the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. The Planet in danger, *L'Atlas du Monde Diplomatique*, pp. 9-37.

<sup>10</sup> Co-directress of the Transnational Institute (Amsterdam) and co-foundress of ATTAC (France), expert in the area of hunger and poverty in the Third World, the consequences of debt for countries on the way to development, North-South relationships, transnational institutions like the Worldbank, the I.M.F., etc.

<sup>11</sup> *Another World Is Possible If...* New York, 2004.

movement for a just world will give rise to more and more feelings of solidarity and will succeed. An awareness will be established bridging borders and present day economic and political conditions. Susan George claims that this plan for a new world will succeed if, amidst other conditions, Europeans take the lead in the contemporary world. By solidifying the European entity, by building up a social, cultural and ideological identity and by means of international collaboration, a viable, just and ecologically sustainable world is possible. But success will come only through dialogue, negotiations, developing consensus and honest collaboration, with the support of scientific investigations, and not by military confrontations or by economic exploitation. In a lasting way, the deadlocks in the new geopolitics that has been set up will have to be transcended<sup>12</sup>.

Let us also call attention to Colin Crouch's analysis of the Anglo-American model of a completely privatised comfortable society<sup>13</sup>. The privatised State is politically weak (small turn-out of voters) to the point of undermining citizenship, eroding local and regional administrative bodies. But it has at its disposal an extremely well developed lobby in the business domain. The well-off society does very little for the ordinary people. Such a post-democratic society constitutes the most dangerous threat to the democracy of the Western world. It has become well established in the United States and it is being successfully infiltrated into the European Union.

## Historic transitions.

However, Europe is a case apart<sup>14</sup>. For more than 50 years - in continuity with the rational approach of Modernity and the Enlightenment - numerous studies in sociology and in the psychology of religion have been trying to trace the phenomenon of secularisation. It is a development which appeared especially in Western Europe. No other continent was affected by such a distancing of itself from institutional religions viz. Catholicism and

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. L'Atlas du Monde Diplomatique, (note 8) pp. 40-79.

<sup>13</sup> *Post-Democracy*, Cambridge, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> G. Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*, London, 2002.

Protestantism. Even so, the same phenomenon is also noticed with respect to other ideological systems and on other continents, amongst intellectuals and economically emancipated persons. In general, on the other continents, such as the United States, Latin America or Africa, Catholics and Protestants do not give up religious practice in large numbers. In instances where membership of a particular Church does not meet the expectations of the faithful, either, they change Churches, or, they attend Pentecostal groups, or join the sects, or integrate with native syncretist churches ...

In Europe, Catholics and Protestants do not change churches or religion. Only a minority of persons change their religious identity. In cases of disappointment another kind of shifting takes place. The majority, especially among the younger generations give up regular religious practice, but keep up formal, chosen membership<sup>15</sup>. This development is surely provoking consternation and perplexity in ecclesiastical authorities, in interpretations of observance and in their significantly divergent understandings.

In spite of that, institutional religion in Europe is far from having disappeared<sup>16</sup>. 1/ It seems that specific attitudes to a religion persist and continue to slant life choices and scales of value of whole populations. Right up to the present time European society is still affected by its religious past. 2/ Certain big religious festivals - publicised by the media - are maintained and arouse a certain amount of interest. 3/ It turns out that the Church's charismatic potential offers a reference setting for persons (adults) seeking a sense of meaning for life or religious membership. 4/ Challenged by the great ethical, social, cultural, medical, political and economic questions the churches do not stay on the sidelines. From the positions they adopt they can bring about a qualitative difference in relation to the dilemmas experienced at the heart of contemporary society.

This development signals a major breakdown in comparison with the situation three centuries ago. J. B de La Salle located his initiative at the heart of the French Catholic Church. The

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<sup>15</sup> *Atlas of European Values*, Tilburg, 2005, pp. 62-63.

<sup>16</sup> J.-P. Willaime, *Europe et religions. Les enjeux du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 2004, pp. 52-62.

Church and the State were closely linked as guarantors of the continuity of that society. That being the case, education plainly planned the integration of the Christian and ecclesial faith in the lives of the children: teaching citizenship in the name of God and rooting man in the divine life. Every plan of life was located within the Church. The Brothers' community was entirely devoted to that end, all the while taking on its socio-political presuppositions.

The separation of Church and State, like the kind introduced into France by secularisation (1905), a result of the Revolution, instituted a different kind of society. In a way, the whole of Europe was affected by it. If, on the one hand, the Church lost its "absolutist" influence and if many ecclesial institutions deeply rooted in social life realised that their activities and ambitions were reduced, on the other hand, these institutions gained from it by concentrating on their specific evangelical and pastoral mission. They realised that they were obliged to choose other strategies to make an impact on society.

Faithful to their pragmatic genius, the Brothers adapted, as soon as possible to the political and administrative conditions of the separation of Church and State and succeeded in finding a niche for their establishments in strategic places in accord with their mission. But at the same time, society having become more "pluralist" new situations required detailed reflection and a different pedagogical and pastoral approach. "Subjects" - children, youths and parents - more than in the past, exercised their right to liberty of conscience, thought and action in all areas. Religion changed its social status in a society which had become a-denominational.

The Institute was founded in the wake of the renewal of the Council of Trent. The Counter-Reformation was felt up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Vatican Council II sought to take account of the change which took place following on from Modernity and the Enlightenment. By concentrating on "the signs of the times", and on contemporary man, bearer of the Holy Spirit, openness to the world led to some remarkable initiatives. Since Vatican II, dialogue has reached new heights of collaboration in the area of the great dilemmas in ethics, medicine, politics, social justice and the development of a new ecumenism.

## The “return of religion”.

Certain ones, like Card. Poupard and Card. Ratzinger, consider secularisation, laicisation, as the most dangerous question for Europe today<sup>17</sup>. They accuse non-practising Christians of indifference and unbelief. Their diagnosis is severe and demands a clear and strong response. They are reacting against nihilist relativism, secularism, individualism and laicism. According to them Christianity is being laicised! This diagnosis has given rise to a generous response in certain countries still mostly Catholic, such as Poland, where the people believe they are called to be the “new evangelisers” of western Europe.

From whence comes the interest in the “return of religion” in the guise of a new evangelisation, the contribution of new religious movements, charismatic enthusiasm, mass ecclesial rallies, initiatives by authorities to launch a more convincing commitment, etc. Sometimes this (nostalgic) aspiring is found in fundamentalist and traditionalist tendencies. The “return of religion” is then interpreted in a literal, conformist sense, as a quite uncritical fidelity to the orthodoxy of the institutional Church and its hierarchical authority.

Other groups of believers, thinkers and practitioners pay more attention to the Christian character inherent in the very process of secularisation. They look upon it as a stage in the development of Christianity. In it no break is occurring with the specific direction of the Christian faith, but rather with a certain historical form of Christianity whose days are definitely over. In exchange for the experience of modernity and post-modernity, these believers are aware of the real issue for Christianity in a different society, with new questions and responsibilities. From this comes their interest in a more open collaboration with culture and contemporary society. Whilst recognising the validity of the separation of Church and State, they reject any opposition in principle between the

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<sup>17</sup> Investigation into ‘non-belief and religious indifference’, carried out by the Pontifical Council for Culture as preparation for the 2004 annual Assembly. Cf. [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org); <http://www.dimarzio.it/srs/article.php?sid=306>; and <http://www.cnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=28199>. Whilst relying on the objectivity of the observation in the investigation, this diagnosis seems to ignore or minimise the analysis of authors like, for example, Grace Davie (note 14) Colin Crouch (note 13) and Jean-Paul Willaime (note 16).

secular domain and the religious domain. More particularly, research into the quality of life on the one hand, and the concern to be committed to the service of the deprived and the excluded on the other, are seen as manifestations of the incarnation of the God of life. It is for the eyes of faith to recognise it.

The debate / conflict between these two tendencies is fairly fundamental and runs across all the pastoral and educational strategies. A clarification of the philosophical and theological presuppositions cannot be by-passed. Otherwise one is left with either an “essentialist” understanding, an a-historic, conceptual, eerie Christianity; or one opts for an “existentialist” understanding, a Christianity rooted in concrete reality, historical, experiential, conditioned by the perceptions of the senses<sup>18</sup>.

Jean Boissonnat emphasises the importance of modifying one’s perceptions<sup>19</sup>. In a certain manner, he says, God made Europe. Christianity gave the continent its foundational values and its first institutions. But then, Europe rid itself of God by means of the great philosophical currents and schisms, by setting up laicised institutions. Today, Europe is trying to become a new entity in the midst of a globalised world, and God is not a member of it: God is not a European!

## **The contribution of CLEE.**

At its meeting in March 2002, the CLEE Bureau designed a systematic work plan for 2002 - 2006 to go, in detail, into the range of questions for the Lasallian Educational Mission in Europe and to mobilise collaborators to respond to them in a creative manner.

While bearing in mind the four themes suggested by the MEL Permanent Council and aspects of the contemporary world explored by the five colloquiums, the CLEE Bureau was determined to highlight four themes highly significant for the situation of the Institute in Europe. The whole preoccupation concerned

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<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this problem cf. G. De Scgrijver, *Recent Theological Debates in Europe. Their Impact on Interreligious Dialogue*, Bangalore, 2004, pp. 1-122.

<sup>19</sup> *Dieu et l’Europe*, Paris, 2005.

the emergence of the new Europe, with the integration of the countries of Central Europe and the East. What will the Lasallian educational mission be in this new context?

Three assessments are called for

1/ From all the evidence, the reality of the Institute cannot be thought of as the sum of the efforts in the different countries until now lined up side by side economically, politically, culturally and religiously. Inside the continent, 'Lasallian' frontiers developed since the beginning of the Institute must be abolished. A new entity must be shaped that is different and surpassing the sum of all that has existed until the present.

2/ The traditional way of seeing the Brothers in Europe is vanishing. There are already several Districts on their way to extinction and, statistically, all European Districts are changing along the same line. The reality of the educational mission is being placed more and more in the hands of lay collaborators, either affected by the founding charism, committed to children and young people in difficulty, or eager to discover meaning in their lives, to be committed to serving mankind in the spirit of the Christian faith. The "post-congregation" era is on the doorstep.

3/ The place of religion in European society is changing. A change that cannot be ignored is obvious. Christian Europe is being transformed into a multi-cultural and multi-religious reality, distinct from the ethnic, cultural and religious multi-nationality of the past. Traditional educational institutions will have to reposition themselves in an environment so much more pluralist and in line with the educational policies of governments. They will have to go further than the compromises for co-existence set up in the past. A presence in this educational world in the name of the gospel and the Lasallian tradition will have to be rethought and re-positioned in a creative fashion.

The CLEE Bureau therefore selected four themes perceived as fundamental in the process of change that is occurring in Europe at the present time. Each theme was tackled in one of the annual assemblies. Those taking part were spurred on in their reflections and encouraged to take initiatives to integrate into their involvement awareness of the new European reality.

### **General classification of themes:**

#### **Emergence of the European Union with the inclusion of Central Europe and the East and the Lasallian Educational Mission.**

<b>Themes explored by CLEE</b>	<b>CLEE Calendar</b>		
	<b>Dynamic aspects borne in mind by MEL</b> Justice and poverty - Rights of the Child - Educational Innovations Announcing the Faith and school-based pastoral care		
	<b>Preparation</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Involvements</b>
1. European frontiers and migration; inter-cultural and inter-religious dimensions; plurality	questionnaire	2002	
2. The environment in which the child grows up; the neo-liberal plan and the educational policy of the EU	questionnaire	2003	
3. Society-institutions tensions and violence: role of the school in society	questionnaire	2004	
4. Quality of human life; secularisation and 'the return of religion'; religious teaching and introduction to the faith	questionnaire	2005	
Synthesis of the dossier	-	2006	

These themes are inter-connected and constitute a whole. However there is a certain logic in the sequence of the different sessions.

The **first meeting** undertook to have a good look, principally, at the evidence that the concept ‘Europe’ is changing profoundly. It is no longer a group of nations; it is about a geopolitical construct. The variations of the word ‘frontier’ makes it into an enlightening analyser. We distinguish, of course, the frontier of the European Union of the 25. But there is also the Schengen area, that of the Council of Europe, of the euro, of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). There is also the lethal frontier that migrants coming from Africa and elsewhere attempt to cross at the risk of losing their lives. That is why the first meeting determined to explore a triple theme: the question of frontiers, migration and the new debate with plurality. These new realities jostle with the manner in which Lasallian establishments were set up in Europe.

The **second meeting** wanted to measure the true nature of the plan the Western world has chosen for itself and is preaching throughout the whole world: the neo-liberal capitalist system and a democracy more and more ‘privatised’ for the benefit of the business world. This is the real environment in which children are growing up. What educational policy does the European Union advocate in the face of such a ‘dictatorship’? Lasallians, in Europe, are questioned in a way that cannot be ignored to reconsider their educational contribution in response to the anthropological and ethical dimension of such a plan. It is proving essential to be provided with different skills to decide on how to be part of the world of education. Where must they take their place to make a qualitative difference?

The **third meeting** wanted to take into consideration the emerging relational arena in the new socio-cultural entity. The new relationships between countries and the freedom of movement for people and services deeply affect relationships between populations, institutions and society. A zone of insecurity becomes established when European institutions do not handle the new forms and opportunities for meeting and exchange. All these variations jostle with the traditions, customs, rites and public and private spaces. It is a form of violence that people are invited to handle in a civilised way. Rather than experience civility in the

'European' spirit, some people prefer to insist on their own right, through bloody violence if necessary. This process affects all institutions and the school milieu in particular since children and the young (migrants) take on board social tensions, with which it is beyond their capacity to come to terms. What are Lasallian establishments doing to remedy or prevent interpersonal and institutional violence?

During the **fourth meeting** CLEE saw itself confronted with the question of the quality of human life promoted by the new European situation. What kind of Man is surfacing within this new system? In the way this first chapter heralds him, these European men and women take a different position on the questions of the meaning of life, values and institutionalised religions. What will become of religion? Rather than remain with nostalgic regret for the unified Christian past, it is better to be ready to listen to the God of life who can manifest himself in his own way within the very womb of this Europe coming to birth. The concern for ensuring the continuity of the Christian tradition, for initiating the young generations into the unprecedented world of religions, of the Christian faith in particular, of creating a school environment open to making God possible, ought to find a deep echo in all Lasallians. What aim and what institutional approach can give a guarantee of a true and prophetic fulfilment?

The present bulletin offers an overview of the study of each theme. For each meeting it offers a presentation of the context and objectives followed by the programme as it was carried out. Then the reader will find a synthesis of the various contributions and the formulation of a few implications or conclusions to be held over for the international Assembly in 2006. Brother José María Martínez brought out a sessions report for each meeting. Likewise he drew up a document giving a synthesis bringing together the texts of the talks, the papers and the reactions of the language groups. For the writing of this bulletin the author has freely drawn from this ample documentation.

By establishing cross-links between the various chapters, the reader can begin an analytical reflection and build up a reference framework likely to open up new perspectives for the future.

Very clearly the approach to each theme remains incomplete and biased. Limits were necessary and so some pertinent information

and the more ample documentation provided is lacking. With the reality being so complex and changing, it is impossible, in practice, to grasp it fully and interpret it correctly, certainly not during a brief meeting with participants showing the best of good will, but who are involved full-time in delivering the educational mission. However, the sensibilities of the participants as well as the speakers, while being dependent on a particular situation in a given country, assured a rich and diversified approach, indispensable for stimulating awareness and a change of perspective. Each one, while being a "European" remained influenced by a history and being part of a precise socio-cultural and ideological background. That was the starting point for a new openness and a new spirit of collaboration and solidarity. In fact each meeting represented an exercise in disorientation, in transition to a reality to come. Thanks to the work plan devised in 2002, it has been possible to complete a consistent and structured exploration of a situation which overwhelms us on all sides.

The impact of this experience will depend, on the one hand, on those who took part. They were able to live this rich, substantial and questioning but promising journey. It is up to them to take initiatives to integrate their awareness, information and strategies for action into the educational, renewal and strategic management activities of Lasallian works.

On the other hand, this Bulletin also wants to mobilise those responsible for the Institute in Europe to take decisions with respect to the direction of the educational mission within an emerging reality. When the Institute is looking at regrouping all the Districts under the authority and administration of a single Region, the opportunity is presented of stimulating the collaborators to bring the new European identity into their thinking. The conditions are completely different from in the past. It is clear from the CLEE meetings that it is indispensable for the proper direction of our work, on the one hand, to be well informed and to make a careful study of the processes of transformation in our society, and on the other to study with the same care the changes in relationship between religion and society and to find for the Institute the direction and places of incorporation where our witness has some chance of being pertinent. As separation of Church and State is deep-seated in Europe, it is for Christians to rethink the very character of their support for the faith and the Church in

terms of a new style of incorporation into how things are rather than shutting themselves off from the rest of the world in a community reflex. Being more in direct contact with society, the responsibility of the Brothers and the collaborators associated with them is greater than in the past. Society is not opposed to religions. But their influence is no longer accepted as evident. They no longer enjoy recognition or a power accepted as 'natural'. Christians are being asked to become part of the social reality, with people of different backgrounds, and to work in such a way that their way of acting and their commitment are persuasive of the value of the spirit of faith. They are to act to give proof of authenticity and truthfulness, rather than just making a statement.

## II. The frontiers of Europe, migration and handling plurality

### Objectives of the session.

The European continent is being transformed step by step into a new entity. This is leading to greater flexibility in the movement and exchange of people, goods and services. The balance established in days gone by between nations as a result of military and political wars and ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts is being called into question. A certain abolition of the borders and a strengthening of the contours of the Union are bringing a new interpretation of 'migration', and other criteria for handling it are being set in place. This development is upsetting certain sectors of the native populations.

The objective of this first stage of the project is to explore the meaning and extent of the change in concepts of border and migration. What is the new reality that is emerging from the deconstruction of the geopolitical map inherited from the past? In what respects is the new Europe the result of influences coming from other continents, of the impact of 'stateless' globalisation? The system is changing and no longer resembles what looked to us like a possible rebuilding after the Second World War. Coming out of it is a chaotic, fluid, shifting, different plurality from that juxtaposed and brought under control in the past. The emergence of a new entity is too complex a subject to be able to exhaust it in one instalment. But the session aims to gather the basic data to gain a better understanding and evaluate the efforts of the Lasallian activities and to face up to the challenges met at this moment.

The meeting took place at Sint-Wivinaklooster in Groot-Bijgaarden (Belgium) from 28 November to 1 December, 2002. After an introduction on the implications of multiculturalism and pluralism on the proclamation of the faith by Br José María Martínez Beltrán, three lectures drew out the theme. 1/ Frontiers and migration: presentation of the topic (Br. Herman Lombaerts), 2/ Migration, migrants and image building (Mme Ching Lin Pang,

Centre for equality of opportunity and the fight against racism, Brussels) and 3/ Migration in France and the role of Lasallian education (Br. Alain Ory). Then there were three reports on particular situations: "A non-racist school" (Mr Mark Holsteens, Institut Sint Jozef, Bokrijk-Genk), Immigration in Spain (Comisión Regional de Educación de España) and Emigration in the United Kingdom (Br. Philip Smith).

## Frontiers of Europe.

More than 800 million people look upon themselves as Europeans. 435 million of them live in the 25 States of the European Union<sup>20</sup>. However, frontiers to the East of the continent are not rigid. Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine are often looked upon as being part of Europe. But from a geographical point of view, Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and possibly Greenland have as much right to this claim. Greenland is a dependency of Denmark, while Iceland has closer ties with USA. Turkey and Azerbaijan, who do not share Christian roots, are often considered as being "too far to the East" even though the populations of Albania and Bosnia are also mostly Muslim.

A frontier stands for a critical distinction between several kinds of claims. A frontier separates, puts order into things, settles membership, or identifies what is different. Realities on one side or the other of a frontier are, from a certain point of view, irreconcilable. In all arenas there are frontiers. Of course, in the first place, we think of geographical, historical and political frontiers between the Nation-States. But there are also linguistic frontiers, ethnic frontiers and economic, juridical and psychological frontiers, and frontiers between cultures and religions<sup>21</sup>.

*Frontier* is a shifting concept. It is both historical and contractual.

Frontiers have a double function: 1/ to control migration and 2/ to ensure security, protect advantages and attract investments. Sharing political and economic options is the cornerstone of the European frontiers.

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<sup>20</sup> *Atlas of European Values* (note 8), p.14f.f.

<sup>21</sup> How "Europe" was built and grew, *L'Atlas du Monde Diplomatique*, Paris, 2005, pp. 60-61.

As far as the E.U. is concerned, the external frontiers of the Union also take on a political and strategic dimension<sup>22</sup>. The abolition of frontiers within the Union (countries which signed the Schengen Convention for example) is justified in the name of the confident attitude among the populations of the countries involved. For one thing, the free exchange of goods, persons, services and ideas postulates a liberty / equality on many points of view and encourages access to well-being for all, a symbol of a prosperous situation. At the same time, these countries are susceptible to the process of globalisation, often run by stateless parties. But, on the other hand, the external boundaries of the Union signal a decisive difference from the economic, financial, political, religious and cultural points of view<sup>23</sup>.

## Towards a European identity?

To unify a continent, abolish borders, erect others, and to do this intentionally, is to choose to plan a society. Of course, this plan is not limited by the outline of Europe. What is the relationship between "Europeans", "non-Europeans" and the rest of the world? At whose cost is the E.U. being developed? For the sake of what priorities, what values, and with what cultural and religious openness is the development of a competitive edge being carried out? Finally, is the progressive abolition of internal frontiers in the Union, while signalling separateness compared with other 'European' entities, guaranteeing the emergence of a new European identity?

Europe is a complex mosaic of former and recent lines of force in natural, political, linguistic and religious kinds of things. In the Middle Ages, 80 million people lived in 200 States or pseudo-States, fiefs or other controlling systems. Modern European countries are, for the most part, combinations of those embryonic states

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<sup>22</sup> H. Elsenhans (dir.) *Une architecture européenne équilibrée, l'ouverture de l'Union européenne vers l'Europe centrale et la Méditerranée*, Paris, 1999; M. Albert, C. Ayache & M. Barnier *Les nouvelles frontières de l'Europe*, Paris, 1993; E. Philippart (dir.) *Nations et frontières dans la nouvelle Europe, l'impact croisé*, Brussels, 1993.

<sup>23</sup> H. Lombaerts & E. Osewska & A. Scerri, *Catholic Education, European and Maltese Perspectives. Church Schools' Response to Future Challenge*, Floriana, Malta, 2004, pp. 27-43.

with reduced cultural cohesion; here one might think of the recent civil war in Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia. However, Europe displays superb cultural diversity which assures its astonishing success.

Identification with the European entity represents, first of all, a feeling of belonging and of personal awareness: a feeling of interdependence, a high level of solidarity, common roots (national pride), shared memories and experiences, a common language and reference to the same culture and a feeling of destiny. Thus, for Europeans, the nation comes first then Europe, accepted in an instrumental and utilitarian sense, without emotional or affective attachment - 71% of Greeks think that belonging to the E.U. is a good thing, but they do not trust it. Only 7% of Russians feel they are Europeans, but 2/3 of their population wish to join the E.U.

"European" identity is of a different order from what is understood as ethnic, cultural or national identity. This is where a fundamental debate starts about the important subject of this new entity in radical development i.e. the E.U. To unify a continent, abolish the borders and erect others, and to do this intentionally, is to choose a plan for society with options in the economic, political, ideological, ethical and religious spheres. This, of course, is not limited to the contours of Europe.

## Migration.

The United Nations defines migration as the movement from one of the 200 or so nations in the world to another in 12 months or more, whatever be the reason behind it. International migration - a challenge for the 21st century - drives the migrant to leave the land of his birth, citizenship or legal status to try and get on with life in another country. According to this reasonably comprehensive definition, there were about 150 million migrants in 2000, that means 2.5% or 1 in 40 are outside the land of their birth or citizenship whether as immigrants, foreign students and workers or illegal residents (IOM, 2000)<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Philip Martin, *Migration internationale: un défi pour le siècle*, 2001; cf. [http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/label\\_france/FRANCE/DOSSIER/presidence/06.html](http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/label_france/FRANCE/DOSSIER/presidence/06.html); [http://www.gcir.org/about\\_immigration/world\\_map/europe.htm](http://www.gcir.org/about_immigration/world_map/europe.htm).

At present, migration movements across the world are being strongly influenced by the process of economic globalisation; they are taking place within a vast multidimensional movement of people, capital, goods, services and ideas. In addition, it is important to realise that migration also forms part, at present, of an international market providing enormous capital offering thousands of work opportunities, handled by people and agencies pre-occupied mainly with the benefits they reckon on gaining from it. To be something different is what leads to migration.

Migration is a complex process which reflects, in part, the unpredictable reactions of people to the concrete circumstances that affect their lives. There are economic migrants responding to recruitment for labour or fleeing unemployment, low wages or bad harvests. Non-economic migrants look forward to family reunion or want to escape war and persecution or desire to try new experiences<sup>25</sup>.

Demographic factors stimulate migration. 97% of demographic growth (1.4% or 84 million a year) takes place in "developing" countries. Migration into "developed" countries with a declining birth rate is, then, a strong possibility.

For example, the connection between demographic development in Africa and Europe can be looked on as a factor encouraging migration.

	Estimates of world population				
	1 billion	6 billions	9.2 billions		
	1800	2000		2050	
Europe	20%	725	12%	634	7%
Africa	8%	775	12%	1.800	20%

The impact of the demographic factor needs to be modified. Public opinion, impressed by the images spread by the media,

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<sup>25</sup> J. Niessen, Migrants, Refugees and Minorities in the New Europe, in J. Wiersma (ed.) *Discernment and Commitment*, Kampen, 1993, pp. 185-219.

sees as a massive flight the refugees crossing from Africa through Mauritania (Nouadhibou, Kandahar), the Canary Islands or Morocco (Ceuta, Melilla) to Spain and the European Union. They pay large sums of money and risk their lives. We are indeed talking about a dramatic reality. But their migration is primarily an intra-African affair<sup>26</sup>; only a small percentage tries to batter down the doors of fortress Europe<sup>27</sup>.

Economic factors (poverty and unemployment) would be responsible for migration from poor to rich countries and from rural to urban zones. But the organisation of their influx depends more and more on legal and illegal networks which grab an increasing part of the benefits of globalisation by making jobs insecure. The 25 richest countries (per capita income of US\$ 26,000) show a strong contrast with the 175 poorest countries (per capita income US\$1,200) (1999 data)<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, income in urban areas is higher than income in agrarian areas<sup>29</sup>. 45% of the world's workers work in agriculture (1999) - that gives rise to migration from rural areas to urban areas. In 1980, 32% of the world population lived in urban areas; in 1999, 41% are living in urban areas.

Many fear that this movement is occurring in Europe, from the Eastern countries into western Europe. Studies on this topic indicate that in the course of the next five years the flow of migrants from all the new member States into all the present member States - in the event that there is totally free movement of persons - would probably be about 1% of the population of the new member States, or 200,000 people a year<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Géo-économie des flux migratoires, *L'Atlas du Monde Diplomatique*, 2005, pp. 78-79.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Pierre Turquois, Nouadhibou, administrative centre of illegal emigration, *Le Monde* 23.03.2006.

<sup>28</sup> "Choc des civilisations" ou choc Nord-Sud? *L'Atlas du Monde Diplomatique*, 2005, pp. 42-43.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. The much talked-about arrangement for immigration into USA: about 80% of the 2.5 million paid workers are generally young migrants from rural Mexico; but it is mainly the American owners who profit from it. PH. Martin, *Migration internationale*, (note 5) pp. 109-110.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. [hppt://www.eurofound.eu.int/press/migration\\_fr.htm](http://www.eurofound.eu.int/press/migration_fr.htm) (23.06.2005); cf. also Delphine Nakache, La migration: une priorité stratégique pour l'Union Européenne dans le partenariat Nord/Sud, [hppt://www.ubites.uquam.ca/gric/pdf/DelphineNakacheCIMADE.pdf](http://www.ubites.uquam.ca/gric/pdf/DelphineNakacheCIMADE.pdf) (November 2003).

Foreigners / migrants spread around the different countries in a very unequal manner. Proportionally, countries smaller in area have a greater concentration of migrants than countries with a larger area. This is borne out for Luxembourg (34.1%) and Switzerland (19.4%), Austria, Belgium and Germany (9%), Denmark, France, Ireland, Holland, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom (between 6.3 and 3.1%). All the other countries have less than 3% of migrants. Recently, migration has affected European society less than in the 1990s<sup>31</sup>. Seeing that the number of illegal migrants is a little known factor, it is impossible to estimate the volume of migration correctly.

Unequal sharing coincides with divergent ideas and policies regarding migration in the various countries of Europe. And the view each one has of immigration is rooted in the politico-historical trials by which the nation was formed<sup>32</sup>. From this comes the diversity of vocabulary: a radical view of the nation (France); multiculturalism in Great Britain, while taking care to combat institutionalised discrimination; the liberal tradition in the Low Countries and Sweden is a spur to the emancipation of minorities; in Germany the ethnic-linguistic component which values the history of the notion of the "German people"; the doctrine of non-participative assimilation in Switzerland; liberal admission without procedures for integration in Spain and Italy, which, recently became countries of immigration, etc. Claude Bolzman and Manuel Boucher distinguish four axes around which divergences and conflicts relating to national integration policies for immigrants are seen. 1/ the relationship between cultural rights and other civil rights (the equal-different connection); 2/ the relationship between political rights and nationality (formal links with the nation-State); 3/ globalisation which calls into question a certain number of socio-economic rights of the whole population; and 4/ limits of access to civil rights in democratic societies.

Let us not forget that migration is rather the exception than the rule. But it is something that always exists. It points to an interac-

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<sup>31</sup> John Salt, *Current trends in international migration in Europe*, Council of Europe, Report of the OECD, COMG (2001) 33.

<sup>32</sup> Dominic Schnapper, National traditions and rational knowledge, *Sociologie et Société*, XXXI (1999), p. 18; Cf. also: Claude Bolzman et Manuel Boucher, En Europe, à chacun son "modèle", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 2006, p. 15.

tion between different systems in societies. It is a response to a difference perceived as critical for the persons concerned or their families in a particular context. The extreme and repeated experience of a vital need, of alienation, of a humiliation, of a suffering or of some ambition or other, forces a certain number of people, in desperation, to contravene all borders, to sacrifice everything to seek access to the promises of another society. Questions of social justice, of the rights of man and of children, which are reflected in all this, influence the relationships between the countries implicated in the flow of migration. Inhumane situations resulting from conflicts between interested parties (private persons, Nation-States, the situation of the population...) call for initiatives on the part of authorities, all sorts of organisations and private persons to alleviate fundamental deficiencies<sup>33</sup>.

## Plurality, pluralism and personal liberty.

The consequences of migration are found on different levels:

- The right of other cultures to exist and their right to be integrated into European society.
- The establishment of relationships between the native born and foreigners: the policies at stake here have become irreconcilable.
- Sharing the territories of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities with Islam and other religious and spiritual movements or current philosophies.
- The issue has gone beyond polite tolerance. Henceforth the question of truth and the hierarchy of the various faiths is at the heart of the debate.
- Drafting a new line of argument concerning “differences”: legitimacy, becoming part of social and institutional life, the rules of good-fellowship, the integration of diversity / distance and different forms of rapprochement.

Plurality is synonymous with diversity, with multiplicity. This term take us back to the plural make-up of reality. Plurality points to

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. also B. Sanchez Martin & J.M. Martínez Beltrán, Multiculturalisme et immigration, Cahier MEL 26, 2006.

the fact that a society is made up of different socio-cultural subsystems (industry, pressure groups, the press, the law, the government, parliament, the unions, the Churches, education, the army, political parties, etc.) which often represent very diverse interests and maintain a balance of power amongst themselves.

By contrast, “pluralism” is a philosophy of the person that conceives reality as a plurality of individual entities. Only the autonomous being constitutes reality. Pluralism is also a political, social and educational system, which recognises the existence of juxtaposed principles and convictions and their cooperation. In this sense pluralism is opposed to monism. Often pluralism is considered to be the guarantor of the liberty of the individual in society. An abuse of power can be corrected through the intervention of other authorities. In this sense, pluralism is preferable to dictatorship which has a monopoly on centralised power.

## Handling plurality.

What, then, happens to the educational project inspired by faith and the Christian tradition? What is the authority, what the role of the Churches when plurality is the rule and demands respect?

The legitimacy of plurality, in society as in its institutions, is claiming for itself respect for the liberty of the individual. Recognising plurality at the level of the staff of a school introduces another discourse about the search for truth or norms, about support for a tradition. It introduces a different relationship with the students and their environment, another code of collaboration within the school. People representing different opinions speak to one another differently, leaving the other person the liberty and the right of adopting a divergent point of view and of justifying it. The delicate point is avoiding indoctrination, and guaranteeing education with, at its core, the liberty of the learner<sup>34</sup>.

The Declaration on religious liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1965) is a reflection on modern society as it has developed since the 17-18<sup>th</sup> century. The Church has recognised that it is to blame for not having always respected religious liberty. In the course of the last

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<sup>34</sup> Y. Dutercq, Plurality of societies and common culture: teacher and students seeking shared norms, <http://www.acelf.ca/revue/XXIX-1/articles/06-Dutercq.html#h-3>

Council, it did recognise religious liberty. It connected it with the freedom of the act of faith, the issue in the relationship between Jesus and his apostles. The German theologian Walter Kasper has always emphasised that this is a document of capital importance for the present situation<sup>35</sup>. How is God's truth, the foundation of the view of the Church, on the one hand, to be connected with the liberty of the person, the foundation of religious liberty, on the other?

There is the right to free speech, the right to communicate (the Press), the right to privacy, and the right of assembly. These are fundamental rights inscribed in civil constitutions. The Church, for its part, is an assembly of persons who are united in the name of their freedom to profess and practise a religion. In this capacity it is positioned between the state on the one side, and private life on the other. So, it has a role and a public responsibility, distinct from the responsibility of the State. Its involvement is more than a simple agnostic tolerance. Being part of the pluralist mediatory arena of civil society, the Church guards its freedom to dialogue, to question, to discern, to speak in the name of its deepest convictions, at the same time listening attentively to the statements of others. And this liberty guarantees it also the liberty to be a witness and sacrament by means of its involvement and actions in the midst of society<sup>36</sup>.

## The role of Lasallian establishments.

The Brothers and their collaborators have not remained indifferent to the consequences of migration to Europe - as well as to other continents. Across the continent there are numerous initiatives in view of alleviating the needs of young people and their families coming from elsewhere. It appears that in various countries, non-government schools (and Lasallian schools are in this group) have few foreign students. Is this one consequence of his-

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<sup>35</sup> W. Kasper, Religionsfreiheit, II Katholische Kirche, in *Staatslexikon, Recht, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Band 4*, Freiburg, 1988, pp. 825-827.

<sup>36</sup> B. Laeyendecker, Onrust op een grensgebied. Een globale verkenning, *Praktische Theologie* 2002/4, 396-417; J. A. van der Ven, Godsdienstvrijheid engagement. De rooms-katholieke kerk in Nederland bij de aanvang van het derde millennium, *Ibid.* pp. 418-431.

torical establishment and of the relationships between Church and State? Or is it the expression of some pragmatic or strategic positioning of Christian schools in a specific kind of society? Public opinion in most countries does not favour the integration of those who immigrate. For example, 61% of Frenchmen think there are too many foreigners in the country; 63% think there are too many Arabs; 21% think there are too many Jews. For 32% acceptance must be stopped. However, it transpires that, when the situation arises, Lasallian schools are sure to look at enquiries. During the session a certain number of initiatives were presented: the Oscar Romero in Garges (a suburb of Paris), A.D.O.S. (Lyons), a 'non-racist' school (the Saint Joseph Institute, Bokrijk-Genk, Belgium), the I.E.S. in Huarte (Pampeluna, Spain), acceptance of immigrant students in the Districts of Bilboa, Catalonia, Madrid, Valencia-Palma, and Valladolid in Spain. The Lasallian colleges of "St. Joseph" in Blackheath and Beulah Hill (London) cater for an important multicultural and multi-religious population among the students as well as the teachers, even though, in general, most Lasallian schools in Great Britain are not worried about immigration because they are set up in regions where there are not many immigrants.

The presence of foreign students requires cultural identity to be looked upon as a richness not as a danger. A move must be made from thinking in terms of likeness (I have a student who thinks as I do) to thinking in terms of difference (they do not think as I do, and this is an opportunity and a richness).

The school as an institution has a major role and responsibility. Adaptation to the new realities requires that presuppositions, attitudes and real-life relationships be transformed. Rather than turning away or expelling foreigners, the other person is to be accepted and welcomed with his own personality. For the bishops of England and Wales, Catholic schools are duty bound to offer shelter and to welcome other faiths, to be of service to the local community and to be a place of meeting, dialogue and friendship.

### III. The environment in which children are growing up. The educational policy of the European Union in relation to the Lasallian plan

#### The objective of the session.

In 1967, in a relevant manner, the Institute gave prominence to the importance of the presence of the Brothers in the contemporary world, and hence the importance of having a good knowledge of that reality with a view to implementing suitable involvement. Attention to this concern requires that the Brothers and their collaborators adjust constantly since this world is changing quickly and completely. With the expansion of the European Union the real nature of the continent is changing. While drawing its new borders and asserting its new identity, the European environment is deeply embroiled in the phenomenon of internationalisation and globalisation. So what is this new environment in which the younger generation is growing up? This session endeavoured

- 1/ to decipher the characteristics of European society as a neo-liberal society, to draw up an opinion about the questions and to put to advantage the possibilities at our disposal;
- 2/ to be better able to unravel what are the responsibilities of Lasallian institutions in such a context.

CLEE met in the provincial house of the District of Andalusia, at Dos Hermanas, Seville, from 27 to 30 November 2003. Brother José María Martínez Beltrán presented the topic "neo-liberalism and education", identifying a certain number of problems to be explored during the session. José Rozalén Medina, professor of philosophy and the sciences of education in Madrid, made a substantial contribution by tackling two aspects of the theme: 1/ The neo-liberal system and its expressions in our world; 2/ Neo-liberalism as an ideology and the implications for education. Several reports illustrated what a wealthy, consumer society can lead to. Br. Alain Ory gave a report on the Environment, the School

Institution and Youth, in France. The Proyecto Hombre Association (Jerez) then came and set out for us its programme of prevention and supervision with respect to drugs' usage and alcoholism. It is a programme aimed at families and schools. Br. Angel Terceno then told us about his experience with "threshold pedagogy" [teaching at its most elementary level] in Pamplona (Institute of Secondary Teaching in Huarte). Br. Belisario Sánchez delivered Victor Amor's text on the new technologies and means of communication as dimensions of contemporary society.

## **The milieu in which children and youths are growing up today.**

This topic is pitched at a high level of abstraction since it touches on the fundamental structure of western society. This structure affects the whole of society and it creates a complex network of influential agents in the economic area as well as the legal, social, cultural and ideological areas. From now on, this environment constitutes an important arena for training and socialisation for children, young people and adults. There is no longer any controlling authority capable of holding back or directing the appropriate reactions of a society which is so complex, open and unpredictable. Children and youths come to school with quite an amount of already acquired baggage, and they are affected in multiple ways, in particular by the media, youth culture and contacts with their peers. As a result, the responsibility of the school is extended and transformed. The composition of the teaching staff and the body of the students is penetrated by forces peculiar to a society which is open and pluralist, and subject to various reconstructions. Although teachers are careful to upgrade their skills, to draw inspiration from new resources and to enlist the services of experts in different fields, the students turn out to be people playing an important active role and the parents appear as negotiators that are to be reckoned with regarding the presuppositions of education and the actual running of the establishments. What is the kind of environment in which our students are living? And what do the students expect from the school? What do they show us by their ways of acting? What are the young people doing in response to this environment?

## An evaluative approach to the neo-liberal system and to neo-liberalism<sup>37</sup>

In economics, the term “neo-liberalism” describes various liberal schools such as the Austrian school and the Chicago monetarist school. They were inspired by the neo-classical school, which itself followed the classical school of the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup>. This trend is more frequently called the neo-classical school<sup>38</sup>.

In Europe the term “neo-liberalism” has been used for some years with reference to an alleged phenomenon of renewal and /or radicalisation of liberalism, in response to the Keynesian doctrine, and with Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek as principal theoreticians<sup>39</sup>. More and more a pejorative connotation is attached to it stressing that so-called “neo-liberalism” increases social inequalities, reduces the sovereignty of States and harms the development of the third world.

In the United States Keynesianism may occasionally be described as neo-liberal since John Maynard Keynes declared that he was a “new liberal” to support his interventionist social-democratic doctrine. An Englishman draws a distinction between “new liberalism” and “neo-liberal”. The profound differences about the meanings of liberal between the European continent and America finds its explanation in McCarthyism which prompted many moderate American socialists to hide behind the names “liberals” and “progressives”.

Michel Foucault for his part claims that the neo-liberal doctrine flourished in Germany, in the 30s, close to the Nazi state perceived as a monstrous but logical outcome of a planned econo-

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<sup>37</sup> The vocabulary remains ambiguous and can only be understood by referring to the economic theories from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards and the emergence of ‘liberalism’

<sup>38</sup> <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/N%C3%A9olib%C3%A9ralisme> (17.05.06); see also the article by Maurice Lageux, [http://agora.qc.ca/reftext.nsf/Documents/Neoliberalisme--Qu'est-ce que le néoliberalisme\\_par\\_Maurice\\_Lageux](http://agora.qc.ca/reftext.nsf/Documents/Neoliberalisme--Qu'est-ce_que_le_néoliberalisme_par_Maurice_Lageux) (17.05.06). The expression “the neo-liberal system” gives rise to very critical analyses and harsh evaluations of neo-liberal thought, especially on the part of the World Social Forum and the ‘antiglobalists’.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Chicago, 1982; F. A. Hayek, *The road to Serfdom*, London 1986.

my. According to him, these radical theories found their first practical application in Germany and not in the United States. In the aftermath of the war, the FRG was actually built up starting from its industrial capacity and not from its utterly dismembered state structures. It was thanks to their forced exile during the war that people like Hayek were able to make the link with the United States (notably with the Chicago School)<sup>40</sup>. According to Foucault, at the origins of neo-liberalism, is, indeed, found the idea that it is solely the economy that is to allow the coexistence of individual liberties, while limiting the power of the State, from the inside. So the classic model of the sovereignty of the state is abandoned in favour of a "*technique of government*". And, from there, you come to define the individual primarily according to his productive capacities. He becomes a "*self-contractor*" who, according to the received economic canons, will have to adapt, innovate, etc. So, you talk of "*human capital*"; you redefine culture as "*cultural capital*", and the body as "*genetic capital (or patrimony)*" to be preserved or made "*to bear fruit*" ...possibly by manipulation or cloning!

José L. Rozalén Medina recalled that in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century Adam Smith laid the theoretical foundations of liberalism in his work *The wealth of Nations*. Smith affirms that the market is to be competitive, for it is defined by the meeting of supply and demand. As a general rule the individual does not set out to promote the public interest. Each one thinks only of his own profit, but he is led, as if by an invisible hand, to promote some aim that does not figure in his own intentions... By seeking his own interest, he assures that of society in a more effective way than if that was in his plan.

In the course of the session, José L. Rozalén Medina explained that neo-liberalism is the fashion in first-world countries and lays claim to being the only viable system to manage coexistence between members of the human race. Economic globalisation displays a logic which affects all sectors (profitability, competitiveness, irrational consumerism). According to this option, we have to reach a *Single Thought*. Neo-liberalism speaks of liberty, of autonomy, provided they are submissive to the law of supply and demand. It invokes participation and democracy, to the extent

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.terra-economica.info/Aux-origines-du-neoliberalisme.html>.  
(17.05.06)

that they are understood in an individualistic sense, as the possibility of being part of the structures set up for this purpose, of choosing one's representatives by means of voting. It attempts to privatise everything resulting in distress for the weakest and accentuating social differences. The Welfare State, which shows concern for the very poorest, disappears bit by bit, and our politicians forget to ask themselves the question asked by Socrates and Plato according to which "every policy should be ethical". The primacy accorded the individual leads to individualism and to losing interest in the other as part of one-self.

Under cover of universal progress, neo-liberalism holds out to us a series of traps:

1. the trap of professional success;
2. the trap of emotional success and its consequences such as the constant break-up of couples, friendships, serious commitments and personal relationships;
3. the trap of moral relativism;
4. the trap of the success of western civilisation.

The present stage in the evolution of the capitalist system in the most advanced countries is distinguished:

1. by the acceleration of technological progress, which demands constant increases in investment and a greater share of capital assigned to the process of production;
2. by the strengthening of monopolistic businesses, nearly always of the multinational kind, as they can cope with all the investment needed and the availability of the extensive resources required by technological progress;
3. by the intervention, greater each day, by the State in economic life, to protect, in certain countries, the interests of big businesses.

While taking into account the development that has taken place during the XX<sup>th</sup> century, who can assess the global amount? Is there reason to be pessimistic or optimistic? Or must we rather note with César Vidal that all the great works of universal thought remain at the heart of the quest for the meaning of life and open up future prospects: the Gospel, the Talmud, the Koran, the Declaration of the Rights of Man...?<sup>41</sup> It would be the responsibil-

ity of Europe to create and spread utopias for a new humanism. Europe cannot agree to be simply a name empty of content. It should be envisaged and constructed by Europeans with ongoing arbitration and solidarity. The Greek 'logos' in fruitful dialectic with Roman 'virtue', 'Christian charity', Renaissance 'humanism', Enlightenment 'rationality', and 'life impregnated with reason' has progressively woven the historical infrastructure of Europe and it cannot relinquish any of its roots.

## Neo-liberalism as an ideology and its involvement in education.

The key concept of neo-liberalism is that of financing based on demand: a product has value, not in itself, but because of the demand to which it gives rise. So, an adequate demand must be stimulated. The greatest demand corresponds to the greatest number of consumers and the greatest support.

According to this ideology education is looked upon as one more product in the market, depending on the process of supply and demand. And as the new liberals pursue, without let-up, their efforts at privatisation, they are in favour of the (economic) privatisation of education. They promote pleasing the clients, free choice by parents, adapting to individual needs, competition and selection of the best, and effective outcomes at the lowest cost. For neo-liberals, the government school is only one form of education amongst others, in competition with them, to satisfy freedom of choice. They commercialise their functions and values, by transferring them from the public domain and its powers to that of the market, handing the school over to the chances of the latter.

Therefore, the problem arises of a fundamental debate on the issue of public and private education, the role of parents, the State, and free initiative<sup>41</sup>. The various partners involved will have to meet together to put in place the balances likely to safeguard the autonomy of each in a shared responsibility. Will the public

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<sup>41</sup> Vidal César, *Los textos que cambiaron la Historia*, 1998, Planeta; [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/C3%A9sar\\_Vidal](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/C3%A9sar_Vidal).

<sup>42</sup> P. Brown & H. Lauder, Education, Globalisation and Economic Development, *Journal of Educational Policy* 11(1), 1996, pp. 1-25.

arena respect diversity, and an egalitarian, just and united society? Will it resist this mercantilist and consumerist hegemony? Will the school environment guarantee the education of all the students respecting their personal potentialities brushing aside every form of discrimination, marginalisation, and social, economic or ideological exclusion? Will the plan of action of the administration resist subordinating education to market policies? Will the school set in place participative administration, respecting the right of students to get organised, to demand responsibility, to negotiate, to unite, to hold meetings and to go on strike?

In an environment economically competitive and consumerist, socially open, but complex and fragile, individuals enjoy enormous possibilities for fulfilment, even at the risk of restricting themselves to an anarchic role. Relying on a poll on the aspirations and values of the young, Br Alain Ory pointed out that this very tendency of over-valuing the individual runs the risk of weakening family cohesion. Parent figures become more blurred. Parents experience difficulties in knowing where they stand with regard to their children, and in the single parent situation, one of the parents is made to take on both roles. In such a situation marked by excessive consumption<sup>43</sup>, the wishes of the child defeat the requirements of a balanced education. The child-as-king and 'youth culture', products of the neo-liberal market place, impose a style of life paying tribute to an eclectic type of happiness.

## Education policy of the European Union.

The EU has no intention of designing or applying a 'common policy' on education. Nevertheless, it has particular ways of encouraging cooperation between the various teaching establishments to a European standard or establishing a "European forum for education". In practice, the EU is implementing the existing trends within the various teaching establishments in European countries. The EU is stressing especially life-long education and training, assessment of the quality of schools and teaching institutions and cooperation with non-member countries.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le bonheur paradoxal. Essai sur la société d'hyper-consommation*, Paris, 2006.

In the light of the upheavals brought about by globalisation and the information-society, the European Union set out, in Lisbon, its new strategic objective for the coming decade. It is to become the economy with the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth accompanied by a policy of improved education in the European Union.

These objectives say much about the affinities of a European education policy with the scheme for western society. How can it carry out its schemes successfully without encouraging the integration of the efforts of the various countries in the socio-economic context and without coordinating the priorities of the society? Finally, the education policy of the EU is guaranteed, financially, by the various countries. And the global status of the EU cannot be disconnected from the economic and political choices of the western world which tries to be competitive with the other continents, Asia in particular<sup>44</sup>.

## Positioning Lasallian activities.

While being part of a neo-liberal society, the Lasallian school protects itself from reproducing the presuppositions of that society in its educational activities. It takes as its objective to invite all the partners to apply a critical reading of the environment, centred as it is on the market philosophy, and to become aware of the focus of educational activity inspired by humanist and gospel options. It is a matter of developing a style of administration displaying counter-values in respect of the obvious facts of a neo-liberal society. Given what is at stake, fundamental and strategic choices are called for centred on brotherhood, gratuity, interiority and solidarity, and inspired by the “spirit of faith” and association. The young need places of security, more liberating than protective, based on dialogue and sharing. They would need to have dealings with authentic adults, capable of standing for truth, credible in word and act.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. D. Hill, Global Neo-Liberalism, The Deformation of Education and Resistance, *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 1(1), 2003: <http://www.jceps.com/?pageID=article&articleID=7>

Our network of establishments is at the centre of this clash and this debate at the local level, but also at the world level. The Institute is involved in education in schools in more than eighty-four countries covering all the continents, fitting in with the economy of the western world and with that of the “third world”. Independently of their good will to be at the service of the education of the poor and disadvantaged young, and in spite of clear views opposed to the neo-liberal system, but because of their geopolitical situation and of institutional bonds, it is possible that Lasallians also contribute to the implementation of the neo-liberal system and, indirectly, to the fact that millions of persons are suffering from it. It is crucial that, at the local level as well as at the Institute level, the collaborators examine their involvement in the worldwide system and help one another to discern what they can do to stand together behind a raft of priority choices which are appropriate for them. This questioning demands new skills. Henceforth, the solution, the common formula of Lasallian education, is no longer available in advance. Partners see themselves constrained to analyse concrete situations and to discern on the spot what options embody their commitment to bring about a shared mission, capable of taking on the role of convinced dissidents. They are to be active and involved against an abusive system, willing to be authentic elements in social and moral readjustment. They struggle using means other than those of the neo-capitalist society. These means are slower, with less aggressive language, a more fraternal approach, less competitive, less individualistic and less influenced by exclusivism.

Whence the importance of developing a new code of ethics for Christian education in Europe conscious of the pitfalls and paradoxes linked with the diversity of contexts and the process of economic and socio-cultural globalisation. The educational plan gets down to work through educational communities offering spaces for creativity, dialogue communication and consultation starting with personal involvement. Common identity is inspired by the spirit of faith and love for young people, in particular for those who see themselves deprived of basic recognition as persons. It is important to bring together in this project all that are stakeholders, children, young people and their parents in the first instance, but also the local and international community and intensify collaboration with all those who stand up against the proofs of neo-liber-

al ideology (social forums, reflection and action groups, on the various continents...).

On a local level, noteworthy initiatives exist which try hard to remedy amongst the young the destructive effects of the environment in which they have grown up. Such a one is the educational and therapeutic programme, in Spain, for the treatment and prevention of drug abuse which, each year, accepts more than 12,000 addicts. This programme plans activities to be performed in the home, or in the school setting, or offers families the possibility of assistance and consultation by telephone. Another such initiative is the Institute of Secondary Education in Huarte (Spain) which welcomes students who suffer a serious setback in school so as to incorporate them as soon as possible in the workforce. Victims of the neo-liberal world, they live at the pace of the hyper-consumption society. They cling to their group of friends and give themselves up to unbridled pleasure; they live in revolt against all forms of regulation or authority. Threshold pedagogy, personal respect, closeness, appreciation, celebrations, a friendly atmosphere and confrontation that is fair, help them to enhance their prestige and assume a place and a role in society. Let us not forget that as a result of communist dictatorships in Central Europe and the East, threshold pedagogy was the only option left open. The Brothers and their collaborators in Poland for example were forced to become involved in the world of handicapped children and adults, or of young people living at odds with the legal system or on the fringes of society, or, in Romania for example, to be of service in an anonymous fashion.

The Lasallian European commissions (CLEE, CLEP and CLEM) and the European Association of Principals of Lasallian Institutions (ASSEDIL) have been a major factor in raising the awareness of Lasallians about what is emerging as the European reality and reinterpreting their commitments in response to the questionings of the neo-liberal society. Given the history of Europe and of the Institute in Europe, there are a number of "frontiers" to be abolished in order to create a new human, Christian and Lasallian solidarity over and above the prejudices and gaps resulting from numerous wars and national aspirations.

## IV. The phenomenon of violence in contemporary society and the consequences for the Lasallian school

### Objectives of the session.

In Europe, since the 1960s, relations between society and institutions have been thoroughly remodelled. Their relationships have been weakened. From now on they are the result of negotiations; they are flexible and are being rapidly reorganised at the pace of change in society. Institutions, public as well as private are under attack, sometimes violent, from individuals, particular groups or discontented crowds carried away by disconcerting events. They have lost their obvious past impunity.

In social relationships, among individuals, in families, at the level of institutions, among children, youths and adults, violence is within reach; it is met at "the incident" level. It also appears in the school milieu and upsets the traditionally stable relationships between the administration, the teachers and the students, sometimes their parents. Are Lasallian activities to be left in a state of confusion in the face of this development? Or do we have specific advantages at our disposal to face it?

The aim of this session:

- 1/ to place the phenomenon of violence in the context of contemporary society, evaluate its causes, its significance and its importance;
- 2/ to check the culture in today's establishments against the educational spirituality of J. B. de La Salle;
- 3/ to explore constructive initiatives in relation to the various manifestations of violence in our schools and design an educational strategy on this matter.

The CLEE assembly met in the casa Villa Speranza, S. Mauro Torinese (Turin, Italy) from 25 to 29 November, 2004. After a general introduction by Br José María Martínez Beltrán, the keynote address for the session was given by Br. Herman Lombaerts under

the title, "Society and violence in the new Europe. What is at stake for Lasallian works". Thanks to the papers given by some Principals, by Giuseppe Dell'Oglio (Turin) on "Deflecting institutional violence from leading too many young people to failure in school", by Mr. Albert Serrat and Br. José Antolínez (Burgos) on "Bastardisation or rackets in schools (bullying)", the participants were able to base their discussions on concrete initiatives and have a look at different forms, sometimes tragic, of violence within educational institutions. And, starting from an historical reading of the Lasallian tradition, Br. Léon Lauraire argued in favour of a positive response to the question, "Is Lasallian pedagogy creative of a non-violent milieu?" Finally, Ernesto Olivero, founder of Servizio Missionario Giovani (SERMIG, Turin) spoke about his involvement with respect to young people caught up in various forms of injustice.

## **Experiences of frustration and possible contribution of schools.**

By way of preparation, those taking part were supposed to reflect on three questions:

- 1/ Are you directly confronted by forms and situations of violence in your work? What does this violence start from? How is it shown and what are the consequences?
- 2/ What are the forms of violence in contemporary society that you are especially aware of?
- 3/ In what ways do these forms of violence affect your manner of living, thinking and working?

In his introduction to the session, Br. José María Martínez offered a glimpse of the responses to those questions. He emphasised the complexity of social and interpersonal relationships within which violence can be seen. With supporting documentation, Br. José María illustrated to what extent social reality gives rise to numerous forms of frustration to the younger generations. Solutions call for mature reflection, the development of new skills and appropriate help for the victims. Consequently the question arises as to whether the school can continue to be an instrument of social cohesion and democratic integration for young citizens. For insti-

tutionalised education, measures concerning attention to diversity, training for coexistence, education in how to behave and sensitivity to values appear as priorities that must be addressed.

## Society and violence in the new Europe.

Br. Herman Lombaerts presented the theme of the session in great detail. In keeping with the proposal for MEL (social justice, educational innovations, the rights of the child and the development of school pastoral care) CLEE made a systematic study of European "Lebenswelt" (the set of convictions that regulate the life of a given society) in which our activities take place. Within the emerging framework of the European Union, the progressive inclusion of countries from Central Europe and the East has caused the deconstruction of western Europe in order to include within it a culture which is traditionally European, but "different". Consequently, it is imperative to work out together a new collective memory and to adjust perceptions. If, in days gone by, the European continent handled its conflicts and ambitions by means of war and military violence, these days, locating the clues to "disorders" (of every kind, in every area) encourages the search for diplomatic and political means, the creation of suitable institutions and finding the right arrangement to guarantee the well-being of all Europeans. The interaction of developments in society (globalisation, TICE, consumption, looking for security in all areas, openness...) with developments within institutions (personal freedom, diversification, functionality, secularity, professionalism...) is creating tensions. Links with oppression are being reorganised, and we are seeing new forms of violence appearing and new ways of looking at them to combat them. The traditional definition is that it is a voluntary act with the intention of doing wrong. A systematic reading insists on the contingent aspect, on the coincidence of other intentions and logics aimed at restoring order. Violence is a relationship which often has its roots in some suffering, some anguish or in some other vulnerability. So, there are different ways of identifying and understanding violence. From this comes the importance of making a good diagnosis of the phenomena of violence that are seen within the school. They reveal an important message concerning the persons implicated and about the educational insti-

tution in the strict sense, always interacting with a very specific situation.

Currently, two types of violence deserve attention. On the one hand, there is the deterioration of society: course behaviour, bad language and brutality, to be distinguished from attitudes denoting inattention, lack of concern, indifference, (deterioration in social relationships, helpfulness, family relationships, in the environment, in male-female relationships and love and in the meaning of life). How are these different forms of deterioration to be overcome in order to bring in a culture of mutual respect and avoid being taken over by a "street-wise ideology"? In the latter case an insult is not ambiguous. It identifies the offending party, inevitably humiliates him and in an equivalent manner. It invokes a fatalistic view of the other in terms of hostility and draws its pride from a ruthless struggle. This logic can infiltrate the school in an overt or covert manner. It then demands a response understandable in terms of the circumstances and one that is respectful of persons; it is a response which implies listening and dialogue to re-establish bases for a co-responsibility rooted in an educational mission that cares about the future of mankind.

On the other hand, various forms of terrorism disturb security and paralyse numerous plans for peaceful co-existence. In the course of history different strategies have been adopted to handle violence (wars, diplomacy, control of natural resources and economic and military hegemony). From now on, it is "the war on terrorism" that should restore order. In the face of the observation that proposed solutions often reinforce the logic of violence, people remain perplexed.

Two philosophers have tried to interpret the terrorist act of 9/11<sup>45</sup>. For J. Habermas, violence stands for a pathological element of Modernity. It is the result of the fact that post-industrial society "is colonising" the *Lebenswelt* of the populations and supporting a return to the exclusivity of pre-modern beliefs. Can inter-subjective communication end up in a rational consensus about the

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<sup>45</sup> Jurgen Habermas & Jacques Derrida, *Filosofie in een tijl van terreur. Gesprekken met Giovanna Borradori, Kampen/Kapellen*, 2004 (*Philosophy in a time of terror - dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, Chicago, 2003).

“best argument” and outstrip terrorist violence, as Habermas proposes? For J. Derrida, terrorism is a symptom of a crisis of auto-immunity and a response to incalculable forces, to undefinable responsibilities. Terrorism is unpardonable and stands for the “axis of evil”, evidence of the decadence of a certain theology. Derrida accepts instead a spiritual response: a geopolitics of unconditional pardon, inspired by tolerance, hospitality and the “Abrahamic” experience.

It turns out that, to establish a just order, it is important to handle differences, inequalities and encounters between different sensibilities and values in another way and to articulate a spirituality with strategies for action and management.

As far as Lasallian works are concerned, Br. H. Lombaerts proposes spreading, in view of the phenomena of violence, a culture and administration based on participation. To anticipate (and / or fight against) some forms of violence it would be necessary to involve the whole educational community so as to get beyond certain personal and institutional deadlocks. It would be highly desirable to develop collective skill in the observation of facts and situations, in reflection, in decision-making, in action and in evaluation in order to bring about a qualitative change in education.

As for the propositions of J. Habermas to overtake violence by consensus about the “best argument”, the German theologian J.-B. Metz has noted that the human condition does not allow itself to be reduced to rationality<sup>46</sup>. Human thinking is branded by an “assumed memory”, by an empathic sensibility. Metz recognises a structure of deep memory (recollection) in human thinking. He associates with it the memory of innocent victims of violence in the course of wars, genocides and so many terrorist acts. Innocent victims give rise to universal solidarity. Hence the importance of referring to the Christian tradition in which the anamnesis, in the eucharistic celebration, gathers the faithful together in the name

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<sup>46</sup> Johannes Baptist Metz, *Anamnetische Vernunft eines Theologen zur Krise der Geisteswissenschaften*, in Axel Honnet, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe, Albrecht Wellmer (Hrsg.), *Zwischenbetrachtungen im Prozess der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt/M., 1989, 733-738; Benjamin Taubald, *Anamnetische Vernunft. Untersuchungen zu einem Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie*, LIT, Münster/Hamburg/London, 2001, p.115.

of an innocent victim. And precisely this anamnestic solidarity is the foundation of a spirituality of non-violence and its ritualisation in daily life<sup>47</sup>.

The European Union doing battle with new forms of violence, often inherent in its very emergence, is calling upon the schools to change their culture, to find and refine their strategies for teaching and living together, to handle with more care the numerous interactions with their environment and to support initiatives encouraging intercultural and inter-religious contacts. The history of the Institute and Lasallian spirituality claims to follow a creative tradition with respect to the chaos upsetting the lives of some children and youths.

## Urban violence in XVII<sup>th</sup> and XVIII<sup>th</sup> centuries, in France.

To give a setting to the attitude of saint John Baptist de La Salle in the face of violence and the educational responses he tried to bring to it, Br. Léon Lauraire briefly recalled its main forms and the causes of this violence in his era.

Historians have identified a great many forms of violence, as for example, brawling (quarrelling, fighting, punching) personal revenge, duelling, assassinating for money, violent robbery, attacks against agents of public order, rape, revolts and verbal abuse... At that time, this violence was omnipresent and it broke out easily even in the very homes, in the streets or certain places of ordinary social life, or in particular situations. The children and young people were mixed up in them as spectators, victims or instigators<sup>48</sup>.

This concrete setting enables us to understand de La Salle's hostility to violence, his distrust of libertines who had already plunged into violence and his determination to stamp violence out of the school to preserve the students from it.

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<sup>47</sup> H. Lombaerts, Ritual's Narrative Logics, in P. De Mey, J. Haers & J. Lambers, *The Mission to Proclaim and to Celebrate Christian Existence*, Leuven, 2005, pp. 307-310; *Questions Liturgiques*, 86(2005) 203-215.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *La Conduite des Ecoles*, Chapter 15.

Br. Lauraire identified six causes of urban violence:

- 1/ socio-economic inequalities, a large section of the population being on the poverty line were leading an uncouth and precarious mode of life;
- 2/ contemptuous attitudes on the part of the rich who, at the same time, had power, money, prestige and social status. The common people, victims of offhand behaviour and brutality felt resentment or frustration;
- 3/ the arbitrariness of absolute power, the poor not being entitled to speak were defenceless;
- 4/ due to a general lack of literacy (80% of the population) scientific and especially medical ignorance of natural phenomena caused permanent fear. The poor above all, faced with sickness and epidemics, felt helpless;
- 5/ harshness because of under-developed and under-refined emotions. The commonplace nature of the sight of death led to a lack of appreciation of human life from which arose the conviction that brute force dominates;
- 6/ an environment of insecurity and violence: grinding poverty, natural phenomena and the constant risk of aggression.

For de La Salle, physical violence was a kind of sacrilege. He considered that violent behaviour went against the Rules of Politeness and Christian Civility. Educators, then, would be careful to encourage the children to practise politeness and civility "through the motive of the presence of God ... out of respect for the presence of God" and so as a "virtue which has something to do with God, our neighbour and ourselves"<sup>49</sup>. That is why he was strict with any form of violence showing its head in school, such as fighting; the guilty schoolboys would be punished in a most exemplary manner. On the other hand, in an ascetical and moral sense, de La Salle speaks of doing violence to oneself to make progress in virtue, not forgetting that in his day corporal punishment was accepted in educational practice.

According to *The Conduct of Schools*, compared with violent behaviour, de La Salle and his Brothers promoted instead a pre-

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<sup>49</sup> *Rules of Politeness*, (006, 001).

ventive and incentive type of teaching, one creative of a non-violent milieu (a fraternal milieu). Br. Lauraire described it in seven characteristics.

- 1/ A pedagogy of the heart: to awaken and refine sensibility, tenderness, mildness, respect, considerateness and tactfulness;
- 2/ A pedagogy of fraternal sociability encouraging the students to develop mutual respect, continuous mutual help and a sense of solidarity;
- 3/ A pedagogy of success allowing each student to progress at his own pace and according to his abilities, to go ahead with confidence and a certain serenity and so avoid feeling anxious or insecure.
- 4/ A behaviourist pedagogy (the practice of an attitude of restraint, modesty and self-mastery) is an invitation to non-violent behaviour in school, but also in general society;
- 5/ A pedagogy of interiority: several activities in the course of the day encourage the establishment of calm and aim at developing interiority in the students;
- 6/ A preventive pedagogy is intended to create a culture capable of preventing the rising of tensions, frustration, chaos and aggressiveness;
- 7/ A training in civility; to the children of tradesmen and the poor, de La Salle proposes the ideal of becoming a civilised person capable of rejecting the use of force and violence.

## Positioning Lasallians in view of the violence in contemporary society.

Is this “Lasallian pedagogy” relevant in our European establishments? With the necessary adaptations to the current environment, Br. Lauraire has no doubt about it. In fact, bit by bit, society has become utterly transformed. With schooling becoming general, a certain civility has spread through all classes of society. Targeted actions refine attitudes, personal behaviour and the culture of institutions. Promotional messages encourage the population to give up practices hurtful to their own health or at high risk to others. However, there is always some violence. It changes, it

becomes professionalised, is criminalised and appears in refined and evil guises. Well-organised vigilance is imperative in society as well as in institutions.

Such was the project presented by Mr Albert Serrat and Brother José Antolínez. According to what they said, violence in schools takes on many forms and different degrees of intensity: violent behaviour in class, rough handling between schoolmates, vandalism and material damage, physical violence and sexual aggression. Bullying makes its presence felt under different forms: physical aggression and insults, by ostracising and excluding, but also by messages on cell phones and sent through the internet. Bullying is the most widely spread form of violence, especially among 10 to 15 year olds; but it also exists among adults. According to a poll of 1200 students, it emerges that 50% of them have been victims of sporadic aggression. 70% of teachers regard discipline as an important problem. Lack of discipline is at the origin of the “burnt out” teachers syndrome because of the asocial behaviour of some students and in particular because of bullying. An establishment, then, has a duty to study this phenomenon attentively and to do so in a prudent and competent manner. At La Salle College (Palencia), they organised an in-depth study of the profile of the victims, the places where bullying occurred and the different forms it took (rough games for example). Then they set up an *Equipo de Convivencia Colegial* (4 teachers and 3 students) charged with developing an intervention strategy as much with the victims as with the aggressors. They also sought cooperation on the part of the parents<sup>50</sup>.

Mr Giuseppe Dell’Oglio, Principal of the Turin Technical Institute, posed the problem of a form of institutional violence. When an establishment does not care about the education pathway of the students, it can easily create for itself assessment and exclusion practices experienced by the students as violent. By studying the assessment system and checking the criteria invoked to make it obligatory for some students to fail, it has been possible not only to let some of them pass, but also to put in place a system of support teaching to help students overcome their fail-

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<sup>50</sup> Colegio La Salle, Palencia (Spain), *Como viva para convivir*. In relation to the *Programa de sensibilización contra el maltrato entre iguales*. From the REA Association (Valladolid).

ure. This initiative deserves to be cited because it puts the finger on one of the harmful aspects of the bureaucratisation of school teaching, of introducing the marketplace culture into the school and, as a result, thwarting certain fundamental values in our pedagogical and spiritual direction. Lasallian pedagogy, as Br. Lauraire sketched it, invites us to make a close examination of the system of teaching and assessment as it is practised in the practical reality.

Those taking part also listened to the testimony of Mr Ernesto Olivero, founder of the Servizio Missionario Giovani (SERMIG, Turin). This Centre organises weeks for training, for research into music, dialogue and living together, a help to the development and the crisis situations in development projects in some poor countries.

## V. Positioning religion in the European Union. The mission of Lasallian schools: evangelisation, catechesis and religious knowledge

### Objectives of the session.

The themes of the three preceding sessions (migration, the neo-liberal plan and violence) mentioned some aspects of the change that is taking place at present with the formation of the European Union. They have facilitated the laying out of the grid of a geopolitical map of the European continent as a frame of reference for a more fundamental questioning. In reality, all the countries involved are confronted with an extensive evolution such that the socio-religious, educational and political position of our establishments are destabilised by it. After the “denominationalisation” of European society, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, strongly spurred on by the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, we are seeing at present the completion of the “de-denominationalisation” of civil society. This movement is giving rise to some paradoxical responses within the Churches: a stepped up secularisation in the face of denominationalism and fundamentalism. Is the Institute in Europe confronted with a “secularisation” of the Lasallian project? Is it possible to ensure the continuity of the Lasallian project, in Europe, without going through a “secularised” interpretation of its spirituality? What “mystical” inspiration can revitalise the commitment of Lasallians today? These questions are strangely linked with the preoccupations of the XVI<sup>th</sup> and XVII<sup>th</sup> centuries, more particularly with Jansenism, with which saint John Baptist de La Salle had to clash<sup>51</sup>.

This session endeavoured

1/ to study the change that is taking place in the social standing of traditional religions and movements in the quest for meaning, especially among the youthful generations;

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<sup>51</sup> M. De Certeau, *Le Lieu de l'autre. Histoire religieuse et mystique*, Paris, 2005, p.232.

2/ to get a better grasp of what the search for meaning and quality of life might mean as an unexpected opportunity for creating an educational environment likely to "make God possible".

3/ to indicate what are the present synergic forces in the pluralist Lasallian educational community to live together the adventure of a multicultural and multi-religious collaboration.

The session took place in the *de La Salle Schule*, Strebersdorf-Vienna (Austria) from 25 to 27 November, 2005. Br. Herman Lombaerts introduced the topic of the meeting: the emergence of Man and of the God of life in the new Europe. Three lectures gave food for thought on the place of religion in the Europe of tomorrow. Professor P. M. Zulehner (Vienna University) explored two hypotheses of the sociology of religion: "Is western Europe secularised? Are Central and Eastern Europe on the way to secularisation?". Professor Secundino Movilla (Saint Pius X Institute, Madrid) then examined a question hotly debated in Europe: "The return of religion: probability or wishful thinking?". And finally Professor Flavio Pajer, fsc (Salesian University, Rome and Naples University) tackled the question: "The fate of the teaching of religion in pluralist Europe". In addition Br. John Deeney (England) recounted his experience as one who accompanied young people involved in development projects in Africa: what is the impact of such an experience on their personal lives? Br. Alain Ory (France) recalled the troubles of the French Lasallian institutions with secularisation. Sr. María José Manez (Spain) talked about her involvement as a missionary collaborator in a Lasallian milieu in Africa. And Br. Herman Lombaerts passed on the results of his fundamental and empirical research on the perception held of a teacher of religion, on the one hand by the teachers themselves and on the other hand by their students.

## **Religion in Europe.**

During the preparatory phase the participants were invited to reflect on the topic with three questions: 1/ In what way have the establishments in your District been affected by the process of secularisation peculiar to western Europe? 2/ What initiatives have been taken by the teachers and those in charge to cope with it? With what aims, depending on what resources, by what means? 3/ Why maintain Lasallian works in a secularised Europe?

By what means and by mobilising what resources can these works guarantee a “remnant” of meaning?

## The hypothesis of secularisation.

Has Europe broken its deep links with the Judeo-Christian tradition, as certain people say? That is the thesis of a secularised Europe. P.M. Zulehner recalled that the secularisation theory was formulated to gain an understanding of the development of religion and the Churches in modern societies and cultures<sup>52</sup>. This theory also takes us back to disenchantment with the world (Max Weber) or to the process of making religion invisible (Th. Luckmann). The question could be linked to different historical stages in a gradual emancipation of modern man in Europe (Cf. *Bill of Rights* (1689); the French Revolution (1789); the emergence of democracies, etc.). The totalitarian systems of Fascism and Communism on their side made a contribution to restricting the influence of religion. But it was above all from the middle of the 20th century that the push for freedom seeped through, in western Europe, into all sectors of society and into every field: liberation with regard to ecclesiastical-religious power, the collapse of making religion a justification, the fight against possible repression by institutions, norms, and authorities. A new vocabulary was called for: secularity related back to secular societies with relative autonomy in non-religious areas, to the cooperation between the Church and the State with, as secondary effect, the identification of Christianity with the Church and no longer with the culture. Secularism on the other hand aimed above all for the birth of a European atheism with the negation of every supernatural reality. A secularised society professes radical separation between Church and State. According to the graphs presented by Zulehner, progress towards atheism is most marked (more than 50% of the population) in Northern Ireland and England, France (including Corsica), Sweden, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Belarus.

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. the publications for the 1970s of authors such as Th. Luckmann, P.L. Berger, G. Dux etc.

## So, what is happening to religion?

Modern liberal societies leave free choice of religion to the individual, in contrast with membership determined by birth. On one hand, we are seeing the co-existence of a plurality of religions and ideological systems<sup>53</sup>. The countries in which more than 50% of the population look upon themselves as committed Christians are Ireland, Portugal, Italy (with Sicily and Sardinia) Greece, Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania and Malta<sup>54</sup>. When it comes to dividing up populations by their religions and ideologies according to age, it transpires that those with atheistic leanings are mainly in the 50-59 group and those less than 30. Committed Christians are met mainly amongst those over 50. What interests the sociologists is precisely a double movement in changing their conviction in the group under 30: some believers deny their faith; some non-believers become converts. On the other hand, the pressure of having to make a choice lessens the force of the imprint of the Churches (poor religious socialisation, the neutralisation of catechesis and a falling off of sacramental practice) and makes de-Christianisation easier.

## Will we see a renaissance of spirituality?

From the 1990s, a new interest is being shown in spirituality. This movement represents a complex reality. A secularised use of religious symbols suggests that it is a matter of a profane spirituality. But a spirituality springing from a secular environment would be the expression of a new quest for quality of life<sup>55</sup>. Ariane Martin has just published some research on the reach of profane spirituality<sup>56</sup>. It can extend to exploration of the self, magic, healing, community, the festive aspect of life, travel to distant places, con-

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<sup>53</sup> According to a census in Austria, in 1999, 31% say they are committed Christians, 27% with atheistic leanings, 32% naturalist humanists, 10% members of eclectic religions; to this must be added the members of world religions like Islam and Buddhism.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. also L.Halman, R. Luijks & M. van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values*, Tilburg, 2005, PP. 60-73.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. the advertising bill-boards emphasising improvement in the quality of life or making use of pseudo-religious indicators.

<sup>56</sup> *Sehnsucht - der Anfang von allem. Dimensionen zeitgenössischer Spiritualität*, Ostfildern, 2005.

nection with the world... Can this spirituality be expressing a protest against a hopeless secularity? Or is it rather a flight, for example by losing oneself in all sorts of eccentric experiences? One can only note the contrast with aspiring to meet God, as did the Jewish people, or with the desire for membership in Christ, the Son of God.

Zulehner concluded that the tension between secularity and spirituality means an opportunity for the younger generations. Henceforth these two categories no longer keep religious membership separate; from secularity can spring a new attraction to religion. From this comes the necessity of adopting critical questioning, of refining and deepening discernment in the face of all these tendencies of spiritualisation. Paradoxically, with all this development the Churches are growing weaker. What may be their contribution in contemporary Europe? The mission of the Christian Churches and of all religion does not change. It is to remain faithful to the Incarnation. The traditional polarities 'contemplation and action', 'mystical and political', 'faith in God and solidarity with the poor and the helpless' and the coinciding of 'love of God and love of man' attest that the profane or secularity and the religious call out to each other. It is the intervening period that counts. To live this tension with equanimity the need is for symbolic places, spiritual masters and suitable initiations.

## The "return of religion": probability or wishful thinking?

Professor Secundino Movilla asked if it was a question of a return of institutional religion or the emergence of personal religion. And if return there is, it would be only among conservative sectors. What are we speaking about, then, when 'return' denotes something new, distinct from what was known in the past?

Movilla distinguished between traditional religion involved in a process of change, and religion in its present day forms of expression.

On one hand, there exists a process of change, of erosion of the sacred, and, on the other, a reconfiguration of what is religious. From a quantitative point of view the metamorphosis is concerned with the weakening and deconstruction of established religion

(de-dogmatisation, disaffection, merchandising the spiritual, and breaking down the system of rites and beliefs). From a qualitative point of view, he remarked on the innovation of new tendencies and sensibilities or a reconfiguration of the religious (interiorisation and individualisation, subjectivity and emotionality, and the communitarian or gregarious aspect).

On the other hand, young people today have particular means and styles for expressing themselves religiously. What is called “post-modern religion” gives the impression of being a “light” religious inclination. The religion that some syncretist movements are preaching is an eclectic amalgam of neo-mystical and neo-esoteric elements. The religion of the so-called new religious movements has neo-conservative, traditionalist, and fundamentalist characteristics. The religion of social movements, by contrast, campaigns on behalf of the big universal causes of humanity.

If we had to identify what the young people who visit our pastoral and educational bases are like, we would be content to make a distinction between the religious inclination of the *pilgrim* and that of the *convert*<sup>57</sup>. The characteristic feature of the religious leanings of the pilgrim is a fluidity in spiritual processes thanks to which the individual progressively gives meaning to his life and, little by little, strengthens his religious identity. In addition, the provisional and temporary character of his religious attachments leaves the door open to possible and variable forms of membership. The religious leanings of the convert (a minority group) show that he has gone through a process of conversion and authentic Christian initiation. He aspires to live a faith experience, recognises the initiative of God and makes a conscious choice of a new identity.

This diagnosis says much about our pastoral and educational involvement. The real counter-weight to individualised religion lies in the experience of community and sharing faith. That is why we have to keep on emphasising Christian formation and catechesis in *koinonia* (1 Pet. 2,17: 5,9) and in *ekklesia* (1 Cor. 25,9; Gal. 13; Acts 8,3). Movilla suggests four aspects to be implemented in accompanying young people in search of faith.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le pèlerin et le converti. La religion en mouvement*, Paris, 1999; P. Richard, Le Dieu de la vie et la renaissance de la religion, *Concilium*, no.258 (1995), 170.

1/ Present a religion that can be expected to bring a *spirituality* with it, meaning a special sensibility allowing the discovery of the presence of mystery and the divine in reality, one's self, in relationship with the symbolic, celebration, rejoicing, gratuity and contemplation.

2/ A religion in which *experience* again takes on importance. Religious experience has an emotional component and an affective aspect. It constitutes a support for the identity of the subject, for personalising the faith. Acting in a manner that changes the way the young live their religion into religious experiences is a necessary educational effort.

3/ A religion that makes its own *the cause of the poor and the outcast*. This means rethinking utopia starting from reference to the Kingdom of God in a way that introduces and sets the code of ethics in commitment to the liberation of the oppressed.

4/ A *multii-religious, ecumenical and a universal* religion. In the European Union, the intermingling of different races and cultures is giving rise to multiculturalism and a situation of religious pluralism or multi-religiousness which is not without repercussion nor without deep impact on beliefs. The reality in which we are living leads us to think that uniqueness of religions is tending towards universality, meaning towards that true universalism in which each person is valued because he is different and unique; discussion takes place with the other person and he/she is truly accepted in solidarity.

## Teaching religion in a pluralist Europe<sup>58</sup>.

The break-up sketched in the two preceding talks has its corollary in the diversity of vocabulary about the teaching of religion. Br. Pajer mentioned a number of them: Culture religieuse, Enseignement laïque du fait religieux, Sociedad - Cultura y religión, Multifaith Religious Education, Interreligious Learning, Lebensgestaltung-Ethic-Religionskunde, Ethikunterricht, Bibelunterricht, Konfessionelle-kooperativer Religionsunterricht,

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Br. Pajer, Scuola e istruzione religiosa dell'Europa multireligiosa: problemi e sfide, in Br. Pajer (ed.), Europa, scuola. Monoteismi e confessioni cristiane per una nuova cittadinanza europea, Turin, 2005, 1-31.

Educação moral e religiosa católica, Visions de la vie, Cours philosophiques, Etude comparée des religions, etc. These expressions take us back to both a pedagogical and specialist approach in teaching and to the social and institutional context.

In the context of the Institute, in Europe, and taking into account the diversity of agreements between Church and States, we congratulate ourselves on enjoying a certain liberty in the manner of carrying out our mission. But how far can we exercise this liberty and this autonomy, including in the area of religious education? Here we are grappling with one paradox of the (western) Europe of these last years. While often the teaching of religion also seems to be becoming insecure or dwindling in denominational schools, there is proving to be a vast consensus about the idea that the State, through its school system, should make knowledge of the fact of religion general and reinforce it.

Br. Pajer points to four reasons why the State in many countries wants to strengthen this knowledge:

- 1/ to combat the lack of religious culture, something which inhibits the understanding of a central quality of personal and social life as well as a sizeable part of the western cultural heritage.
- 2/ to face up to the new religious pluralism.
- 3/ to make a response to the search for meaning, which has become acute after the collapse of the great secular ideologies.
- 4/ to support education for democratic citizenship, for tolerance and respect for the “other” and for respect for the rights of man.

He then described some tendencies that the teaching of religion is going to take tomorrow:

- 1/ a widening of single denomination content so as to include some themes peculiar to other Christian denominations, to other religions, and to vague religions, spiritualities, philosophies of life, etc.
- 2/ an increasingly structured integration of the three monotheistic faiths in religious programmes and courses.
- 3/ an ethical bias (ethicisation) in courses in religion.
- 4/ making religious instruction a “civil” affair in the sense that this making it a civil matter is more subject to the imperatives of social

cohesion in civil society, and the sense that some political decisions are adopted by civil authorities (of the State or the European Union).

5/ a process of integration of religious training into the intercultural methodology.

6/ a progressive integration of courses in religion into one or other of the disciplines of the compulsory curriculum: less and less, do religion courses, in public schools survive in isolation on the level of programming, the use of time or specialist development.

Br. Pajer insisted that he had just laid out an overview that could disturb us as educators with a mission. In fact, we become aware of being sometimes dangerously dispossessed of our capital of convictions and professional practices accumulated during centuries and passed down religiously in the school setting. We have a premonition that the task in which we have invested all sorts of resources may slip out of our hands. But the official authorities cannot dodge taking serious account of the network in society in their analyses and plans concerning the “religious education” element of our mission. It is the objective of relationships, connections, examples and dependencies in which our persons and our institutions are steeped. The crisis in education has its origin and its cause well beyond the classroom.

Possible perspectives will develop around a few “polarisations” and about which we shall be led to take decisions concerning educational policies: the *denominational / non-denominational* approach, the *cognitive / hermeneutic* approach, *religion courses / academic courses* with requirements of knowledge, common sense and knowing how to live, the *mono / multi or inter-religious* approach, the *local / European* approach, the *religion by rote / religion in action* approach. It is important to emphasise that you cannot know your own religion well if you do not know what comes close to it in, or differentiates it from, other religions. And, of course, the Christian school must keep its denominational identity and develop a religious culture as an active record of the inherited patrimony, but it cannot refrain from making the most of, and developing, according to its mission, religion as an activity, otherwise called the dynamic, not to say subversive, potential of the Gospel.

## The hermeneutic-infectious model of teaching religion.

While on the polarity “cognitive / hermeneutic approach”, Br Herman Lombaerts presented the hermeneutic-infectious model developed at the centre for research into religious pedagogy at the Catholic University of Leuven as a response to the present impasse. This model is justified theoretically on the basis of some philosophical and theological thinking, in particular from the social sciences, on religious hermeneutics and training throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To check to what extent religion teachers and their students are susceptible to that approach, he thought up an empirical enquiry, carried out by Joke Maex, among 100 teachers (average age 40.5 years) and their 1,400 students (average age 17 years)<sup>59</sup>. The teachers were invited to describe themselves as teachers by means of a questionnaire. The students were invited to describe their teacher using the same questionnaire.

Thanks to various statistical processes and a critical debate about the theoretical approach, it turned out that - hypothetically - four kinds of teachers could be pinpointed: the “committed Christian” teacher, the “tolerant” teacher, the teacher passing over in silence, not to say even suggesting a “discontinuity” in the Christian tradition, and the “collaborative teacher open to dialogue”. The hermeneutic-infectious model is found among the fourth and first types.

As far as the students were concerned, it was possible to pinpoint perceptions of five teaching styles among the teachers. The students differentiated the “open and pluralist” teacher, the “Christian but firm” teacher, the teacher who “reinforces family education”, the “collaborative” teacher, and the teacher who passes over in silence or suggests “discontinuity”. The hermeneutic-infectious model is found mostly in the first and fourth types.

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<sup>59</sup> Three works sum up this research: D. Pollefeyt, D. Hutsbaut, H. Lombaerts, M. De Vlieger, A. Dillen, J. Maex & W. Smit, *Godsdienstonderricht uitgedaagd. Jongeren en (inter)levensbeschouwelijke vorming ingezien onderwijs*, Leuven, 2004; J. Maex, *Een hermeneutisch-communicatief concept vakdidactiek godsdienst*, Pro Manuscripto, Leuven, 2003; H. Lombaerts & D. Pollefeyt, *Hermeneutics and Religious Education*, Leuven, 2004.

In synthesis, a certain polarisation can be identified within the five categories examined:

- 1/ the personality of the teacher is of the biographical (narrative identity) or dogmatic order,
- 2/ in his relations with the students, the teacher goes along with the talk of the students or teaches along a straight line,
- 3/ teachers have hermeneutic skill or feel paralysed, inhibited about it,
- 4/ they make the Judeo-Christian tradition attractive and find it important or they distance themselves from it and
- 5/ teachers practise dialogue with open communication or they confine themselves to a sceptical position with regard to the aptitudes of students in this matter.

In Flanders less than 50% said that they were “believers” in the broad sense of the term. Only a minority of these acknowledged having discussions with their parents about religion. The religion teacher proved to be the most important discussion partner in what concerns the religious or philosophical area of life. This in no way contradicts the fact that parents and grand-parents are an important influence in the personal choices young people adopt in this area.

### **With young Europeans in Africa.**

Brother John Deeney organises aid projects in different countries on the African continent. Contact with that reality is for the young people a deeply moving experience. They discover the nature of the African people and this arouses their respect and broadens their horizons. Their way of living in a comfort-loving society, ideologically very secular, is called into question by it. They have more appreciation of their own situation in Europe and ask questions about western society. They realise that money is not everything, that it does not bring happiness and they understand why the Church becomes involved in favour of justice, in solidarity with the daily struggle of Africans. They admire the missionaries. At the same time, the group experience firms their commitment and helps them clarify their options and convictions. It is also an occasion for them to get a better grasp

of the meaning and impact of the spirit of faith, brotherhood and service.

After some experience with l'ONG Proyde, in Peru, María José Manez lived for two years, thanks to the support of the Brothers, as a co-worker in Equatorial Guinea. There she came face to face with the difficult circumstances of family life, with the children not having the benefit of a stable and united home. The mentality of the people is still strongly influenced by pre-modern ideas, depending on the forces of nature, submissive to the power of the spirits. There, she became more aware of how much presence in 'missionary' or disadvantaged environments is an essential part of Lasallian commitment. Branded by this experience 'elsewhere', she has formed a 'Parménie' association to work, in a milieu for the most part Gypsy, with young people in Paterna (Valencia).

## Lasallian establishments in France and secularisation.

Br. Alain Ory wondered about the contribution Lasallian schools could bring to a traditionally Catholic country, as in the time of saint John Baptist de La Salle, but one now deeply scarred by secularisation. These days, 71% of Frenchmen say that it is up to each one to define his options for life, independently of the Churches. Secularisation, even if it has not marked the death of religion, has caused some profound shifts. From this comes the question: why maintain Lasallian schools in this secularised Europe? He offered three pertinent arguments.

1/ This activity, whose foundations go back to John Baptist de La Salle and the *Conduct of Schools*, is still pertinent today. Attention to the young, particularly those in difficult circumstances, educational activity 'together and by association', the concern to raise real men, to talk about God, make up the three axes which respond to the educational needs of the contemporary world.

2/ Without commitment in the service of the mission, it would be wishful thinking to try to continue that mission. Commitment must be preceded or accompanied by some time of specific formation in the Lasallian charism in its historical setting and in its updating. The fact that 12 "associates" have made a commitment to share for some time in the mission is a factor of great importance.

3/ In a secularised society, the religious area is marked by “de-institutionalisation” pluralism, subjectivism, and rationalism. The school is one of the rare places where the young are able, among themselves and with adults, to discuss, compare their opinions, express their convictions and doubts, and deepen their faith and celebrate it. The Lasallian school, like the Catholic school, has this mission from the Church to fulfil today even more than yesterday.

## Conclusions

At the end of this exploration of a few fundamental details of the emerging European Union, some conclusions are called for. But it is up to the readers to continue the study and to work out their own understanding. The key question of this Bulletin concerns the relevance of the Lasallian mission in a Europe which is being reinvented as it interacts with a world situation in full change.

The study of the four themes has allowed for a better understanding of the extent to which economic, political, social and cultural priorities set the tone in putting together the plan for Europe. Although the Churches, particularly the Catholic and Protestant ones, still make a certain impression on social life, and try hard to take part in the debate on ethical questions or in the matter of social justice, they no longer hold the initiative in forming the new Europe. The traditional religions realise that they have to adopt a different position in society and to safeguard their presence and visibility in spite of their weakening as institutions.

The historical dilemma is being repeated. As already pointed out in Chapter V, it is to the credit of an author such as Michel de Certeau to have aligned the changes of European Christians in the XXIst century with the many tensions proper to the XVI<sup>th</sup> and XVII<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>60</sup>. Every time, now as in the past, that a widespread change in the understanding of the people takes place, and that the authority of religions and philosophical systems is called into question by new situations, the Churches tend to focus on two different emotions. On one hand, it is possible to observe a strengthening of the barriers marking the difference between an ecclesial entity and the world round about, a withdrawal to an orthodox doctrine and an in-church discipline, a centralisation of authority supporting obedience and uniformity, and a strengthening of a spirituality and a liturgy controlled by the institution. On the other hand, there is seen a more audacious infiltration into the society inspired by a more personal perception of beliefs and the church, a greater willingness for dialogue and inter-religious and intercul-

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<sup>60</sup> *Le lieu de l'autre. Histoire religieuse et mystique*, Paris 2005.

tural collaboration, a greater attention to actual circumstances and the socio-economic realities, the qualitative change to co-existence in this world being a condition for the Kingdom of God to be a credible reality for the multitude. The required 'conversion' and 'reform' can then crystallise around different, not to say, conflicting sensitivities.

The Institute, in Europe, cannot escape this transition. Democratised school teaching, public or private, denominational or pluralist, is more and more controlled by governments in the name of a pluralist society. In a not too distant future, depending on the situation in each nation, will it be possible for the Lasallian network, like other teaching congregations and diocesan institutions, to save its institutional and protected islet where the education offered is based on a particular spirituality and method of teaching? With this question in mind, the two sensitivities become understandable. What would be the benefit of a strategic withdrawal to an institution with its own peculiar identity, shielding itself from the influences of a secularised environment? On the contrary, what would be the opportunities arising from an involvement entailing a re-interpretation of an historical charism into some new reality and at the heart of the existential debates in contemporary society?

The exploration of the themes facilitates the identification, as an example, of some sensitive points that cannot be ignored on which the taking of a concrete position will reveal a prophetic sensitivity within the lived reality of the younger generations.

## **The hypothesis of secularisation.**

The label attached to Europe gives food for thought. What is the significance of a mass movement of the 'baptised' distancing themselves from an historical model of supporting the faith and membership in an ecclesial institution? What is outmoded in this tradition that supports the conclusion that today institutionalised religion no longer makes any difference regarding the meaning of life, either for the present or for eternity? Is the 'revealed' word, as the institution wants to keep it alive and to present it in a contemporary context, perceived as having lost its relevance, as perverted, misleading, without credibility? What discernment is

called for as much in relation to the contemporary environment as in relation to the ‘word’ so that it drop its revelatory and prophetic character? It is peculiar to man to like truthful, authentic speech, passing on unfailing inner conviction. Why should that not be the case today? Lasallian pedagogy has become established in the school institution. It is an instrument particularly sensitive to the authenticity of the spoken word. Lasallians notice the deep malaise and the risk of discontinuity. This is reason enough to listen attentively to the silent and argued discourse regarding the cultural gap and to catch a glimpse of the sort of witness who could arouse interest in a different word, coming from a different place, audible and credible?

## The challenge of immigration.

The phenomenon is obvious in all countries. Different models are used to deal with it. The question asked is not if or to what extent our establishments accept or not the children of immigrant families. There is a risk in clinging to some kind of apostolic naivety, unaware of the complexity of the phenomenon. The issue has much deeper roots. Faced with the different ways of looking at and accepting the reality of migration, of embracing or not a policy of hospitality, assimilation and integration, those in charge of our works are called upon to discern what policy they will adopt in accepting “foreigners” and easing their integration into the school programme. They run the risk of paying tribute to the economic and political interests of national governments, reflected in a policy of education in school, and of putting aside a concern for social justice and evangelical values or forgetting quite simply the preconditions of trans-national solidarity at the very heart of the Institute. The fact of migration, like the situation of foreigners in the work force or among People on the Move, gives rise to the need for organising meetings for study, exchanging experiences, relevant analysis and dialogue in order to develop educational strategies which denote a difference. We no longer have at our sole disposal recipes for facing up to contemporary questionings. Lasallian genius will emerge starting from the quality of a discernment and common action, worked out together in response to the complex and diversified European reality but inspired by what the founder and so many generations have been able to accomplish in the past.

## The authority of the school.

Today, the State, the law, the police, Parents and the school no longer carry authority because of a very deep crisis of trust and credibility with regard to them. The parties involved in the school and the content it insists on are called into question. Henceforth, every decision, every modification of the regulations, every disciplinary correction or form of evaluation of the teaching provided etc. must be negotiated. Is this a dramatic decline in comparison with a well-ordered and disciplined past? Or can there be perceived in it signs of a new model of cooperation between the generations as accompaniment of a process of integration into a different society? Our tradition advocates a non-violent pedagogy, guaranteeing the flowering of a person according to values which are profoundly human and evangelical, presuppositions taken as given and passed on from generation to generation.

The obvious order of the past has exploded. An educational environment is taking shape with and through progressive interaction between the different parties concerned taking as given the plurality in their family situations, their ethnic, cultural, economic and religious origins, their aspirations in the face of life, schooling and their integration into a sometimes chaotic society. The school makes victims, as much amongst the students as amongst the staff, because its institutional way of acting reflects a violent side by its bonds (conscious or unconscious) with the economic and political priorities of society.

Therein lies a preoccupation felt throughout the whole Lasallian corps in Europe. The same social influences determine the development of the continent. A shared interpretation of diversity can help in getting around local barriers, imprisonment in presuppositions or stereotyped, reproductive practices, and awaken the inspiration and motivation to create an educational environment which can make a qualitative difference. That was a major preoccupation of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

## De-nationalise the word ‘Lasallian’.

In fact, the word ‘Lasallian’ covers a multitude of meanings, in Europe as elsewhere. Its frequent use in talks, texts and projects

suggests it has a precise meaning. But the true presupposed meaning is never where it is suspected to be. It takes us back to an inaccessible “insert”. Rather, the word makes reference to a symbolic category, to a multilateral frame of reference, never identifiable with this or that person, situation or country.

From one country to another, “Lasallian” is coloured by ethnic and cultural filtering, enclosed within national borders and impregnated with the perceptions and prejudices peculiar to a particular place. This, then, is the right time to “de-nationalise” ‘Lasallian’ and develop, at the European level, a new collective memory. Meetings and discussions would enable personal and community life stories to be integrated, the diversity of sensitivities, meanings and ‘vocation’ to be kept in mind and a new interpretation of ‘mission’ to be developed.

Stemming from this is the importance of exploring the relevant places in which to be and of reflecting together on what emerges from practical experience and the diversity of commitments. Formation sessions in Rome or in the Regions, Colloquiums and the Assemblies of European Commissions have shown the importance of a multiplicity of methods of sharing, analysing and studying, going beyond the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious boundaries.

## Final Questions Posed

### **For reflection and sharing:**

1. Chapter 1: What limitations would you put on the text? What aspects would you stress as the most significant with regard to the mission of the Institute in Europe and in the world?
2. Chapter 2: What concepts come across most clearly in the explanation? What action ought to be taken by the Lasallian mission with regard to emigration? In your particular setting, what can be gained in promoting diversity?
3. Chapter 3: What are the principal challenges presented by neo-liberalism for the Lasallian context in which you are involved? Where would the greatest effort be placed? How are we to help the most vulnerable members—the children and the young—who are immersed in the eye of the hurricane?
4. Chapter 4: Besides the concrete examples of violence described in the text, do you know of some successful experience in the sphere of the family? of the neighborhood? of the school? of the city? What must be kept in mind while planning for a Lasallian presence in places where there is everyday violence?
5. Conclusions: “De-nationalize the Lasallian Way” in my milieu will mean accentuating what specific traits?

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