

Brother Nicolas Capelle, fsc

A religious Institute for Catholic Education:

The Brothers of the Christian
Schools in the 20th century



MEL Bulletin

49

Brother Nicolas Capelle, fsc

A religious Institute for Catholic Education:

**The Brothers of the Christian
Schools in the 20th century**

English translation: Brother Allen Geppert

Brothers of the Christian Schools
Via Aurelia 476
00165 Rome, Italy

October 2013

Abstract

Everything depends on education. For the last two and a half centuries in particular, our modern society has invested much effort in promoting it. The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools - one of the oldest educational institutions - has been involved in this process for over three centuries. In this article, we propose to examine how this Institute fared in the particularly turbulent period of the 20th century. The author will focus his attention on a number of significant aspects of the life of this Institute, in the hope they will stimulate reflection about education today.

The article reviews: De La Salle's Institute and Lasallians in 2010; and the history of the Institute in the 20th century.

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 2010

This Catholic Institute of religious Brothers was founded in 1680 by John Baptist de La Salle, a French priest. He organised a small community of men, dedicated entirely to the education of working-class boys from the suburbs of large cities. There had been others before him who had tried to tackle the scourge of ignorance afflicting boys, but to no avail! De La Salle, however, succeeded, because he realised that the key to success was the training of teachers, an obsession which stayed with him for forty years. For this "key" he created three "locks" which needed to function simultaneously: a theology of the teaching profession; a religious rule to bind the teachers together as brothers; and teaching methods tested by the teachers. This constituted the core element which gave stability to this group of teachers which became a dedicated body of Brothers. On his death in 1719, De La Salle left in France an Institute numbering a hundred or so Brothers and twenty or so primary schools.

Of course, after 330 years of activity and after being twice officially suppressed¹ - in 1792 and 1904 - the Institute has changed considerably. According to a statistical survey made in 2004,² the Institute numbers a thousand schools and universities, run by some 80,000 teachers and a variety of support staff, including 5,300 Brothers, in 80 countries and 5 continents. The educational work of the Institute is carried out in three complementary areas:

- (a) some 1,000 ordinary school establishments (primary, middle and secondary schools, universities, engineering institutes, evening classes), catering for 850,000 students.
- (b) 142 specialised educational centres (street children, drug addicts, single women, migrants, disabled persons) working directly with 250,000 young people and adults.
- (c) Brothers made available for work in private, State or Church organisations.

Pupils and students fall into the following categories:

- kindergartens: 5%, primary schools: 25%, secondary schools: 50%, universities: 13% and increasing significantly; evening classes: 2%.

¹ In its confrontation with the Catholic Church, the Revolution of 1789 showed a great mistrust in congregations and monasteries. For three reasons: respect for individual liberty with regard to the vow of obedience, control of the education of the young with regard to the numerous Church schools, the overseeing of real estate assets with regard to the private property of the congregations which enjoyed considerable juridical advantages thanks to which they escaped the ordinary rules of succession. And on this last point, the French State and the Episcopate had the same analysis.

"Also the first Legislative Assembly which sat in 1791-92 finished the destruction of the Religious Orders :...it abolished the secular congregations , almost all devoted to teaching."

BUISSON Ferdinand, Nouveau dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire. Hachette 1911.

100 years later, the Institute endured another destruction which resulted from the conflict between the Church and the Republic, each seeking to establish its influence in the school. Also, within the framework of a series of government measures (1901, 1903, the Law of July 7 1904) the congregations would be abolished, notably the teaching congregations.

LANFREY André, Sécularisation, séparation et guerre scolaire, Cerf. 2003.

SORREL Christian, La République contre les congrégations: histoire d'une passion française (1899-1904), Cerf. 2003.

² Official statistics of the Institute : Cahiers de la Mission Educative Lasallienne N° 16 p. 61-71, Rome 2004.

- 60% of the school population is male, and 40% female. In the teaching staff there is male-female parity. The teacher-pupil ratio (all students and staff taken as a whole) is 1: 10-12 (Europe, Americas); 1: 15-20 (Asia, Africa); in non-formal centres 1: 100.
- The social background of families falls into 4 categories: upper class: 12%, middle class: 53%, families with financial difficulties: 22%, in great need: 13%.

In what follows, we shall try to point out some of the distinguishing features characterising the life of the Institute in the 20th century. We shall treat each half of the century separately, using the 1939-1945 conflict as a dividing line.

The Institute between 1904 and 1946

The origin of the Institute is French. In 1900, of the 15,000 Brothers spread out all over the world, 10,651 were French. The central government of the Institute was French. In this context, the official suppression of the Institute in France by the French government on July 7th 1904, was a real thunderbolt. The Brothers were confronted by a dramatic situation: the decrees of July 12th, 13th and 15th ordered the closure of 801 of their 1,359 French establishments. This event brought about a crisis of identity in the Institute. “Who are we, first and foremost? Teachers? Religious? Must we become secularised (abandon our religious habit) in order to continue our Christian educational service; or should we leave for less anti-religious countries?” Each French Brother had to make up his own mind. By 1908, a third of the Brothers working as teachers in the year 1903-1904 had left the Institute; another third had left for exile abroad, consolidating the work of missionary Brothers there; and a third remained in France, secularised fictitiously, in order to continue to provide the educational service which was also their religious commitment.

This crisis left a deep impression on the 20th century, both as a crisis of identity and as a fight against the forces of secularisation and anti-Catholic attitudes. This understanding of what happened prevailed all the longer as the example of France was followed by other European countries (Spain, Germany, Austria) and Latin America (Mexico, Chile, Nicaragua, Colombia), all deeply concerned by the problem of the separation of Church and State. All this had

a great deal of influence on the overall mentality of the Institute. In the course of the century, we note in the Institute, a certain suspicion of philosophical systems which have no fixed reference to religion; an avoidance of all political and social debate; and in compensation, a focus on practical involvement in education, centred on the needs of the young; and a preference for analytical research into methodology and into other educational fields. On the other hand, perhaps what we have here may be the original character trait inherited from the Founder who himself was a very prudent person, subjecting any proposed change to the careful experimentation of his community, whether this change was religious or pedagogical.

And yet, while the 1904 crisis shook the Institute, it did not slow its progress to any great extent. We note this especially in four areas: the international character of the Institute, the diversity in its commitments and establishments, its concern for education, and education in the Faith.

The international character of the Institute

In the 18th century, the Institute was present in France, Switzerland, Italy. After the Revolution and from 1830, the Institute spread rapidly to La Reunion, Guyana, Canada, the United States, Germany, Belgium Great Britain, Malta, Austria, Greece, Romania, Monaco, Spain, Luxembourg, Ireland, Bulgaria, Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, Algeria, Egypt, Turkey Tunisia, The Cape, Madagascar, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Nicaragua, Panama, Cuba, Mexico, Porto Rico, Brazil, Indochina, Malaysia, Burma, Hindustan, Cambodia, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Syria, Palestine, Israel and Jordan, Lebanon.

In 1904, some 3,000 French Brothers emigrated, consolidating in this way establishments abroad, and so expansion continued: Australia, Mexico, Cochin-China, Mauritius, Brazil, Holland, Albania, the Canaries. From 1914, and until 1966, the same process continued: Portugal, Yugoslavia, Belgian Congo, Libya, Spanish Morocco, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Union of South Africa, Mali, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Upper Volta, Cameroons, Somalia, Djibouti, Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru, San Domingo, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, Japan, Borneo, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Philippines, Papua-New Guinea and New Zealand.

This expansion reflects a dual purpose: to be of service by evangelising through education, culture and social immersion; and, in this way, by promoting not only the individual but also the society to which the Institute sends Brothers. The Institute is not - in the classic sense - a "missionary institute" devoted principally to the evangelisation of non-Christians. The Institute approaches evangelisation by another more "secular" route, one might say: it educates the individual and society in order to improve them, so that they can achieve their own plans for self-fulfilment. And in this secular approach, the Institute acknowledges the action of the Spirit of Jesus at work in the world. That is why the Brothers do not leave "as missionaries with a ready-made plan for others", but as Brothers who come "to make their skills available to promote the plans of the people and their society". Their primary concern is inculturation. In practice, this means learning the language of the people, and recruiting young indigenous Brothers who, after a short while, will take responsibility for the future of the Institute in their own country. We should add, however, that this planned sequence of events was not always followed, when, the colonialist ulterior motives of certain governments dictated the role of the Brothers. This was the case in 1906 in Turkey, Egypt and Syria, where the French government - which had suppressed the Institute in France - supported unequivocally the Brothers' schools in order to maintain French influence in these strategic areas.

The international dimension of the Institute would prove to be a great asset for it. It would put it into contact with cultures and political, social and religious systems, which would give it the vision and practical experience essential for confronting inter-cultural and inter-religious problems which, from the 1960s onwards, would be the backdrop for great international exchanges.

However, the government of the Institute remained essentially French until 1946, and problems beyond the confines of Europe were often neglected. As early as the 1880s, the American Brothers reacted, and tension persisted for forty years until finally a solution was found in 1923, when Pope Pius XI intervened. This conflict was in a way one between tradition and modernity. The French superiors wanted to maintain the original rule forbidding the teaching of Latin in Brothers' schools: their priority should be primary and vocational education for working-class children. The

American Brothers lived in quite a different context: their bishops had promoted the establishment of a network of schools reserved for children from Catholic families to prevent them from having to go to Protestant ones. Moreover, their society was changing rapidly and facing new challenges. In addition, the Brothers had been asked to open academies at secondary level, and then university colleges. In both cases, the curriculum included Latin. It was a serious crisis: the Institute was on the point of splitting up, but in this instance also, with the help of time, Lasallian pragmatism came to the rescue.

The diversity of commitments and establishments

This first half of the 20th century was a great period for development and initiatives which were always a response to the same questions: who are our pupils and what is their background? What do they need in order to take their place in society? To what social and religious needs should they respond? Such were the questions considered by individual Brothers and communities. By way of example, we can mention a few educational initiatives from various parts of the globe.

In Saigon: a vocational school for deaf-mute children, teaching cabinet-making, shoemaking; in Bogota: an Art and Craft school for fitting, working with a forge, ceramics, joinery, weaving, shoe-making, brush-making; in Rome: a centre for maimed children; in Turin: a school for chimney-sweepers; in Guénange: an orphanage with a printing shop, forge, iron-working, dressmaking; in Trier: a centre for apprentices; in Virginia: a college for young blacks, offering them courses in mechanical engineering and agriculture, training them to be cartwrights, blacksmiths, body-workers, tailors, shoemakers, bricklayers, painters, cooks, bakers, market-gardeners. Agricultural colleges, as in Lincolndale (USA) and Carlsbourg (Belgium). Numerous teacher-training colleges, as in Rhodes, Panama, Malonne (Belgium), Middleton (England), Peru, Chile and Ecuador.

In support of its training of teachers and to provide practical texts for their use, the Institute published texts on a great variety of subjects. It continued to do so and increased its output, publishing books on philosophy, moral philosophy, summaries of Logic and the history of philosophy, agriculture, animal-technology, accountancy, chemistry, physics, languages (Dutch, Spanish,

Turkish, German), geology, reading, accessible courses on harmony and accompaniment, harmonious lyres, political economy, French composition, land surveying, grammar, Arab literature, a new system of economical, mechanical, theory-based and practical ventilation, aesthetics, general history, general geography, historical surveys of commerce, biology, cosmography, and all aspects of stylistics and mathematics. Publication of texts continued up to the 1990s, when financial pressure, such as that of competition, discouraged the Institute from continuing this work.

Concern for education

The teaching vocation of the Brothers puts them at the very heart of the society in which they live. In France, after the French Revolution, the Brothers had been associated with the campaign of the civil authorities to promote schooling. Throughout the 19th century, they found themselves, wherever they were, at the heart and, often, at the origin of the considerable efforts society was making to respond to the new need for literacy - a special concern of the period. This process, moreover, fitted in very well with the work and aims of the Institute. But, at the end of the century, the Brothers found themselves - in France and later elsewhere - in a paradoxical situation: the ones who had fought for free education for all, and who had made their schools accessible to all without social distinction, now found themselves excluded from this national campaign, and were obliged to open independent, often fee-paying, schools. They were forced to practise segregation in the admission of pupils which challenged their fidelity to their origins. There were heart-rending discussions among them: in order to continue their educational mission to the young people of France, would it not be better to become seemingly secularised? Some Brothers thought so; but when some Brothers adopted this solution, after 1904, they were not in favour with the Institute. However, after the First World War, when circumstances had changed, this solution was finally backed by the Institute. It was even adopted in 1911 to allow the Brothers to return to Germany; in 1916, to enable them to return to Mexico; and in 1933, following Spanish legislation forbidding religious to teach, to work in Spain. Despite this, the Institute strove to maintain its priorities: gratuity of teaching or, at least, low fees; the spread of basic education, accessibility to all, development of courses of a vocational nature, establishment of pedagogical training for

young Brothers, and veritable training colleges for lay teachers. Sometimes, in response to pressure from parents, or for financial reasons, the Brothers opened secondary schools, anticipating in this way a social need which would gradually become generalised in the course of the century. Whatever the situation of the Brothers, their work was widely appreciated by representatives of civil society, who often found their inspiration in their best-known achievements.

From 1890, the Brothers had given their support - and this continued for twenty years - to the publication "*Christian Education*" which the newly created independent Catholic schools wished to promote in their confrontation with a State education which attacked Christian values. This weekly publication provided "*general information about the schools and their curriculum, and gave advice and information useful to teachers in their daily work regarding legal and administrative questions, examinations, teaching practices with school homeworks, and reviews of educational publications....*" Gradually, a supplement was added which "*offered teachers a means to extend their knowledge, and to prepare for advanced diploma examinations*". In those years, educational activity was boundless and reached its peak at the time of the World Fair in 1900, during which the Institute won over 60 awards, including 4 Grand Prix, 14 Gold Medals and 21 Silver Medals.

The Fair revealed the scientific work of the Brothers: the *Geographical Atlas* of the Belgian Brother Alexis Marie, the *Flora of the Auvergne* of the French Brothers Heribaud and Gustave, and the work on *Physics* of the American Brother Potamian; the textbooks produced by them: on *Mathematics* by the French Brother Gabriel Marie, on *Christian Philosophy* by the French Brother Louis de Poissy, and the *Breton-French* book by Brother Constantius.

Following this Fair, a series of entirely new educational treatises were published: *Elements of Practical Pedagogy* (1902), *Pedagogical Directory for the use of the Christian Schools* (1903), *Conduct of the Christian Schools* (1903), *the Catechist's Manual* (1907), *Manual of Pedagogy* (1909), *The Young Children's Catechist* (1910), *Methodology of Teaching Reading* (1910). These works were translated or adapted into English, German and Spanish.

But the internationalisation of the Institute and its dispersion in the 1904 period made it necessary to have an official Institute publication to serve as a link between the Brothers. In 1907, the first issue appeared of the *Bulletin of the Christian Schools*. Its aims were as follows: “*To make known school establishments run or supported by the Brothers, during schooltime and afterwards; to encourage by articles which can help*” educational practice. This *Bulletin* appeared regularly during the whole century, except during the two periods of war. They are a mine of information on the educational aims and on the various projects supported by the Institute in response to the needs of an increasingly diverse clientele of young people and adults. This *Bulletin* is a means of communication between the Brothers and a forum where they can share their experiences. But on several occasions, the reader is reminded that “*this publication is not the official voice of the Institute*”; consequently the editors of the publication (who are, however, appointed by the Superior General) give space in their columns to all kinds of projects. And so, the *Bulletin* includes, at the same time, educational articles speaking of order and discipline, and others describing projects which lay more stress on being attentive to the needs of young people, and to their actual situation, and on promoting initiative and participation. One has the feeling that the Institute is maintaining its traditional approach to education, which is, as it were, its trade-mark; but that it is always open to the real situation in the field, which leads it imperceptibly to modify this approach. And so, in the 1927 *Bulletin*, the Brothers are encouraged to read works concerned with modern methods, such as: “*How to diagnose ability in children*” by Claparède; “*American application of psychology to organisation and education*” by Decroly-Buyse; “*Educational psychology*” by De la Vaissière; “*The Active School*” by Ferrière; “*Critical Study of Educational Systems*” by the Belgian Catholic Action organisation.

The strength of the Institute lies there, perhaps: having a recognised traditional approach to education and modifying it slowly to meet new needs. In this connection, we can learn much from an unpublished document addressed to the whole Institute, which the Superior General had prepared for publication in August 1914, but which was relegated to the archives when war was declared.

The document announced a new *“Educational Bulletin of the Christian Schools”*, and casts light on the very modern concerns of the Brothers’ superiors. In addition to making this announcement, the author stresses the need for the study of education and openness to new sciences : *“Under the heading ‘Education’ could be placed articles on the psychology of children and adolescents, and on the most reliable findings of experimental pedagogy...Fifty years ago, the word ‘pedagogy’ sounded bad in some countries....nowadays, educational science is attractive, very wide-ranging and very useful...The need for educational study can be inferred from....the progress made by this science in all countries, especially over the last half-century...It is first of all a science whose principles need to be studied. Expertise, unsupported by theories which justify and direct it, can be simply empirical procedures, resulting from a long and costly experience, acquired partly at the expense of the pupils...But in education, one should at all costs reduce proceeding by trial and error to a minimum...The study of education brings with it the advantage of making one avoid routine, of freeing one’s mind of preconceived opinions, and of renewing in the teacher a taste for very noble but monotonous functions...Study extends and increases personal ideas through a broad-based and intelligent understanding of other people’s ideas...it teaches a teacher intellectual modesty and leads him to question his own professional competence; it inspires him to make changes in himself, so that he can progress from being adequate to become better, and then to be good...Education is progressive. There is a part of it which never changes - the fundamental facts of psychology and logic, and the moral principles which regulate human activity. But the applications of psychology, and the methods and procedures of teaching can be perfected. And these successive improvements deserve to be known.”*³ Once again, this text shows the Institute is open to pedagogical innovation without renouncing any of its aims: to educate and teach while ensuring that a scientific approach is balanced by the pragmatism of common sense.

In the 1960s, the crisis of institutions (family, States, Church, universities) just like the democratization of teaching, shook the education system and caused doubt about its legitimacy. The

³ Circulaires instructives et administratives N° 194, p. 10-18, Rome 1914.

Brothers took part in it in impassioned discussions, in which a confrontation took place between theory and praxis, and the new worldwide environment and the classroom. A good Lasallian tradition!

Education in the Faith

We cannot, however, speak of education without speaking of Christian education. In fact, Catholic catechism (education in the Faith) has always been very important for the Institute. As a result of the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation, the time of the Founder was also a time for catechisms; a time careful about the contents, the methodology and the composition of these manuals.

At the end of the 19th century, a similar reaction occurred, stimulated by anti-clerical conflict, but also by the removal of catechisms from schools, not only in France. The international assembly of the Brothers (in religious parlance, the General Chapter) of 1894, concentrated almost exclusively on the religious training of the Brothers and on the catechism (the two were linked) and adopted no fewer than 18 resolutions. The efforts of the Brothers received encouragement from Pope Pius X, who gave them the title of "Apostles of the Catechism" in 1903. But here also, we see the Institute allowing the expression of two different trends.

The first is represented by Brother Paul Joseph (1854-1923) who compiled all that was produced for the World Fair of 1900. He published "*Elements of educational practice*" in 1901. There followed a text by the Superior General, entitled "*Methodology of religious education*". In it, the traditional approach of the Brothers is reaffirmed: the deductive method, instruction in the truths of the Faith: the pupil receives the truth that is explained.

But six years later, in 1907, Brother Bernard Louis (1847-1915) published a work entitled "*The Catechist's Manual*". He was in

⁴ This catechetical method, drawn up in Germany by H. Stieglitz at the end of the 19th Century, aimed at freeing teaching from the authority of the catechetical text. It was characterized by the attention given to the psychology of the child, by inviting him to call upon his own intellectual, imaginative and affective capacities; and also on his spiritual experience.

WACKEMHEIM Charles, *La Catéchèse* p. 66, Puf 1983 Paris.

COKE Mary, *Le mouvement catéchétique de Jules Ferry à Vatican II*, p. 44, Centurion 1988.

contact with the Munich movement⁴ and his thinking was inspired by it: catechesis must start from the life and experience of the child in order to arrive at abstract notions; and only then should application to the life of the child take place. One must take into account the psychology of the child and his form of spiritual perception. Catechesis must be progressive: taking into account age and maturity, catechesis proceeds through repetition and progressive introduction of new concepts, over the course of the years.

It is interesting to note that the two approaches co-existed side-by-side among the Brothers between 1901 and 1940: one had as its point of reference the past history of the Institute and “Doctrine as an object”; while the other, in its concern to focus on the “subjects of the Doctrine”, took on board the advances made in educational science.

The period was marked by two kinds of initiatives:

- the first: the training of volunteer catechists, encouraged by the Pope. In practice, this meant the promotion of catechetical centres, publications, congresses in the West Indies, and in the USA; the establishment of St Mary’s Press in 1943; and the publication of the *“La Salle Catechist”*, the first catechetical revue, in 1934. But no doubt it was the Italian Brothers whose work in this field was most remarkable. In North Italy, a group of pupils and former pupils who were volunteer catechists created a secular institute for catechists. Also Brother Candido Chiorra (1860-1941) founded the first chair in catechesis, at the seminary in Turin, in Italy, followed by those in Parma, Lucca Casale and Bubbio. Between 1932 and 1946, the Italian Brothers published some 70 catechetical works.
- the second: a text commissioned by the Superior General and dated 1938. It reaffirms the *“sacrosanct validity”* of the former method of the Brothers; the importance of the art of questioning, of explaining words, as well as the need *“to make a note of attendance figures, baptisms, confessions and communions which demonstrate the effects of the action of grace”*. However, for pragmatic reasons, the text no longer ignores intuitive approaches, the use of pictures and examples from everyday life, or the religious experience of the children. The

text insists also on the formation of teams of volunteer catechists, as part of the specialised Catholic Action set-up in schools.⁵

And so the years 1920-1940 already echoed the great catechetical changes which occurred after the Second World War, and with which are associated the names of Fr Joseph Colomb and Brother Vincent Ayel. These two Frenchmen had great influence on the Institute, and not only in France. "Catechists", the revue created by Brother Vincent in 1952, was a resounding success, and rapidly found its way to Latin America, the USA, Australia as well as Spain, which pursued a policy of forming voluntary catechists by opening in 1950 a Centre for Catechetical Theology in Salamanca.

In practice, at the start of the Second World War, the Brothers' Institute was gradually moving away from the 19th century, and in three areas in particular: its central government was gradually becoming internationalised, and the teaching of secular and religious subjects was evolving. However, it was still traumatised by the secularisation of education which had spread beyond the confines of France and had reached other modern countries. In addition, the legal suppression of the Institute in France in 1904 was still deeply felt. The sufferings of the new worldwide conflict and the profound social and political upheavals resulting from it would oblige the Institute to face the new problems which heralded the following century.

The Institute from 1950 to 2010

At the end of the war, the Institute tried to regroup and to take up once again the kind of life it had known before the interruption, and an international assembly was called in 1946. Perhaps it was too soon: ways of thinking had been so profoundly shaken that attempts at "restoration" caused great tension among the Brothers. Twenty years would have to go by before the Institute could draw up for itself a new hope-inspiring way forward.

And in fact everything was moving and in all directions: decolonialisation, new North-South relations, non-aligned countries, the

⁵ PEREZ NAVARRO José María, *La catequesis lasaliana en los últimos 50 años* Editions PieX Madrid, 2003, 405 p. (cf. p. 92-94).

rebuilding of Europe, the Cold War, US domination, consumerism; institutional shakeups - the family, marriage, schools, authority, Churches, States. The two principal focal points of the Institute were being given a hard time: the School, with the democratisation of education, and a new approach to learning and authority; and the Catholic Church, whose pronouncements reflected defiance and condemnation in the face of the general spread of secularisation.

However, the Institute would become profoundly transformed thanks to two kinds of factors: internal first of all, and then external.

Of the internal factors we can mention the following: greater openness to university studies as can be seen in the USA, Latin America (Colombia, Mexico) and in Spain also; and as a consequence, statements and internal discussions which are more constructive and open to new situations; an updated view of the lay status of the Brother and of his specific place in the Church; a less anecdotal approach to the origins of the foundation, and a deliberately scientific study of the founding texts which make it possible to exhume a treasure which time had buried beneath a layer of practices and routine; the person of the Founder⁶ and a remodelled definition of the "educational service of the poor" - all this stimulated a new surge forward.

⁶ Collection des Cahiers Lasalliens sur l'itinéraire, l'œuvre, les écrits de J.B. de La Salle Rome:

CAMPOS, SAUVAGE, Jean Baptiste de La Salle, Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres Beauchesne Bibliothèque de spiritualité, Paris 1977, 511 p.

LAURAIRE Léon, La Conduite des Ecoles, Cahiers Lasalliens N° 61, 62, 63, Rome. POUTET Yves, Le 18^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes, Imprimeries réunies, Rennes (France) 1970, 446 p.

SCAGLIONE Secondino, J.-B. de La Salle. Cammino spirituale dell'educatore cristiano, Torino 1974, 304 p.

REMO L. Guidi, Jean Baptiste de La Salle: storiografico del grand siècle, Tiellemedia 2000, 579 p.

GALLEGO Saturnino, Vida y pensamiento de san Juan Bautista de La Salle I, II, Madrid 1986, 635 y 901 p.

GIL Pedro, Trois siècles d'identité lasallienne, Etudes lasalliennes N°4, Rome 1999, 396 p.

SALM Luc, The Work is Yours. The life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Christian Brothers Publications, 1989, Romeville Illinois, 226 p.

CALCUTT Alfred, De La Salle. A city saint and the liberation of the poor through education, De La Salle Publication Oxford, 1993, 650 p.

Of the external factors, we shall pick out here only those which concern the Catholic Church: opportunities for biblical studies, catechesis; young Churches, immersion in working-class environments; and preparation for the Vatican II Council. More or less everywhere, Brothers welcomed these new realities and were willing to take them on. Of course, all this led to critical discussion, questioning of the establishment, and the alteration of personal standpoints. The Brothers had an opportunity to reconsider their own choice of life, and a certain number decided to look elsewhere, while others tried to bring about a more traditionalist reform which failed. In 1964, the Institute numbered 16,700 Brothers; in 1980, 10,000. The new age took a heavy toll of the Institute which maintained its original status as a society of lay religious, educating mainly by means of schools.

The great turning point at this time was unquestionably the Vatican II Council. The subjects it considered and its research intensified the whole ferment of ideas and initiatives which had been present in the Institute since 1950. And so the Brothers' international assembly which was held in Rome in 1966 and 1967 would give an incredible impetus to the Institute. This assembly brought together the main representatives of the Brothers of the whole world, elected democratically. It marked definitively the end of the French hegemony, to the benefit of the Brothers of North America who now took over the leadership of the Institute, leaving to a few European Brothers the task of drawing up the key themes which would inspire a process of renewal in the old Institute. These themes were presented in two complementary texts, *The Rule of the Brothers* (1967) and *The Declaration: the Brother in the world today* (1967) important texts which can be considered to be the re-founding documents of the Brothers' Institute. Why? Because these documents, endorsed by the Brothers' assembly, focused on three areas that would inspire the energy of the Institute for the next fifty years: the charismatic figure of De La Salle; the originality of a community of laymen bound together by a vow of association; commitment to the educational service of the poor. All the inspiration of this renewal lies in these three elements; they are the true matrix of the religious and educational vitality needed by the Institute to meet the challenges it faced at the turn of this century. This inspiration clearly left its mark and this constitutes today the Institute's public image. What was this mark?

In the context of this article, I should like to single out four effects of this inspiration which enabled the Institute to enter the 21st century with realism: the reformulation of the Lasallian vision of education, the educational service of the poor, the development of higher education, the involvement of lay people formally associated with the mission of the Institute.

The Lasallian vision of education

After 1966, a number of Lasallian countries (Argentina, France, USA, Belgium, Italy...) wished to give their vision of education a new and public image: they wished to update it, taking into account the new generations of young people, but also the social and ecclesial needs of the times. This important task was undertaken with an open mind and pragmatically : on the basis of a proposed outline, the Brothers and their collaborators in the country concerned defined what their education should focus on, and how it could be implemented in concrete terms in their teaching or everyday activities, and then, from them, worked out good practices. And so, in 1983, thirty European Lasallians made a summary of their approach to education in their own countries, and then compared them with already constituted collections of summaries in the USA, Argentina, the Philippines, and Canada. Similar work was gradually undertaken more or less everywhere. In the 1990s, there was a proliferation of reference texts which facilitated the regular evaluation of practices every four years, in each of the Lasallian Provinces, and every seven years, on an international level. In this way, a common language and the circulation of practices made it possible to create, on a global level, a common view of education and a new kind of fraternity. This was notably strengthened by international formation sessions in Rome for Brothers and lay persons involved in the common task. The internationalised Institute found there the means to nourish a unity of inspiration while endorsing contextualised educational responses. The “Lasallian vision of education” and “Lasallian formation at the Generalate in Rome” were in those days onerous but indispensable requirements for the unity of the Institute and respect for subsidiarity.

The “Educational service of the poor”

Since 1950, with the publication of studies on the Founder, concern for the “educational service of the poor” had become a

recurring theme, going hand in hand with the rediscovery of the special vow of the Brothers, the *"vow of association for the educational service of the poor"*. This gave a new impetus to groups of Brothers who wished to live in a more radical way. The international assembly of 1966 insisted that *"the educational service of the poor should become the rule in the Institute and not the exception"*; and an official text from the superiors of the Institute in 1980, entitled *"The educational service of the poor and the promotion of justice"* gave a new legitimacy to communities of Brothers who wished to follow this line. Why *"new legitimacy"*? Because working in schools had always been seen, and rightly so, as a service which, in one way or another, tackled some kind of poverty; and many Brothers thought that they were contributing - whatever kind of work they were doing - to the eradication of some kind of poverty. There were lively discussions at times among the Brothers, but gradually the Institute as a whole became more tolerant. It is worth noting that the superiors and the international assemblies of 1986, 1993, 2000 and 2007 continued to pursue this line of thought and laid stress on it. Concern was shown especially for people suffering because of their culture - indigenous populations, travellers, migrants, people with no income; for the rights of the child, the dignity of teachers in developing regions. This gave rise to a whole series of initiatives: schools in difficult districts with special forms of teaching; social centres; canteens; cultural programmes (democracy, citizenship...); pedagogical research (mediation, reading, quality of education...); defenders of the rights of the child, youth workers; analysis of the economic situation of families; Justice and Peace programmes; concern for ethnic minorities; restarting evening classes; creating educational materials; congresses on child abuse; development of technical education; second-chance schools. And so the term *"school"* took on a broader meaning: it became a place for jointly pursued activities, in partnership with new cultural and social participants. In 1990, Unesco awarded the NOMA prize to the Institute for its contribution to the spread of literacy.

It was during this period that the debates around the question *"to which poor are we sent?"*. became blurred. Why? Because the Institute took the habit of contextualising its analyses. A study of official Institute texts shows clearly that its language and angles of attack evolved in the aftermath of, for example, the deliberations of the Vatican II Council, the events of May 1968, the exhortation

of Paul VI in 1975, the conferences of Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1978), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1987. Through these external contributions, the Institute was becoming attentive to the new categories of poor and was looking for ways of meeting them in an adapted way. Incidentally, it is instructive to compare the official statistics from 2004 with those of 2011: they show a real educational commitment to the service of young people in a situation of precariousness and poverty.⁷ And so, the Institute became a true partner whom the poor could instruct.

The development of higher education

Parallel to its involvement in new areas of poverty, over the previous fifty years the Institute had increased its presence also at university level. There is nothing paradoxical about this: a characteristic of Lasallian presence is its attentiveness to the needs of young people and society; and this concern is equally valid both for social groups with cultural problems, and for future social high-performers. Over this question also there was real debate among the Brothers, a search for discernment, each one's understanding of education inevitably coloured by specific situations. This debate had begun in the 19th century among the Brothers of North America⁸, as we have already said. For their part, other Brothers, in France, but also in Latin America, set up special courses and organised advanced science laboratories which, in some cases, were the first step in the establishment of university education in some countries. But the development of Lasallian universities occurred especially after 1950: in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and in ten other countries of the sub-continent, in the Philippines, in Africa and, of course, in the USA and Europe. We should note that here also pragmatism was a major factor in the establishment of the seventy-two present-day university centres. In them one can find practical sciences and technology side-by-side with more speculative courses: architecture, management, information and communication sciences, agronomy, life sciences, engineering colleges, polytechnic institutes, but also law, medicine and educational science faculties, etc.

⁷ Cahiers de la Mission Educative Lasallienne N° 16, p. 61-71, Rome 2004. Bulletin de l'Institut N° 253, p. 66-70, Rome 2011.

⁸ BATTERSBY, William, *The Christian Brothers in the United States, 1900-1925*, Winona, 1966, 413 p.

We should note also, however, that while the State guarded jealously its control over universities (France and Belgium), Lasallians developed vocational post-baccalaureate courses as well as schools of engineering, in response to the demands of families, but also to the changes occurring in important sectors of industry and of the service industry.

In the 90s, Lasallian universities contributed to an open-ended study of education by holding five international colloquia, which analysed four important aspects of the new environment of education all over the world: globalisation, the family, the megapolises, and new information and communication technology. The 5th colloquium considered the announcement of the Christian Faith. This showed the specific contribution of Lasallian universities. No doubt, they are called upon to provide a greater impetus to the Lasallian message in the future.

Two characteristics distinguish Lasallian universities especially in southern countries. There, courses are devised in response to needs identified by the local community: the university becomes a major factor in this community; teachers/researchers and students serve the local population by providing education and promoting development.

Since the end of the 1970s, presidents and chancellors have been meeting regularly. At present, universities are federated in an international association, the IALU. This organisation serves as a driving force by means of congresses which set up projects directed towards teachers and students (joint courses and MAs recognised by two or three institutions). Apart from their intrinsic interest as university courses, these higher education establishments see them also as opportunities for making known Lasallian educational thinking and practice, which constitute one of the voices in the international educational choral score.

The involvement of formally associated lay people in the mission of the Institute

This is a major characteristic of the Institute at the beginning of this 21st century. This characteristic - the result of patient work over a period of thirty years - is not the fruit of a clearly planned wish or decision, but rather the result of similar lines of action in different Lasallian countries without any pre-established plan, and gradually

spreading to the Institute as a whole, to the point that it acquired a kind of new identity. This line of action was the result of several factors: the Second Vatican Council which promoted the Christian lay status; Lasallian research which made accessible to teachers of all religious denominations the charismatic and internationally known figure of the Founder; an updated Lasallian vision of education; the power of association for the educational service of the poor. Initially, the Brothers viewed this movement with some caution, and then, when they understood that the new image of their Institute and of the Catholic Church lay there, they decided to actively support it. This took place at two levels: training associates by bringing them into contact with Lasallian spirituality and practice; allowing these associates to influence the educational guidelines and policies of the Institute. In some way, the Brothers accepted they were no longer the sole trustees of a spiritual and educational heritage, which was also that of the Catholic Church, but also of the educational world as a whole. And so, the Institute clearly went into a partnership with its non-Brother colleagues and called on them to share in real terms in decision-making, previously the prerogative of the Institute alone. The international assemblies of 1993, 2000 and 2006 were a proof of this. This desire of the Institute is supported at the present time by a strongly-held conviction: the genius of De La Salle - who was able to associate the Brothers with the work of Christian education - has inspired today a new development in the search for a particular kind of association of Lasallian teachers who find in the Founder a powerful source of inspiration for their lives and for their profession, their professional commitment becoming as a result also a spiritual commitment. And so, from now on, one is led to think that the future creative capacity of the Lasallian Institute will be the fruit of two associations coming from the same original source: the special association of the Brothers among themselves; and the association of Lasallian teachers who are Christian or belong to different religious traditions. These two types of association are dedicated to the same educational task, both giving priority to *“the salvation of the children of the working class and the poor”*, to use the traditional expression of John Baptist de La Salle.

Conclusion

For the Brothers' Institute, the 20th century was a period of great

transition in its 300 year history. First of all, it had to abandon the problems of the 19th century to which it had perfectly adapted: it had responded to specific and evident needs at a time when numerous countries were embracing modernity; and it had all the teaching strategies useful at the time. These two elements worked so well together that Institute numbers reached their peak between 1880 and 1960 : 15,500 Brothers in 1900; 16,700 in 1964.

After the Second World War, new problems arose, and the Institute - like many others - had to re-examine the ideas which had inspired its foundation. It contextualised them in the light of what was happening in society around it and in the Church, and of the colourful clientele of young people knocking at its doors. It was able to do so thanks to men of vision who, in terms of research, reflection and educational and pedagogical practices, accepted not to ignore new problems: Christian anthropology, new ecclesiology, social construction, respect for and protection of cultures, inter-religious dialogue, living among the destitute, provision of education for all in all kinds of forms, offering the Gospel as the road to humanisation, power-sharing.

And so, one can say that the renewed Lasallian Institute can face the 21st century with courage, and humility. Courage: it is able to re-examine very regularly the path it is treading and make adjustments. Humility: it has lost some of its substance, but it has entered into dialogue with other partners, who have changed its vision of the world and of evangelisation. By this openness, it has learned to share its charism of Christian education, and in this way, it has extended its understanding of "Lasallian association", which is, perhaps, a new stage in its centuries-old journey just at a time when the need for education is so obvious in countries⁹.

⁹ BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Collection des Bulletins des Ecoles Chrétiennes, Archives FSC, Rome 1907-2011.

Collection des Cahiers Lasalliens, Rome 1959 à 2011.

Collection des Cahiers de la Mission Educative Lasallienne, Rome 2001-2011.

BEDEL Henri, Etudes lasalliennes N° 11, 12, Rome 2003, 2007.

CROS Françoise, VANISCOTTE Francine:

Les initiatives lasalliennes, Recherches universitaires, Rome 2004.

Les projets éducatifs, Recherches universitaires, Rome 2005.

CAPELLE Nicolas, « Je veux aller dans ton école », Ed. Salvator, Paris 2006.

SCAGLIONE Secondino, Bibliographia internationalis Lasalliana (1703-2000) in Revista lasalliana N° 1-2 del 2001.

Ressources lasalliennes, www.lasalle.org

MEL Bulletin

41. World appeal to a new mobilization for childhood
42. Cultures and Justice: Way forward for Mission of Consecrated Life
43. Entrusted to my care. The Joys of Teaching Minds & Touching Hearts
44. The Lasallian Mission in Latin America and the Caribbean: A challenge full of hope
45. PERLA - Lasallian Regional Educational Project for Latin America
46. Environmental education plan for sustainable development
47. De La Salle and the theology of education



TASSA RISCOSSA – TAXE PERÇUE ROMA – ITALIA

Supplemento al n. 1 del 2013 di **Rivista lasalliana**
Trimestrale di cultura e formazione pedagogica della Associazione Culturale Lasalliana
Direzione e redazione: 00149 Roma – Via dell'Imbrecciata, 181
<http://www.lasalliana.com> – E-mail: gabriele.pomatto@gmail.com