

One Call, Many Voices: Sustaining Spirituality Amidst Secularization



1. “The search for God and the search for the human cannot be separated.”

A monk in his travels found once a precious stone and kept it. One day he met a traveler, and when he opened his bag to share his provisions with him, the traveler saw the jewel and asked the monk to give it to him. The monk did so readily. The traveler departed overjoyed with the unexpected gift of the precious stone that was enough to give him wealth and security for the rest of his life.

However, a few days later he came back in search of the monk, found him, gave him back the stone and entreated him: “Now give me something much more precious than this stone, valuable as it is. Give me that which enabled you to give it to me” (Anthony De Mello, SJ).

In a world of many voices and values, we are tempted by the allure of the apparent good. Possessing or controlling it seems to offer a deep satisfaction. Yet, it often proves to be unworthy of its promise. In the end we learn it is temporary, lacking salt or sustenance. As we grow, we learn that what does satisfy our deep human hunger is generosity; we learn the profound satisfaction of

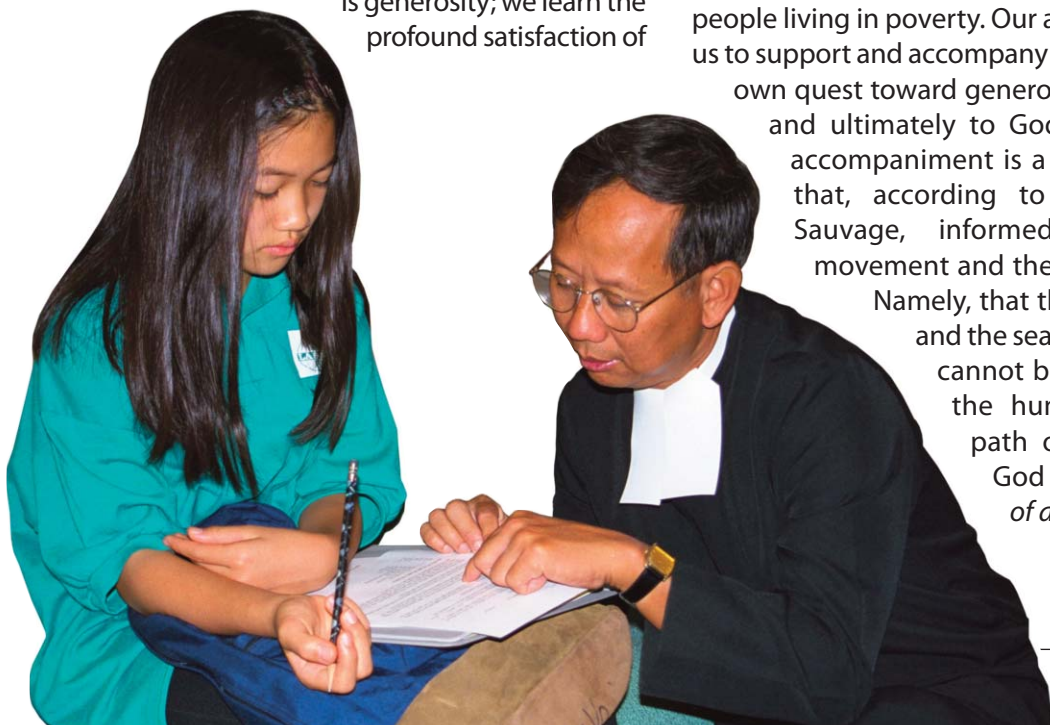
giving in joyful freedom.

To live a life of generosity and freedom is to respond to a call in the depths of the heart. This response is met in a lifelong quest to first locate the divine spark within ourselves and then to allow it to ignite our hearts and enflame us with the love of our Creator.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Brothers and of the Christian Schools, was seized by this call. His lifelong quest, undertaken in joyful freedom, led him to share the totality of his person with those in greatest need. For De La Salle, the human person is made in the image of God, “just a little less than God” (Psalm 8.5). The human is a reflection of the mysterious goodness and generosity of God. His life gave birth to our association that today draws from the deep wells of his encounter with the living God.

As in De La Salle’s day, we face social forces that threaten and attack the dignity of the human person, especially those most vulnerable: young people living in poverty. Our association impels us to support and accompany the young in their own quest toward generosity and freedom, and ultimately to God. Central to our accompaniment is a spiritual premise that, according to Brother Michel Sauvage, informed the conciliar movement and the Founder’s quest.

Namely, that the search for God and the search for the human cannot be separated—for, the human is the only path of the human to God (*The Fragile Hope of a Witness*, p. 326).



2. “The integral development of individuals makes them open to the grace of God and the light of faith.”

Our spirituality is therefore rooted in generosity and located in an educational community where the needs of the human person are central. As Lasallians we feel moved to cooperate with God in the growth of each and every son and daughter (Med. 205.1).

Our cooperation with God doesn't allow us to turn away from the suffering endured by our brothers and sisters in war, slavery, political oppression, and the denial of rights. As a community we grieve with victims of the hostile hatreds that seek to diminish and deny life.

Our cooperation impels us to “accompany each person in their search for meaning and for God. [We] are convinced that an education which promotes the integral development of individuals makes them open to the grace of God and the light of faith” (*Rule*, 16).

One cannot read the long history of the *Conduct of Schools* without noting the primacy of care and vigilance for the person. This care has always been marked by an attention to the inner life of the maturing person. Through the centuries, this spirituality has informed a pedagogy of interiority. We open them to the grace of God and the light of faith through music, art, prayer, worship, ritual, and dance. Since we promote the development of the whole person, this pedagogy cultivates every intelligence: cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, physical, and spiritual.

Foundational to this pedagogy is the community in which these activities take place. We often encounter the young, especially

adolescents and young adults, at the intersection of belief and disbelief. In this encounter we can be credible reference points in the noisy public square. The voices they hear in the ambient culture are often a strident mix of the outrageous and the sublime. For those who doubt God's presence, we set aside discomfort and judgment in order to listen. We recognize that a person who doubts is also engaged in reflection. We know the young want to explore what belongs and doesn't belong, to explore the mystery in life, to express their awe at the transcendent in sign and ritual that they can relate to. They want to re-examine the assumptions that they are born into, and to probe what it means to live, love, trust, and die (Br. Luke Salm).

Young people need a trusted space in the company of trusted adults to express what is happening interiorly. In these settings and moments we can be the mentors, teachers, guides, or companions that help them develop their inner life. This is perhaps the finest expression of our association: to generously



provide places where welcome, peace, and respect are lived out and characterized by the acceptance of each person. Places where cultural diversity is not an occasion for conflict, exclusion, or destructive tension but rather where being different is an enriching component of community life (Circular 461, 2.3.2).

Our pedagogy of interiority prizes the liberty of the human person, but it also challenges the person to participate in her liberation, to assume responsibility for care of the environment, and to respond to the needs of others.

3. “A church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue.”

We tell the story of God’s presence in human history in word, ritual, gesture, prayer, and song. This story is a living memory, and as it is our “arterial blood,” it infuses life into our association as educational communities. One of the archetypal stories of our living memory is from the day of Pentecost, when they were all together in one place...

“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability...

“Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?... All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2)

Like the early Christian community, young people hear different voices, encounter dissonance with the wider culture, experience diversity among people. They ask, Which voices are we to listen to? Which voices are we to honor? Which voices are we to counter? Where is God in all of this noise?

One of our critical roles as Lasallian educators is to help adolescents and young adults to understand one another and to discern the one call of God: a “provident God, at work in the fabric of reality. A God whose heart-of-hearts has been conquered by the needs of young people who hunger with a hunger they cannot always articulate—a hunger for salvation, for ‘salus,’ for wholeness” (Br. Jeffrey Calligan).

We believe the Holy Spirit gives us the grace to provide them guidance, and we follow the lead of our Founder who was always in dialogue with the poor, with the Church, and with the culture and various religious traditions. Generous listening and openness mark these Lasallian dialogues.



First Dialogue

Ours is an apostolic spirituality, so our first dialogue is with the poor. Pope Francis reminds us of Jesus' example: "Jesus goes and heals and integrates the marginalized, the ones who are outside the city, the ones outside the encampment" (*The Name of God Is Mercy*).

Our commitment to dialogue is always on behalf of those "outside the encampment." When voices in the ambient culture advocate for control or oppression, we hear the one call to adore the presence of Christ in the poor. In response to voices that wish to make the world a battleground and people combatants, we hear the one call to love the world as Jesus did. When strident voices peddle fear in order to subvert the common good, we hear the one call to radical trust in God. When voices elevate economic success at the expense of the poor, we hear the one call to represent the needs of society's most vulnerable.

The poor invite us into the difficult conversations. Is there a purpose to human suffering? What is our human obligation to one another? These conversations inspire us to "establish common ground for cooperation on the basis of the promotion of human dignity, solidarity among all human beings, and the integral development of the individual, in line with Lasallian tradition" (*Rule*, 17.2).

Second Dialogue

When we gather as Church, we are invited into a transformative encounter with the Risen One. As the living Body of Christ, we are sent as disciples to

continue Jesus' mission of healing and reconciliation. Our second dialogue is with the Church, to ensure that we are led by the Spirit as we bring our word and witness to the world. This intra-Church dialogue happens in local and pastoral settings as well as hierarchical and administrative ones.

The Lasallian charism is a gift for the Church and for the world (*Rule*, 54.4). Cognizant of this gift, our dialogue is a shared discernment for the wider ecclesial mission. At the local level, we participate and contribute to the life of the community. At the diocesan, national, and international levels, we meet with Bishops and other pastoral leaders in order to deepen our shared understanding of how our educational and evangelizing mission shares in the wider ecclesial mission. We are faithful to these dialogues in order to live out our communion as the living Body of Christ.

The Bishops of Asia point the way for us: the local church "is incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated... this means concretely a church in continuous, humble, and





loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life realities of the people...”

Third Dialogue

Our Lasallian identity and mission often finds itself inside a growing differentiation between the secular and religious spheres. In many settings, there are tense struggles between churches and states about where the

boundaries of influence lie. Religious liberty is often under threat of diminishment.

The fundamental starting point for the third dialogue is a deep understanding of the culture in which we live. This requires a continuous, humble, and loving dialogue in order to understand the deep aspirations of people (*Rule*, 14). For this reason, we stand apart from polarizing voices calling for allegiance to the right, the left, or even the center. Our focus is single-mindedly on the human person, seeking “to make it possible for them to live with dignity as sons and daughters of God” (*Rule*, 13).

Lasallian spirituality does not seek to proselytize or impose, but rather seeks inventive ways to share the “reason for our hope” (1 Peter 3.15). It offers the witness of its presence, friendship, and generous service. It listens with care and respect and is open to the questions proposed by people of other faiths. It seeks common ground with the culture in order to build educational bridges that promote human dignity, fundamental honesty, concern for others, a voice and opportunity for everyone, equality of race and gender, a tolerance of others and their differences, sexual responsibility, solutions for conflict that do not involve violence or war, hospitality, decency, courtesy, fairness, and an openness to God and the transcendent.



4. “Expert in the art of speaking to God, of speaking about God, and of speaking for God.”

One of the trap doors in ministry is the temptation to think we must always be available, never stopping, even slowing down. To stop or to slow is to disengage and to set aside the exhilaration of accomplishing, moving, interacting, and doing. It is also to admit that we can't meet every need. As we expend this energy on behalf of those entrusted to our care, it is not uncommon that we overlook care for our inner life.

We recall then that we cannot give what we do not have. We cannot call others to live in the holy presence of God if we ourselves do not dwell in the presence of God. Saint La Salle speaks of this care of our inner life in this way: “... you should make yourself expert in the art of speaking to God, of speaking about God and of speaking for God. Be convinced that you will never speak to your students and win them over to God except in so far as you have learned how to speak to him and to speak about him” (Med. 64.2).

So we listen when Jesus says, “Come away and rest awhile” (Mark 6.31). It is in prayer, the fourth dialogue, that our hearts are refreshed, where we re-locate the divine spark within ourselves and allow God to love us into being. It is in this relationship that we regain the joyful freedom and cheerful generosity (2 Cor. 9.7) that sustains us.

Saint La Salle and the first communities were marked by a total self-giving for the young people God entrusted to them. Today, we are called to the same dynamism—so that, by our example and our accompaniment we, like the monk in the story, give the young what they most hunger for, the spirit of generosity and freedom. The four dialogues that emerge from the educational and spiritual vision of Saint La Salle help us to answer this call to be

contemporary Good Shepherds “announcing the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel.”



PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How are we engaged in dialogue with the poor? With the Church? With contemporary culture? With those of other faiths?
2. What happens at the “intersection of belief and disbelief”? How are we accompanying young people in their faith journeys effectively? How can we tell? How do you and your educational community provide guidance and space for the growth of the person’s inner life?
3. How are we preparing ourselves—personally and as an educational community—to be Good Shepherds for those entrusted to us?

To learn more about the initiatives taken to respond to the challenges in this Reflection, go to <http://www.lasalle.org>

Share your experiences and send them to comunicazione@lasalle.org



Previous issue
2015-2016
“A Gospel Adventure”

Next issue
2017-2018
“Lasallians Without Limits”

La  **Salle**
General Council

November 27, 2016