

Pedro María Gil

From one community to another

II. The Interior Architecture

LASALLIAN STUDIES 19

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to another**

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Brother Pedro María Gil, FSC

BROTHERS OF
THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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**Brothers of
the Christian
Schools**

LASALLIAN STUDIES No. 19

Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

From one community to another

2. The Interior Architecture

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Dedication

To Itziar Muniozguren,

who passed away while this book was in press;

for twenty years, in her family and in her community, she showed us that all of this could become true: in her life, the future was already present.

From this first page, our acknowledgement to:

Ferdinand Biziyaremye, Michael Valenzuela, Colette Allix, Antonio Botana, Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, Heather Ruple and Paco Chiva for their contribution from their chronicles and reflections on the daily reality of this discourse in territories they know well;

also, to the organisers and participants of the Seminar held in Rome between 28 October and 1 November, 2024:

without all of them, it would not have been possible to move from the first to the second part of this paper, so that there is no longer a first or a second ones, but only one reflection from two perspectives.

Let them be the first recipients of these pages.

History has revealed to us that religious life will last as long as the Church. It has shown a remarkable power of survival, a marvellous capacity to develop and adapt, in spite of periods of crisis, in spite of the ups and downs that religious life has known. If we have the courage, the openness and the willingness to be led by the Spirit, the work begun by Saint La Salle and developed by generations of his children over nearly three centuries will see a new flowering of its dynamism in the next generation, that is, over the next century.

Br. Charles-Henry, *Address to the General Chapter*, 23 April 1976.¹

1 In the Report of the Brother Superior to the 40th General Chapter. Cf. AMG, ED 278/1.

Introduction

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools commemorates this year 2025 the 300th anniversary of its recognition as a social institution. It is a good occasion to look to the future and to ask ourselves about the meaning of its journey through these three long centuries of life.

This reflection aims to help in that task and therefore opens by recalling those dates.

It all began around 1680, with the successive crossings of the itineraries of Roland, De La Salle, Nyel and Barré. This is not the time to detail those encounters, but it is the time to situate them half a century or so before the date whose tercentenary is being celebrated these days.

In Reims, the lives of those four people had been converging on a common point: the education of the children, both boys and girls, of the poor. From the beginning, they knew that nothing could be achieved without bringing together groups of people committed to the task. That was the place of convergence: the group, which soon became a community. Today, from the perspective of history and the present situation of their heritage, we can affirm this without any doubt.

And in one way or another they tried to safeguard it.

In the case of the Lasallian Institution, this stability would be achieved by the first years of the new century, at the end of its first twenty-five or thirty years. This was clearly the case by 1710. We can therefore say that this institution entered the 18th century with the internal configuration that would maintain it for the next three centuries.

It lacked, however, legal recognition. In the eyes of the law, it was an aggregate of persons attending a handful of schools. Nothing else; so that as a whole it lacked legal personality. This, understandably, must have been of concern to its members as they faced the challenge of passing on their commitment to the next generation.

This concern would play the leading role of the next fifteen years, after which it was finally fulfilled with the Bull *In Apostolicae dignitatis solio* of Benedict XIII at the end of January, 1725. In it, the Pope recognised, approved and confirmed the existence of a small community with its headquarters in Rouen, in the suburb of Saint Yon. And he encouraged it to continue to live as they had done until then.

It was the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.²

In those days, their schools had no serious problems: they ran well, based on a pedagogy of the continuous atten-

2 About all around this topic of the Bull of Approbation of the Lasallian Institute, cf. Fr. Maurice-Auguste, *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)*, Cahiers lasalliens, 11, Rome, 1962, vi+416pp. A magnificent work, full of nuances, very well documented.

tion of the teacher and his application of logic and order to learning; they also constituted a network, so that as a whole they ensured the successes and corrected the errors of each place. Society knew this, recognised it and was prepared to entrust its children to them, provided that someone with a good heart and a good money came along to support the school project.

From its beginnings, as we have recalled, its need was different: it was about the institution itself, the society or community that its teachers had established.

While its first founder was alive, the institution was himself, one could say. He, in fact, represented for the society and for the Brothers the continuity, the coherence maintained, the identity. Now that he was dead, that is to say, since 1719, there was no longer any sign of the autonomy of their collective identity. They and their pedagogical and organisational technique remained, but they were nobody in the eyes of the legal order of society.

There was a need for them to exist as a corporation responsible for a network of schools. And it cost them a lot, but they succeeded. Everything was settled between September 1724 and January 1725, the final five months of four years of negotiations.

There were two areas, the State and the Church, neither of which could be described as first or second. And perhaps, on closer inspection, this simultaneity helps us to understand what it is all about and in what sense it can help us to understand the present.

Recognition by the State was achieved first: the Letters Patent at the end of September. The Regent, the Duc d'Orléans, had refused to grant them several times, for whatever reasons. Perhaps because he was more inclined towards Jansenism (which was not seen in the Brothers), perhaps simply because he did not want to burden the State Administration with another more or less religious or semi-monastic institution. The fact was that, at his death, the very young king, Louis XV, agreed to sign the document presented to him.

Then, without being influenced by that of the King, acceptance from Rome was obtained. It was the Congregations or Dicasteries of the Pontifical Secretariat and of the Council which, by December of the same year, had already agreed to accept the request of the Brothers. The Pope took it up on the date we know, 26 January.

The King and the Pope: in every negotiation there had been a moment when recognition A was sought in order to guarantee recognition B, which in the end seemed to be of greater interest. Thus, sometimes they thought that the Letters Patent would facilitate the Bull and sometimes that the Bull would facilitate the Letters Patent. In reality, either was enough for them: the other would come on its own, in due course.

... This is history. Today, three centuries later, it is important to bear in mind the implications of this fact.

Indeed, the fact that both recognitions imply the social acceptance of a religious institution means that certain features of its definition may have a civil form and a re-

ligious scope, and vice versa. For example, that the profession of the monastic triad implies a specific economic, occupational, social status.

This was the case of institutions such as the Lasallian. Thus we understand, for example, that the suppression of those vows by the civil authority meant the suppression of all the institutions defined by their profession. It happened in August 1792, in the days of the Revolution.

1726, 1792: it might seem that with these references we are suggesting questions from the days of the Ancient Regime, which do not affect us today, but this may not be the case.

For example: what was the meaning of those vows: to conclude an employment contract or to bear witness to the kingdom of God? In consequence, what was the meaning of those vows, a consecration or a contract? was it possible to express the institutional link and their social commitment in any other way? and, thinking from today's perspective, what would have been their way of expressing their commitment to the popular school today and thus become an entity recognisable by the law?

So it turns out that, three centuries later, that Bull offers the Lasallian Institution a very useful watchtower in the face of the challenge of its future.

For example, we cannot recall the bewilderment of the members of the last General Chapter on the subject of association without encountering questions such as those we have just enunciated. The difficulty of their answers is

due to the difficult harmony between the different models that were found in that assembly.

That is why we say that the Bull, on this anniversary, helps us to ask ourselves in a new way about the identity both of the Lasallian community and of its members. Perhaps it directs more to a question than to an answer, it is true; but it prevents us from remaining in superficial formulas, out of touch with history or simply repeated.

The Bull showed the relationship between Identity and Network: on the one hand, it took up the Brothers' conviction that without a network the Identity of each school would not be sustained; and on the other hand it assumed that without the Identity of each community the Network would not be possible. The Network and the Identity were mutually possible.

That was the Bull.

Its contribution is not insignificant, especially if we bear in mind that the great question of the last century in the Lasallian world has been the definition of its community. And that community, like so many others, is usually defined by the vows (according to the most common theology).

For that reason, we must recall from this first page a fact well known from the first Lasallian biographers: the first request that the Brothers sent to Rome for recognition did not include the conventional religious vows. It spoke of other vows: obedience and stability in the educational service of the poor.

These were vows, to be sure. But they were vows that expressed an existential commitment to a Christian project to which the members of the community believed themselves to be called by God. And that call and that commitment logically implied a concrete way of living.

Of that shared faith which animated their commitment we say that it defined and defines the Lasallian community.

And of it, three hundred years after that Bull, we say that it has been making its way through the last century of this institution. This study aims to show this.

Part Two:

The Interior

Architecture

The axes of the new community

The Brothers recognize, analyze, and face together in faith the difficulties and the particular challenges encountered by their Institute. By contemplating the history of salvation being enacted in their life and in that of the Institute, they experience the grace of the paschal mystery. By meditating on the Gospel journey of the Founder, they find a model of fidelity in adversity and the power of new beginnings.

Rule, 155.

Now, at the beginning of this *Part Two*, when we have almost forgotten that we are three centuries away from that Bull, if we open it again, we find ourselves in another world.

At first glance it may even seem to us that the document does not fit in with us, that it is outdated, that it defines a time gone by. It may not seem to help us, three centuries later. If, however, we insist on overcoming this feeling, we can find a very clear light: the distinction between what is approved and the terms used in the approbation.

Then we will begin to think that perhaps the document can tell us something, even in such a different time. We will be distinguishing between the dynamic and the form, the soul of life and what it looks like. And from that point of view, we will ask ourselves what it tells us in this situation of at least half a century of change.

To this end, opening his History of Three General Chapters, Br. Salm recalls a peculiar curse: may you live in times of change³. It expresses a great truth. In such times living is particularly hard. There is no common language and it is hardly possible to understand each other, so that its inhabitants are close to what one felicitous expression

3 Thus begins his study, already quoted, *A Religious Institute in Transition...*

called a 'lonely crowd'⁴, which may be our way of speaking of the Tower of Babel. Perhaps this is what we find in the Lasallian Institution, when we look up from the Bull we have been reading and contemplate the present of that Community that was approved three centuries ago.

As we soon understand, this is typical of times of great change. It is also said with another play on words, which we have already picked up: we do not say the same thing when we speak of a time of change and a change of era. And it is often added that it is not easy to tell whether one is living in the former or the latter.

4 It is the title and theme of D. Riesman's book, *The Lonely Crowd*. It is worth noting that it was written between 1948 and 1949 and focused on American society. Its subtitle, *A Study of the Changing American Character*, is highly significant. In 1983 N. Stone published his *Europe Transformed, 1878-1919*, which we have already quoted. We do so again in order to point out between the two references the period 1890-1950 and better understand the roots of the change that Riesman and his team found in their society. It is a period of sixty or seventy years. We immediately see that this could not be a local process alone, but something that would sooner or later affect the whole world. Salm's expression is thus understandable: he looks at the path of the Lasallian Institution over forty years in this way and explains the difficulty of finding a suitable model. With regard to the apparent chaos of such times and its impact on Lasallian institutional discourse, we can look much further back and ask ourselves, for example, about the first definition of sacramental theology, back in the 12th century: how many Popes, in the days of Peter Lombard (1100-1160), would have agreed on the definition and number of the Sacraments, as it would become accepted during the following centuries? Salm's irony was the magnitude of the change he saw in the Lasallian Institution over the forty years he reflects in his work... and the task still to be accomplished.

Need we add that our study, the passage from one Community to another, is part of a change of era, and that it is only from this change that we can invoke a three-hundred-year heritage or understand that document of the beginnings?

Our *Part One* shows that for the Lasallian Institution, as for the whole of humanity, what we have experienced since 1904 is a progressive change of era. It is good to recall it, again and again, to perceive the combination of the past harvest and the new future it contains.

Above all, it evokes a path of trial and error, proposals and revisions, plans, structures and itineraries that no one would have imagined fifty years earlier. It is enough to compare two General Chapters, one before and one after the days of the Council. Or, for example, the Circulars of Brothers Adrien and Junien-Victor on the Ten Commandments of the Institute⁵ and those of Brother Alvaro on the Sign of the Community. Or the *Rules* of 1901 and 2015.

It also shows the path travelled or at least the change that has taken place in specific Districts, and gives meaning to the testimonies collected today and those that would have been collected eighty years ago; or the attitudes of the Brothers everywhere today and only thirty years ago; or the different sensitivities in the territories of the same continent.

5 Circulars 270 (12.1.1930), 274 (11.1.1931), 276 (26.1.1932), 278 (8.1.1933), 281 (7.1.1934), 292 (26.1.1936), 195 (10.1.1937), 299 (9.1.1938), 302 (6.1.1939), 305 (8.1.1939) and 324 (6.1.1948), the latter by Br.1948), the latter by Br. Athanase-Emile, after the parenthesis of the war and the first post-war period, when the new version of the *Rule*, in which the Ten Commandments still appeared, had just been approved.

Moreover, it is clear that all this has not happened in the Districts in a harmonious way, from one agreement to another, but in leaps and bounds, with advances and reversals, with different speeds and sometimes very violent tensions. And it is not difficult to compare the chronicles of one territory with those of another: the different speeds of collective consciences, the more or less corporative attitudes that do not always coincide or even resemble each other, are immediately apparent.

Yes, more than once in this century the Lasallian Institution has been reminiscent of the myth of Babel, dressed in unshared vocabularies, more or less crowded and more or less fragmented. There is therefore no originality in pointing out that it is all about finding the important words that have emerged over the years. Identifying and defining them, of course.

As we have been describing it, the last century of the Lasallian Institution, that is to say, this time of change, has developed in three steps. In each of them it has been saying new, important words. The task of this *Part Two* is to bring them together.

As we have understood, the first of these three steps, some fifty years, occupied the first half of the 20th century. It was an unfortunate period in the history of the world and especially in this Institution. It was characterised by the urgency of finding ways to survive and to preserve the inheritance received. We understand it as running from the 1901 General Chapter to the beginnings of the 1956 General Chapter. We have referred to it under the term **Restoration**.

The second step, lasting thirty years or so, is a movement which began in the run-up to the Second Vatican Council; it exploded with that great Assembly and the Lasallian Assembly of 1966-1967 and the following decade; and it stretched out, calming down until the 1993 General Chapter. It is characterised by the exaltation of faith in one's own capacity to lead the Institution and the rereading of the Origins. In this study, a time of **Renewal**.

The third covers the following thirty years, up to the present day. It is here that the recreation of the Institute, now reduced to history in many areas and undergoing redefinition in others, finally takes place. It is characterised by the emergence of new forms of Community or of belonging to the Institute. We have characterised it as one of **Refoundation**, three centuries after that Bull which recognised the first Community.

The change is there. It has to be there, passing from the chaos of Babel to the hope of the Prophets. Is it possible to identify its major signs, thus avoiding the mentioned curse and rewriting the Bull?

The updating of the *Rules*, the symptom of a new era

To address this issue, it would be enough to recall the history of the *Rules* of the Lasallian Institution over the last century. There are more axes for so many memories, of course, but this one has a significant capacity to bring together many others. The updating of the *Rules* is a chronicle of a hundred years which points directly to the heart of that great document of 1725, to its eighteen defining articles.

Already in 1901, in response to both internal and external upheaval, the Chapter set out to study its accommodation to the conditions of the new century. Two years later there was a Circular on the Bull, we must not forget.

The result was the purging of irrelevant usages and the recovery of the text of the origins, 1718. The world order was breaking down in all social dimensions - cultural, scientific, political, aesthetic, religious, economic - and a new one was in sight. The Lasallian response was to underline with energy the founding circumstance, precisely when the very social order that was then tottering was being born.

The same thing happened in 1946. And here too, four years later, we find another Circular on the Bull, as we said above (it was the 1924 Circular, reprinted and enlarged).

After forty terrible years of expulsions, world wars, persecutions and new world structures, the Lasallian Institution once again emphasised the reference to the origins, seeking to confront the newness - undeniable for all - by returning to the spirit of the foundation. Logically, it was only ten years later that the new Chapter would again request the revision of the Lasallian Code. And, also logically, from that moment onwards, the Bull disappeared from the Lasallian scene.

The task was faced at first timidly and tending to reproduce the same vice in the invocation of the origins as a way of situating oneself in the present. Little by little, on account of the convocation and the holding of the Council, everything changed. Thus the 1967 *Rules* came to the Lasallian Community accompanied by a reflection on its

identity, on fidelity to and renewal of the founding spirit. We have pointed this out at the time.

Unfortunately, no one in the Institution was in a position to assimilate in peace such realities as the loss of almost four out of ten Brothers within five or six years of the Council and that Chapter. The tremendous scandal of the ignoble squabbling within the General Council itself over what should be done is therefore understandable. That shame was shown in full force at the next Chapter, in 1976, preventing progress and clarification of the path taken ten years earlier. The *Rule* would not be touched, because it was within the twenty-year margin given by the Council for adjustment. It would be the task of the 1986 Assembly, but the bitterness of dissent had left a very bad seed.

In 1986 the *Rule* was renewed in its structure as it had been renewed in its spirit in 1966. Everything was now organised around a term coined in the days of the Council: 'dimensions'. Those which shaped the person of the Brother: Consecration, Community, Mission. It represented another anthropology or, better, another theology. The identity of the Brother and of his community was interpreted in terms of the origins and of the present time simultaneously, and to do so, this identity was considered in an integral way, not in a sectorial way.

However, the seed of the previous dissension now bore a poisoned fruit: it treated the dimensions as if they were elements, therefore something separable, distinguishable. From the beginning, this reduction weighed down the happy expressive finding of the new *Rule* that we have

seen the journey of the Lasallian Institute take for twenty years: 'sharing the mission'.

What seemed to open the way to a new configuration of the educational community turned out to be too imprecise a theme. It reduced the mission to a task without realising that in order to carry it out, it was by no means necessary to live as the Brother lived. It could not be, and everyone gradually realised this. It was in this spirit that the presence of collaborators was established at the next General Chapter, in 1993, and soon everyone's sensibility found another term on which to pin new hopes: Association. It had the advantage of belonging to the Lasallian tradition. As such, it was expected to overcome difficulties or even some suspicion.

The term had and has great symbolic scope. However, in 1976 it had been rejected for daring to propose that it might henceforth be appropriate for the Brothers' vow to be just that. It would include the others and the whole regime of the Community, but it was rejected. We have also recalled it. It seemed to resemble too closely formulas closer to the secular Christian than to the 'consecrated'.

On the other hand, although this was not so visible, the term was somewhat modified in its new presence in the Lasallian world. Originally, 'association' referred to the network of communities, to the whole, to the total organisation of the educational projects and the communities which animated them. In the beginning, 'association' meant a network of communities. Now, however, it was intended to be used with the meaning of 'Community'.

Even with both caveats, the term still had and still has the capacity for the future. And it showed where the big question lay: the new community.

Association entails how to understand Lasallian Community today, what profile its members should have, what the links of the members should be like, what traits it must necessarily share, the relation with the origins and the whole Lasallian tradition.

This explains the difficulty encountered by the Commission charged with adapting the text of the *Rule* from the year 2000 onwards. It could not go further than what had been established, for the simple reason that it could not be established any further. And it had to resign its task in the hands of the Council, waiting for a new word from the next Chapter, this time in 2007.

Aware of the need and the limits, the Chapter again asked for another Commission to develop the work. This time it was completed between 2014 and 2015. It is the text which now animates the worldwide Lasallian Community and on which the latest General Chapter, 2022, counted.

It has kept the structure of 1986 and has interpreted it again and again in the light of the real nature of the life of the Communities in the global context of the New Evangelisation. Thus the text is full of nuances and allows for progress in the practice of the relationship between Partners and Brothers. It also makes it possible to support diverse practices in the different territories of the five Regions of the Institute.

In spite of this, the Capitulants of 2022 left Rome with the feeling of not having reached an understanding, of not having found the necessary harmony to face the tremendous challenges of an Institute in a state of exhaustion in various regions of the world and without entirely satisfactory orientations for all.

How is this possible? As we asked at the beginning of this study: are we, a century later, facing a never-ending story?

Perhaps it is a question of perplexity in the face of art. 4 of the 2015 *Rule*: “The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, approved by the Bull *In apostolicae dignitatis solio* of Pope Benedict XIII, is an institute of pontifical right, composed exclusively of lay religious.”

Is it really compatible with the discourse on Association, the new Community, Fraternity...?

Four centuries later, perhaps, still Trent

How is it possible that after so many efforts we still do not feel ourselves in a common house, ordered according to a common creed, serenely committed to a common task? How is it possible that we do not find a system capable of filling us with hope as we contemplate the future?

There is an answer, simple and clear and by no means exclusive to the Lasallian Community: the religious institutions born after the Council of Trent have never managed to live harmoniously their religious consecration and their apostolic commitment.

This may seem a pretentious, daring statement, without sufficient foundation. But it is not. History has shown that all the forms of apostolic religious life born after that Council, all of them, suffer from the same evil: they have lived a history much more coherent in their deeds than in their doctrine. With the change of the historical cycle, this will become unavoidable and its assumption will condition their future.

In our study, from the perspective of the Bull of 1725, we keep an intimate reference to all this: it was the Congregation 'of the Council' that approved the life of that group. And 'Council', at that time, was the Council of Trent. A century and a half had passed or, above all, another way of living had been entered into, but the reference was still marked by the Counter-Reformation. In this sense, the Bull had to be reactive rather than proactive. And the same applies to its interpretation for another two centuries.

All this was already evident in the Lasallian Institution and the like a long time ago. We have recalled it since the beginning of *Part One* of this study. We recall it as a synthesis, even at the risk of unnecessary repetition.

Lasallian history shows, among other data from a century ago, the concern aroused by the Constitution *Conditae a Christo* of December 1900. In it, the Vatican reminded all institutions such as the Lasallian Institution of the need to homogenise the signs of belonging of its members, defining these signs by the taking of the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Of the thirteen thousand Brothers in the Institute at that time, a little more than two thousand neither had vows nor were thinking of professing vows. They remained in the community and were in the category of '*novice employé*'.

The fact is very eloquent: it implies that vows were not necessary to be a Brother. They were not part of his identity. They only facilitated their work, or perhaps established a level of commitment to the Institution that made them worthy of some special trust or responsibility. But they were nothing more than a facilitator of the organisation, a homogeniser of working relationships.

In other words, the vows did not imply any special reference to the afterlife of God, to the Kingdom, to the world of what we call eschatological, as we have been understanding and expressing already before Vatican II. The vows were not intended to make anyone a sign of anything other than a renewed capacity to work, a simpler economic status and greater availability.

In reality, what defined a Brother was something else: his belonging to a Community dedicated exclusively to the education of the working classes. That belonging, in that society of Christianity, was a clear sign of feeling called by God to live and work in that way for the Gospel. That belonging, that Community and that school were a sign of the presence of God in the faith that those men shared.

It was so, and yet such a synthesis was not expressed in the Church at the beginning of the 20th century. That is why Pope St. Pius X could write to the Brothers that they should in no way think that their apostolic action was

above their religious consecration, but quite the contrary. For their life was not like that of other Christians, but was above it. For this reason - this was the question that motivated such a response - they should not compromise their vows in order to be able to continue their schools, in an apparent secularisation of their life.

With this understanding of themselves and their relationship to secular Christian life the French Brothers - numbering ten thousand out of a world total of thirteen or fourteen thousand - either left their homeland for other lands around the world, or remained there apparently secularised, or simply left the Congregation. It must have been terrible.

If we add to this initial situation the two world wars, the emergence of fascism, the persecutions in Mexico and Spain, the condemnation of Modernism, the problematic universalisation of its educational model, the consequent authoritarian reinforcement as a safeguard against so many tensions, if we take all this into account, we will understand the logic of maintaining an irrational theology about the identity of the Brother, his Consecration and his Community.

For example, it was logical that, in 1946, at the General Chapter, the Brothers were urged to dispense as far as possible with the lay personnel who had to be recruited because of the vicissitudes of war, and that the total ban on female personnel in schools and communities was indicated. And it was equally logical that, ten years later, the new Chapter encouraged the establishment of the Association of Lasallian Educators, with its practices of piety and its

organisational headquarters in Rome at the Generalate. After all, it was not the first time that the Institute had considered the question of a Third Order (on this occasion the expression does not seem to have been mentioned).⁶

Then came the Second Vatican Council and the Chapter of 1966-1967. It was an enormously complex conjuncture.

At its core was an awareness of the changing times, of the exhaustion of a great historical cycle, of the crisis of all social models. It would soon become evident that the structures born after the Second World War were not sufficient to lead humanity through the change that was taking place. Soon all the institutions of the Church would also be feeling the extent of the crisis, with the gap between the culture of the people and the Gospel, with the difficulties in all cases of adapted renewal.

When this happened, it would begin to be seen that institutions such as the Lasallian ones were not declining because of a lack of faith within them, but because of their inadequacy to adapt to the new social conditions. For the time being, 1966-1967, what could be seen was a naïve awareness that renewal was possible, that in a short time - perhaps a decade - all the upward trends would have been re-established.

It was not, it could not be like that. The dimensions of the situation required at least a generation to assimilate it. And that, while broadening the awareness of some, did

6 On the Association and the term Third Order, see *Part One, 1. Restoring, 2. On the events in 1904.*

the same to the resentment of others. This is the underground story of the twenty years up to the 1986 Assembly. From then on, everything would necessarily start to be different.

The big clues to the future were already there.

Sharing the Sign

The last thirty years, from the 1993 Chapter to the present day, have seen the emergence of a renewed model of Consecration. Both fruit and effect, consciously and without having foreseen it, the discourse of the Community as a Sign is opening up.

The Circulars of the last three Superiors General, aware as no one else was of the paths of the Institute, are clearly along these lines. It is also reflected in the sometimes somewhat triumphalist approach of the Institute's Bulletins of these same decades. It can also be found in the orientation of the MEL (Lasallian Educational Mission) Bulletins. And it is certainly the driving force behind the dialogue between General Chapters and Mission Assemblies.

It could not be otherwise.

Like so many others, the Lasallian Institution tries to situate itself in the context of what we are calling the New Evangelisation during this same period. This reference takes all Christian institutions back to the days of the presentation of the Gospel to humanity and thus forces them

to show themselves as the place of the manifestation of the Risen Lord.

In this way the profound relationship between Evangelisation and Witness is understood, which leads to the other between Evangelisation and the Community which evangelises and is evangelised. This is where, today as in its beginnings, the meaning of any community comes in. It naturally coincides with its social function: it brings to society its faith in the reality of a God who fills the world, who initiated it and who awaits it definitively. Evangelisation begins when society encounters a group that shares that faith.

One of its forms was, from the first centuries, that adopted by groups that we later called monastic, religious, consecrated.

They embraced a particularly significant way of life, in their desire to live by making God's eternal now transparent in the temporal now of the people. Their shared commitment was and is the guarantor of their faith and the meaning of their social function. This transparency is their contribution to Evangelisation, that is to say, what they have been placed in this world for, their sending out to history, to their mission.

All this had to make its way little by little, once the days of the Council and the Post-Council had passed, once the dimensions of the 'signs of the times', as Pope John said, had been perceived. And in this the Lasallian Institution could not be an exception. All its efforts to find a coherent identity discourse is an example of this great tide of his-

tory and of the Gospel telling itself together the possible meaning of what is being lived.

This is where the renewal of the Lasallian community comes in, as the Institute's documentation has been insisting in recent years. It needs only to find the formula which expresses its constituent links. And the image of the Sign which is being shared helps effectively to formulate them. It allows us to identify and define what we have been finding.

Indeed, the overview we have just mentioned must have taken us to certain concepts that had been appearing repeatedly. Properly or insufficiently understood, concepts such as vows, mission, consecration, school, faith, sharing, association, commitment, commitment, the poor, creativity, fidelity, renewal, ministries, formation, plurality, witness..., have come up again and again.

That is why it is necessary to review personally what we know about the development of the Lasallian Community over the last century, its various changes, its proclamations, its insistence and relapses, its figures, its relations with society and with the Church. It is essential to do so, perhaps starting with the geography and history closest to us, to gradually broaden the areas of examination and end up contextualising all its elements, the particulars in the generals and the generals before the particulars.

Usually, this exercise places before our eyes a handful of explicit or implicit insistencies, around which all the others coalesce.

At the same time, they show that these grouping terms are indebted to all the others, i.e. they are understood as a function of all the others, regardless of their apparent belonging: be it education, religion, society, or personal, they are all marked by their reference to all the others.

This, as we shall see, constitutes an additional problem. Because not everything is done by grouping the insistences together. It is also necessary to interpret them, which is when their relationships become an arduous task. It is much easier to define things inwardly than to define them outwardly.

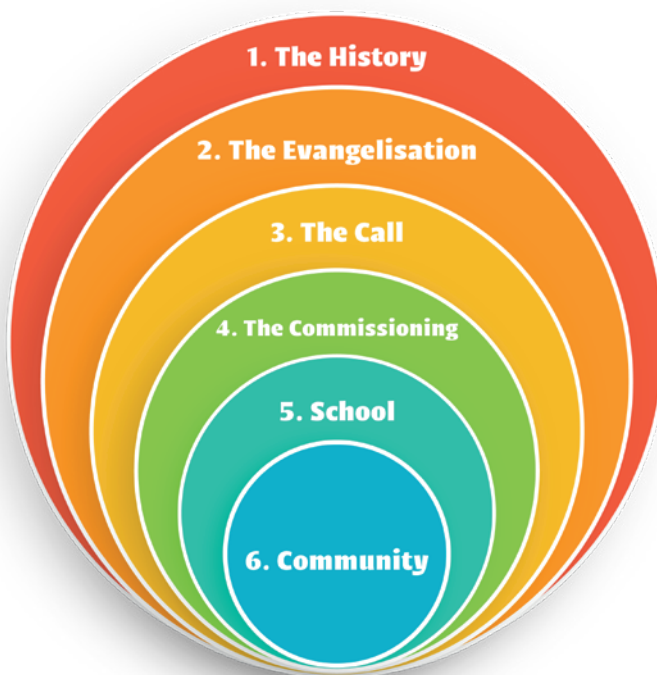
That is why the first result of reading the present and its immediate roots is to perceive the system or systems that exist between the roots of what we are encountering. Then comes the other: understanding the scope of each term.

The following pages are conceived from this method. They first identify the grouping concepts and then interpret their scope within a system or set.

Six Criteria for establishing the new Community

These six perspectives constitute a system for defining the Lasallian Community as it has emerged over the last century. They are perceived if, as we have been saying, we take the time to review the Lasallian itinerary and to project what it tells us about the present in which we live.

They can be as follows:



Logically, the first constant that appears in our study, the one we evoke from the memory of the Bull, is the path of history, with its dynamics, its periods, its eras. **[1.] An Institution in History**, that is to say, the evidence of the mystery of time. This is the first major criterion for the present and the immediate future: this Institution is a historical institution.

The next step also arises from the general context of our chronicles and our reflection: it is the memory of what we call the New Evangelisation. It makes us look differently at the dynamics of history, the ways of the 'signs of the times', so that we see in them the transcendence of the calls that shake all the Institutions of the Church, their birth, development and exhaustion. **[2.] In the context of the New Evangelisation**, which brings with it the new Christian community.

Thus, as a matter of course, we receive the following criterion: the vocational discourse. It animates the whole process evoked up to this point. One of its best emblems is the Prologue of the 1966/67 *Rule*, that call to personalise the circumstance. And this is not a minor issue. **[3.] The Call**, grounded or framed in God's Plan, as proposed in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.

Vocation is logically linked to Mission, that is to say, the purpose of the Call. In the Lasallian Institution it has appeared again and again for seventy years: with regard to the priesthood, the vows, formation, sharing, ageing, the organisation charts for the animation of the Institute, the specificities proper to each territory when considering Lasallian hope.

In all these topics, time and again, we find the perplexity between action and witness, that is to say, between effort and interior life or between consecration and apostolic commitment. The relationship between Vocation and Mission, to put it in more usual terms, is not so clear.

The future cannot bear this perplexity much longer. The Lasallian documentation is aware of this and is providing the Institution with clearer and more mature texts each day. Daily life, in the same way, is making the facts come before the words and offering more and more light. That is why our next criterion must be [4.] what **Mission** means, how to understand it from God's Plan today.

There is a problem, however, in understanding this fourth criterion. It stems from the magnitude and novelty of social, cultural, institutional change. Change is so strong and so seductive that it invites more to live the urgencies than fidelity. In the world of education, in particular, this shifts the centre of gravity from the construction of people to the organisation of societies.

The path through *Part One*, and especially the last stages of it, shows this clearly by emphasising the inner life of the one who seeks to educate, that is to say, the coherence between doing and being. It is very easily understood, too. For the vocational experience to emerge and grow, it is necessary that the person be nourished by what he lives or does and, reciprocally, that his doing be nourished by his being, by the call that constitutes him. That is the next criterion is [5] **The Christian school**, that is to say, the soul of the Mission incarnated in the educational

fact, in the relationship or relationships that constitute any school.

Here the guiding concept once again is relationship. Nothing new, of course, but often completely absent.

This category refers first and foremost to the relationship that the person who educates lives with the learner. It also refers to the relationship between the two people and the knowledge, between their personal lives and the knowledge that animates the life of society. And finally, it refers to that which is experienced between the different people involved in all of this within the same educational project.

None of these perspectives is unknown, but any or all three of them can disappear for lack of use. For this reason, it is important to point out their play as the last criterion in our reflection. Thus we speak, finally, of **[6.] What The community of the Christian school** is like, that is to say, the face of the Mission.

In the itinerary of the Lasallian Institution it appears expressly, again and again. And we point out as strong points the *Declaration on the Brother*, 1966/67, and the recent *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission*, 2020.

From there, the configuration of each Lasallian Project is better understood, because no community can be constituted without sharing the interior coherence which, in this case, reflects the coherence that must exist between the educational project and its environment. This must be the case if we are talking about an Institution and not only about an educational proposal.

These six criteria, by mutually constituting each other, open the door to a possible System or hermeneutic key in the configuration of the New Community. And there is no great difficulty in pointing out their presence in the itinerary of the great Lasallian Community over the last fifty years. Detecting its trace personally helps to approach the present with realism and hope.

This is what the following pages offer.

The first of these six criteria has a general or global character. It includes and gives meaning to all the rest. It orders a series of minor signs, through which it emerges in the life of the people. It is the process of the dynamics of history, the global panorama of the great river that has brought us to this delta.

Institutions and History shape each other.

That is why, in any time of social change, institutions that are aware of their own history offer society more guarantees for the future.

1. An Institution in History

Our study reveals on every page that what is happening to us is not the result of any planning. We could almost describe it as autonomous, so that all we have to do is to understand and interpret its manifestations and react to them.

There are areas, as is evident, that are shaped by our initiative, and this can give us the impression that the same thing happens in all the others, as if history were something subject or at least subject to our initiative. But on the whole, this is not the case. History, the great history of the Lasallian Community over its three centuries of life, shows this clearly. That is why none of its great questions can be answered outside that great context.

Here are three examples. The first: during the 18th century, no one could think of the consequences of the introduction of organisational reason in the administration of societies. What they could think about was the writing of the *Encyclopedia*. Nor could anyone have imagined at the beginning of the French Revolution what the spread of its motto, Equality, Fraternity, Liberty would mean for Europe and the whole world a hundred years later. What they would all do, little by little, was to draw up their respective Constitutions. Nor could anyone have imagined what, only a century and a half later, would emerge from the colonising movements directed from Europe throughout the world. They could – and not all of them – think of territorial plans of exploitation, but no more.

There is no need to go on for the half-century spanning the two so-called world wars, or even the process that would open up between 1944 and 1950 with the establishment of the institutions for the economic and social stability of the world to come (from Bretton Woods to the *Declaration of Human Rights*). The institutions and the texts, with the end of so much bitterness, sought to manage the future. It was their duty, their responsibility. But it was soon to be seen that the social dimensions of the future exceeded all their predictions.

At such a juncture, the most frequent thing to do was to react, interpret, plan in the short term..., only to repeat it a generation later.

This rhythm of short or long-term reactions and planning can be clearly seen in the history of the Lasallian Community. It was first the onset of Modernity with the

imposition of rational logic as an attitude for understanding life and society. The first Community did not perceive it, could not do it. But it learned to live the relationship between the gospel and the rational organisation of basic education. And the same thing happened throughout the 19th century with the expansion of programmes and the worldwide spread of the enlightened models. Neither then were they the ones who discovered the social or educational situation. They could not discover it, but they knew how to live it in dialogue with the Gospel in the new societies that were emerging in the West.

This is why we can understand that, with the beginning of the 20th century, the progressive disintegration of the rationalist-bourgeois model of the previous century would strongly affect our institution. That is why we have started in the days of 1900/1905. And we understand, moreover, that such an affectation could hardly be perceived in its true extent by its protagonists. For example: there is distance or progress between the attitudes of the Communities in France in 1905 and in Spain in 1931; but in both cases they coincide in not being able to understand the historical change in process. Today we see that, at bottom, both are more reactionary than proactive.

The same was to happen in the middle decades of the same century with the upturn of a new economic and legal order potentially applicable to the whole world. Thus, the restoration of the world order, organised around two antagonistic blocs, would mean a wealth of possibilities for all the world's peoples, whether developed or developing.

This would multiply the possibilities for the growth of the Lasallian Institution, at least in the areas of what has already been verified throughout the previous century. That is why today we better appreciate the fragility of that sense of triumph and success which filled the plans of many Districts and prevented them from perceiving that what was truly new was not the exaltation of what was already known but something else which was emerging.⁷

And so it has been in the last generation, from the *Letter to the Lasallian Family* ⁸, from the General Council in February 1989, to the present day.

Logically the past years, at least since the days of the Second Vatican Council, bring to all areas of Lasallian life the clear feeling that it is not a question of changing this or that element of the whole, but of asking oneself what paths the whole is taking. Those last days of the century, those immediately preceding the General Chapter of 1993, were a key moment in Lasallian awareness.

7 From these considerations, it is worth reviewing the issue of the Bulletin dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the 1966 General Chapter and in particular to the *Declaration*. It is 256, October 2017, entitled *Creativity and Courage: Living the Promise of the 39th General Chapter*. All its articles are full of suggestions, and we would like to highlight the one signed jointly by Brothers Miguel Campos and Robert Schieler.

8 It was very important in the general context of our study, four years before the Chapter of 1993: it laid the foundations for the new institutionalisation of the Community. It expressed, of course, the sense of the presence of lay people for the first time in a significant part of the next great assembly.

All social institutions have been modifying their identity and their image over the last century. All of them. This has meant that they have been walking on the razor's edge, that is to say, on the verge of forgetting their own identity and replacing it with certain images, in tune with each current situation, but perhaps far from their own definition.

The indisputable fact is the change in image. Rightly or wrongly, all institutions are replacing their inherited image with one that is more in tune with changing social customs. And there, in this change, their future is at stake: everything depends on whether the change in image entails or is encouraged by a change in definition or not.

When it does not, the change of image itself is ephemeral. It changes for a while, to the point of exasperation (epoch of change), but finally it disappears (change of era) and its capital or the value that may have remained is transferred to another space where it is still profitable in some way.

Understanding the new Community

From this great perspective of History we can better perceive one of the clearest indicators of our *Part One*: the search for the place of the 'non-religious' in the daily configuration of Lasallian Projects.

We had intentionally begun the historical review with the text of St. Pius X to the Institute. There it was made very clear that it was the Brothers, in their identity as religious men, who were to develop the inherited work. This was

the understanding of the Capitulants of 1946 with their decision to dispense with lay teachers.

As was to be expected, ten years later, in 1956, it was recognised that it had not been possible to implement it as planned. We mentioned this at the beginning of *Part One*, so that today we can refer back as far as the modification of the design of Lasallian Projects and the presence in them of ‘non-religious’ personnel. This was a reality which was not only tolerated but which brought a specific value. Fifty years earlier, it would have been unimaginable to come across this paragraph of the *Declaration*, in 1967:

The school will be molded into community only through a faculty rich in the diversity and the unity of its members. For this reason the Brothers work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life and of civic affairs. Lay teachers should be completely involved with the whole life of the school: with catechesis, apostolic organizations, extra-curricular activities, and administrative positions (*Declaration* 46.3).

There is no need to repeat what we have recalled in the general historical overview of *Part One* of this study. However, there is a need to reread the different local descriptions in order to realise the extent and the meaning of the increase in the committed presence of the laity in the Lasallian Project in the decades following the Council, right up to the present day.

It is true that in many cases the project has been dissolving with the progressive disappearance of the Brothers. It

is also true that logically there must be more of them than others. It is true, and perhaps that is why the indicator we are pointing out is even more significant.

It is the increase - not only quantitative - in the number of people committed beyond the limits of their employment contract. The increase that we understand as a sign is the nature of that commitment: it is always an expression of the person's faith. It is a qualitative change.

It does not matter, in this case, whether it is a conventional faith, that is to say, a faith that can be similar to that of the Christian community or any other religious confession. What matters is that faith in itself, i.e. the acceptance that the Mystery (God, therefore) is in the life process of the students and in the will of the educators.

Later we will refer to this from a vocational point of view. Now we speak of an institutional sign: the number of educators who profess their faith in the transcendence of their educational ministry has grown significantly. With them, the ways of living the Lasallian relationship have grown - above all they have diversified.

In this case the indicator points to two domains: personal and institutional, as a sign with two sides. It is important to bear this in mind.

On the personal level, first, the indicator raises the need to identify accurately the commitment or consecration of each person. This implies first of all the awareness that the only formula we had inherited for these situations of believing commitment was the replication or adaptation

of monastic models. We do not need to expand on this at this stage of our work. But there is a need to point out that the real challenge lies in specifying and trusting the resulting formulas: we need to think from 'secularity', not from the vows. And we need to recognise that the formula inherited in the form of religious teaching life (like other forms of consecration born in Modernity) is conceived in a way that is - for today - anachronistic.

And it is understood, from this point of view, that the institutional forms for sharing the vocation, that is to say, the forms of the community, must also be different. This is its second dimension.

They must be conceived on the basis of secular commitment and witness, in such a way that they include within them the efficacy of apostolic dedication, the transparency of the God whose call is shared and the definitiveness of the commitments that are lived within them.

We will have to comment on this later, but let this fundamental note remain here: 'commitment' has a plural meaning. It refers, as is easy to imagine, to the compatibility of the commitment diversified according to the different states of life of the members of the community. We cannot forget that the recipient of the call, the place of the presence of the Lord who calls and the form it takes before his people is not uniquely and primarily individual, but something both personal and communal. Each person is nourished by what he or she shares and the community is constituted in this sharing.

It is similar to the paradox of the term ‘brother’, singular in its expression and plural in its meaning. And it is the same with ‘Brother’.

This means, as was pointed out in the paragraph of the Declaration quoted above, that for his people the place of the sign of God is the Community and not so much each of its members. Much less, some members more than others. The Community.

As we have said, all this will have to be nuanced from the spiritual and theological point of view, that is to say, the experience and the foundation. But now, when considering it from its belonging to history, we must remember its organisational aspect, its relationship with the exercise of the ministry of evangelisation in education. For this is another facet of the historical novelty that imposes a historical change: education and educational community do not mean the same thing today as they did eighty years ago.

One can argue almost endlessly about whether education changes society or the other way round. Surely the answer depends on one’s prejudices or preconceived ideas about social institutions. On the other hand, there is unanimous acceptance of the relationship between the two, between society and education. They constantly have to maintain it, so that this relationship makes education move and society concretise its self-awareness. They necessarily go hand in hand, even if at times one is slightly ahead of the other.

It is important for us to bear this in mind in order to remember something as simple as the fact that the same phenomenon must occur between education itself and

the community that educates. That is to say: education cannot change without the community changing as well. It is not only a question of the relationship between the school and its society: the school itself also constitutes a type of society within which lives a human group that we call the educating community.

Even before the Council, the Lasallian Institution clearly recognised this and began by accepting in principle the disruption that educational change meant for the daily life of the Community. Later it turned out that the disruption, initially tolerable, became less so as it multiplied. The Community was thus at times rather reluctant to modify both its project and its discourse.

From the days of the Council, however, this was already very clear. This is recalled in the second part of the *Declaration*. The first part had spoken about the identity of the Brother and of the consecrated Community. The second addresses the domains of apostolic commitment and distinguishes three areas, which are to be expected: education in the faith, the poor, and the renewal of education. We have recalled this above.

There was no difficulty in admitting any of these three areas. Thus, all three were attended to, although more the first and the third than the second, but they were taken on board. What was not done, however, was to realise that none of this could be done without modifying the daily life of the Community. Above all, without changing its constitution.

It was easier to reshape the educational organisation than to touch the Community. This is what is important and what this last reflection is about.

Community and Organisation

Indeed: touching the Community meant address the great issue of Lasallian identity ‘in today’s world’, that is to say, the question of the profile of its members in the face of the new times. And this, in that context, as we recalled in the *Part One* of this study, was much more difficult task.

We have recalled the disparate weight of the subject of the priesthood in those assemblies. Thus we can interpret its sometimes more reactive than creative echo. And we can understand why the real issue, not the identity of the Brother, but that of the Community, was not addressed.

This resulted in a situation that we can well imagine as schizophrenic: in the project, the Community model was reserved for the group of Brothers, while for the whole of each educational project, the organisation model was applied. This was a very serious situation (which continued for decades afterwards). As a result, the Institution was much more up to date as an organisation for education than as a Community to animate it. The local chronicles are much better understood in this light.

The *Declaration*, as we have recalled, did not take time to become aware of all this (it was the work of barely three months, September-November 1967, in the midst of con-

siderable tension and in the midst of other Chapter tasks)⁹. For that reason, we do not find in it any light for understanding the Lasallian Community from now on, a subject which would become the protagonist of the half century that followed.

There is in this what we can surely qualify as the most serious deficit in the Lasallian itinerary of this last half century, so long. A reading of what we might call our local chronicles, shows this clearly. It is necessary to read between the lines, of course, but we immediately feel that we are far removed from the opinions and the debatable. The testimonies say it without saying it.

This is an understandable deficit. The dialogue between Criteria and Prejudice is never easy.

On the one hand, there is the tremendous debate on the identity of the Brother. It was certainly the great theme, both explicit and implicit, of the General Chapters of 1956, 1966, 1976 and 1986. And we cannot say with conviction that the question was responded at the end of those forty years. This would have weighed heavily in constituting the community required for the animation of educational projects as diversified as those that the dynamics of history were imposing.

9 Cf. the voluminous and thorough study by Josean Villalabeitia, quoted several times in this study: *Un falso dilema, I. ¿Religioso o maestro? II. La respuesta capitular*, Rome, 2008, two vols. 286 and 264 pp. Easier to read and with more sectorial themes, the collective work *La Declaración, 30 años después*, Valladolid, 1998, 254 pp.

But there was and still is another factor: the forgetfulness that the foundation had not consisted of establishing schools, but rather communities to animate them. This forgetfulness, or at least neglect, was the cause of the fact that in the institution the Community gradually disintegrated and was reduced to an organisation.

Again, the *Declaration*, in a sufficiently clear formula, already quoted in our *Part One*:

... In this reappraisal [the whole of art. 49 is devoted to the Revision of the works] it must be remembered that the influence of the Christian school will come more from quality and excellence than from mere numbers. The first objective, then, will not be to preserve existing schools but to form excellent communities¹⁰ staffed by qualified teachers in sufficient numbers to be the animating influence of a school (*Declaration* 49.3).

Our local chronicles show it just as clearly. It is enough to read them against the background of the *Declaration on the Brother in today's world*, 1966–67, up to the *Declaration on the Lasallian Mission* of 2020. In all of them, the will to belong, the identification with a shared project, emerges.

10 The original and official French text reads '*communautés vivantes*'. It could be said that this expression goes a little further than the english and spanish versions, underlining the continuity of the process of becoming a community. It thus adds the everyday, always to be done and always in the pipeline. See, *Part One*, 2. *Renewing I. A Declaration*.

Refounding, Committing oneself

From that will we better identify one more indicator in the Lasallian present and its roots: the call to foundational commitment.

It should be noted that ‘call’ does not include ‘response’. Everywhere, globally and in the immediate area, we see the need to take on the situation as a personal programme both to guide one’s own life and the future of the institution. It is seen, it is even expressed. There is a reference to invitation, personal conversion, fraternity.

The fact that this does not include the response, at least in a massive, repeated, abundant way, does not mean that the call is not there. It means that the response is not there, that is, that people and communities understand that the response cannot consist of just anything. And this is the sign, precisely formulated: the awareness of the necessity, the possibility and the transcendence of the answer.

At the root of such a situation, helping us to understand the paradox it contains, we can see an echo of the deficit pointed out above, a very concrete weakness. It has two manifestations: one, in the definition of identity, and the other, in the animation of the whole. They go hand in hand. Perhaps they are even two sides of the same coin.

On the one hand, we find the incompleteness of the identity design, i.e. the perplexity and diversity in the perception of the situation and in local responses. Symptom enough to understand this is the role attributed to the Brother in the coming times. There are places where he, the Brother,

is supposed to be the one who has the light to constitute around him what may come; and there are others where the Brother is a member of the Community, with a specific experience and knowledge of the situation, but without any title of clairvoyance or privilege of priority over anyone else.

This is the first side of the sign of fragility: imprecision in the definition of the Lasallian Community. The second, a consequence of the first, is indecision in the animation of the whole or perhaps the excessive weight of the spiritual-disincarnated in governance proposals.

Perhaps it is not possible to do otherwise or to manage in any other way. The fact is that for the past forty years the responses have been excessively different and fragmentary, as befits points of view that are far removed from each other or even opposed to each other.

The result is what we refer to as institutional or community weakness: indecision when it comes to taking on the task of refounding as a personal and shared responsibility. It is like a vacuum where there should not be one, so that its nature is not very clear. And it raises the question of how to live the faith at the same level as the organisation - excellent - of the Lasallian commitment.

For this institution, the question contains the most important Sign of the last hundred years. It points to its meaning in today's Church.

We are no longer in the last decades of 17th century France, but in a very different world. And in this other world, the

relationship between text and context which gives meaning to things can be translated for the Lasallian world into the question of the relationship between educating and evangelising. Not simply how to recreate educational projects, not even by referring them to the poor and marginalised of today. It is something much deeper. It is possibly a question of reconceiving mediation, that is to say, the educating community, and moving forward in this endeavour until a new institutional model is designed.

All the members of the current Lasallian groups feel called to this. This is what the refounding commitment is all about, capable of redefining the attitude to life. This is the test of faith, of believing in the God who calls us and dwells in us: in the remodelling of the relationship between the instrument and its meaning, that is to say, the relationship which originally existed between the school of the poor in the emerging modernity and a community which believed itself to be consecrated to it from the eternity of God's Plan.

This set of indicators points to an entirely new scene in the life of the Church and the world. In our day it is being called the New Evangelisation. And it is certainly in its light that all of them attain an unsuspected transcendence.

Certainly in another time

This block of indicators makes sense of the distinction between change and time. Our local chronicles indirectly confirm this: initiatives are sustained when they are born out of the awareness of the change of epoch; on the other

hand, they soon disappear when they are experienced as just one of the changes in these times of change.

This is why we are repeatedly reminded of that expression that shook us in the days of the Council: the ‘signs of the times’.

Perhaps today it is somewhat forgotten or reduced to an inconsequential mimicry of social novelties. Perhaps right now it is limited to types of behaviour in its most superficial sense, ways of speaking, timetables, methodologies, etc. There is a kind of fatigue in the face of results that resist or a habit of novelties that trivialises them all.

The transformation of the world that gave birth to them in the middle of the last century did not remain in a couple of decades, but has continued up to the present day. It has continued and has led our lives to situations unimaginable only fifty years ago. That is why it is essential to take it up again in its full scope.

From this point of view, the ‘signs of the times’ go much further than the indispensable area of doing. They point to being, and in particular to being with others, to the Community and to the institution. Logically, it is clear that such an institution needs to keep in mind the dimensions of the world, its path towards globalisation, its need for the Gospel and the conditions of its being meaningful.

This is the great lesson of this set of indicators: the Lasalian subject is a facet of the great question of the Church or of Society or of History. Without this context, it only delivers absurdity.

That is why, because of the magnitude or transcendence of this whole, we need always to remember that the Signs of which we speak are God's: like the very meaning of history, they are never entirely within our reach. They point to the trace of his presence, without locating it exclusively in any place or time. They invite us to be attentive, to dialogue, to availability, to live everything from his heart.

And an institution such as the Lasallian one has an added value in this task: its awareness of having been born and grown up in this same dialogue over four centuries.

To speak of the mystery of history, of living a change of the times and of Signs of God helps us to imagine the possible scope of this other expression, so often used for a couple of decades now, 'New Evangelisation'. In our case, in this study, it is in its light that we have just discovered the meaning of the journey of the Institution over the last century.

The New Evangelisation is expressed in sacramental forms previously unknown.

By sacrament we understand any manifestation of the Incarnation of God.

2. The New Evangelisation

A few pages above, we quoted the General Chapter of 1993, speaking of its awareness of being part of a movement half a century old. This is the Preamble to what it wishes to express to the Lasallian Institute (1.1). And immediately (1.2. and 1.3.):

The Church sends us as consecrated lay people in religious life to work for the 'new evangelisation' of young people and adults who live in this world in all settings, in all culture, in all religious faiths.¹¹

11 Circular 435, 24 June 1993. On 1 October 1981, reporting on the results of the Intercapitular Meeting, Circular 415 already dealt with the topic, although referring only to the then called young Churches, to the countries of first evangelisation (o.c., 27-32).

The context of the New Evangelisation is an indispensable perspective in this study, a bridge that guides us on the great stage of history. It is a question of the visibility of the Gospel in the Lasallian Project.¹²

From the beginning of the 20th century, in fact, the New Evangelisation was already at the root of the discomfort of all Christian institutions in the face of social dynamics. In those days, Modernity was showing itself to be exhausted, even before the First World War. The deep discomfort of the Churches with the European model of society testified to the exhaustion and insignificance of the inherited evangelisation. There was now a new way of looking at life and history. Christian institutions, all of them, suffered from the insignificance of their own proposal, without understanding it too well.

It is not quite difficult, for example, to interpret from this point of view the various socialisms of the end of the century, the Modernist movement in Theology, Barth's commentary on Romans, the emergence of fascism, the existential underlining of the Philosophies of values and Phenomenology. They were all signs of the same reality. Something new was already in the world and it manifested itself in a general situation of crisis, dramatically

12 This same approach is proposed in the suggestive text of Juan F. Martínez Sáez, *La nueva evangelización y las nuevas formas de vida consagrada y evangélica*, in *Commentarium pro religiosis et misionariis*, vol. 84 (2003), fasc. I-IV pp. 7-43. See, in particular, his reflection on the new evangelisation as a hermeneutical context. Also *Perspectivas y retos para las nuevas formas de vida consagrada*, paper at II Jornada de Nuevas Formas de Vida Consagrada Universidad Eclesiástica San Dámaso (Madrid) 21 October 2011.

expressed in the two great wars, plus half a dozen other minor, local conflicts.

It was clear that, until the true dimensions of what was happening were identified, all institutions would tend towards restorationist postures: they would try to reproduce the previous social conditions in a way that could establish and assist the development of familiar ways. Once the nature of the change became more visible, it would be a different matter. A gigantic or global crisis would then open up, within which the light of hope would shine as absence or promise.

As both - absence and promise - came to be seen as two sides of the same reality, institutions would eventually make sense of the horizon that Christians today call the New Evangelisation.

The various vicissitudes through which the Lasallian Institution has passed in this last century are a typical example of all this. They are understood in their light, in such a way that their interaction is evident: the New Evangelisation gives historical category to what happens in the Lasallian world and at the same time that particular world is presented to scholars as an exemplary sector of the same global phenomenon.

It could not be otherwise: as a Christian institution and as one dedicated to the relationship between the Gospel and Culture.

A mission country

In *Part One* of this study, and speaking about the 1976 General Chapter, we recalled a paragraph from Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi*, a year before that assembly. It referred to the relationship between the Gospel and Culture:

The split¹³ between Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelisation of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed (EN 20).

These are words pronounced already half a century ago, which we must reread from the Lasallian itinerary from *Gaudium et spes*, 1965, to *Fratelli tutti*, 2020. Let us remember only that, if there is such a split, the Lasallian Institution has no meaning. Nothing less. If things are as *Evangelii nuntiandi* points out, the Lasallian Institution must disappear, necessarily, whoever opposes it, because its life cycle has run out.

13 The Latin text uses the term '*discidium*', with a certain connotation of drama, of violence. It is noticeable in the terms used in the Vatican versions of this text: *split/bruch/rottura*. The nuance of tearing apart, applied to this theme, is striking. It could have read: disappearance, blurring, confusion, dissolution, annulment of boundaries... Perhaps the violence of the term means nothing, but its force is striking.

It may seem very radical, but it is a thesis with which it is easy to agree, for or against the Christian school: if there is a relationship between Religion and Culture, culture itself is the place where Religion is expressed; if there is no such relationship, culture is no place for religion. Now, if education is, on principle, focused on culture, it will or will not be a suitable place for a religious institution, depending on whether or not the religious aspect is there. Depending on whether it is there or not, it will or will not be what in classical theology was called a 'theological place'.

An institution such as the Lasallian one comes into being when education is a theological place, at least potentially, and disappears otherwise. Quite rightly, that Chapter was prepared like few others from the point of view of the design of the educational, Lasallian and evangelical scene, even if it later proved to be unsuccessful due to other factors.

Gaudium et spes was a declaration of principles, a definition, a system; *Fratelli tutti* is the proposal of an attitude rather than a programme; in the middle, *Evangelii nuntianti*, ten years after the Council and enlightening the way for the following decades, a warning, a denunciation, a sign of non-human territory. Between the three documents there is a clear sequence.

As an aid to perceive their transcendence, we can evoke that principle of Tillich, already a century ago: 'Religion is

the substance of culture; culture is the form of religion'¹⁴. If we accept this formula, Paul VI's words mean that in a certain sense religion was impossible, at least at that time, 1975. And it must have been, if the word Christian was outside the surrounding culture. The same is obviously true of the Lasallian word.

Now, if it was impossible at that time, things would not be much easier two or three decades later, given the magnitude of the cultural changes that have taken place. Let this reference be valid for the period between the Lasallian Chapters of 1993 and 2007.

Half a century later, to continue to speak of an impossible relationship is perhaps excessive. However, what certainly underlies the orientations of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis is a continuous declaration of the urgency of recovering that relationship. If we fail to do so, we will be opening all the doors to the disappearance of the Christian, of sheer insignificance.

14 He formulated it as early as 1919, in his short paper *On the Idea of a Theology of Culture*. What is important in this proposition is the dialectical relationship between what Tillich called 'substance' and 'form' (the terms, which coincide in their etymological reference, are *substanz/form*): they are the two dimensions of culture, i.e. its visibility and its transcendence. His formula: '*Religion, als das was uns unbedingt angeht uns angeht, ist die sinngebende Substanz der Kultur, und Kultur ist die Gesamtheit der Formen, in denen das Grundanliegen der Religion seinen Ausdruck findet. Abgekürzt: Religion ist die Substanz der Kultur, und Kultur ist die Form der Religion*'. (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9, p. 102: *Aspekte einer religiösen Analyse der Kultur*).

In our study these references help us to understand both the nature of the Lasallian present and its immediate past and the basic orientation for its survival. We can understand it best from an expression with eighty years of history, to which we have also referred in *Part One* of this study: ‘mission country’.

The relationship between ‘mission country’ and ‘new evangelisation’ is evident. And the sixty years that have elapsed since the publication of that study to the appearance of the second expression are particularly eloquent. To realise that those years have passed between the two is to shine a light on Lasallian history that reveals otherwise hidden connections.

When the term was coined in the early post-war years, its authors referred to their country, France¹⁵. Gradually, over the next half century, it became clear that it extended to many parts of the world, hitherto considered countries of Christendom. In this sense, we have gradually learned that it was not the fruit of the concrete conditions of one country, but that it expressed a global change, much more transcendent.

Indeed, the local reference, i.e. the area to be recovered, was no longer the order of that world of Christianity from which society had moved away in specific matters. In real-

15 One nuance should be remembered: its authors titled their work *La France, pays de mission ?* with a question mark at the end. In other words, a title-question. It was 1943. Cf. *Part One*, in the context of the 1946 General Chapter: *1. Restoring, 3. Half a century later, the Rules again.*

ity, those factors were the expression of something greater, which the years have led us to understand as a change of era.

When the Popes of the second half of the 20th century have spoken of these things, they have placed them on a horizon unimaginable eighty years ago. The qualification of a particular country as a place of mission seemed to speak of the recovery of Christianity in a particular place; a generation later, we had understood that we were facing a global situation. The world was again a mission country, a global space in need of the first presentation of the Gospel.

We understood it more adequately when we realised that not only the world was that mission country, but that the Church itself was mission country. The Church itself, part of that world, deprived of the social and cultural support in which it expressed its own conscience, needed to see itself as a field of evangelisation.

The Church itself needed, needs, to rediscover its doctrinal and institutional vocabulary, not primarily governed by that which has just expired, but by the situation of the first Christian communities, when ‘church’ meant above all the closest community and all subsequent doctrinal and institutional development was still to be conceived.

That is why it is not surprising that we should also address the great Lasallian Community as a mission country. Evangelising, yes, and also to evangelise. We can see this by pointing out, quite simply, the relationship between the path that leads from one expression to another and certain key moments in that of the Lasallian Institution.

First of all, there is the proximity between the work of Godin and Daniel and the spirit of the 1946 Chapter: it was a matter of rearming in the face of institutional deterioration, as they saw themselves qualified as mission land. Thirty years later, in the days of *Evangelii nuntiandi*, we are still pondering on the echoes of the (intercapitular) Meeting of Brother Visitors in 1971, in the dull and violent tension between Commissions on the topic of the vows, that is to say, around Lasallian identity and on the threshold of the General Chapter of 1976. Another thirty years more, and we find the General Chapters of 1993 and 2000, with their slogans of sharing the mission and Lasallian Association. In those same days we find, for example, the *Tertio Millennio adveniente*, 1994, which speaks forcefully of renewal in the ways of living and presenting the Gospel....

The comment cannot be left unsaid: how much better it would have been for the Institution if it had been able to contextualise its own dynamics in the great game of history and of the Gospel...

There is no need to go on. The relationship between the two paths is clear. As it is, consequently, that it will not be possible to walk along one without being aware of also walking along the other.

Therefore, one cannot interpret, for example, the numerical decline in the figure of Brothers without recalling the collapse of the relationship between the Gospel and the culture professed in Lasallian institutions. And it is true that this rupture may be more structural than conscious. Nor can the emergence of new commitments, outside the vow commitments, be sufficiently understood if we

ignore the emergence of new responses to the proposal of the Gospel in the new societies.

It is clear and, if we think about it a little, it is also shocking. Because the gap between the Gospel and culture in institutions such as the Lasallian one is the reflection of another deeper one, common to all educational institutions: that between culture and school. With it, an unknown horizon presents itself, in which the indications of the maps that have been in use are hardly useful. And, of course, it goes back to the root of the Christian message: it indicates the need for a model or reference capable of guiding the recomposition of the relationship between the Gospel and Culture.

So, why do we feel that wearing or not wearing the habit is of little importance? Why are the inherited educational institutions looked upon with caution? Why is it so difficult to bring together all the members of the new Lasallian Community? Where are we living when these questions arise?

In which Church

At the time of the first evangelisation, the first Christian communities had it very clear: everything consisted in living in this world as an announcement, an anticipated presence of the definitive one. It was and is the law of the Incarnation.

The word of Jesus, first of all, and then his person, showed it: God, God the Father, the Lord of Israel and the Author

of Creation, that God was the life of the life of those communities. He was their Father and their meaning, present and accessible not only to their members but to every human being. His presence in the world was attested to by the continuing presence of Jesus, the Messiah, the Anointed One, who continued to live among them by his Spirit.¹⁶

Evangelisation thus consisted in the spreading of the sacramental character of the human, in the celebration of the Sacrament of Humanity, in our words.

Therefore, the life of faith consisted in feeling needy and gifted of God, inhabited¹⁷ by the risen Jesus in his Spirit, the same Spirit of God, who spoke within them inexpressible words, surely incomprehensible, greater than the mouth that pronounced them.

It consisted in hearing and repeating those words and understanding them as the breath not only of their persons

16 On this topic we evoke the hymns of the Letters of Paul, Ephesians and Colossians, which are not the only ones to formulate it, but perhaps the richest in the panorama they describe. Their terms '*Pleroma*' (the fullness, the totality, of this world in God) and '*Anakephalaiosis*' (the meaning and presence of Christ, the head, in that whole) guide the believer's attitude and 'understanding' of the humanity of the triune God. They situate the whole Christian Message in a clearly spiritual or existential understanding. It is, moreover, a very clear theme and spirit in the tradition of the origins, in the spirituality of Monsieur de La Salle.

17 In Col. 1:29, Paul uses the verb '*energueo*' (to be the inner 'energy') to refer to this: Christ and those who believe in Him. And the same observation applies as in the previous note about the character of these terms.

but of all life in this world, the world itself, the ever-living and continuing creation, the itinerary of humanity, from God and to God.

This was the Gospel: to encounter Jesus, the Anointed One, alive in one's own life, and to believe that this encounter was the fullness of creation, the incorporation of all into the Anointed One already in this world, as an anticipated expression of what would be the final non-time, that is, the definitive inclusion in the initial non-time. This was affirmed in hymns similar to those we find today in Paul's Letters.

It was a matter, however, of embodying that manifestation or that encounter with the Risen Lord. It is important to know how to perceive him in his mark on all of humanity: wherever there was an awareness of one's own limitation and the possibility of overcoming it; wherever there was a hunger for God or an awareness of the possibility of meeting him one day, there was the mark of God, the evidence of his Sign.

There one could share in the Lord's prayer and celebrate with Him and with others His great Thanksgiving. For the perception of God's mark on humanity, the Lord's presence in the poor, in the needy, in the simple, that manifestation was already the saving grace of the Father, who thus stretched out his hand, guaranteeing his faithfulness.

It was necessary to listen to his Word, the Word of the Poor, of those who wanted and needed, of those who confessed their poverty or deprivation, of those who offered their persons as the anticipated presence of God in the

love of one and all. That is why the two great manifestations or evidences of the Lord's presence were the Poor and the Community.¹⁸

The Poor, as can be understood, were all those who accepted their lack or their hope. In them God was calling: God was first kindling their hope and then, little by little and mysteriously or incomprehensibly, satisfying it. To hear Him in them or within oneself was to receive His Word, the Gospel, the true good news: He is with us or we are in Him. And he does not fail, because his faithfulness is a gift he gives to all.

This listening, this reception of God, had to be made effective. And not so much by putting an end to their shortcomings as by fulfilling their hopes. It was like that and there was no other secret. In our study, moreover, it is a language that resonates immediately with the people of education: to fill today's need and tomorrow's hope. The Gospel and the School are not far apart.

Fulfilling the needs was the first requirement for presenting oneself before the Lord, having responded to his grace with one's own fidelity. But it was necessary to go further: the satisfaction of needs could not make us forget the intimate source from which God's call flowed. It could in no way leave anyone comfortable in this world or in this life.

18 It is impossible to ignore the fact that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* open with precisely this reference. They inscribe the Vocation of the Society of the Christian Schools in this background of eternity, no less.

People's longing for eternity was needed to direct their lives towards the life of God.

And this was what was constituting them into a Community, that is to say, into Church.

Listening to God's call in the human hope was the first moment of evangelisation. Everything began and continues to begin with the awareness of one's own need, of one's own limits understood as an insurmountable frontier. It is the beginning of the religious phenomenon, in any of its institutional forms or doctrinal traditions.

An aside: it is at the same time the starting point of any science, of any craft or knowledge. It is the source and the goal of everything human beings propose in their educational institutions to the new generations. That is why they immediately understand that the way to learn knowledge is to relate it to their own need to know. That is why they also understand very early on that their work consists precisely in this, in stimulating awareness of the need and its satisfaction through knowledge.

In both perspectives, religious and educational, it is about Poverty, the mystery or the sacrament of Poverty.

Therefore, returning to the strictly religious space of this reflection, when this limit is interpreted and lived as the place of God's manifestation - speaking already within the Christian tradition - it becomes a surmountable frontier, the place of the leap, the gateway to a new world. This is the good news of Jesus, the Gospel.

However, as the history of all religious forms teaches, this 'Gospel' was not - is not - complete until the emergence of group or community a that shares this itinerary to the point of making it common and unique.

The Community constructed its language, recreating words already known or inventing new ones. Then, in finding their words, they were Community. Then the ministry of evangelisation was realised: now it was a whole group or church that exercised it. This made evangelisation definitively visible, because it was no longer just something personal-individual but something personal-shared. And the Word of God appeared with definite clarity: when the attitude of someone became the attitude of others, personal faithfulness became communal faithfulness. In this sense we speak of 'ministries' in Paul's Letters.

It cannot be said which of the two axes came first, Poverty or Community. Probably the first is always the need, the awareness and expression of the need. What is undisputed is the mutual constitution of the two as the shared itinerary progresses.

As the journey progressed, the most appropriate functions appeared to make communications within the community and with its environment flow smoothly. Thus the various ministries were broken down, specialised functions for the support of the evangelising project and its transplantation in other areas. This is how the concrete action within and outside the Community came into being, as well as its name and its organisational or statutory consolidation.

Thus the hierarchical, i.e. service, apparatus in the Christian community came into being; thus its doctrinal interpretation and fixation; thus its ritualisation, i.e. the celebratory expression of the sacramental experience, now made into a cult and calendar.

...This is how it had to happen and how it happened in the first Lasallian Community: this is the meaning of its journey, in particular, through the 18th century, as well as that lived in different places where it was established in the following centuries.

Future and Contemplation

For our study, it is the perspective from which to prepare for the future in the Lasallian Community.

In the middle of the 20th century, the heritage consisted in its way of reading the Incarnation at the beginning of Modernity. It was the meaning of their 'double' spirit of faith and zeal. In their light they read the Incarnation of the Word of God in a concrete space, the theological place that was the emerging school. Now, as the *Part One* have suggested, this is not exactly our case, and understandably so. That beginning of Modernity has already borne its fruits, so that it does not and cannot answer our question about the Signs of the Incarnation of God today.

Little by little it became clear that light and the enlightened were not one and the same thing.

That is why in the days of the Council, at the same time as the awareness of living in another time, already 'post-modern', was spreading, the inheritance received turned out to be shrinking in on itself and reveal its own inadequacy in the face of the reality of the Lasallian Project. On the one hand, it consisted of the memory of two and three centuries of history; on the other, half a century more, of a perplexed examination of its coherence with the new times. This is the reason for so much tension and so much perplexity in the Lasallian community between 1960 and 1990. Another thing is that it could be seen and was seen throughout the Lasallian universe.

It seems clear that at least at the beginning of modernity there was a relationship between Christian religion and culture in European society. According to this relationship, all institutions, Church or not (monasteries or professional guilds, for example), gave meaning to their action, their structures and their discourse. Consequently, the words expressing their own awareness had a precise content. They were a vehicle for the religious significance of the life of an institution.

Today, of course, we cannot take it for granted that such words can continue to be so, even if they have been purified of one or other historical connotations. Indeed, the problem may lie in the words themselves, not in any of their connotations. That is why we say that it may not be enough to make them right: they may have to be replaced. And we will have to propose the same for institutional, structural 'words', i.e. the organisation of their fidelity in both local and territorial or global forms.

The impressive thing is that they coincide with evangelical simplicity and poverty. They lead us to them. This coincidence, in fact, a faithful reflection of the Sermon on the Mount, constitutes a human group as Christian; and it makes that group bear the sign of simplicity¹⁹, a specific note of what we call 'religious consecration'.

If we recall the history of the Lasallian Family tradition, it is indeed striking that consecration came to the Lasallian Institution much more from its encounter with the Poor than from its attachment to a place in the world of canons. It was not even a question of theology on the subject, frankly deficient in those days.

It was the Poor and their school that delivered that group to live a model of consecration totally faithful to the message of the first Christian community and full of life in the face of the future of the new societies. When that future arrived, according to this, the reference would not be so much in the theology of consecration as in proximity to the Poor.

It is difficult to exaggerate the scope of all this. The relationship and the distinction between the light and the enlightened, which we have just recalled, can be felt simultaneously.

19 We use the vocabulary of R. Panikkar. He speaks of the 'archetype of simplicity' as an indispensable structure in the understanding of what is human, whose special visibilisation that same humanity finds in the monastic, in his aforementioned *Blessed Simplicity*.

In the following pages, it seems natural to discover that it is not only a question of re-founding the Lasallian Community, but of re-founding that institution of the Church which we call consecrated Community. And we will say the same of the vocabulary of Lasallian identity when faced with the task of formulating the language of the Gospel. Or, within the same logic, of the Christian school with regard to the school.

The magnitude of these contents imposes the mood or the spirit to live them.

It is something so impressive that it overwhelms and overcomes. It makes us realise that there is not enough preparation to cope with it. What we are experiencing calls first and foremost for an attitude of listening, of embracing it, so that the response will come later. The response, in fact, is the echo of reality as it meets our welcome.

And we cannot but evoke the two traits with which biographers portray Monsieur de La Salle: mystic in action. It can be said in different ways, but that is what it is: the combination of listening and speaking, of acceptance and commitment, of silence and organisation, of passivity and initiative. That is how it was in that first foundation, as befitted a time similar to our own: in both a new way of living is opening up.

In the Lasallian present only such a contemplative/active attitude is capable of interpreting the educational fact. Only it is capable of living and showing the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the universalisation of what is human which we are experiencing today.

And a New Language

When, for example as a result of a General Chapter, the Lassaillian Institution changes its model for the Central Administration or the Animation of the Institute, it is changing its language. It is happening in these days of ours: it is not the same to speak of Plenary Assembly and General Chapter, nor of subsidiary responsibility and 'Leavening Project'.

Language, indeed, is another way of marking the boundaries of our world, as Wittgenstein wrote. Our language expresses our vision of things, our way of discovering wholes and their relationships, our aspirations and frustrations. It also expresses our way of configuring ourselves in the plural, our organisation, our codes of functioning, explicit or implicit.

Language refers to our words, yes, but it is also expressed in our institutions. That is why we cannot include in the *Rule* the expression 'Shared Mission' without at the same time establishing the channels for this participation; nor can we speak of a Community Programme without at the same time establishing the procedures for personal communication within the community. In the past, before using these two expressions, there were neither gatherings of the teaching staff as a whole nor the same appreciation of personal relationships.

The renewal of language and the renewal of institutions go together. Because they are one and the same renewal.

Opening precisely the last decade of our reflection and giving context to what is being thought and done in the

Church these days, we find in 2012 the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelisation; and the first great document of Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, in 2013. It is the horizon for appreciating, directly, the General Chapter of the following year and, afterwards, all the thinking and doing of the Lasallian Institution up to the present day.

One could say that it is the same situation as St Paul in the Areopagus, with his well-known expression: "... For as I walked around looking carefully at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, 'To an Unknown God.' What therefore you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you. " (*Acts 17:23*). We know how that encounter ended, but it is not that ending that matters to us. What we find in our own time is that same attention to what is unknown, longing for it, seeking it, trying to imagine it.

In our case, as then, there will be problems when the theme of the Incarnation and, hand in hand with it, the Death and Resurrection of God appears. That is to say, there will be problems as soon as we try to give this unknown God the face of the personal daily life. The key problem is not, as we see in the Areopagus, in accepting God's transcendence; it is in accepting his smallness, his immanence, that is to say, his humanity.

We say 'as then': in the Lasallian Project all this translates into the issue of how an educational community can live and transmit the language of the Gospel. It is, if looked at it carefully, one of the main protagonists of the last half century.

In Christianity the question of language is born with the mystery of the Incarnation, that is to say, with the mystery of the only knowledge we have of God, the Lord: Jesus. He is the face of God, his Word. Therefore, God, our God, is imaginable and can be said.

Now, just as all our words or all our images can be used to express him, none of them encompass him, none of them define him. We cannot absolutise any of them.

That Jesus is the head of the body, of the Church (as the hymn of the Colossians sings), means that this whole world is his body or his face or the manifestation of God: “and in him all things hold together.” (1:17) But precisely because of the transitoriness of our life and our world, it turns out that our God, the Immutable, Transcendent, Eternal, our God, has history, has limits: we²⁰. That is to say, he does not fit into any of our words, which flow with us, unstable and hopeful, but he has no other words to tell us his Good News. Exactly: we are the ones who have no other words than our own.

That is why it is important to speak of New Evangelisation.

For we may well be living in a world of words as different or new as the logical systems that support them. Our study makes this clear, evoking the path followed between

20 Evocation of D. Alonso's verse: God is an immense lake without a shore, /except in a tender, /tiny, frightened point,/where he has been pleased to limit himself:/me./.... Cf. his work *Hombre y Dios*. Later, in the final pages of this *Part Two*, we will relate 'limit' to 'frontier'. The reference to D. Alonso and his language makes our further interpretation much easier.

its two boundary pages, 1904 and 2015, the two General Chapters or, better, the two revisions of the *Rules*.

We may be living in this world that surrounds us and to which we belong. Perhaps. But at the same time, it can happen that within this Institution we live, or believe we live, in another world. It is a way of rejecting or defending oneself from the proximity of God: rejecting what does not look like God because it does not conform to the idea we have of Him.

That is why we end by recalling, once again, that none of this makes any sense if the Institution as a whole does not consider itself part of that mission country which is our own Church.

Our study has reminded us again and again of the need to consider the project as we do with all the presences of the Church in this world, in this society: within the Lasallian world there is the same distance or the same split as in society and the Church in general between religion and culture.

That is why we say that the horizon of the re-foundation of this institution (and so many others like it) is not in the 17th or the 19th century, but in the Acts of the Apostles, in the generations that were expressed in the Gospels.

Like them, today's Lasallian Communities need to interpret themselves on the basis of the Incarnation of God. It is the heart of the Christian message, the criterion par excellence of Christian hermeneutics.

Culture, a Theological Place

It is important in this study to always remember the relationship between Evangelisation and Language, that is to say, between religion and culture, as Pope Montini said. This gives the adjective ‘new’ a much more precise and ambitious scope at the same time.

Indeed, if the task of language renewal - Lasallian, religious, Christian - is undertaken without contextualising it in the new evangelisation, the whole effort may be reduced to an ineffective accommodation. On the other hand, if the renewal of language is based on the need for a new evangelisation, the process is much more radical and, paradoxically, only then can it be sustained.

It is important to bear this in mind in order to be faithful and realistic at the same time. And in order to overcome the difficulties, the mistakes and the successes inherent in the task.

This is what Tillich’s above-mentioned principle is all about: religion and culture, substance and form. Without giving too much thought to the meaning or scope of each of the terms, we do understand the true secular or incarnated dimension of the Gospel, the same one that his contemporaries saw, surprised, in the word of Jesus, as well as in his person. Above all, in his person.

This means that the word or language of evangelisation in its sound is not different from the words and language of culture. They are different in their intention, in their scope. That is to say, the renewal of language, within the

reflection of our study, is more in the charge of transcendence that can be in everyday language, than in the invention of new terms.

This is why, for example, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* contain the theological reading of institutional identity without using at all the vocabulary we might expect from the theology of religious life. They speak of God's Plan, of identification with Jesus Christ, of the Church, of the Guardian Angels, of educational commitment and personalisation, of responsibility in educational work, of hope in the recognition of God and society.²¹ Not even in the only mention of the Institution or the Society of the Christian Schools, not even then, is there any mention of religious life or of monastic life, or of religious vows.

This is why we recalled earlier Wittgenstein's formula on language and the world. It is very useful to realise that sometimes one can be using a language that is foreign to everyday life, as if one existed in two different and simultaneous worlds, the spoken and the lived. It happens when institutional and doctrinal language do not match.

This is particularly true in the vocabulary of the identity of institutions such as the Lasallian one, partly because of an undue cult of an inherited vocabulary, partly because of prevention with regard to the depth and

21 MTR 207,3,3. The term 'Institut' is used: '*Demandez lui aussi instamment, qu'il lui plaise d'accroître votre Institut, et de lui faire fructifier de jour en jour; afin que comme dit S.Paul, les coeurs des fidèles soient affermis dans la sainteté et dans la justice*'. It is understood to be the Society or Community of 'the Brothers of the Christian Schools', present in the full title of the MTR.

transcendence of the language of daily life. In such situations our language denies the very character of what is Christian, which is the Incarnation or absolute proximity of God, the profanity of his appearance, his presence in every person and in every event.

And it is also understandable, as we have been insisting, that the renewal of language necessarily entails the renewal of the institution. Sometimes, therefore, in order to reject institutional changes, we cross out large areas of our language, or reduce them to ideology.

In the days immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council and throughout the preparation for the 1966 Chapter, a twofold slogan became common in the Lasallian community: the Founder had to be returned to the Institute and the Institute to the Brothers.

It was a rediscovery of the first source and a new responsibility.

The call emerges, new, at the heart of the challenging task of living the new times.²²

3. The Call

The first part of that motto suggested that the Founder be returned to the Institute, that is to say, that the knowledge and awareness of the Origins should reach everyone; that everyone should feel it as their own and that this ownership should guide their lives. They wanted to shake off alien theological and spiritual models, from which they expected no future. This was done and they managed to grow in identification, in specificity.

The second reminded them that it was up to the Brothers to guide the present of the Institute on the basis of

22 Circular 475, 9.2.2020, entitled *From Hope to Commitment: Understanding Lasallian Vocations* would be sufficient testimony. We cannot, however, ignore the reference to the very recent Plenary Assembly, July 2024: the coincidence between the whole vocational discourse and the meaning of this gathering is clear.

their knowledge of their milieu and their own personal paths. They wanted to recover institutional responsibility through more communitarian, shared procedures. This was also done and certainly succeeded in increasing responsibility and initiative on all sides.

Perhaps, however, on both sides there was an important gap: the awareness of the time that had elapsed from the Lasallian origins to the present. Accordingly, fidelity found its reference point in the First Community, but ignored the history of the Community, the message of Lasallian globalisation, that of the metamorphoses in the life of peoples.

This deficit of historicity helped in the inclination towards an existential commitment in which the dominion of the future somewhat hid its reception from the hands of God.

It was an approach full of enthusiasm, though markedly voluntarist. It was understandable: to consider oneself in an time of change invites more to commitment than contemplation; on the other hand, as the sense of the change of era grew, the call to contemplation of the mystery hidden beneath all commitments would sound louder. The awareness of history, of its passage through the life of institutions and the shaping of their forms, makes us look at the present with a different respect.

It is what corresponds to a transcendent consideration of life and society. It is, in other words, what lies beneath the biblical category of the Covenant. There is indeed a profound relationship between the awareness of history and the life of faith, the contemplation of the Mystery of God.

As far as our study is concerned, it can surely be said that, for a generation at least, the Lasallian Community cultivated the configuration of its life project somewhat above the call of God. What needed to be done was urgent and, in many cases, obvious.

The world in which we live, evoked in the itinerary of our *Part One*, underlines the plausibility of this interpretation of the dynamics of the last century. It is the clear message of the last generation of Lasallian documents and of the life journeys of its members, especially the new ones.

In this sense it is symptomatic that on more than one occasion the recent documents of the Lasallian Institution, pretending to formulate concepts or systems of concepts, have recourse to the narrative genre. They do not propose a discourse, but present the experience of people who are living those concepts.²³

And it is probably a good exercise to review the biographies of Brothers who are particularly significant from the institutional point of view and who have died in the last half century. It cannot be said that these biographies constitute a bibliographical block that is very popular, and yet they contain a call or a wake-up call that no one had foreseen. One sees in many of them how the

23 The latest, or almost the latest, Circular 478 giving an account of the guidelines of the last General Chapter, in November 2022. In this case, however, there are no personal stories but the literary device of a presumed capitulant who, in twenty years' time, tells us his memories of what he experienced. It is about his experiences rather than definitions. Remember, among other similar references, Bulletin No. 254, in 2015.

biographers try to take stock between what their biographers set out to do in their lives and their deep connection or disconnection with the call of God, of their Brothers and of their people.

In particular, it is worthwhile to review the biographies of the Superiors of recent decades. It is surely their last offering to the Lasallian Community.²⁴

It does not seem exaggerated to receive from these events a message which recalls the profound meaning of that motto. Giving the Institute back to the Brothers did not only mean making them owners of something, but also showing them in a new way the call of God. The personal chronicles bear witness to the meaning of that recovered property.

In this case, in this world and in these societies in which the vocational discourse seems more a thing of other times, we find it again in personal situations where we did not expect it and where we had not looked for it.

Thus, from our evocation of one hundred years and from the evidence at the heart of our local chronicles, we understand that in the vocational underlining there are at least three warnings, three major proposals.

24 We can take as an example that devoted to Brother Michel, *The Fragile Hope of a Witness*. It is certainly an exceptional biography, as was his life. However, it is a sufficient illustration of what we want to say and valid for so many others: in it we see not only what Michel proposed but also his generous will to be faithful.

They are three realities specific to this Institution, but by no means exclusive to it.

Recovering Vocation (one)

The first speaks of the need to give to the vocational call the recognition that it is the beginning of everything and that without it there is only a vain movement. It reminds us, then, that perhaps because of weariness in the face of the vicissitudes of such eventful times, the Lasallian Institution needs to recover the transcendental or theological dimension of the call. It has been very clear in Lasallian documentation for at least three decades.

In this case ‘recover’ means to realise that it is something well known, that we have it right there before our eyes.

Surely this is the secret of the different processes throughout the Lasallian world around the discourse of association or of the new Community. In fact, if we say that it is not a process programmed from any Lasallian work and that everything is born in a local and personal experience, it will not be difficult to realise that the vocational call is what has sustained the journey of the Institute in these fifty years. It is difficult to find a better reason to explain the continuity and growth of these gestures over such a long period of time.

When we look closely, we find it with total clarity. There is, at times, a striking excitement about them, but they are not usually noisy situations. Instead, it is the experience of receiving a call, an invitation, the possibility of

taking on something unforeseen, surprising and gratifying in one's own life.

In that Prologue or presentation of the *Rules* of 1967 it was said:

Brother, You have known the desire to serve men, the feelings of the needs of the world and the poor, the desire to teach and do good around you, and you have come in the hope of achieving your ideal in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Without fully understanding it yet, you came because God himself was searching for you and you were beginning to find him, and because in your heart you wanted to love him praise him and devote yourself entirely to his service...²⁵

Beautiful and programmatic words that were written specifically for the Brothers, as befitted the nature of that document, but which today we see again and again made real in so many other people.

25 Br. P.-A. Jourjon comments specifically on this Prologue in his *Pour un renouveau spirituel*, o.c., pp. 381-394. It is clear that he had been its definitive editor, so he conveys its spirit with a special interest, as if he had not quite accepted the Chapter's decision not to include it in the text of the *Rule* itself. This was understandable: three years earlier, at the same time as the General Chapter, the *Taizé Rule* had been published in French, the prologue to which had inspired him. Quite rightly, he understood that it contained the spirit of everything else and that it was therefore appropriate to include it in the wording adopted by the Chapter. This is a very suggestive parallel for the first half of the 21st century.

It is vocation, which transforms the known of life and brings meaning or small responses to the everyday. Everywhere we find the same theme: there is something surprising and fulfilling, something satisfying. There is something where there was not supposed to be anything more than work or contracted tasks. Suddenly the discourse, without ceasing to refer to work, is also something else.

It is easy to imagine. At first it is a curious, friendly, interested entry into an unfamiliar but intriguing field. Soon it becomes more attractive. A group of people interested in the same subject is discovered and a believing understanding of what is happening progresses.

The believing consideration often bursts forth at this or that place in Scripture or Lasallian Tradition that suddenly shows a relationship to what someone was feeling in their heart or needed. Perhaps he was not fully aware that he was living it and at a certain moment, in front of a certain person, or in a certain process of formation, he perceives it. It is admired and enjoyed.

In the context, surrounding this intimate experience, there is always the community, local or institutional fact.

Locally, there are other people who in some way share the same experience of being guided by God or by the Mystery of life. And in the institutional it is perceived as a piece of a great continuity, a process of several centuries that reinforces the consistency of the present moment. In both cases it is received as a testimony that the project is guaranteed by something or someone greater.

The verification that the vocational fact was not exclusive to anyone is not the least of the Signs of this time.

When a person, having passed or assumed the moment of friendly admiration for another or for a project, finds himself before the Mystery that envelops and guides him, his life is moved. In the secret of his heart he feels and knows that he is now much more than before or much more than he thought he was. If this is shared with others around the same project, then it is certainly the soul of a community.

It can be lived silently or loudly, explicitly or implicitly. It doesn't matter much, as long as it is known to be happening, because not even the most detailed explanation can bear witness to it.

It is about the Mystery of God leading the Institution beyond time.

Rediscovering Secularity (two)

Also in 1967, in the *Declaration* it had been written:

... the Brothers work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life and civil affairs. Lay teachers should be completely involved with the whole life of the school... (*Declaration* 46, 3.2).

The 'unique contribution through their knowledge' includes, logically, their path to the Mystery or the path of the Mystery through their life. Their specific experience

includes their way of living the call and the response of the Lord in his educational work and in the rest of his life.

Hence we understand that the meaning of this contribution is twofold, if we look at the interior of the Institution.

First of all, the contribution of one's own sensitivity to the realities of life: family, society, work, public participation. All this is affected by his vocational experience and, if it is not a contribution of these experiences themselves, it is at least a contribution of his own person from these experiences. From this point of view there is already a specificity and an enrichment in the quality of vocational awareness as a whole.

Underneath or within, we find another facet in this contribution: that of bringing consecration and secularity closer together.

This is a very important issue, since the well-known members of the Lasallian communities, the Brothers, after three centuries of walking through history may well have unduly sacralised their existential practice, as well as the whole language in which they express themselves. From this point of view, then, the contribution of the new vocations acts on the awareness of the old ones as a corrective or a centring on the essential. It distances us from a possible and often real sacralisation of the Brother's life which denaturalises him and with him, with each one of them, the whole Lasallian Project.

If, going a step further, we consider this possible contribution from the point of view of the mission, we also find very important issues.

If we live in a time not only of New Evangelisation but also of New Humanity, it is clear that the design of educational projects must undergo a radical adaptation to the new social conditions. It cannot be a question of the methodological world, but of something that affects the very concept of education and its relationship with the Gospel.

In our *Part One*, we made a distinction between these two challenges: technical and adaptation. While the technical ones are considerable, the adaptive ones are much more so. And this is precisely where it is necessary to be close to the source of the new culture or the new society.

For this reason, it is essential to pay attention to and assume the specific nature of the new vocations.

Taking Responsibility (and three)

Thirdly, we are faced with a challenge. It is contained in this proposition: it is easier to engage in the reorganisation of the established than in the re-foundation of the Lasallian Community. In one way or another it must have assailed us throughout the whole of this reflection.

To give the Institute back to the Brothers or to give it back to the Community, depending on whether we are talking about seventy years ago or today, means putting one's

life in God's hands or leaving it in the realms of our own knowledge. The difference is in the foundation of faith that can move us in this commitment: whether it is our own resources or God's call.

In the last seventy or sixty years there has been no lack of invitations to commit oneself to the re-foundation of the Lasallian Institution.

In the days of the Council and the 1966-67 General Chapter, the term 'renewal' was used. This was done, for example, by Brother Superior in the presentation of the *Declaration*. It was logical, since the Council itself spoke of 'adapted renewal' in *Perfectae caritatis*. And we have noted how it was soon seen that renewal led to limits not previously thought of, so that it was gradually replaced by a more ambitious term: 'refoundation'.

If we go back to the tensions of those days, from 1966 to the threshold of 1986, it will not be hard to imagine the tensions that either of the two terms, especially the second one, aroused. Finally, thirty or forty years after the Council, the term²⁶ was already being used by the Superiors General themselves.

26 In this regard, cf. Brother Superior Johnston's Pastoral Letter, l.l.93, entitled *Transformation*; and Br. M. Sauvage's, the last pages of his essay *Perspectives on Refoundation*, in Cahiers Lasalliens 55, 293-312, especially his final paragraphs on Fragility and Hope.

However, it is one thing to face refounding from business or institutional dynamics, and another to do so from God's call. Thus, we can probably agree that in recent decades we have used the term re-foundation, but above all in the sense of adaptation.

It is perfectly debatable as well as very serious, so it is enough to point out its possibility. But what is by no means debatable is that at the heart of refounding is the awareness of God's call to commit one's life to this task.

God's Plan

It is, literally, John Baptist de La Salle's proposal: the spirit of faith, that is, not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God.

Nothing new: the various revisions of the *Rule* recall it again and again. So in 1967, 1986, and 2015. It requires no comment.

There is, necessarily, a question: whether we believe in God or in our resources.

It cannot be avoided, as if there were no place in Lasallian circles for it or if the answers were obvious. These places are also children of their time, that is to say, of a time in which all language - verbal and institutional - has almost ceased to signify or refer to transcendence. For the same reason, the Lasallian Community may not lack the word

or the organisation, but its reference to faith may more than once be no more than presumed.

Remembering this is the great service that the new Community receives from its long-standing members, but especially from the new ones.

The old ones dominate the vocabulary and the ways of awareness. But they can be like the underground tunnels through which the lava has flowed, now empty, only a tourist attraction. The new ones can help to remember the fire of God.

This remembrance of faith gives meaning to the following three criteria.

The three criteria above are like the cardinal points of the Lasallian universe (and others like them, of course). They mark the limits or the possibilities of the script. Between the three of them - the Mystery of History, the New Evangelisation, the Mystery of Vocation - they deliver a very specific consideration of the great questions which have appeared in this world over the last century.

First of all, they raise the great question of what is meant by 'mission' in the Lasallian Project. By introducing the theme of the Mystery of History and of the Gospel, they force us to ask whether the Mission coincides with the **work** or whether it is something else, something different but which does not seem to be so...

Then, faced with the novelty of the presence of the Mystery of God in people's lives and journeys, we find the question of whether or not the work of education is or is not an occasion for an **encounter** with God. We ask ourselves whether or not the educational model is indifferent to the manifestation of God.

And finally, faced with the evidence that education, however one looks at it, is a shared task, they raise the big question of whether a **group** of professionals is an organisation or an educational community. It is the question of what constitutes the Lasallian Community.

These are the three remaining criteria.

The three previous criteria bring up issues whose nature can be discovered immediately when we consider the present of the Lasallian community. Now, in fourth place and hand in hand with them, another much more enigmatic one appears: the problem of the relationship between religious life and apostolic life.

This century has shown that their relations are not easy and leaves the Institution with the conviction that as long as these relations are not natural, there is no future for the new Community.

It is a question of becoming a Sign of God: this fourth page of the Theology of Consecration.

4. The Commissioning

Now we go one step further. In this case it is something specific to all the institutions of apostolic life which throughout Modernity have adopted forms of consecrated life²⁷ from earlier times, adapting them to the society of their time.

27 The Theology of Consecration today needs to reflect rigorously on the formula of St Thomas which, expressly or implicitly, has guided all formation in the Lasallian Community (and in many others, as is evident): *“Ita maius est contemplata aliis tradere quam solum contemplari”*. His vision, in *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2. 188,6.

Just as the previous theme, vocational awareness, has been proposed since its appearance in the new members of the Lasallian Communities, this one responds initially to the state of mind of the Brothers: where is theirs as always; where is their mission in the face of the commitment of so many people who ‘have not made the novitiate’?

It is born there, yes, in them. But even before arriving at their answer, it leaps into the minds of all the others and becomes a common question.

The first question is what they are expected to do. But after: what is it that they are expected to do; what is it that they are expected to be; what is the relationship between being and doing; what is it that remains of their lives when they no longer have anything to do or simply cannot do it; what, in short, is this ministry of the Christian school, what does it mean to be a teacher?

In this study we have to ask ourselves how they can receive the reflection of the Superiors or the proposals of the Chapters, from what idea of themselves.

To answer this question requires a revision of our usual language, because it may not be enough. It is time to keep in mind the perspectives of the paths of History and those of the New Evangelisation. And to dare to face up to all that blocked or made possible the writing of the *Rules*.

It is worthwhile to study the question in the light of the three criteria above.

The Ministry of the Sign

First of all: consecrated life entered into the Communities of apostolic life of Modernity as a means of ensuring the stability of the evangelising commitment, not as something intended in itself. It is essential to bear this in mind and to see all its subsequent development in this light.

What counted initially was the usefulness of renunciation in relation to apostolic dedication.

This beginning left in the air the serious question of whether or not renunciation of this world was compatible with dedication to the Gospel in this world. Two, three or four centuries ago, this question did not arise. It simply did not make sense.

They were another society and another culture, which had not gone through the invention of the concept of progress and its scope in the profession of faith. This was to begin to be considered in the 18th century, especially in Protestant circles, where religious life had de facto disappeared.

Today, on the other hand, given that dedication to the Gospel in this world made and still makes sense, the question cannot be avoided. It makes us wonder whether renunciation of this world can be specific to the consecrated life or not. It is the question of the meaning of evangelical renunciation and its compatibility with apostolic commitment. This question has been clearly posed for a century. In our study we find it from the time of the beginning of *Part One*.

That is why, when we try to understand our Communities today and start directly from religious life, we may not be very coherent with what we are trying to do. It may be that we are positioning ourselves more on the basis of a custom, or even a prejudice, than on the basis of the identity of the community under examination.

This is the interaction of Consecration and Apostolic Commitment.

Within the system encompassed by both concepts there are at least two other items involved in the same reflection: one, the work (apostolic, teaching in this case) and the mission (also apostolic and teaching); and two, the community (educator) and the organisation (also educator).

Then: Consecration and Commitment, Work and Mission, Community and Organisation. Central themes, without discussion.

Well, we cannot say that there is, if not unanimity, then at least harmony around these concepts, neither in the doctrinal corpus emanating from the leadership of the great Lasallian Community, nor in the processes and instruments developed in the sectors and at the local level. There is none. In this way our documents and our practices are saying that the Lasallian Institution suffers from a deficit which it has not been able to remedy for half a century. For example, when any of these six terms appear in local projects or in the Superiors' Letters, they do not always mean the same thing.

In this situation, it is almost irresponsible to speak of Lasallian Family, Association, Shared Mission, Fraternity or, more recently, Leavening Project.

The recent *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission* (2020), quoted and praised several times in this study, serves as an example. It is a beautiful document, with really felicitous blocks. See, for example, these two paragraphs:

The community educates, strengthens its members, cares for the weak and nurtures their spirit. It is the best guarantee to respond to the greatest imaginable challenges. To be Lasallian, by definition, is to belong to a community and to commit oneself within that same community to a common task. Community and mission are two sides of the same coin. Community is for the mission, and mission creates community. You cannot have one without the other (DLEM p.65).

Abandonment, as De La Salle expressed it, consists in putting life, projects, and dreams in God's hands, like "the sailor who goes to sea without sails or oars." It is the attitude of one who expects everything from God. It is the source of the deeply evangelical virtue of hope (DLEM p.67).

Excellent, both of them. The first one points out the relationship between Community and Mission; the second, the profound attitude that constitutes it. It is not just any human group, therefore. The relationship between the attitude of abandonment and the way in which this community lives and understands the mission is clear. Logically, when we see them, we cannot avoid our concern about the reality of Lasallian groups from that point of

view. And we understand that this is the great challenge facing this Institution.

When Part Four of this *Declaration* (the last, the most proactive part) speaks of the challenges of the educational mission, not a word is said about it. They are all external, pedagogical or social challenges. As far as we can read, for this document the redefinition of the educational community is not a challenge, even though in the Lasallian world there is no greater challenge. And we realise that we are dealing with a document on Christian education in the new social conditions, yes, but not on the community which animates it. For this document the mission consists in the educational project, not in the sign of the community which animates it.

In fact, we were warned from its title. It is not a Declaration on the Lasallian Mission, or on the Mission of the Lasallian Community. Its theme is the Lasallian Educational Mission. They are not the same thing. Indeed, if we think about it, 'Lasallian educational mission' is a redundancy or a pleonasm: there can be no other mission than education. Why, then, add it? Perhaps because we are separating Lasallian mission and Lasallian school and so we speak of the school, but not of the mission.

And something similar can be said of another beautiful document, published a year before this one. It is entitled *Lasallian Formation for Mission; The Pilgrim's Handbook*. Again the pleonasm: in this Community there can be no formation if it is not for the mission. Why, then, add it? Perhaps because we are separating Lasallian formation

and formation for education and so we speak of formation for the school, but not of Lasallian formation.

These are statements which need a lot of nuances and they are only proposed here in order to help reflection, taking it a little beyond clichés or what is to be expected. But, even so, they help us perceive that in fact neither in Mission nor in Formation is Consecration included.

We do not know if it is because it is not perceived or because, if it is perceived, it is too uncomfortable to deal with something still unresolved.

The Word of the One Who Sends

The idea and the term ‘consecration’ have been used over the last three centuries against a background that we have only become aware of since the Second Vatican Council. It is the emergence, the development and the disintegration of the idea and the term ‘progress’. These were three times in the context of which the separation of religion and culture took place, even if in all of them the same term continued to be used again and again. Regardless of the awareness of those who used it, in each of them it has meant something different.

From the beginning, way back in the late 17th century, ‘progress’ meant attending to the development of societies, or rather to their management, as if they had no connection with religion. It was the legacy of that early secularity marked by the treaties of Westphalia (1648), again and again cited in this study. As the scholars point-

ed out two centuries later, there was already a deficit in the Enlightenment definition of progress²⁸. The dialectic of the distinction between science and mystery was in fact obscured by the almost total predominance of science, so that the attitude towards life and alleged progress was limited to the quantitative, the empirical, which surely reached its zenith in Comte's formulas.

During the 19th century, progress gradually took over the world, transforming societies and, of course, their entire outlook on life. It gradually emptied itself of everything that was not organisational logic. It gave rise to the tremendous catastrophe of the first half century of the 20th century, from which it still pretended to emerge duly amended and more capable of peace and future. But in that second phase, twenty years after the establishment of the institutions for world order, by the early 1970s it was already evident that progress was not such, or had not been such.

It had meant a great development in the welfare of peoples, although always with some people's welfare being placed above that of others. And, above all, with the prospect of its imbalances being corrected, a picture emerged that ranged from the uncomfortable to the desolate, leaving a tremendous question mark over the real progress inherited.

28 This is the thesis that Horkheimer and Adorno presented like no one before them in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, already in 1944, with the deep bitterness of the war, emigration and social decomposition.

In each of these phases, as can be understood, ‘consecration’ meant something different in the lives of those who wanted to live it.

In the first, very much in the tone of what later came to be called the Protestant Ethics, Consecration meant effort, austerity, order, honesty, generosity, inventiveness, dedication. In the second, on the other hand, it meant nothing, or at least nothing effective: it merely played into the hands of developmentalism, distancing itself from it, in an attitude of contempt and condemnation of what had been achieved based on what was lacking. In fact, it amounted to ‘being better able to operate’. In the third, Consecration has meant a challenge, a response to the disintegration of the established, a proposal between accompaniment and transcendence of the way of the world.

In our study, although focused in the course of the Lasallian Institution during the 20th century, we have been finding the three types or the three meanings. Everything depended on the situation of the different territories in relation to the social models of the rest of the world. It can be seen quite clearly if one draws a line from the 1905 Chapter through the 1966-67 Chapter to the 2015 Chapter. It can be seen in the internal bibliography of the Lasallian Institution during the century, from the early days of the *Bulletin de l’Institut*, then between 1907 and 1935, and finally those from 1950 to 1980 plus those which accompanied the passage from one century to the next.

Certainly, at each of these moments Consecration means something different and we need to keep this in mind in order not to make an anachronistic reflection.

Anachronism often has very bad consequences, especially when several interlocutors use the same term, but from different contexts. Each one can use references to one of the three steps or models we have just mentioned in his or her own context, and then they get nowhere, lost in a necessarily endless debate.

Consecration originally meant the surrender or presentation of someone or something to God, to be sanctified. God alone was supposed to consecrate, because God alone is 'sacred'. Hence it was a matter of offering and promising to keep the offering. To consecrate meant to be consecrated. But with the passage of time this idea was modified, as a further sign of the routinisation of charisms: they cease to have meaning and yet remain, in the form of routines from which the spirit has been absent.

Thus, consecration meant in fact something that a person attributed to oneself. It was not primarily something whose primary protagonist was God, but the human being. This brought precisely that which distinguishes the consecrated person from others. On the other hand, the reference to God underlines the opposite: the common source of our lives, which in some people is manifested in one way and in others in another.

Therefore, depending on which approach is emphasised, the reference to the common source or to the difference between persons will prevail. This is a serious issue, as can be seen when we realise that we speak of mission when we refer to what is done, to the work in which a commitment is shown. If the common source does not take precedence, then the work will almost be an end in itself, so that the

mission will consist of the work. In the other approach, on the other hand, the task is the opportunity to reveal the source of everything. The mission is no longer to do nothing in itself, but to refer to the one who consecrates, to the one who sends so that what is done may be done.

And the term 'mission' must also be thought of in the same way.

'Mission' means commissioning. The word origin of the term is the verb '*mittere*', that is, to send. In its participle, the one sent is the '*missus*', and the sending itself is the '*missio*'. The mission, therefore, is the commissioning. Its purpose is to reproduce the message or the task entrusted to someone, for whose reproduction it is sent. It is not an autonomous message, a task invented by the one sent or the missionary. The content of the mission is the memory of the sender, of the first sender. Not something else.

Thus, once again we find the transcendence of both consecration and mission: both refer back to the one who consecrates, who is the one who sends. In reality, he consecrates for a commissioning, for a mission. Logically, this mission cannot consist of any other task than that of remembering the consecrator/committer.

This is exactly the idea of the Messiah: the one consecrated ('anointed') by God to be his witness in the midst of his people. The Messiah - consecrated, anointed, 'christ' - appears in the midst of his People to remind his People that their God is in their midst and that therefore their life and this world have meaning. It is the Kingdom or Reign of God.

And it is worth noting in this regard that, just as in the case of the Messiah the term ‘anointed’ or ‘christ’ is used, in the Lasallian theology of the origins, the Brother is Jesus for his students. The Brother is the one sent, that is to say, the one consecrated, by God for his students. That is why for them he is Jesus, the Anointed One.

Yes: we are talking about something much more transcendent than the educational work. The work becomes mission because of its character as a Sign of the One who sends.

Mission, Sign, Fidelity

That is why the basic attitude in mission is fidelity. And not simply fidelity to something already established, that is to say, to a way of organising, of working, of thinking, of speaking. It is that, of course, but fidelity refers above all to listening to the one who sends, who shows himself in those who are close to us.

By the principle of the Incarnation that we have been pointing out, consecration is celebrated in the places and the people in whom God shows himself. That is to say, on the margins, in the places where desire and need reign. To perceive it and to respond to it is fidelity.

Logically, this is something with a unique fruitfulness.

Indeed, if fidelity refers first and foremost to the God who consecrates and calls, one lives in direct contact with a source superior to all other sources. There is no other explanation for the maintenance of institutions such as the

Lasallian one throughout history. Their guarantee is not their creativity but their fidelity.

This is how the relationship between professional success and reference to God is understood.

Society knows this because it sees it. At first it applauds, i.e. it shows its satisfaction, thanks, acknowledges and provides new resources. But then it falls silent and remains in suspense: it has gone beyond success and wonders about the source of what it is seeing. When this silence arrives, the work has become a Sign. Therefore, when he does not find it, he loses all respect for that institution and ignores it. He deduces that in order to live these results, it is not necessary to live in any special way, and he despises the apparent difference, which no longer means anything.

This is the real background to the discourse of the Pastoral Letters, Christmas messages, when speaking of the sign of fraternity, between 2010 and 2020. It is not fraternity in itself, as an example of coexistence and community; nor is it fraternity for work, for its improvement and effectiveness. It is fraternity around the work, that is to say, around the Mission. They are not the same thing. Although it may seem a little complicated or even twisted: we are talking about the fraternity consecrated in the Mission, lived as a Sign of Someone, definitively and fruitfully faithful.

No one has imposed it, but it is what underlies all the processes of formation, of articulation of new and old Lasallian groups. This, said or implied in different ways, but this. Equally, if one looks carefully, one discovers it as the constant and the guarantee of all the initiatives which

have been emerging over the last thirty years and which are still alive, breaking all the inherited limits.²⁹

It is also what ultimately underpins the life of all the members of the Lasallian Community, beyond the limits of their professional contracts. The mission transcends all contracts, precedes them and survives them. The Mission enables people outside the working conditions to continue to live the ministry of education by taking part in the Sign which constitutes them as a Community.

All faith, any faith, is a sign of what is believed, whether or not it is accompanied by action. That is why we say that when faith is accompanied by an action, the sign is not the action itself but the action insofar as it is transcended from within by the object of the faith of the one who acts. Thus, when this faith is shared, the sign becomes much more precise, it adopts a specific and specifying character: in the case of our reflection, it is faith in the God who shows himself daily in the personal and educational relationship, not only in the interiority of each person who shares.

It could be said that this way of relating work and sign or community and mission refers back to the Emmaus episode, now converted into a state, a habitual thing, a way of being.

29 The path from - for example - the 1991 *Guide for Formation* to the latest, 2019 (which we have just quoted in the body of this last section) is impressive. A simple comparison of the two tables of contents, thirty years between the two, clearly shows this. It is not easy to find a better way of becoming aware of the path of the Lasallian Community in this last generation.

‘Emmaus’, in fact, is not a reference to another world to come, but to this one in which we live. Emmaus means not that this life is a passage to another, but that this life has in itself its own transcendence. And it cannot be otherwise, since we are not talking about a new time, once this one we know comes to an end.

‘Emmaus’ leaves us in this world, but immerses us in it until we find in it its own beyond: beyond what it seems, beyond limitations or misunderstandings, beyond joys and sin, hatreds and frustrations, beyond all this and at the same time within itself, there is the Lord. This is what we learn at Emmaus. Not to wait for another world, but to live in this world in another way.

Everything consists in believing in Him and surrendering to Him. Then our whole life is a Sign. All our work, commitment, or all our being, silently, contemplating, loving and being loved, all this shows itself as the beyond that is already here.

This is what is expected of the Community: not to point to what is to come, but to what has already come and to discover/reveal it with meaning, that is to say, with hope. When such a community claims to be educational, then its school is for its people the guarantee that life is worth living.

This is the message of the prophets.

Witnesses of Fraternity

It is essential to remember again and again that John Baptist de La Salle is not the founder of the Christian Schools but of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. What he and his companions founded was a Community and a network of Communities to sustain the work of the Christian Schools. We know that.

When thinking about the future and formulating guidelines or definitions, we have to consider the density of that formula, the inheritance it has meant for the Lasallian Institution. And to think about it from what we have been saying about the ‘signs of the times’, Evangelisation and Language.

Consequently we find at first that ‘teacher’ means commitment to a learner or, more realistically, to a group of students. And it may seem to us to be enough because in a certain sense this relationship can be qualified as ‘community’. However, when we speak of Community, of the Community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, we are talking about something else. We are adding to the term Teacher the presence of other teachers alongside the first, others who commit themselves with him for the service of their students. From ‘relationship’ we move to ‘Fraternity’.³⁰

30 Just as we mentioned a few pages ago the parallel reading of the *Guides for Formation*, we now add: it is worth reviewing from this point of view, among others, Circular 466, January 2013, *They will call themselves Brothers*; and the Pastoral Letter of December 2019, *Witnesses to Fraternity*, a title which we have taken for this page and which we will recall later on.

This is what they founded and what we have inherited. It is in this place that the specificity of Lasallian Identity resides: in the depth of life that its members share and emit outwards as a Sign of what sends them out and unites them. That which we perceive when we contemplate simultaneously an educational organisation and an educational community.

It happens that this was not always valued as much by the surrounding culture and language as by the members' own awareness. Thus, as shocking or daring as it may seem to state it. Both the surrounding culture and their own awareness may have thought that the basic thing was action, engagement; and believed that the community was only a means, a facilitator.

This, indisputably, would be a hindrance when times came when the surrounding culture, the Christian word or anthropology had changed. For for a time a defective self-awareness might well have been compatible with their reception by their society as people belonging to another world, of which they were a Sign. The former made amends in the latter. Now, when times changed, when there was no such social and institutional substitution, they would have to purify their own conscience and express themselves differently. Because they would have found that, in order to organise the school properly, it was not necessary to live as they did.

For more than half a century, they have been in that other time.

Little by little they have come to see that from now on they will have to live their community not as a means to something else, but as the very reality in which they have committed their lives. Their mission, their meaning, will be to show themselves by doing what they do.

Perhaps, however, it can be said that this approach is sometimes not very much taken into account in the formation processes in the Lasallian Institution. Despite its presence both in the *Rules* and in the *Guides for Formation*, perhaps in fact the educational service is emphasised more than the reference to the meaning of life, to the Mystery of God. Perhaps the invitation to personal commitment and initiative is proposed more than the awareness of being ministers of the Lord, witnesses to his reality in this world. In fact, in more than one situation this may be the case, and in line with what has been called ‘weak thinking’, we would be making a ‘weak reading’ of the documents. Certainly, that may be like that.

Sometimes - and this is only a hypothesis - one can propose to the new members of the Community only the motto of self-denial, generous dedication, commitment and initiative. Well then: perhaps in doing so, one does not sufficiently take into account the scope of the possible vocational itinerary that may be animating this commitment. It is different to follow a call that comes from

outside and transcends us, and another, ours alone, more voluntary than faithful.³¹

It is important to point this out, because its inheritance or its identity is to live the school as the face of God. That is to say, to specialise in the Ministry of the Sign.

31 Many years ago - the first edition is from 1960 - G. Huygue published *Équilibre et Adaptation*, within the great theme 'Problems of Religious Life Today' (Cerf, Paris), in Spanish and English versions in the same year 1961. It is impressive to read paragraphs such as these: "... we are always in danger of baptising 'zèle du salut des âmes' which is nothing more or less than a more or less deafened expression of an *incoercible need for activity*. We can develop and never reveal the person of Christ. One can reveal oneself and only reveal oneself. It is, moreover, much more a matter of evangelising than of developing oneself, and there is a world between the two..." (O.c. p. 23). (O.c. p. 233). These expressions are repeated and known in many places, yesterday and today. If we remember it, it is because of its location: on the threshold of the Council and of the renewal of so many institutions such as the Lasallian one. It cannot be said that all of us (not even a notable majority) would have taken it into account, neither then nor in the two or three decades that followed. And, at least in the early years of publication, we knew and applauded the author.

One more step, following the previous path: the integration between the transparency of God and the professionalism of the educator. The process leads us to a perspective based as much on effort and ingenuity as on the contemplation of the mystery of knowledge and human development.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, faced with the risk of reducing education to a function, the path presents above all wisdom or the interior life, that is to say, the proposal to live the school from the person.

In this case, we are on the page of the Theology of Education. We are talking about Education and Mystery.

5. The Christian School

Our study has recalled that in the last eighty years one of the most repeated topics in the Lasallian world has been the reference to the origins. It had already emerged strongly before the Council; then, the last seventy or eighty years have been magnificent in this sense³². They

32 Tribute to their names: Michel Sauvage, Maurice-Auguste, Saturnino Gallego, Luis Varela, Carlos Alcalde, Yves Poutet, Michel Fiévet, Vincent Ayel, Jean Pungier, Luke Salm, Miguel Campos, Luis Aroz, Augustine Loes, Henri Bédél, Jean Guy Rodrigue, Secondino Scaglione, André Rayez, Émile Lett, Georges Rigault, W. J. Battersby, Leo Burkhard, Félix-Paul, Mario Presciuttini, Émile Rousset, ...

have been evoked as never before in all the processes of formation of new Lasallian scenes. During that time the days of the first foundation have been very close to us, attractive, exciting, even fascinating. You only have to look at how and how much they are quoted.

In any case, there has been an unbalancing effect in this recovery: fascinating as it is, it has perhaps invited more scholarship than consideration over the following centuries. It was like building a three-century bridge and expecting to walk across it from one end to the other, speaking the same language. This must be emphasised again and again, at the risk of falling into a purely voluntarist reading of the soul of the project.

For example: seeing that in the mid-twentieth century the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* were still very little taken into account, or the *Method of Prayer* was read in a very simplistic way, or no significance was given to the *Collection*, seeing these things, there was only an interest in recovering another reading of those texts. But not the question of why it happened. We have encountered it several times.

Then, necessarily, came the other itinerary, no longer of the Founder, but of the Institution, the Institute, the Community and the Society of the Christian Schools. And then the consideration became more complete. That is why it is only from the 1986 *Rule* onwards that we find:

The Brothers are convinced that the Holy Spirit was manifested in a special way in the life, work and writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle, their Father, and *subsequently*

in the living tradition of the Institute. They draw from these sources the inspiration required by their mission and its fulfillment. For this reason they strive constantly to deepen their knowledge of the Founder and of the history of the Institute (Art. 4. Italics added).

And the 2015 edition reproduces this text verbatim in article 10. Before, in the 1967 edition, there was no place for tradition or the history of the Institute. Nor in 1976 was it considered appropriate to introduce this nuance. We suppose that it was perceived, yes, but not with the significance of twenty or thirty years later.

That is how it happened, yes, and it is important to qualify it.

Before the studies to recover the sources were planned, Georges Rigault's formidable *Histoire de l'Institut* had already been published. In particular, the first of its ten volumes did just that: it portrayed the origins, and did so with a vigour that is hard to surpass. Thus, it is very eloquent to read in parallel that first volume and, for example, the two volumes by Br. Yves Poutet on Lasallian Origins, the biography of the Founder, by Br. Saturnino Gallego, and the latest biography, that of Bernard Hours. Poutet, Gallego and Hours may seem to us - because they are - rigorous in their locating of influences or in their very precise historical contextualisation, but all three are indebted to Rigault's work.

Rigault's work had been composed on patterns that belonged to other times. With his series finished by 1952³³, the great crisis had not yet broken out, both in the social and Lasallian point of view. It was latent, as our study has been suggesting and as we mentioned a few pages ago. There was no reason to question the great man's kind of history.

He collected data, arranged them, and set them out, in a monumental work. But he did not interpret them, at least not as radically as we need today. That is why, when the founding texts were recovered in the middle of the last century, the question of why they were forgotten or why they were interpreted in a reductive way did not arise with the same strength. There was probably not enough awareness of the role of history in the journey of the Lasallian Institution.

Perhaps it could be said that it was more chronicle than history. Its difference becomes apparent in times of a new era.

33 The first, in 1937. We speak of ten volumes and not nine because of the last in the series, on the first third of the Lasallian 20th century, which he left in manuscript and which we have quoted more than once. It was published in the last decade of the century, under the title *Les temps de la sécularisation (1904-1914)*, opening the series *Études Lasalliennes*, in Rome, 1991. It is very much present in the first sections of *Part One*.

Modern Times: the First Harmony

In the closing days of the seventeenth century, Modernity was emerging³⁴. In the first Lasallian Community they did not know it, but it was like that. It is only by taking this into account that we can understand the journey of the Institution. That is why we must admit that the dimensions of their work transcended the limits of their awareness. It is a historical constant, which logically affects us three centuries later.

In John Baptist de La Salle's mind, the first thing was a combination of his own apostolic project and the moral obligation to Nicolas Roland. The reference to the Gospel must be assumed, since he had only recently been ordained and had already spent ten years in the diocesan structures, a cleric in one way or another. From his relationship with Roland, his recently deceased spiritual director and bridge to Barré, he was left with his moral obligation to direct his school work.

Soon, as he became more personally involved, he realised that, first of all, he needed a more serious, today we would say professional, organisation. That is where it all began: on the part of the group of teachers, with the organisation; on his part, with the organisation plus the gospel. From

34 Let us recall once again that “modern” in this study are the times between the Treaties of Westphalia (1648) and the end of Vatican II (1965). They thus cover a period of more or less three centuries, with its three natural phases: constitution, development and exhaustion. It is important to specify this because the Lasallian Institution was born with Modernity. It is a product of it, we might say.

there, the rest would be built, starting with a common organisation and a common project.

Why was it successful? Why did it mean a multi-century success? It is important to know this in order to envision its future.

First of all, because of the organisation. It was necessary to unite the evangelising purpose and the organisation, not only at local level, but initially at regional level, because several other schools soon appeared which had to function in a network and in harmony³⁵. This is why organisation was necessary. The decisive aspect of such a start was that organisation was not arrived at only because of the needs of the group, or because the Founder found disorder unbearable. The same thing was happening to his time, to his society and to evangelisation. It was a constant of the time: a new way of living society was in the making.

In the last decades of that century, after a hundred years of war and doctrinal, religious and scientific upheavals, things were already leaving a sediment on which the new times would be built: it was a question of order, logic, applied both to thought and to social coexistence. This is why we say that the Founder's contribution was not only his own. It was the spirit of his time, which in his case found its way through his commitment to the popular school.³⁶

35 The 'inheritance' which John Baptist de La Salle received was already a small network or group of schools, with the mark of Father Barré above all.

36 As a portrait of the period or of the historical moment, on behalf of several others, we cite the work of P. Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne (1680-1715)*, Boivin, Paris, 1935.

We understand better the correspondence between rational order and social welfare, to put it in our terms. The separation or distinction between mystery (referring above all to religion) and reason (embodied above all in social organisation), brought a level of well-being that satisfied the responsible bodies. But above all it was urgent in the face of the tremendous misery inherited from previous centuries. Reason and order redeemed the misery of the poor. At the very least, they gave them a chance to understand the workings of society a little better. After another half century, they would be the vehicle for their rights through laws and take part in government.³⁷

This was a society in which the value of community was still important and which was discovering the social order on a new level. The school, especially the elementary school, by establishing and disseminating the value of organisation, was for the people the main agent of this discovery³⁸. Nothing less.

37 The work of Ph. Sassier, *Du bon usage des pauvres*, Fayard, Paris, 1990, is highly suggestive in this respect. In the subtitle is his thesis: *Histoire d'un thème politique*. It helps to understand the true scope of what those schools were doing from the early days of the 18th century and in the centuries to come.

38 Such would be, for example, one of the conclusions of the French Republic after the defeat of Sedan, in 1870, when the Lasallian Project was almost two centuries old: the Prussian teachers were ahead of the French. The phenomenon, or the conclusion, would gradually impose itself on all the countries of the world. In the French case, this situation was at the source of the attitude of the Third Republic towards primary education and, in particular, towards the presence of religious in public schools.

If, in addition, the teachers lived fully their vocation, then all this was tangible for them. And it satisfied them. They found meaning in the rigour of their uniformity. On the other hand, those who, a hundred years later, scorned them for their meagre intellectual background, were wrong. ‘*Ignorantins*’³⁹ in appearance, they were the vanguard of Modernity and opened the way for it by spreading the key to its secrets, i.e. order, made reading, writing and calculation.

As can be understood, this had at least two important effects from the beginning, as far as our study is concerned: community and professionalism.

First and foremost, this reinforced the rewarding nature of their composition as a community. They could live it with more or less enthusiasm, but its positive meaning was very clear. And from the beginning they had learned to understand it as God’s Plan that bound them together. God had chosen them, had counted on them, from before the constitution of the world, as expressed in the Pauline texts which their founder interpreted for them in those *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. In this way, the vision of the school from the point of view of faith and association became one.

This is a key point, the encounter between the emergence of the modern school, the community, the association of

39 The expression, dating from the 18th century, is a good illustration of the social sense of the enlightened despots who used it.

communities/schools and faith. And it is worth looking at with the respect that the great social signs deserve.

Picking up the term from Westphalia⁴⁰, back when all this started, the encounter of these factors meant that those *'Ignorantins'* had already been eighty years secularising the popular primary school when they were met by La Chalotais and Voltaire. That's what it sounds like: secularising. And in two ways.

On the one hand, they were distinguishing the need to know God and the need to live in the new society. And, recognising the transcendence of both objectives, their distinction and their relationship, they dedicated their school formula to them. That is why their school was no longer the parish catechism as well as some reading, but something else: the modern popular school.

But there was more: they constituted themselves as a network, designing a translocal 'association' with its own identity and institutional autonomy. They constituted themselves as an entity at the service of the emerging society, but at the same time autonomous with respect to its administration. They understood that their service required the autonomy of their association of educational communities.

With the passing of the centuries, this double secularising movement - with respect to the Church and the State

40 Their Documents, a set of "treatises", contained for the first time in the history of the West the term "secularisation", referring to the separation of ecclesiastical and civil administrations.

- would be their best service to the new society. And today it allows us to consider its future in its own way. It is nothing less than the door through which we enter the world of its hope as an institution.

The intimate mystery

There was something in that harmony that we should remember, because of its proximity to our present time. It is its inner, spiritual aspect. It was and it is the condition for everything to work, yesterday and today. Everything depended and still depends on whether or not the work, in addition to being personally and institutionally nourishing, makes faith possible.

That secret is the subject of this fifth criterion. We are talking about the soul of the Mission.

That harmony was born of the correspondence between social need, the topicality of thought and the organisation of the school. It was producing an intimate experience of serenity, of inner coherence. With simplicity or even poverty and without too much expression, neither oral nor written, it satisfied the vital and professional expectations of that group of teachers. We can easily imagine it. It was the satisfaction of a job well done and of their positive social image.

It was their secret (we can talk like this). It was inside, in the heart of that professional or spiritual coherence: they understood that that serenity and that satisfaction was the face of God (the expression is ours, but not its content).

They spoke of the spirit of faith and the spirit of zeal, with a vocabulary typical of the time, very much of the French School of Spirituality. Faith, the spirit of faith, was the soul of everything: they proposed to see God in everything, both in what they received and in what they offered: not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God.

There had to be something at the heart of this coherence that could be lived in this way.

It was not simply a matter of a clear spirit of work⁴¹. It was much more than understanding the effort as a way to gain the other life. It was about living the afterlife now. As it sounds. That is why the other side of the spirit of faith - the spirit of zeal - could not only be the relief, the emptying.

41 The *Commentary on the Twelve Virtues of the Good Teacher*, in which the Superior of the time, Agathon, presents to the Brothers his way of reading what the Founder had left only as an enumeration, is a sufficiently clear testimony to this. It is symptomatic what he proposes in the presentation of the work, claiming an order which, not being that of John Baptist de La Salle, he himself cannot emphasise very much. But it reflects his way of interpreting the Founder almost a century later. For the Superior, the whole is like a great arch, supported first of all by Wisdom (it goes without saying that this does not mean a great deal of knowledge, but a deep interior life) and then by Gentleness: “...Ainsi, on pourrait mettre la Sagesse dans le premier rang, parce qu’elle présente le grand objet, l’objet entier qu’un Maître doit se proposer; la Prudence dans le second, parce qu’elle lui fait connaître la manière de le bien remplir. Ensuite viendraient les autres vertus, chacune à sa place, et l’ouvrage serait terminé par la Douceur. Elle est en effet le complément des vertus d’un bon Maître, par l’excellence du prix que lui donne la Charité, qui est la reine et la maîtresse de toutes les vertus...”.

The place of the nourishment of their faith was where they lived their zeal, not anywhere else. That school was the sacramental mediation of the encounter with God.

For it was God who showed himself to them in their effort, in their service, in their meticulous use of a didactics full of detail. It was - so to speak - the spirit of order or, with a certain boldness of expression, the other sacrament of order.

This was greatly facilitated by the elementary nature of their programmes (in terms of content). Indeed, the closer their work was to the basic logic, the less it could be distracted by exercises of memory, of skills without reflection, of repetition of other people's knowledge. This is why we see in them the paradox of the high quality of their level of planning, apparently inconsistent to the level of content. This is how we understand, for example, their resistance to the inclusion of subjects in their school curriculum. It is fair to recognise that at the beginning they did not understand why, already in the first third of the 19th century, they had to introduce content that had never been in their school.

Two centuries later, it is understandable why they initially decided to ‘tolerate’ this renewal of their programmes⁴². It was not only because they did not master them, because they did not know them. It was also because of that, of course, but underneath it was what we have been pointing out. The memorisation of a wealth of new content was not an occasion for inner life; the experience of logic was; at least it could be.

This was the case from the days of Brother Benilde in Saugues to those of Brother Exupérien in Paris. And the fact that this occurred more in the realm of the implicit or even the unconscious does not invalidate it as a basic category of their spirituality.

A not entirely conscious exhaustion

We cannot dispense with this perspective, otherwise we will fall into the mistake of interpreting the object of our study - this latest Lasallian century - only from its social, anthropological or cultural dimension. Because it is,

42 The expression ‘tolerate’ is from that Assembly of 1834. Very soon, however, both the positive experience of their network/association and their results in their village would push them to progress in the quantity and quality of their programmes. Already four years later, at the 1837 General Chapter, they were aware of the change in the situation. Thus, at the request of different social bodies, they would diversify and extend their school models to include vocational areas and special situations (blind, prisoners, handicapped of other kinds). Cf. the study by B. Alpagó *Educational responses of the Institute; elements for an overview*, in the collective work *That your school runs well*, Rome, 2013, pp. 220-237.

but in a very special way. They felt themselves, or so they thought, to be Ministers of God, animated by the Spirit of Jesus. That is why they could say that there was no gap between the things of God and the things of the School, those of their profession as educators and of their baptismal consecration.

This may seem to be a perspective outside the limits of a reflection that claims to be objective, but it is not. The proximity of the mystery means that the experience of living itself is considered in a different way: as a part, an aspect, a side, a dimension..., complementary to others, which transcend them. If, as we know, the effectiveness of the teacher grows as a function of his personal satisfaction in his profession (always assuming professional dignity, as is evident)⁴³, then we will accept that when someone lives considering that his life is already something else within it, then his creativity and resilience grow.

And it is definitely not because it is a plural or shared interiority.

It is important to underline this because, as we have already pointed out several times, it is about a sacramental

43 By way of example, just two references. Right now, J.-P. Delahaye, writing from his experience in the governance of education in France, *L'école n'est pas faite pour les pauvres*, Le Bord de l'eau, Lormont, 2022. The subtitle is eloquent: *Pour une école républicaine et fraternelle*. And half a century ago, C. Freinet, this time from his decades of militancy in basic education, in his collection *Les dits de Mathieu*, Delachaux et Niestlé, Neuchatel, 1967. Here again, the subtitle should be retained: *Parables for a popular school*.

community. It is not a personal experience of faith contained in a professional organisation. The organisation becomes a sacrament because shared vocation and shared work are the place of truly personal faith, that is to say, shared, relational.

It is then understood that, if one day this harmony were to break down, their association, their school and their faith would be insignificant for their people, useless, invisible. They would say nothing to themselves. It would soon be noticed, without anyone needing to oppose them: their creativity would disappear, both in their institutional design and in their didactic or educational models in general. No matter how hard they tried, they would cease to provide meaning to their people as a social institution.

The observation, while belonging to common sense, is important in that it describes a situation not exclusive to past centuries, but very real not so many years ago in more than one region of the Lasallian world. And it is understandable that this should be so, given the difference in the pace of access first to Modernity and then to Postmodernity.

It is important to perceive this in order to understand this paradoxical combination of honesty and error in so many institutional words and gestures. It appears again and again in the succession of General or Regional Chapters over the last fifty years or in efforts and programmes to increase the number of people involved in the project.

Honesty and error: this is explained to some extent by the fact that at that juncture of desegregation there were two circumstances that made it more difficult to perceive, as

can be seen in *Part One* of this study. It can be seen, first of all, in the deficiency of the vocabulary and the theological system for codifying the identity of the Lasallian Project. Two examples, precisely in two very influential expressions: Shared Mission and Association. This has been underlined above. Neither of the two was sufficiently precise and they were already used by everyone.

By the end of the 17th century, a model of knowledge and construction of society was emerging. It was embodied in its different dimensions (culture, aesthetics, science, politics, religion). Two centuries later, that model had shrunk in on itself, reduced to a system of resource exploitation without regard for its meaning. And in the middle, at the crossroads of all these dimensions, was the school, education in general, serving such a reduction more than it itself could perceive. The aforementioned Circular of Br Irlide in 1881 is an indisputable symptom of this.

Since, moreover, the theological vocabulary used to express and tell its identity responded to a clearly earlier world, with no relation (even opposition) to the history of the peoples, it became much more difficult to interpret and situate itself before the social novelty as an institution. This was also pointed out in the first pages of *Part One*.

Both factors - the sociological and the theological - were profoundly present in the four Lasallian General Chapters from 1946 to 1976. They did not help to clarify the interpretation of the present. Since then, the picture has changed little by little, as can be seen in the Chapter chronicles.

Challenges and a new Community

Today - the end of the 20th century, the beginning of the 21st - we are living another model of the relationship between education and its environment, another model in the management of educational institutions, another model in the inclusion of each project in those of society as a whole... In fact, we are facing another model of Lasallian Community.

It is like a refrain that we hear over and over again and need to interpret. It is the context of everything, absolutely everything, that is experienced in the Lasallian Project during the 20th century. And everything is marked, made possible or conditioned by it, much more than a reference to the history of pedagogy.

A new way of belonging: that is what was in the mentality of those Chapters of 1993 and 2000. It is what we felt under the discourse of Shared Mission and the regional actions that were springing up almost everywhere. It is what lies behind the slogan of refounding.

Our study has taken up the initiative of the District of San Francisco around the year 2000, proposing a distinction: for any institution, there are technical challenges and structural challenges⁴⁴. We mentioned this in order to point out that education, like post-modern culture and society, needs responses to the technical challenges it faces, but above all it needs them with regards to the structural challenges that surround it.

44 See the transition from the General Chapters of 1993 and 2000. Cf. *Part One, 6: 1993: Sharing the Mission* (2).

For more clarity of this study, we will say that it is a situation equivalent to that which was experienced in the primary education of the poor in the days of the first La-sallian Community. The modern popular school which its members spread, together with others, meant a revolution, first of all in terms of its recipients, then in terms of its contents, and finally in terms of its methodology.

As for the recipients, we should remember that even they themselves and their contemporaries still considered their schools as charity schools, that is to say, centres where the poor were welcomed to endure the bitterness of life. It was not a question of educating him so that he could move forward, to find a trade, to lay the foundations for further education. No. They were schools of mercy, of charity. And that was the first revolution of that Community and some others like it⁴⁵. They did it: their deeds went far beyond their consciences.

It was the same in terms of content or programmes: it is difficult for us to understand, but the fact that that school was dedicated strictly to logic, mathematics and grammar was a revolution. That first community, on the other hand, secularised the Christian school by dedicating it to

45 In addition to the study already cited by Ph. Sassier, *Du bon usage des pauvres*, as a general context from a strictly socio-political perspective, we note the two by M. Fiévet *Les enfants pauvres à l'école (la révolution scolaire de Jean-Baptiste de La Salle)* and *L'invention de l'école des filles (des Amazones de Dieu aux XVIIe et XVIII siècles)*, both in Ed. Imago, 2001 and 254 pp, 2006 and 237 pp respectively.

logic, calculus, grammatical analysis⁴⁶, without, however, ceasing to be Christian. Indeed, it was Christian precisely because it devoted itself to it.

Their methodology gave their project its definitive form, as a school and as a Christian school at the same time. Again: their practice was much more than their mentalities.

It had to be on the same scale as the needs of those for whom it was intended and the secularisation of its contents. This is why it was spread the school network with other schools, with homogeneous functioning in all of them and with rigorous organisation in each establishment. This is how they established the registers and the various levels within the school and within each classroom. By going on the scale, as we have said, of the urgencies they found around them, we can understand how they tried to give the appearance of discipline, that is to say, of order.

A similar thing is what corresponds to post-modern times. It is to this type of action that the challenges of adaptation, formulated for the year 2000 and made a reality in all our local chronicles, refer. In all of them.

At the beginning of the last century, around the terrible days of 1904, it was already evident that we were facing a radically

46 The Christian reading of the emergence of the modern popular school is our own. It is based, among others, on J.B. Metz's *Theology of the World*. The synthesis of that school around logic can be seen, for example, in M. Foucault's classic, *Watch and Punish*, as well as in Jacques and Mona Ozouf's *La République des instituteurs*.

new time in terms of adaptation⁴⁷. However, a good part of the Superiors and the forces of the General Chapters tended to interpret the newness in terms of a technical challenge. The so-called Latin affair, for example, from the last decade of the 19th century until 1923, was also a terrible manifestation of the disorientation of the approach.⁴⁸

In fact, in the Lasallian universe the first half of the 20th century as a whole is a clear example of the tension between the need to broaden and modify the design of educational projects, on the one hand, and the impossibility of delivering it with a reactionary rather than a creative attitude, on the other. The 1946 Chapter, for example, read from the perspective of the challenges, offers a clear vision of the inner state of the Institution in the previous fifty years.

Then, moving forward in history, the distinction between the two types of challenges goes even further. It is not enough to say that the problems of an institution are of one type or the other. It is not even enough to point out the error of considering adaptation problems as if they were technical. Because there is still the possibility of

47 The Lasallian presence at the various Universal Exhibitions held in the last quarter of the 19th century was well known. Paris, London, Chicago and again Paris, with their medals, bear witness to the Lasallian Institute's educational updating movement at that time. This was also reflected in the General Chapters of the time and in the remodelling of its school/educational manuals.

48 An excellent synthesis of the whole subject can be found in the fourth volume of the *Initiation to the History of the Institute...*, by Br. Bédel (XIX-XX Centuries, 1875-1928; Lasallian Studies 11, Rome, 2006), pp. 99-124.

those who, knowing the distinction and trying to take it into account, act with technical formulas and believe that they are doing it differently.

The issue is important in our reflection on the identity of the community, as can be seen below.

Both the local chronicles and the panorama of Lasallian documentation of recent decades show clearly that such a gesture is often made in the belief that it is a response to a challenge of adaptation. And yet, more than once, a merely technical formula is proposed, imagining that it is not, but that it goes beyond that. The result is always frustrating and ends up blinding us to any possible novelty, with the result that the institution gradually disintegrates.

Renewal in education today is based on the principle that everything is a function of its relationships. Everything is because it is part of structures, wholes that give their being to each of their elements. That is why it is fair to say that in reality subjects or subjects disappear, but not contents. These depend on the location of each element of reality within the whole. This is why we are always dealing with multidisciplinary realities, marked not by autonomy but by belonging.

Understanding this is often not easy. It is probably due to habit, both in the mind of each teacher and in the configuration of their professional relationships. The one goes with the other.

Indeed: the natural application of these principles leads to the re-constitution of the educational community. Be-

cause the person is also a function of his or her relationship. That is why the educational organisation - community or not - is also a necessary reflection of the reality of the knowledge it serves. And this is a concept that is not yet so widespread among us. It can be seen, as it could not be otherwise, in the latest *Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission*. But the reality of its establishments does not yet reach this level of response to the times.

Thus, it is necessary to realise that a team is not yet a community of teachers. A team is marked more by the organisation of different specialities than by the needs of a common theme. As the latter becomes more and more important, we speak of community. 'Common theme' refers to school planning, of course, but also to the meaning of school. So, at least, as a general principle.

From what we have seen in the last decades of Lasallian history, we can dare to point out that the survival of the project depends on the constitution of communities on truly structural or interdisciplinary or contextual projects. Perhaps even experience is already showing this in the attempts at renewal which have taken place over the last eighty years. When innovation disappears, what has failed is not the vision of programme renewal, but the

team, the teaching community⁴⁹. And everywhere in the Lasallian world we know of examples.

A new Harmony

Here again, in these new times, the key to harmony lies within, in spirituality. All the preceding discourse, both in this *Part Two* and in the previous one, should have shown this: only in the shared vocation of a group can we speak of an educational community, and therefore only then are we in the presence of a school today. We do not want to say ‘a Christian school today’, no. We mean what we say: there is only a school if there is a community. Its constitution is much more important than its ideological colour.

In our reflection we have recalled it, supported by the whole of the institutional documentation: it is necessary that the way of living education enlivens our capacity to contemplate the Mystery of God.

49 This is what is evoked by the expression used in recent times in European circles: ‘the school which learns’. It is a happy image to point to the improvement of the school institution, in addition to that of its teachers and as a definitive guarantee of its being in tune with the times. Cf., for example, M.A. Santos Guerra, *La Escuela que aprende*, Morata, 2000, 146pp. In its original context, we find above all Peter Senge and his *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organisation* (1990), widely disseminated in all organisational circles. At the root of this way of thinking and constituting social institutions is always the path that runs between the organisation and the community.

It is true that the spirit of education or pedagogy can lead to this, but a further step is needed in order not to remain an organisation, that is, something that only guarantees the present of the educational institution, but not its sustainability in the medium term. If the educational ministry is lived according to the keys of what we call postmodernity, it seems clear that little by little we are living this belonging or new system, which makes truth the truth.

If everything is about belonging, that is to say, about relationships, no one can be a member of an educational organisation if they do not live this same spirit. In other words, the person who educates is the one who feels part of it, who shares the same working group and the knowledge it shares, who feels he belongs to the history of a specific place and to the path of the world or of nature. One could say: he who becomes one with the soul of what he teaches. Otherwise, he only instructs: a machine will soon replace him.

In earlier times, the time we call Modernity, harmony emerged little by little in the experience of work well done, of order and profitability, of progress in the well-being of society, in the mastery of knowledge and its application to the growth of peoples. Harmony arose when, by explicitly or implicitly sharing this intimate experience, the group found that a special, effective and solid pedagogical capacity emerged from it.

Similarly, in this other time that we call Postmodernity, harmony arises from this other source.

Now it is the contemplation of the flow of life and history beyond their logical constants, the experience of knowing oneself to be part of a collective consciousness, the perception of the virtualities and limits of belonging, of the expiration and indispensability of all programmes and all expressions. In the end, of the elusiveness of the mystery of the encounter between student and teacher, of the knowledge that the bond that unites them, at the same time surpasses them, delivers them, encourages them and, in the end, prevents them from judging each other.

The exhaustion of Modernity delivers us to seek a God beyond God, a Church beyond the Church, a Religion beyond Religion. And, by the same reasoning, a School beyond the School.

We could say that we need to find something that is not contaminated by our logical or critical deformation. We need something where community and the encounter with God is emphasised, whatever name it may have. A place where we celebrate together the need to live the mystery, where we move from the critical purification of all words to the identification with a shared experience.

After Modernity, the Spirit: in this sense we invoke Joaquín de Fiore, as we could do with Teilhard and his *Mass on the World*, back in the steppes of Central Asia a hundred years

ago⁵⁰. It is also the memory of the birth of the first community, those fifty days between Easter and Pentecost.

Let's take a closer look: in reality the commemorations of Pentecost and Easter were one and the same at the beginning of the Christian chronicle. The first Pentecost, to begin with, is understood from Easter, as its culmination. That is why in Christianity the scene of the shaking of the house, the tongues as of fire and the word understood by all are the parallel or the continuity of the first encounter with the Risen One. We are no longer talking about the holy women or the disciples. Now it is the manifestation of the Risen One for all the people, without walls or doors.

Everyone understands that they are in the presence of the spirit of Jesus, the crucified one who now lives. His spirit, present in this group and in this event, proves it. It is the group of Jesus and they have been violently invaded by his spirit. What has been heard and is being seen is the spirit of Jesus, soon to be the Holy Spirit of God and then the Holy Spirit, the imprint of the Father and the presence of the Anointed One, son of woman. The Spirit, made into a group, *ekklesia*.⁵¹

50 From Joaquín de Fiore, in the second half of the 12th century, we remember his understanding of history and his placing us in the Age of the Spirit. For his part, Teilhard lived and wrote his long prayer, like the canon of a cosmic Eucharist, in 1923.

51 Let us recall that the term was already used in Greece five centuries before Christ to denote the assembly or governing body of the city.

Pentecost means the encounter with the Spirit⁵². And simultaneously, the constitution of the Community, which is the Church and will be the Church.

They know that in them and among them the Mystery, the fullness, the definitive meaning has been inaugurated. The whole history of their people has come to an end: it is the Spirit of Easter, the one who transcends everything and fills it with meaning, the one announced by Jesus, the one who died and rose again and now lives forever.

They do not own what they have before them, but it is that, precisely that, which makes them persons. That something is now Someone. That is why they understand the tension that will henceforth drive their lives: their God is in them and at the same time greater than all of them. From now on they know his name, their names, because they are their names, each one's names, their gestures, all their words, all their fundamental experiences. These are the names of their Lord. But at the same time they know that none of them encompasses Him completely, so that

52 Once again, we are reminded of K. Rahner's conclusion: the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not be a Christian. In *Writings on Theology*, vol. 7 (German ed.) *Writings on Theology* (Madrid: Taurus, 1969), 7:13-34.

to know Him is not to dominate Him, nor to behave properly is to acquire rights over Him.⁵³

They are aware that He is the love that binds them together and at the same time that this love is the only law and the only truth. From now on to live is to show it. It is their good news.

In our case, in this reflection on the journey from one Lassallian Community to another, it is necessary to realise and live intentionally what had been underpinning the meaning of the Christian Schools in the previous century: the sign of the Community. It is a chain of sources or a virtuous circle: the school is lived as a Community; the Community, as a sign; the sign, from the personal and

53 Like few others, the following text illustrates this idea. It is by Lorenzo Milani, then at Calenzano, and in honour of his contribution to the understanding of the school, we allow ourselves a long quotation. He wrote thus, in 1950, to a young communist with whom he felt very close: “...Pipetta, fratello, quando per ogni tua miseria io patirò due miserie, quando per ogni tua sconfitta io patirò due sconfitte, Pipetta, quel giorno, lascia che te lo dica subito, io non ti ti dirò più come dico ora: ‘hai ragione’. That day, finally, he was able to open his mouth to the only cry of victory worthy of a priest of Christ: ‘Pipetta, hai torto. Beati i poveri perché il regno dei cieli è loro’. Ma il giorno che avremo sfondata insieme la cancellata di qualche parco, installata insieme la casa dei poveri nella regia del ricco, ricordatene, Pipetta, non ti fidar di me, quel giorno io ti tradirò. Quel giorno io non resterò là con te. Io tornerò nella tua casuccia piovosa et puzzolente a pregare per te davanti al mio signore Crocifisso. Quando tu non avrai più fame ne sete, ricordatene Pipetta, quel giorno io ti tradirò. Quel giorno, finalmente, potrò cantare l’unico grido di vittoria degna d’un sacerdote di Cristo: Beati i... fame e sete...”. See in *Lettere di don Lorenzo Milani priore di Barbiana*, Mondadori, 1970, p.12.

shared relationship with God; and that relationship, from the call of the poor in the school.

Within this circuit, the last few decades have led us to discover something that, without doubt, we had not perceived or at least cultivated. We find it both in the local Chronicles and in the texts of the Institute.

It is its soul: the personal and silent relationship with the God who calls. This was the point of our discourse on interior harmony and its spiritual character.

Communion and the Gospel

Belonging, the mystique of belonging: this is the clear approach that derives from the change in the cultural paradigm, that is to say, in the educational mediation with regard to Lasallian identity.

It can be said that the itinerary of Modernity has led to its own overcoming, leaving society at a new, unforeseen point. During this period, during these three centuries, the starting point and the method, that is to say, the keys to the journey, were logic, analysis and organisation. However, their development, by making them global, has led to their overcoming. Thus, the new logic has to be understood not only from its decomposition into successively smaller units, but from its inclusion in successively more complex structures.

This has transformed all forms of human consciousness, so that everything is interpreted in terms of the whole,

not only in economic or quantitative terms, but also in cultural, spiritual and even religious terms.

This gives rise to a very specific approach to what is to be understood by education and all forms of school.

From now on, to be educated, to be trained, will mean to become capable of discovering relationships, to master overall visions as well as locally specific exploitations. Educating will mean getting used to perceiving collective identities, shared knowledge, and achieving this through the corresponding methodology.

It is clear that this imposes, is already imposing, a new model of educational institution. It no longer has exclusive or excluding timetables, nor disciplines, nor specialists. Everything is articulated, and is already being articulated, from the dialogue between the educational institution and other social institutions, between the teaching staff and the institutions of social animation, between basic or initial training and lifelong learning, between specialisation and the vision of life, that is to say, between knowledge and culture.

This is the situation in which we live. Paradoxically, the educational institutions we know tend to shrink in on themselves, leaving a large part of the objective of training in the hands of other social institutions. That is to say, the complete model of education that operates today throughout the world consists of traditional educational institutions and other new ones, which were not initially intended to be formative but to occupy a niche in the socialisation of new generations.

We know the situation and there is no need to elaborate on it. It has become clear to us that now ‘education’ does not coincide with conventional educational institution. At the same time, this implies a new model of educator.

Its novelty must of course lie in the knowledge of its area. It will also lie in its inclusion in complex social contexts and in its ability to take part in teams. And, definitely, in its inner life. This point must be underlined, precisely because of the same logic that delivers us from Modernity to what we call Postmodernity.

The guarantee of quality in the ministry of the school and of the Christian school must lie not only in the vast knowledge of each of those involved in it, but also in its contemplative capacity, that is to say, in what we could call its habitual dealings with the unity of all knowledge⁵⁴. It could be said that life and knowledge are mastered from within and not from outside, that is to say, from their source rather than from the whole of their results. All the Circulars and Pastoral Letters of the last twenty years underline this. All of them.

54 Thus opening the door to the last section of this *Part Two*, we recall here the entire work of F. Capra, pointing out in particular *The Hidden Connections* (2002) for which he allows us to discover the heart of institutions such as the Lasallian one. We also recall, already in the world of education, E. Morin, with *The Seven Necessary Knowledges for the Education of the Future* (Unesco, 1999), a formidable and at the same time simple reflection on complex thinking, which in this study we understand as the foundation of the educational community.

If we consider it from the point of view of faith, the one we approach in these reflections when we speak of inner harmony, we will find a familiar place: the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Jesus, or....

In this case, professional mediation calls us to feel and accept its universal animation, rather than to know it, reason it, purify it, fragment it and theorise it. It will therefore be a matter of living a spirituality marked more by contemplation than by effort, and more by belonging than by distance.

Once again, it is a matter of the Spirit of Faith, in its Lasalian denomination.

We have seen it in this study: everywhere there is talk of building communities at the service of this project, lived today, Sign of God today, in this globality.

Everywhere, the evidence that without relationship there is no education: the same challenge of the Origins, between the Baroque and the Modernity, when the establishment of those communities was the guarantee of the success and the survival of the new schools.

This last one is the Community Theology page: to rediscover that it is the Sign of God, the key to refoundation. This is what we are talking about with 'Association' and 'Fraternity', three centuries later.

6. The Community of the Christian School

In the days immediately before the Second Vatican Council and the two or three decades that followed (around 1956-1986), the efforts of the Lasallian Institution were focused on the critical analysis of what was being lived with the presumed stamp of the inheritance received. It was, as Chapters and Circulars testify, a brilliant effort, indispensable and in many cases exhausting. It was particularly noticeable in the initial and ongoing formation programmes. We have recalled this.

However, not everything had been done. The analysis and rationalisation of the structures focused more on the

configuration of the mediations than on their meaning. The configuration was about remodelling the school; the very meaning of the school was another matter. Perhaps it could not have been otherwise.⁵⁵

The revision of meaning seemed less urgent or even unnecessary. In the midst of the work of reframing the mediations, the reality of meaning was taken for granted, that is, it was hoped that the soul of fidelity to God and the poor would be maintained through that honest and painstaking effort. The one would bring the other.

But it was not the case. It could not be, as was soon seen. Everything would depend on the degree of perception of social change. As it saw its scope, it would also be seen that in addition to the mediations its meaning was at stake.

The Lasallian Institution - as surely many others - lived a relationship with God in which the cleanliness of practice counted a little more than the depth of contemplation and

55 It is impossible here to ignore the movement that proposed the deschooling of society, expressed in Ivan Illich's term (for example, in his *Deschooling Society* of 1971). It is also impossible to forget the generous and intelligent efforts of Br. D. Piveteau and the *Orientations* magazine team, so in tune with the Cuernavaca proposals, read from the French experience of May, 1968. Today, half a century later, we see that more than once we have been concerned with how to do things, without sufficiently considering their why. In our theme, for example, this could and can mean devoting oneself to shaping Lasallian identity without questioning what is taken for granted. In relation to Culture and Education, in general but in a way that is very close to our study, J. Wagensberg reflects on this in a very suggestive way in his *A más cómo, menos porqué* (Barcelona, 2016).

the personal fidelity of the whole community. It would seem that the times still called more for renewal than for re-foundation. This, at least, is the air that the different groups of the Institution seem to have breathed from Vatican II to the present day.

It is understandable: the first thing that is perceived is the specific maladjustment and its proximate causes. On the other hand, the deep root of all the imbalances is slow to appear. One is the call for reform; another is the call for refoundation. Thus, in the days of the Council it was easier to see the maladjustments than the change of times. Therein lay the real reason for the misalignments. Logically, the institutions need at least a generation to perceive this. And furthermore, it will not be a perception that occurs simultaneously in all the territories where it is established.

If this is the case, as it seems to be, this has left for today and the coming decades an essential task: the fidelity and the future of the institutions of the Christian school require that the relationship between educational community and evangelisation be consciously lived.

This is what we are referring to when we speak of the significance of mediation in the renewal of the Lasallian Project.

In the Lasallian literature and official publications of the last century this only appears in the last few decades, perhaps since the turn of the century. It does not appear before, that is to say, until a somewhat confused or initial perception of the new Community is reached through

the slogan 'Shared Mission'. And certainly, without the strength, forcefulness or unanimity of today.

This Institution knows that in the path of education in the last half century, development and specialisation have still counted more than belonging or community. Also, that the abundance of successes in the labour insertion in society has been more important than the visibility of the community model.

In this sense, the globalisation of the Lasallian Project has been able to work against it, slowing down the awareness of the whole. It has been a dramatic paradox: the universal quantity of experiences has not facilitated the appreciation of the whole.

In fact, over the last eighty years we have seen how, when social novelty appeared, it was seen as something foreign to the inherited family tradition. It was interpreted as an undue presence of the social (or political) in education. Gradually, however, life imposed its law and the school institution ended up taking into account its belonging to society. As a process repeated everywhere, the problem came from its different location in history and the different awareness of globalisation, depending on the territories.⁵⁶

56 Thus, the diversification of training modules for work, the attention to foreigners, the relationship with the administrations, the constitution of sports clubs, the promotion of regional folklore, the adult education, the catechumenal groups, etc.

In this sense, it cannot be said that in the last half century the globality of the Lasallian Project has been indeed harmonious⁵⁷. It is necessary to understand the mediating value of economic situations with regard to the way of feeling culture and religion. There are economic situations which do not allow us to embrace the historical perspective that is possible in others. This is a very important consideration in the process of the Lasallian Community and above all in the proposal for its future⁵⁸. It can be seen in the self-awareness of the Institute in the succession of General Chapters or in the variety of local chronicles describing its own processes.

This was like that because what was expressed in one place was often rejected in another, attributed to error or fault of the outside community. Thus, the local reaction to the novelty and its results was compared with the same reaction in another territory to apparently different results. The opinion was understandable: this is wrong; or, at least, what has been done is not safe, it is better to continue with what is ours, what is here.

57 This is the echo which comes to us from reading number 250 of the Bulletin of the Institute (defining Association and presenting very interesting personal testimonies) and numbers 255-260 (devoted to the description of the situation of the five great zones of the Lasallian world, 2015-2020).

58 One place where this reality has been experienced throughout the last Lasallian century has been the General Council, the Regime or the Government of the Institute. There is no need to mention names because certain events, such as the one we remember inside the General Council in the sixties and seventies of the last century. Cfr. *Part One, 2. Renewing, 1. A Declaration*.

What follows, this last consideration, is intended to take this into account and to provide a horizon of hope.

The Sacrament of Community

We open with a leap back to the last third of the 4th century, in the Christian Church of the East. Another world, certainly.

There is a passage in the work of St. John Chrysostom that may help in understanding the final hypothesis or proposal we are arriving at. It is in his *Treatise against the impugn-ers of the Monastic Life*.

The work consists of three discourses with the common denominator that can be deduced from its title. The first is general, that is to say, referring to the appreciation of monastic life by society as a whole; the second is addressed to a non-Christian father faced with the monastic vocation of his son; the third, to a Christian father, faced with the same situation. The reference that interests us comes in the latter:

... Do you not see how the farmers, no matter how much haste they are in to enjoy the fruits of their labour, would never allow it to be harvested before it is ripe? So let us not withdraw our children from their solitary life too soon, let us allow the lessons to become well established and the plants to take root. If they need to spend ten, twenty years in the monastery, let us not fret, let us not grieve over it, for the longer they spend in the gymnasium, the more strength they will acquire. Or rather, if you

like, let us not determine any time at all: the limit should be the time he needs to deliver the fruits of his virtue in full season. Then, let him come back from the desert with joy; not before.⁵⁹

What the saint is suggesting is that it is very good for every Christian to live a few years of his life in a monastery. Just as it sounds. That, at that historical moment (second half of the 4th century), in the face of the degeneration or massification of the faith, it was good for every Christian to go to the monastery and there to be educated as a monk for a few years. To every Christian.

On entering the *Treatise*, we expected an exposition on the excellencies of monastic life as we understand it or as it is lived today in the Christian Churches, at least in the West. Suddenly we find that the saint is not talking about what we know. He is talking about something else. For him, monastic life meant Christian formation par excellence, so that everyone - and this had been his personal experience - should live it until he felt mature as a Christian and as a citizen. That is why it would be wrong for a father not to respect the maturing of his son.

This is what the text says and we immediately agree with it. If we read the *Treatise* from this point of view, that is, considering monastic time as a time of Christian formation, it seems to us that this is the way things should be.

59 The quotation is from the Spanish version of the BAC, *Obras de San Juan Crisóstomo, Tratados ascéticos*, Madrid, 1958, pp.513f. In the Greek Patrology, *Migne* version (1863), vol. 47, pp. 379ff.

However, if we think about it more calmly, we find ourselves faced with questions that are not so easy to answer: during those ten or twenty years, has the young man been a member of a monastic community? Therefore, what is a monastic community? What is monastic life? and - what is important for our study - does it have anything to do with what today we call religious life or consecrated life? In short: can it help us in understanding the new forms of community?

These are the handful of questions to which we referred earlier when we spoke of the different rhythms of Lasalian globalisation and the acceptance or rejection of the various responses to the present day.⁶⁰

In reality, understanding consecrated life as a school of Christianity is not something new. It cannot be, of course, if these things were already being proposed in the 4th century. But neither is it new if we consider the centuries that followed. Indeed, 'consecrated' communities have always exercised a similar ministry: not so much by taking on 'temporary' members within themselves in the manner of long-term formands, but by offering themselves to

60 Circular 435, reporting on the General Chapter of 1993, made this point very clearly: [it speaks of the Shared Mission and the History of the Institute, particularly at the end of the 20th century] "...The diversity of situations in which we find ourselves leads us to be open to new pathways. And that sometimes requires us to re-evaluate certain things that happened in the past. **The movement toward shared mission has not been uniform:** there has been teeth-gnashing and backsliding, understandable enough at that time. In this light, it is understandable that some Brothers today are known for having these attitudes and these hesitations." (the words in bold type, in the text).

their people as a reference or example of relationship with God and even with society and the world at large.⁶¹

Let us consider this approach to consecration in the light of the messages of Lasallian Chapters and Superiors over the last thirty years. Let us imagine, for example, the title of the Pastoral Letter of Brother Robert Schieler in 2019: *Witnesses of Fraternity*. With some surprise we will find a clear continuity or coherence across a span of fifteen centuries.

And it is precisely the root of that coherence or that continuity that takes us further than we sometimes think. Because it takes us beyond the question of the redefinition of the Lasallian. It delivers us to the great question of the re-understanding of consecrated life.

No, with the title of the Letter of Superior Schieler which we have just quoted, we are not only dealing with a question addressed to a specific institution, but to the meaning of consecration traditionally called ‘religious’.

The dimensions of the question

As a consequence of the above, we propose that the Lasallian question about the passage from one community to another over these hundred years... has no answer in itself. Instead, we see that it is included in this larger one: how to understand today the relationship between evangeli-

61 It is very suggestive, in this sense, to imagine a bridge between those monks in Egypt in the first centuries of Christianity and the Buddhist monasteries in Southeast Asia today.

sation and consecrated life (Chrysostom's 'monastic life'). And we also appreciate that this *Treatise* helps to interpret the path of this last century, not only in this particular Institution but in all the forms of encounter between Consecration and Evangelisation ('apostolic life', in the vocabulary of the *Code of Canon Law*).⁶²

In this study, something that has been abundantly clear throughout the last century seems to be evident. It is the effect that the contrast with the Vatican II event has had on all things Christian. The Council has shaken everything, but without delivering a solution. This task, the solution or solutions, is the task of each area of the Church and is its post-conciliar programme. For our study, in particular, it means that without taking it into account, it is not possible to interpret the internal journey of this institution.

From the beginning of the 20th century, as we have noted, there appeared in this respect in the Lasallian Institution both a structural deficit and a deficit of conscience. We remember it in the two episodes of the *Conditae a Christo* and the letter of St Pius X, 1900 and 1905. It reappeared in the perplexities of the middle of the century around the question of the lay teaching profession and especially the priesthood and the nature of the vows, from 1946 to 1976. It began to become a clamour with the entry of non-Brothers into the educational communities or into

62 *Code of Canon Law*, book II, sec. II, cc.731-746. It is worth noting that the Institutions of Consecrated Life occupy Section I of this same book (cc. 573-730), so that the Code suffers from the same doctrinal perplexity of those who have problems relating consecration and apostolate.

the Project as a whole, from 1976 onwards. The final straw of perplexity came at the Chapters of 1993 and 2000 with the presence, even partial, of lay people in the work of the highest organ of animation of the community. And from those dates onwards, logically, there have been repeated invitations to Lasallian circles to experiment with new situations and to convert them into institutional discourse. The latest is called Leavening Project (2022) and Plenary Assembly (2024).

As a specific area generated by this last dynamic of presences and proposals, the Institution has been creating something like a parallel or double network for the animation of its whole: a network of institutions and flows specific to the Brothers' Communities and another, centred on doing, understood as mission. In fact, except at the top, occupied by the Brother Superior General, everything else functions in parallel, usually coordinated and sometimes autonomous.

This last reality, autonomy, is understandable especially in view of the deficient definitions of each of the networks. This is where the discourse of renewal enters or appears, no longer of the Lasallian Institution, but of Consecrated Life itself. Some situations show this clearly: everywhere we feel the ultimate inadequacy or ineffectiveness of the inherited vocabulary and at the same time everywhere there are emerging clues that imply a new concept of consecration and community. This is why we can sometimes wonder if this double network does not solve the problem, but merely poses it. At times, it certainly seems to delay or postpone it.

It is reasonable that none of this is understandable without interpreting it within a much broader context than

the itinerary of this institution. That is why the huge leap backwards from the distant reference to Chrysostom can be useful.

It is clear that on the basis of that reflection one could, as Luther did, propose an alternative definition of religious consecration. It could be proposed and debated as an interpretation of the history of consecrated life over a millennium. More: it surely needs to be done.

But in this study, even taking into account this general horizon, we remain in a specific place in the territory. It is the area of the new configuration of the Community of the Christian school. And here these texts do help us to realise the necessarily reactive character of Trent's proposals on the subject and the consequent perplexity of the institutions of the Church in the face of the need to assume the new forms of apostolic life.

It cannot be said that Trent made things easy for the consecrated men and women to dedicate themselves to the apostolate. De La Salle, like Vincent de Paul, Jeanne de Lestonnac, Francis de Sales, Jeanne De Chantal, Anne de Xaintongue, Pierre Fourier, Nicolas Barré, Mary Ward, Louise de Marillac, and so many others, were anticipating the future⁶³. Their lives meant for their Church a question that would take centuries (several Revolutions, social and

63 On this subject, the reflections of Br Maurice-Auguste in his above-mentioned study on the Bull are very useful: *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles...*, Cahiers Lasalliens II, in its first two chapters, pp. 4-43.

scientific, the two most devastating Wars known to the world and two Councils) to be raised.

This is why we affirm that, at the origin of the dialogue between Apostolic Life and Consecrated Life in Modernity, that is to say, at the beginning of their own history (because they were all born after Trent), the Congregations of Apostolic Life do not have a satisfactory contextual reference in the face of their perplexities. Their journey has been made rather in spite of the theology of the Counter-Reformation and in favour of the dynamics of Modernity. This is a serious limitation, the consequences of which we have been suffering since the days after Vatican II.

It is from this perspective that we can better understand the three-century journey of the Lasallian Institution and above all the horizon of the challenges it faces today.

Three Centuries, three Phases

In fact, if we review the whole of Lasallian history we find three phases or periods, of unequal duration depending on the countries or cultural areas concerned. And the succession of the three offers a perfectly interpretable outlook from the perspective we are commenting on. We have mentioned it several times in this study.

There was first a time of establishment, adjustment, design, in response to a need, and in a specific territory. It is the French 18th century, the time of the Enlightenment and the birth of Modernity. The community lived this time in its own way of interpreting God's call and in the canonical

or legal structure of institutions such as its own. It is a first time of foundation and identity design.

There was then a new time, which was accessed through the French Revolution: that of the bourgeois and positivist society of the 19th century. Here the formula proved exceptionally fruitful, both in its own development and in the pattern it offered to many others like it. If the previous moment was that of the origins, the foundation, this second one is that of institutional fulfilment, the appropriate service to the new societies.

And then came a third, marked by the decline of its previous models and the hesitant emergence of new forms. It was characterised by its different appearance in different societies. We can situate this third period in the first three quarters of the 20th century, although in the various Lasalian regions it occurred as they reached their own 20th century and their own crisis. Thus, what in certain countries occurred between 1900 and 1960, in others would happen between 1930 and 1970, or similar values, but always as a repeated succession of the same graph.

Our reflection has focused on this third period. It has turned out to be a place of signs with respect to our present, quite similar to the Field of Stars that shook medieval Europe. It is here that the question of the new Community has arisen, as we have been evoking.

From this three-times perspective, it is well understood that the question of the new community means the exhaustion of the previous pattern. We also understand the

difficulty of finding the new one. And finally, we understand the magnitude of the factors involved.

In the beginning there was a natural alliance between the work of the school and the Community. The stability of the work required a strongly cohesive Community, which implied exclusive and lifelong dedication. This guaranteed stability of commitment and service. It also made possible an programme of specialisation and progress in the educational service, so that the guarantee did not refer only to the present, but was projected into the future, to a possible future imagined only as an improvement of the past, not as its improvement.

This is what the first foundation consisted of. This is what the Letters Patent and the Bull sealed.

What happened was that the stability of the Community, key to the project, was sustained by faith in the vocation shared by its members. However, this was not a guarantee approved by the social institutions of the time. It was a time and a society that we call Christendom, where the distance between theological definitions and social laws was not so clear, so that theological realities and their civil effects could be confused⁶⁴. For civil law, stability was a function of a special commitment of each member to the project of the Institution, i.e. the vows.

64 By way of example and as a more than sufficient explanation: it was the Assembly of the French Revolution which suppressed the vows of the Lasallian Community in August 1792. At first sight, this is surprising, as something that was none of its business. But, if one thinks carefully, it was not the vows that were suppressed but their effect: the very existence of that community.

It was in this context that the Lasallian process in Rome took place, when, on a proposal from outside the applicant Community, the reference to the vows was included to facilitate the granting of the Bull of Approbation.⁶⁵

The Community was perfectly constituted without them, as can be understood from the fact that, in the first version of their application, when they presented themselves, they had not spoken of vows at all. However, without them it was more difficult to obtain Roman approbation and, on the other hand, with them it seemed much easier to present themselves to the French administration and to be recognised as a legal and socially reliable entity.

We emphasise that this way of considering the vows refers to the domain of utility, not of meaning. And we continue to stress that this path would sooner or later lead to absurdity.

Thus, they understood that there was no problem in accepting the structure of the new vows together with the institutionalisation of their Community and of the Association of communities⁶⁶, which rather expressed itself in

65 Cf. *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes à la recherche...* (Cahiers Lasalliens 11, 215ff) and *Les vœux des Frères...* (Cahiers Lasalliens 2, 106ff).

66 Blain, the biographer, comments on it in these terms: “... [les Frères] ravis de l'ouverture que la Divine Providence le faisait leur, ils coururent au devant du beau joug qu'on leur leur offrait, et présentèrent avec joie le col aux agréables chaines qu'on leur préparait”. Quoted in Maurice-Auguste, *Cahiers Lasalliens* 2, 111. The writer is an ecclesiastic, that is to say, someone who we must assume is familiar with the theology of the time in relation to religious life.

the vows of stability, obedience and association. In reality, the vow structure or protocol expressed the real commitment of the community to the Poor and to God. With time, however, and especially with time from the beginning to the end of the 18th century, it happened that the new structure changed from being the expression of the community to being seen as its source and guardian.⁶⁷

From this reversal onwards, the Lasallian Institution jeopardised its future on the maintenance of the protocol, henceforth understood as the basic structure of its identity. Thus, paradoxically, the essence of its specific understanding of consecrated life disappeared. Herein lies the key.

If we recall the striking concept of monastic life proposed by Chrysostom around 380, if we imagine what the Community of the Daughters of Charity of Vincent de Paul was around 1650, or the first Cistercian group of Robert of Molesmes around 1100, or the monks of Columbanus and Boniface in the Saxon lands around 650, or the Sisters

67 Brother Agathon expressed himself this way in his plea to public opinion and to the authorities of the Revolution: “... *ces vœux perpétuels, quoique simples, sont un moyen nécessaire aux frères pour soutenir et propager leur institut, dont la conservation est désirée par tous ses membres. Sans vœux, ils ne pourroient ni compter sur leurs sujets, ni par suite s'obliger à en fournir nulle part; ils ne pourroient même en avoir, parce que personne ne voudroit d'un état qui ne présenteroit aucune perspective ni ressource assurée, en cas de vieillesse et d'infirmité; sans vœux par conséquent ils ne pourroient se conserver. Des vœux annuels produiroient chez eux le même effet que le défaut absolu de vœux*”. *Idée Générale de l'Institut des FEC*, 1790. We quote from the copy corresponding to the town of Angers. See in AMG and Archives Lyon, p.3. Its proximity to Blain's expressions which we have reviewed a couple of notes above is clear.

of the Company of Mary, of Jeanne de Lestonnac, around 1620, or the terrible defeat of her contemporary Mary Ward, around 1640, if we reflect on this apparently heterogeneous set of situations, it will not be difficult to find ourselves faced with the identity of the consecrated life.

We will have arrived at a group of persons and institutions, with a common activity, based on God's call, and perceived by their contemporaries as something out of the ordinary, something inexplicable in itself, a sign of something else or of another world.⁶⁸

In this sense, we can speak of consecrated life by referring to the first community. And we will accept the vow structure because and insofar as it contributes to expressing

68 A theme of great significance in this discourse is that of the 'monasticisation' of the laity, taking up Harnack's expression in his study of the ideal and history of monasticism. He spoke of '*mönchisierung des Laientums*' in his *Das Mönchtum, seine ideale und seine geschichte*, already in 1881. Vauchez takes it up in several of his works on spirituality in the Middle Ages (e.g. expressly in *La lente valorisation de l'état laïque (XII^e-XV^e siècle)*, collaboration in *Structures et dynamiques religieuses dans les sociétés de l'Occident latin (1179-1449)*, Rennes, 2010, pp. 207-217). The expression itself refers to the phenomenon of the derivation of something non-monastic into monastic forms. In this way the monastic is only a means to satisfy the meaning of a life that this other form did not intend to attain its own meaning. It is a situation of juxtaposition or inadequacy that sooner or later explodes in silent exhaustion or transmutes into something for which it was not born. The story of the Sisters of the Visitation of St. F. Chantal and St. F. de Sales has a certain caricature value: they, born to 'visit' the needy, after a moment of undue monasticisation, no longer 'visit' anyone, but 'are visited', and become known as 'Visitandines'.

this profound identity. But we denaturalise everything if, insensibly, we drift from this perspective of essence-expression to one of requirement-commitment.

Even if in that situation we do not speak of ‘religious’ life but of ‘consecrated’ life.⁶⁹

The succession of the three moments in Lasallian history and their inclusion in the context of modernity, which in its turn was to enter into crisis in the middle of the 20th century, makes us understand better the value and the fragility of the alliance between community and vows.

In fact, it was Modernity itself which experienced the three moments we have indicated for this Institution: its preparation from the middle of the 17th century, its fullness between the middle of the 18th and the 19th centuries, and its progressive exhaustion, evident a century later. It is the succession of three stages: definition or proposal, development and results, perplexity and replacement by another model.

They coincide, and it could not be otherwise. That is why the reference to Chrysostom’s *Treatise* is useful: not to do what he did, nor to live as he lived, but to imagine between our past and our future something as different and yet co-

69 It is well to recall here the well-known words of St. Vincent de Paul in one of his talks to the Daughters of Charity: “You will consider that you do not belong to any religion, because none of them goes well with your state...”. And the rest of the paragraph, justifying that statement by proposing another model of cloister, chapel, residence, *Rules* and Superior. It was 24 August 1659 (see in *ES IX*, 1178-1179 / *Cost X*, 661).

inciding as his model and that of today. The text of that great man broadens the horizon of what is possible and leads us to seek formulas in which fidelity and re-foundation make sense in the face of new times.

Thus, from the previous sections of this *Part Two* of our study, we can deduce that the soul of the Consecration is to become a reference to the essence of the Christian Message. It is a matter of articulating a way of life that reflects it, that comes close to it. It has to be a way of life that in some way stands out, attracts attention, does not fit in completely, distinguishes itself from the way of life of the society that receives or can receive the Gospel.

That is what we call, today and always, consecrated life. Or religious life or monastic life.

From there we look at the dedication to the school of the poor and we understand that the ministry or the work of the Lasallian Community consists in living the education of the poor in such a way that its people see in its school not only a foretaste of the Kingdom of God but its very realisation, within the limits of our living the Gospel in space and time. A Sign of something that in itself cannot be seen.

Is it possible to be such a thing today?

The Ministry of the Sign

In reality, what we in Christianity call ‘ministries’ are of two kinds: Animation and Sign.

The ministry of Animation includes all that is necessary for the Christian Community to live in order, to communicate within itself, to identify itself to the outside world, to be sustained by structures capable of receiving the future. It is the ministry that deals with the organisation, the presidency, the doctrine and therefore has different forms.

The ministry of the Sign is of another order: it refers to the special service of persons or groups who live in the midst of others as a reminder that everything is greater, that everything is possible, that there is a time beyond time and a space of another order than this space. It is not primarily about doing but about being. These people and groups are not distinguished by what they do but by the way they do it. It is the ministry of silence, of witness (which we have advanced in the last lines of the presentation of the fourth criterion).

It also has two forms, depending on whether the emphasis is on family life or community life.

Family life is the common level of human relationship and shows this world that the God of Jesus becomes real in the love that unites the members of that family or that friendship. When it is a community not based on love but on a vocation to a commitment, it is not so different: then one is a sign of what unites its members in a project. In both situations one is a sign of something that transcends the usual experience of human beings in living their relationships.

This last 'modality' is the 'ministry' that history has been assigning to hermits, religious, consecrated, or whatever

one wants to call them, with or without vows, with or without life in common. History has done so, of course, but not without seriously offending the other situation, family life, which Paul understood as 'a great mystery': that of 'the union of Christ and his Church', in Ephesians chapter 5.

The days of the *Declaration* - the whole of 1967 and especially its fourth quarter - were a time of great tension in the Chapter. It was precisely because of the two ways of understanding Mission.

Looking back over all that, we can infer today that one or the other conceived the Mission above all as doing, work, commitment. Consequently, it seemed that the definition of the Brother's identity was to be made from/for the Doing and not from his consecrated life. This can still be noticed today when one looks at the overview of that *Declaration* and sees that, between the block of chapters dedicated to three aspects of Mission (second part) and the previous ones, dedicated to Identity (first part), there is not as much of a relationship as one might expect. In fact, there is a significant discrepancy between the two blocks. In this respect, it can be said, we repeat, that the *Declaration* could have done with more time, almost a third session of the Chapter.

Surely it would not have been possible, it is also true. Surely only a few months later, the ideas or approaches would not have changed significantly and we must therefore be content today with the text as it is. There could, yes, have

been a second session in any of the subsequent Chapters from 1993 onwards⁷⁰, but this was not the case.

At its root was perhaps a faulty understanding of the concept of mission. Indeed, when Mission is understood in terms of the educational Organisation, one arrives at a different identity than when Mission and Community are related. In the one case one refers to Work and in the other to Sign. Only the latter is the way to the future.

It is not a question of uselessly logical or mathematical divisions or classifications, of course.

That is why it is perhaps more accurate to say that the Mission, read from the point of view of the educational organisation, is closer to the sphere of Work (without, however, ceasing to be a sign of the way of understanding the life of the members of the organisation). On the other hand, when the Mission is related to the Community, more emphasis is placed on the testimony of what unites the members of this committed Community (without underestimating the aspect of commitment and work).

As we have said, in one case we will speak of the predominance of the Sign; in the other, of the Work.

70 History shows that the usual dimensions of a Chapter today do not allow us to enlarge on the topics from which it presents its proposals. The situation that made it logical to accept a second session in 1966 has been repeated over the last thirty years: it is a step further than the definitions needed sixty years ago. And possibly the failure to do so is one of the reasons for the lack of sufficient clarity and foundation in the orientations coming to the Lasallian Institute today.

And these are not, we insist, chimerical disquisitions, because depending on the approach we adopt, when looking for clues for the future, we will end up asking ourselves: what should our community do or what should it be like. They are not the same question, so their answers do not lead to the same result, nor are they equally adept at pointing to new paths.

What was not taken into account in the days of that *Declaration* was that the Identity or the Consecration of the Brother can be understood from the Mission, as long as the Mission is read from the Consecration of the Community.⁷¹ It is the logical consequence of that discourse of the dimensions, which we pointed out at the time and which the *Rules* have taken on as a scheme or criterion since 1986.

In the Lasallian Community there must always appear the educational work, the commitment, the task. Always. That is what it was born for and that is its condition of fidelity and future. But what was established from the beginning, as we have recalled several times, was not a network of schools but a network of communities to serve the schools. And that changed everything.

In the Mission, 'the school' has to appear, necessarily, whatever the scope of the term in each historical place or moment. But, being the function of a Community or a network of Communities, a new factor appears: that Com-

71 Cf., in *Part One*, speaking of the 1966/67 Chapter, the section *Renewing Awareness*, *Renewing Definitions*, and the reference to Br. Brun's comments (*Renewing*, I. *A Declaration*).

munity and that network of Communities needed to be based on something that transcended the concrete work of each school and each person. Each school and each person, in fact, were what they were because they were part of a Community and a network of Communities.

The Mission of such a Community, as we have recalled above, is to offer its people a school that is a sign of hope. Every school is, or can be, a sign of hope, certainly. But it is like science or thought: if they are possible, it is because life has meaning, that is to say, those who think, know, do or make profitable, are a guarantee of the future, a sign of hope, therefore. Every school.

When we talk about the community school, we also mean about something else. This school presents itself to its people as being animated by a community capable of the best professional gesture because it draws from a source that transcends the empirical. Its professional fecundity or excellence is based on what unites its members, on what makes this school a collective institution.

Association, Yesterday and Today

With this title we can express the profound message of the local chronicles taken into account in this study: their protagonists are speaking of the emergence of a new, unforeseen Lasallian laity. What is more, they see it not as an accident or as a replacement, but as an opportunity. The opportunity.

It is not possible to dream, that is to say, to simply substitute the decrease in the number of Brothers for an ideal illusion. It would seem that for some people everything is solved by welcoming new members into the educational projects. This is something else. We cannot ignore the drama of the extinction of a model of Community, the one based exclusively on Brothers, consecrated in community, celibate. No. This is something that must always be kept in mind, as a question thanks to which the institution continues to live on because of the awareness it awakens.

When we speak of an opportunity, we must think of something else that emerges precisely there, in the exhaustion of the first. And one could certainly apply to this awareness the Gospel comparison of the grain of wheat that dies, but does not die⁷². It is much more than the permanence of the Project when the Brothers disappear.

Because it is possible to consider the situation from the point of view not of death but of life. The emergence of this new laity can be interpreted as evidence that not all people are in the educational projects simply for contractual, employment or economic reasons. Far from it.

We can, first of all, admire the generosity and fruitfulness of a type of person from whom, only forty years ago, nobody in the Lasallian world asked for anything other than

72 Henri Denis' endearing and profound commentary, *Semences* (Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2004), on 'writing for beyond our lifetimes', things that will come true in other generations. He applied it to his words of spiritual guidance or belief in the parish to which he devoted his last years, which he called his 'spiritual testament'.

a few hours in exchange for a work contract. There, in a field that gave no warning of what was to come, there, precisely there, is where this future has happened. It is happening.

We can and must also recognise that this emergency has not been the fruit of the Brothers' sharpness in trying to ensure the relay within the works. This emergence has been part of the new way of being Christian, of the new local churches, of the new sensitivity to transcendence, of the awareness of the possibility of linking life commitment and work commitment. It has been part, in short, of the emergence of a new way of society, in which the ways of living and showing commitment are not the same as they have always been.

And we can, finally, interpret in this way the crucial gestures that have taken place throughout the 20th century in which new forms of religious commitment, both confessional and inter-confessional, Christian and from other cultures, have been taking shape. In all legitimacy.

These are situations recalled in several of the latest Circulars or various messages of the Lasallian General Council and which can be glimpsed in the series of testimonies in the Bulletins of the Institute nos. 250 to 260, in the second half of the decade 2010/20. Before all of them, the readers feel sent back to their own home, to their own land, and examine such and such gestures similar or contrary to those they are reading, perhaps reported from the antipodes of what they know.

This referral to one's own awareness ends up leading the members of the concrete communities to ask themselves about their own identity. And this is already a grace. What we can call the last one, to this day.

Examining one's own identity, in fact, is not reducible to spending a weekend of retreat or spiritual serenity and simply returning to where we were and what we were. It is precisely what impact these sessions have, as if inviting a much deeper examination. That is the space of grace.⁷³

It is to relive the experience of Vaugirard in September 1691, when the Founder gathered all the Brothers together in the face of the great crisis. In his schools, there remained students from the Teachers' School; they, leaving behind all other preoccupations, devoted themselves to examining their personal and institutional journey.

73 As if defining our horizon, in closing some pages on the theology of the vows, J. Angulo states: "The frontiers between the different ways of living the following of Christ are not as clear as we might wish and the Christian life resists being boxed into narrow schemes without, for that reason, any of the forms it acquires losing their validity. Accepting this reality means coming to terms with the uncertain and accepting that we may be dealing with a *'formless way of life'*. Identity *is not defined by contrast* and does not depend on having clear and well-defined contours, but on the awareness of who we are and to what extent the mediations we use are still valid for each one of us for that ultimate purpose we all share: to follow Jesus Christ from the roots of our existence". Janire Angulo, *Los votos: una realidad por repensar*, rev. Vida Nueva n. 3.350 (27.1.2024), centrefold. The italics are ours.

Then and now, there is first of all a clear awareness of what is going off. That same awareness delivers a clearer perception of the very reality of vocational commitment. It shows it as something perceived by those who share it and those who contemplate it, inside and outside the community. In this study it delivers another way of looking at the last century of Lasallian history (and all others like it). It proposes that over and above all the personal situations of permanence or weariness, a new form of believing commitment is emerging.

It is the emergence of these new forms that determines the exhaustion of the previous one, at least of its exclusivity. That is why these new forms are a grace: because they do not speak of death but of life. Just like that autumn in Vaugirard which ended in November with what was later called the Heroic Vow.

This is what Superior Charles Henry was referring to, opening the 1977 General Chapter with the words we have evoked on the first page of this study.

The grace of the New Community

At this almost final moment of our reflection, we see clearly formulated the alternative which has been hinted at from the first page: the new Community is either the development of the previous one or an illusion, that is to say, the continuity of the Lasallian Project or its negation.

In the first possibility, reflection on the new Community would point to the recreation of the previous one, in

an unforeseen process, the fruit of the maturing of what is known. It would be the evangelical image of the buried grain of wheat. In the second, the opposite: all this discourse would be shown as the configuration of something with no more soul than the hopeless will to survive.

In both cases - continuity or exhaustion, between the past and the future of this institution - we will be in a position to interpret its entire history differently. We would be talking about something that was or something that can be.

Indeed, if we consider that the emergence of the new Community means the end of the previous one, we can only hope for its definitive exhaustion and, at the same time, the progressive consolidation of other new forms. These are outcomes in which there is no point in intervening.

But if we consider that the emergence of the new forms is the continuation by transformation of the previous ones, then we will understand the previous ones in a different way. We will understand where its soul has been and we will situate it not in its legal or contextual apparatus but in the coherence of its community with its environment and in the quality of educational relations.

This present helps us to see the whole history of these forms of consecration and apostolic commitment in a different way. It is a present that transforms our vision of the past. It goes without saying that this possibility is sufficient to justify the process of this reflection.

On this side of the alternative, we will understand differently the Brothers' life commitment, the consecration they share.

We will no longer see their Community as a constraining obligation in terms of results (more time, closer to work), an obligation reinforced by their religious profession. Instead, we will understand it as the experience and demonstration of communion with the Spirit of the Lord in the service of the popular school, throughout this time in history that we call Modernity. And this way of living consecration will be what defines his life, not the vows.

We will understand why the canonical structure has been conspicuously insignificant throughout the history of this Institution. And we will better understand its current inaccuracies, as well as the possibility of gradually converting the ways of building the Lasallian community today into criteria.

We will find the paradox that the emergence of the new community will not primarily imply the exhaustion of the previous one, but its evolution and completion⁷⁴, until today. And it will be, without any false consolation, the emergence of a new hope.

74 In the so-called Heroic Vow, in the Lasallian origins, 1691, the time limit given by the three contracting parties is expressed thus: "*jusqu'à l'entière consommation de l'établissement de ladite Société...*". Perhaps it can be interpreted in two ways: '...until the definitive consolidation of...', or '...until the disappearance of...'. Whatever they thought, one way or the other, imagining their spirit from this point of view is very suggestive for the present.

This necessarily leads to a new understanding of vocations or identities within the community. It is a new way that does not imply the disappearance of either of its two main forms, but proposes to each one the need to configure itself by taking into account the existence of the other. This is the other side of God's gift, gift and task.

This is why we must point out a partially mistaken and yet frequent behaviour in these matters: to consider the newer members of these new Communities from the model of the previous ones. The error consists in considering that the main analogue of the new Communities must be the previous model, that of the Brother, which will accommodate the new, but always within certain limits.

The mistake is to insist that the future must adapt to its past.

The Brother, his Community, are the custodians of an institutional memory which they live and which they offer to the new Lasallian forms. This is their meaning. But, faced with such a change of time, it is not the same thing to keep the memory of the origins as to have the model for the future.

If, on the other hand, we consider the present situation as a continuation and new form of what was before, old and new, we will learn to look at past forms in a different way. We will understand that their substance was not in this or that trait but in another, which is precisely what continues to animate the initial project today, centuries later.

We will be opening the doors to a renewed concept of consecration.

The Brother will learn to see himself differently. He will see himself as a lay Christian who adopts the usual institutional expression of the time to share in the apostolic commitment. He will understand the apostolic function of his consecration, not reduced to a system for concentrating resources on the educational work. It will understand that its task is, as it has always been, to show the reality of the greatest simplicity made into an educating community.

The new member of the Community, a lay person, will feel very close the presence of the Founder who contemplates the formulas of Christian commitment today and embarks on the objective of making the Lord present in the popular school. The lay person will understand that their way of life is a continuity of that original consecration, the baptismal consecration, which perhaps had become diluted in time. The lay person will live their baptism under the gaze and expectations of the other inhabitants of their community and their school. The lay person will understand that their task is, as it has always been, to show the presence of God in the love that animates their life.

The new Community leads its former members to understand themselves in a new way. And this is precisely what enables them to constitute the new Community.

Therein lies the novelty and the grace of the Spirit: in conducting this Institution not to forget what it has been and how it has been, but to think of itself in terms of the new constitution of its Community, a child of the new times and of the new evangelisation. The new Community seems

to be a gift that invites us to consider it as one of the pages of the redefinition of consecrated life in the Church.

It leads up to a redefinition of the heritage. It is precisely what all the Circulars and Letters of Lasallian Superiors have been offering for at least twenty years.

The end: A System

The aim of this *Part Two* was to bring together, group together and resolve the main questions raised in the course of our reflection.

Between the three claims there is a process from greater to lesser acceptability.

It is easily acceptable that in the reflection we gather together the major signs or the most striking realities of our journey. The overview or the whole of what we have collected may not be shared, but the claim to do so will be accepted, like that of anyone else who has undertaken a similar journey.

Next, grouping. At first glance, this might not be too complicated. But, as soon as we realise that grouping already involves more than a little interpretation, we find that it is not so easy to accept other people's groupings. Grouping already requires criteria; maybe temporary, but criteria.

Finally, to resolve. If both the collection of signs and their grouping raise really serious questions or issues, then it is by no means easy to accept the proposed solutions. The more the data collection and its organisation become

questions, the more difficult it becomes to accept their proposals.

This is why it is important to show the criteria that deliver both the collection and the grouping of the various signs that appear in the study.

And it is important not to attribute dogmatic value to anything that follows, but to receive it as a possible reflection on all that has gone before. Thus, the final claim of 'solving' should be better understood as 'leading to the solution'. The task of understanding a territory is not easy, nor is the task of imagining paths for it.

To 'solve' the questions that arise from our study is something like specifying the horizon and the direction of the great map that we need to know.

As all scholars in any field know, their spirit is nourished by two ways of looking at the area of their study. On the one hand, there are the general visions, the notions contrasted by other specialists and with a potentially universal scope. On the other hand, there is the specific knowledge and experimentation, the casuistry, the most concrete. Our study tries to take this into account and it is important to state it in these final pages. Today we speak of global and local.

The general image in any science has the task of enabling us to understand the local. This is logical. But in understanding and interpreting the local, the process is reversed or complemented: neither overviews are absolute, nor are local experiences autonomous from the global.

Our study, therefore, tries to formulate above all the scope of global questions: the sacrament of the school, the sign of community, the shared vocation, education and evangelisation, fidelity and transience, etc. However, it does not claim to give them a complete answer. It recognises that the answer must ultimately be local, so that its contribution is above all the precision of the scope of the question.

This was the aim of our study: to reach a common language regarding Lasallian identity.⁷⁵

The community or the universality of that language is not in the guidelines which are derived for the whole Lasallian world. It is in the very formulation of its major questions and in the criteria that have delivered us to them. It is a language to indicate the scope and horizon of the questions to be answered precisely within each territory.

It may seem very little, but it is a lot. We start from something that is accepted everywhere: in life, in religion, in technology, in politics, the questions are common; the answers are complementary. The answers are common in their intention or in their hope and in the area they point to for what is possible. They are not common in the formulation of their answers.

75 At this point, we recall with pleasure the text *Unanimité dans le pluralisme*, which the Taizé Community published in 1966. It is a set of seventy pages, as a complement to *La Règle de Taizé*. Its value lies in its simplicity and depth: if the *Rule* is already simple and profound, this text helps us to realise that the different ways in which it is made visible in the world will live the same spirit. (The Taizé text, *Rule and Unanimity*, was published in several other languages from 1966 onwards).

On that basis a shared future can be built. On the other hand, when the commonality of the issues is rejected or when the issues are interpreted in opposite ways, there is no possibility of sharing any answers. Even if one nominally belongs to the same institutional body that seems to be questioning its identity. When this happens, the institution has lost its future.

The Lasallian Institution as a whole has probably not yet reached this point. It is enough to look at the prospect of the last five General Chapters on these issues. It does not have a common language and therefore can neither understand local initiatives from another territory nor present its own in a meaningful way.

What follows is therefore presented as the possible underground architecture of the common language. Or, in other words, of the possible future.

We proceed in five steps:

- First, we group the six themes of *Part Two* into three axes: we see clearly that each one is configured by its relation to another: **[1.] Three Axes**
- Then we stop at a sort of common denominator, like a constant that is present in all of them: they are always in movement. It is **[2.] A Constant**.
- Thirdly, we configure the system, showing that this internal constant is the soul of the whole: **[3.] The System**

- The fourth step is reserved for a kind of guarantee of all the above: it is necessary to consider oneself as part of a whole in which nobody is anybody's limit. It is **[4:] Limit vs. Border.**
- Lastly, by way of example, we list some concrete derivations of all this: **[5.] Brief operational**

The result is a particularly abstract set, which we accompany with some graphs.

1. Three axes

In the previous process, in the succession of the six constants or criteria, three axes appear. They constitute the basis of the language of identity. They give meaning and content to our words. They are:

- first of all, the one between **History** and the **New Evangelisation**;
- then, between **Vocation** and **Mission**, between Call and Commissioning;
- and finally, between **Interiority and Institution**, between School and Community.

Their combination allows us to detect a meaning in the whole of the diachronic and synchronic visions of the process experienced by the Lasallian Institution throughout this century. The configuration that the whole adopts after its play is the space in which the great questions of the future of the Lasallian Institution can be resolved, especially that of the new configuration of its Community.

The **first**:

It expresses the relationship between the path of history and that of the showing or revelation of the Mystery.

History  Evangelisation

This first axis recalls that in a project such as the Lasallian one, History and Evangelisation are mutually constituted.

In this case, it is the same as in any other. Everything results from the interweaving of two visions: that of each project and that of the dynamics of its environment. History reveals the situations in which its own limitation or its openness to the Mystery that animates it becomes transparent. Evangelisation, for its part, always consists in the expression of this mutual approach of humanity to the mystery and of the mystery to humanity. The school is the mediator of this movement, the bridge or the square where they meet.

Thus, there is neither History without the expression of the Mystery, nor Evangelisation without the dynamics of time⁷⁶. Attention: without this encounter there is no Christian school either.

This means, quite simply, that the expression of what we in Christianity call the Word of God varies or appears in different ways according to the great moments or times of history. It means that, with the passage of time, insensibly, the face of God is modified or incarnated in different social or human ways. And it means that the different and successive historical periods elaborate institutional forms to express this dynamic. Such institutional forms are, by definition, as conjunctural in their expression as they are enduring in their meaning.⁷⁷

76 Below this, the brilliant orientation of W. Pannenberg, interpreting the Protestant theological tradition in the very days of the Council, with his understanding of Revelation as History (*Offenbarung als Geschichte*, Göttingen, 1961).

77 The history of Egyptian monasticism, i.e. the origin of what we call consecrated life, with the different forms it took already in its first centuries, cannot be ignored at this point.

The scope of these themes is evident in the configuration of the Lasallian Institution and, in particular, in that of its Communities: it is a historical institution at the service of evangelisation.

The **second**:

It is constituted by the relationship between Vocation and Mission, that is to say, between calling and sending.

Calling  Commissioning

This set expresses the echo of the appearances of the mystery in society and in people. Thus, when this or that gesture of the culture of an epoch offers clues to the Mystery of life, there arises the awareness of receiving a special call to point it out. And it can occur both in individuals (destitution of any kind) and in society as a whole (cultural mutations, educational needs, etc.).

Vocation responds to a human need, whether individual or collective, as we are insisting. Humanity needs to incarnate or make visible the manifestations of what transcends it and therefore professionalises those who dedicate themselves to this task. It is a constant of humanity, prior to all theorisations on the subject.

In Christianity this call is interpreted as a special way of the presence of the Word of God in the midst of peoples. Vocation is thus the privileged continuity of the presence of Jesus throughout the ages. Vocation makes people ministers of the Gospel, people who by their lives show the places of the manifestation of God.

The relationship of this topic with that of the previous axis is immediately understood: it is the vocational fact that concretely expresses the coherence between the journey of History and the need for Evangelisation. This is why we say that the final meaning of the vocational event is the showing of the Gospel, that is to say, the service to the signs of God that are more especially evident in each time.

Vocation, therefore, in itself does not consist of or leads to do anything but expresses the reality of the God who calls and who is in the heart of persons, peoples and times.

And again, we have to point out what we all see in this matter in relation to the Lasallian Institution: its configuration is based on the call of the God of History, so that its mission consists in showing people that call, in the concrete area of the formation of persons, especially those in whom the Mystery of God is most evident, that is to say, in those in need.

And the **third**:

The interplay of these two axes necessarily leads to the third: the Community and its soul.

School  Community

Indeed: if Evangelisation is to happen in History, if Vocation and Mission emerge from and for this same play, people and institutions need to live in its heart, to be in tune with its source. They must live in the intimate space where History and Gospel (which is the Christian name

for Mystery) meet, where social forms at the service of human transcendence emerge.

That ultimate place is the root of mediation, that is, of the institutional form in which the encounter between the Gospel and History is manifested. Thus, both the spirit of the people and their shared protocols must reflect the modes of this encounter, otherwise the vocation and the mission will be invalidated.

It can happen, unfortunately, that this connection or harmony with the heart of History is lost, so that everything dissolves in appearance, whether it is the Gospel or the Mission. When, on the other hand, such harmony occurs, the whole institution is animated by an astonishing creative capacity. The most excellent professionalism is thus the symptom that the words of the institutional identity are full of life.

There is a guarantee and at the same time a sign that this is the way things are: the shared way of living the vocation. And it is at this point that the correspondence between the Signs of God in History and the quality of the institutional forms of any ministerial community definitely appears.

For at least a century a fundamental step in the human or social model has been becoming evident. It is the path that delivers from reason to relationship. We have recalled it in points 5. and 6.

It helps to see how, at the beginning of our study, in the opening pages of *Part One*, the Lasallian Institution config-

ured its community model on the basis of reason. And it could not be otherwise, since it had to reflect the criteria of all social institutions still at the turn of the century between the 19th and the 20th. Gradually, however, as it became clear in the world that the guiding category for understanding the path of humanity was no longer reason but relationship, the very model of community was quietly being remodelled.

Throughout this process, the progressive emptying of meaning of the inherited form of Lasallian Community was becoming apparent.

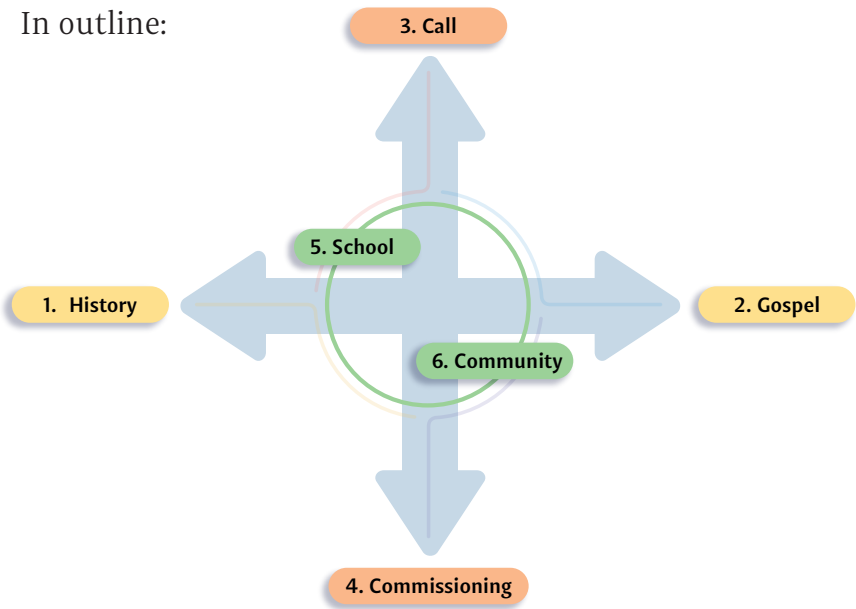
Today it is evident that the whole of society, the whole of humanity, is governed by this criterion. We are by being part of it, that to live is to live together. Thus, in the middle of the last century, in the French Districts, the expression 'educational community' was born and spread throughout the world. As sometimes happens in history, it was a great discovery.

That expression pointed to the need to share the educational project, in such a way as to guarantee the totality of what was being done and at the same time to enable the institution to extend the conventional under the guidance of belonging to a local community.

Thus understood and now expressed in the vocabulary of the previous axes, the community was the face of the Gospel in this new time. And it still is, fifty or seventy years later. It is in it that the whole discourse of our Second Part

becomes real and allows us to interpret all the vicissitudes of the First Part.

In outline:



2. A Constant

It seems understandable, and even evident at times, the relationship between the six criteria, articulating them in the three axes that we propose. But there is more. In this case, there is a structural or functional similarity between all of them.

It is something like a tension within them. It would seem that in each of them there is an balance that can never be either long-lastingly stable or constantly unstable. Depending on how its inhabitants situate themselves within it, they put meaning into terms that other inhabitants are also using, even if they do not exactly coincide with their own.

It is a dialectical tension. Its path between balance and imbalance allows an Institution to feel alive, able to dialogue with the conditions of its environment, in geography and in history.

It all depends on whether each of the topics is lived from inertia or towards meaning.

Let us clarify it: both realities are essential. Both. We need inertia and meaning, just as we need to have a from where and a to where. In no way can we be so simple as to qualify as good what is related to meaning and bad what is related to inertia. No. Institutions, like all living things, need both, in a tension that gives them life. What often happens is that at times or in territories, for whatever reason, one is cultivated over the other.

Then the Institution is exhausted or dies, belonging neither to its land nor to its time.⁷⁸

It has lost its history. It is reduced to a succession of moments, local anecdotes without continuity. It is not. It is only there. In reality, it belongs only to itself. This, in times of social stability, is sometimes not perceived. In times of instability, on the other hand, it becomes all the more evident the greater the social novelty. It is when institutions disappear or recreate themselves, when they feel their history or when they find they have none. It is the path from a hundred years ago to today.

Basically, it is what goes from the Bull of 1725 to the days of its tercentenary.

And it is logical, because dialectics means fundamentally that forms are never definitive, operationally speaking. Such 'forms' are conceptual or verbal (they constitute doctrinal discourse) and structural (they constitute institutional discourse). As history shows, in changes of historical cycle, society must reject everything that, because of its rigidity, prevents access to the new conditions of life. This is the horizon of the so-called technical and adaptive challenges, repeatedly cited in this study.

78 *'Être de son temps et de son pays'*: we take the expression from the formidable Circular of Br. Irlide, 6.1.1881, already quoted. He appropriated what could at the time have been a reproach from society to the Lasallian school; he took it up and proposed it as a model, a reference, a watchword.

We can see it in the three axes of this system, as we have just presented them and made them visible in the graph.

First of all, if we begin by examining the way history is experienced, we find that everything oscillates between two sides or poles: on the one hand, insignificance, inertia and repetition, on the other hand, causalities and cycles. It is immediately clear that every institution must constantly examine its own way of perceiving history, the general history of peoples. In this way, it understands itself in terms of a moment and a local situation, which it has to live in dialogue with the permanent and processual aspects of history.

This is how the relationship of the Lasallian Institution with the social administration of education appears, putting concrete faces on it.

Everything comes, as we know and must be recognised on all sides, from the fact that the Lasallian Project existed in society at least a century before the constitution of the Public Administration in force until today. At the beginning of the 19th century, when the Administration appeared, the Project was integrated into it and took on the specific function of experimentation and responsible alternatives. And the Administration accepts it within this approach.

The scope of the subject is clear in the configuration of each of its projects at this juncture in the first half of the 21st century.

Correlatively, in the case of the New Evangelisation, it is immediately clear that everything depends on whether the reality of God is in fact conceived on the margins or within the life and history of peoples. It all depends on whether we understand the Incarnation of God, to use a strictly Christian term. Whether we understand ourselves as the face of God, his children, his presence and his Word, or whether we isolate certain words of his beyond the concrete life of peoples. It is, once again, the difficult balance between the immeasurability of God, permanent, and each of his Words or signs, as we understand him in his Son Jesus, son of a woman.

Surely the best example of this theme is that of the different ways in which the Second Vatican Council arrived in the different areas of the Lasallian world. Key in its initiation and its development was the sensitivity contained in the expression 'Signs of the times': the difference in the ways in which the theme was received according to the Lasallian territories is evident, with the expected consequences in the configuration of their local projects.

Secondly and consequently, our understanding of Vocation will take place between the same extremes or poles. In this case everything will depend on how we situate ourselves between our enthusiasm to respond and our understanding that this same response is placed in our hearts by our environment. It is the Mystery of God, made person in us and in our environment, that shows itself and dialogues with itself within us: that dialogue is Vocation. That is why vocation always oscillates between the call and the initiative, our own or shared.

It is understandable in this case, as we have seen in this study, that times of change are not easy in terms of a balanced living of the theme. It is understandable, in such times, that the need to get involved in the recreation of forms blurs the transcendent component of the call. Thus the resulting operation may obey more to the forces of each person or project than to the call of God which locates the source of resources in another universe.

It is clear how this will affect attitudes to the maintenance and renewal of institutional forms in each project.

If we look at the meaning of Vocation, i.e. Mission, we find it again: this time it is the emphasis on what is commanded to be done or what is done. It is something much more clearly said than lived. In fact, in life it is impossible, without abandoning one's responsibility, to renounce one's own initiative. So, in cultivating it, as one is obliged to do, it is sometimes very difficult to understand to whom one responds with it. That is to say, the examination of fidelity in what one does: whether one is faithful to one's own will or to the will of the one who sends.

The same happens on the other side of the mission, that is, in the intimate ceremony where initiative, effort, resilience, dedication and creativity emerge. Here the tension or dialectic is between contemplation and action, between communion with reality and the effort to transform it. It is understandable that often, especially in the face of urgency driven by need or greed, institutions are guided more by the one than by the other. And it is understandable that on occasions they reach the point of no return

to error when the institutional interest itself is lived as loyalty to the society served.

This is our third axis. With it we recall how in recent years – and one only has to leaf through the latest circulars of the Superiors to see this – the emphasis on interiority, on silence, perhaps even on contemplation, has been strongly emphasised. It is a sign of how this Institution finds itself somewhat uncomfortable in a discourse which is received as if it only emphasised the operational. Corresponding in this to the movements of social renewal, such Lasallian texts or proposals reflect what is happening in the world, with the call to recollection and examination in the face of the ravages of globalisation.⁷⁹

That is why in the Community lies the final touchstone, the definitive criterion for all of the above. In this case, everything depends on how the tensions between organisation and community, belonging and effectiveness are experienced at any given moment, at the closest level. The perception of all the other factors of this system will depend on how the daily relationship within the local project is experienced. This is why we affirm that the way community is lived is the definitive criterion for how all the other factors are perceived, from history to mission. This cannot be surprising.

79 For a century it has been like a refrain periodically repeated by social analysts: the reduction of the scope or value of words and institutions to what is operational or immediately comprehensible. It is an abundant literature, in all languages and in all cultures. By way of example, in recent years, we cite the work of Byung-Chul Han, in particular his recent *Vita Contemplativa*, Berlin, 2022.

If, as a background to these last statements, we project the dynamics of the last century of Modernity in terms of social institutions, we will find all this strongly reinforced.

As we have pointed out time and again, the movement from Community to Organisation, now understood as major social categories, is the general context of what is happening to Institutions such as the Lasallian one. All of them, in fact, born in times of Christianity or at least in very expressly Christian wills, need to assume that this great reference has disappeared not only from their environment, but also from their interior, if we can speak in this way.

‘Its interior’ means the concrete configuration of the community in response to or in relation to the social environment that receives its presence and its mission. Logically, this configuration needs to be modified or at least to be aware that, if it does not do so, it continues to present itself as something that responds to the times when society was more of a Community than an Organisation. And that, therefore, its entire identity discourse is juxtaposed to the social discourse.

In the end, it turns out that awareness of the dialectic of life is the key to the future reaching the institutions: it is the symptom that the Community knows that it is animated by something greater than itself. If one looks at it carefully, there is no great novelty in this either: for more than half a century in the Lasallian Institution the term ‘itinerary’ has been a place of honour.

It expresses precisely this tension, made fidelity.

3. The system

This way of interpreting the steps of our *Part Two* shows that among the six there is a dynamic that can constitute them into a System. Such a System, if we really find it, must contain sufficient orientation with regard to the present and the future of our Institution.

The dynamic is shown by the fact that, while there is a first axis and a second and a third, the process is not limited to the second being deduced from the first and the third from the second. The same can be said of the six sections as a whole. In reality, each one is concretised in the next, so that the next is the visible face or reality of the previous one. Thus, Evangelisation, for example, is made visible successively in the Call and in the Community. The third axis, likewise, concretises the interplay between History and the Gospel.

And we note that between all of them there is not a successive but a multiple circular or reciprocal dynamic. It is like a whole that makes the interpretation of each of its moments both richer and more difficult. Rather than circular, however, we should speak of a 'spiral', which is what becomes an inner circle when it is traversed by time, history, fidelity, that is to say, as it constitutes the itinerary, personal or institutional.

In fact, this special circularity is animated by the dialectic between inertia and meaning, insofar as this dialectic is the way of perceiving and responding to all the stimuli of life. It is like the blood of life or the spirit of institutions, in all their dimensions. And it is the reason why we speak of

systemic visions, in anthropology as in the social sciences. Perhaps even in the theological consideration of reality.

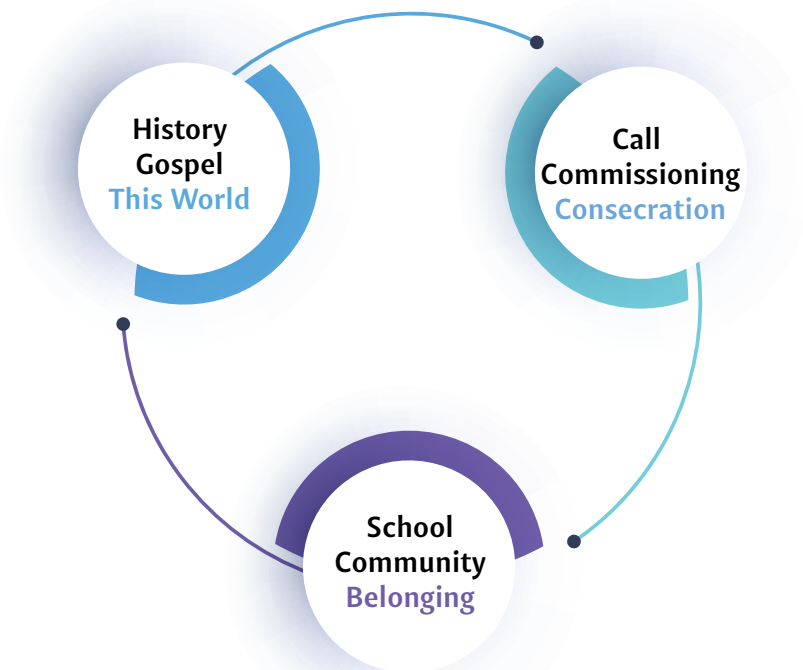
Therefore, if in these reflections we could speak of before and after or first and second, we would say that everything begins with the double awareness of the Mystery of History and of the Gospel. Then, in response, the institutions that make it visible take shape. It seems logical. And in doing so, in expressing in this way the flow of life that circulates among the six concepts we have shown in *Part Two* of the study, we immediately realise that when we reach the sixth step we are back at the first. Only now we find ourselves considering reality with a depth that we did not have before.

It is better understood if we dare to express each of the three axes in a single concept, as if we were reducing the six concepts of our reflection to three. In doing so, after the above reasoning, the depth and the task that is contained in each of them is better perceived. At the same time, one understands the loss that a non-dialectical consideration of such terms entails.

It would be something like this:

- the first axis, which groups together History and Gospel, could be called **This World**;
- the second, which groups Call and Commissioning, could be called **Consecration**;
- and the third, which groups School and Community, could be called **Belonging**.

‘This world’, ‘Consecration’, ‘Belonging’: it is, again, very clear its proximity to the system that in the Lasallian Institution appeared in the Chapter of 1966-67. Then it was Consecration, Community, Mission (in recent years it has become ‘faith, service, community’). And so it remains in the latest version of the *Rule of Life* of the Lasallian community. Now we find it again and, we insist, it is not because we have insisted that it should appear.



It seems to be clear that Consecration is to be understood as the set Call-Transparency of God. Likewise, that Community corresponds to the School-Community set. And that the relationship between the Gospel and History is the horizon of the Mission.

Therefore, 'This world', 'Consecration' and 'Belonging' as we relate them, are clearly concepts of circular, reciprocal meaning.

'Consecration', for example. It arises from a belonging and leads to growing in it, at a given time and in a given space. The Call does not only come from outside each person, but directs that person into his or her environment, as if he or she had to return it or become its echo and should make it resonate where it seemed to have been born.

'This world', likewise, is not something that is over there, moved by inertial forces, like a gigantic automatism that only responds to its laws. To speak of 'this world' is to refer to something specific to the one who speaks, who for his part contributes to shaping it and lives by responding consciously or unconsciously to the dynamics that call to them from outside themselves. Each person both receives and constructs 'this world'. Each person inscribes himself/herself in the processes he or she encounters and dialogues with them, in such a way that over the centuries it is seen that he/she has grasped the possibilities suggested by an inertia that seemed autonomous but turned out to need to be taken part in.

Take part or 'Belonging', in short, encompasses everything else, gives it meaning. It is the category (if we can use this

term) par excellence, the mother space of all others. It expresses the unity of everything, the mysterious unity of time and space in which both are superseded. That is why from the beginning the major signs of humanity are diverse forms of belonging: language, operate, thought, organisation, religion, kinship, morality, aesthetics...

This way of considering the three axes, or the six steps above, takes us to the realisation that their respective definitions are like an endless dialogue.

And this may be precisely their greatest contribution to the development of our institutions. Conceived this way, these three definitions place us before a radically new future with respect to the imaginaries of three centuries ago. They represent a change in the model. They first expressed the life of organisations conceived according to rational models in the service of the Gospel and against poverty in this society. In the course of this century, as we see in our study, we have moved on to relational models, also in the service of the Gospel and against poverty.

It is a new whole in which the Institution - its organisation chart and its creed - is defined not by its sufficiency but by its belonging. This is the change.

We are already living it.

It is like that, even if we must recognise that we often live it in juxtaposition with a creed and an organisational chart that we imagine differently from the way they really are. We are not shocked or disheartened because, as shocking as it may seem, this is not a new situation.

This distance between the everyday and the theoretical is something that all institutions experience at one time or another in their history. Their identity discourse is not enough to say who they are, but they repeat it as if it did. If they do not disappear in this schizophrenia, it is because they are unconscious, that is to say, unreflected. With the passage of time, the discomfort it provokes modifies both the discourse and the organisational charts.

Two examples: professing flight from this world and living for the betterment of this world; or, again, the path of the last ten General Chapters. They do not require comment.

4. Limit vs. Border

A final word on the nature of criteria and models in this discourse.

From the beginning, we have tried to understand, that is to say, to embrace the scope of the term ‘Lasallian Community’. We have sought to define it, to set limits to it (that is what ‘define’ means). Well, now that we have finished, we can say that no, we do not set limits either to ‘community’ or to any of the terms related to it. The process of reflection has been delivering us, insensibly, to replace the term ‘limit’ with that of ‘border’.⁸⁰

We understand that this oscillation is the best reflection of our study as a whole.

Throughout *Part Two* we have sought to take into account first and foremost the dynamics of the history of the Lasallian Institution over the last century. It has examined or at least evoked various moments in its itinerary, trying to find, beneath the anecdotes, the paths of history, the evolution of social forms.

We have also tried to take into account the various local histories in which new forms of Lasallian Community have emerged over the last few generations. We have evoked people, processes, places, rhythms, and respectfully pointed out the questions which arise in different situations.

80 We have pointed out this topic in the commentary on our second criterion, *The New Evangelisation*.

We have tried to make these sensations concrete in an outline of a system, with the succession of the six places of reflection in *Part Two*. And we have always encountered the problem of limits, i.e. the difficulty of accommodating inherited forms to new situations.

That is why now, on this almost last page, we present a change of vocabulary. We propose to consider everything not from the limits of something but from its borders.⁸¹

‘Limit’ is a concept to indicate how far one can go, which is at the same time the moment beyond which one cannot go. ‘Border’, on the other hand, only initially seems to say the same thing. The border says how far one goes, but adds that where one ends, another reality begins. It is an unknown reality, or at least not one’s own, but a reality.

The border indicates that there is something on the other side. For the border on the other side there is nothing. The border invites to think about whether or not there will be a way to contact the other side, the other entity or reality. The border cannot do so because it understands that beyond its own reality there is no other reality.

81 From Wittgenstein, especially in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, we take the term ‘limit’. From Trías, present throughout his work, the term ‘border’ (see, for example, *City over city*). However, the interpretation of the relationship between the two concepts, as presented in these pages, is our own. It is the perspective from which *Palabras como pájaros, reflexiones sobre la nueva comunidad de las escuelas cristianas* is written: the same reality can have different names, like hypothetical birds going from one territory to another (Eds. SPX, Madrid, 2006).

The limit represents the mood of a vision of reality from its comprehensibility. That is why in this vision it is necessary to clarify with precision the different 'areas' of reality. This is the only way to move between them, to organise them and to make them profitable. This is the security provided by limits, because within them everything must be clear and comprehensible. On the other hand, when life is seen from the point of view of borders, one does not always live comfortably. The existence of borders, in fact, speaks of something by definition unattainable or transcendent on this side of the border. The border thus delivers hope or despair rather than comfort, depending on whether it is seen as permeable or not.

Employing a distinction that we have already mentioned in this study, 'limit' is an organisational concept; 'border' refers or can refer to Community.

Indeed, 'community' means a set of permeable boundaries, at once maintained and at the same time disappearing. Each member of a community is a person, responsible, capable of initiative; and at the same time, he or she is part of others, which enable him or her to exercise responsibility and are the main destination of his or her responsibility. Each person is what he or she is precisely because he or she belongs to one or more others. Belonging produces both the singular and the plural of verbs.

From this point of view, it becomes immediately clear that, depending on which term is accepted, the understanding of the Lasallian Community is quite different. In each perspective, words and gestures have a different scope. So different that in reality it is only from the vocab-

ulary of the frontier that we can speak of the passage from one community to another.

It is thus understood how, throughout the reflection of this study, we have been proposing the conversion of the limit into a border.

This study is based on the conviction that, in parallel to the passage from reason to relation, characteristic of the end of Modernity, there has been in our institutions the conversion of the limits themselves as frontiers. Assuming this double conversion - historical and intimate - is the condition for the future.

There always remains, however, the great question of by virtue of what we can propose this step. Or specifically, by virtue of what can such a conversion of the models of Consecration and Community Life be proposed? There is an answer, as is also evident: in the Lord there are no limits or boundaries, because we are in Him.

We need to feel the scope of the question, that is to say, to accept the force with which it arises in all Lasallian places: it is one thing for the discourse to sound pleasant and another for it to be true.

We cannot in fact denaturalise the inherited community by accepting a false way out, a substitute (*ersatz*, substitute, as they used to say in psychoanalysis). We are talking about institutions as venerable, well-founded, fruitful and long-standing as the various forms of consecrated life. It may sound like an insult, an offence, to get rid of all this with the joyful distinction of our conversion of the boundary into a frontier.

Quite the contrary: we need persons and groups capable of taking on the conjuncture of the New Evangelisation, aware that the Lord continues today to act out what John Baptist de La Salle indicated in his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* about the actuality of God's Providence and the presence of Jesus in this community.

And it is not going to be easy. Quite simply: it is not easy at all to assume, here and now, the role of founders of this Community.

From this response we can review the theses or principles derived from the three axes, as we have interpreted them above: then we will find their true scope. They do not paint a comfortable picture, but they do underpin the hope they offer.

In situations such as the one in which the Lasallian Community is living today, different ways of being or different places to be appear. In the light of the discourse on limits and borders, it is clear that it is not a question of being one thing or another, of being in one place or another. It is not a matter of being something rather than something else, nor of being in one place rather than another. It is much more judicious to be in one's own place and in one's own being, bearing in mind that there are others, other places and other beings.

This is how we live what we are... from the perspective of others, that is, from the perspective of the whole. And then the seed of the future emerges everywhere and little by little.

5. Brief operative, by way of example

On the basis of this approach, and with the necessary critical caution required in this type of study, we can now propose a series of avenues for the better operationalisation of the previous discourse.

It is a task which is directly related to any programming or orientation effort within the Lasallian Community. It is, for example, the interpretation which underlies the internal Code of life in the Brothers' community, their *Rule*, as it has been structured since 1986. We have already pointed this out several times.

At the time we noted how, since that date, the *Rule* of the Brothers' life has been structured around the three dimensions of their identity (consecration, community, mission): all three have provided the System from which to interpret the possible reality and have been reflected in the successive revisions that have taken place since then. When, finally, the Chapter of 2014 received the proposed text drawn up by the corresponding Commission in 2012, it again took up this systematic perspective and structured its reflection from the approach we are proposing.

The Commission, the Chapter and the General Council followed the same path as this study: they took on a system and tried to see how it could be made operational. They understood that each of the dimensions of the Lasallian community was indebted to the others and from there they formulated the code of community life.

In the last of the sections of our *Part One* we commented on the results of that work, which were so suggestive. For this reason, this study, after a similar reflection, but without the concern of arriving at any code of life, but rather by diving into its foundations, proposes the following clues.

They are something halfway between the System itself and the operative articulation. They express the criteria or principles that derive from the axes of the system and enunciate the principles that underlie the articulation.

Thus, between the guiding system, which is perceived in a more reasoned way, and the concrete protocols, which have to be formulated especially in each place, there is not only a bridge between the two extremes, but also a space that delivers other new or different concretisations.

These tracks can also help us to see both the value and the weaknesses of what the Lasallian community is proposing. It is, in any case, an indispensable moment, which conditions the believing value of the possible operative.

From the first axis, 'signs of the times'/New Evangelisation, we find:

- **living everything in pluriformity and harmony:** simultaneously attending to the dynamics of the sector or territory and those of the whole, so that difference is lived within a single global vision;
 - this makes it possible to reach at proposals that are comprehensible in all territories;

- **to be configured according to the specific environment**, so that everything is done on the basis of local belonging, always within the general vision of History;
 - this allows the ultimate guarantee: fidelity and realism;
- **to be preferably configured according to the marginalisations** within the specific territory, that is, from the social spaces (personal or sectorial) in which the lack is most manifest and the ‘signs of the times’ are clearest;
 - this makes it possible to be always in contact with the limits of the cultural models proposed to society.

From the second axis, the Call and the Mission:

- **God is the first agent of consecration:** He consecrates and offers the capacity to respond to Him;
 - this allows us to base and orient the Lasallian Project on coordinates that transcend all measurable results;
- **the synthesis of spirit of faith/spirit of zeal is always indispensable**, and even more so in times of historical change, so that fidelity to consecration is not reduced to a commitment without transcendence;
 - this allows for a profoundly rewarding and fruitful vision of reality;

- **the Community is the first depository of the Lasallian Call and the Lasallian Mission:** it is its task to accompany and enlighten the journey of its members;
 - this makes it possible to guarantee the definitive criterion of vocational commitment.

From the third axis, Interiority and Institutionalisation:

- **The fundamental criterion that shapes the Community is its nature as a Sign of God:** this is the basis for distinguishing between the meaning and the form of the bonds in our context of the New Evangelisation;
 - this makes it possible to approach the theology of consecration in a new way;
- **at this moment in history, it is the primary task of the Community to care for the formation of its members in fidelity,** that is to say, the continuous enrichment of conscience, overcoming any mimicry or even domestication;
 - this makes it possible to relate Community and Formation, underlining their aspect of permanence and self-understanding.

**History and
Evangelisation:**

- Live everything from Pluriformity and Harmony
- Be configured according to a specific territory within the network as a whole.
- Be configured according to the margins

**Call and
Mission:**

- God, the primary agent of consecration.
- The Community, its primary repository
- The synthesis of spirit of faith/spirit of zeal

**Interiority and
Institution:**

- The Community is defined as a sign of God
- Formation in fidelity

A remark: these principles or theses are not the only ones that can be derived from the keys of our system. Very probably, when reflection has led someone to relate these paragraphs to a situation that is very close to him or her, a new formulation will be born in his or her conscience. They will also probably find that they do not merely reflect one of the axes, but take part in the others.

Just like the drafters of the *Rule* of 2015, which we discussed in the last section of *Part One*.⁸²

82 Cf. *Part One*, 3. *Refounding*, 3. 2015: a necessary revision.

Epilogue: Three centuries later

...the ‘vagrant birds’. These are birds that don’t follow the usual migratory routes. Some people refer to these birds as those who accidentally lost their way. But in biology, vagrant birds have a very special role. They extend the known spaces for food and other essential benefits, reaching beyond what is known to the flock. This is a very important element in ensuring the sustainability of the species. They may be called wayward birds, but they are also essential to ensure long-term survival.

2022. *General Chapter. Final message.*⁸³

Three centuries after that Bull we are perhaps in a better position than its contemporaries to interpret what was approved.

83 Final words of the Message of the General Council in the Circular on the General Chapter of 2022 of the same year. Circular 478.

At the time it was accepted and confirmed, obviously, but we can ask ourselves if it was expressed in a language that responded to the present that the community was living. From what we have been experiencing in the last century of Lasallian history, we can indeed think that the expression responded to another context, as was the medieval context compared to the modern one.

Perhaps the Bull was using 13th century language to describe what was being established in the 18th century.

And perhaps this was because the theological language of the early 18th century in many circles was still that of the 13th century. So that when that language showed its limitations, the whole theology expressed with its help began to enter into crisis. This crisis has been the hidden protagonist of our study.

This is why we say that looking at the Bull from our present – the 21st – can allow us to affirm that its value and its possible limitation can be better appreciated: it recognised the value and the novelty of what it approved and at the same time it dressed it in a garment that could end up drowning it. Its three-century history begs the question, to say the least.

It seems logical to affirm that the Bull placed the new institution in a framework fixed since Trent. It could not have been otherwise. That is why we must ask ourselves whether that framework responded to the exhaustion of one model or the birth of another. And so we must assess its intention as well as its form.

The study that we conclude with this Epilogue allows us to advance an answer.

Today it seems to us that such framework was configured from the equivalence consecration = escape from the world, that is to say, from the lesser appreciation of the life of society in general. It was understandable, given the inheritance received from the late Middle Ages and the accumulation of errors and successes of the European 16th century. Thus, by emphasising the specificity and goodness of one way of life, it was emphasising its opposition to another, not its own identity. This was to be an almost fatal deficit for the centuries to come.

This perspective is crucial for the present and the immediate future.

Today we can affirm that this opposition produced two negative effects, although at the time it was not seen as such. First, it placed one of the opposites below the other, according to their greater or lesser proximity to the life of society. Secondly, in the case of one of the two, it delivered their manifestations as ends in themselves. This second effect expresses the function assumed by the vows, specifically the so-called triad.

Well, when the Brothers applied for Roman recognition, they were not thinking of the triad. We know that they included it at the suggestion of others, in order to facilitate what they were seeking. And that they did so, as was typical of their time, from a faulty understanding of its meaning.

Three centuries later, if we succeed in overcoming the corset of that triad in this way and look at the petitioning community, we will surely find that ‘religious’ consecration is not specified by the vows but by something else. For the Bull will have made us aware of an undue or abusive equivalence between the ministry of that community and the triad.

The Bull gives us a glimpse of the surprising way of life of those thus ‘consecrated’. It is the definitive symptom: they were and are surprising, then and now. They surprised by the shocking nature of their behaviour, by the disproportionate nature of their commitments, by their capacity to go beyond all that was reasonable or understandable. First moment, the surprise.

If we come to see it, we will be defining the so-called ‘consecrated life’ by its Sign value. Because they did believe themselves to be ‘consecrated’. Second moment, suspicion: what could be behind it.

This is an appropriate equivalence: that between the surprise and the evocation of its cause or its root, that is, between the simple life of that community and the exceptional Sign of God that their schools constituted. With the Bull we will have found that the sign, or the Sign, always springs from the disproportionate nature of the bond that unites a person or group of persons with those to whom they minister, to whom they think, to whom they belong, for whom they are devoted. This was, this is, the community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Third moment, astonishment.

Surprise, suspicion, astonishment: that is why we can say that the Community consecrated them, consecrate them.

To unite Community and Consecration in this way means that we give to the Community the role that in Sacred Scripture is attributed to God, who anoints or consecrates the Son. He sends him to his people and to the world to be their witness. He makes the Anointed One his Messiah, his Sign of Salvation for the peoples. It is exactly the Community, its ultimate definition.

In it we find that the link is the source of the Sign. Simply: because there is no reason - human reason, it is understood - for such a bond. Only faith in being a response to God's eternal plan, only that faith is capable of maintaining that bond, whereby it becomes a Sign.

It is a very natural process. As we say, it begins with surprise at the abnormality of the way of life; it continues with the justification of that abnormality by faith in a God who calls and lives in those who believe themselves called to that life; and it concludes with the conversion of that group into a living Sign of the exceptional nature of God. And all this in the midst of a secular activity, in the midst of which there was room for people identified by their shared commitment and not by anything else. That had been the way of life of the applicants for Roman recognition in 1725. Precisely that.

But in 1725 the Bull could not have expressed itself in this way.

In 2025, three centuries later, in view of the itinerary of the last hundred years of this Institution, we can accept that its language today would be different. That is why we say that, if we succeed in reading it from this point of view, that is, translating it from these days of ours, then the Bull sounds differently. And both it and the Letters Patent come to seem like very vivid documents. They help to bear witness to an intensely creative moment. With them a new way of living the baptismal consecration was born.

We do not know if they perceived it in this way. Surely their founder did, and this would explain his lack of commitment to achieve that recognition. Surely he realised that they were creating something that did not exist and needed a new name. But he didn't know it either, so he thought it best to leave it all in a kind of no time.

It is time to look at these three centuries and pick up the name they are telling us. Our task is to imagine what eighteen articles we would present today in order to obtain a new Bull that would express what the first one intended.

At the last General Chapter there were perhaps as many new versions for those eighteen as there were capitulants. Their disparity, however, may have been more apparent than real: it all depended on their awareness of the roots of the Lasallian present.

Studies like this one could help to blur the former and grow in the latter.

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