

# CREATIVITY: THE HALLMARK OF LASALLIAN EDUCATION

## Introduction

The word 'creativity' would not have been a word used or easily understood in 1680 by Canon John Baptist de La Salle, Adrien Nyel and the fourteen year old pupil-teacher Christophe who opened the school at Saint-Maurice in Rheims in France 331 years ago. They were simply transplanting a kind of school for poor boys that had been successful in the city of Rouen. 39 years later, however, when De La Salle died in 1719, this little group of just 100 teachers had already 'created' a new kind of school, not simply replicated in every continent today, but rather **inculturated** according to foundation principles enshrined in the Brothers' Rule of 1717 and the 1720 classic text of western education we know as *The Conduct of Schools*.<sup>1</sup>

It is important not to overlook the fundamental creativity which led De La Salle, priest and canon, by a series of commitments to the foundation of the Brothers as a group of laymen, a community, a society and finally an Institute approved by the Church. Here is the proto-type of all teaching brotherhoods which, in the mid-nineteenth century, became the fastest growing movement in the Catholic Church. For over three centuries this group has twice come close to obliteration in the country of its birth but exists today in over 80 countries. We need to ask, therefore, what were the foundation principles that have enabled the brotherhood to continue with such vitality for so long? What is there about the successful application of these foundation principles in many different countries and cultures in over 80 countries of today's world that has enabled them to transcend such basic differences and divisions as race, gender, language and religions?

We have access to over 50,000 pages of a 10 volume history of the Brothers of the Christian Schools<sup>2</sup> written over 20 years by Georges Rigault, a member of the French academy, that takes us from 1651, the birth of John Baptist de La Salle, to 1928. We have in addition books, articles and extensive archives in the different languages in which Brothers have taught. The challenge presented by the title is to avoid becoming lost in the detail and failing to trace the consistent attitudes and application of principles that account for the continuing existence and creativity of this Lasallian movement today.

## Foundation principles

De La Salle's writings leave us in no doubt that he saw his Institute as important in answering the needs of the children of the working class and the poor in the developing cities and towns when the parents of such boys were unable to do so because of their own lack of education, their poverty and their daily need to work to stay alive and try to provide for their families. The education offered therefore had to be completely **gratuitous**.<sup>3</sup> As a priest, De La Salle, like his saintly predecessors and

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<sup>1</sup>Circulated first as a manuscript after 1706 and printed, after revision, in 1720.

<sup>2</sup> Rigault, Georges L'histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes

<sup>3</sup> "The Brothers will teach gratuitously" (Rule of 1705, Ch.7. 1b)

contemporaries, Vincent de Paul, Francis de Sales and Jean Jacques Olier, was concerned at the overall ignorance and religious indifference of the poor, but his life's work was to balance two leading ideas: from a theological point of view, God wished everyone to achieve salvation by coming to know and appreciate their dignity as Christians in practising their religion; from a practical point of view the children of "artisans and the poor" needed to receive an education that enabled them to contribute by their work in the new kind of commercial society developing in towns and cities throughout France. The school was to be open to all. It was through the particular kind of school he developed that De La Salle saw that both the theological and the educational question could be answered at the same time through his "Christian school." Thus we find De La Salle reminding his first Brothers that "being with the children from morning until night they may teach them those things that are necessary to lead a good life"<sup>4</sup>, but this is not simply an empty assurance about the Christian belief in an after-life, for he also directs his Brothers to remind any parents who intend to take their children from school for some temporary benefit not to do so, for "however limited the child's intelligence, the child who has learned to read and write, will be capable of doing anything."<sup>5</sup>

This principle of "answering needs" finds a particular focus in the work that was subsequently developed after 1709 at Saint Yon. Here, at the request of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of Rouen, De La Salle and his Brothers were confronted first of all with looking after delinquent boys, and then with being responsible for the care of men, contained and detained indefinitely through the infamous system of *lettres de cachet*. This concern for the 'delinquents' and 'outcasts' at Saint Yon was to become a model for similar kinds of works throughout the history of the Institute to the present day.

The three foundation principles, applied mainly through the Institute's insistence on complete gratuity in 'schools' in the broadest sense, can therefore be set out as follows:

Try to answer the needs – physical, spiritual and intellectual – of each particular group by creating a relationship of being 'older brother' to them;

By being open to all who wished to come, try to help each member of the group to acquire literacy, numeracy, manners and the skills (e.g. writing) needed to obtain and develop employment in a particular society;

Try to find ways of helping those who, for one reason or another, have become 'outcasts' in their society.

The history from 1680 to the present day falls naturally into three 'centuries':

From 1680 to the suppression of the Institute in 1792 during the French Revolution;

The restoration of the Institute in France in 1805 under Napoleon until 1905 when the application of the secularisation laws in France forced the Institute into exile in Belgium;

Since 1905 the widespread development of the Institute around the world to the present day where the Lasallian works originally established by the Brothers are maintained largely by men and women who are not members of the Institute.

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<sup>4</sup> Rule 1705, No.3

<sup>5</sup> The Conduct of School, Absences p.161

These three ‘centuries’ will each be considered from the perspective of ‘innovation’ and ‘creativity.’

## THE FIRST CENTURY: 1680-1792

Rather than try to set a detailed list of everything achieved in this period when the 100 Brothers of 1719 at the death of De La Salle became some 800 or more with about 100 novices added each year as Brother Agathon testified before the revolutionary tribunal, we can better appreciate the creativity of the Brothers by a comparative table of **before** and **after**.

Besides the obvious improvements shown by the table, however, there are some particular aspects of ‘answering needs’ in Paris and in other cities with particular needs that deserve to be mentioned:

- Developing the ‘simultaneous’ method of education to replace individual instruction;
- The setting up of a ‘breakfast’ session at the beginning of each day because children were coming to school hungry;
- The emphasis on correct pronunciation of the recently standardised French language, correct spelling and training in politeness and good manners;
- The opening in 1698 of Sunday evening schools for young adults in Paris;
- The teaching of elementary navigation in Calais to the children of sailors;
- The development of boarding schools and the care of delinquents on the Saint Yon model;
- The foundation of Saint Yon at the request of parents, as a boarding school with special attention to teaching commercial methods;
- In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the teaching of modern languages, Spanish and Italian in Marseille and of English in Rouen;
- Teaching commercial principles and book-keeping in the seven boarding schools;
- The withdrawing of some experienced teachers from schools and the setting up at Maréville of a ‘scholasticate’ in order to deepen the training of Brothers who were to teach new material to the older pupils in the boarding schools.

BEFORE 1680	BY 1792
Teaching was mainly individual	Simultaneous method of teaching was used
Literacy began with Latin	Teaching was entirely in French
Teachers were not trained	Teachers were trained & supervised
Teaching writing was controlled by a guild	A particular style of handwriting was taught
The poor and the better-off were seated separately	Pupils took places according to their placing after the last monthly test
Corporal punishment was widely used	Corporal punishment was forbidden by the Brothers’ Rule of 1717
Teachers were not highly regarded & had to be paid	The brotherhood had been formally approved by a Bull of Approbation from Pope Benedict XIII

Progress was haphazard & uncertain	Monthly tests were held & results communicated to parents
Attendance was haphazard & not controlled	Absenteeism was carefully monitored so that pupils did not fall behind

Accustomed as we are to the 18<sup>th</sup> century idea of “progress”, the American 1776 Revolution and the ideals of “liberty, equality and fraternity” espoused by the French Revolution, it is interesting to note that the Brothers’ gratuitous provision of education of the poor was strongly opposed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the French *philosophes*. We need to ask why this was so.

As the map you have been watching clearly shows, the Brothers’ elementary schools had spread into many different parts of France and the growth of boarding schools on the Saint Yon model, that is, with facilities for delinquents and prisoners, had attracted a great deal of attention. The debate between the traditionalists who had been raised on Latin and Greek as fundamental to education and those who favoured an education more geared to practical matters such as commercial methods, modern languages useful for trade, and more scientific concerns was to rage for another hundred years. But the Brothers, because of their Rule which forbade them to study or teach Latin and therefore left them unable to attend universities which required Latin as a pre-requisite, developed largely through personal study, the more advanced teaching of mathematics, commercial subjects, natural sciences and foreign languages for their boarding schools where their pupils often spent six or seven years.

As the Brothers’ headquarters remained at Saint Yon in Rouen, they were often referred to in shorthand terms as “Yontains”, and because of the phonetic similarity between this name and the French word for an ignorant person, *ignorantin*, the name *Yontains* became a derisory term for those who opposed the kind of elementary education which the Brothers extended to the poor.

As you look at the comparative table that follows, it is interesting to appreciate the difference between the concern of the *philosophes* that the education of the poor is not needed because it endangers the very structure of the hierarchical society in which they occupy higher positions, and the foundation Lasallian texts that simply assume why everyone has the right to be educated. Notice that the final text cited is from De La Salle’s meditation for 31st December –the review of the past year- in which the Brothers are asked to reflect on just how they have taught the ordinary basic, secular subjects in their schools. This is noteworthy because for De La Salle and his Brothers everything done in the school is important: in the six and a half to seven hours spent in the classroom each day, the greater part of each day is spent teaching the ‘secular’ subjects and ‘skills’ needed to advance, while only one half-hour each day is devoted to teaching the catechism.

The table that follows contrasts the opinions of some of the philosophes with some of the foundation writings of De La Salle:

THE BROTHERS & THE "ENLIGHTENED" PHILOSOPHERS

The" Philosophers"	De La Salle & his Brothers
<p><b>Langourla:</b> "We must, as I said to the king, drive out these <i>ignorantins</i>, these Brothers with long sleeves, whom Jesus rebukes in the person of the Pharisees, for the rascals teach the people to handle the pen which is such a dangerous weapon in certain hands"</p>	<p>"The need for this Institute is very great because workmen and the poor usually have little education themselves and, as they are busy all day long earning a livelihood, they are unable to give their children what is needed for a proper education."</p>
<p><b>La Chalotais:</b>"The Brothers also known as the <i>ignorantins</i>, came along to finish everything off. They teach reading and writing to people who should have learned nothing but how to draw and how to handle a plane and a file, but who now no longer want to [These <i>ignorantins</i> are the successors of the Jesuits]..Among the ordinary people, knowing how to read and write should be restricted to those who live by these skills or to those whom these skills help to earn a living."</p>	<p>"All disorders, especially among the children of artisans and the poor, usually come about because they have been left to themselves and badly brought up. It is almost impossible to remedy this at a later age because of the bad habits contracted, no matter whether frequent instruction is given or whether the Sacraments are received often. Since the principal fruit to be looked for by setting up Christian schools is to foresee such disorders and prevent their consequences, it is easy to see the importance and necessity of such schools."</p>
<p><b>Voltaire:</b>"I thank you for condemning the education of laborers. I who farm the land need agricultural workers and not tonsured clerics. Send me above all some of these <i>ignorantins</i> Brothers to harness and guide my plows. " [Letter to La Chalotais of 28 02-1763]</p> <p>"It is right that the people be guided and not educated; they don't deserve that." [Letter of 19-03-1766]</p> <p>"I consider it essential that there be ignorant beggars on earth." [Letter 01-04-1766]</p>	<p>"The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children and that is why it maintains schools, so that the children, who are under the care of the teachers from morning until evening, may learn to live well by being instructed in Christian maxims and thus receiving a suitable education."</p>

<p><b>Verlac:</b> "How are we to stop this flood of education.... which is introducing confusion into every class and condition?" 1759</p> <p>"Hands better fitted for the plough or the hoe are being taught to hold the pen. Where will all this end?" (Source unknown)</p>	<p>Have you taught those under your guidance the other matters which are part of your duty, such as reading, writing, and all the rest, with all the attention possible? If that has not been the case during the year, you will give God a big account not only for your time, but also for the food and all that has been furnished for your livelihood, since that was the intention of the assignment for which your needs were provided." Meditation N° 91,3 for December 31</p>
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Brother Agathon, the Superior General, in 1792, made a number of attempts to save the Institute through his memorandum to the delegates of the National Assembly.<sup>6</sup> There was recognition of the contribution made by the Brothers but the renegade former Oratorian priest who brought the suppression resolution to the Assembly insisted that all congregations must be included in the decree of suppression. The Brothers' Institute, along with all other monasteries, convents and religious congregations was formally suppressed, and their lands sold to provide pensions for the now secularised men and women members. Although there were three communities in Italy, the Institute in France practically ceased to exist except for some small groups well away from Paris.

## 2. THE SECOND CENTURY: 1805-1905

Napoleon Bonaparte allowed the Brothers under the leadership of Brother Frumence to return to France from Italy to re-found the Institute in Lyon.<sup>7</sup> Henri Bedel calculates that some 75 original Brothers answered the call once the Brothers had re-established themselves at Lyon, but by the end of the century the Brothers numbered over 10,000 in France alone and totalled over 15,000 in over 30 countries outside France.

The century was marked by five critical events in France, three internal and two external:

1. the revolution of 1830 which, by forcing the hereditary Bourbon Charles X to resign, installed the principle of popular sovereignty of King Louis-Philippe of the house of Orleans;
2. the revolution of 1848 which eventually led to the Third Empire under Napoleon III;
3. the armed intervention of Napoleon III in the internal affairs of Mexico, the support for the Hapsburg Maximilian and the final defeat of French forces;
4. the French provocation of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 which saw the utter humiliation of French forces and the siege of Paris;
5. the internal struggle of the **Commune** of 1871 against what was felt to be an inefficient middle class government opposed to the working class.

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<sup>6</sup> Rigault, Vol. III, pp.187

<sup>7</sup> Rigault III, Part 3, Ch.2 p.498

Each of these events had important implications for the Brothers as their position in the Church led inevitably to their suffering from the growing anti-clericalism that developed particularly after 1870 and eventually led to their 'expulsion' after 1904.

### What was the source of the Brothers' 'creativity'?

In general it can be said that the very restraints that were imposed on the Brothers throughout the century often led them to seek to find ways of responding to what they saw as **needs** that they could meet. This was not so for the majority of Brothers in France between 1833 and 1882 because they were involved in running primary schools under government regulations. But their rapid growth in numbers, the extraordinary leadership of Brother Philippe Bransiet between 1838 and 1874, their ability to respond to local needs through the boarding schools and their unified brotherhood, gave them an organisation and a platform which enabled them to contribute to the overall quality of French education precisely because they could contribute from **outside** the system. Two examples of this can be seen for example in the ability of the Institute to supply whole teams of Brothers to work in the prisons, and in Brother Philippe placing all the Brothers at the disposition of the government as stretcher-bearers during the 1870 Franco-Prussian war.

### 1805-1813

The permission granted by Napoleon Bonaparte to the Brothers was not a complete 'restoration' although he defended the Brothers against their detractors.<sup>8</sup> The Brothers were recognised officially only if they limited themselves to running primary schools which were to be under the direct supervision of the universities. They were required to teach what was known as the *Imperial Catechism* which taught people to obey and respect their leader. Secondary schools such as the 8 boarding schools on the Saint-Yon model the Brothers had run during the 18<sup>th</sup>C were not allowed as all secondary education was to be done through the secular *lycées*.

After the fall of Bonaparte and the restoration of the Bourbon king Louis XVIII, there was an extraordinary flowering of religious congregations of men and women who used or adapted the *Conduct of Schools*.<sup>9</sup> After 1815, however, the Brothers had to resist the introduction of what was called *Mutual Teaching*,<sup>10</sup> adapted from the Lancaster-Bell methodology used in parts of England, where a single teacher passed on his teaching to monitors who in turn passed it on to up to ten pupils. The method was evidently economical – fewer teachers had to be provided and paid – but for the Brothers this method was completely opposed to the basic 'older brother' relationship which was a foundation principle for the Institute. While the Brothers were 'lampooned' in the gazettes of the day for this opposition, they eventually won the day since the methodology of the *Conduct* already made use of 'monitors' in a different way by the twelve different classroom responsibilities

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<sup>8</sup> "It is said that primary schools conducted by the Brothers introduced a new and dangerous spirit into the University. I cannot understand the fanaticism shown by certain people... it amounts to a real prejudice. I receive requests from everywhere requesting their restoration. Such a general outcry clearly shows their utility." Minute of 1808

<sup>9</sup> For example, the Marist Brothers, Irish Christian Brothers, Brothers of Ploermel etc. and many congregations of women

<sup>10</sup> Methode mutuel d'enseignement

assigned to pupils after each monthly exam. The Brothers were able to take something from the *Mutual Method*, as Pierre Lorain, a professor at the Royal College of Louis-le-Grand notes in 1837: “In spite of the spirit of conservation which distinguishes the Brothers, they have been prepared to introduce some important changes into their pedagogy.”

France, like many other European countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sought to establish a national system of education for primary schools. In England in 1820, Lord Brougham’s maiden speech to the House of Commons,<sup>11</sup> cited the example of what the Abbé de La Salle had achieved in the zone of Saint-Antoine in Paris, one of the flash points of the French Revolution, by pointing out that “from the period of the establishment of the *ignorantium* schools in Paris, the expense of the police in the Fauxbourg St. Antoine was reduced 30,000 francs annually.” This ‘policing’ notion of education of the poor as a means of control was widely supported in many countries.

### After the 1830 Revolution

The education minister in France, Guizot, was entrusted with the foundation of a national system of primary schools. It is interesting to note his address to the parliamentary deputies as follows:<sup>12</sup>

There is an example known throughout the world, that of the Brothers of Christian Doctrine.<sup>13</sup> It is impossible to deny that their numbers are increasing, that they have done a great deal of good, adopted the best methods, and, in a word, played an important role in the progress of education.

In the educational reform of Guizot in 1833, the Brothers were entrusted with public schools but not as individuals. The school was given to the Institute and the authorisation of the Brothers as teachers came through their obedience as members of the Institute. This was not a satisfactory long term solution as it could easily lead to a certain mediocrity and lack of personal study, but the rapid increase in the number of Brothers gave them a dominant position in primary education well into the 1860’s, especially through the public profile of the Superior, Brother Philippe Bransiet (1837-1873), who was consulted by various ministers of education in France at each period of reform, and interviewed in 1859 by the English school inspector and poet, Matthew Arnold, on behalf of *A Select Commission on Education of the House of Commons*.<sup>14</sup>

One of the consequences of becoming part of the national system of primary schools in the long term was the threat to the principle of gratuity. Cities and small towns of a certain size welcomed the Brothers as a community and were prepared to support them. It was inevitable, however, that at a certain stage there was pressure from official sources for the Brothers to charge for tuition, or, in some cases, to have the local authority require parents to pay something even though the Brothers themselves were not required to collect the money directly. This was the case in France itself but absolute gratuity became practically impossible to maintain in the rapid spread of the Institute

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<sup>11</sup> Hansard, June 28, 1820 p.57

<sup>12</sup> Archives of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, NA 100-1.12

<sup>13</sup> This incorrect name was often used to describe the Brothers whose official title was *Brothers of the Christian Schools*.

<sup>14</sup> Archives of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome.

outside of France after 1850. The upholding of the principle of gratuity challenged the creativity of the Brothers so that many different kinds of compromise were developed, such as for example the requirement that each boarding school should pay for the support of a completely gratuitous school.

Another aspect of the creativity of the Brothers in Paris was shown after 1820 by their attempts to open night schools for adults just like the Sunday schools begun by De La Salle. Rigault quotes Ambroise Rendu in 1821 writing that “ a large number of people in the society are redoubling their efforts to obtain a kind of teaching, more extensive than what is available through primary schools, more specific than what is taught in the colleges, and better adapted to the real needs of people and their estimates.”<sup>15</sup> The first successful attempt by the Brothers was made by Brother Philippe just months before the 1830 Revolution when the following courses were taught until 10.30 in the evenings:

Reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, drawing, singing and music, especially French composition, keeping commercial books.<sup>16</sup>

After this there was a rapid development of similar kinds of activity throughout the Brothers’ schools and communities in France so that Brother Philippe as Superior General in 1848 could state that since 1830, over 48,500 workmen had been taught by the Brothers in evening courses. It was in formal recognition of these classes that the French National Railways laid on a free special train so that the delegates to the 1844 General Chapter could visit the Founder’s tomb at Rouen.

### **Complementary courses and Superior Primary Schools**

It was through what were called complementary courses and the development of what became known as “superior primary schools”, that the creativity of individual Brothers is shown as well as their keen awareness of the needs of their pupils and their parents. The same Brother Philippe, at this time a young Assistant, writes to the Director in Rheims in 1831 as follows:

The gentlemen who comprise your committee wish you to teach geography, history, chemistry, mineralogy and physiology... Tell them that we are going to agree, and that the Brothers, friends of the people and devoted to serving children, will always be ready to do whatever is useful for them, especially when it concerns spreading light and propagating the sciences.<sup>17</sup>

There is a similar authorisation given to the Brother Director of Orléans who wants “binoculars and instruments to teach mathematics, technical drawing, surveying and geography.”<sup>18</sup> When the departmental authority suggests to the town council of Castres that they should open a “superior primary school”, they reply they have no need because the Brothers teach all that is needed,

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<sup>15</sup> Rigault, V, p.134

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, IV, p.471

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, V, p.134

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.135

“grammar, French history, geography, technical drawing” and through lay teachers “drawing and singing.”<sup>19</sup>

The government commission of 1834, responsible for the curriculum of primary schools, had already authorised drawing, geography and history. All of this new teaching became possible because the Brothers, as individuals or as groups, often showed their creativity by writing the school books needed for these new subjects. The *Conduct of Schools* went through some 23 different upgradings during the century, was widely used with appropriate changes by many other feminine teaching Congregations and by other Brothers’ Congregations, and was translated into English. But it was the re-opening after 1830 of boarding schools similar to those run by the Brothers before the French Revolution that gave even greater scope to the creativity of the Brothers as individuals and as a group.

### Boarding schools

The opening of some 39 boarding schools between 1830 and 1900, in which the Brothers were no longer constrained by the curriculum content required in the public schools where the majority of Brothers served, enabled a number of Brothers to work together to introduce new subjects into their teaching and to write the necessary manuals to teach them, often school texts of the highest quality. While the ongoing debate about a traditional classical education and the need for a more practical scientific and technical education raged on, the boarding schools gave the Brothers the freedom to develop a curriculum more adapted to answering local needs. The numbered list that follows shows the relationship between perceived ‘needs’ and the creativity of the Institute to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through its boarding schools:

1. In 1829, the Brothers having re-opened their institution for training teachers in Rouen, set the pattern for what became one of their characteristic works in other countries ;
2. In 1830 the boarding school at Béziers became the prototype for 39 such institutions, of which Passy, Motte-Servolex, Quimper (Le Likès), and Beauvais became best known ;
3. Quimper and Beauvais were the pioneers of a succession of agricultural schools renowned for the prizes gained in national and international exhibitions;
4. The prospectus for Béziers shows the importance accorded to religion: “Here there are traditions that honour the past, guarantee the future, and which are followed in all things that are useful by removing from human institutions things that rust over time, changing them as needed by new generations.”
5. The development at Passy of more advanced mathematics and commercial methods, including the teaching of modern languages, led Duruy, the minister of education in the mid-1860’s, to visit the school and to recommend the model to the parliament, leading to the foundation by the state of what became known as “secondary modern schools.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.132

<sup>20</sup> Battersby’s History of the Brothers of the Christian Schools Vol.II, p.31 cites a remark of Duruy as follows: It is to De La Salle that France owed, if not the first idea, at least the putting into practice and popularising of this kind of instruction [i.e. secondary modern schools]. From the first attempt there emerged a teaching, which if

## Professional schools and Agricultural Schools<sup>21</sup>

Over twenty years earlier in Paris the Brothers had opened two works that were characteristic of their awareness of the needs of the poor. The first of these, in Rue Neuve-Saint-Étienne was a centre for apprenticeship. Students attended the centre for certain forms of teaching while undergoing their apprenticeship training, supervised and regulated by the Brothers and the employers. The second professional school, that in the Rue Francs-Bourgeois, was the first completely commercial school. Away from Paris, the Brothers opened schools for adults in Lyon in 1834 and again in 1846. What was special about these schools was that they continued the groundwork already established in primary schools, so as to prepare young men for admission to the varied specialist activities that characterised the city of Lyon itself.

The curriculum of these professional schools was particularly centred on commercial subjects such as mathematics, double-entry book keeping and the study of foreign languages. This kind of model was to become typical of schools subsequently opened in Belgium, Holland, Germany (*Handelschule*) Egypt, and throughout the Ottoman Turk Empire.

The teaching of agriculture, initiated first in the school at Beauvais, has long continued in Lasallian schools in France to the present day. The original school now forms part of the Catholic University of Paris.<sup>22</sup>

## Looking after young prisoners<sup>23</sup>

This work, so closely related to the work begun at Saint-Yon in De La Salle's lifetime, was begun by the Brothers in Paris 1840 and although the assault that resulted in the death on a Brother in 1848 led to their large scale withdrawal from being in overall responsibility, the overall educational work with prisoners continued in many places until the anti-clerical laws of 1882 prohibited it. 37 Brothers were assigned to the Central prison of Nîmes in 1842; 48 Brothers to Fontevault in 1844; 39 to supervise 545 prisoners at Toulouse (Hérault) in 1845, and Brothers were assigned as well to prisons in Melun and Aniane. The presence of the Brothers in prisons was so significant that it is not surprising that Jean Valjean in Hugo's *Les Misérables* is depicted as a former student of the Brothers in the penal colony at Toulon.<sup>24</sup>

It is significant that the Brother with overall responsibility of all those working in prisons until 1848 was a Brother Facile. When he took charge of the first foundations of the Brothers in the USA, one of his first actions was to accept responsibility for a *Protectory* to care for young prisoners.

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it had been generalised, would have advanced by one century the organisation of specialised secondary education.

<sup>21</sup> *Bulletin des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*, No.13, Janvier 1925, pp.301-313

<sup>22</sup> Ministers Duruy and Simon visiting the agricultural sections of the Brothers' schools at Passy and Beauvais remarked "You will not be upset, Gentlemen, that we are following in your footsteps." Institute Bulletin No.13, Janvier 1925, p.305

<sup>23</sup> *Bulletin des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*, No.3, Janvier-Décembre 1909, pp.28-63

<sup>24</sup> Dossier prepared by Alain Houry, Parménie, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2005.

## Special classes

Rigault points out that around 1863 the Brothers ran special classes in Le Havre and Marseille for the children of customs officers, a class for cabin boys in Marseille, and a school for wards of navy personnel at Brest. All of these activities were supported by the state. At about the same time, the Brothers, entrusted with three schools for the deaf and dumb, were given appropriate training.<sup>25</sup>

In 1859, the Archbishop of Paris asked for some 80 Brothers to stabilise work with orphans begun by a priest but now in danger of failing. Schools at Vaugirard and Issy-les-Moulineaux were expanded and by 1862 offered training to 1540 boys and young men in “wood carving and bronze, making musical instruments, opticians, jewellers, shawl designers, wood-gilders, saddlers and case makers, baby-ware, sculptors, carpenters...” At Issy, young men were trained as gardeners.<sup>26</sup>

## Christian youth groups

Concern for young people abandoned in cities became a matter of concern in Paris in the 1840's. In 1845, the Brother Directors of all the schools in Paris decided to seek patrons to help fund the foundation of facilities for youth groups in all their schools. By 1872 there were 17 such groups catering for about 3000 young men, but by 1897 the number of young members had grown to 31,200. The importance of this movement was that membership was not restricted to attendance in the Brothers' schools: all young men were welcome, with the hope that those from more stable Christian homes might help the less privileged.

It was out of this movement that Brother Exupérien decided to choose outstanding leaders and form them into an élite group to train others. This movement took the name of the recently canonised Benedict-Joseph Labre who had rejected the consumer society in his life of chosen poverty. This Saint-Labre society was eventually to be able to provide one trained leader for every six members of the youth groups.<sup>27</sup>

## Christian Trade Unions

It was out of the Saint-Labre leaders that a Brother Hiéron eventually formed a service to help place young men with commercial training in good positions. From these modest beginnings there emerged eventually a small trade union, which by 1919, became the Christian group representing some 350 smaller unions. All the leaders of this group at various stages had come through the training offered by the Saint-Labre society.<sup>28</sup>

## School texts and some famous authors

A major contribution of the Brothers to the development of education in France was the preparation of texts for use in schools. There were some instances of this before the French Revolution, as for

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<sup>25</sup> Rigault, V, p.363

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.461-463

<sup>27</sup> Rigault, V, p.481

<sup>28</sup> Cited by Alain Houry in *Les Innovations pédagogiques des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes pendant le XIXme siècle*

example, the texts of Brother Agathon on Arithmetic and Bookkeeping. Brother Philippe, before becoming Superior General, was the author of four widely-used texts, the first in 1825 being a *Practical Geometry applied to Technical Drawing*, the second and third in 1833 being a *New Treatise on Arithmetic* and a *Summary of Geography*, and, in 1836, a *History of France*. As the Brothers' reputation was especially linked with the teaching of calligraphy, technical drawing and mathematics, their manuals were widely used throughout France. Such texts were usually published under the initials of the current Superior General, e.g. *FPB* for Brother Philippe Bransiet, or by a general title such as *Une Commission de Professeurs* [A group of teachers].

Frequently texts prepared by the Brothers in this anonymous way were adopted officially by the ministry of education. An outstanding example was the text of Brother Victoris, author of a number of texts on handwriting, especially his *Methodical Course for Linear Design* which won the highest award at the 1867 Exposition in Paris. Indeed, when Brother Victoris declined the offer of the gold medal for his work and asked that the prize be awarded to the Institute, the Commission had a special silver medal struck for the author.

Among many other outstanding authors were Brother Bernard-Louis, who, having completed the work of Brother Victoris by a series of models, graphics and bas-relief of high quality, learned German so as to be able to present the work at the Vienna Exposition of 1874. Later he was the author of the *Catechist's Manual*, which, when presented to Pope Pius X, led him to name the Brothers as *Apostles of the Catechism*.<sup>29</sup>

Brother Alexis, a Belgian, is praised by the French historian Ferdinand Buisson for "introducing into the popular school a whole series of scientific procedures, especially the hypsometric maps in geography." This work won first prize at the 1884 Exhibition in London and the material submitted by the Institute was praised in the London *Times*, *Journal of Education*, the *Athenaeum* and by the journal *Nature* in the following paragraph:

There is one society which merits more than a passing notice, since its collective exhibit is not merely one of the most remarkable and interesting in the whole educational exhibition, but is one from which a great deal is to be learnt. It is cosmopolitan in its aims, and exhibits the results of its schools in Belgium, France, England, the United States, Canada, Egypt and India... Foremost among the features is their system of models maps and atlases for the study of geography which are exhibited by Brother Alexis. These are the first hypsometrical maps published in France, and we believe the first of their kind published anywhere for school use.<sup>30</sup>

## The Saint Luke Schools

In Ghent in Belgium in 1862, the Brothers were invited to take over the direction of a small school specialising in design. Eventually there were three more such schools opened in Belgium at Brussels, Tournai, Liège and one in Lille in France which aimed "to give young students, especially the children of workmen, the theoretical and practical knowledge to take on worthy positions in the building and decorating industry as architects, responsible for public works, wood workers, carpenters, cabinet

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<sup>29</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> July 1907, Brief of Pope Pius X

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Battersby, *History of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the Nineteenth Century 185-1900*, pp.166-7.

makers, sculptors in wood or stone, locksmith, painters of all kinds, engravers, goldsmiths... Art in the studio should ennoble the craft, complement it and make it popular... It should repair the present rupture between art and craft and honour manual work.”<sup>31</sup>

The Saint Luke schools were highly successful in maintaining the traditional skills and content of European art in general while concentrating on the importance of architecture and industrial design appropriate for a changing society.

### **An appreciation by an outsider**

Gustave Le Bon was a prominent French educator and author whose 1902 book *Psychology of Education* was widely used for many years, offered a most interesting comment on the creativity of the Brothers:

You could hardly imagine that the Brothers of the Christian Schools, previously relegated to primary teaching at the most basic level, could ever be serious rivals to the university in secondary and higher education. In a few years, they have made astonishing progress. The only agricultural institution is in their hands. They direct commercial and industrial schools that have no rivals.<sup>32</sup>

It is significant that the edition of the same text in 1914 (i.e. after the ‘expulsion’ of the Brothers) has added the phrase, “Their savage expulsion should be considered a national disaster.”

### **The Institute becomes international**

Although the Brothers had been invited by the Society of Saint-Sulpice to open schools in Canada during the lifetime of De La Salle, it was only in 1833 that they made their first Canadian foundation. De La Salle’s concern as expressed to his successor, Brother Barthélemy, was that the Brothers would be made use of as individuals and not as members of a community. This was a well-founded concern, as this was exactly what happened to the first Brothers who went to the United States in 1818. But in 1843, Brother Philippe accepted the invitation and the initial foundation in USA was in Philadelphia in 1845.

While the expansion of the Institute was often linked with responses to appeals from the Church, there were also government requests to provide a French schooling to the children of French citizens involved in consular or commercial interests in the near East and in the Ottoman Turk empire. Indeed the Institute at one stage had 43 schools in the Ottoman Turk Empire. There was also the close link between the proximity of the seminary of the *Missions étrangères* (Foreign missions) and the Brothers’ headquarters in Rue Oudinot which often led returning missionary priests to seek Brothers. It was this link that led to the Brothers opening schools in many different countries of Asia after 1852. Perhaps the most enduring creative aspect of the ventures into Asia was the Brothers’ openness to other languages, cultures and religions when the prevailing missiology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was aimed at conversion. But from the prospectus of the first school opened in Singapore in 1852 we can read that

“the principles upon which the [Brothers’] school is based will be as liberal as possibly can be; thus, it will be open to everyone, whatever his creed may be; and should, for instance, a boy of a persuasion different from

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<sup>31</sup> Report on industrial and professional teaching in Belgium presented to the Minister in 1897.

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit. chapter 6, book 1

that of Roman Catholics wish to attend it, no interference whatever will take place with his religion, unless his parents or guardians express their wish to have him instructed in the Catholic religion. Public religious instructions will be given to Roman Catholic boys before or after school hours; the Master will most carefully watch over the morals of the whole, whatever their religious persuasion may be."<sup>33</sup>

The principal result of this movement into other countries with other languages and cultures was that the schools could no longer be based on the prevailing French model. Many French Brothers learned English and became the founders of schools in Asia. The schools in the United States in these 'melting pot' years needed English speakers. There was such rapid recruitment of Brothers from mainly Irish, German and Polish families that a number of these English-speaking Brothers were sent in the 1850's and 1860's to the expanding schools in Asia. The unforeseen consequences in the English-speaking world, particularly in USA, was that the prevailing anti-Catholic attitudes encountered in some areas led the hierarchy to ask the Brothers to open secondary schools, and ultimately, even universities, entry into which and into priestly seminaries, required Latin. While the creativity of certain Brothers led them into having Latin taught off the school premises by outsiders, the inability of the predominantly French superiors to understand a situation outside of their own culture and experience reinforced a literal maintenance of the Founder's original prohibition against Latin from another time and culture. The prohibition on having Latin taught was exacted in a way that was manifestly unjust to a number of highly placed Brothers – who, in spite of everything, accepted- and the matter was resolved only in 1924 by a direction from Pope Pius XI.<sup>34</sup>

In the second half of the century, the expansion of the Institute into neighbouring European countries – Belgium, Germany, Austria, Romania, Hungary and Spain – and the continuing growth in the near East and in Asia, in a growing number of countries in Central and Latin America, brought new kinds of challenges from the different linguistic and cultural situations encountered. It was precisely this rapid internationalization of the Institute that offered possibilities to many thousands of French Brothers who chose to go into exile rather than accept the consequences of the anti-religious laws brought down in France after 1904.

### 3. 1905 TO THE PRESENT

In the aftermath of the 1904 legislation in France, prompt, **creative** and courageous action by Brother Exupérien [arguing that an unjust law need not be obeyed] invited Brothers to a 'fictitious' secularisation which had to be signed by the Superior General Gabriel Marie, who opposed this action he was compelled to do and subsequently refused to accept as Brothers those who did so. The 'secularised' Brothers managed to keep control of many schools in this way until after World War 1, when the 1904 laws were never formally rescinded nor did the Institute regain its "legal person", but the Brothers could again live in communities and teach in schools.

The international Institute in this period has had to deal with the disruption caused by the major conflicts of the First World War (1914-1918), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Second World War (1939-1945), the Communist control in Eastern Europe (1948-1990), revolutions in Cuba and

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<sup>33</sup> Père Beurel, archives of *Missions étrangères*

<sup>34</sup> Rescript added to the Brothers' Rule.

Central America, right-wing governments in Brazil, Argentina and Chile, the Vietnam war and many other conflicts that affected the lives of Brothers' communities.

The experience of European Brothers deported as workers into Germany during the Second World War and the encounter with their fellow countrymen in prisons and in camps brought home to many Brothers the need for a much more relevant approach to religious instruction and catechesis. It was this concern that led the Institute to found a whole series of catechetical reviews in the 1950's – *Catéchèse* in France, *Sinite* in Spain, *La Salle Catechist* in USA and *Our Apostolate* in Australia.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Institute which attained its greatest numerical membership in 1966, has subsequently continued to decline in numbers in the western world where the number of new members has steadily declined. At the same time, the number of Lasallian works throughout the world has continue to increase to a situation in which the annual statistics published by the Institute show that 97% of those engaged in these Lasallian works – some 75,000 persons at least - are not members of the Institute. What the Institute has lived in the past 50 years has been the recognition and acceptance of lay men and increasingly lay women as associated in the traditional Lasallian mission of what the 1987 Rule was careful to call “human and Christian education”<sup>35</sup> with careful and deliberate attention to the order of the two adjectives. The gift that John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers have shared so widely and so generously has now transcended what were once the boundaries imposed by culture, language and religion: it is a gift beyond recall!

Increasingly in post-World War II Europe and also in Canada, a number of countries brought down educational reforms which by bringing the Brothers' schools into the national system, solved their financial problems but also gave the state various forms of control over the deployment of the Brothers as teachers. In the long term, this loss of autonomy has not been helpful.

Given the impossibility of setting out in a balanced way what has been creative about the Lasallian mission in over 80 countries, our concern will be directed to evaluating the three foundation principles in reference to each of the following series of events :

The sequence of six General Chapters from 1966 to 2007;

The conferring of the UNESCO *Noma Prize* on the Institute in 1990 as found in the Institute Bulletin No.234, and the very title, *Educational Innovations*, of the 2003 Bulletin No.248, show that creativity is indeed the “hallmark” of so many Lasallian works.

The titles of the sequence of 41 Lasallian Education Mission( MEL) booklets since 2006 witnesses to continuing creativity.

## **General Chapters 1966-2007**

The General Chapter of 1966-1967 following the Second Vatican Council 1962 -1965 of the Catholic Church was in many ways the most significant since that of 1717. The first post-war Chapter of 1946

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<sup>35</sup> Rule of 1987, No 3. The discussion of these two words was an important debate in the 1986 Chapter, some arguing that the full meaning of ‘Christian’ obviously included that of ‘human’, but delegates working in Asia and in Muslim societies pointed out that their role was that of a ‘Christian’ presence, and not necessarily one of ‘conversion’.

had looked to the past and to a policy of restoration after the serious disruption that had affected Institute works in Europe and in Asia. The 1956 Chapter, by authorising critical studies of all De La Salle's writings, produced a generation of outstanding scholars and created the climate when it became possible to look seriously at the re-writing of the foundation Rule by responding to the Vatican Council's direction to religious congregations to look back to their foundation to evaluate how their present policies did, or did not, respond to the *charism* of their founders<sup>36</sup>. It was against this ferment of Lasallian scholarship and the Church's concern to be relevant to the modern world that the careful preparation of the 1966 Chapter took place.

The most creative action of the delegates was their decision to affirm their identity as Brothers who chose **not** to be ordained in spite of pressure even from highly placed Church officials to admit priests into the Institute. The approval of this affirmation in the document entitled *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*<sup>37</sup> required the delegates to prolong the Chapter into the fall of 1967. The second creative decision was to accept an updated experimental Rule for evaluation in the light of prolonged experience, a process that lasted some 20 years until the 1986 Chapter when a completely new formulation was accepted and approved by the Church in 1987. Through this action, the spirit of the original 1717 Rule was maintained while the now irrelevant limitations of certain aspects of a 17<sup>th</sup> century French culture and theology were discarded.

A major concern arising from the Chapter as it surveyed its past was expressed as "the need to return to the poor." Two forward looking directions were the recognition of the growing importance of lay teachers in Lasallian works and the election from the United States of the first Superior General who was not French, and of a Vicar General who was Spanish. The Institute, enriched by its French heritage, had now become truly international.

The Chapter of 1976 had to face the fact that many Brothers, who had not welcomed the radical changes of the previous Chapter, had chosen to leave the Institute. The delegates, however, courageously endorsed the directions already taken, and highlighted the continuing growth of lay people who sought a more formal recognition of their way of 'belonging' to the Lasallian movement and to what was increasingly referred to as the *Lasallian Family*.

The 1986 Chapter, following a series of draft versions previously circulated, approved a new formulation of the Rule which was subsequently approved by the Church in 1987. A shorthand term in the Rule to describe this growing relationship between the Brothers and their lay colleagues, "shared mission"<sup>38</sup>, was adopted as an official title. A small number of lay colleagues were admitted as 'observers' to the discussion of mission during this Chapter because the annual statistics of the Institute noted that while the number of Brothers continued to decline, the number of Lasallian works continued to increase. A document on the *Lasallian Family* was written by the Brother Superior and Council and widely disseminated after 1990 outside of the Institute. As the 10 years

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<sup>36</sup> See *Perfectae caritatis* in Documents of the Second Vatican Council

<sup>37</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> December 1967

<sup>38</sup> 1987 Rule No.17

interval between Chapters was now thought to be too long in a rapidly changing world, a decision was taken to hold them every seven years.

The sequence of the 1993, 2000 and 2007 Chapters strengthened previous decisions about shared mission, attention to the poor, the need to incorporate more dedicated lay Lasallians into District and Institute structures that were concerned with mission, and the need to consolidate places where the continuing decline in the number of still active Brothers required a re-structuring. All these Chapters have had lay delegates present for the discussion of mission. The Mission Assembly of 2006 (see MEL Bulletin No.1) confirmed and strengthened directions already taken, highlighting the importance of the concept of *association* as a binding force between Brothers and lay Lasallians. This direction has been highlighted in the three most recent Christmas letters of Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverría, and in the September 2010 Circular 461 from the General Council entitled, *Associated for the Lasallian Mission: An Act of Hope*.

## The Noma Prize

On September 8<sup>th</sup> 1990, an extraordinary demonstration of the ongoing creativity of the Institute on a world-wide basis was the awarding of the Noma Prize in its highest category to the Institute. The official award, in French, translates as follows:

Organisation of the United Nations for education, science and culture, UNESCO, on the occasion of the celebration of the international day of Literacy, the international jury for the prize on literacy has awarded THE NOMA PRIZE for the year 1990 to The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In testimony of which the present diploma, adorned with the seal of the Organisation has been given.<sup>39</sup>

It was representatives from UNESCO who had suggested that the Institute submit a dossier of what was being done throughout the Lasallian world during the International Literacy Year. In the time available some 51 different projects were submitted from Europe, Africa, Asia and North and South America from 20 different countries. A number of important projects arrived too late to be submitted.

Brother José-Maria Vallodolid, Education Secretary of the Institute, speaks of the impression made on a journalist:

“I will always remember the admiration expressed by a journalist in Geneva who asked how it was possible to do all these different kinds of works in so many different places, all bearing the same distinctive mark. He had been through the voluminous dossier UNESCO had put on show in the press room. All I could answer was that the Institute, the Brothers and their collaborators, do this as part of their normal work and that it reflects the nature of their commitment. I told him that also that many other and even more valuable examples of this kind of work are not included in the dossier because those involved did not think it necessary to speak about them.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Institute Bulletin No.234, 1990

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.3

Brother José-Maria, in the same reference, remarks that it was during this same year that, in attribute to the Brothers at the beatification of Brother Scubilion on the island of Réunion, the French Premier, M. Rocard, remarked that even before the French Revolution, the Brothers had made France literate. We could note also, as the Premier remarked, that the creative Brother Scubilion anticipated the formal abolition of slavery in France by his work with the slaves.

In the 21 literacy projects in Europe it was significant that nine were concerned with teaching immigrant people to read and write. Two projects leading to reading and writing, one in French and the other in Spanish, had been developed by individual Brothers using completely new phonic methods. Eight projects were about after-school activities, homework centres and youth groups, many of which were directed or aided by brothers who are retired. The projects in Africa were mainly concerned with adult literacy programmes. It is significant that many of these projects have been organized and run by Brothers who have come to these countries as missionaries. In Togo, besides running a school for the past 40 years, the Brothers have helped to provide wells for clean drinking water, to help people develop gardens and eventually form a cooperative for marketing produce.

The committee that evaluated the complete dossier gave special mention to two projects, one in Camerouns and the other in Equatorial Guinea, either of which in the opinion of the committee members, merited to win the prize by itself. The first of these was the method of reading, writing and arithmetic devised by Brother Antoine Huysmans at Abong-Mbang because this has helped to provide a written language for the first time to the Pygmy people of the Camerouns. The second was the Graphonic Method devised by Brother Manuel Magaz, a Spaniard, at Bata in Equatorial Guinea who taught reading and writing at the same time, in fact with writing preceding reading. A third example of the same kind that arrived too late to be included in the dossier was that from Balgo Hills in Australia where Brothers working with an aboriginal tribe have produced reading books which presented the Kukatja people with their written language for the first time.

In Malaysia works with Vietnamese refugees learning English were organised by a small number of Brothers who enlisted former and present students of their schools as volunteers. Similarly in the Philippines, literacy classes for adults between 18 and 45 began once the ordinary work with students had ended with students from the top classes acting as monitors. Brothers and former students worked also with street children in certain areas and ran Sunday schools for young people who did not attend school.

Some overall impressions about creativity from reading the projects in Bulletin 234 are

- The continuing concern for literacy, numeracy and the development of the skills needed to live with dignity in developing societies;
- The spirit of gratuity which is always present in that the gift of education is offered freely to all who wish to come without any strings attached, a gift which would not be possible without the large number of volunteers – among whom are many ‘retired’ Brothers - as well as present and former students;
- The initial and continuing financing comes from the Institute in first world countries but, to avoid the danger of being seen as ‘patronising’, each project aims at helping groups become self-supporting;

- While the projects depend greatly at the beginning on the gratuitous support of volunteers, the people being helped and who make progress are invited to help others who are not so advanced ;
- It is the Institute’s traditional “older brother” relationship that invites students and former students to help others less fortunate;
- The willingness to work with groups on the ‘margins’ of various societies continues the tradition of being open to all by answering needs that official and other agencies do not address.

Three years later in 2003, the Institute Bulletin No.248, published under the title, *Educational Innovations*. As you look at the Summary page now on screen, you see a wide range of different activities, each of which immediately attributable to the basic Lasallian Principles enunciated at the beginning of this presentation.

### The MEL Booklets

Beginning in 2005, the Institute Secretary for the Education Mission invited a number of contributors to write short pamphlets, 35-40 pages, to share with all people engaged in the Lasallian mission of human and Christian education, the particular aspect they were attempting to address. 41 of these booklets, known as MEL booklets, from their original French designation have now been written and translated into the three main languages used in the Institute, English, Spanish and French. They are deliberately produced in a *pdf* format which allows them to be downloaded from the Institute website by whoever wishes to use them. Even a simple reading of the 41 titles given separately as an appendix to this text demonstrates the continuing creativity of so many people, Brothers and lay women and men Lasallians, engaged today in the Lasallian mission.

In the Introduction to No.37, *The Brothers of the Christian Schools in France and the Educational Service of “Artisans and the Poor” through Technical Education*, Brother Nicolas Capelle writes:

What is attributed to John Baptist de La Salle himself at the beginning of the bulletin as regards the useful and future achievements of education offered by him, can be fully applied to all those who have continued his work. Abundant examples exist to affirm that it is not at all about continuing to persist in attacking such and such a threat or change. Lasallian work is always on the verge of renewal with a “plus” that makes it unique. So it is that, like the gods, Lasallian heritage does not put up with the ethic of the minimum. Perhaps this is one of the secrets of its constant expansion and vigor. One of the things which this bulletin succeeds in doing best is to introduce, in the last part, the testimony of some Brothers and lay persons in their struggle to make education accessible to the needy, by quality education in which the targets themselves are involved in the final results. The reader will make personal connections and sentiments as he contrasts the testimony offered with that of his own reality and he will be encouraged when he sees the same emotions and feelings as a type of common denominator in Lasallians when they are able to melt like wax in a mission that is taken up in giving life. This is the Gospel paradox here and now.

Some of these booklets offer a fuller treatment of some of the outstanding projects referred to or simply noted in the Institute Bulletin No.234 which dealt with the Noma Prize. I have chosen to give attention to the following 4 booklets because they illustrate very different situations in which the basic foundation principles have been employed in a most creative way.

### **03. WHEN SCHOOL COMES TO THE CHILDREN**

Since 1948 in France Brothers began to work with the children of itinerant people and by 1989 had financed and provided 14 Mobile schools, each led originally by at least one Brother. Brother Étienne Pierre first thought of the mobile schools, and as he gained experience in the work, attracted over 100 volunteers to help him. He invented a very successful and widely used card system known as the KIKO Method for teaching reading and writing to itinerant children. As he gained personal experience of this work, Brother Camille Verger developed a doctoral thesis which has become the foundation text for all subsequently engaged in this kind of work. Brother Nicolas Capelle, in his introduction to this booklet, offers this simple background information about the Gypsies:

For centuries [these nomadic people] have refused integration into French society. They therefore reject the method, *par excellence*, the school... Lasallians have taken this refusal into account... Since the Gypsies don't come to school, the school will go to them.

Claire Guerin-Leseur, a mother of two children, writes this pamphlet about her twelve years of professional commitment to this work. The account is simple, deeply moving, and for all Lasallians, a reminder of the way in which the Lasallian mission of human and Christian education is being carried by dedicated lay Lasallians.

### **05. LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE, THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE**

The sub-title of this booklet is, "Who listens? Who cares?" It describes a most creative experience of Boystown, Australia, from what had originally been a work that De La Salle would easily have recognised, 120 court-committed young boys 12-15 years of age, under the responsibility of 12 Brothers and some dedicated helpers. In the 1980's, the philosophical approach taken by the government which supported the work changed, and it was decreed that in the future the boys could not be kept longer than three weeks in residential care but would then have to be returned to their original environment to accelerate their re-habilitation. The Brothers refusal to accept this situation meant that the government would no longer pay for the support and residential care.

Before taking a final decision to accept or reject this new philosophy, Brother Paul Smith, the experienced director of Boystown with a degree in criminology, visited similar institutions in the English speaking world, and eventually took the following courageous decision: if we can't continue to help the boys who have been guilty of criminal behaviour, we will concentrate from now on the kind of preventative pedagogy recommended in the *Conduct of Schools* on the basis that prevention is better than cure. This led Brother Paul to found a help-line for young people to be able to ring toll free to talk with sympathetic counsellors. Funded exclusively at first by the government's permission to run ten important lotteries each year, *Kids Helpline* came into being at first in one Australian state but the very success of the work has now seen it become national: it can be contacted day and night from anywhere in Australia. Not long after the first couple of years, there was popular demand from parents to found a similar service called *Parents Helpline* in the original state. In 2011, the original community of 12 Brothers and helpers has been replaced by an enterprise employing over 500 people – phone counsellors, employment agencies, trainers in basic skills of every kind – under the direction of a lay woman supervised by a Board chaired by the Brother Visitor. The original creativity of Brother Paul has been matched and extended by the majority of lay people who choose to work in the Boystown enterprises. The quality of the work done and the monthly publication of the

statistics of the topics of the calls received have now become a data bank for politicians and social researchers.

## **26. MULTICULTURALISM AND IMMIGRATION**

The booklet is written by two Spanish Brothers based on their experience of the growing legal and illegal forms of entry into Spain and Portugal. It would be difficult to find another topic of such resonance all over today's world as this title. The preface tells us that "(this) booklet, written in simple and clear language will help us to understand the existing models of integration, to avoid dangerous confusions, to opt for co-operative models of learning... to eradicate the false truths of the prophets of doom, which are centred on cheap security or sponsored by exclusive socio-political tendencies."

This particular perspective is complemented and enlarged by *No.29, De La Salle at the Heart of Contemporary Multi-Cultural and Multi-Religious Society*, in which Belgian Herman Lombaerts, after an introductory chapter, calls on some 20 Brothers from around the world to comment on the same topic from the particular situation where they live and work today.

## **07. PRIORITY TO THE POOR: THE SCHOOLS OF SAN MIGUEL IN THE UNITED STATES**

This bulletin, written by the then Vicar-General Brother Bill Mann, states that "the Miguel School Movement describes the wave of new schools established by the De La Salle Christian Brothers over the past ten years to specifically address the needs of students from economically-poor communities. A Miguel school is defined as a small, Lasallian, elementary, middle or high school, that is not tuition driven and serves students and families from all faiths and cultures."

The fact that Catholic schools in the United States receive no government assistance has long been a matter of concern for the Brothers that their schools may become unavailable on economic grounds to the very poor for whom they were originally founded. The San Miguel Movement, and similar initiatives in individual Districts, has been one way of facing this dilemma. It is fundamental to the success of these schools that the majority of teachers are young men and women graduates who volunteer some years of their lives to this service. Moreover, the demonstrated success of such schools, has drawn the attention of government agencies interested in applying the model to what are called Charter Schools, where government assistance could be available under certain conditions.

## **CONCLUSION**

In an article on *Lasallian Spirituality* which I was invited to write some years ago, I tried to express something of what I have been privileged to experience from having visited Lasallian works in many different parts of the world. It may be the most appropriate way of concluding this broad perspective on Lasallian creativity:

"John Baptist de La Salle lived and died as a Catholic priest in 17<sup>th</sup> century France without ever leaving his native country, but his 'spirituality' has proved to have an appeal well-beyond the culture in which it originated. Today, many people who choose to work in a Lasallian work may not necessarily share the Christian heritage on which the work was founded. Among such persons are Christians of other

denominations, Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucianists and Shintoists, followers of traditional religions or of no religion at all. Many find themselves in agreement with Lasallian principles such as gratuity, compassion and personal relationships – all things beyond the material – and expressive therefore of a ‘spirituality’. This is particularly so when they see the Lasallian enterprise working to ‘save’ young people **from** the consequences of structural poverty in order to prepare them **for** a lived with greater dignity as human beings.”

In this paragraph we encounter the same Lasallian foundational principles we have surveyed over the past 330 years.

January 26<sup>th</sup> 2011

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