

THE LASALLIAN ASSOCIATION IN FRANCE

1 — Introduction

The decade of the 1970's saw the progressive development in France, to the level of Lasallian middle and secondary schools what had existed up to that time in the primary schools and in certain middle schools: The transfer of the Direction of these Institutions from the Brothers to Lay persons.

Often it was the case of conferring such Direction on a layman who had been with the Brothers as a student or as a teacher in a Lasallian school having a community of Brothers.

In other cases, a lay Director, who has not had this "Lasallian experience" takes charge of a School which still has a Community of Brothers. Such lay Directors between 1970 and 1980 could be called the "First Generation", that is those having known and lived in one way or other within the Lasallian educational climate under the strong influence of Religious.

2 — The origins of the Association

Around 1975, some lay Directors of Lasallian elementary and secondary schools of France wanted to reflect together on their mission as well as on the future of the establishments which were confided to their care. After having met together several times, they opened themselves to the influence of the Institute of the Brothers and were particularly well received and listened to in their search by the Brothers in charge of the Institute in France.

There was a period of concerted study and openness over a three year period which led to such very diverse questions as:

- A Lasallian pedagogy for today
- The connection between pedagogy and spirituality
- Openness to youth, especially the most deprived.
- What connections exist between the Institute and the Lay Directors? How can these ties be strengthened... Where can new ones be created?
- The isolation often strongly felt by lay Directors
- In case of a conflict between a Lay Director and members of the Educational community, does a way of seeking arbitration exist?

(This type of protection is hardly talked about at present).

- How to find and form successors to the Directors?

In the course of these exchanges, the Brothers and the Laymen were very attentive to one another and probably each had to go out of his way to better understand the "other fellow".

The Brothers Visitors participating in these meetings insisted on the fact that John Baptist De La Salle made as his plan that of working "together and by association".

They understood that the lay people — in their present position — wanted to bring the Lasallian educational message to youth, and in particular wanted to be attentive to those students having difficulties in these schools, "open to the world", where an evangelical climate is developed. The Brothers very rightly underscored the point that the Founder was solicitous not only of pedagogy but he also was a guide prompting us to bring to the world a "view of faith and a view of love".

If not everything was simple during these dialogues (still the educational stakes were important and the questions profound...) we could say that all the participants enriched their life and their love for education during this period.

3 — The creation of the Association

In 1978, conscious of the necessity of working "together", the De La Salle Association was created. What were its original aims?

— *Object of the Association*

The purpose of the Association is to develop the educational and spiritual values proposed by Saint John Baptist De La Salle and by his Institute, to maintain and promote a Christian education for the young within educational institutions, such as are described in the document "Points of View on Christian Education and on Education in the Faith" (Please refer to the General Chapter of 1967 and to the National Chapter of 1969).

For this purpose, The Association multiplies the links of mutual help and cooperation between, on one part, the members of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and on the other, the Directors named

or recognized by it to direct the school establishment and those who wish to belong to this Association.

In 1979 another role of the Association was carefully studied: that of a trusteeship of the members institutions, the Brothers Visitors of the French Region having adopted the following two resolutions:

1. The Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian School can also exercise, through the La Salle Association a trusteeship when a school run by a layman belongs to the Association.

2. For this relationship, the Brother Visitor of the District within the territory where the school run by a layman is located, should first of all give his consent to the Administrative Council of the Association.

It must be noted here that when a school hands over its trusteeship to the Lasallian Association, an agreement is signed between the Association and the Diocesan Community for Catholic Education in the diocese where the school is located in order to establish good cooperation between the two entities.

4 — The composition and function of the Association

— Composition

The Association is made up of founding members, associate members, and corresponding members.

a) The *founding* members are:

— The members of the Conference of Brothers Visitors of France, members by right;

— The lay directors of the Catholic schools, who together with the Brothers Visitors, had set up the Association.

b) The *Associate* Members can be:

— Everyone who exercises the function of head of a school or of an Academic Director;

— A representative of the management of the institution whose statutes are in keeping with the aims and purposes of the Association;

— The national secretaries of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools;

c) The *corresponding* Members are those physical persons who have proposed their candidature and have been accepted by the Council of the Administration.

— Its function

The Administrative Council of the Association meets on an average of twice per trimester. It is composed of eleven people: The Brothers in charge of the Region, five other Brothers, and five laymen.

The President is always a layman and the Secretary is a Brother. In order to collaborate more closely with the Association, the Institute has released a Brother for the post of "Secretary of Education".

Our reflections and our common Brothers-Laymen endeavours have led the Secretariat of Education to publish regularly a magazine "Lasallian Educational Activity". This magazine contains numerous educational topics and pays great attention to the daily existence of our Institutions.

In 1981-82, a "White Book" entitled, "Schools for the Young", about the Lasallian Schools, was published and widely diffused, in particular to selected regional and national institutions, as well as to the Ministry of National Education.

The Association and the Secretariat for Education have taken the trouble to organize meetings of Directors, both Brothers and lay, and each year some Lasallian week-ends to which all educators are invited. It was during these national and regional meetings that, among other themes, the deepening of the Lasallian educational plan in all its different forms, was tackled, work has been the object of an article in the magazine cited above.

In 1984 and 1985, meetings were organized in each district of France.

Occasionally, the President of the Association and some lay members of the council are invited to one of the meetings of the Visitors' Conference of France.

Likewise, the Assembly of the Brothers of the Region of France received a delegation of lay Directors during its meeting of 1982 and devoted some time to the work of the Lasallian Association.

As can be seen very well, the Brothers and the laity have thus decided to cooperate with one another in the study of the living tradition coming down to us from the Founder.

These meetings with the members of the Institute are also a privileged opportunity for the lay people to have an exchange with the Brothers in all simplicity.

Still, there is yet another mode of action which is very important in the Association and that is the *Visits to the Institutions*. These are of two kinds:

a) When a school asks to join the Association, an "Introductory" visit of two days is made to the place. One Brother and one lay member of the Council of the Association, accompanied by the Brother Visitor of the District, come to the school to meet the administrators and all the others who make up the educational community.

The Director is invited to prepare the programme of the two days which delves also into the financial and administrative conditions of the school as well as the spiritual and pedagogical matters, future plans, etc..

Recommendations are made on accepting the institution into the Lasallian Association.

b) Periodically, the member Institutions are visited, usually for a day or for a day and a half. This is an opportunity of strengthening the ties, of mutual examination and of enrichment.

A report, drawn up in collaboration with the Director, is sent to the Council of the Association.

At present, six institutions spread throughout France are Associate members of the Association. They educate close to 15,000 children, of which a relatively important proportion are in Technical Training.

E. ARQUILLERE

Director of the

John Baptist De La Salle

Learning Center of Lyons