

**THE POPES
AND THE INSTITUTE
OF THE BROTHERS
OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (2/2)**

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● **PIUS IX (Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti)
1846-1878**

Pius IX continued his predilection for the school in Castelgandolfo. Rigault (20) assures us that the Pope enjoyed talking with the Brothers of the school and that he visited the children in class, never leaving without giving them a gift.

In 1853 when the chapel was being built the Brothers asked the Pope for permission to convert the palace atrium into a chapel and he agreed. Today it is still a beautiful place for prayer for the Community and student body.

Another apostolate associated with the Pope was the Vatican "Schola Cantorum" school. Brother Vincenzo, from the school in San Salvatore in Lauro, skillfully became famous quickly (21) because he took the Institute name of Mastai from the Pope's last name.

A gesture of kindness towards the Institute was the naming of the Benedictine cardinal Juan Bautista Pitra as Protector of the Institute. He was distinguished by his zeal, character, learning and virtue and he had been a disciple of Dom Guéranger.

Much has been said about the friendship between Pius IX and Brother Philip, Superior General. The pontificate of Pius IX lasted 31 years and Brother Philip was Superior for 36 years.

There are several anecdotes about this friendship.

One example is that of a general audience in 1862. In front of the large multitude the Pope asked Brother Philip:

– "Brother Philip, where will we find bread to feed so many people?"

Brother Philip, who had brought the donations from the Brothers' schools throughout the world, responded:

– "Holy Father, the Brothers and students throughout the world have collected this small help for Your Holiness".

Also, perhaps in the very same papal audience, it is told that the Pope asked Brother Philip:

– "How old are you, Brother Philip?"

– "Brother Philip is the same age as Your Holiness".

The two of them knew very well that they were both born in 1792.

In the same or in another audience the Pope said as he was pointing to Brother Philip:

– "This is Brother Philip who is known throughout the world..."

Brother Philip underscored the Pontiff's witty remark with:

– "And also in Madagascar since yesterday where the Brothers have founded a Community".

A year before his death in 1874, Brother Philip was fortunate to hear the Pope proclaim the heroism of the virtues of the Venerable John Baptist de La Salle.

Pius IX, a few months before his death in 1878, told the Brothers: "At least you, Brothers of the Christian Schools, you who love your Holy Father and desire to console him in his pain, be solicitous about saving the souls of common children, the children of workers. These children will be the ones who will begin the regeneration of society".

● **LEON XIII (Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci)
1878-1903**

Leon XIII is the Pope of "Rerum Novarum", of the workers, of the industrial and technical age...During his long pontificate there were three Superiors in the Institute: Brothers Irlide, Joseph and Gabriel Mary.

The General Chapter of 1897, following the directives of the Pope, supported and promoted the "Youth Centers" or "Perseverance" as some called them. The Pope congratulated the Brothers and recommended to them that they continue this important post school apostolate (21).

The same Pope recommended to his own relatives a school for the education of one of his nephews: San José-De Merode, administered by the Brothers in Rome located in the Piazza di Spagna.

When electric lighting was being installed in St. Peter's Basilica, the Pope wanted the "mysteries" of electricity explained to him and Brother Leone, a teacher at the San José school was chosen to explain these "mysteries" to the Pope (22).

On February 19, 1888, Leon XIII beatified the Venerable John Baptist de La Salle. The ceremony reverberated around the world throughout the Institute but especially in special Lasallian places: Rheims, Paris, Rouen...Lives of the Founder, images, stamps, all these made their appearance...and it was the reason for the publication of the life of the Founder written by A. Ravelet.

It was also Leon XIII who canonized the Founder on May 24, 1900, along with Saint Rita of Cassia. This was also the day when electric illumination was turned on in the Vatican for the first time.

The year 1900 was proclaimed a Holy Year and also the Universal Exposition was held in Paris where the Institute won 13 gold medals, 21 silver, 14 bronze and 6 honorable mentions for its contributions to teaching.

● **SAINT PIUS X (Giuseppe Sarto)
1904-1914**

These were difficult years in Church government especially in France where the Combes' law had suppressed religious congregations. Brother Gabriel Mary, Superior General, consulted with the Pope about the best way to deal with this difficult situation.

In a papal audience given to the Brothers on October 10, 1903, the Pope honored them with the title "Apostles of the Catechism". This was in no way a rhetorical honor since it was recognized in a Papal Brief in July of the same year with the publication of the "Manuel du Catéchiste" (23).

Desirous of promoting Catholic Associations in Rome, Pius X asked the superiors to assign Brother Biagio to this task. His qualities as an organizer produced great results and many federations emerged. Worthy of special note was the eventual acquisition of sports federations. Because of his job and the explicit desire of the Pope, Brother Biagio had direct access to him as many times as he thought necessary without the need to ask for an audience beforehand.

● **PIUS XI (Achille Ratti)
1922-1939**

On April 26, 1923 the 34th General Chapter opened in which Brother Imier of Jesus submitted his resignation. A few days before, on April 17, 1923, Pius XI had sent a letter expressing his wish that the Institute open itself to the teaching of classical languages. Because of this letter the Institute became entrenched in a matter which had caused a lot of tension in some regions.

The year 1923 was also the year when the Pope authorized the incorporation of the Institute of the Franciscans of Charity of Menacor into our Institute. This was a small congregation that had various apostolates in Majorca.

On October 26, 1923 Pius XI beatified Brother Solomon, formerly Nicholas Leclercq, in a group of 196 martyrs of the French Revolution.

January 6, 1928, saw the Pope proclaim the heroism of the virtues of Brother Benilde and in his speech he spoke about the "terrible cotidiano", alluding to the monotonous and simple life of daily labor.

Pius XI promoted mission work in particular and he asked for special effort in this area. In 1928, the year Brother Allais Charles died, the Institute responded to the Pontiff's request with a special interest in mission countries (24).

● PIUS XII (Eugenio Pacelli) 1939-1958

Pius XII knew and respected the Institute greatly because until he was elected Pope he was its Cardinal protector. As such he had participated in the consecration ceremonies of the Generalate Church in Rome.

As Pope, in 1946, through the new Cardinal protector, he asked the Brothers to create a new Technical Institute which would later bear the name of Pius XII.

On April 4, 1958, he beatified Brother Benilde.

On May 15, 1950, he declared St. John Baptist de La Salle "heavenly patron of Christian educators" since he knew the pedagogical work of La Salle in the Church and in history. Later Lasallian Christian teachers offered to the Pope in gratitude for this gesture the present papal throne in the basilica of St. John Lateran.

● JOHN XXIII (Giuseppe Roncalli) 1958-1963

John XXIII, the Pope who convened the Second Vatican Council, had several encounters with our Institute before becoming Pope.

During his years as a young priest he lived in the San José-De Merode Institute as chaplain (25).

He was the Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople and the Brothers from Bulgaria were building the Saints Cyril and Methodius School in 1935. It was he who blessed the finished building.

His devotion to St. John Baptist de La Salle was reflected in his "spiritual notes" when on one April 7 he wrote: *"I respect the great saint we celebrate today like no one else: he should be one of the principal protectors of my work... The life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle has inspired in me a great edification and at the same time, extreme confusion. In order to succeed in what the Lord asked of him, and he is admired so much by the Church today for this, he had to suffer persecution, humiliation and untold sorrow..."* (26).

● PAUL VI (Giovanni Battista Montini) 1963-1978

In 1930, barely 37 years old and with 10 years of priestly service, Father Montini was the chaplain of the Pius XI Institute administered in Rome by the Brothers.

Later, while working with the F.U.C.I. (Italian Catholic University Federation), he held his meetings and conferences in the San José-De Merode high school in the Piazza di Spagna.

Brother Ivo, a teacher at the same school, was his French teacher and close friend.

When he was a Cardinal in 1962 he visited Nigeria and had a special meeting with the Brothers to whom he spoke about his experiences with Lasallian apostolates.

As Pope in 1963, shortly after beginning the second session of the second Vatican council, he named Brother Nicet-Joseph, Superior General, to serve as an expert.

In 1965 he visited the Pius XI Institute in Aventino where he served as chaplain. In his words of inspiration he "encouraged the Brothers to attribute all technical progress to God by means of faith and love".

In 1966 he authorized sweeping reforms of the primary school of the Brothers in Castelgandolfo. Today that school bears his name. Worthy of note is the beautiful chapel altarpiece made of pieces of porcelain and representing the Lord's birth.

On October 29, 1967 Brother Benilde was canonized but since the Pope had the flu that day the ceremony was presided over by Cardinal Larraona, CMF.

In 1974 Paul VI named Brother Charles Henry, Superior General as an expert in education for the Synod on Evangelization in the modern world. Nine other Superior Generals were invited to the same Synod (27).

On October 30, 1977, the beatification of Brothers Mutien Marie Wiaux and Miguel Febres Cordero took place in St. Peter's Square. The Pope, in a later speech from his window, said *"I honor all those who dedicate their lives to teaching and who make of this a Christian apostolate"* (28).

On the previous day, October 29, the Synod on Catechetics had closed, to which Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, Superior General, had been named as an expert.

● JOHN PAUL I (Albino Luciani) 1978, three months

We have chosen this anecdote about this Pope, when he was a cardinal, as told by Elio D'Aurora, an Italian writer, who has written a biography about St. John Baptist De la Salle.

The author writes about himself receiving a book from Cardinal Luciani. It was a copy of the cardinal's famous book "Illustrisimi". D'Aurora expressed surprise because among those excellent letters he did not find one addressed to La Salle. The Cardinal responded, *"Dear Elio, St. John Baptist de La Salle is a person for which I have so much respect that I can't imagine what I could write to him about. I consider him to be a total saint. I think it is he who should write to me, since he is the most elevated of all those about whom I wrote and he could teach me how to reestablish the light of reason in many young people"* (29).

● JOHN PAUL II (Karol Wojtyla) 1978-

In 1980 when the tercentenary of the foundation of the Institute was being celebrated, John Paul II wrote a letter to the Superior General in which he offered his congratulations for the work of the Institute in the world.

On November 21, 1981, he visited the Generalate of the Brothers. The visit was originally scheduled for May 16 but the assassination attempt caused it to be postponed. During his visit, he spoke to many families who were present for the occasion as well as to the Brothers in the chapter room and he celebrated the Eucharist in the Generalate chapel. He then accompanied the Brothers for supper. That supper room has now been named "John Paul II room".

But his most important connection with our Institute deals with the numbers of Brothers elevated to honor on the altars by John Paul II:

- October 21, 1984, canonization of Brother Miguel Febres Cordero.
- November 1, 1987, beatification of Brother Arnold.
- May 2, 1989, Beatification of Brother Scubilion, on the island of Reunion.
- December 10, 1989, canonization of Brother Mutien Marie Wiaux.
- April 29, 1990, beatification of the 8 Brother martyrs of Asturias and Brother Jaime Hilario, martyr in Catalonia.
- October 10, 1993, beatification of the 7 Brother martyrs of Almeria.
- October 16, 1994, beatification of Father Nicholas Roland, spiritual director of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Words of John Paul II to the Brothers: *"Be faithful to the charism of your Institute, be faithful to your original vocation as Apostles of the Schools"*. ●

(20) Rigault, op. cit., VI, 78. - (21) S. Gallego, Sembraron con Amor, 194.
 (22) F. Alban, Historie de l'Institut, 823. - (23) S. Gallego, Sembraron..., 241. Rigault, op. cit., VII, 148, 162. - (24) Circular 266, 31, 32. - (25) F. Alban, op. cit., 805, 824. - (26) S. Gallego, Vida y pensamiento..., XVII.
 (27) S. Gallego, Sembraron..., 731. - (28) Bulletin F.E.C., n. 221, 33. - (29) S. Gallego, Vidaypensamiento..., XVI.