

★ *lasalliana*

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**OUR LASALLIAN MISSION IN FRANCE:
TODAY AND TOMORROW**

**CONGRESS OF THE "ASSOCIATION LA SALLE"
Paris, France
18 - 20 April 1997**

**Brother John Johnston,
Superior General**

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The La Salle Association (ALS) in France

The La Salle Association (ALS) came into existence in 1978, when a number of lay headmasters asked the Brother Visitors of France to offer them the kind of accompaniment they provided for their own Brother headmasters, that is, to offer personal and spiritual support, and to guarantee the Lasallian character of the school by the canonical "tutelle" of the Institute, in accordance with the statutes of the Catholic Education Council of France.

Since 1986, the ALS has been providing this "tutelle" for all the schools belonging to the Lasallian "network" in France. All headmasters, whether Brothers or lay, belong to it. Brothers and lay persons are equally represented on the Board of Governors, and its chairman is a lay person. In the case of a tied ballot, the Brother Regional Coordinator (at present, the Brother Visitor) casts the deciding vote. This last measure was expressly requested by the lay members of the ALS.

In terms of financial support and staffing, the running of the network is mainly in the hands of the Brothers. Brothers appointed for the purpose visit schools; Lasallian formation is provided by the French Lasallian Centre in Paris and by Lasallian teams; specialised teachers' courses are run by the La Salle Institute; and communication and pastoral services are provided.

After more than 10 years of existence, it was time to assess the degree of success achieved by the network, and to draw up guidelines to ensure its future. At the present time, the Lasallian network covers 150 towns. It includes all levels of education from kindergarten to university, and the majority of the principals, 165, are lay people, while only 25 Brothers hold this position. Teachers are obliged to retire at the age of 65, and, at present, only 300 Brothers are still teaching, and many are on the point of retirement. The majority of schools have no Brothers' community attached, not even a community of retired Brothers. The average age of the 1,100 Brothers in France is 72.

Will the network be able, or want to continue to maintain the Lasallian character of schools as the number of Brothers decreases? This is a question which concerns both the Brothers as a whole, and those involved in the educational communities of the network. This being so, the recently held general meeting of the ALS was attended not only by its own members, but also by the members of the coming District Chapter and by four representatives from each of the schools. It was on April 20th last, at the end of this meeting, held at Issy les Moulineaux, near Paris, that Brother Superior General gave the address that follows.

B.A.H.



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It has been a great pleasure for me to participate in the Congress of the Association La Salle. I am very grateful for the invitation to be present throughout the program and for the opportunity to deliver my own reflections this morning.

Preparing this address has been intellectually stimulating. It has obliged me to study very carefully your preparatory material; to struggle to understand, with your own analyses as my point of departure, the reality of Lasallian education today in France; to formulate my own observations, questions, and comments; and to find appropriate responses to your excellent questions and very legitimate concerns. I can assure you that the entire process has been for me immensely challenging and profitable. Some of the questions that you have compelled me to consider involve issues that the Institute as a whole has not yet addressed directly. They are questions, however, that many other sectors of the Lasallian world will face inevitably in the very near future.

I have profound admiration for the extraordinary 317 year history of the Lasallian mission in France. You have today a great number and a fascinating variety of educational commitments. You continue to strive to provide human and Christian education for children and young people from families of moderate or low incomes, for youth who are marginalized, as well as for youth who are slow learners or who suffer from learning disabilities. I admire the creativity and boldness that have resulted in the very original organization that you call the Association La Salle. You have developed structures that permit you to respond effectively to your particular needs. Moreover, you have created a program of formation on the national level that has contributed and continues to contribute significantly to the never ending process of making our schools more authentically Lasallian.

Of course, there is always need for ongoing evaluation and constant search for even more effective approaches. And that is why you have come together. During these days you have become a temporary, but no less real, *community*, a union of Visitors, heads, delegates from some 306 units of Lasallian education in France, officials of the Association La Salle, and District Chapter delegates. You have come together to make a progress report on the functioning of the ALS since 1986: to evaluate its structures and mode of operation after eleven years of day to day experience, to consider its advantages and disadvantages, and to determine the consequences and lines of action for the coming years.

You have organized a stimulating program. Mgr. Coloni has shared important reflections on what the Church expects of us at this challenging moment in the history of Catholic education in France. Mr. Pierre Daniel, Secretary General of Catholic Education, has stimulated our thinking on the meaning of Catholic schools in the pluralistic age in which we find ourselves. You have spent many hours in group discussion and in very pertinent informal conversations.

The Congress is the result of intensive work that began at the local level. Some 350 documents were submitted to the ALS General Assembly, which then formulated syntheses. I have read the preparatory material with great interest. I have found your evaluations to be very frank. You tend to be quite critical of yourselves, perhaps too critical. But that tendency is far better than complacency.

I welcome the opportunity you have afforded me. I offer you these thoughts as a Brother who comes from a country, Church, and educational tradition very different from your own, and as one who has had an extraordinary international experience during the past twenty-one years. In preparing this talk, I have taken as point of departure your own evaluations, as well as the questions you submitted to me. I have reflected upon this material in the light of my overall experience and in the light of my limited knowledge of the reality of France.

From the beginning I want to insist that in no way do I pretend to have definitive answers to all of your questions. I hope, therefore, that your expectations are realistic. I am in total agreement with the delegates of the General Chapter of 1966-67 when they said that the Brothers, and I would add, all Lasallians, "must not wait for ready-made solutions from those in authority for the new problems that come from a world in evolution" (*Decl. 53*). Moreover, I believe firmly in the principles of subsidiarity and of inculturation, which is a way of expressing my conviction that decisions should be taken, to the extent possible, on the local level and in consideration of local realities.

What I can do, however, is to present principles and orientations that I consider to be of fundamental importance and of universal validity. I shall attempt to resolve certain ambiguities and to clarify a few areas that appear to me to be somewhat clouded. I shall address your questions and preoccupations as directly and honestly as I can.

As I have said, you have raised some concerns that no General Chapter has ever addressed. Nor did the current General Council consider them during the composition of the soon-to-be-published document on mission, a document based on the orientations of the last General Chapter. On these points I shall offer some personal opinions, which, of course, do not represent official positions of the Institute. They are rather contributions to an ongoing dialogue.

The point I am trying to make is simply this: you, Lasallians in France, must accept responsibility for the Lasallian mission in your country. You must make decisions that are at one and the same time in harmony with our traditions and effectively responsive to your specific reality. In France today and throughout the Lasallian world, we need creative and dynamic thinking, together with boldness and courage. We need to be prudent, of course, but not so afraid of making mistakes that we are paralyzed, unable to act, and confined to *reacting*. We need to *act* with foresight and decisiveness, rather than merely *react* to crises as they arrive. In the jargon of our day we must be *proactive*. We need to dominate our fears and act with confidence in ourselves, in one another, and in God.

The Lasallian Mission Today

Your working document indicates that for many of the teachers and personnel of your establishments, the international dimension seems quite remote. That is not surprising. We all tend to live within the "four walls" of our institutions and, for this reason, require reminders from time to time that the Lasallian world is bigger than our school, than our country, than our continent. Those of you who have had many years of contact with the Brothers and those who today are in schools to which communities are allied are perhaps more conscious than others of the international dimension. I suppose also that those who have taken the course at the Center of Lasallian Formation (CLF), as well as those who participate actively in the ALS, become, through their lived experience, more aware of the national, and to a certain extent at least, international dimension of the Lasallian educational tradition.

Intercontinental gatherings, at least on a regular basis, are not feasible. But meetings among Lasallians in Europe, such as the two large gatherings at Ostia and Strasbourg, are possible and very helpful. Moreover, a certain number of Lasallians participate in the European Association of Heads of Lasallian Institutions (ASSEDIL), or as members of various standing European commissions.

But my presence at the Congress is a reminder that we are all participants in the Lasallian mission of human and Christian education, a mission lived in more than eighty countries throughout the world. There are some 800,000 students in more than 900 educational institutions: pre-school, elementary, middle, secondary, technical, engineering, agricultural, teacher training, university. There are programs for the illiterate, migrants, itinerants, physically and mentally disabled, youth with learning impediments, youngsters with behavioral problems. There are pastoral centers offering a variety of religious and apostolic activities. There are centers for sport and other forms of recreation and social activities.

Among the 800,000 pupils and students are infants, children, adolescents, young adults, adults, and veteran adults. They represent a striking variety of cultures, races, ethnic heritages, and languages. They are not only Catholic, but also Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Shintoist, Confucianist, members of traditional religions, or of no religious faith. Some countries of the Lasallian world are well developed or moderately developed economically, while others are extremely poor. Most of them enjoy relative peace; but too many are ravaged by division, violence, and even war. Political realities range from highly supportive of our educational mission to totally opposed.

From Brothers' Schools to Lasallian Schools

There are more than 63,000 administrators and teachers engaged in this worldwide mission. Ninety-two percent of them are lay men and women. Two percent are priests or religious of other congregations. Six percent are Brothers of the Christian Schools. These statistics graphically express the extraordinary change we have experienced during the past several decades in the manner of living the Lasallian mission.

For some 250 years the Brothers of the Christian Schools were the "agents" of the Lasallian mission, aided by a small number of lay men. I have often described the operative model of that long period by an inverted triangle, the large number of Brothers at the inverted base and the small number of lay men at the inverted pinnacle. These lay teachers helped the Brothers conduct *Brothers' Schools*. But during the post-Vatican II years, the number of Brothers markedly decreased while the number of lay men and lay women notably increased. Moreover the Church - and the Institute - which previously had "tolerated" lay personnel as "a necessary evil" - recognized officially that the laity are called to participate in all aspects of Church life.

For these reasons the triangle began to change shape and gradually came to resemble a normal, rather than inverted, triangle. But it quickly became apparent that this *Brothers' school* model no longer made sense. During several years of confusion and frustration, a new model gradually evolved. This model is today officially accepted. We call it the *Lasallian School* model. The change of language is important. A *Lasallian School* is a school that is "animated", not by the Brothers, with lay men and women in a supportive role, but by the entire educative community, in which the Brothers participate. This model is best described not by a triangle, but by a circle that is parallel to the ground.

This new understanding has become increasingly accepted as reasonable, necessary, and viable. Enthusiasm among so many of our lay colleagues, together with a willingness and readiness to participate actively, has both surprised and pleased the Brothers. The rapid development of this new way of understanding Lasallian mission has been bold and stimulating.

Now it is immediately evident to you that the model of *Lasallian School* that I have just described is not the operative model of a very great number of your establishments, that is to say, of those schools in which there are no Brothers at all. The evolutionary process is continuing. Because of changing situations not only in France but in an increasing number of other countries, it is necessary to make more precise the models I have just described. Let us, therefore, sub-divide the circle model into *Circles 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5*.

Circle 1 describes a Lasallian educative community in which there is a community of Brothers directly involved in the school, a Brother as head, and a large number of lay teachers. The school served by this educative community is an active participant in the District network of Lasallian institutions. In some countries such schools are immediately accountable to "boards" or councils made up of both Brothers and lay men and women. But they are all ultimately accountable to the Visitor of the District. This model is the operative model of a very significant number of Lasallian institutions throughout the world today. It is obviously, however, not the most common model operating in France today.

Circle 2 describes a Lasallian educative community in which there is a community of Brothers directly involved in the school, a lay man or woman as head, and a large number of lay teachers. The school is also an active participant in the Lasallian network and accountable, ultimately, to the Visitor. This is the model of an increasing number of Lasallian institutions throughout the world and of a certain number of establishments in France.

Circle 3 describes a Lasallian educative community in which there is a community of Brothers, none of whom, however, are directly involved in the school, a lay head, and a large number of lay teachers. The school participates actively in the Lasallian network in the same manner as the schools in *Circles 1 and 2*. This model is common in a number of sectors of the Institute, including your own, and will inevitably become more common.

Circle 4 describes a Lasallian educative community in which there is no community of Brothers, a lay head, and a large number of lay teachers. The school continues to be an active participant in the network and is accountable in the same manner as the schools in *Circles 1, 2, and 3*. This is an increasingly common model in the District of France and in a few other sectors.

Lasallian networks today are made up of schools which can be classified in some or all of these four categories. In France, however, there is a dimension that is unique: it is only in your country that the ultimate accountability, at least in practice, is not to the Visitor and District Council, but to a district level structure made up of Brothers and of lay men and women, with a lay man or woman as President. There is an equal number of Brothers and of lay members on both the Administrative Council, effectively the "Council of the *tutelle*", as well as the Executive Committee. The final authority rests with the Visitor: for validity of decisions his vote must obligatorily figure in the majority.

N.B. The French word *tutelle* can be translated literally as *tutelage*. Catholic schools in France are under the *tutelage* - that is to say, guardianship, trusteeship, guiding influence - of either the diocese or of specific religious congregations. The concept of *tutelle* is of considerable importance in France. For this reason I shall employ the French word, rather than the seldom used English equivalent *tutelage*.

Circle 5, however, is quite different. It describes a Lasallian educative community that is similar to *Circle 4*. But the school it serves is accountable to intermediate bodies in which there are no Brothers and, ultimately, to a "Council of the *tutelle*" in which there are no Brothers.

This model does not exist at the present time. I have expressed it because I have the impression that it represents a goal towards which you are advancing. But I have the impression also - perhaps I am mistaken - that it is a goal that you have "assumed" or "taken for granted", rather than chosen freely, consciously, and explicitly from among various alternatives.

Throughout the past 317 years Lasallian education has always been intrinsically linked to the Brothers of the Christian Schools. *Circle 5* describes the Lasallian educational heritage, and responsibility for it, as having passed, *in whole or in part*, from the hands of the Institute to the hands of a corporate body composed exclusively of lay men and women. This transfer would take place should the Brothers decide that they do not wish to maintain, or are not able to maintain, responsibility for the *tutelle* of the Lasallian Network.

Before accepting *Circle 5* as a viable alternative, however, profound and complex questions have to be addressed and answered: Is *Circle 5* feasible? Is it desirable? Would it be acceptable to the Institute? Would it be acceptable to Church authorities? Later in this conference I shall offer some personal reflections on this topic.

Your Evaluation

I have watched recent developments in France with admiration and have often spoken of your experience during visits to other sectors. The Institute has much to learn from you. That is why I have been particularly interested in your own evaluation of the Association La Salle and of the exercise of the *tutelle* since 1986. In one way or another heads, teachers, personnel, Visitors, officials of the ALS have expressed their judgments. For my own use I have attempted to prepare a very succinct syntheses of positive and negative points, together with some of your observations and questions. I hope that this formulation is an essentially accurate resume.

Positive aspects:

- * The ALS has helped the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to continue its mission with a reduced number of Brothers.
- * The services of the ALS have been recognized and appreciated, primarily by the heads and by the Office of Catholic Education.
- * The visits to the establishments have been beneficial primarily for those in responsibility and for those making the visits. They are a tangible sign of membership in a network and have nourished a sense of belonging to it.
- * The *tutelle*, which has canonical authority, fosters the Lasallian identity of the institutions; promotes mutual relationships among the schools in the network; helps to mediate in difficult situations; challenges schools to grow professionally; offers ongoing formation.

Negative aspects:

- * Certain heads do not really adhere to the Lasallian Network. They attribute their non-adhesion, among other factors, to distance, multiple demands on their time, daily work, and financial considerations.
- * Some heads and others in positions of responsibility find it difficult to formulate aspects of our specific identity. They seem to lack the competence required. Some manifest a lack of commitment to the Lasallian vision.
- * Some heads are not at ease in verifying whether or not candidates for posts will be active supporters of Lasallian principles.
- * Relations between the *tutelle* and the faculties and personnel are often nonexistent. Many teachers do not seem to be aware of the Lasallian dimension. Consequently, they manifest ignorance or indifference in regard to the Lasallian identity. In fact, the word *Lasallian* understood as *religious* is at times the object of rejection.
- * Sometimes Brothers and communities manifest lack of clarity and even indifference concerning the *tutelle* and their relationship to it. Some Brothers and communities have a sense of being marginalized, while others tend to

marginalize themselves.

Some of your observations:

- * The Brothers must continue to question themselves about their place in the network in order to find happiness in their vocation, and in order to make known and to render attractive in the Church and among young people their specific consecration and ministry.
 - * There is a need to clarify the relationship of the *tutelle* with the entire educative community, including the management board of the institution (OGEC).
 - * Should ALS be an organization of heads only or should it include also the Presidents of OGEC?
 - * Is it necessary to maintain the *tutelle* of a school when there is no longer a community of Brothers? Is there not a risk that management could take precedence over mission?
 - * What will be the situation of formators for the Lasallian network in ten years? How will the pastoral, pedagogical, and theological aspects of Lasallian formation be assured?
- *What happens to the canonical status if the *tutelle* has to be exercised by lay men and women? In Canon Law and in the statutes of Catholic Education, it is the major superior who is responsible for the *tutelle*. What therefore is the role of the President of the ALS and of the lay delegates?

This list of positive elements, negative elements, and observations is based on your own evaluation. Permit me now to offer some of my own personal reactions, comments, and recommendations based upon that evaluation.

Meaning of Lasallian

As I have remarked on a number of occasions, I frequently have the impression that when I use the adjective *Lasallian*, John Baptist de La Salle is very irritated with me. In fact he is probably saying this morning: "I founded *Christian* schools and my successor is talking about *Lasallian* schools. Moreover, some people are talking about *Lasallian values*. What does that mean? The values I espoused were not my own; they were the values of the Gospel, they were *Christian* values."

We should take this observation seriously. We have to avoid words and actions that suggest a "cult of personality". I recently heard a young Salesian seminarian relate what happened when he asked his primary school class, "Who created the world?" One child answered immediately and enthusiastically, "Don Bosco"! De La Salle reminds us that when people asked John the Baptizer whether he was the Christ, or Elijah, or a prophet, he responded that he was none of those. He was only a "voice" striving to prepare the way for Christ. The founder said it must be the same for the Brothers (*Med.* 3.1). And that is precisely how De La Salle wants us to think of him.

Christian schools and Lasallian schools are not parallel categories. There is no question of Christian schools here and Lasallian schools there. A Lasallian school - whatever its nature or level - is essentially a *Christian* school. Researchers tell us that De La Salle used the word *Christian* frequently in his writings - 738 times, to be exact. They tell us also that when he used the word *Christian* in speaking of the schools, he meant *Catholic* (Bueno, Carmelo, *Lasallian Themes 1*, p.77).

For the sake of clarity, let me state explicitly that De La Salle's use of the expression *Christian* was not based on ecumenical considerations. It might be convenient to claim that De La Salle founded "ecumenical" Christian schools, but that would be a distortion of historical fact. De La Salle was a man of his day and lived in a specific geographical area. Nevertheless, he was a man who always made his own the thinking of the Church. Were he living today, I think that he would participate enthusiastically in the search for unity among all Christians.

Another important clarification. It is not helpful to say that our schools are "catholic" in the sense that they are open to everyone. It is, of course, true that they are open to all. For this reason, to consider them to be "catholic" in this sense is *technically* correct. But to use "catholic" in this manner is evasive and misleading. Lasallian schools are *CATHOLIC* in the sense that they are shaped by belief in Jesus Christ, as that faith is understood and professed in the Catholic Church.

It is in the very nature of the Church to proclaim Jesus Christ and to invite men, women, and young people to follow him. That is the interpretation the Church gives to Christ's words: "Go, teach all nations." The Church is a communion of persons, many of whom belong to communities within the larger communion. The Lasallian Family is one such community.

Lasallian schools, therefore, must be transparently **CATHOLIC** in order to be, as the *Rule* of the Brothers states, *signs of the kingdom* and *means of salvation*. The Christian identity of our schools involves more than courses of religious instruction, more also than pastoral programs. The Christian dimension must permeate and shape every aspect of the life of the school: tone, atmosphere, spirit, signs, symbols, relationships, curriculum, requirements, policies, regulations ... Because our schools are Catholic, they are called to *propose* - but in no way to *impose* - Jesus Christ, accepting with love and respect all the young people confided to them, whatever their religious beliefs.

We acknowledge, of course, that our schools exist in an age in which religious faith is often trivialized. Religion today is frequently treated as an unimportant facet of the human personality, one that should be kept "private"; religious convictions are presumed by some to be irrational, arbitrary, and irrelevant; religious people are expected to "bracket" their religious convictions from the rest of their personality.

Consequently, it happens in the Lasallian world, as we heard a few minutes ago, that some teachers are willing to call their schools *Lasallian*, but are reluctant to acknowledge that they are *Christian*. They profess "fidelity" to certain Lasallian pedagogical principles, but at the same time minimize or hide, if not deny, their Christian character.

We need, therefore, to be clear: an institution can legitimately call itself *Lasallian* only if it is unambiguously *Christian*.

The Specificity of Lasallian Education

But if Lasallian schools are essentially Christian schools, is there a "specificity" of Lasallian education? Are there characteristics that give Lasallian schools a specific identity?

The answer is clearly "yes". Lasallian schools are Christian schools, but schools in which a certain number of specific characteristics are given prominence. These characteristics correspond to priorities which De La Salle considered essential. The founder, however, did not leave us a definitive list of these characteristics. For this reason lists can vary somewhat in content, order, and number. I have made a list of seven characteristics, and, for practical purposes, have placed them in a certain order. But there is nothing absolute about either the list or the order. In practice the characteristics are interrelated. It is the integration of these characteristics which gives the school its *Lasallian* identity.

I spoke of these characteristics at length at Strasbourg three years ago. I limit myself now simply to naming them. A school can be said to be Lasallian when there is a profound reverence for each student as a unique person, when there is a spirit of community, when the school offers "quality education", when it really merits the adjective *Christian*, when it manifests solidarity with the poor and promotes the quest for justice and peace, when its administrators and teachers have made their own the characteristics of Lasallian education, and when the school community is formed in reference to the story of John Baptist de La Salle.

Lasallian Family

You have developed a lexicon that enables you to speak intelligibly within the world of Catholic and Lasallian education in France today. You speak of the *tutelle*, of the *Association La Salle*, of the *Lasallian Network*, of the *Local Delegations of the ALS* ... You employ less often than other sectors of the Lasallian world the expressions "shared mission" and "Lasallian Family". I am very pleased that you have created your own vocabulary. The expression "shared mission" has perhaps outlived its usefulness, and the expression "Lasallian Family", despite official orientations, continues to be given diverse definitions. It seems to me that when you speak of those who are *partners* in the *Lasallian Network*, you are speaking of those who are usually called *members* of the *Lasallian Family*. Nevertheless - and please forgive my frankness - I think that you also speak with a certain lack of precision. For that reason, the reflections that follow are, I think, pertinent.

Four years ago the General Chapter described the *Lasallian Family* in these words:

The expression *Lasallian Family* designates all those who participate in the Lasallian educational enterprise, especially those who are moving toward a sharing of the spirit and mission of St. John Baptist de La Salle. For that reason, by a process of initiation, formation and accompaniment, the Districts will stimulate groups among the Lasallian partners that will make possible a greater commitment (*Circ. 435, p. 49*).

The key **passage** is *all those who participate in the Lasallian educational enterprise*, that is to say, heads, other administrators, teachers, personnel, board members, parents, former students, friends, benefactors ... The key **word**

in the description is *participate*. The word is not defined, but it is clear that *to participate* is to be personally committed to the Lasallian educational endeavor. Furthermore, the description says that the expression *Lasallian Family* designates *especially* "those who are moving toward a sharing of the spirit and mission" of De La Salle.

In choosing the word "especially" the authors acknowledge and accept the existence of varying degrees of commitment and participation. Moreover, the words "moving toward" suggest an ongoing process. According to this description, to be considered a *member* of the *Lasallian Family* or a *partner* in the *Lasallian Network*, a person must, at the very least, accept the enterprise with respect and do nothing to impede its implementation. This is obviously the minimum level of participation. But the willingness to accept this minimum level manifests a realistic recognition that persons participate at different levels. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, we have among our Lasallian partners persons of many different religious faiths or of no faith at all. They share in some of the values that we consider Christian and Lasallian without sharing in all of them. Our policy in the Lasallian world is to center attention on what unites us rather than on what divides or separates us.

The *ideal* of full participation in Lasallian spirituality and mission is clear, but we must take people where they are, provided that they, at the very least, honor the Lasallian enterprise. The expressions *members of the Lasallian Family* or *partners in the Lasallian Network*, are, therefore, "umbrella" expressions. They describe a communion of persons who participate at various levels of commitment. Our approach should be to welcome everyone and at the same time encourage each to participate at a deeper level.

A more intensified sharing

The Brothers are called by *Rule* to make known "the essential elements of the Lasallian message to all the members of the educational community" and to propose "to those who desire it a more intensified sharing of Lasallian spirituality", encouraging such persons to make a more specific apostolic commitment. For this purpose they participate "in the formation of communities of faith" (*Rule*, 17c).

We recognize in these words a level of participation in the *Lasallian Family* that is distinct from the level I have just described. We are speaking now of "groups" or "communities of faith" within the *Lasallian Family* that have very clear and precise membership requirements: the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the two congregations of Lasallian Sisters, the Union of Catechists, Signum Fidei, the Third Order, Lasallian *Equipas* (Teams), and some, if not all, groups of Lasallian Youth and Volunteers ... Each of these "communities" has its own specific identity.

I conclude these thoughts on the meaning of *Lasallian* with a comment that my predecessor, Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, used to make in gatherings such as this one. He would caution his listeners about "taking the name of La Salle in vain", that is to say, adopting a reductionist approach to his life and teaching. We need to remember that De La Salle's vision of education cannot be separated from his vision of the human person and of God.

Some Additional Observations and Comments

Partners in the Lasallian educational endeavor

Under Theme 4 of the preparatory document, there is a quotation from the General Chapter proceedings that needs some explanation and clarification:

"The Institute, in its desire to support and welcome this promotion of lay people, offers to those men and women who wish to be involved in the partnership the opportunity to commit themselves more closely and deeply to the spirit and charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle, who saw educators as ministers of the Gospel" (*Circ.* 435, p. 30).

The words "offers to those men and women who wish to be involved in the partnership" need to be interpreted carefully in the light of what I have just said. The *Rule* of the Brothers states that "to achieve the purposes of a school, the Brothers foster a spirit of collaboration and mutual enrichment among **all the members** of the educational community" (*Rule*, 17b). This passage expresses the conviction that the participation of *all* the members of the educational community is needed to help the school achieve its purposes. But, as I said a few minutes ago, there is another level, and it is to this level that the passage quoted in the preparatory document makes reference: the Brothers propose "to those who desire it a more intensified sharing" (*Rule*, 17c).

It is misleading, therefore, to imply that commitment in the partnership is optional. It is not. *All must* participate - at least at the minimum level which I have already discussed.

If this participation is required of all the members of the Lasallian educational community, it is obviously required *a fortiori* of the heads. For this reason I find disconcerting the comments about the lack of active participation of some heads. I think that we have to be very clear. The person who accepts appointment as head in a school belonging to the Lasallian Network is obliged to conduct the institution in accord with Lasallian principles and must be held accountable by the Network for his performance.

All of these comments point to the ongoing need to give high priority to the CLF and at the same time to find more efficacious means for contributing to the Lasallian formation of the heads of the schools, as well as for both informing and forming the teachers and personnel generally, at the level of each establishment. I encourage you also to continue to promote the Lasallian "teams", a structure which can help those who have made the CLF or similar programs to maintain and deepen their commitment.

The specifically Christian character

I would like to comment on a sentence in Article 2 of the Statutes of the Association La Salle. There is probably a very logical explanation for the choice of words, but I find the passage to be potentially misleading. Among the powers of the ALS is that of "favoring maximum collaboration with the other diocesan associations *called to promote the specifically Christian character of the Lasallian educational institutions*. The choice of words could lead one to think that the task of promoting "the specifically Christian character" of our institutions is the task of the diocese rather than of the Association La Salle.

That is surely not the correct interpretation of the passage. Nevertheless, I would recommend that the text be revised. The current words suggest also that the principal if not exclusive task of the diocesan associations is that of promoting the Christian character, whereas I would think that their tasks are more comprehensive than that.

I am sure that it is obvious to us all that the promotion of the specifically Christian character of the Lasallian educational institutions must be a major priority of the ALS, especially of its Council and Executive Committee and of those charged with responsibility for pastoral activities and groups. In practice this obligation will include rendering assistance to the head, who has the principal obligation for fostering the Christian dimension.

In an interview published in *la Croix* a few months ago, your speaker of yesterday afternoon, Mr. Pierre Daniel, Secretary General of Catholic Education, spoke directly of this responsibility. He said that because Catholic schools are open to all youth who are disposed to respect the Christian dimension, they have among their students young people who are very different in regard to religious belief and at times have no religious belief at all. For this reason, he commented, the head must be convinced that a Catholic school is mission territory, one of the rare places where the Church can be in contact with the young. To respect young people, he added, does not mean that we take a neutral or indifferent stance.

I am in complete agreement. Many of the young people in our schools today are wrestling with fundamental questions concerning the meaning of life, as well as the place of religion, and are not ready at this time to declare themselves believers in Jesus Christ and his Gospel. We have to have teachers who are ready and able to meet these young people where they are, take them seriously, "walk with them" in total respect. We need to have teachers who personally believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and are willing to share that belief openly and sincerely. But, of course, there must be no attempt to impose that faith on the young. Teachers have to honor the right of young people to make their own decisions and in their own time. In speaking of the challenge that we face today in our schools, these words from the *Declaration* of the Brothers, written thirty years ago, are still very pertinent:

"These difficulties invite us to search together for answers in a clear-sighted and courageous fashion. We do not renounce in any way our determination to proclaim Jesus Christ; we believe that young people today need the gospel message and that they are capable of hearing it. In an atmosphere of freedom, and with full respect for the vast differences among the young in their religious development and the way they look upon Christ, it is important that we satisfy the hunger of those believers who want a more profound explanation of their faith, and that we try to answer the questions they are asking about the meaning of their lives" (*Decl.* 39.4).

In this regard I urge you to give your strong support to programs of religious instruction and of "religious culture" at every level of every establishment without exception. I encourage you also to make sure that the pastoral dimension enjoys real priority in your schools and to support the work of those engaged in pastoral ministry within the schools. In a particular way I recommend that you promote programs and activities associated with the Lasallian Youth movement in France, as well as with the program for volunteers. What Mr. Francis Tribout said recently about youth gatherings and group activities corresponds to what Lasallian educators are saying everywhere in the Lasallian world: young people welcome these opportunities for communication and dialogue with their peers concerning their problems, doubts, hopes, interpersonal relations, service to others - and their religious faith.

The number of establishments in the Lasallian Network

One final recommendation before I make some comments concerning the future. I suggest that you look closely at the extraordinary number of institutions for which you are responsible today. Can the Association La Salle provide the direction and animation that is required to assure that these schools are authentically Lasallian? That is a question for you. I have no firm position.

The Lasallian Network of Tomorrow

Earlier I spoke of the evolution from *Brothers' schools* to *Lasallian Schools* as a movement from a model I described as triangular to a model I described as circular. I said that in the Lasallian world today there are four different kinds of circles, depending on the degree of active involvement of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

I then suggested that there is a fifth possibility: Lasallian Schools that belong to a network in which few or no Brothers participate, a network in which the *tutelle* has passed from the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to an organization composed of lay men and women. *Circle 5* does not in fact exist. Nevertheless, in the not-too-distant future, it will be necessary to state clearly whether or not it is a long-range goal.

Before I offer you some personal and tentative reflections on the subject, let me say explicitly that we Brothers of the Christian Schools believe in our vocation and continue to be convinced that God is calling young men to follow us. We are blessed with good numbers of vocations in some countries, while in other countries, including France, we have few candidates.

It seems clear, therefore, that in France, in the not-too-distant future, there will be relatively few Brothers directly involved in schools. My own conviction is that these Brothers should form communities of approximately five to seven Brothers and concentrate their efforts in a very limited number of schools. I see no way that a small number of Brothers would be able to exercise responsibility for the *tutelle* of some 300 educational units. Nor do I see any compelling reason why they should be expected to exercise such responsibility.

But my opinions notwithstanding, the Brothers of France at some point of time will have to decide to maintain the *tutelle* over all or a reduced number of the establishments currently in the network, and, in dialogue with the members of the Association La Salle, decide what actions to take concerning the other schools.

I am aware that there are other possible arrangements. For example, the Brothers could decide to serve in a certain number of schools under the responsibility of an Association La Salle in which the Brothers no longer exercise the ultimate authority.

Throughout the history of the Institute, districts, when no longer able to maintain a community in a particular school, have passed that institution, with very rare exceptions, to the diocese, to another religious congregation, to the state - or have decided to close it. It is only in recent years that a concerted effort has been made to maintain schools as Lasallian schools, even without Brothers. You have considerable experience in this regard. But it is one thing to maintain Lasallian schools when the Institute has considerable visibility, and when Brothers are directly involved in the operation and animation of the network. It would be quite another thing should the Institute be less visible and involved.

The question that must be directly addressed is whether it is reasonable, realistic, and desirable to strive to maintain the Lasallian Network in the future without the involvement of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

In other words, can one envisage an association made up of well-informed and profoundly committed lay men and women who, with the help of sound structures of animation and accountability, together with efficacious programs of initial and ongoing formation, maintain schools that are authentically Lasallian?

I don't know the answer to that question. But I am certainly open to exploring the possibility. I think that reflection and discussion have to take place in an atmosphere that is calm, creative, realistic, and totally free. As you know, there are both canonical and juridical considerations. My opinion, however, is that solutions can be found to whatever problems there are in these areas. I think there are three far more fundamental questions: 1) Do the lay members of the Association La Salle *want* to maintain the Lasallian Network even without Brothers? 2) Are they prepared to make the *commitment* that would be required? 3) Can they provide reasonable assurance that their successors would possess this *desire* and *commitment*?

I mentioned that the discussion has to take place in an atmosphere that is totally free. By that I mean, among other things, that nobody - Brother or lay - should feel guilty about deciding that certain schools or even the entire network should be passed to the diocese. The Institute has *never* said that our schools must remain *Lasallian* even in

the absence of the Brothers. The personal opinion that I have expressed consistently over the years is that what is essential is that our schools continue as *Catholic* institutions. If, however, they can be maintained also as *Lasallian*, so much the better.

It is my understanding that certain bishops in France have expressed doubts about the long-range possibility of maintaining the Lasallian Network with few or with no Brothers. I can appreciate their concern. The bishops are obliged to do everything they can to assure that schools currently under the *tutelle* of religious institutes continue as Catholic institutions, in the event that members of those institutes can no longer exercise effectively their traditional role. If Lasallians take the position that the network can be maintained without the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the burden of proof rests with the Lasallians.

Conclusion

As I said in the beginning of this long address, I believe profoundly in both inculturation and subsidiarity. In other words I believe that, to the extent possible, decisions should be taken on the local level and in consideration of local realities. You are the current leaders of the Lasallian Network in France. As such you don't have the luxury of waiting passively for the future to "happen". It is your obligation to participate actively in both the reflection and the decision-making required to assure a viable future for the schools in your extensive network. To assist you, I have articulated pertinent directives and orientations of the Institute. At the same time I have offered you some personal opinions.

I think the best way for me to close this conference is to borrow the concluding remarks of an extraordinary address delivered last September to the National Catholic Education Convention in New Zealand by an eighteen year old student of De La Salle Institute in Auckland. This young man told those distinguished educators a simple story, a story that I think has something important to say to you.

"There was once an old wise man and a young smart man. One day the young smart man captured a small bird in the palm of his hands and he went up to the old wise man and said: 'Old man, I have a small bird in the palm of my hands. Is this bird dead or is it alive?' He was going to trick the old man. The old man thought to himself, 'If I say it is dead, then the young man will release it to fly away, thus proving me wrong. But if I say it is alive, he will squeeze it to death and again prove me wrong.' After thinking about his response carefully, the old wise man replied, '*Young man, the life of the bird is in your hands.*'"

Lasallians, the life of the bird is in your hands.