

THE BUILDING UP OF THE HISTORIC MEMORY OF THE INSTITUTE TODAY

First part

What has been done to preserve the Historic Memory of the Institute

*Brother Henri Bédel fsc
District of France*

ABSTRACT

Brother Henri Bédel, an historian, presents three articles on the building up of the historical memory of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, taken from the five books he has written for the Lasallian Studies Collection (5, 6, 9, 11, and 12). He provides a basic methodological framework and a synthesis where he covers key events for the purpose of inviting the reader to an in-depth study. The bibliography is referenced throughout the article.

Key-words: historical memory, Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Superior General, Lasallian Studies.

INTRODUCTION

I was asked to write a text on “The building up of the historic memory of the Institute today”. Two things appear clear:

1. It is already a question of the ‘Historic memory of the Institute’. This therefore concerns the rooting of the Institute in the past which we have tried and which we try to restore according to the historic method, that is to say, at least up to now, above all from written documents. The first part of the present text will be devoted to making a kind of rapid database of what has been achieved in this area. Since I have myself carried out a work of this kind I shall then use that to show what guided it and bring out what one can hope to expect from it as well as its limits.
2. In the second place, there is the precision ‘Today’. At the moment where we find ourselves, it seems that there are two aspects to be envisaged. The first is connected with the preservation of what has been done in the Institute, in order to preserve this ‘memory’. There is therefore a kind of assessment to be established on this subject. There is also the need to question ourselves on the means for ensuring the material conservation of what is thus related to the past. This question arises with even more acuity in countries where the Brothers, after having been present for a long time, are gradually disappearing. Equally, from the fact that new methods of conservation are appearing, we need to be concerned with ensuring their lasting quality. The

second aspect concerns the continuation of what has allowed us, up to now, to transmit ‘the historic memory of the Institute’. The International Council of Lasallian Studies (CIEL) has planned the method for ensuring the pursuit of what I have myself undertaken and which stops at 1946. Now it is a question of carrying out what was thus envisaged. Other orientations can equally be given and followed.

1. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO PRESERVE THE HISTORIC MEMORY OF THE INSTITUTE.

Before going into detail, it would seem useful, so as not to have to return to it, to recall the general means we have for accessing this ‘Memory’.

First of all in the framework itself of the Institute, access to various collections of archives, the main one being in the Mother House in Rome and which we continue to refer to by its French language initials (AMG). In the different administrative sub-divisions across the world there are also what we call District Archives (AD) or even those of smaller units, starting with local Communities. At present, archive centres grouping those from a number of Districts, past or present, have been created. This is the case in the US, France, Central Europe and doubtless in other countries. These archive centres can also preserve Institute printed matter, past or recent, such as books published by the Institute or its members, publications intended for the Brothers, such as circulars, death notices, various bulletins or those addressed to a wider public [here it is important to try to preserve entire series, which can often prove an exploit!]. These publications can also be preserved in specialized centres, as in Spain it seems, and definitely in Turin for Italy.

In the archives proper to the Institute one also finds ‘*Histories*’ established for an entire District or even a sector of the Institute, such as that by Br. Lémandus for the South of France. More often these *Histories* have been held by communities as was prescribed by Br. Superior Irlide in 1881. Later Communities were asked to draw up an annual *History Supplement* which had to be sent to the Mother House. They are found in the AMG.

However, especially because of the school activities of the Brothers, elements connected with them and their institutions can be found in Ecclesiastical Archives and still others in those of different public bodies or collectives. Thus, in France you can consult the National Archives (AN) of Paris, the Department Archives (AD) or Municipal Archives (AM).

Historians have already frequently consulted the archives and book deposits already mentioned. Such is the case especially with those who have written the General Histories of the Institute such as that in French by Georges Rigault or in English by Br. Clair Stanislaus (Battersby). I also tried, as will be presented later. To this type of work we must add that of Br. Pedro Gil published in *Études Lasalliennes* No.4 and which in a historic outline proposes a deep reflection on what we are dealing with here. There are also the Histories of the Institute drawn up in different countries and which have progressively multiplied in recent years. [These are of fairly diverse types, but the main archive centres or book deposits should keep one copy of as many as possible of these]. There are, of course, books published locally to recall the past of a house of the Institute, but that is on another scale. To these historic works one could add, for example, studies of the same natures which have appeared in the *Bulletin des Écoles Chrétiennes* (BEC), at least in the first series of editions.

This long preamble has seemed necessary to avoid having to come back over these different aspects for each of the big stages which one can deal with in the drawing up and transmission of the 'Historical memory of the Institute'. After what one might call the 'time of the origins', one can distinguish three parts corresponding to a different century; a major event for the Institute having occurred close to the passage from one of these centuries to another, marks the separation between them.

[Placed in the same way between brackets, precisions, explanations, reflections will be given in the course of the text. References to volumes having as their title: *Introduction to the History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, and published in the series *Études Lasalliennes*, will be given in the following way: EL 5; EL 9; EL 11; EL 12].

1.1. The Time of the Origins

In this 'time of the origins' we include what concerns the establishment by John Baptist De La Salle of the 'Society of the Christian Schools' - later called 'The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools' - and the years when the Brothers who were taking on the running of their Institute obtained the recognition of the latter by the public authorities and the Holy See.

For the Brothers who lived at the time of their Founder - in the meaning given to this word at present - what he wrote for them contributed for many of them to the formation of a common spirit which has become the first element of the 'historic memory' which began to be formed among the Brothers after the death of their 'Dear Father', as they used to call him affectionately. These writings included the correspondence which the members of the Institute had to exchange regularly with the person who had been their Superior for a long time. This correspondence must have been abundant. There remain no more than some elements that one finds in the *Complete Works* grouping together the writings of St. J.-B. De La Salle, between pages 509 and 594.

Other writings have taken the form of books which J.-B. De La Salle himself published for the Brothers; whether it was 'pedagogical and scholarly' works, notably *The Conduct of Christian Schools* or the two works called 'spiritual' which were the *Collection of Little Treatises* or the book of *Rules*. For the Brothers who survived their Founder, as well as for those who then entered the Institute, there were added to these works others considered as being by J.B. De La Salle and which were published in the 1730s. In fact if one does not always find there the letter of what he wished to express, one has the substance. [The 'princeps' edition of the books we have just mentioned was reproduced in the series *Cahiers Lasalliens*; a presentation of this was made in a series of pamphlets edited in Canada by Br. Raymond Brisebois. These works can also be found in the *Complete Works*].

Starting out from the Brothers who were in the Institute in the 1730s and therefore for us also, the 'historic memory' which was kept during the 'period of the origins' depends a lot on what was written by the first biographers of Monsieur De La Salle: Br. Bernard, one of the first disciples of the Founder; Don François-Élie Maillefer, Canon Regular, nephew of the Founder; Canon Blain who exercised different functions among the Brothers in Rouen. To be honest, the Brothers barely had any knowledge of the texts written by the two former; preference in the Institute was given to the two tomes of Canon Blain's work: *La Vie de monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur de Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, published in Rouen in 1733 (cf. EL 5, pp.15-16).

The biographies written in the 18th Century were often inspired by this last work. In the same way, in the 19th Century, Br. Lucard, took up elements of it in the first volume of his *Annales de l'Institut des*

Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes. It was only towards the end of the 19th Century, on the occasion of the Beatification of the Founder, that Armand Ravelet wrote a biography according to the historic method. Following this, other authors did the same in different languages. More recently, research carried out by Br. Louis-Marie Aroz on John Baptist De La Salle and his family has renewed the knowledge we had on this subject up to then. Some historians were able to profit from the results of this research which have been published in various Cahiers Lasalliens.

It is thus, that starting out from the writings of the first biographers and different complementary elements collected elsewhere; one can go back over two principle times from the Origins of the Institute.

1-1-1 Formation of the Institute

In this regard, in the 'Historic Memory' of the Institute we like to recall how Canon De La Salle who was not at all destined for that, came to look after schools for the poor boys of Reims and then to get interested in their teachers, so much so that after having gathered them into a community of 'Brothers', he ended up forming with them a 'Society' resembling those which, at present in the Church, are known by the name 'Societies of Apostolic Life' - with the difference that in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools thus constituted, there were no priests, with the temporary exception of him whom the Brothers wanted to keep as Superior.

In the last years of the 17th Century and the early years of the 18th, this Society gradually grew – to which CL3 testifies. And since it had been formed with a view to running 'gratuitous schools' it expanded into twenty establishments in the North and South East of France. Two Brothers were even sent to Rome in 1702. Only one remained and by dint of perseverance, he obtained 'a stable employment under contract in a Papal school' (EL5, p.136) [See also *La prima scuola lasalliana a Roma* by Br. Rodolfo Meoli].

1-1-2 The taking charge of the Institute by the Brothers

J.-B. De La Salle, in spite of his wish to entrust the running of the Institute to a Brother, had to continue as Superior for longer than he would have wished. However, during the years 1712-1714, because of difficulties encountered, he went away to the Midi regions of France. The beneficial stage spent in Grenoble and on the hill of Parménie (see CL57), along with the appeal addressed to him by the Brothers of Paris and neighborhood, led him to take up again his place in the Institute up to the time of his replacement in 1717 by Br. Barthelemy (Joseph Truffet). He was not losing interest in the Institute but from now on it would be in the hands of the Brothers.

When Br. Barthelemy died, he was replaced by Br. Timothée (Guillaume Samson Bazin). The latter was concerned with obtaining the recognition of the Institute by the authorities of the Kingdom and the Holy See. The steps taken with the former ended in 1724 with the obtaining of *Lettres Patent* which were registered by the Parliament in Rouen. The approaches to Rome were aimed at obtaining a *Bull of Approbation*. These succeeded in 1725. [The study of this question by Br. Maurice-Auguste (Alphonse Hermans) was the subject of CL11]. It remains true however, that in the course of these approaches, those who were leading them were led to agree that, from then on, the Brothers would pronounce the three traditional vows of religion, which led to the Institute being introduced among those that we now call 'Institutes of Consecrated Life'. On the other hand, the vow of association was replaced by a vow

of teaching the poor gratuitously, the interpretation of which would not be without posing problems later. The Brothers modified their Rules and the formula of their vows to have them conform to the Bull, in 1726.

1-2 The 18th century

Under this heading one understands here the time between 1726 and the year 1804 which, for the Institute could be considered as marking the end of the consequences brought about for it by the major event of the French Revolution.

As regards the way in which the Brothers of this period appropriated the 'historic memory' of the Institute, one could say that there was no difference from that of the Brothers present in the first quarter of this century. Both continued to find in the writings of the Founder of the Institute, the same source of inspiration. In the volumes of Canon Blain, they would discover the work of the Founder of the Institute. But, perhaps, more anxious to find in the latter a model to imitate, they were more attentive to the second volume of Blain emphasizing the virtues of Monsieur De La Salle.

As for the knowledge which we ourselves can have of this period, what needs to be emphasized is that the documents concerning the Institute which could have disappeared or at least be dispersed at the time of the French Revolution, were preserved thanks to an initiative of the Superior General who was at the head of the Institute at the beginning of these events - an initiative which we will come back to later. It is necessary also to note that for the period we are considering at present, we have a second tome of the *Annales de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, written in the 19th Century by Br. Lucard. Its interest lies in its being much closer to the facts in question; on the other hand we must sometimes regret a certain lack of reliability. Having said that, one can indicate broadly, what merits our attention in the two main periods we can bring back to the period examined here.

1-2-1 In the course of the 18th Century

The continuity with the preceding time indicated above was all the more ensured because the Superior General who had been elected in 1720 remained the same up to 1751. Under his prudent leadership, about 60 'houses' –communities with a dependent school- were opened by the Brothers across France, with the exception of a zone between the North-West and South-West. During the final years of his mandate, Br. Timothée encountered some problems. At the General Chapter of 1751 he asked to be relieved of his duties. This was granted and he died some months later.

In a second period of time which one could make run up to 1777, the Institute came up against different forms of opposition, notably from the Jansenists, from the supporters of the Philosophy of the 'Lumières' and even from some ecclesiastical authorities, including the Archbishop of Rouen. During this time, Br. Claude (Pierre Nivet, aged 61) had been chosen as Superior. His successor, Br. Florence (Jean Boubel, born in 1725), elected in 1767, was considerably younger. However, not considering himself up to the task, at the General Chapter of 1777 he offered his resignation, which was accepted. Under these Superiors, a wished-for slowing down in the creation of new works, took place.

A third period of time opened with the election as Superior of Br. Agathon (Joseph Gonlieu, born in 1731). The latter gave a new impetus to the Institute. This Brother addressed himself readily to the Brothers under the form of Circulars the texts of which have been preserved. Three of them carry the

title *Instructive letter of Br. Agathon, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, addressed to all the Brothers*. Among those we find one where he develops the *Twelve Virtues of a Good Master* which J-B. De La Salle had only listed in the *Collection of Little Treatises*. All this was not unconnected with the fact that Br. Agathon found himself at the head of an Institute full of strength, even if one of his Assistants, Br. Paschal, condemned the fact that too many Brothers were leaving the Institute. Since he saw the remedy in a better formation, he sketched its main lines (see EL6, p.121). 6

1-2-2 The Time of the French Revolution

At the time of the French Revolution, because of the shape taken by the events, the 'Historic Memory' of the Institute could have died out. Without seeing things in this way, of course, Br. Agathon, when he noticed that there was a threat to the Institute, made an effort to turn it around by addressing, from 1789, a series of short articles to the members of the Constituent Assembly which had emerged from the States General. He brought out the importance of the vows pronounced by the Brothers for ensuring the cohesion of the Institute; he also stressed the social role played by the Brothers. [These articles are preserved in the AMG].

When the Assembly, in 1790, suppressed the monastic Orders, the 'Secular Congregations' - called thus because their members were involved in teaching or caring for the sick - the Institute of the Brothers which was part of this, was spared. But, on the other hand, in the same year, the Assembly, wishing to reorganize the Church in France adopted what was called the 'Civil constitution of the clergy'. When it was required that persons exercising a public function accept it - at the same time as the ensemble of the new Constitution - by taking an oath, the Brothers teaching in the primary schools saw themselves forced to take this oath. When Brother Agathon told the Brothers about the schismatic character of the said Constitution of the Clergy, the Brothers called upon to take the demanded oath - including some who were not in the schools - for the most part refused to give in to this demand. The result was that those who were in the schools lost their place. Since the Institute could not take charge of all these Brothers, some left from that moment with the approval of the Superiors. This is how Br. Vivien (François-René Gaudenne) found himself being entrusted by the Br. Superior with a trunk containing some relics of the Founder and various documents including important registers. This Brother who became a Secretary in the Gendarmerie, kept this until he gave it back on rejoining the Institute after the Revolution. The ostracism measures taken with regard to the 'non oath-takers' brought about the death of 7 Brothers: Br. Solomon massacred at the Carmelite prison on Sept. 2nd 1792, Br. Moniteur, guillotined at Rennes in 1794 and Bros. Pierre-Christophe, arrested in Moselle, Leon and Roger at Moulin and Uldaric at Nancy, who after having reached Rochefort on foot and been piled into wrecked ships died on board in frightful conditions (cf. EL 6, p.199f).

A law of August 18th 1792 suppressed the 'Secular Congregations' including that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, thus obliging all its members to disperse. Information from various sources found at the AMG or left behind on their death by former members of the Institute who had rejoined; allow us to know what became of certain Brothers. It is thus that we learn that Br. Agathon had been put in prison in 1793 and that he had only escaped death by the appeasement of the Terror which followed the fall of Robespierre [for the chronology we are not taking into account here the 'Revolutionary Calendar' established at the time]. Br. Agathon later lived at Avignon with some former Brothers. For his part, the former Superior- General, Br. Florence, was incarcerated at Avignon along with Br. Maurille, with whom he had been living.

Nevertheless, during this period, the continuity of the Institute was ensured by the Brothers already in Italy and others who had joined them in Rome and Ferrare, as well as at Estavayer in Switzerland. Since these Brothers did not know what had become of their Superior, Pope Pius VI, in 1795, named Br. Frumence (J.B. Herbet), then Director of one of the houses in Rome, as Vicar-General of the Institute. In a moment of calm during the persecution in France, Br. Agathon wrote to Br. Frumence. While in this letter he showed his deference towards the person the Pope had named as Vicar-General, the Titular Superior General said he was ready to resume his duties as soon as that would be possible. But, in France, the period of calm was of short duration and, as we now know, Br. Agathon died on September 17th 1798 (cf. EL 6, p. 213f).

One could surmise that after the taking of power by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799, the revolutionary movement had ended in France. In the framework of the reorganization of elementary education undertaken by the one with the title of Prime Minister, former members of the Institute grouped together, especially after 1802, to retake or take charge of schools. A request with a view to receiving official authorization for gathering together having been presented to Bonaparte in the name of the most important of these groups formed in Lyon, the Prime Minister wrote on this request the comment 'approved', on December 2nd 1803. The Prefect of Rhone, having been made aware of this response in November 1804, informed the Brothers about it a few days before the Vicar General, arriving from Rome, joined them.

1-3 The 19th Century

For this century, if for what concerns the Institute, we pick here as a beginning, the date 1804, we choose the normal date of the end of the century as its end. Furthermore, in what concerns this new period, the two aspects presented in the preamble for the periods preceding it, will be integrated into each of the three subdivisions which will be looked at one after the other.

1-3-1 The Restoration of the Institute (1804-1838)

When the French Revolution had ended, the transmission of the 'Historic Memory' of the Institute depended on the Brothers who had entered in the course of the 18th Century and who participated in its restoration sometimes even before the arrival of Br. Frumence in Lyon but especially from then on. Several sources found in the AMG allow us to evaluate that the number of Brothers who successively rejoined the Institute was about one hundred. To that number we should add the twenty or so who had ensured its continuity in Italy and Switzerland during the time of the Revolution (Cf. EL 9, pp 57, 58).

Brother Frumence having died in 1810, a General Chapter composed almost exclusively of Brothers who had entered the Institute before the Revolution took place and elected as Superior General Br. Gerbaud (Sébastien Thomas) who had contributed effectively to the reestablishment of the Institute in France. The General Chapter also showed clearly its intention of placing itself in continuity with that of 1787. When, in 1822, a new Superior General had to be named, the choice of the Chapter once again fell upon a member of the old generation: Br. Guillaume de Jésus (François Marre), aged 74. In 1792 he had to leave the Pensionat de Marseille because he had refused to take the required oath and he succeeded in getting to Rome; he went back to France in 1813. Particularly affable, this Brother, in turn, made himself the guarantor of the continuity of the Institute with regard to what it had been before the Revolution. [With regard to what concerns us here, one could emphasize the special interest of the 'minutes' of the correspondence of the three Superiors of which we have been speaking and which

make up several notebooks kept in the AMG. One could add to this those on which Br. Guillaume liked to establish lists and statistics!].

But, moreover, it must be recognized that one of the merits of the Brothers who had ‘escaped’ from the Revolution, had been to immediately associate young Brothers with their efforts to restore the Institute. Br. Jonas (J.B. Mairez) – arrested in Belgium in 1798 and in prison for 27 years before being liberated in 1800 – could write to Br. Frumence on the subject of the novices he was training in Langres: “These are the children of the Revolution, very different from what we were” (quoted in Rigault IV, p. 174). On the other hand, Br. Gerbaud recognized in a letter of 1817, that he counted on “the pupils-novices- of Br. Emery (their Director) and not on the Directors coming out of the brawl of the Revolution” (quoted in Rigault IV, p.446. Effectively, with the older ones who held on up to the limit of their strength, it was the young who allowed the Institute to contribute to the restoring of primary education in France, in view of which, he who had become Emperor Napoleon 1st wished to associate the Brothers with the body of teachers which had been created above all for secondary education under the name of ‘Imperial University’, by a decree of March 17th 1808.

One could say that the transmission which was made from the older towards the young ones had been accomplished when Br. Anaclet (Louis Constantin Claude, born in 1788) who had entered the Institute in Lyon in 1805, was elected to replace Br. Guillaume de Jésus. The choice of the Capitulants could be explained by the qualities which this Brother had shown in every respect. It should be noted that the new Superior had introduced certain flexibility with regard to positions forbidden categorically up till then. Thus in 1834, a ‘General Committee’ convened with a view to revising the ‘*Conduct of Schools*’, agreed to introduce certain elements from the method called ‘Mutual Education’, whereas Br. Gerbaud, supported by the General Chapter of 1816, had confronted the government of the period which had wanted to impose this method on the Brothers.

During these same years the Brothers who were in Rome and Orvieto where a novitiate had been opened in 1795, had experienced difficulties with the French administration at the time of the annexation of the Pontifical States to the Napoleonic Empire. On the other hand, when the monarchy had been reestablished in France, King Charles, having asked that the French Brothers establish themselves in Rome, the arrival of these Brothers in Rome in 1828, depending directly on the Superior General, had established a ‘duality’ of Brothers in Rome and other places, which would go on for some time. After the Congress of Vienna which reestablished the Italian Brothers, the Brothers began to gain other towns in the Papal States. Furthermore, the King, finding himself in charge of Piedmont, and knowing the Brothers from Savoy, which was also under him, asked for some Brothers for the city of Turin; the first ones which were sent there began in 1830 a fruitful work which would extend to other cities.

During the Revolution, the French Brothers had taken refuge in the Belgium provinces and got themselves known there. When, in 1814-1815, the Congress of Vienna had reattached these provinces to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the municipalities being able to call upon Religious Congregations to run their primary schools, several towns asked for Brothers and got them. Such was the case in Namur (1818), Liege (1819), Tournai (1821). But the frustrating annoyances of which they became the object on the part of the Dutch authorities, Protestant or liberal, led the Brothers, including the Belgians who had entered the Institute, to return to France. But when in 1830, Belgium obtained its independence and made freedom of education one of its institutional principles, the Brothers returned and the Institute started to develop in the country.

Bourbon Island (now Reunion) having been given to France in 1815, the government authorities asked for Brothers to open schools there. Six Brothers landed there in 1816, but the real beginning of the work of the Brothers there began in 1826. A similar attempt was made in Cayenne, in French Guyane, in 1823. The letter sent by Br. Guillaume de Jésus to the Brothers who had gone there traced out 'a veritable program of missionary apostolate' but it came to nothing as the attempt failed from 1825. [This letter is known from the 'minutes' found in the AMG under: EE272-1/22 let.38].

1-3-2 The Time of Br. Philippe

One could say that the memory of the rapid move of Br. Anaclet to the head of the Institute was eclipsed by that of his successor whose Generalship lasted for almost 36 years. In 1838, the General Chapter elected as Superior of the Institute, Br. Philippe (Mathieu Bransiet) aged 46. In his youth he had seen his parents hide priests who had refused to take the Constitutional Oath. He had also benefited from the teaching of a Brother who had to leave the Institute because of the Revolution. He entered the Novitiate in Lyon in 1809. He was quickly noticed for his merits wherever he was sent.

If we have kept few of the handwritten documents of this Superior, nevertheless one finds in the AMG an abundant correspondence which, by means of one or more secretaries, he carried on with members of the Institute, with those who wrote to him to get Brothers or different religious or civil bodies up to members of the government – was it not said that Br. Philippe had twice been a Minister of Public Instruction. From Br. Philippe we have also kept many Circulars, including those intended to retrace the main lines of the lives of the deceased Brothers, whose writing he had systematized. Besides, this Superior wrote or arranged to be written, several books aimed, in particular, at fostering the piety of the Brothers, but whose doctrinal weakness was in line with that which, in a general way, characterized this period.

In the Institute we continue to hear that the time when Br. Philippe was at the head of the Institute marked its 'apogee'. If, by that, one wishes to say that the number of Brothers had been at its highest, it is false – if twice, the Brothers, counting from the end of the novitiate reached 15,700 - it was in 1902-03 and 1964-65. On the other hand, the time of Br. Philippe's Generalship was that when the Institute had its strongest and most rapid growth – in 1840 the number of Brothers was around 2,500 and by 1875 it had reached 11,700 (cf. EL 9, p.146).

Furthermore, during the same years, the Institute had reached quite a few new countries. There was Switzerland (Geneva) in 1839; Turkey in 1841; the USA in 1845; Egypt in 1847; Germany in 1850; Singapore and Malaysia in 1852; Algeria in 1853; England in 1855; Tunisia and Madagascar in 1856; Austria in 1857; Mauritius in 1858; the Indies in 1857; Burma in 1860; French Indochina in 1865; Ceylon in 1868. The results obtained were, however, unequal. While in the USA the Brothers had arrived at the time when the American Bishops were establishing network of school establishments for the children of the numerous Catholic immigrants and the Institute was solidly implanted, in England it had difficulty finding its place. Then there were the mission countries where the Brothers were generally called by French missionaries and while, for example, they succeeded well in implanting themselves in Turkey and Egypt or even in most of the English possessions in South-East Asia and in India, they quickly abandoned adventurous implantations and even, sometime later, the most favorable South-East region of the sub-continent.

And also, the works of the Brothers were diversifying. After Br. Guillaume had obtained favorable opinion from the Holy See for the establishing of boarding-schools, they had already created some in

France. Each of the 'Districts' among which the 'houses' of the Institute were divided tended to have at least one boarding-school which assured it the resources for the formation of young Brothers. Under the Generalship of Brother Philippe the number of Districts having increased by the subdivision of older ones, the same thing happened with the boarding-schools. The Brothers even think that this Superior favored these creations to the detriment of the gratuitous schools. It is not proven but it is true that in the boarding-schools the *ratio* of Brothers to pupils was much higher than in the schools – with, it is true the presence of fairly large numbers of Brothers with temporary vows or old Brothers. Once could also point out the exaggerated 'weight' of certain Directors of these establishments in the Districts, especially when they were in charge for a long time. [All this needs to be 'refined'].

In a more exceptional way, Brothers found themselves called to direct Training Colleges intended to train teachers for primary education. Some of these were to be found in France and Belgium. Some of these, in Piedmont, were associated with the formation of such teachers.

Various types of specialized establishments were also entrusted to the Brothers. In some countries, especially in Central Europe and in the US, it was the same for orphanages. The Brothers took over some schools for the deaf and dumb. In the areas which one would call peri- or post-school, Br. Philippe encouraged the Brothers to organize 'youth works' – also called 'patronages' – on Sunday afternoons for their pupils and young past-pupils. To prolong their educational action beyond their classes, the Brothers took charge of 'apprentices'. To a larger extent 'classes for adults' operating in the evenings, were organized in worker cities in France, Piedmont, Belgium, and Canada. 'Military works' were also created by the Brothers in various towns in France. During part of Br. Philippe's Generalship large groups of Brothers were put in charge of supervising prisoners in some French prisons. Independent of that, which was really exceptional, Brothers continued to instruct and catechize prisoners in France, Belgium and Piedmont.

But all this had a reverse side: in spite of the growth of the Institute, the 'lack of personnel' was often invoked by the Br. Superior in order to refuse or delay the creation of new 'houses'. In order to face up to urgent needs, young people in formation saw themselves withdrawn from the novitiate sometimes long before the end of its theoretical duration of one year. Those who, at the end of their novitiate were accepted into the Institute were placed in a community with a view to being trained for their 'employment'. In fact, more often they were put in charge of a 'little class' (lower?) generally with many pupils. There was a Brother whose mission was to guide them but he had a class of his own to run and so was hardly available for exercising the role which had been entrusted to him. After this first year, those who were admitted to continuing in the Institute hardly saw their situation change during the few years when they could take temporary vows – these being renewed up to final profession then fixed at 28. All these years of waiting could not but favour the departure from the Institute of a not insignificant number of these young men; without counting the relatively large number of those who died prematurely. In all it required a considerable number of entries into the novitiates to compensate for these losses while allowing the Institute to grow. [Generally we speak of three entries for one final profession. But at present we think that we could have the means of getting out of this approximation].

Whatever may have been its glories and its shadows, the 'Time of Br. Philippe' ended in the ordeal which constituted the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and the Parisian revolt called 'The Commune'. During the war Br. Philippe encouraged the Brothers to go and pick up the wounded on the battlefields and take care of them by organizing infirmaries in their establishments. During the Commune, he had to leave Paris himself to get away from the threat of incarceration by those revolting, which his fame caused to hang over him. On the other hand, Br. Assistant Exuperien and some Scholastics who had

tried to leave Paris were arrested and imprisoned, but they did not suffer the fate of the ‘hostages’ who had been shot.

During the General Chapter, which because of events had been put back to 1873, Br. Philippe handed in his resignation; it was not accepted. The following year he died. The Chapter called to choose his successor appointed Br. Jean-Olympe (Joseph Paget), then aged 61. But he died in 1875. As Pius IX said of him “he was only shown to the Institute”. The brevity of this Generalship led to it being attached to the ‘Time of Br. Philippe’.

1-3-3 Last quarter of the 19th Century (1875-1899)

In the ‘Historic Memory’ of the Institute, it is not certain that we have been sufficiently aware of the impact of the legislative measures which affected the Brothers, especially in France, where their presence remained large, during the period we are looking at here.

The date of 1875 is suitable for marking the beginning of this period. In the Institute it was the year when Br. Irlide (Jean-Pierre Cazaneuve) then aged 64, was named Superior General. In France it was when the Constitutional Laws which could allow the return of the Monarchy or the installment of the Republic, were adopted. By a majority vote it was decided that at the head of the State would be placed a President of the Republic. In the years which followed, the Republicans obtained the majority in the two legislative assemblies. They were able to apply their program which included notably the installing of a ‘gratuitous, lay and compulsory education’. Already in 1878, a directive of the Minister of Public Instruction, facilitated the replacement, in public schools, of members of a Religious Congregation by ‘lay’ teachers- in the sense of non-religious- or even ‘laïques’...a word implying neutrality or even hostility vis-à-vis religion. A law of 1882 ‘laicized’ the content of teaching by replacing the teaching of religion by that of simply ‘morals’.

Already in France the Brothers were no longer teaching in public schools but from the moment when the ‘laicisation’ of the latter was taking shape, Br. Irlide had written several pamphlets to defend the right which had been recognized to the Brothers to teach in these types of schools; he supported himself, besides, with the authorization which Bonaparte, in 1803, had accorded to the Brothers to reassemble in Lyons, rather than with the imperial decree of 1808. When the law of 1882 was adopted, the same Superior called a Chapter. Relying on what the Brothers of Piedmont, in a similar situation, had done from 1856 on and those of the first Kingdom of Italy from 1865, Br. Irlide invited the Brothers to stay in the public schools where they continued to be accepted; all they had to do was simply have the pupils pray and teach catechism somewhere other than in the classroom. In 1886, a new law ‘laicized’ the staff of the public schools. According to this law, the Brothers had to leave those schools where they were, within a period of five years.

Often, the Brothers excluded from a public school could continue their educational activity in a ‘free school’ created nearby. But, sometimes, since these lacked sufficient resources, they had to have recourse to contributions from the parents. Thus at the time when public education was becoming gratuitous, the Brothers could be forced to ask for authorization to depart from gratuity in their schools. This fact, which also occurred in lots of countries, had also the inconvenience of restricting admission in the Brothers’ schools to a certain category of pupils – those from families able to pay a fee, although exceptions were always possible. This was in contradiction with what the Brothers had always wished in applying the principle of gratuity to all their pupils, that is to say: accepting all those who turned up.

To succeed Br. Irlide, the General Chapter of 1884 elected Br. Joseph (Joseph-Marie Josserand) born in 1823. The charge entrusted to him was not perhaps that which was most suitable to this great educator but he acquitted himself of it with courage. He had, first of all to take on the consequences of the law of 1886 in France. In 1889, when a new law forced the young Brothers to do three years of military service, in order for these Brothers to get through this ordeal while remaining faithful to their vocation, Br. Joseph put into action all the means at his disposal to prepare them for this and support during that time. In 1895, he had to take a stand with regard to the imposition of a new fiscal tax on Religious Congregations. He finally agreed to submit to it which, to say the least, was badly accepted by the Superiors of similar Congregations.

However, in 1888, Br. Joseph had the satisfaction of seeing the Cause of Beatification of John Baptist De La Salle come to fruition. On February 19th of that year, along with 200 Brothers, he was present at the glorification of the new Blessed. But with advancing years the state of health of the Brother Superior deteriorated. In spite of this, in 1894, he presided at the General Chapter with a “competence recognized by all” (quoted in EL 11, p.48). Later his health problems got worse and Br. Joseph died on January 1st 1897.

The General Chapter convoked for March 16th appointed as Superior General Br. Gabriel-Marie (Edmond Bruhnes). His rigour as a mathematician did not predispose him to half-measures. Thus, in the course of the Chapter, he approved the proposition of the Commission on Schools aiming at returning to a more strict application of the principle of gratuity in the schools. He showed the same attitude when, at the Chapter what has been called the ‘Question of Latin in the United States’ was taken up. To be brief, we need to recall that the American bishops having called the Brothers to open *Academies* – at secondary level – and University Colleges, they were required to introduce the teaching of Latin but this was forbidden by a Chapter of the Rule. This established fact brought up at various General Chapters was the subject of a sort of tacit agreement. This was not the case at the Chapter of 1897 where an ‘order’ fixed “the period of time necessary so that all teaching of Latin would prudently and surely come to an end in those establishments where it had been introduced” (quoted in EL 11, p. 95). The Brother Superior with the help of some Assistants set about having this decision applied, which produced reactions in the United States [This question is dealt with by the Historians of the Institute for the United States; it is presented in EL 11, p.93f].

During these same years there was a new outbreak of anticlerical or even antireligious hostility from certain political forces in France. For the Institute this was expressed mainly in regard to what was called the Flamidien Affair. In 1889, a Brother was accused of having caused the death of a pupil in an establishment in Lille. In the end the case was annulled and the accused exonerated. The case had aroused a lot of passions.

To be fair, it must be added that during the period in question an effort had been made in the Institute to lead the Brothers to intensify their spiritual life. This had above all taken the form of retreats using the method of ‘Spiritual Exercises’ of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Br. Assistant Exuperien had been the main promoter. For his part, Br. Superior Joseph had achieved the opening of what under the name of ‘Second Novitiate’ offered the Brothers a time of resourcing which at the beginning lasted three months. One could see the effect of the effort thus pursued, in a relative diminution in the number of Brothers who were leaving the Institute each year. On the apostolic front, Br. Joseph made himself the interpreter of the Pope for the Brothers by inviting them to multiply the ‘youth works’ for their pupils and young past-pupils. With a view to ensuring the supervision of these ‘works, Br. Exuperien, on his part, set out to create a group of young men animated by an intense Christian life; this took the name of

Society of Saint Labre. With the members of this group, Br. Hiéron launched the first Christian trade union in France, under the name of 'Trade Union of Employees of Commerce and Industry'.

1-4 The 20th Century

In this part of the text we are dealing completely with the 20th Century. In fact we begin with the year 1900 and at the end we will try not to go beyond to call up the first years of the 21st Century: these are still part of the present day. For dealing with this century we are certainly not lacking documents and more and more they are even overabundant. On the other hand, the ground has hardly yet been cleared in the framework of the General History of the Institute. On the subject of what we will deal with under the name of 'secularization' we have the first three volumes of the series from Lasallian Studies, the first of which is the first edition of a text of Georges Rigault dealing with the years 1904-1914. One part of No.11 of the same series covers the years 1900-1928. It is continued by a No.12 which reaches the year 1946 which ends the five volumes of the *Initiation to the History of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* published by the Mother House in Rome. Histories of the Institute in various countries take up what concerns this century up to the time of their publication. Personal reminiscences turn up occasionally to complete what has not been found elsewhere.

In 1900, the new century began favourably for the Institute. On May 24th Pope Leo XIII canonized the man who would be henceforth called Saint John Baptist De La Salle. Numerous Brothers and pilgrims from all around the world surrounded Br. Superior Gabriel-Marie. The new Saint was celebrated solemnly in all the countries where the Brothers were present. This year was also marked by the numerous awards which the establishments of the Brothers all over the world received at the Universal Exhibition in Paris. One could say that the educational work of the Brothers was thus universally recognized!

In 1901, the Br. Superior called a special General Chapter with a view to providing the Institute with a new text of the Rule. The writing of the text was a matter of lining it up with the century since they wanted it to remain as close as possible to the text reviewed by the founder following the Chapter of 1716, while many articles of the Rule thus revised had already been modified beginning in 1726 and that a certain number of usages had been abolished. The intention of the Superior was for this new edition of the Rule to be for the Brothers a new impetus of fidelity. It is true that, without it being foreseeable with any certainty; those Brothers – at least those in France – could expect some difficult times.

1-4-1 A Time of great ordeals for the Brothers in France (1900-1928)

The 'Historic Memory' of the Institute remembers for the beginning of the 20th Century the upheaval which occurred for the Institute in France, following a law of 1904 which, in a general way, excluded members of Religious Congregations as such, from all forms of teaching in the country and which directly concerned the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools which it planned to officially suppress. Thousands of Brothers were directly affected and the Institute as a whole was to endure long-lasting consequences.

In France, the awful political climate of the end of the 19th Century persisted during the first years of the following century when, notably, those in power took it out on Religious Congregations. A law of 1901, very favorable to ordinary associations, showed itself particularly restrictive in the articles

concerning Religious Congregations. The application of these articles to those which were considered as being 'unauthorized' led, in 1903, to their suppression. Since that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was 'recognized', our Institute was not concerned. On the other hand, a law of July 7th 1904 planned the closing of schools entrusted to the Institute and its official suppression within a period of 10 years. The first decrees of application of the law appeared in the second fortnight of July. From that moment 3/5 of the establishments of the Brothers in France and Algeria became the objects of a measure of 'legal closing'. Thousands of Brothers found themselves unemployed. Those who were 60 or older could join the retirement houses which were maintained, even if their premises were confiscated by the State. Some Brothers, especially among the young, left the Institute. Others were able to go to establishments not yet 'closed'. If not, two solutions were possible.

Some were able to go into exile or prepare to do so. Thus, from the first year, certain Brothers went to various countries where they were integrated into existing Districts or Districts in the course of being created. Some established boarding schools in neighboring countries near the border with France in order to take in young French students. The other option led the Brothers to remain in France and to continue to exercise their educational mission in the 'free' establishments, while hiding the fact that they were Religious. It was customary to say that these Brothers had 'secularized' themselves – 'fictitiously' was understood. The choice between these two possibilities was personal but since it took place in consultation with the Superiors – Assistants and Visitors – it was also affected by the preference expressed by these Superiors; that of some leaned clearly towards expatriation; that of others – few in number – leaned towards secularization; some went for both solutions.

The situation of the Brothers who 'secularized' themselves was not without presenting risks: they could be pursued for 'the offense of reconstituting a dissolved Congregation'. There were, in fact, some who suffered searches by the police. Some had to appear before a tribunal, some had to pay a fine. More often they were released. In fact this varied depending on the place and above all it evolved in the course of the ten years planned for applying the law; the relative rigour of the beginnings gradually eased off. In the final analysis, the danger came rather from the interior. The necessity of leading a kind of life closer to that of 'seculars' led a certain number of 'secularized' Brothers to adopt it totally and break with the Institute. If certain Superiors took the means of keeping in touch with those who had been secularized, others left them to themselves.

The war which broke out in 1914 modified the course of events. The decree closing the 13 schools of the Brothers still open in France and the 2 in Algeria, which was published in July, was postponed with the declaration of war. The expatriated Brothers having returned to France to defend their country, the 'putting beyond the law' of which the Religious had been victims could no longer be applied, neither during the war, nor after it. Even if they had to keep secular dress, the Brothers could affirm more and more openly their character of Religious. On the part of the Institute, the 'secularized', who up till then had not been included in the annual statistics, began again to figure in them from the end of the war, at first under a special mention and later openly.

There is no place here for a similar development on the subject of the 'expatriated'. What one can point out is that, thanks to the French Brothers who left their country because of the law of 1904, the Institute established itself in about six countries where it had not yet been present. In a parallel manner, Brothers of other nationalities, especially the Irish, introduced the Institute into an equivalent number of new countries.

[From registers giving the situation, in October 1915, of the Brothers present in the Institute at the end of 1903, we can know how these were divided up at the time (cf. EL 11, p.137). From these lists can

one not at least determine which the Brothers who were expatriated were and what their number was, since these Brothers having remained in the Institute, regardless of which country they went to, one should have their identification sheet in the AMG?].

1-4-2 The preparation, the course and the immediate aftermath of the Second World War (1929-1945)

As far as the Institute is concerned, the end of the years we have been speaking about could be situated either in 1923 or 1928. In the course of each of these years, a General Chapter had to be called to elect a new Superior General. On this subject, the exceptional fact which needs to pick out is that, Br. Allais-Charles and Br. Adrien who were respectively elected were blood brothers and therefore had the same family name: Petiot. In fact, I have chosen the date 1928 because in general history it precedes the Great Economic Depression which favoured the rise of totalitarian regimes and prepared the Second World War.

Naturally, the Brothers suffered the consequences of the economic depression which, across the world caused a drop in resources in many families, which as a result experienced difficulty in entrusting their children to the establishments run by the Brothers if they had to pay a fee for schooling or boarding; the Brothers naturally suffered the repercussions from this. But in the 'Historic Memory' what is noted in particular for this period is the fact that the Brothers were the victims of a persecution in different countries, which was not unconnected with the international situation at the time.

In Mexico, after an arrangement in 1929 which brought an end to the revolt of the Cristeros brought about by the ostracism of the government towards Catholics, a resumption of this kind of politics in 1934 threatened in particular Catholic schools. The Brothers fearing that they would not be able to maintain this character in their schools, closed them and opened classes in private houses, moving them about to evade the surveillance of the public authorities. The pressure diminishing from 1940 on put an end to these precautions.

It was above all in Spain that the Brothers suffered the persecution of which the Catholics of that country had been the object in the course of the 20th Century. Where the Brothers are concerned one could see the beginnings of this in the law which, in 1933, forbade Religious to teach in the country and which the Brothers got round by wearing civilian dress; or yet again the revolutionary episode which broke out in the Asturias in 1934 and during which the 8 Brothers of Turon were shot. But it was above all from the moment of the victory of the *Popular Front* in the legislative elections of 1936 and the rising of part of the army against the Republican regime that a civil war broke out between the two sides sharing the country. On the side of the Republicans the violence had above all as its target the clergy or the Religious Congregations, as well as lay Catholics. The Brothers were the victims of different kinds of persecution led by the 'Reds'. One cannot develop this more here but, in all, when the conflict ended in April 1939, 157 Brothers had been put to death which, added to the Brothers of Turon, gives a total of 165. The District of Barcelona alone had 97 victims.

As regards Germany and Austria, different sources show the hostility of the National Socialist regime towards Christianity. In both countries, the Brothers had to suffer from it, in Germany from 1933 and especially from 1936 and in Austria from 1938. With regard to Germany, the reports addressed to the Superiors by Br. Kilian – replacing Br. Visitor Roderich, obliged to stay in Knutwil, Switzerland – show that the Brothers were the object of a real persecution; however, as one of the reports from 1936 states: "According to our governments, they do not wish to make martyrs among the German priests

and Religious. By every means they try to dishonor them” (AMG NB 111- 1/10). Thus it was that the Brothers were at first worried about borrowings they had made without authorization from Districts in other countries; but in the end no charges were brought against them on this subject. Then two Brothers and two former Brothers were arrested for immoral acts with pupils. One Brother was condemned to two years in prison – even though he always declared himself to have been falsely accused – and former Brothers were also condemned. Finally, all the Brothers were forbidden to teach, under the excuse, as indicated by Br. Kilian, “that the Religious were judged to be incapable of educating in conformity with Nazi doctrine” (quoted in EL 12, p. 46). Those in Austria, after the annexation of 1938, were also excluded from teaching. This did not prevent the Brothers of both countries being called to participate in the 1939-45 war in which about 50 of them were killed!

In Poland, during the war, two Brothers were killed by the Germans, but it is not certain that this was because of their being Brothers. On the other hand, it was precisely because of his activities with the young that Br. Wojciech (Piotr Frocha) was sent to a concentration camp and died in conditions similar to those which brought about the death of Father Kolbe.

During the years 1929-1939, the Institute overall had at first a growth which saw it pass from 13,000 Brothers to a little over 14,000 in 1933 and then this number hovered around the 14,000 mark. Within this figure, the number of Brothers in France remained around 4,000. Thus, regarding that which existed up to 1904, the proportion of these Brothers with regard to those found in other countries was reversed. For the same ten years, what was worrying for the future was the fact that the number of novices which had reached the figure of 1,250 in 1930, dropped to 850 in 1939, due to some extent to the situation of the Brothers in Spain and Central Europe. During the same period the Institute gained some Christian countries: Portugal, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica as well as some non-Christian countries: French Morocco, Japan, Manchukuo (a satellite state created by the Japanese). The missionary zeal of Br. Junien Victor (Auguste Détharé) led him to ask two English Brothers to prepare with a view to going to China but the war put an end to this project.

In its different phases, the war which began in 1939 affected the Brothers in many countries across the world. Brothers were called up and some later ended up as prisoners for many years. Others were involved in resistance activities which caused some to end up in Nazi concentration camps. Those who were natives of a country at war with the one in which they were living were put in internment camps. Of these some died because of the conditions in which they were living. Brothers were also victims of bombardments... In the Philippines, independently of their Director who had earlier been seized, 15 Brothers were massacred with some civilians by Japanese soldiers who feared there were guerilla fighters among them. Some Greek Brothers died of hunger. In all we can count some 150 victims but there were certainly more. During the conflict, entire regions of the Institute were cut off from the Superiors who were at Mauléon, in the South of France. Because of this they had known certain autonomy. On their return, Brothers who had found themselves in particular situations during the war found some difficulty in re-adapting to a milieu which was sometimes very closed in on itself.

One would have thought that the General Chapter called in 1946 to elect a successor to Br. Junien-Victor who died in 1940, would take into account the impact of the war on the Institute. In fact, this Chapter was instead oriented towards two things. On the one hand, a letter from the Holy See giving a certain number of modifications to be made to the functioning of the Institute, especially to take into account its more and more marked international character. On the other hand, the choice as Superior-General of Br. Athanase-Emile (Louis Rittmann born in 1880) who by his frequent interventions blocked almost all advances. The Chapter was conducted in the most traditional manner. It ended up rather with a return to what had been done before the war as if the war had never taken place. It even

went as far as adopting the totally unrealistic decision of suppressing in the schools run by the Brothers “the feminine element” and to reduce as far as possible “the civilian element”. It had been the case already for some time in quite a few places that we could not do without the collaboration of those considered then as auxiliaries. 17

One must recognize that the impression left in the Institute by the 10 years which followed the Chapter of 1946, when first Br. Athanase-Emile and then up to 1956, Br. Vicar-General Denis were at the head of the Institute was barely any different from that left by the Chapter. One of the most symbolic facts of these years was the publication, in 1947, of the Rule written by a Commission assembled following the Chapter of 46. By the will of the Brother Superior, the new Rule was made the object of an integral approval by the Congregation for Religious – thus giving equal value to all it contained. This was somewhat in the spirit of the times, as was shown by the book of a Redemptorist priest entitled *La Culte de la Règle* quoted frequently by the Br. Superior in the Circular presenting the new Rule. The reading of this book was freely recommended to the novices as well as *La Culte des Vœux* (The Cult of the Vows) by the same author.

At the Chapter of 1956, Br. Nicet-Joseph (Pierre Loubet) who was Director of the Second Novitiate was elected as Superior-General. If he was not personally inclined towards change, this Superior discreetly gave his support to those who were planning different modifications as, for example, the introduction of parts varying with the liturgical seasons, in the daily prayers; or the re-organization of the religious studies in the Institute. But what was most characteristic was the impetus given to what was then called Lasallian Studies. In a rather paradoxical way, the Capitulants were asking that a new text of the Rule be prepared with a view to being submitted to the Chapter which would be held in 1966. In the 10 years which followed, what had been decided by the Chapter was put into practice.

1-4-3 Uncertain times (1966-2000)

The few changes brought in by the Chapter of 1956, did not mark a break with what had preceded. This would not be the case with the Chapter which began in 1966, following Vatican 2, it must be remembered. As far as the ‘Historic Memory’ of the Institute is concerned, it is from there that we need to date the beginning of a new phase in the development of the history of the Institute.

Undoubtedly for describing this new phase we are not lacking elements; but no synthesis has yet been attempted. We should except from this, however, what Br. Pedro Gil says in Chapter 9 of his work entitled *Trois siècles d'identité lasallienne* in the French translation (p.321 to 334). But it is difficult to depend on these reflections in the present text which wants to be more ‘descriptive’. I will therefore content myself with recalling the memory of events lived personally but not without also mentioning various documents judged to be particularly significant. Figuring especially among these documents will be the results of a survey to which the Visitors were asked to respond, on the basis of the statistics for the end of 1964, with a view to preparing the General Chapter of 1966 [They can be found in the AMG in Rome].

At this Chapter called for May 4th 1966, the participants, in the same way as the Fathers of the Council, quickly emphasized that it was up to them to ensure how the Assembly would proceed. To begin, however, a certain number of subjects were taken up in the traditional method of Chapters. These were questions relative to the spiritual life of the Brothers. The rather disappointing results of this part of the Chapter resulted in their not even being made known to the Brothers. Other subjects were dealt with, among which, in the first place that of Brothers eventually becoming priests, to which a Decree on the

Religious Life of Vatican II had opened up the possibility. We cannot go into detail on the debate which was opened on this subject. The result was that a large majority of the Capitulants rejected such an eventuality. Furthermore, since the Superior-General Br. Nicet-Joseph had made known that he would offer his resignation at the Chapter, he found himself pressed by the Congregation of Religious to do so. The Chapter, having taken the time to review what was in the Rule of Government of the Institute and having accepted the resignation of the Superior-General, proceeded to the election of his successor. Placed under the presidency of the Secretary of the Congregation for Religious, sent for this purpose - something which many of those present, seeing in this a measure of defiance, did not appreciate - the election session led to the choice from the first round of votes of Br. Charles Henry (Thomas-Joseph Buttimer), then Assistant for the United States. For the first time it was a non-French Brother.

As had been planned at the 1956 Chapter, that of 1966 was to adopt a new text of the Rule. Between these two Chapters, a project submitted to the District Councils received only limited support. But when the decree of application of the Decree on the Religious Life of Vatican II stipulated that all the Orders and Congregations should revise their Rules to make them more in conformity with the Gospel and the spirit of their Founders, a new project was established in the Institute to respond to these demands. It had been addressed to the Capitulants; however, it quickly appeared to them that they could not complete this project in the time at their disposal in 1966. When it was understood that the Chapter would include a new session, a new project was sent to the members of the Chapter so that they could submit it to all the Brothers.

Since the text of application of the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* also asked that the Orders and Congregations call a 'special General Chapter', the Institute obtained permission that the second session of the Chapter in progress would fulfill this requirement. Opening in 1967, the new session of the Chapter centred its work on two main objectives: the drawing up of a text presenting in a synthetic way the constituent elements of the vocation of the Brother and the establishment of the new text of the Rule by a commission which would collect the propositions of the other commissions charged with studying different subjects. After a little less than three months, the Chapter adopted almost unanimously the text entitled *The Brother in the world of today*. It was the same for the new text of the Rule which differed markedly from that which had been maintained up till then, in spite of numerous and sometimes frequent retouches. A series of small booklets were to communicate these two texts to the Brothers as well as the results of the work of the different commissions. On their return, the Capitulants applied themselves to spreading and presenting the results of what the Chapter achieved. But they could quickly see that, in general, the Brothers had not been able to make the movement which they themselves had effected during the two periods of nearly three months of their presence in Rome. The result of this was that, if lots of Brothers adhered to what had been proposed to them, others remained reticent and there were some who thought that something else should have been done.

What was not foreseen was that the time necessary for the assimilation of the results of the General Chapter would coincide with that of the calling into question, in all domains, which broke out across the world in 1968. The Institute did not escape this. One can give as an example what happened during a session of a Chapter for France – the holding of which was made possible by a decision of the General Chapter of 1966-67. Some Brothers having been able to assemble in the same place, during meetings with the members of the Chapter properly so-called, questioned numerous aspects of what had been done in Rome in 1966 and 1967. In particular, the *Declaration* (this was the abbreviation used) having invited the Brothers of the Institute to "return to the poor", the Brothers in question felt that not only should that be done but that priority should be given to those who, in the same text were called "the poorest" and for this purpose we should go to live with them. This difference of

interpretation was to bring with it a profound and durable division among the Brothers, especially in France, but also in other countries.

In the years that followed, the Brothers were able to carry out what had been planned – by one group or another – in the framework of the Institute. Some, who felt that the Institute would not be able to respond to their expectations, left it. But many others did the same thing, among the young but also among older members. It must be said that, independently of what has just been shown, already for some time an insidious form of secularization had hit the Institute, at least in certain parts: prayer life was neglected, we should be and do like everybody... [This would need to be gone into more deeply and perhaps expressed in a different way, but it needs to be taken into account when it is a question of the Institute – as well as the Church – in the 60s and 70s].

The combined effects of these different causes led to an erosion of numbers in the Institute which made itself felt above all in certain parts. On the other hand, since the end of the war, it was with quite another type of ordeal that the Brothers saw themselves afflicted: those who found themselves behind ‘the Iron Curtain’ were the object of a real persecution. If, in Poland, the ordeal rather reinforced them, in Romania and Czechoslovakia they were forced to lead a very discreet life; thus when the Austrian Visitor wished to meet them, he had to do so in some sacristy, but above all, not where they lived!

The year 1986 when a new General Chapter was held was marked, in particular, for the Institute, by the approval from the Congregation for Religious, of the Rule adopted in 1967. However, this Rule had been revised, taking into account as far as possible, proposals coming from the Brothers. Thus ended the process begun in 1967 to establish a text of the Rule conforming to what was asked by the text of application of the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* of Vatican II. Without there being any connection between the two things, it happened that at the Chapter of 86, it was decided that from then on, this type of Assembly would be held every 7 years, the next ones being planned for 93 and 2000.

The Chapter which was held in 1986, elected as Superior Br. John Johnston, who was from Memphis Tennessee, a fact he willingly specified. The Brothers of this city where he had been a pupil had encouraged him to become a Brother and since then he had remained profoundly attached to his vocation. As Superior, he made efforts to communicate his conviction, especially by means of the Circular which he addressed to each Brother at New Year each year. By the themes dealt with one can see what were then his preoccupations regarding the Institute.

For two years in succession it dealt with the Rule which had been adopted in 1986 before being approved in 1987. For the Superior it was a historic moment “because – he wrote in 1988 – it marked the end of 40 years of prayerful research with a view to a new expression of our identity, of our mission, of our way of life” (p. 12). That same year he took up again one of the subjects dealt with at the Chapter, that of: association and interdependence. “Brothers, we ought to help our Brothers to become aware of the power for good that we possess if we live and work truly together and by association as an international religious family”, he concluded (p. 17). He also referred to the ‘shared mission’ which the Rule would refer to from then on. On the one hand this was linked to the drop in numbers of the Brothers in different countries, but it was also no less dictated by the intention of the Institute to participate in the promotion of the laity in the Church.

In 1991, a year which was to mark the third Centenary of the ‘Heroic Vow’ of 1691, the Superior did not hesitate to write: “We should be honest concerning the great crisis in vocations in our Institute; a crisis which, I believe is manifestly a crisis with more depth of meaning and significance” (p. 13). The Circular of January 1993 was entitled: Reflections on our Future. It was less a question of making

predictions than of inviting the Brothers to bring about what Br. Johnston called a 'transformation' which should affect all the areas of their lives.

In the course of that same year 1993 a new General Chapter took place. It fell upon it to choose the Superior who would guide the Institute over the next 7 years. Br. John Johnston was chosen to continue his mandate. For this new period, we do not find the same reference points as before in the New Year Circulars. Some dealt with the present time, such as that of 1995 entitled 'Our charism in the light of the Synod' which his presence at the Synod on the Consecrated Life had inspired in him. Or again, in 1997, which dealt with the permanent challenge of the Declaration and was written on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of this text.

To know what happened in the Institute during these seven years, we need to have recourse to other sources but it is not indispensable to stop with it here. What seems to merit being again emphasized is the fact that, if what Br. John Johnston was always stimulating, his spoken words were no less so. During his visits around the world or at meetings in which he participated, he did not hesitate to question his listeners. Even in French, he had been able to reach a mastery of the language which allowed him to improvise when necessary. Some of his interventions remain memorable.

In 2000 the General Chapter picked Br. Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria as Superior General. The confidence of the Institute in him was renewed in 2007. One might consider that with him the Institute remains in the Today.