

AT THE RISK OF A YES, A PROJECT IN FRATERNITY

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ABSTRACT

The reflection which is offered below was given in the context of the French Lasallian Fraternity Assembly on October 23rd 2011. It presents an ensemble of Lasallian pedagogical intuitions which, for the Lasallians of today, translates the concerns which started the Lasallian pedagogical itinerary from the centrality of the fraternal experience.

An impression can go through our minds at the moment when we, seasoned travelers, have to take a new step, cross to a new stage. We are there because we have already moved forward a lot, for 10 or 20 years, in our Network. But there comes a moment when you have to take a leap. And if for you Lay Lasallians, this leap may seem difficult, it is the same for us Brothers.

Well, if we so often call to mind fraternity, confidence, the Gospel, it is because it could not be otherwise at a time when the world of the young and that of adults calls us to take this step forward.

We see in John Baptist De La Salle, someone who was passionate about the freedom of others, a Founder who was going to authorize the freedom of his Brothers. Not an idol before which we remain petrified, but an icon in whose traits our own face is drawn and who says to us, while himself stepping aside behind his work: now all this is handed over to you.

The step to be taken is a giant step. So that we can take it together, we have needed these thirty years of work, where progressively you have come to share the road, the itinerary, the responsibilities, the initiatives, the courageous choices, enabling us today to welcome together this new step. And we can begin to dream that, in a few years, at this same microphone, it will be one of you Lay Lasallians who will come to others to contribute, transmit and share the itinerary of his/her life.

John-Baptist De La Salle, someone who was passionate about freedom: our project is to write, to construct, because in creating the Brothers, he did not say to them: *You will copy me, you will do exactly what I have told you to do*. In creating *his* Brothers, he said to them: *Together we will continue the path for these young people*. One who was passionate about frontiers: this desire to always go beyond, to meeting the other. Not enclosing himself within a diocese but extending his

Institute to all of France. Not setting himself up in one type of education, but opening up to other types of school courses. Not restricting himself to one way of teaching classes but going elsewhere to draw upon resources. Collecting and welcoming in order to be able to give. One who was passionate about the *for all*. His schools would not be ghettos for the poor. He wanted them to offer the best to everyone. His genius was to have taken what was reserved to some, some thousands with the Jesuits and some dozen with the Jansenists. He borrowed the best from Jesuit teaching: the class and the best from Jansenists tradition: teaching through French, and that this would be offered to the greatest number!

If we must found something together following the example of this Founder at the risk of fraternity, that can only be by being ourselves the builders of liberty, of frontiers to be crossed, of universality at the heart of our educational establishment.

My dear friends, this appeal finds echoes today more than in the past: to map out our furrow a little more in a Catholic Education of which we are part, in a National Education of which we are part. Not better but different. A furrow which only the Lasallian tradition can map out, so that with other traditions, the young of all conditions maybe a bit better accompanied, a bit better educated tomorrow.

If we could start out with this conviction that fraternity is at the heart of the act of education! John-Baptist De La Salle did not import it from elsewhere. He found it, hidden like a treasure, in the heart of the School, just asking to be deployed. The Brothers of the Christian Schools are not Religious who found an apostolate in education and in instructing the young. History is not made in this way. They are not a Religious Order which found its *raison d'être* in a mission. They are school teachers passionate in their commitment, who find within this educational commitment the need, the necessity, the compelling desire to follow the Gospel in order to go to the end of the educational dream. That is where fraternity is.

Your school establishment, your education centre, your reception home, the person who presides there each day, are each a presence, a word, a relationship. Of necessity, we are in our establishments, in each other's presence, in shared conversation, in relationships. It is there, it is a gift. John Baptist De La Salle invites us to make this word, this presence, this relationship educational. His genius is to have understood that, from the moment that an adult is in the presence of a young person, or of another adult, in this original place which is the school, every presence, every word, every relationship can -or not- take on an evangelical sense. Word, presence, relation. He goes right to the end, as far as possible and that is why he "made" the Brothers.

And for this presence to be educative, it must be lasting. For this word to be educative it should not be a word of authority. It should be able to reach each one wherever he/she is. For this relation to be educative it should be of brother to brother. He dares the impossible, the forbidden, the unthinkable: putting fraternity between adults and children at the heart of a hierarchy which organizes the society of its time. In a delicate, tranquil manner he establishes fraternity, equality, the possibility of living in this world according to the Gospel. But the great and the powerful of his time are not mistaken in this and it is truly the risk of fraternity, for during the 40 years of his life, devoted to building his work, it was to be combat after combat, because he believed that it

was necessary to preserve this autonomy of the Body, this autonomy of the budding Community, of his schools, for he had this modern idea, he, the man of the classroom, of order, of hierarchy, the man of sometimes rather stiff behavior, of the psychology of the 17th Century, nourished by the Gospel. 44

He becomes, under the strength of the Spirit, unimaginably modern and it for that reason that we are here. We have not come here to meet a historic personage. For 10 years, 20 years or...six months, we have not been following a portrait of the 17th Century, but someone who speaks to us through his modernity. This modernity is a realism, since the School will always be the place of battles. So that it will be evangelic and that it will humanize the young, we will always need fighters. The act of educating will never be naturally evangelic.

You know it, you men and women of the service, whether paid or volunteers. From the moment you enter the doors of your School you are guided by a passion for this service and, at the same time, you know that you have to face up with realism to what makes up the daily life of persons. The act of educating is painful and the relationship between adults is often painful. The daily lives of our establishments are also places where there is potential conflict. John Baptist De La Salle is modern because he does not deny this. He does not say to us: *Go up into the mountains, leave behind the troubles of the city*. His spirituality is that of the Incarnation, of humanization, of meeting with the daily. That is why he had to build this Body of men with this passion of the Body because only the Body allows each one, at his own pace, peacefully but firmly, to place the educating presence, the educating word, the educating relationship exactly where everything is united so that power, inequality, injustice can establish itself in the marks given, the orientations proposed, the posts shared. If we feel the need for the Body, it is because just like 330 years ago, it is for the success of the Gospel, where the Gospel tells us that there is no project other than the humanization of our relations.

The steps which we have described will of necessity always be small steps and if we are committing ourselves to this adventure it will always be with small steps, like our Founder “from commitment to commitment”. But we cannot take these steps on our own, for they appear to be the steps of giants: crossing the school yard without running, accepting that you will meet young people, not shutting oneself in the teachers’ room, going to share a meal, going once in a while into the boarding department to see what is lived by these young people that you will be meeting next morning, daring the “I” when it is a question of a value or an act of faith and not just the “they” of Christians, devoting time to replacing the Christmas Mass by a celebration for all.

These steps we will not be taking alone. We will need to comfort ourselves, re-read our tradition. It is from the interior of the act of educating that we will dare to take them. The future invites us to dig our furrow in Catholic Education. It is demanding because we are invited to no longer make any distinction between our project and the daily life of our establishments. The first place where the Gospel speaks and where Christ speaks is in the classroom, in our class councils and in our boards of discipline. It is in this sense that we are mediators of his Salvation.

In the local Fraternities we are going to return to the source and this source will surprise us. John Baptist De La Salle discovered in the Gospel that, before proclaiming Salvation, before revealing his Messianic character, Jesus multiplied the loaves, cured the sick, pardoned, raised up and

invited to trust. The Catholic school - and that is truly its initiative – is a place where Salvation cannot be proclaimed and received unless it is lived in the daily life of our humanity.

Certain steps can thus lead us far, right to the end, for both the Brothers and for Lay Lasallians. But it is not the Brothers who are going to tell you what you must do to go to the end with John Baptist De La Salle. And this is perhaps, definitively, what is at stake in the launching of these fraternities and of this Fraternity. Once again, in the name of the Founder, we should each feel able - where we are and where we have reached on our journey- to say freely and simply how we can, as Brothers in one state of life and as Lay Lasallians in another, advance together. We must, before thinking of how our education projects will be nourished from this Fraternity, before thinking about what this Fraternity will be for the mission, begin by telling ourselves what this Fraternity can be for our own happiness as teachers, educators, committed volunteers. We Brothers will be with you all the way in walking along this path. We will not trace out the path for you, because we remind ourselves that John Baptist De La Salle had confidence in those he called.

The audacity of the “yes” is both for those who are called and for those who call. We need to be bold enough to call and bold enough to hear the call. Let us remember that if we are in the tradition of our Founder, it is because we believe intimately in the grace of the patience, of the time that his work took, that we firmly believe that a word which is sown, a presence which is offered, a relationship which is developed, tomorrow when the time is ripe, will blossom into an educational commitment for the service of the young, of all these young, whatever their poverties.

We do not know what the future of our La Salle Network will be. What the future of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the District of France will be we do not know. The future of our La Salle Education Fraternity we will not control. And in saying that, we are thinking of being at the heart of the Good News of the Gospel in order to make place for the Spirit. This future we do not need to predict, but each of us, such as we are, have to allow it.

*French Lasallian Fraternity Assembly
Beauvais, France
October 2011*